



## COMMUNICATION MESSAGES FOR PROMOTION OF TOURISM IN HOMABAY COUNTY

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**ABSTRACT** This paper presents an assessment of the relationship between communication messages and tourism promotion. Homabay county located in Kenya's western tourists circuit is rich in tourists' attractions, but continue to receive very little tourists as a result of limited publicity. Promotion of tourism is necessary to enable the sector generate revenue to the county and improve the livelihood of the people around the area. The objective of the study was therefore to assess existing communication messages for promotion of tourism in Homabay county. In Kenya many tourists continue to flock certain destinations that have been frequently visited over the years, such as the Coastal and Nairobi Circuits. The study therefore sought to find out if the missing link in tourism promotion in Homabay county was communication messages. The study was guided by Media framing theory. The approach used was mixed and data was collected using questionnaires that were issued to tourists, interviews with Homabay county government officials and with employees of Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS). Custodians of the selected tourists' sites were also interviewed. Homabay county integrated development plan was also analyzed. A sample of 93 tourists took part, the entire population of the remaining categories of the respondents was used in the study, totaling to 100 participants. Qualitative data was analysed thematically using manual open coding and NVivo 11 software while quantitative data was analysed statistically using SPSS 23.0. The study established that the promotional messages contained cultural and historical information while highlighting the uniqueness of the sites. Framing of messages for tourism promotion in a persuasive and convincing manner evokes in the actual or potential tourists the desire to visit a tourist's destination.

**KEYWORDS** : Communication messages, promotion, tourism

### INTRODUCTION

Promotion is viewed as an important part of the marketing method, in tourism, it means to try and encourage actual as well as potential clients to travel to a destination by spreading of information (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015). Travel and tourism is one of the fastest growing economic activities significant to most countries in the world (Kumari, 2017). Tourism has become one of the largest and the most dynamic industry sectors in the world (Han & Hyun, 2015). Promotion aims at identifying the target group to which the promotion is conducted, finding out the most effective advertising, sales support and public relations programs to be planned, and to select the best methods to be used to control and assess the promotion operation (Istiqomah, 2017).

Kenya is still one of the leading tourists' destinations in Africa in spite of the competition from other destinations in the continent (Sindiga, 2011). After independence the Government of Kenya (GoK) realized the great potential that the tourism industry had and moved to upgrade the infrastructure, superstructure as well as other facilities that aid tourism, (Kangogo, Musiega, & Manyasi, 2013). After independence, there was a spectacular growth in the tourism industry which was characterized by strong government involvement and active partnership with the private sector. In view of the proven potential of tourism, the government formulated Session Paper No. 8 of 1969 on the development of tourism in Kenya which defined the growth targets that it hoped to achieve. It also outlined the areas where the Government would participate jointly with private investors in developing the tourism industry.

For the purpose of planning and development of the tourism industry in Kenya, tourism is divided into eight tourists' circuits, these include: Western, North Rift, South Rift, Central, Nairobi, North Eastern, Coast and Mt. Kenya. The western tourist circuit, which is where Homabay county falls under, consists of twelve sub-circuits including: Trans-Nzoia, Bungoma, Kakamega, Vihiga, Busia, Nandi, Kisumu, Siaya, Homabay, Migori, Kisii and Nyamira. In the past, tourism efforts in the Homabay county have been guided mainly by the national government and the Non-Governmental Organizations. While those efforts have been productive, the increase in tourism activities within the Homabay county, there are still a number of potential touristic sites that have not been given the recognition that they deserve. These sites can earn revenue for the county and improve the lives of the locals by providing job opportunities.

According to the Homabay county government strategic plan for the

year 2013, there is need for improvement in various possible tourist areas including well marketed sites. The strengths weaknesses opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis for the year by the county government reveals that some of the strengths that the county has include among others natural resources, the presence of Lake Victoria - the second largest fresh water lake in the world, attractive scenery, a rich cultural heritage among the communities. One of the weakness highlighted is lack of advertising of the touristic sites as well as potential touristic sites. Tourism is an active and economically viable industry that requires the ability to continuously adjust to the needs and wants of customers such as their satisfaction, safety and enjoyment of the industry; these keep changing (Ogah, Adah, & Osho, 2018).

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by Media Framing Theory, which suggests that the way in which a message is framed, or presented to the audience can influence the choices they make about how to process that information. The manner in which a message is constructed and organized as well as the immediate effect that the message has on the receiver (Shah, McLeod, Gotlieb, & Lee, 2009). The manner in which a message is constructed can persuade readers to behave in a certain way. This theory provides insight into how to frame a message in order to effectively promote tourism. Framing of a message is done by using that which is regarded as important by the receiver, and therefore when the information is called out, its importance is increased (Entman, 1993). Therefore, the content or communication message if well stated can lead to promotion of tourism. The message should therefore be persuasive enough to encourage and convince the potential tourists to visit tourists' destinations (Sniderman & Theriault, 2018). This study was guided by the concept of persuasion within message framing literature. This concept fits my study as there is need to persuade existing and potential tourists' to visit touristic and potential tourists' sites in the county.

### METHODOLOGY

The approach used in the research study is mixed which helps to understand and compare quantitative results and qualitative findings, resulting into rich and comprehensive data. Quantitative data was acquired by use of questionnaires issued to tourists visiting sites in Homabay county in order to establish the nature of information they receive in promotional materials, how this message is presented, how adequate the promotional message was and persuasive and convincing it is. Qualitative data was generated through interviews with the Minister and the Director of tourism in Homabay county, the chief

warden Ruma national park and his assistant; and also interviews with the custodians of the selected tourists sites in Homabay county namely Simbi Nyaima, Tom Mboya mausoleum and Nyamgondho shrine.

The target population was 1433 comprising of 1426 tourists, the minister and director of tourism Homabay county, the chief warden and his assistant Ruma national park and 3 custodians, one from each of the selected tourist sites. A sample of 93 tourists was used in the study, whereas the entire population of the other groups of respondents took part in the study. This comprised of 2 employees of Homabay county, the minister and director of tourism, 2 employees of Ruma national park, chief warden and his assistant; and 3 custodians from the selected potential tourists sites. This gives a total of 100 participants.

The Homabay county government officials and the employees of Ruma national park were sampled purposively as activities related to tourism promotion form part of their duties at the Homabay county government and at Ruma national park respectively; they therefore provided information that is beneficial for this study. The custodians of the selected potential tourists sites were sampled conveniently as the researcher visited the sites. The tourists were also sampled conveniently as the researcher visited Ruma national park, they are the consumers of tourism products and their input was deemed beneficial to the study. The study targeted respondents who are known to have the information that will serve the purpose of this study (Kombo & Tromp, 2006).

Quantitative data was analyzed statistically using SPSS version 23.0 while qualitative data was analyzed thematically using NVivo 11 software. Comparison of qualitative findings to the quantitative result was done and the interpretation given.

**RESULTS INTERPRETATIO AND DISCUSSION**

A total 100 participants were sampled for the study, a total of 86 respondents (86%) took part in the study while 14 respondents (14%) did not. Of the total participants 62 of them were male while 24 were female. The following themes emerged from the study attraction points for tourists in Homabay county and tourism promotional messages.

**Table 1 Attraction points for tourists in Homabay County**

Culturally/ Historically	Scenic sites
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tom Mboya mausoleum is the center for acquiring blessings by community members</li> <li>Abasuba peace museum in Mfangano Island</li> <li>healing water in Simbi Nyaima</li> <li>Ramogi traditional dancers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>several islands –Rusinga, Mfangano, Takawiri, Soklo Kipenji</li> <li>Unique fishing villages</li> <li>birds sanctuary with the pelican birds and Flamingos</li> <li>hot springs e.g Abundu</li> <li>rare rune antelope</li> <li>the archaeological sites in Rusinga Island</li> </ul>

The above table shows the major contents of the messages used in tourism promotion. The tourism promotional messages comprised of cultural and historical information attached to the sites. It also highlighted the scenic sites available in the county.

We have several destinations; in fact we have divided them into three regions. We have Simbi Nyaima which has a healing water and we have flamingos there. We have Ondago swamp which has flamingos, Abundu hot springs where you can boil your eggs within just a few minutes, and then when you approach Homa Bay from Kisumu via Sondu to Oyugis, we have the birds sanctuary with the pelican birds, these are seasonal birds, next to Oyugis birds sanctuary, we also have the hyena's caves . We also have Gor Mahia shrine which has also a very rich history, at Kochia Kagan, we have a lot of culture, and we have the Ramogi traditional dancers. We have tens of islands as well as Nyamgondho wood Ombare shrine in Nyandiwa Gwass, this and Simbi Nyaima has a lot of similarities. (Respondent 1)

It was established that most of the respondents were conversant with the historical information attached to the sites. For example in Tom Mboya mausoleum, the history of Tom Mboya can attract many tourists.

This is Tom Mboya mausoleum. Tom's friends from abroad thought they should build something in his memory. It has been designed in the shape of a bullet that killed him. It was built in his memory; inside you

can see some of his collections. (Custodian 1)

It was established that there is cultural information and heritage attached to the sites, employee 2 of Homabay county government mentioned the rich culture found in Simbi Nyaima and Nyamgondho shrine.

The water in Simbi Nyaima is believed to be medicinal, able to cure skin diseases, some religious factions also use the water, they call it holy water, they sprinkle it on people when praying for them, most people get healed that this is holy water. (Respondent 2)

Custodian 3 of Nyamgondho shrine also cited the unique features at the destination and the cultural attachments to it.

At the Nyamgondho shrine there are footprints of animals on rocks along the shores of lake Victoria. These are believed to be of the animals that the mysterious woman, who is believed to have surfaced mysteriously from the lake, was picked by a fisherman, Nyamgondho, and they later got married. The woman is believed to have gone back into the lake following dispute with the husband. (Custodian 3)

**The table below shows the results of the quantitative data analysis. Table 2 Communication message for promotion of Tourism**

Level of agreement to the questions	Yes	No	Total
It is easy to access information about destination in Homabay county	40	46	80
The promotional information about tourism in Homabay county is convincing	39	41	80
There is adequate information about tourism in the promotional messages that I have come across	33	47	80
I have come across promotional information that increased my awareness of sites in Homabay county	47	33	80

The above findings show that 46 out of 80 tourists disagree to the fact that it is easy to access information about tourists' destinations in Homabay while 40 agree to this. This shows that majority of the tourists who visit tourists destinations in Homabay do not easily access promotional messages, there is therefore need to increase the accessibility of this information. This is in agreement with the views of (Riley & Van Doren, 1992) they state that tourists are still very affected by and interested in the materials obtained from conventional media, especially television.

The information about a specific destination which is mostly demanded by tourists is considered as an important means of promotion for tourism industry (Law, Leung, & Buhalis, 2010). When asked if the promotional information about tourism in Homabay county is convincing, 39 tourists say yes to this while 41 say no. 47 of the 80 tourists disagree that there is adequate information about tourism in the promotional messages that they have come across while 33 say yes to this. This implies that there is the presence of promotional messages that reach some tourists, however this information is not adequate, and maybe are not persuasive enough to convince the potential tourist. The findings agree with the views of (Debski, 2013) who says that message is sent via certain communication medium such as an advertisement on television, and it should be persuasive to the customer, evoking the desire to visit the destination. 47 out of the 80 tourists say that they have come across promotional information that have increased their awareness of destinations Homabay county while 33 say no to this effect. The findings therefore concur with the views of the above scholar since the sites are still largely unknown, there is therefore need to increase the promotional information.

**CONCLUSION**

The above findings show that tourism stakeholders in Homabay county employ use of various messages to promote tourism in the region. The tourism promotional messages comprised of cultural and historical information attached to the sites; while highlighting the heritage of the people of Homabay as well as the scenic sites available in the county.

In spite of the availability of this information, tourism is still low in the region. The study concludes that there is a relationship between framing of the communication messages and tourism promotion. The study concludes that the messages are not framed to convey adequate

information and are not persuasive enough to convince the potential tourists to visit the county. The message is not targeted to a large potential market, especially the international market.

## RECOMMENTATIONS

For improved promotion of tourism in Homabay county, the study recommends that the tourism stakeholders in the region intensify promotion of the sector by increasing promotional messages that increase awareness and reputation of the county, the messages should also be convincing and persuasive enough to evoke the desire to travel from potential tourists and should be targeted at not just local, but also international tourists.

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