

PERSPECTIVE PAPER

Tourism in Africa: opportunities and challenges - perspectives from Eastern and Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT

Tourism in Africa after the pandemic is showing recovery and has even reached the pre-pandemic levels as declared by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 2024. According to UNWTO's 2024 outlook, at least 67% of tourism professionals as experts project better prospects for tourism performance compared to 2023. Due to the projected prospects, this perspective paper aims to explore tourism in Africa particularly Eastern and Southern Africa with a focus on opportunities but also challenges. Specifically, this paper poses two questions; what are the opportunities within the African tourism sector that can spur innovation and societal development? and what are the challenges the African tourism sector has that inhibits it from uncovering its full potentials? This paper uses an integrative literature review as the research method and applies thematic analysis. The findings have shown that among the opportunities for tourism in Africa are harnessing the digital market, integration of technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and metaverse whilst for challenges, the emerged core themes include infrastructure, technology acceptance, research methodology modules, unprofessional customer care personnel and cross-border trade. Therefore, tourism in Africa has opportunities including technology usage whilst among the challenges are infrastructure and technology acceptance. The implications are provided as well as directions for future studies.

KEYWORDS:

Tourism, Africa, Opportunities, Challenges

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INTRODUCTION

Africa is endowed with tourism resources for economic and social development. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) records of 2024, the global projection for recovery in international tourist arrivals is due to reach 96% of pre-pandemic levels. Africa experienced growth of 7% more tourists in 2024 whilst Tanzania witnessed an increase of 49%¹. However, UNWTO¹ confirmed that challenges exist for the tourism sector such as high transport costs, inflation, prices of accommodation, shortage of staff and weather conditions. Likewise, there are opportunities in the tourism sector, for example, Mkwizu² noted that the digital marketing approach is one of the innovations that can be harnessed as opportunities for tourism in Africa. The view of harnessing innovation such as digital marketing and other technologies for tourism purposes in Africa has been echoed by Bama et al.³, Kimeto and Mkwizu⁴, Mkwizu and Kimeto⁵, Mushi⁶ and Raji et al.⁷. In spite of this, more views from African scholars as experts can provide latest information on the prevailing situation of the tourism sector in Africa. Therefore, this perspective paper explores tourism in Eastern and Southern Africa by focusing on opportunities and challenges. Specifically, exploring opportunities within the tourism sector that can spur innovation and societal development; and explore the challenges the African tourism sector has that inhibits the continent from uncovering its full tourism potentials. The significance of this perspective paper is to avail information on opportunities and challenges that exist in the tourism sector in Eastern and Southern Africa so that the tourism stakeholders such as practitioners, policy makers and managers can uncover the full potential of the tourism industry in the post COVID-19 pandemic.

METHODS

The application of integrative literature review method deemed fit to explore tourism in Africa and specifically to address two questions i) What are the current opportunities within the African tourism sector that can spur innovation and societal development? and ii) What are the challenges the African tourism sector has that inhibits it from uncovering its full potentials? Integrative literature review has been used in research by scholars like Cronin and George⁸ and Obazuaye⁹. Furthermore,

Cronin and George⁸ noted that integrative literature review as a research methodology avails “insights into the current state of research on a topic and recommend future research directions”. Similarly, this paper justifies the utilization of the integrative literature review which does not involve collection of primary data but rather source information from reviewed literature, and provide insights on the opportunities and challenges of the tourism sector in Eastern and Southern Africa. In addition, the use of integrative literature review in this paper is to provide directions for further studies on the tourism sector in Africa.

This perspective paper adopts the 3 steps of integrative literature review by Cronin and George⁸ and these are choice of synthesis purposes, literature review and thematic analysis. The first step, the choice of synthesis purpose, is to address the two posed questions in order to explore tourism in Africa by focusing on opportunities and challenges. The second step is the literature review based on journal articles due to journal articles undergoing blind peer review processes hence strengthen the validity and reliability of the selected articles. The rationale for selecting the African Journal of Hospitality and Leisure (AJHL) for the literature review is due to the journal’s blind peer review process of the published journal articles as well as dedication to tourism research for the continent of Africa.

The search words were “Tourism in Africa” OR “Opportunities in the tourism sector for innovation and societal development” or “Challenges in the tourism sector in Africa”. Further selection criteria involved any journal articles not within the search words were excluded and only those with interest to this paper’s topic were included. Hence, this paper considered the exclusion and inclusion criteria in selecting the relevant journal articles for the topic. And the third step employed the thematic analysis which involved coding and summarizing processes manually in order to avail emerging themes to address the two questions posed.

The integrative literature review from the selected journal is for 2 years covering 2023 and 2024 since the aim is to cover Africa’s tourism sector particularly recent developments on opportunities and challenges. Hence, from AJHL, there were 229 articles of which only 25 were relevant journal articles to address the specific

objectives. Therefore, the total relevant reviewed journal's articles as the sample size for this paper's

thematic analysis is 25 as displayed in Table 1 which is placed under the references of this perspective paper.

Table 1: Reviewed Literature

Reference and year	Title	Methods	Findings
Cloete and Ndlovu (2023)	The Future of Sustainable Tourism Education in the Digital Transformation Age Beyond COVID-19 in Namibia	Qualitative	Development of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technology should enable students to engage in realistic simulations of sustainable tourism practices.
Makoni- et al. (2023)	The Drivers and Challenges of Informal Business Tourism in Southern Africa: Evidence from Zimbabwean Cross-Border Traders.	Qualitative	Cross-border trading challenges such as long queues and competition.
Tiso and Melani (2023)	The Adoption of New Technological Advancements to Build Resilience in Hotels.	Quantitative	Significant correlation between the pandemic inciting a change in hotel operations and the integration of technological innovation in hotels to ensure sustainability.
Vumbunu et al. (2023)	Challenges and Prospects of Work-Integrated Learning in Hospitality Training and Education in Botswana: A Case of Bothog University's Dual Learning Model.	Qualitative	Dual study program has challenges like lack of preparedness among students and hotel staff, undefined expectations, burnout and unforeseen costs for both students and the industry.
Kimaro et al. (2023)	An Analysis of the Enablers and Barriers to a Tourism Destination's Resilience: A Case of the Erongo Region in Namibia.	Quantitative	Barriers to tourism include unprofessional customer service, lack of security infrastructure, insufficient investment in the sector, high tax on tourism products and lack of proper amenities. While the enablers include intelligence and academic ability, social competence, self-efficacy and the presence of innovative tourism marketing and local people's traditional environmental knowledge.
Mashapa and Atanga (2023)	Geographic Information Systems: A Toolbox for Sustainable Tourism in Southern Africa.	Qualitative	Geographic information systems technology has the potential to contribute to sustainable tourism development and achieving sustainable development goals.
Sifolo (2023)	Digital Technology Adaptability: Insights from Destination Network Practices for Tourism Businesses in South Africa.	Qualitative and Quantitative	There are interconnected relationships, communication patterns, and collaborative interaction patterns within the network of tourism businesses as best practices for digital technology adaptability to improve the destination's competitiveness and efficiency.

Hader et al. (2023)	Role of Business Intelligence Data in Guest House Management in Gauteng.	Quantitative	Strong acceptance of BI systems among participants. There is a direct relationship between digital literacy and the efficacy of BI system usage.
Kapa et al. (2023)	Perceived Challenges Facing Tourist Guides in South Africa.	Qualitative and Quantitative	Demand from tourist guides to have their industry licensed and regulated, paid better salaries, have regular training and workshops.
Muposhi and Musavengane (2023)	Influencing Hotel Guests' Food Waste Reduction Intentions Through Social Marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility Stimuli.	Quantitative	Social norms and food insecurity are key factors that influence hotel guests' attitude towards food waste reduction.
Cilliers and Hermann (2023)	The Business Model Canvas and Challenges of Volunteer Tourism.	Qualitative	Challenges on infrastructure, offer, customer and financial viability of the VT organizations.
Wulandari et al. (2023)	The Experience of Visiting an Amusement Park in a Developing Country: The Role of Technology Adoption and Service Quality.	Quantitative	Assurance and responsiveness significantly affect the visitor experience and found to predict the experience of visiting the amusement park more powerfully.
Ndhlovu and Dube (2023)	Challenges of Radical Technological Transition in the Restaurant Industry Within Developing Countries.	Documentary review	Organizational culture, infrastructural barriers, and education and training, financial constraints are among the key barriers and challenges.
Wibisono et al. (2023)	Predicting the Adoption of Virtual Reality Tourism in the Post COVID-19 Pandemic Era.	Quantitative	Attitude is significantly influenced by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use.
Septian et al. (2024)	Challenges in Long-Term Public-Private Partnership: Impacts on Public Resource Utilization.	Systematic literature review	PPP can foster innovation and enhance financial sustainability, issues related to governance, frequent renegotiations, and misaligned objectives between public and private sectors often undermine their success.
Musoga et al. (2024)	Moderating Role of Service Innovation on the Relationship between Service Quality and Performance of Hotels in Kenya.	Quantitative	Customer satisfaction, reputation, service quality, and customer loyalty significantly influence hotel performance.
Mashapa and Hassen (2024)	The Metaverse: Perceived Impacts of the New Frontier in Sustainable Tourism.	Quantitative	Metaverse can contribute to sustainable tourism by improving accessibility and reducing the need for physical travel through immersive virtual experiences. But also provides opportunities to educate travelers about eco-friendly practices and conservation projects that improve the long-term viability of the tourism industry.
Misganaw and Signh (2024)	The Effects of Organizational E-readiness on E-marketing Adoption in Tourism Businesses	Quantitative	Organizational preparedness, capability and willingness significantly affect e-marketing adoption.

of Ethiopia: The Mediating Role of Innovation Attributes.

Hurombo et al. (2024)	Exploring the Challenges When Implementing Universal Accessibility in White Water-based Adventure Tourism.	Qualitative	Challenges are limited universal accessibility equipment, costs of adapting the facilities, challenges of hiking up and down the gorges, an absence of a harmonized policy framework for facilitating universal access.
Calinao and Gamoso (2024)	Predictors of Behavioral Intention and the Mediating Effects of Hotel Virtual Reality Experience and Cognitive Absorption.	Quantitative	Investment in superior VR technology can be a strategic tool for hotels to differentiate themselves in a competitive market.
Shereni and Rogerson (2024)	Drivers and Barriers of Carbon Footprint Reduction in the Hospitality Sector.	Quantitative	Main drivers for carbon footprint reduction include a positive public image, conforming to industry best practices, as a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, reduction in operating costs and gaining competitive advantage. Identified barriers include financial constraints, high costs of procuring energy-efficient appliances, lack of knowledge, skills gap, weak legal framework and lack of industry cooperation.
Gupta et al. (2024)	Establishing the Influence of Technology on Travel Behavior through Bibliometric Analysis.	Literature review	Travelers now use personal devices as essential tools for everything ranging from the first phases of organizing and planning journeys to real-world travel experiences. Smartphones and gadgets allow people to easily obtain information on flights, accommodations, activities, and transit alternatives.
Chokoe and Sao Joao (2024)	Technology Usage for Crisis Management in the Hospitality Industry.	Qualitative	Managers were able to effectively manage the effects of COVID well due to their knowledge, skills, and experience.
Hermann and Du Toit (2024)	An Exploratory Review of the Challenges Faced by Lecturers of Tourism Research Methodology in South Africa.	Qualitative	Challenges in the perception of research methodology as a module by students. Professional challenges in the curriculum development and instructional design of the module research methodology.

Compiled by Author (2024)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the reviewed literature reveal that there are current opportunities within the African tourism sector that can spur innovation and societal development but also challenges that inhibits it from

uncovering its full potentials. These are elaborated and discussed.

Current opportunities within the African tourism sector that can spur innovation and societal development

From the reviewed literature, the emerged opportunities are: “positive public image on carbon footprint reduction”, “technology usage in crisis management and travel”, “metaverse in sustainable tourism”, “e-marketing adoption”, “service innovation”, “adoption of virtual reality”, “technology adaptation and adoption”, “social marketing”, “corporate responsibility”, and “acceptance of business intelligence”. The emerged themes on opportunities for the tourism sector in this paper have also indicated the need for technology adoption and adaptation which resonates with past studies like Bama et al.³, Kimeto and Mkwizu⁴, Mkwizu and Kimeto⁵, Mushi⁶ and Raji et al.⁷.

On the positive public image on carbon footprint reduction, the study by Shereni and Rogerson³³ noted that in tourism, reducing the carbon footprint is achievable if barriers such as finances and skills gap are tackled. This implies that financial ability and filling the gap skills are key in enabling successful minimization of carbon footprint. Another opportunity in the African tourism sector is the use of technology for crisis management and travel as indicated by Chokoe and Sao Joao¹¹ and Gupta et al.¹² who have commonly commented that knowledge and skills help manage crises like the effects of COVID but also availability of technologies like smart phones allow travelers to access information which suggest that innovation and societal development relies on technology as well as access to smart phones and other communication gadgets. Equally, on innovation development in the tourism sector, it is important to take advantage of technology innovations like metaverse in sustainable tourism as reflected in Mashapa and Hassen¹³.

Additionally, adoption of e-marketing can spur innovation development in the tourism sector as shown in the study by Misganaw and Signh¹⁴ where majority of the tourism business participants (60%) were from hotels who confirmed that organizational preparedness, capability and willingness were factors that significantly ($P < .001$) predict the adoption of e-marketing in tourism businesses in Ethiopia. The findings of Misganaw and Signh¹⁴ support the previous study by Mkwizu² which advocated for the use of digital marketing in Africa’s tourism industry. On service innovation as opportunity in the tourism sector, the study by Musoga et al.¹⁵ found that the factors of

customer satisfaction, reputation, service quality, and customer loyalty have a significant influence on hotel performance in the tourism sector. Further opportunities like adoption of virtual reality and other technology adaptations were highlighted by Cloete and Ndlovu¹⁰, Wibisono et al.¹⁶, Mashapa and Hassen¹³, Vumbunu et al.¹⁷, Sifolo¹⁸ and Wulandari et al.¹⁹. For instance, Sifolo¹⁸ hinted that communication and collaboration interactions are important in adaptation of digital technologies. On the other hand, social marketing and corporate responsibility indicated by Muposhi and Musavengane²⁰ can be opportunities for the African tourism sector to harness reduction of hotel guests’ attitude towards food waste and thus, spur innovation and societal development. Individuals and communities need food to survive and thrive and therefore, for societies to develop, avoiding food waste is inevitable. Apart from adoption and adaptation of technologies for the tourism sector, it is crucial to have acceptance of business intelligence as emphasized by Hader et al.²¹. Although opportunities exist in the African tourism sector to spur innovation and societal development, there are also several challenges.

Challenges the African tourism sector has that inhibits it from uncovering its full potentials

Some of the emerged challenges faced in the African tourism sector that inhibits it from uncovering its full potential are “competitive markets”, “perception of research methodology as modules”, “absence of harmonized policy framework for hiking”, “Public-Private Partnerships”, “technological transitions”, “business models”, “lack of regular training and workshops”, “unprofessional customer care”, “dual study programs”, and “cross-border trading”. These emerged themes from this study differ from UNWTO¹ which indicated challenges such as accommodation and transport whereas the reviewed literature has revealed more on issues like technology transitions and lack of harmonized policy frameworks.

Calinao and Gamoso²² stated that one of the challenges in the tourism sector is competitive markets and that in order to mitigate this kind of competition, it is necessary to have investment in superior Virtual Reality (VR) technologies as strategic tools for hotels. Another challenge is the perception of research methodology as modules by students which Hermann and Du Toit²³

noted there are professional challenges in the curriculum development and instructional design of the module research methodology. This shows that even in education of tourism, there are curriculum challenges which inhibits the uncovering of the tourism sector's full potential. There is also the absence of harmonized policy framework particularly for hiking as revealed by Hurombo et al.²⁴. The study by Hurombo et al.²⁴ narrated that "There is no alignment between policies that govern adventure tourism activities and land and water management policies". Policy framework is also accompanied by other challenges like limited universal accessibility equipment and costs of adapting the facilities for hiking tourism as emphasized by Hurombo et al.²⁴. This suggests that it is key to overcome challenges of policy and access to facilities so as to harness the full potential of hiking activities in the tourism sector.

In addition, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in the long term is also highlighted as one of the challenges in the tourism sector by Septian et al.²⁵ while Ndhlovu and Dube²⁶ concentrated on technological transition challenges and found these to be organizational culture, infrastructural barriers, education, training and financial constraints. This implies that consideration needs to be made with regard to improvement of infrastructure as well as availing education and training so as to achieve technological transition especially in restaurants within the tourism sector. Business models pose challenges to fully uncover the potential of the tourism sector as indicated by Cilliers and Hermann²⁷ who found that Volunteer Tourism (VT) faces challenges of infrastructure, offer, customer and financial viability of the VT organizations. The study by Kapa et al.²⁸ echoed the lack of regular training and workshops thus supporting Ndhlovu and Dube²⁶.

Lack of training and workshops leads to unskilled labour but also absence of professionals. For instance, Kimaro et al.²⁹ did a study in Erongo region of Namibia and applied quantitative analysis. Findings showed that there are unprofessional customer care services (71.4%) and insufficient investment (67.3%) in the tourism sector. This suggests that training and workshops as well as investments are needed to improve the profession of customer care for the tourism sector. Similarly, there are challenges on dual study

programs in Botswana whereby Vumbunu et al.¹⁷ discovered that these challenges are related to lack of preparedness among students and hotel staff and this is accompanied with undefined expectations, burnout and unforeseen costs for both students and the tourism industry. The findings from Vumbunu et al.¹⁷ suggest that there is a need to further understand the expectations of both students and staff as well as reduce any elements that induce burnout and unexpected costs. In the tourism sector, there is trade and in particular challenges have been noted for cross-border trading. For example, Makoni et al.³⁰ did research in South Africa and found that at the Zimbabwean cross-border, the trade for the informal business tourism has a number of challenges including long queues and competition. Therefore, the reviewed articles have indicated several challenges that inhibits the African tourism sector to uncover its full potential including adoption of new technologies in order to build resilience and minimize carbon footprint as well as utilizing geographical information systems for sustainable tourism development which are emphasized by Tiso and Melani³¹, Mashapa and Atanga³², and Shereni and Rogerson³³.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

This study concludes that there are several opportunities and challenges within the tourism sector in Eastern and Southern Africa. The opportunities are "positive public image on carbon footprint reduction", "technology usage in crisis management and travel", "metaverse in sustainable tourism", "e-marketing adoption", "service innovation", "adoption of virtual reality", "technology adaptation and adoption", "social marketing", "corporate responsibility", and "acceptance of business intelligence. Further findings reveal challenges in the tourism sector that inhibits its full potential. These include "competitive markets", "perception of research methodology as modules", "absence of harmonized policy framework for hiking", "Public-Private Partnerships", "technological transitions", "business models", "lack of regular training and workshops", "unprofessional customer care", "dual study programs", and "cross-border trading".

The outcome of this paper has a practical implication, policy implication, managerial implication and education implication. The practical implication is for tourism stakeholders to prioritize technology usage particularly VR, metaverse, social marketing and e-marketing. Prioritizing technology usage through provision of training programs to assist the integration of technologies in developing innovations for the tourism sector. For instance, the use of VR in museums and national parks to enhance tourists' experiences. The policy implication is for the policy makers to harmonize policy frameworks in hiking to align with other policies such as land for easy implementation. The managerial implication is for Destination Marketing Managers (DMOs) in the tourism sector to embrace service innovation, e-marketing technologies and technology adaptation to spur innovation in the tourism sector of Africa. Also, DMOs should necessitate regular training and workshops to improve skills for staff including those in the customer care services. The key managerial personnel at cross-border stations needs to reduce long queues in order to improve tourism trade. The education implication is for tourism institutions to emphasize better business models and manage the perception of research methodology as modules.

The proposed recommendation from this paper is that the tourism stakeholders (practitioners, researchers, policy makers and tourism institutions) should ensure there is acceptance of business intelligence to spur innovation and societal development in the African tourism sector.

This paper's limitation is on the use of the integrative literature review with thematic analysis. The direction for future review studies should consider other methodologies including quantitative analysis to explore tourism in Africa which is a sector that is constantly changing. This paper accommodated a single journal source and therefore, biased on journal articles only due to blind peer review processes to maintain a rigor literature review methodology. Future studies should deploy multiple journal sources for broader perspectives. Further suggestion for future research direction is the application of a systematic literature review method. The outcome of this perspective paper can also be used by future researchers to explore quantitative approaches or

mixed methods to examine the patterns of opportunities and challenges within the tourism sector in Africa.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared

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