

## Influence of Strategic Tourism Promotion Practices on the Performance of Tour Operator Firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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### Abstract

The study sought to establish the influence of strategic promotion practices on the performance of tour operator firms. Mixed methods research design was adopted. The population was Kenya Association of Tour Operators (KATO) Full Members that are located in Nairobi County and from which a sample size was estimated. Questionnaires and structured interviews were used for data collection. Descriptive statistics and simple linear regression analyses were used in the analysis to answer the research objectives. The findings on the influence of strategic tourism promotion practices on the performance of tour operator firms revealed that to a large extent tour operator firms used recommendations e.g. from a friend or colleague as a strategic tourism promotion practice followed by advertising. There was a statistically significant weak and positive relationship between strategic tourism promotion practices and performance. Further findings revealed that strategic tourism promotion practices positively and statistically significantly influenced performance. Tour firms can rely on strategic tourism promotion practices for their revenue and customer base growth.

**Keywords:** Strategic tourism promotion; tour operator firms; performance; advertising; word of mouth

### Introduction

Promotion is an important ingredient of the marketing mix as it refers to a process of informing, persuading and influencing a consumer to make choice of the product to be bought (Alexandrescu & Milandru, 2018). Some of the essential elements of the promotional mix include advertising; sales promotion; events; public relations; direct and database marketing; online and social media marketing and mobile marketing. Promotion is one of the strongest elements in the Marketing Mix (Lusairia et al., 2021). Strategic Tourism Promotion is a set of means and actions intended to inform potential visitors about the tourism product offered and includes sharing with them its most attractive and innovative attributes (Thabit & Raewf, 2018). Further, Lusairia et al. (2021) asserts that advertising is a strong element of promotion mix and is concerned with where, when, and how the advertisement will be disseminated. Strategic tourism promotion can utilize a variety of mediums including television, radio, internet, and print. Promoting a tourism product or service at the right time of year or during the right season is critical to success. Strategic promotion benefits a tourism business in several ways including: to establish a tourism brand; to create and increase the demand for a tourism

product in the market; to communicate the differentiating factor of the tour firm; and to strengthen the tour operator brand image (Alexandrescu & Milandru, 2018).

According to Yarcan and Çetin (2021), tour operators are businesses that combine two or more travel services (e.g. transport, accommodation, catering, and entertainment, sightseeing) and sell them through travel agencies or directly to final consumers as a single product. A tour operator is thus a crucial link in the distribution chain representing the central connection between customers and providers of tourism services, and thus has the power to influence both the demand and the supply side. The product that a tour operator sells to customers is the 'package tour', i.e. the packaged combination of transport, accommodation and services (Yarcan & Çetin, 2021). Due to bulk buying the tour operator is able to offer this package at a cheaper price than the customer would have been able to achieve dealing directly with individual suppliers. This package is distributed to the customer either directly (e.g. via direct sell, internet) or via a 'middleman' (the travel agent) who arranges the sale of the package for commission, usually 10% of the retail price.

Tour operators in Kenya are governed by Kenya Association of Tour Operators (KATO), which sets policies on how they operate. Tour operators' certification in Kenya is done by Travelife, as an international certification scheme based in The Netherlands, in collaboration with Ecotourism Kenya (EK) and KATO (Ariya et al., 2021). Different types of tour operators currently operate in Kenya including inbound, outbound, domestic and ground operators as categorized by KATO (KATO, 2020). KATO currently categorizes tour operators' membership in terms of their financial turnover. The categories range from A to E. Other categorization includes associate, affiliate, provisional and corporate.

The Kenya Tourism Strategic Plan (2013-18) acknowledged that the country's tourism could greatly depend on its wilderness and wildlife, with various players in both private and public sectors involved in marketing Kenya's tourism product globally. However, the country's marketing efforts seemed disjointed and uncoordinated thereby resulting in reduced impact vis a vis the total resources employed (GoK, 2015). Kenya has also suffered from the perception of the country as an unsafe destination (GoK, 2017). Consequently, according to Kenya's 2013 Economic Survey, about 1.5 million tourists visited Kenya a year, compared to some 8.3 million per year to South Africa which is grouped together with Kenya in terms of tourism destinations (GoK, 2013). In addition, the Kenya Economic Survey 2015 indicated that the number of visitors to Kenya's parks and reserves had been on a downward trend for the last several years (GoK, 2015). For instance, between 2010 and 2014, the number of visitors to parks and reserves dropped by 7.4 per cent from 2,337.7 thousand in 2013 to 2,164.6 thousand in 2014, (GoK, 2015). Performance targets for Kenya's tourism Sector for the period 2018 to 2022 included increasing tourism arrivals to 2.5 million and tourism earnings to Ksh.175 billion (GoK, 2018). However, according to the country's Annual Tourism Sector Performance Report 2022, Kenya's highest recorded international tourist arrivals were only 1,483,752, or 59% of the 2.5 million target (GoK, 2023). The poor performance of Kenya's tourism sector was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic. According to Mandina (2022), the global COVID-19 pandemic has seen a rapid decline in arrivals globally, not only due to travel restrictions, but also reduced traveller confidence. Given their often-tarnished reputations, the pandemic has added a unique challenge to African destinations in their bid to implement tourism recovery strategies. The Kenyan Government suspended international passenger flights from 25th March to 31st July 2020 to contain the spread of COVID-19. Consequently, the number of international visitor arrivals declined by 71.5 per cent from 2,035.4 thousand in 2019 to 579.6 thousand in 2020 (GoK, 2021). Similarly, tourism earnings declined by 43.9 per cent from KSh 163.6 billion in 2019 to KSh 91.7 billion in 2020 (GoK, 2021). Domestic tourism was equally constrained by restriction of movement of persons within Nairobi

Metropolitan and Mombasa as well as suppression of most socio-economic activities during the second and third quarter of 2020. This unfortunate state of affairs has further complicated the tour operations business in Kenya over the years.

Strategic promotion, the element of a firm's decision-making concerned with choosing the most appropriate mix of advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and publicity for communication with its target market, has been proposed by several authors as a great intervention for firm performance. According to Armenski et al., (2018), the goal of strategic tourism promotion is to persuade tourists to buy or consume the tourism product offering. Indeed, strategic tourism promotion practices contribute significantly to increased sales and profits for tour operator firms (Kim & Min, 2016). Reid and Bojanic (2010) explain that strategic tourism promotion practices are more associated with information about where the tourism products and services are distributed and is available in such forums as in trade shows, web pages, resellers, direct mail, and tourist destinations. In addition, strategic promotion enhances tour operator firms' performance for it plays other critical roles for firms such as to build brand loyalty, to remind and reassure customers, to launch a new tourism product and defend market share by responding to competitors' campaigns with their own advertising. Saif (2015) confirms that tourism advertising, indeed, positively influences sales performance of tour operator firms.

### **Statement of the problem**

Kenya's Vision 2030 Economic Blueprint identifies tourism as one of the drivers of economic growth (GoK, 2022). However, the contribution of tourism to the economy, much of it derived from visits to national parks, is actually much lower than expected (The World Bank Group, 2018). Even with a gradual increase in tourism numbers between 2016 and 2019, Kenya's tourism sector performed continuously below the government's annual target of three million tourists as stipulated in the 2013-18 National Tourism Strategy (GoK, 2021). This led to the country being ranked a distance 96th below a host of African countries such as South Africa, Rwanda, Morocco, and Botswana. Besides, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the global tourism and hospitality industry, resulting in substantial losses and widespread closures (Alhammad et al., 2023). The emergence of COVID-19 sent shockwaves to the tourism sector, bringing it to a halt globally (GoK, 2022). In Kenya, tourism related activities faded away; tourism establishments were closed; workers were laid off. Strategic promotion, the element of a firm's decision-making concerned with choosing the most appropriate mix of advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and publicity for communication with its target market, has been proposed by several authors as a great intervention for firm performance (Armenski et al., 2018; Kim & Min, 2016; Reid & Bojanic, 2010). Strategic tourism promotion practices are a potential avenue for revenue collection and by extension revenue growth for tour operator firms. Indeed, strategic tourism promotion practices contribute significantly to increased sales and profits for tour operators (Kim & Min, 2016). Saif (2015) confirms that tourism advertising positively influences sales performance. The rationale behind strategic tourism promotion is that it generates more revenue as compared to the marketing spend. This study will specifically focus on Strategic Tourism Promotion and its influence on tour operator firms' performance.

### **Literature review**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on the tourism industry, where traditional promotional marketing strategies (newspapers, print media, radio, flyers, and billboards) could not adapt to this new marketing environment (Moodley & Naidoo, 2022). To reduce the impact and to curtail the spread of the virus, new travel regulations were applied, primarily based on

the severity of the cases in each country (Matikiti-Manyeverve & Rambe, 2022). Tourism includes aspects such as culture, societies, and economic phenomena that involves the travel of individuals to countries that are out of their usual environment due to work or personal purposes and involves the use of promotional marketing to inform, influence, and persuade travellers (Mkwizu, 2019). Thus, it is vital to formulate a promotional campaign that is strategic in nature, flexible and adaptable to the marketing environment (Moodley & Naidoo, 2022). A tour operator is a company that plans, produces, markets, distributes and sells the organized tourist product (Yarcan & Çetin, 2021). It buys individual travel services, such as air transportation, accommodation and destination services from suppliers such as carriers, hotels and ground operators, and matches these constituents to produce organized tours and inclusive holidays. Promotion is a marketing tool that can be used as a strategy to communicate between the sellers and buyers (Chang, 2017). Through this strategy, the seller attempts to influence and convince the buyers to buy their products or services. Strategic promotion assists in spreading the word to the people about the product or services of a company. It is an effective strategy to create an interest in the mindset of customers. It leads to customer retention.

In many ways, the marketing mix elements are bound together by promotion. Promotion is about how you tell the audience about your product, price or place and even the target behavior (Kim & Min, 2016). Promotions typically include advertising, publicity, sales promotions and other tactics. Pembi et al. (2017) expands the promotional mix elements to include advertising, personal contact, publicity and public relations, sales promotion, instrumental material and corporate design. Ganesh (2020) explains that strategic promotion can be done through an advertising campaign, public relation activities, a free sampling campaign, a free gift campaign, a trading stamp campaign, through demonstrations and exhibitions, through prize giving competitions, through temporary price cuts, and through door-to-door sales, telemarketing, personal sales letters, and e-mails. Alexandrescu and Milandru (2018) assert that the main communication activity of a company is the promotional mix – the marketing communications program – which consists of the specific combination of advertising tools, personal sales, sales promotion and public relations used to fulfill its marketing and advertising objectives. With existing COVID-19 variants globally, Mkwizu (2022) argues that African countries have to re-think their advertising dynamics as destinations re-open for tourism. Advertising, according to Mkwizu (2022) allows information on products and services to reach tourists in different geographical locations.

Notably, Saif (2015) argues that advertising is the most widely researched variable of the promotional mix. It is based on the notion that with sound advertising procedures, tour operator firms can communicate information, constantly remind, and persuade tourists to buy their products and services. However, Pemba et al. (2017) roots for sales promotion whose purpose is to motivate the customers to immediately purchase a particular product hence enhancing its sales. Accordingly, sales promotion is an initiative undertaken by organizations to promote, increase in sales, usage of a product or services. Strategic promotion practices help in connecting the members of the target audience with the behavior. A promotional strategy can have a variety of objectives including: increasing sales, adopting new products, creating brand equity, positioning, retaliating against competition, or creating a corporate image (Abdeta & Zewdie, 2021). Currently, the nature and application of marketing communication is changing due to globalization, competition, and the nature of business. For tour operator firms, adoption of strategic tourism promotion practices is a matter of when, and not if. Indeed, Pembi et al. (2017) agree to this assertion by stating that the promotional mix elements have become the important players in the life of any businesses be it small, medium or large. Al-Azzam (2016) explains that strategic promotion is interchangeably used with strategic communication. According to Armenski et al. (2018), the goal of strategic tourism promotion

is to persuade tourists to buy or consume the tourism product offering. Indeed, strategic tourism promotion practices, according to Kim and Min (2016), contribute significantly to increased sales and profits for tour operator firms. If tourists don't know what products and services a tour firm is offering, then that firm might not survive in today's competitive marketplace. Strategic tourism promotion practices are more associated with information about where the tourism products and services are distributed and is available in such forums as in trade shows, web pages, resellers, direct mail, and tourist destinations (Reid & Bojanic, 2010). In addition, promotion enhances tour operator firms' performance for it plays other critical roles for firms such as to build brand loyalty, to remind and reassure customers, to launch a new tourism product and defend market share by responding to competitors' campaigns with their own advertising. Saif (2015) confirms that tourism advertising, indeed, positively influences sales performance of tour operator firms.

## **Theoretical review**

### ***AIDA theory***

In this study, strategic tourism promotion practices are discussed taking the AIDA model into consideration. The AIDA - Attention, Interest, Desire and Action- Theory was first developed by E.St. Elmo Lewis in 1898 (Li & Yu, 2013). Rawal (2013) defines AIDA as an acronym that describes what happens when a consumer engages with an advertisement. The AIDA model includes four stages: Stage one is to attract attention (and awareness), meaning that before the firm sells something, there is a need to attract the customers' attention. Stage two is to generate interest in the client: When firms demonstrate product features and benefits, people are likely to get interested in the product. Stage three is to create enthusiasm in the people towards purchase (Gharibi et al., 2012). The last step is to end the purchase or sale. Often, firms that encourage customers to act quickly make the difference between realization and failure in marketing efforts (Rawal, 2013). The firm must be able to give customers the reassurance that their decision was correct. Customers that are satisfied by their own decisions are most likely to offer repeat business to the firm, hence improved firm performance (Sharmeela-Banu et al., 2013). Furthermore, there's a tendency in such customers spreading positive word of mouth among their peers (Rawal, 2013). Studies have found that satisfied customers with positive experience will re-purchase which will in turn improve firm's performance (Sharmeela-Banu et al., 2013). A well-designed tourism marketing and promotional strategies ensure long-term success of tour operator firms, bring in more tourists and ensure profitability for these businesses (Ganesh, 2020). Without strategic promotions, both the brand and service of tour operator firms would not be able to garner the attention of the pre-occupied customers.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a mixed methods research design. A mixed method research design is used when the researcher is interested in collecting both numeric and qualitative data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Mixed methods research designs help in adding more information to the analysis done, hence a more definite conclusion. This study was conducted in Nairobi County. Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya is situated in the southern part of the country at an altitude of 1,660 meters above sea level. The county was picked for this study because it plays host to about 256 tour operators of different levels out of 400 tour operators registered members of KATO as at June 2017 making it the most representative compared to the rest. The 256 KATO Full Members located in Nairobi County constituted the target population for this study. The study used Yamane formulae in computing the sample size of 156 (Yamane, 1967). The study used questionnaire and structured interview guide for data collection because questionnaires can be used to collect vast quantities of data from a variety of respondents while interviews are



aimed at collecting clear and more relevant responses (Okello, 2022). The questionnaire had both open ended and closed ended (on a 5-point Likert scale) questions. Pilot study was conducted on the questionnaires and the findings of the pilot study revealed that all the variables (strategic tourism promotion, tour operator firm performance) had Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.7 ranked as good and excellent. The study used supervisor's advice in determining the validity of the study measures. Pilot study was conducted on the structured interview guide on two of the managers from the Tour Firms. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and simple linear regression analyses were used to analyze quantitative data to answer the research objective (Okello, 2022). Correlation analysis conducted to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between strategic tourism promotion practices and tour operator firms' performance. To assess the extent to which strategic tourism promotion practices affects tour operator firms' performance of tour operator firms in Nairobi County, Kenya, the regression model of the form below was used

$$P = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PROM + \varepsilon$$

**Where**  $\beta_0$  is the constant,  $\beta_1$  is the slope for promotion variable and  $\varepsilon$  is the error term. Prior to performing linear regression analyses, pre-requisite tests/ assumptions for linear regression analyses including Normality, Linearity, Heteroscedasticity, and Multicollinearity was done (Okello, 2022). Content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data collected from the interviews,

## Results

### *Demographic characteristics*

The study collected data from a sample size of 156 Tour Operators, from which 131 questionnaires were filled in and returned, giving a response rate of 84%. The study conducted interviews with 5 managers. Table 1 shows that most of the tour operator firms had operated between 11 and 20 years (30.7%), had handled below 500 (32.06%) and were from Category E of the Company (48.09%).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the demographic variables

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Duration of Company Operation		
Below 10 years	25	19.30
11-20 years	37	28.07
21 – 30 years	40	30.70
Above 30 years	29	21.93
Number of Visitors Handled per Annum		
Below 500	42	32.06
500 – 1000	24	18.32
1000 – 2000	17	12.98
2000 – 3000	23	17.56
Above 3000	25	19.08
Category of the Company		
A	23	17.56
B	6	4.58
C	9	6.67
D	30	22.90
E	63	48.09

### *Descriptive, correlational and regression analyses of strategic tourism promotion and tour operator firms' performance*

#### *Descriptive analysis*

The study found that the respondents agreed that to a large extent tour operator firms used recommendations e.g. from a friend or colleague as a strategic tourism promotion practices



(67.2%) followed by advertising (45.0%) (Table 1). This means that recommendations are powerful tools in tourism promotions.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of strategic tourism promotion practices

Promotion	Level of Extent				
	1	2	3	4	5
Advertising	5 (3.8%)	8 (6.1%)	26 (19.8%)	33 (25.2%)	59 (45.0%)
Sales promotion	7 (5.3%)	5 (3.8%)	23 (17.6%)	47 (35.9%)	49 (37.4%)
Personal selling	2 (1.6%)	9 (7.0%)	13 (10.2%)	47 (36.7%)	57 (44.5%)
Exhibitions	16 (12.2%)	19 (14.5%)	28 (21.4%)	32 (24.4%)	36 (27.5%)
Recommendations e.g. from a friend or colleague	3 (2.3%)	8 (6.1%)	5 (3.8%)	27 (20.6%)	88 (67.2%)

### Correlation analysis

The correlation analysis findings shown in Table 2 indicate that there was a statistically significant weak and positive relationship between strategic tourism promotion practices and tour operator firms' performance  $r(131) = 0.174, p = 0.046 < .05$ . This implies that increase in strategic tourism promotion practices increases in tandem with tour operator performance.

Table 2: Correlation between strategic tourism promotion practices and tour operator firms' performance

Correlations		Tour operator firms' performance	Strategic promotion practices
Tour operator firms' performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.174*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.046
	N	131	131
Strategic Promotion Practices	Pearson Correlation	.174*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.046	
	N	131	131

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The assumptions tests for linear regression analysis i.e. Normality, Linearity, Heteroscedasticity, and Multicollinearity From the linear regression analysis tests, the strategic tourism promotion and tour operator firm performance variables were normally distributed. Strategic tourism promotion and tour operator firm performance variables were linearly related. There was no evidence of multicollinearity and heteroscedasticity.

### Linear regression analysis

Table 3 shows that there was a statistical and significant linear relationship between strategic tourism promotion practices and tour operator firms' performance  $F(1,129) = 4.051, p = 0.046 < 0.05$ ). Strategic tourism promotion practices explained 3.0% of the variability in tour operator firms' performance ( $R^2 = 0.030$ ). Strategic tourism promotion practices had a statistically significant positive influence on tour operator firms' performance ( $\beta = 0.170, t(129) = 2.013, p = 0.046 < 0.05$ ).

Table 3: Regression coefficients for strategic tourism promotion practices and tour operator firms' performance

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.649	.341		10.698	.000
	Strategic Promotion Practices	.170	.084	.174	2.013	.046

a. Dependent Variable: tour operator firms' performance

$F(1,129) = 4.051$

$R^2 = 0.030$

The estimated regression equation from Table 3.8 above is given by:

$$Performance = 3.649 + 0.170 * \text{strategic tourism promotion practices}$$

The model revealed that strategic tourism promotion practices positively affects tour operator firms' performance, i.e. a unit mean index increase in strategic tourism promotion practices applied increases tour operator firms' performance by a positive mean index value of 0.170.

The findings from the interview from by one tour manager from Tour Firm X said that..."my tour firm's revenue streams have significantly improved since this firm implemented promotional practices...". Another tour manager from Tour Firm W said that..."my tour firm allocates substantial resources towards promotion, because it always pays off...". A manager from Tour Firm C wondered..."How else would our customers know of our product offering if we don't promote...?".

## Discussion

The study findings revealed that to a large extent Tour Operators used recommendations e.g. from a friend or colleague as a strategic tourism promotion practice followed by advertising. This means that more Tour Operators are increasingly using referrals, also known as Word of Mouth (WOM), and advertising to market the products they sell. When a tourist experiences good tourism services at a destination, he/she will recommend this destination to his friend, colleague, and relatives etc. These findings are consistent with the findings of Kumar and Kaushal (2019) who also found that WOM has a great impact and is therefore a great tool for the promotion of tourism industry. Xu et al. (2020) agree to this assertion by stating that in an era of mobile internet, WOM marketing has become a powerful tool for optimizing tourist destination marketing. For this reason, numerous Tour Operators have established online comment systems on websites to encourage consumers to spread information via their personal social media (Xu et al., 2020), thereby increasing their sales. Liang et al. (2018) indicated that WOM can effectively improve consumers' perceived value and reduce their perceived risk, thus improving their repurchase intentions. In fact, WOM is one of the ways that has the most effect on the people and persuades people to buy a product or service more than other commercials because people usually trust what they hear directly from others (Shirkhodaie & Rastgoo-deylami, 2016). Further, advertising is an important activity that tour operators have used to boost their performance. This finding is consistent with the findings by Picazo-Peral and Moreno-Gil (2018) who found that advertising helps the tourism industry generate tourists from both the local and international marketplace. Syeda and Sadia (2011) concur with this argument and goes further to state that advertisement is a mass communicating of information intended to persuade buyers to buy products with a view to maximizing a company's profits. At the end of the day, advertising tourism products by Tour Operators helps the visitor to get familiar with the place/destination even before visiting it personally. In this view, it is important to note that an improper advertisement can lead to a loss in the tourist business.

The study revealed that the least used strategic tourism promotion practice was exhibitions. This may be due to the fact that during exhibitions, Tour Operators use rented space to market or promote the products they sell. It is the least used because there are other additional charges that are incurred such as renting space for exhibitions, transport and accommodation costs for employees who are participating in those exhibitions. Exhibitions are also predetermined by the organizers outside the control of the Tour Operators. For example, the Sarit Expo in Kenya is held annually in March, leaving the Tour Operators with no flexibility when it comes to planning for such events. These study findings are contradicting the findings of Armenski et al. (2018) who found that the exhibition events can be used to create additional tourism demand, increase visitor numbers, and stimulate travel for lots of people, thereby improving tour operator firms' performance. Exhibition events normally

happen for a few days to a week and generate a high level of demand for travel, catering and accommodation and other hospitality services (Rogers & Davidson, 2015). Further, exhibitions are crucial in communicating to potential visitors about the destination's tourism product and services, thereby increasing the demand for the tourism industry (Benur & Bramwell, 2015). Accordingly, a destination that wishes to realize the full potential of its tourism industry should make use of exhibition events as a potential promotional strategy (Piva et al., 2015).

The study revealed that there was a statistically significant weak and positive relationship between strategic tourism promotion practices and tour operator firms' performance. This means that the more promotional messaging there is, the wider the market reach, and the higher the chances of attracting more tourists. To attract more tourists, Tour Operators should promote more. This finding is consistent with the finding of Kim and Min (2016) who affirm that strategic promotion practices contribute significantly to increased sales and profits for Tour Operators. Further, tour operators have developed and promoted their own brands in order to improve their margins, and by extension, tour operator firms' performance (Picazo-Peral & Moreno-Gil, 2018).

The study revealed that there was a statistical and significant linear relationship between strategic tourism promotion practices and tour operator firms' performance. This means that more promotions translate to better tour operator firms' performance. These findings are consistent with the findings of Shamsi and Khan (2018) who found that promotion is a very important technique that can be used efficiently by firms to increase their sales and eventually profits. The findings are further supported by Chang (2017) who declares that promotions are activities that communicate the merits of the product and persuade target customers to buy it, thereby bringing in revenues. Promotions are likely to have abrupt and considerable effect on the volume of sales (Syeda & Sadia, 2011). This statement is supported by Shamsi and Khan (2018) claims that that the finances of companies undertaking promotional activities increase. Promotions, by their very own nature, affect the tourists to purchase larger amounts and consume it faster; causing an increase in sales and profitability of the tour firm.

The study further revealed that strategic tourism promotion practices had a statistically significant positive influence on tour operator firms' performance. This means that more promotional activities will result to more awareness of the product and create brand loyalty which in turn will generate more sales. Subramanian (2017) asserts that in the modern and contemporary society it is unthinkable in the market to function without a well thought out promotion. Resultantly, promotional activities will lead to better tour operator firms' performance because it will result into more uptake of the tourism product. These findings are consistent with the findings of Subramanian (2017) who found out that promotion is one of the strongest weapons in marketing and product placement services to market. Ashraf et al. (2014) describe promotion as any marketing effort whose function is to inform or persuade actual or potential customers about the merits of given product or service for the purpose of inducing a consumer either to start purchasing or to continue purchasing the firm's product or service. Further, based on the findings of their study, Odunlami and Akinruwa (2017) concluded that promotion is a critical and vital factor that enhances product awareness in the market. This is because Chang (2017) argues that promotion becomes the most primary incentive to rapidly buying more specific products or services in a short period. This finding is however inconsistent with the finding of Odunlami and Akinruwa (2017) who argue that promotional activities are unnecessary and wasteful and that the promotional costs (particularly advertising) are high -resulting in high prices, and low uptake my customers.

## Conclusion

Whereas it is clear that strategic tourism promotion practices lead to an increase in the tour operator firms' performance, the study findings further demonstrate that Tour Operator Firms can rely on strategic tourism promotion practices for their revenue and customer growth. Tour Operators who desire to increase their numbers in terms of revenues and customers should consider more strategic practices that would bring more synergy to strategic tourism promotion practices. There is need to explore what other strategies can blend in with promotion to strengthen Tour Operators' revenues and customer base.

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