

Rural Community Perception of Tourism Development: A Strategic Tool in Rural Development

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How to cite this article: Litheko, A. & Potgieter, M. (2021). Rural Community Perception of Tourism Development: A Strategic Tool in Rural Development. African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, 10(4):1452-1465. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720-172>

Abstract

Local communities are the most valuable assets for a tourist destination; therefore, their perceptions of tourism constitute a crucial pillar for designing tourism development strategies that promote sustainable development. The success of tourism development in a rural setting depends on securing the support and active participation of stakeholders, in particular the community. It is important for planners to gather the perception of local communities about the impacts of tourism when planning the development of tourism. The aim of this study was to learn about the rural community's perceived benefits associated with tourism development; and furthermore, to examine their attitude towards tourism development in their residential surroundings. Data was collected with the aim of gathering the community's viewpoint, in particular their perception and attitude, on tourism development in a rural region, South Africa. The findings specify that the Local Destination Management Organisation (LDMO) and other role players should formulate development strategies that contribute towards creating employment opportunities and to develop an inclusive economy that will enable the local community to benefit through tourism development.

Keywords: Strategy, rural tourism, community, perception, policy consideration

Introduction

Tourist activity can particularly be interesting in rural areas due to the declining effects of other economic sources of wealth generation and overall improvement of the livelihoods of rural communities, according to Perz-Calderon, Prieto-Ballester, Miguel-Barrado and Milanes-Montero (2020). Poverty is a scourge to 42.29% of people in Sub-Saharan Africa who survive on less than \$1.90 a day with most residing in rural communities (Fosu, 2015; Mdiya, Tarvinga, Mushunje, Mopipi & Ngarava, 2020); in relation to South Africa, approximately 55.5% of the population (30.3 million) are living in poverty (World Bank Group, 2020). The National Department of Tourism (2012) in South Africa resolved that prime tourism attractions are not only located within the borders of cities, but also in rural areas. In some of these deprived areas, there are prime heritage sites and a range of other major tourism attractions and/or activities. Although rural areas have always attracted tourists, Sharpley (2002) argued that rural tourism remained, on a relatively small scale, a passive activity and traditionally, rural areas were predominantly associated with agriculture until the mid-20th century. Tourism development in rural areas can certainly make a considerable contribution towards the prosperity of rural communities if strategically developed and managed. The success of tourism

development in a rural setting depends on securing the support and active participation of stakeholders, in particular the community, as they are regarded as one of the primary beneficiaries of any benefits realised from such an endeavour. It is important for planners to gather the perception of local communities, as explained by Nunkoo and Ramkisson (2011), about the impacts of tourism when planning the development of tourism. Local communities are the most valuable assets for a tourist destination, and therefore their perceptions of tourism constitute a crucial pillar for designing tourism development strategies that promote sustainable development, as indicated by Hateftabar and Chapuis (2020).

This paper is based on understanding the rural community's perception concerning tourism development. The aim of this study was to learn about the rural community's perceived benefits associated with tourism development, and furthermore to examine their attitude towards tourism development in their residential surroundings. The Local Destination Management Organisation's (LDMO) understanding of the community's perspective concerning the impact of tourism development can serve as a strategic instrument in the planning and policy formulation for the development of sustainable tourism development in a rural environment. The following section will elaborate on the literature review of the study.

Literature review

Tourism development in a rural setting

Tourism has been embraced as a new economic driver in numerous rural areas due to associated entrepreneurship opportunities and its ability to attract foreign direct investment, to generate jobs, and because tourism supports the growth of the local economy (Wilson *et al.*, 2001; Hurst & Niehm, 2012). Tourism can also aid the transition of a rural community and its business sector by providing more diverse economic and community development options (Davis & Marais, 2004). Some positive aspects regarding the development of the tourism activity, as presented by Borma (2014), can lead to maintaining peace in the world, educating nations, environmental protection, and the protection of historical and traditional structures. In addition, tourism can substantially contribute toward:

- growth employment, while accelerating socio-economic development;
- the increase in living standards, in particular communities living in remote areas;
- the improvement of national and international law;
- the development of a national conscience; and
- educating community members about the importance of protecting and conserving natural and cultural resources.

Consequently, for tourism development to be successful and beneficial for the development of a rural community, it must be planned and managed responsibly by local tourism authorities (Inskeep, 1991; Martin, 1995; Butler *et al.*, 1998; Yuksel *et al.*, 1999; Southgate & Sharpley, 2002; De Oliveira, 2003; Ghoddousi, Pintassilgo, Mendes, Ghoddousi & Sequeira, 2018; Stoffelen *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, rural communities that use or plan to use tourism as an economic development tool to diversify their economy must be involved in the development of policies for the sustainable development of the community (Yuksel *et al.*, 1999; Pucako & Ratz, 2000; Southgate & Sharpley, 2002; De Oliveira, 2003; Kruja & Hasaj, 2010; Stoffelen *et al.*, 2020).

Tourism has become a global industry with increasing impacts on regional and local development. Ezeuduji and Rid (2011) reported that tourism's contribution to Gambia's gross domestic product (GDP), Gambia being one of the smallest nations in West Africa, was projected to increase from an estimated 13% in 2004 to around 18% by 2020. The Emerging Market Group (EMG) projected that employment generated by Gambia's tourism is to increase from an estimated 16 000 jobs in 2004 to around 35 000 jobs in 2020, as explained by Rid *et*

al. (2014). This level of economic impact makes tourism economically significant to the Gambian nation. Many regions and countries in sub-Sahara Africa increasingly perceive tourism as a strategy by which to attract foreign direct investment and to create employment. Similarly, tourism as a rural development tool has received significant prominence in South African policy discourse recently, perhaps even more forcefully than in the past 15 years (Rogerson & Zoleka, 2005; Swartbroke & Horne, 2007; Rogerson & Visser, 2011; Visser & Hoogendoorn, 2012; Baz, 2020; Nugroho & Numata, 2020). According to Visser and Hoogendoorn (2012), following the 2009 elections, the South African national government instituted significant changes in government to support tourism. This included the establishment of a stand-alone Ministry of Tourism, which points to acknowledging that tourism has grown in stature and requires dedicated support from government (Viljoen & Henama, 2017). Tourism is a major agent of change, as stated by Beeton (2005), who mentioned furthermore that tourism can contribute immensely to the socio-economic needs of a community, especially a rural community, such as creating employment opportunities and improving the standard of living.

Tourism a strategic tool for rural development

The inherent qualities that many rural communities possess, include attributes such as personalised attention and genuine interaction with the tourists. For example, enthusiasm for sharing their local culture/heritage, overall authenticity of character, and the demand for tourism attraction in rural areas have increased in many instances in recent years, as indicated by Gartner (2004) and Hurst and Niehm (2012). The demand for tourism in rural areas can contribute to the development of sustainable tourism that could develop rural communities. Some of the ways, as indicated by Akama and Kieti (2007) and Ghoddousi et al. (2018), in which tourism can contribute towards rural development include: (1) creation of opportunities for self- and local employment; (2) encouraging collaboration among public and private sectors, non-governmental organisations, and local communities; (3) enhancing socio-cultural effects of tourism; (4) enabling local access to infrastructure and services that are provided for tourists; (5) supporting local communities' participation; and (6) fostering institutional capacity-building to enable the active participation of local community members. Tourism development, particularly in a rural region, is seen as a vehicle for regional development in South Africa, as it contributes towards eliminating regional disparities, in particular between metropolitan centres and remote areas. Tourism can contribute immensely to poverty alleviation, job creation, preservation of arts and culture, and sustainable environmental management in the development of rural regions (National Department of Tourism, 2012).

The strategic development of tourism by LDMO and other related stakeholders can contribute to sustainable tourism development that provides boundless economic opportunities to rural communities. The development of a strategy, as established by Pearce and Robinson (2007), Emello (2010) and Louw and Venter (2010), is influenced by the extra-organisational practices of an organisation, such as how it manages its stakeholders and its wider social fields (how it is done), and the intra-organisational practices of people in the organisation and their activities carried out (what is done). There is a reciprocal relationship between intra- and extra-organisational strategic activities, as asserted by Speculand (2014). However, this relationship is influenced by what people do (their activities), because the activities carried out by people influence the way in which strategies are implemented. One of the most important tasks during strategy formulation is the management of the interface between the many and often competing demands of an organisation's different stakeholders, in particular that of the community, in relation to the strategic development of a rural region. Top management of an organisation is accountable for the formulation of an organisation's strategy and needs to attend to the

management of the community's interest to ensure the strategy's robustness, according to Ackerman and Eden (2011), Nies and Natter (2010) and Sheth (2011). By anticipating and managing the community's reaction to organisational strategies, as formulated by Byrd and Gustke (2011), actions can be put in place that can either capitalise on potential positive responses or reduce negative responses. The community is likely to have a powerful effect on the feasibility of an organisation achieving its strategic goals and contributing towards the organisation's long-term viability and the development of sustainable tourism, as asserted by Waligo et al. (2013). The perception and attitude of a community toward the impact of tourism are important planning and policy considerations for the development of sustainable tourism development in a rural environment (Ko & Stewart, 2002). This study analysed the perception of the community on the state of tourism development in rural settlements and their viewpoint on the benefit they derive from tourism. The succeeding section will expound on the importance of understanding the community perception concerning tourism development from a policy consideration perspective.

Community perception of tourism development

Perception is the keystone of building knowledge, not just about products, but also about everything else in the world, although it is common to refer to perception as if it were somehow different from the truth. However, this is not the case: perception may differ between individuals, but for each person his/her own perception is the whole truth. This is sometimes difficult to remember, as explained by Joubert (2010), but in fact, our whole experience of the world happens inside our heads, filtered by our senses and moderated by our previous experiences. It is important to understand how stakeholders, especially those in the community, perceive tourism to gain, firstly, an understanding of the behaviour and concerns of locals, and a better comprehension of local agreement's initiatives and support for tourism development strategies, policies and actions, as ascertained by Harrill (2004). The majority of the community, as highlighted by Gon et al. (2016) and Baz (2020), perceive that there are more benefits compared to costs from tourism development in rural areas, and believe that tourism attracts investment and tourist arrivals, improve a destinations' image (for example, through infrastructure development), and also contribute towards the growth of community development. The perceived impacts of tourism by the community, as assessed by Choi and Sirakaya (2005), Guan et al. (2011), Ye et al. (2014) and Hateftabar and Chapuis (2020), partly determine the success of tourism development. These perceived impacts are classified into three categories:

- Economic impacts involve improving the local economy, creating job opportunities.
- Socio-cultural impacts include an increase in the availability of recreational activities, increase in the number of traffic accidents, promotion of cultural exchange and loss of tranquillity in an area.
- Environmental impacts include improving infrastructure development, enhancing the protection of the natural environment, as well as preventing damage to natural surroundings and the destruction of the local ecosystem.

Social exchange theory (SET) is the most frequently applied theoretical basis to understand the perception and attitudes of communities toward tourism development (Sharpley, 2014). SET argues that rational humans base their behavioural tendencies on maximising benefits and minimising costs, implying that if local communities maximise their benefits through tourism development, they will subsequently support the tourism development efforts initiated by LDMO, as illustrated in Figure 1.

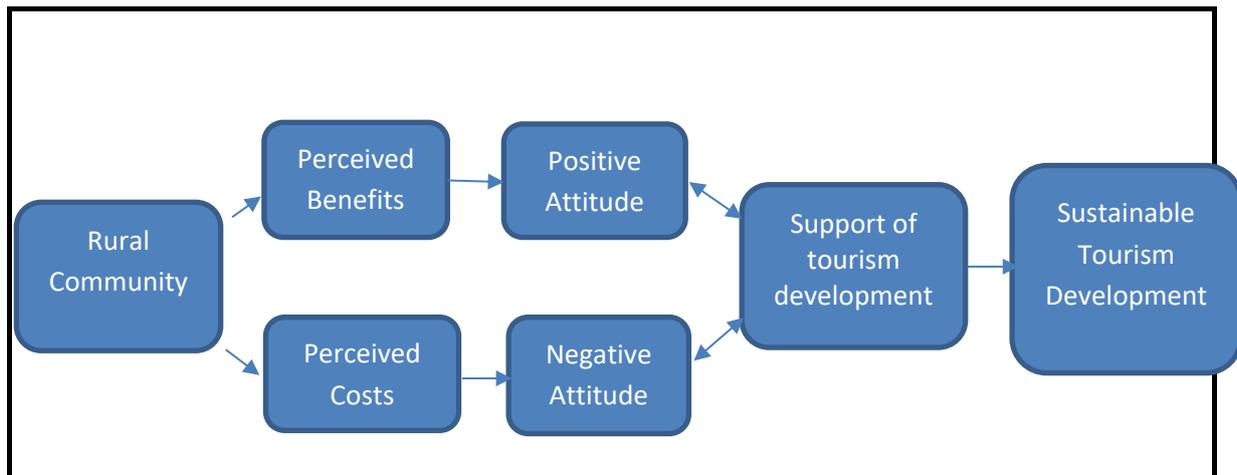


Figure 1: Rural community support for tourism development
Source: adopted from Nugroho and Numato (2020)

McKenzie (2012) and Ghoddousi et al. (2018) indicated that if residents perceive benefits from national parks, they will subsequently come to support the conservation efforts and existence of the national park. Research findings from previous studies indicate that the socio-economic effect has been the most discernible impact of tourism activities on adjacent communities in protected areas world-wide (Sebele, 2010; Molina-Munillo et al. 2016; Nugroho & Numata, 2020). Similarly, Pilanesberg National Park situated in South Africa has been a source of economic opportunities for local community, improving living standards, and the development of village infrastructure (Stoffelen, Adiyia, Vanneste & Kotze, 2020). Conversely, studies have also found evidence of the shortcomings of tourism development. Akyeampong (2011) indicated that the socio-economic benefits of tourism in Kakim National Park in Ghana were only modest. Tourism development can harm aspects of society, culture and the environment, for example generating noise, traffic congestion and overcrowding (Huong & Lee, 2017; Segota et al., 2017). In addition, Sene-Harper et al. (2019) found that, in Senegal, the absence of a legal framework for communal land tenure and tourism concession rights has reduced the channels through which communities can benefit from tourism around national parks. Conversely, Scheyvens and Russell (2012) found that, in Fiji, a stronger communal land policy supports the interests of landowners against private investors to ensure that communities can maximise tourism benefits. Investigating the community's viewpoints, specifically their perception and attitude, toward tourism development is a significant step for LDMO if they are to encourage community involvement and support for tourism development programmes, and moreover is important for sustainable natural resource management and conservation (Pudyatmoko et al., 2018; Nugroho & Numato, 2020).

Research method

The study utilised a quantitative research method. The goal of quantitative research, as explained by Thomas (2003), Seidman (2006), Charles and Metler (2010), is to describe trends or to explain relationships between variables. The sample size, as pointed out by Wilkinson (2003), Kongsved et al. (2007) and Johl and Renganathan (2010), is typically large and it is ideally randomly selected from a larger research population so that the results can be generalised to the population. Data was collected with the aim of obtaining the community's viewpoint concerning tourism development, and in particular their perception and attitude towards tourism development. In this study, the population was all members of the community residing in villages located in and around the Pilanesberg region, as depicted in Figure 1, with

an estimated population of 350 000 residents. In view of the fact that it was improbable for the researcher to reach all the members of the target population, it was ideal to identify a sample of the population that was accessible. The nature of the sample population depended on the time and other resources of the researcher. The non-probability conventional sampling for the quantitative method was used and this method involves accessing participants wherever in the chosen villages and typically wherever is convenient (Collis & Hussey, 2009). The sample size was 800 and questionnaires were distributed among members of the community and only adult residents (18 years and above) were approached to act as respondents, and sample members ranged from all gender and income groups. Anonymity was ensured when the questionnaires distributed to respondents were collected, as no names of the respondents were written on the questionnaires. Questionnaires allow for anonymity of the respondents, and that gives them liberty to express their views freely, especially on contentious issues (Yin, 2008; Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Questionnaires were the best data collection technique for the quantitative method, as the study dealt with or investigated people’s perception or opinions. After the data collection process was completed, 359 completed questionnaires were ready to be used. All responses from the survey questionnaires were assigned numeric codes, as explained in the data collection process section, and subsequently inserted into the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS), which included bi-variant, multivariate and regression analysis, as mentioned by Field (2013).

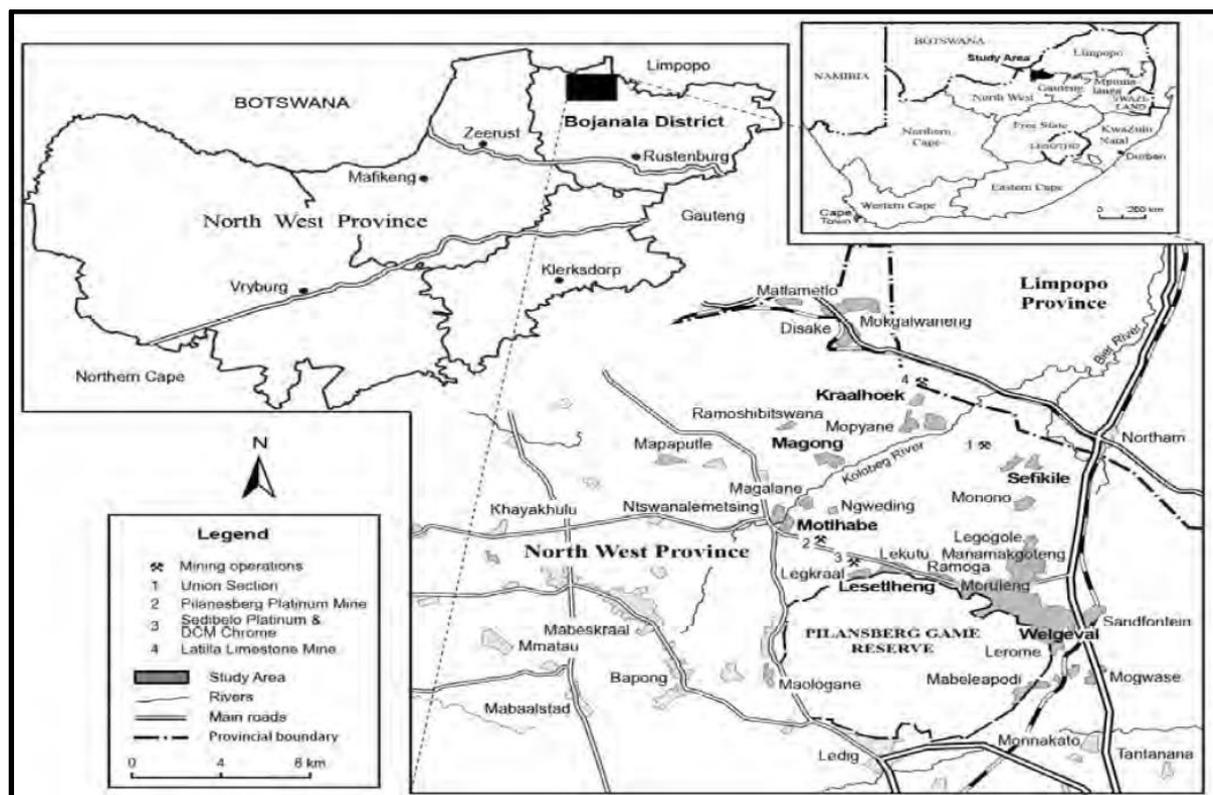


Figure 1: Research populations: Villages
 Source: Mnwana (2014)

Results and discussion

A large percentage of the respondents (61.2%), as illustrated in Figure 2, has matriculated from high school and this is followed by 30.9% who have acquired a certificate from a tertiary institution. This suggests that most of the respondents are most likely have considerable

knowledge of the importance of tourism development in the Pilanesberg area and are likely to be aware of the benefits of tourism and what this sector could contribute towards uplifting the area.

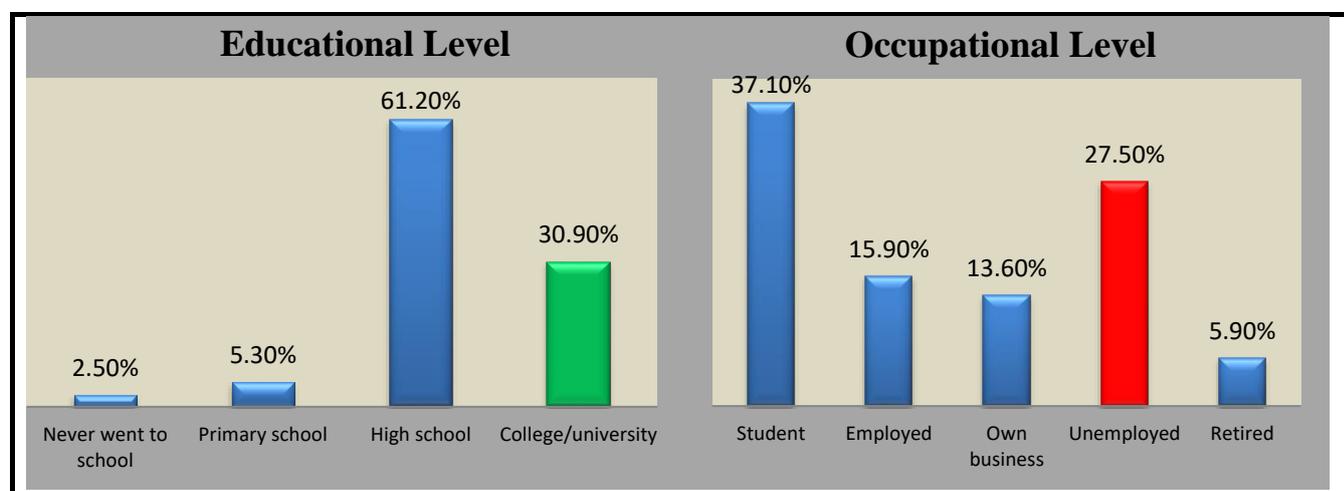


Figure 2: Educational and occupational level of population

Furthermore, Figure 2 illustrates that a surprisingly large portion of the respondents (37%) indicated that they were students at a tertiary institution. A slightly lower percentage of respondents, 29.5% (15.9 +13.6), was economically active and earned an income from an organisation that employed them, or as entrepreneurs. Unemployed respondents were 27.5% and those who are retired were 5.9%. As revealed by the findings, there is a high percentage of respondents in the community who were unemployed and the findings highlight the need for a local destination management organisation to strategically develop and manage tourism in the area, a comprehensive knowledge of the community’s perspective is a significant step towards creating inclusive tourism development that empowers the community.

Tourism benefits for the community

In order to understand the inevitable impacts of tourism on a community, their perception should be investigated. The findings point out that a somewhat low percentage (39.0%) of respondents do benefit from tourism development and an overwhelmingly majority (61.0%) of respondents stated that the community is not benefitting from tourism development. One of the open-ended questions posed to respondents was to describe the benefits associated with tourism development in their community, and the results were as follows: (1) tourism development in the Pilanesberg area was a source for employment; and (2) benefit from tourism development through owning tourism business selling products and services to tourists (for example: food, accommodation, tour operators, tour guides, et cetera); and cultural activities (for example: artefacts, cultural dances and events). What is very concerning is that the majority of respondents highlighting that they do not benefit from tourism in and around the Pilanesberg area. This is in concurrence with Figure 2 where it is indicated that a high number of respondents (27.5%) are unemployed. These results indicate that the tourism sector does somewhat contribute towards the development of the community, and only through the strategic management of tourism development in this area will the benefits for the community be optimised and spread to other villages. How the members of the community perceive the aforementioned benefits of tourism development is a critical predictor of their support for, and likelihood of, achieving sustainable tourism development and management. On the other hand, this will enable the LDMO to adopt adequate responsive mechanisms to any negative factors

that might be to the detriment of sustainable tourism development in the rural region. Tourism, specifically in a rural region, can positively affect the lives of members of the community by bringing about increased income and employment opportunities, an improved standard of living, improved infrastructure, and the promotion and preservation of local culture and heritage. The existence of small business enterprises is dependent on the strength of rural areas with certain qualities symptomatic of their situation, such as the level of development, natural beauty, cultural activities and uniqueness.

Chi-square test of independence

The chi-square test of independence is concerned with the relationship between two different variables (or categories) in a population under study. There is a significant relationship ($p=0.008$) between the two variables, Do tourism businesses within your community employ people from this area? versus gender, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Chi-square results: Tourism businesses employing local residents in the BBK community versus gender

Variables	Do tourism businesses within your community employ people from this area?		
	Yes	No	Total
Male	90	82	172
Female	70	113	183
Total	160	195	n = 355

p-value = 0.008 Chi-square statistic = 7.094 (df = 1)

If the probability value (p-value) is less than or equal to 0.05, then there is a significant relationship between the two variables, and if the p value is greater than 0.05, then there is no significant relationship. The observed frequencies, chi-square statistic and the p-value with one degree of freedom ($df = 1$), are shown in Table 1. Since the p-value (0.008) is less than 0.05, this implies that there is a level of significance between the two variables and this means that the views of the respondents on tourism employment are significantly dependent on their gender. Of note is that the majority of the respondents, i.e. 113 (31.8%), who disagree with the item listed in Table 1, are women, whereas many of the respondents, i.e. 90 (25.4%), who agree, are men. Figure 3 validates the point that female respondents had a mean score of 3.20 and this suggests that female respondents

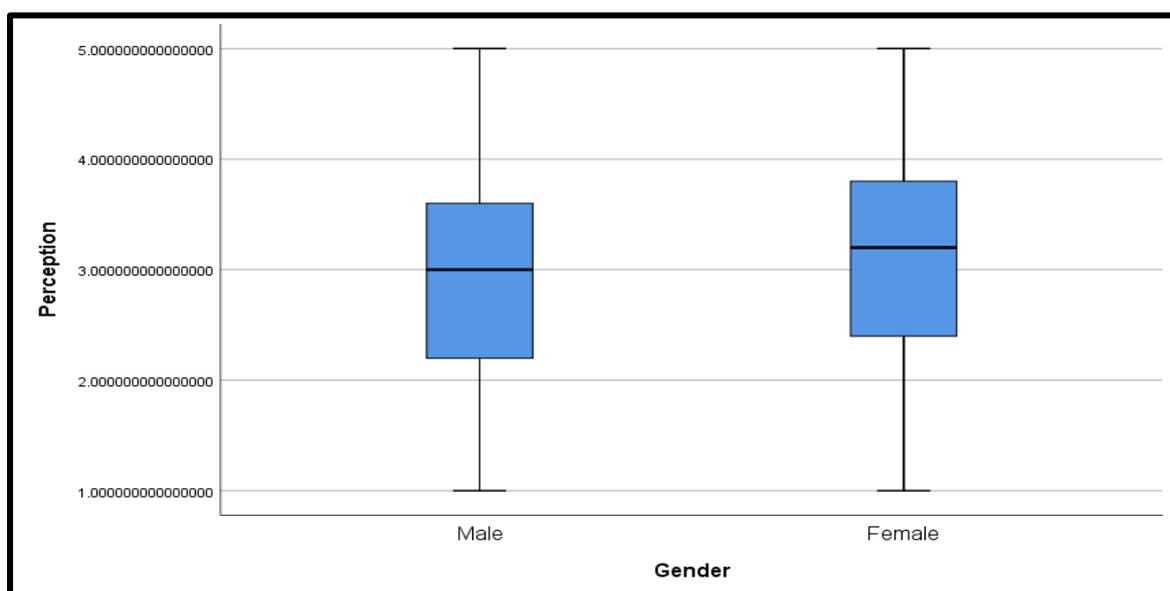


Figure 4: Perception by gender box

have a slightly higher negative perception towards tourism compared to male respondents. The scale ranges from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). This will propose to the tourism authorities to develop strategies that will encourage females to be more involved and participate in the tourism development process in the hope of shaping their perception to be more positive towards tourism. The tourism sector offers considerable potential for the development of entrepreneurial activities, in particular because most businesses operating in the tourism sector are small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs), such as guesthouses, bed-and-breakfast enterprises, tour operators, and many more. Funding entrepreneurship initiatives targeting women could be a policy measure to promote women empowerment and, at the same time, contribute towards the preservation and conservation of culture and heritage.

Correlation of variables: Pearson correlation coefficient

The Pearson correlation coefficient is used to measure the extent to which two variables are associated (for example, when X changes, Y also tends to change). The results obtained for this test are indicated in Table 2. Since the p-values are less than 0.01 for the level of significance for attitude and perception, the correlation between age group and views of the community on tourism development is significant. Negative correlation coefficients ($r = -0.220$ and -0.243) indicate that there is a negative correlation between age group and the views of the community on tourism development. It means that elderly community members, with regard to years, tend to agree with the tourism issues in terms of attitude and perception, whereas younger residents tend to disagree. The findings correspond with national figures. According to the quarterly labour force survey of the first quarter of 2021, young people are still struggling in the South African labour market. The official unemployment rate was 32.6%. This rate was 46.3% among young people aged 15 to 34 years, implying that almost one in every two young people in the labour force did not have a job in the first quarter of 2021 (StatsSA, 2021).

Table 2: Pearson correlation between age group and views of the community on tourism development

Item	Statistic	
Attitude (n=356)	Correlation coefficient (r)	-0.220**
	p - value	0.000
Perception (n=356)	Correlation coefficient (r)	-0.243**
	p - value	0.000

**Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

As shown in Table 3, respondents’ perception towards tourism development has a positive relationship with their attitude, as it is shown to be $p = 0.745$, which is closer to 1.

Table 3: Correlation of variables: Attitude and perception (Pearson correlation coefficient)

Variable		Attitude	Perception
Attitude	Pearson correlation	1	.745**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	359	359
Perception	Pearson correlation	.745**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	359	359

**Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

If the correlation coefficient is 1, the variables have a perfect positive correlation. This means that if one variable moves a given amount, the second moves proportionally in the same direction. A positive correlation coefficient less than 1 indicates a less than perfect positive correlation, with the strength of the correlation growing as the number approaches 1. The results reveal that members of the community who agree with one viewpoint (attitude) tend to

agree with other viewpoints (perception). This means that if one variable moves a given amount, the second moves proportionally in the same direction. This section presented the respondents' correlated viewpoints on tourism development, specifically their perceptions and attitudes. The findings gathered from this section will enable the LDMO to be in a better position to strategically plan and manage the relations with the community in pursuit of attaining a sustainable tourism development in rural region.

Preferences in terms of tourism development in a rural region

Respondents were given the opportunity to freely express their preferences and needs in terms of tourism development in a rural community by means of open-ended questions. The responses received were unfortunately only 35 of the 357 respondents who expressed their views. The creation of employment opportunities through tourism development in a rural community was mentioned by as many as 31 of the respondents. The findings indicate that the LDMO and other role players should formulate development strategies that contribute towards creating employment opportunities and to develop a vibrant, equitable and sustainable economy that will enable the local community to benefit from tourism, in particular through job creation. Tourism brings entrepreneurship opportunities, creates employment and has the potential to alleviate poverty in a community, in particular in a rural region.

Conclusion and recommendation

The understanding of how the community-group perceives the benefits or lack of benefits associated with tourism development is an initial phase an LDMO needs to consider when formulating strategies on how to manage the community as a stakeholder. As a result, it is important for an LDMO to involve the members of a community in the decision-making process and when formulating strategies. The support and participation of members of the community group in tourism are critical for the sustainable development of a rural region through tourism. One of the main factors indicating the success of using tourism for regional development purposes is the spread of tourism benefits to all villages, specifically the more remote areas where unemployment in all probability is at its highest. Added to the factors that can inform policy-making is understanding the attitude of the members of the community towards tourism development, as it is vital for the successful and sustainable development of a tourism destination. The attitude of the community and their support for tourism development are positively related to the personal benefits and positive impacts of tourism development. A positive attitude from the members of the community will enhance their involvement and support for the development process of tourism, and subsequently enhance the quality of service and the experience offered to tourists. The LDMO, in partnership with government, in particular at local level, has to undertake action for the provision of adequate educational, technical and professional training programmes to assist existing tourism businesses and emerging entrepreneurs with the objective of establishing a culture and system of service excellence in rural communities as a tourism destination. In addition, community awareness-building campaigns are essential to train local residents, local entrepreneurs and others on how they can support tourism and benefit from it. Building knowledge in a destination will enable local residents to be in a better position to determine their own needs and direct tourism development in their rural communities.

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