



INFLUENCE OF KNOWLEDGE SHARING BY TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS ON A DESTINATION'S COMPETITIVENESS, BARINGO COUNTY- KENYA

Erick Were Odunga 

Moi University, Kenya
odungawe@gmail.com

Damiannah Kieti

Moi University, Kenya
dmanono@yahoo.com

Jackson K. Too

Moi University, Kenya
jtoo@cue.or.ke

Abstract

Knowledge sharing is a key factor that influences competitive advantage of tourism enterprises. Besides, the tourism sector has been posited to have a reluctant knowledge adoption environment. This study sought to establish the effect of knowledge sharing on tourism destination's competitiveness. The study was informed by the Resource-based theory and Knowledge management theory. Baringo County was targeted as the study area because of its undisputable potential for tourism in the North Rift region. The study utilized the ex- post facto research design. It employed purposive, stratified and simple random sampling to select 245 respondents. A semi structured questionnaire was used in data collection. AMOS version 21 using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to analyzed the effects of knowledge sharing on destination competitiveness. The regression results indicated that knowledge sharing by primary tourism stakeholders had a significant effect on destination competitiveness ($\beta = 0.411$; $t=4.898$; $p<0.05$). There was a positive influence of knowledge sharing on tourism

destination competitiveness in Baringo County. The study recommends that organizations should adopt more ways of sharing knowledge among employees in order to improve their knowledge management capacities. The alignment of knowledge sharing policy to the organizational strategy will act as a guideline on how knowledge should be disseminated within the organizations.

Keywords: Knowledge sharing, Tourism, Stakeholders, Destination, Competitiveness

INTRODUCTION

Competitiveness is an important factor the success of organizations and tourism destinations have no choice but to go on board on competitive strategies. Firm competitiveness is related to their efforts in developing and maintaining an added advantage over a longer time period. According to Kaplan (2010) firm competitiveness is influenced by three factors: size of the target market, increased access to resources and customers and also restrictions on the competitor power. In most instances, firms can improve their competitiveness when the managers use strategy which is defined by the industry characteristics which are not easy to imitate. Hakkak and Ghodsi, (2015), consider a competitiveness of a firm to activities that are required to deliver a differentiated value for a firm.

Tourism being important for many national economies has seen sector players engage in intense competition as they seek out those factors that may influence the choices made by tourists to visit their country, city or region as a tourist destination (Barbosa, De Oliveira, & Rezende, 2010). Globally, the tourism sector has witnessed tremendous growth in recent years (Ruhanen & Cooper, 2015) and this has seen many new destinations emerge hence pushing up levels of competition. Contrary to the global trend, the Kenya Tourism industry has been on a decline since 2013 albeit tourism accounting for 12 percent of Kenya Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and earning an annual revenue of \$1.1 billion (KNBS, 2014). The number of tourists visiting Kenya dropped in 2014 compared to 2013 and in 2015 the numbers declined further by 25 percent in the first five months KTB (2015), show how adversely the tourism industry had been damaged.

The turbulent business environment has forced many of the tourism businesses and stakeholders to scrutinize their competitive strategies to provide a sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) in the business environment. Saravanan (2017) noted that central to the developing of a sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) in rapidly and often changing circumstances is the ability of a business to learn fast and adapt quickly so as to create new advantages that will keep it one step ahead of competitors. It is in this regard that organizations

are developing and implementing strategies to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage and enhance their survival (Porter, 1985).

Competitive tourism destinations have been known to exhibit key indicators such as endowed resources (Dwyer, Larry, Kim & Chulwon, 2010) all of which if in the right mix would lead to its competitiveness and the social economic prosperity of its people. The knowledge resource has been singled out as important in the current dispensation if a destination was to gain competitiveness. Knowledge management as a practice has therefore been propagated as the way to go for most industries seeking competitiveness. For knowledge management to be effective, every employee in the organization should have access to the pertinent information relevant to his department at the right time specifically during decision-making.

Tourism has become an industry based on knowledge in the struggle to seek competitiveness. Indeed, Knowledge according to Tan (2011) is the true asset of any marketing-oriented organization, and its integration across departments and disciplines should be emphasized. Rajender and Kumar (2012) recognized that the re-use of information and knowledge minimized the need to refer explicitly to past projects, it reduced the time and cost of solving problems, and that it improved the quality of solutions during projects. Thus, further emphasizing the importance of knowledge sharing.

Knowledge sharing has been noted to be continuously reducing the cost of information generation and transmission, and it also catalyzes innovation. Overall, research on knowledge sharing has been based on two paths. One is that knowledge sharing can enhance the convenience of information transfer and thus provide enterprises with a competitive advantage while the other path is that knowledge sharing is conducive to the transfer of employee experience and customer information, so as to enable better customer management, and on this basis to increase customer satisfaction (Olsen and Connolly, 2000). Knowledge sharing has gradually been regarded as an important factor that stimulates the innovation and development of tourism industry as well as promotes the service level of hospitality (Bouncken 2002 & Sungsoo, Uysal and Chang 2002).

Olsen and Connolly (2000) studied the relationship between technology innovation and the capacity of developing employees' tacit knowledge within tourist enterprises, which opened up the research about knowledge sharing in tourism. Afterwards, studies increased rapidly and there came out many classical studies within the subsequent three years, of which the research content included knowledge sharing and touristic destination, knowledge sharing and enterprises innovation, knowledge sharing and employee innovation, knowledge sharing and hotel customer relationship management (Bartol and Srivastava 2002; Hjalager, 2002; Bouncken, 2002; Smidts, Pruyn and van Riel, 2001). On this basis, an increasing number of

scholars began to study the function and acting path of knowledge sharing in tourism (Pan and Laws, 2006; Magnini, 2008; Yang, 2009; Yang, 2010; Chen and Cheng 2012).

Tourism which is regarded as a highly knowledge-based and information intense industry, is a consequence of current developments in information and communication technologies allowing the extensive use of sharing, reusing, storing, and generation of knowledge. Thus, it is essential to trace transformations in technologies and consumer culture influencing the distribution as well as accessibility of travel related information (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Recently, social network websites have played a significant role in marketing and tourism promotion in the travel industry worldwide. Indeed, social media has enabled individuals to interact with each other based on their interests. It has also transformed the nature of communication among people, particularly travellers (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). Social media via a group of Internet-based applications has given internet users opportunity to have interaction and communication and relationships (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Today, travellers, especially leisure travellers, can decide on a destination through social media. Indeed, this phenomenon has changed the way of thinking and making decision.

Consequently, the Tourism industry and travel destinations should consider travellers' attitudes towards social media, and find approaches to popularize information available on social media. For instance, hotels can interact with their customers through websites such as, Flickr, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. They may also share information, modify their services or refine their brands through these platforms (McCarthy, Stock, & Verma, 2010). Furthermore, social media websites such as online travel community have been known to play a significant role in internet marketing and electronic commerce (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2010). Nowadays, travel has become an information intensive industry that makes travellers have access to information easily through internet (Qu & Lee, 2011). Online travel websites help travellers to arrange their trip for themselves and gain knowledge-based information. The key challenge in promoting a virtual society has been supply of knowledge that is the desire to share knowledge with other people (Reychav & Weisberg, 2009; Zhang & Sundaresan, 2010).

From the perspective of the tourism industry, knowledge sharing is crucial in promoting information communication and cost controlling and thus competitiveness. However, as the industry is made up of touristic enterprises, it is extremely essential to assess knowledge sharing based on the context of these enterprises. Scholars focus on tourist companies explores the function of knowledge sharing in the dimension of organizational learning and service innovation as well as to see how knowledge sharing could be transformed into corporate competitive advantage. Existing studies on tourism knowledge sharing were developed along two routes. The first route was to discuss the relationship between knowledge sharing activities

and organizational learning in touristic enterprises. The result shows that knowledge sharing could increase the breadth and depth of organizational learning and create a constructive learning atmosphere among employees (Yang, 2008 & Sigala, 2008).

The other route was to explore how knowledge sharing behavior could influence service innovation in touristic enterprises. It is believed that internal knowledge sharing could accelerate knowledge interaction and application, which expands employees' knowledge network and stimulate their innovative behavior. In other words, innovation relies on the creation of new knowledge and knowledge sharing could bring out knowledge innovation, which exactly meets the prerequisite of service innovation (Cooper, 2006).

Knowledge sharing is the process that experience, information, skills and expertise are exchanged, shared and transferred among organization members (Kim and Lee, 2013). On the one hand, information and skills maybe transmitted across among coequals during the daily communication of employees (Kyoungjoo, 2016). On the other hand, expertise could be shared and inherited downwards from master to apprentice. Throughout the process, certain factors like cultural atmosphere, interpersonal relationship, social network and social trust, could support and motivate knowledge sharing. Within organisations, knowledge sharing happens in a formal or informal way of employees' shared behavior. The formal knowledge sharing is led by management in most cases, which includes organized experience sharing sessions or seminars among internal organization members. While the informal one, is much more flexible and diverse such that knowledge sharing could exist in regular gatherings or office chats and the roles of knowledge provider and recipient can be exchanged freely without any definite boundaries. Both the two ways make up the process of knowledge sharing in tourism enterprises.

In spite of Kenya being known as a favourite tourist destination in Africa, there are still many challenges that her tourism sector is experiencing (Gitau, 2014). Although tourism has been and continues to be an important source of revenue for Kenya, and a source of livelihood for many, its dynamics have changed in the wake of terrorism and increased competition (World Bank, 2014). Over recent years the tourism industry in Kenya has sought to remain competitive having suffered from the issuance of travel advisories by foreign governments that resulted in a reduction of foreign tourists and consequently, closure of hotels and staff layoffs. In the face of these adversities, Counties to whom tourism is a delegated function have specifically sought ways of remaining competitive. One initiative has been the formation of regional economic blocs an example being the North Rift Economic Bloc (NOREB) that brings together Uasin Gishu, Nandi, Elgeyo Marakwet, Trans Nzoia, Baringo, West Pokot, Turkana and Samburu counties

drawn from the North rift region of Kenya. The Kenya Tourism Board is expected to work in partnership with these blocs as it promotes Kenya's tourism image (KTB, 2015).

The study was conducted in Baringo County which is situated in the Rift valley region of Kenya and one of the NOREB counties. The declining trend in national tourism was observable in the county as exhibited in the decline in number of visitors to Lake Bogoria National Park in Baringo County where the numbers declined from 94,400 in 2010, 108,300 in 2011, 114,600 in 2012 and 91,500 in 2013 to 80,500 in 2014 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics , 2015) thus necessitating the study.

Statement of the problem

Tourism is a labour intensive industry that relies heavily on interpersonal communication and interaction. The majority of the knowledge created in tourism is tacit knowledge that is difficult to transfer to other persons either by means of writing it down or verbalizing it. In the absence of enough stimulation and motivation, the efficiency of personal knowledge sharing would be greatly reduced. Tourism enterprises have thus sought to moderate the knowledge sharing process in order to benefit from it.

Despite the generation, sharing and application of new knowledge to feed innovation and product development being adjudged critical for competitiveness, most enterprises in Kenya have been slow, unaware and at times resistant in adopting knowledge management practices to gain competitiveness (Cheruiyot, Jagongo & Owino, 2012). When knowledge is effectively managed it leads to a reduction in operating costs, faster development of new products, better customer service thus generating competitiveness for the firms in a destination. Considering the complexity of knowledge sharing as well as the lack of empirical evidence on its benefits in the promotion of competitiveness of a tourism destination, it was imperative to do a study. This study sought to establish the effect of knowledge sharing on tourism destination competitiveness in Baringo County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Destination Competitiveness

According to Hakkak and Ghodsi (2015), firm competitiveness is a choice on a number of activities required in order to deliver value in the firm. It is related to the firm's efforts in developing and maintaining an advantage over a long period of time. The competitiveness in firms could be influenced by three factors that include size in the target market, increased access on the resources and customers and also restriction on the competitor power. In most of the cases, firms are able to improve on their competitiveness when the managers make use of

the strategy defined by the industry characteristics that are not easy to imitate. In order for a firm to be competitive, it was therefore vital for its customers to differentiate the firm products and services from the competitors.

To achieve competitive advantage for its tourism industry, any destination ought to ensure that its overall 'appeal', and the tourist experience offered, had to be superior to that of the alternative destinations open to potential visitors. Existing and potential visitation to any destination was found to be inextricably linked to that destination's overall competitiveness, whichever way that was defined or measured (Dwyer, 2010). Ideally, destinations seek to outwit their competitors globally, nationally and regionally by embracing the right competitive strategies. Competitiveness in tourism has been linked to economics, marketing and strategic perspectives, price, quality and satisfaction. Destinations are therefore rated as competitive if their market share, measured by visitor numbers and financial returns are increasing (Hassan, 2000). Elsewhere, destination competitiveness has been associated with the economic prosperity of the residents of the Country due to the multifaceted nature of the tourism industry and the diversity of the industries that are involved in making destinations competitive.

The key to gaining and retaining a competitive edge was found to be attainable by ensuring that systematic knowledge of a company was effectively managed through strategies that develop, organise, transfer and retain their knowledge resources throughout the whole organization (Ahmad and Daghfous, 2010). Ahmad and Daghfous (2010) revealed that knowledge management played a vital role in the process of strategy and in analysis of the many organizations in their study. They underscored the value obtained from knowledge sharing activities. This value included improved communications, visibility, and adaptability to changing environments which all led to increased competitiveness of the firm.

As technology advances, knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer have become progressively cheaper and more widely available. This has stimulated further knowledge creation and sharing resulting into a cycle that has proved beneficial for firms which practice knowledge management effectively. Paghaleh, *et. al.* (2011) found that Information Technology enabled two major abilities for knowledge management, that is the ability to reveal knowledge and the ability to create fast connections among knowledge channels. Fernandez *et. al.* (2004), firmly attested to IT being fundamental to effective knowledge management and ultimately to competitive advantage.

A majority of previous studies on tourism destination competitiveness aimed at diagnosing the competitive positions of specific destinations (Enright & Newton, 2005). Several other studies have sought to develop general models and theories of destination competitiveness. For instance, Crouch and Ritchie (2003) study on the nature and structure of

destination competitiveness sought to develop a conceptual model based on the theories of comparative advantage and competitive advantage (Crouch, 2007). This study however sought to determine the effect of primary stakeholder knowledge sharing practices on a tourism destination competitiveness.

Knowledge management

Knowledge management (KM) is highly significant in tourism industry (Shaw & Williams, 2009), In fact, it is known as a competitive tool in the tourism industry (Cooper, 2006; Hallin & Marnburg, 2008). KM can provide customers with timely well-informed knowledge regarding travel costs, destinations, flights, etc. Scholars in the area of information systems have investigated the function of shared knowledge both at explicit and tacit levels. It is appreciated that the bulk of knowledge is tacit, where tacit knowledge is the hidden knowledge acquired over a period of time making it difficult to convey and transfer this sort of knowledge to other people. On the other hand there is explicit knowledge that is codified and transmitted in a formal or systematic language (Davidavičienė & Raudeliūnienė, 2010).

The relationship between these two sorts of knowledge is best explained by the knowledge dynamics model elaborated by Ikujiro Nonaka which gives three layers of the knowledge creation process, that is the process of knowledge creation through socialization-externalization- combination- internalization (SECI) and knowledge conversion process between tacit and explicit knowledge, the platform of knowledge creation (Ba) and the knowledge assets. Drawing from the SECI model, only knowledge externalization and internalization are regarded as the true conversion processes whereas socialization and combination are transfer processes (Bratianu, 2010). Generally, Nonaka's SECI models portrays knowledge transfer as a spiral process in which existing knowledge is either tacit knowledge or explicit knowledge and the objective of knowledge transfer is to convey either tacit or explicit knowledge. When knowledge transfer is viewed as a continuous learning process, the model becomes a clockwise spiral. A destination's ability to learn depends on its ability to initiate and sustain the learning spiral as it illustrates the depth of understanding as one moves to deeper levels (Nonaka, 1997). The Knowledge Spiral takes place at a "Ba.", Japanese concept for Place (Nonaka & Konno, 1998). 'Ba' is either a physical location such as an office or virtual space via email, teleconferencing or mental through shared experiences, ideas, beliefs and in relationships as people sharing common goals.

Destinations stakeholders that embrace a knowledge sharing culture do encourage their employees to experiment with new ideas. This has an effect of encouraging the development of new ways of doing things that will make them competitive. When knowledge is shared within an

organization, employees are able to know the knowledge assets at their disposal and if put to good use, these knowledge resources may inform innovative ways of developing new products, new processes, new strategies that will eventually influence the behavior of the stakeholders and consequently give rise to a competitive edge for the destination within which they are domiciled.

Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing involves the exchange of information and knowledge from one source (person, group or organization) to another (Fugate, Theodore & Mentzer, 2009). According to Chilton (2013), the success of any KM processes in any organization relies on the effectiveness of the knowledge sharing. The general problem in KM is that most of the large organizations are not conscious of the valuable knowledge they possess (Kiessling *et al.*, 2009). With effective KM processes, hidden knowledge can easily be discovered, and such process are mostly facilitated through sharing. According to Liao and Wu (2009), knowledge sharing plays an intermediate role to support knowledge exchange in the organization and aids the achievement and sustenance of their competitive advantage.

Maroofi, Nayebi and Dehghani (2013) conducted a study on Strategic Knowledge Management, innovation, sharing and Performance, their aim was to spread knowledge involving a certain subject of the results of knowledge management (KM) strategies on firm's innovation and incorporated in performance. The sampling procedure was based on random sampling, with regards to firm size and activity sector. The study consisted of 195 Iranian organizations and employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results showed that both KM strategies influenced innovation and organizational performance directly and indirectly. Thus, one of the main final decisions of the research was that KM was found to have significant mechanism of increasing innovation and incorporated in performance.

Radwan (2013) investigated pharmaceutical firms and noted that policies and strategies of knowledge management had a positive relationship with a firm's differentiation strategy which was acquired through superior communication and knowledge sharing through KM programs in the organization. This differentiation strategy is what gave them competitive advantage. Dawson (2000) stated that employees' knowledge was value that they transferred into the organization's resources thus building it. Knowledge sharing in organisations is considered a mutually beneficial activity where the giver as well as the receiver gain as they participate in sharing as new knowledge develops in the process (Sveiby, 2001). Contrary to having the numerous benefits attributed to knowledge sharing, knowledge is equated with power when an organization is in active economic competition and naturally people or organisations in a

competitive mode will not be willing to share knowledge with their competitors (Goh, 2002). Liu and Chen (2005) realised that in actuality, knowledge resided in those employees who engaged in the knowledge process of accessing, sharing, creating, transferring and maintaining. This proves to be a challenge to knowledge advancement as it relies on these employees sharing behaviours or habits thus hard to monitor and control (Liebowitz, 2011).

Wanjiru and Gathenya (2015) conducted a study on the Role of Knowledge Management on Performance of Social Enterprises in Kenya: A Case Study of Nairobi City County. The study investigated the role of knowledge sharing on performance of social enterprises in Kenya where 10 social enterprises in Nairobi were selected for the study. A sample of 90 individuals were interviewed from the 10 organizations. Data was collected using questionnaires, interview guides and review of organizations' document. Data was analyzed through quantitative and qualitative methods. It was found that most of the social enterprises shared knowledge as indicated by 65% of the respondents who reported that their organizations had established ways of documenting and sharing knowledge.

Knowledge Sharing and tourism destination Competitiveness

Today, knowledge is known as an important competitive asset substantially supporting and fostering adaptation, survival and prominent performance of an enterprise (Marques & Simón, 2006). Knowledge sharing enables individuals to share experiences, insights or knowledge with other individuals. Recipients of knowledge might use it to develop their performance, In other words, Knowledge sharing is an exchange activity among individuals, groups and communities that facilitates sharing of experience, skills and interests (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). In the tourism industry, knowledge sharing points to a tourists' desire to share experiences with others or seeking information assistance (Qu & Lee, 2011). A study found that 84% of leisure travellers used the internet as a planning source that gave them information about flight, cost, and destination (Torres, 2010).

Today, websites containing travelers' feedback and comments are becoming popular. Thus, many researchers have considered the significant role of such websites in the travel planning process (Huang, 2012; Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011). The development of World Wide Web technologies has made it necessary for industries to determine those technologies that have the potential to serve their long-term strategic goals. This development provides the opportunity for using the internet as an important tool for travel planning.

Social media are important in information search and decision-making behaviors in tourism industry (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2011). Several studies have showed the significant role of social media in both travelers' decision making and tourism operation and management

(Leung et al., 2013; Li & Wang, 2011; Noone, McGuire, & Rohlfs, 2011). The development of technologies in the area of internet-based social media has made travelers enable to share their travel stories. Increased usage of social media brings electronic word of-mouth closer to traditional word-of-mouth communication which is still a crucial information source for travel planning and decision-making (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012).

Olsen and Connolly (2000) believed that companies should regard knowledge and information as the key to successful business, but because many stakeholders lack the ability to collect information and develop tacit knowledge, they need to have effective knowledge sharing behavior to promote the externalization of tacit knowledge and information transfer. Furthermore, the advent of the information era also requires tourism companies to share knowledge. Sungsoo, Uysal and Chang (2002) pointed out in their research that due to the improvement of information and communication technologies, tourism increasingly requires the sharing, transfer, storage, and reuse of knowledge in order to enhance information dissemination capabilities and intrinsic value. In the study on the macro innovation behavior of tourism industry, Cooper (2006) and Hjalager (2002) believed that innovation relies on the creation of new knowledge, and new knowledge creation relies on the sharing of knowledge, therefore knowledge sharing can promote the occurrence of innovative behavior and thus enhance the competitive advantage of touristic destinations and travel companies. It is observed that tourists and locals can share knowledge through social media interactions, further social media may generate tourist information to attract tourists (Edwards, Cheng, Wong, Zhang and Wu, 2016) and also promote personal innovation (Sigala and Chalkiti 2015).

As a typical form of service industry, the tourism industry is directly influenced by effective customer relationship management which acts as a competitive advantage to maintain the development of any given destination. Knowledge sharing among tourism companies facilitates the transfer of customer information along the tourism supply chain thereby laying the foundation of improving customer satisfaction. From the viewpoint of knowledge sharing within tourism enterprises, Bouncken (2002) through empirical research found that hotels belong to knowledge-centralized industry. Because knowledge is constantly exchanged and applied in the process of employees' exchanging experiences, most knowledge sharing behavior in hotels are related to customer relationship management, mainly focused on service quality and information of customer preferences, etc. Customer relationship management therefore forms a core source of competitive advantage.

Edwards, Cheng, Wong, Zhang and Wu (2016) studied knowledge sharing and customer relationship management in travel agency alliances and found that knowledge sharing among organizations positively influenced successful customer relationship management, especially in

the travel agency groups. Gholami, Asli, Shirkouhi and Noruzi (2013) in their empirical study using structural equation modeling (SEM) to investigate the Influence of Knowledge Management Practices on Organizational Performance, randomly sampled 282 senior managers from Small and Medium size enterprises and found that knowledge acquisition, knowledge storage, knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, and knowledge implementation had significant factor loading on knowledge management and also, productivity, performance, staff performance, innovation, work relationships, and customer satisfaction had significant factor loading on organizational performance.

Mahapa (2013) conducted a study on the Impact of Knowledge management practices on Organizational Performance in the Hospitality Industry of Zimbabwe. The research identified knowledge management practices and how they impact on organizational performance in the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe. The research made use of the Processes, Intellectual capital, Culture and Strategy (PICS) model which shows a substantial positive relationship between processes, intellectual capital, and knowledge acquisition and knowledge management. The research was based on case studies of 3 hotels in Zimbabwe. Structured interviews were used to elicit information from managerial employees and questionnaires were administered to non-managerial employees. Stratified random sampling was used to select a total 50 participants mainly 15 managerial and 35 non-managerial staff in the research from all the hotels. The findings from the study revealed that the organisations had in place knowledge management practices and these led to development of new ideas, new products and also new ways of doing things that eventually led to improved organizational performance.

Choe (2011) in a study on the taxonomy of knowledge management practices in manufacturing firms focusing on the use of Target Costing Systems(TCS) and Information Technology (IT) infrastructure sought to develop a framework useful for classifying four types of knowledge management (KM) strategies in manufacturing firms i.e. explorative, exploitative, mixed and negative. The study adopted a multi-methodological approach by mixing both qualitative and quantitative methods before developing a framework. Through a Case study of the H Motor Company in Korea the study aimed at investigating the functions of TCS in the management of tacit knowledge and found that with the use of TCS, a firm could create, transfer and share diverse kinds of tacit knowledge among employees for the facilitation of process innovation.

Aubke, Wöber, Scott, and Baggio, (2014) conducted a study on revenue management teams in hotel industry, and found that knowledge sharing is very important in the process of revenue management, and it has become one of the reasons to gain increasing corporate revenue. Therefore, knowledge sharing is extremely important for the generation of competitive

advantage of the enterprises. It was found to reduce the cost and time of information transfer, improve the timeliness of decision-making, and promote the occurrence of knowledge innovation. On this basis, knowledge sharing can most likely promote the innovation of tourism enterprises and gain competitive advantage. At the same time, effective knowledge sharing behavior can lay the foundation for excellent customer relationship management and internal revenue management and become an important source of competitive advantage for the company.

It is worth noting that knowledge sharing is more necessary for the hotel industry due to higher costs and high staff turnover in the hotels. Through the knowledge sharing by tourists on social media or online travel booking platforms, travel companies can use it to build a good reputation and further transform it into a competitive advantage for the company. It is evident that the reviewed studies failed to focus on the knowledge sharing and competitiveness in the tourism destination in general and specifically did not focus on knowledge sharing by stakeholders and competitiveness of firms in the tourism destination in Kenya. This study sought to address the identified gaps in literature by answering the following research question: how does knowledge sharing by primary destination stakeholders affect competitiveness of a tourism destination in Kenya.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Knowledge Management Theory

The knowledge management theory as first proposed by Grant in 1996 was adopted to guide the study. It supposes that knowledge management practices such as knowledge acquisition, knowledge storage, knowledge creation, knowledge sharing and knowledge implementation play a critical role in achieving high level productivity, financial and human resource performance and finally improving sustainable competitive advantage (Soderberg & Holden, 2002). This theory helps significantly towards realizing the important role of knowledge management. This theory is applicable to the study since tourism stakeholders can share knowledge acquired through innovation, new methods of marketing increasing their customer base and consequently increasing their competitiveness.

Duhon (1998) asserts that knowledge management is a discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving and sharing all of an enterprise's information assets. These assets may include databases, documents, policies, procedures, and previously un-captured expertise and experience in individual workers. Knowledge is regarded as a fluid mix of framed experiences, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and

information. In organizations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organizational routines, processes, practices, and norms (Davenport and Prusak, 1998).

Davenport, De Long & Beers (1999) identify several factors of an organizational culture that inhibit the successful transfer of knowledge within an organization. Deficits in trust, differences in cultures and language habits, lack of time and meeting-opportunities, incentives for knowledge carriers, lack of capacity to absorb new knowledge and believe it was not invented here are some of the identified impediments to knowledge sharing. According to Wiig(1997) improvements in knowledge management promotes factors that lead to superior performance, organizational creativity, operational effectiveness and quality of products and services.

According to Kelleher and Levene (2009), knowledge sharing throughout the organization enhances existing organizational business processes, introduces more efficient and effective business processes and removes redundant processes. It further promotes a collaborative and integrated approach to the access and use of an organisation's knowledge assets. Consequently, in a dispensation where the economy is majorly knowledge based, knowledge is becoming the most important asset for organizational success among other assets such as capital, materials, machineries, and properties (Kelleher & Levene, 2009).

Resource Based view Theory

Resource Based view Theory originated from Penrose's idea (1959) of the firm as a coordinated 'bundle' of resources. The theory sought to tackle the question of a firm's goals and strategic behavior. According to resource-based view, firms perform well and create value when they implement strategies by exploiting their internal resources and capabilities. The knowledge-based views of the firm and offshoot of the resource based view considers knowledge as the most strategically significant resource of the firm (Grant, 1996) and identifies the primary role for the firm in the creation and application of knowledge (Bierly and Daly, 2002). This view considers a firm as a 'distributed knowledge system' composed of knowledge-holding employees, and believes the firm's role is to co-ordinate these employees so that they can create knowledge and value for the firm (Spender, 1996). The rationale is that knowledge endows firms with various competencies and capabilities that account for firm performance and competitiveness in the market. Kogut and Zander (1992) suggested that for a firm to remain competitive, it must effectively and efficiently create, locate, capture and share knowledge and expertise in order to apply that knowledge to solve problems and exploit opportunities.

Resource-based theory treats enterprises as potential creators of value-added capabilities, and the underlying organizational competences involve viewing the assets and resources of the firm from a knowledge-based perspective (Conner and Prahalad, 1996). It focuses on the idea of costly-to-copy attributes of the firm as sources of business returns and the means to achieve superior performance and competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). A firm's resources consist of all assets both tangible and intangible, human and nonhuman that are possessed or controlled by the firm and that permit it to devise and apply value-enhancing strategies (Wernerfelt, 1984). Knowledge is a resource that is valuable, uncommon, poorly imitable and non-substitutable and it comprise the firm's unique or core competencies (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). It presents a lasting competitive advantage (Hitt, Bierman, Shimizu & Kochhar, 2001). Specifically, intangible firm-specific resources such as knowledge permit firms to add up value to incoming factors of production (Hitt et al., 2001). It represents competitive advantage for a firm. Such advantage is developed over time and cannot easily be imitated.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Baringo County which is located in the former Rift Valley Province. Its headquarters and largest town is Kabarnet. The County is bordered by Turkana County and West Pokot County to the North, Samburu County and Laikipia County to the East, Nakuru County and Kericho County to the South, Uasin Gishu County to the South West and Elgeyo Marakwet County to the West. It had a total human population of 555,561 and 110,649 Households on land area of 11,015 Km² (The 50 Treasures of Kenya Trust, 2016).

Baringo County had immense tourism potential as exhibited by the impressive attractive scenery i.e. Kipkogom/ Kapkiamo rocky cliffs, Kerio valley, the physical features such as Lake Baringo, Lake Bogoria, Lake Kamnorok, Nuregoi, Cheploch Gorge. Other attractions include the Lake Kamnorok Game reserve, Lake Bogoria National reserve and the hot springs and geysers, numerous reptile parks, diverse bird species, Kabarnet Museum, Nature conservancies (Ruko, Kaptuiya, Morop/ Tarambas, Ngenyin and Kimngochoch), prehistoric sites at kipsaraman, the highland forests and lowland Arid and Semi-Arid Lands flora and the Equator crossing at Mogotio. Besides the county had set up a Tourism Information and Resource Centre at Mogotio, numerous Curio Businesses and cultural centres (Keitany, 2016). To cater for the large number of travelers a number of hospitality establishments were operational in the county, which include Kabarnet Hotel, Kibelion hotel, Rift Valley Spa Hotel, Paradise Hotel, Sportline Hotel, Saimo resort, Terrix Hotel, Chambai Hotel among others. These Establishments were of different rating with some located right in the administrative towns and a number near the tourist attractions away from the towns.

The study was guided specifically by the assumptions of the post positivist research paradigm which adopted a reductionist approach by breaking down the general idea into variables that could be tested. Knowledge sharing by primary destination stakeholders was the independent variable and competitiveness of the tourism destination the dependent variable. These variables informed the hypotheses of the study which was tested for its effect as expected under this paradigm.

This study employed the ex post facto research design where a correlation investigation was conducted to determine how knowledge sharing associated with destination competitiveness. Ex- post facto was preferred for this study because it was not possible to use the more powerful experimental designs and secondly, the researcher was unable to manipulate the independent variable which was knowledge management practices by primary destination stakeholders. To actualise the ex-post-facto design the study explored specific knowledge management practices i.e. knowledge sharing and the likely effect on destination competitiveness. The study identified a sample from amongst the primary tourism stakeholders who operated within the County.

The study targeted primary stakeholders (firms/ entities without which tourism could not be able to take place) within Baringo County(tourism destination). These primary stakeholders were deemed to be those individuals or groups that actively participated in the delivery of the tourism product. The study specifically targeted the Baringo County Government staff drawn from the Departments of Tourism, Planning and information and purposively the County Executive Committee (CEC) members, Chief Officers and Directors in charge were to be included in the sample, the Kenya Wildlife Services staff, Conservancy proprietors/ chairmen, the National Museums of Kenya staff, the Tourism Information Centre staff, the Tourist class hotels and restaurants staff and Tour operators and guides operating within the county especially around Lake Bogoria and Baringo and the Kenya Forest Services staff.

The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling designs. Baringo County was purposively targeted as the study area because of its undisputable potential for tourism in the North Rift region (Keitany, 2016). The target population was divided into strata based on the organizations the respondents were drawn from as a way of ensuring representation while taking into consideration the sizes and importance of each stratum. Simple random sampling was employed to arrive at the respondents within the respective organisations. Simple random sampling was preferred because it gave each element an equal chance of participating in the study thus minimizing bias.

This study adopted the use of formulae to determine sample size as this allowed for capturing desired combinations of levels of precision, confidence and variability. Some of

proposed formulae according to Israel (1992) were by Cochran (1963) and Yamane (1967), of which the study adopted the more simplified Yamane formulae. To determine sample size (n) the Yamane formulae ($n = N / (1 + N (e)^2)$) assuming 95% confidence level and margin of error (P= 0.05) was applied. According to the Baringo County Annual Development plan 2018, the targeted population cumulatively was 732 members of staff, hence a sample size of 259 respondents was selected.

The study aimed at collecting primary data through administration of questionnaires to respondents and document analysis conducted to obtain preliminary secondary data for the study. Staff at different levels in the organization structure in each establishment were requested to fill the questionnaire, the purpose of which was to assist the researcher triangulate the responses given by the staff of the same establishment. Stratification was done for other respondents in respect to the organisations they were serving i.e. main stream financial institutions, Kenya Wildlife Services, National Museums of Kenya, Tourism Information Centers, Kenya Forest Services, Conservancies, boating companies and other tourist attractions.

To ascertain content validity of the research instruments, experts in tourism were requested to check for relevance of the instrument for the purpose of the study, relevance of items and the whole instrument to the respondents, appropriateness of the questions in the instrument to the respondent, coverage of content domain of interest, clarity of language used and clarity of the items and questions. The study ensured internal validity by developing accurate instruments and standardised data collection procedures through the training of research assistants and external validity by selecting respondents randomly and stratifying primary stakeholders to increase the chances of representativeness of all in the study.

Reliability which refers to the dependability of the research instrument to consistently yield the same data under similar conditions was measured through a pilot study. This was conducted outside the area of study i.e. in Elgeyo Marakwet County whose aim was to avoid the actual respondents targeted by the study. Piloting was done after approval of the instruments. Upon analysis of the data generated from the questionnaires a Cronbach's alpha of 0.853 was obtained. These results showed an alpha value above the recommended of 0.7 (Kothari, 2004) thus indicating that instrument results were reliable hence provided the confidence to proceed and administer the instrument to respondents for the study.

The questionnaires upon collection from the field were sorted and the data therein was coded before analysis was undertaken. Statistical Package for social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 and descriptive statistics were ran to allow for data cleaning, checking for errors, missing values and outliers. The data was transferred to AMOS version 21 to allow for the generation of a Structural Equation Model (SEM) that would enable analysis to meet the research objectives

on how knowledge sharing affected a tourism destination's competitiveness. Since SEM allows latent constructs to be tested using multiple indicators, rather than using the mean score of the multiple indicators, the share variance of these indicators is used to test the relationship(s) under investigation. According to McQuitty and Wolf (2013) SEMs are most appropriately used in a confirmatory fashion to test a theory that explains the relationships among a group of variables. These relationships are specified prior to theory testing and inform data collection. In addition, it allowed for hypothesis testing thus fulfilling the requirement of the study. Using SEM, validation of measurement models consistent with the latent variables (knowledge sharing and destination competitiveness) was conducted for confirmatory, construct validity, convergent validity and discriminant validity. Unidimensionality was to be confirmed by factor loadings being positive and above 0.6 (Awang, 2012), while convergent validity was to be evaluated by examining factor loadings (> 0.6) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) beyond 0.5 for good convergence (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). Fit indices were then calculated to examine whether they indicated a good fit between the measurement model and the data.

RESULTS

Validation of the Measurement Models

Two measurement models consistent with the two latent variables namely: knowledge sharing and destination competitiveness were validated for confirmatory unidimensionality, construct validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. For each of the measurement models, unidimensionality was confirmed by factor loadings being positive and above 0.6 (Awang, 2012). Convergent validity was evaluated by examining the factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). Standard factor loadings above 0.6 and AVE beyond the recommended level of 0.50 would then suggest good convergent validity for the construct (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). Fit indices were then calculated to examine whether they indicated a good fit between the measurement model and data. The overall fit was achieved by comparing the default indices with the following indices as recommended by Cheung and Rensvold (2002) where $\chi^2 / df < 5.0$; GFI > 0.90 ; NFI > 0.90 ; RFI > 0.90 ; IFI > 0.90 ; TLI > 0.90 ; CFI > 0.90 and RMSEA of < 0.05 .

Destination Competitiveness

Destination competitiveness was measured using 15 statements (record, visitors, competitors, imitate, unique, innovation, transparent, consultation, customers, revenue, prices, feedback, follow-up, advance and advantage) derived from exploratory factor analysis pattern matrix. An examination of the unidimensionality requirements for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

revealed that three out of fifteen indicators of knowledge application factor loadings exceeded the recommended value of 0.6. The indicators (customers, revenue and prices) were therefore deemed to be unidimensional and were retained. The competitiveness indicators i.e. record, visitors, competitors, imitate, unique, innovation, transparent, consultation, feedback, follow-up, advance and advantage had a factor loading of less than 0.6 (Figure 1) which was below the recommended minimum value of 0.6 (Awang, 2012). These indicators failed to attain the threshold of the confirmatory unidimensionality and were therefore omitted from the overall measurement model.

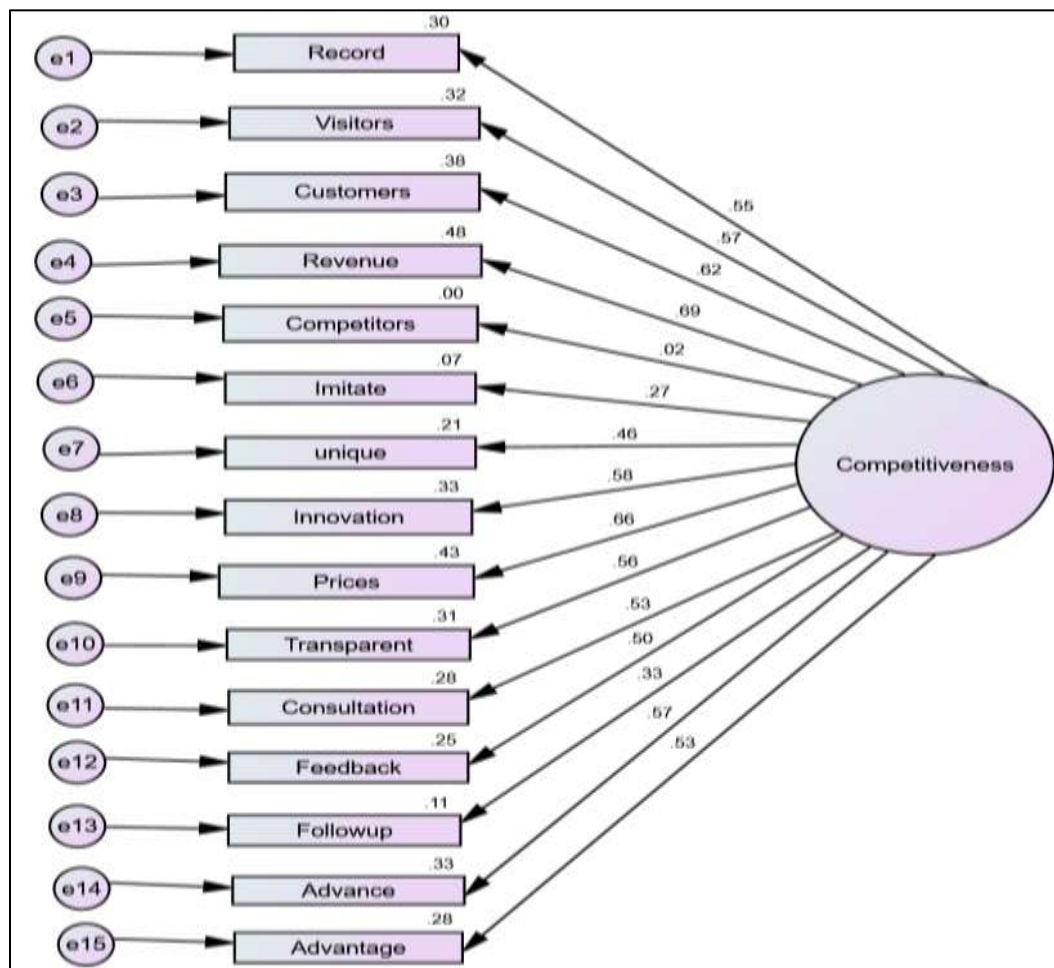


Figure 1 Destination Competitiveness Measurement Model

The AVE value (0.429) for the remaining three indicators revealed not a good convergent validity for the destination competitiveness when the other twelve indicators were omitted (Table 1). The composite reliability of 0.692 was close to 0.7, confirming that the destination competitiveness construct was reliable.

Table 1: Composite Reliability and AVE for Destination Competitiveness

Construct	Items	Factor loadings	AVE	CR
Competitiveness	Customers	.616	0.429	0.692
	Revenue	.690		
	Prices	.656		

Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing was measured using the following 12 statements(website, connectivity, internet, branches, aware, shared, orientation, leadership, leveraged, professional, social and receptive) derived from exploratory factor analysis pattern matrix. An examination of the unidimensionality requirements for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed that five out of twelve indicators of knowledge sharing factor loadings exceeded the recommended value of 0.6. The indicators (website, connectivity, internet, social and receptive) were therefore deemed to be unidimensional and were retained. The indicators i.e. branches, aware, shared, orientation, leadership, leveraged and professional had a factor loading of less than 0.6 which was below the recommended minimum value of 0.6 (Awang, 2012). The indicators that failed to attain the threshold of the confirmatory unidimensionality were omitted from the overall measurement model.

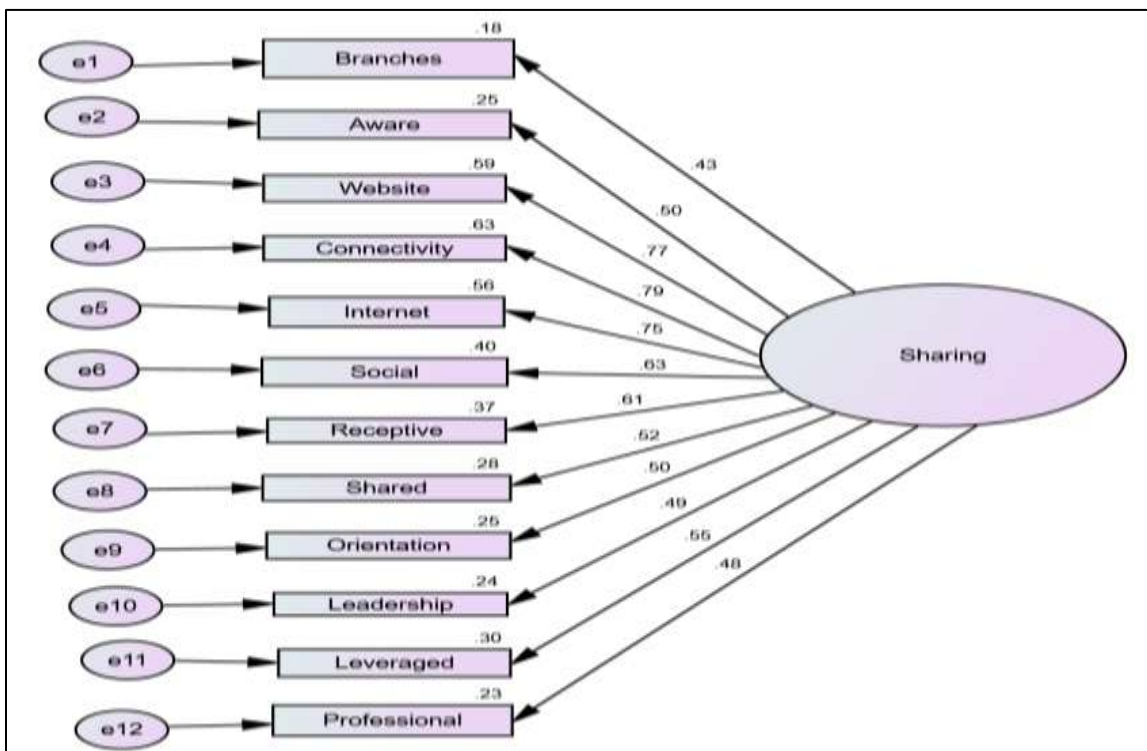


Figure 2 Knowledge Sharing Measurement Model

The AVE value (0.508) for the remaining five indicators revealed good convergent validity for the knowledge sharing when the other seven indicators were omitted (Table 2). The composite reliability of 0.837 was above 0.7, confirming that the knowledge sharing construct was reliable.

Table 2: Composite Reliability and AVE for Knowledge Sharing

Construct	Items	Factor loadings	AVE	CR
Sharing	Website	.766	0.508	0.837
	Connectivity	.792		
	Internet	.751		
	Social network	.630		
	Receptive	.608		

From the responses, it is indicated that tourism destinations used websites, internet, social network (emails and databases) connectivity, and receptiveness as aspects of sharing knowledge. This infers that most of the firms in the tourism destinations in Kenya used internet as a form of sharing knowledge among their customers. Social media thus gives tourism industry the opportunity to understand and discover consumers' demands.

Proposed Measurement Model

The proposed overall measurement model was a correlated two-factor model with five indicators loading on the knowledge sharing factor and three indicators loading on the competitiveness factor (Figure 3).

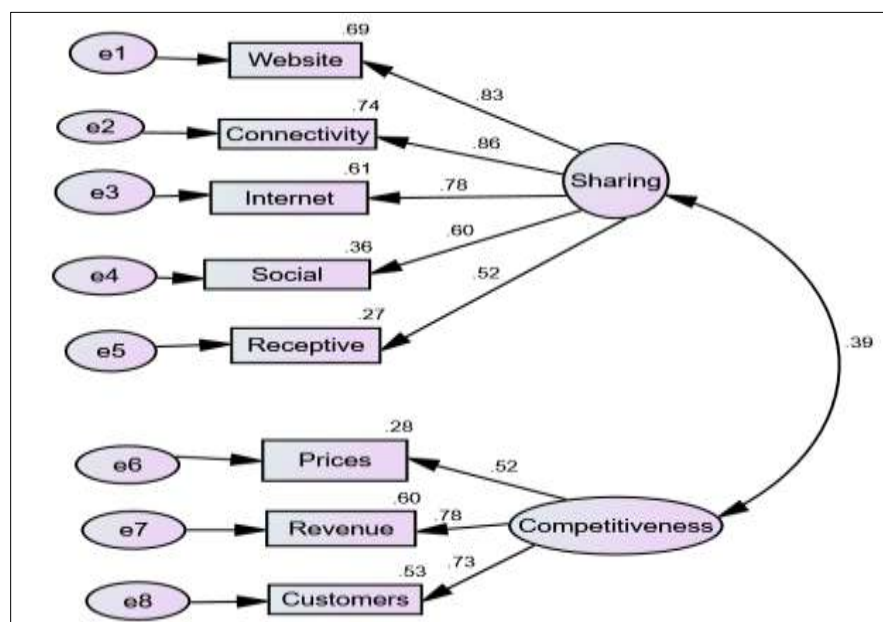


Figure 3: The Proposed Measurement Model

Fit indices for the proposed overall measurement model indicated a poor fit between the model and data. Some of the test indices of the measurement model violated the recommended model fit indices (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). The proposed measurement model had Chi-square = 81.634 and indices fit ($\chi^2/df=4.297$; NFI = 0.893; RFI = 0.843; IFI = 0.916; TLI = 0.875; CFI = 0.915; RMSEA = 0.116). The indices violated the recommended model fit indices. Thus, the modification of indices was therefore made.

Modified Measurement Model

The proposed measurement model was modified by correlating error terms as suggested by modification indices. The following error terms were therefore correlated e2↔e4; e2↔e5, e2↔e6 and e4↔e5 (Figure 4). Although the resulting first modified measurement model had a better fit with a Chi-square = 17.533 ($\chi^2/df=1.169$; NFI = 0.977; RFI = 0.957; IFI = 0.997; TLI = 0.994; CFI = 0.997; RMSEA = 0.026). All the model fit indices were not violated and were within the recommended model fit indices.

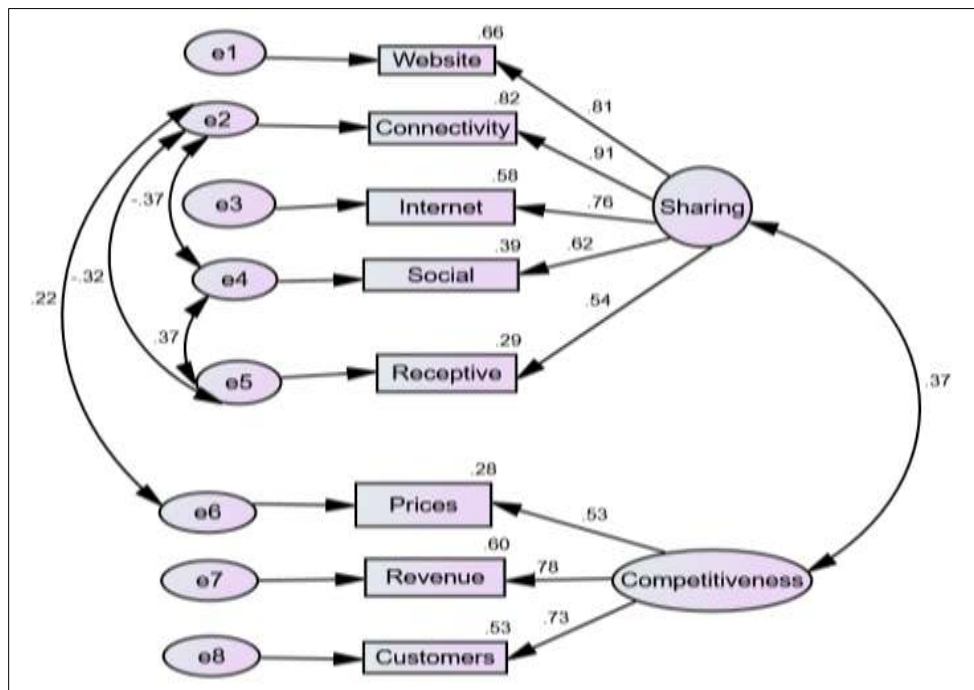


Figure 4: Modified Measurement Model

Validation of the Structural Model

The structural model involved one exogenous and one endogenous latent variable. The hypothesized structural model conceptualized that the exogenous variables; knowledge sharing, had direct effects on destination competitiveness (Figure 5).

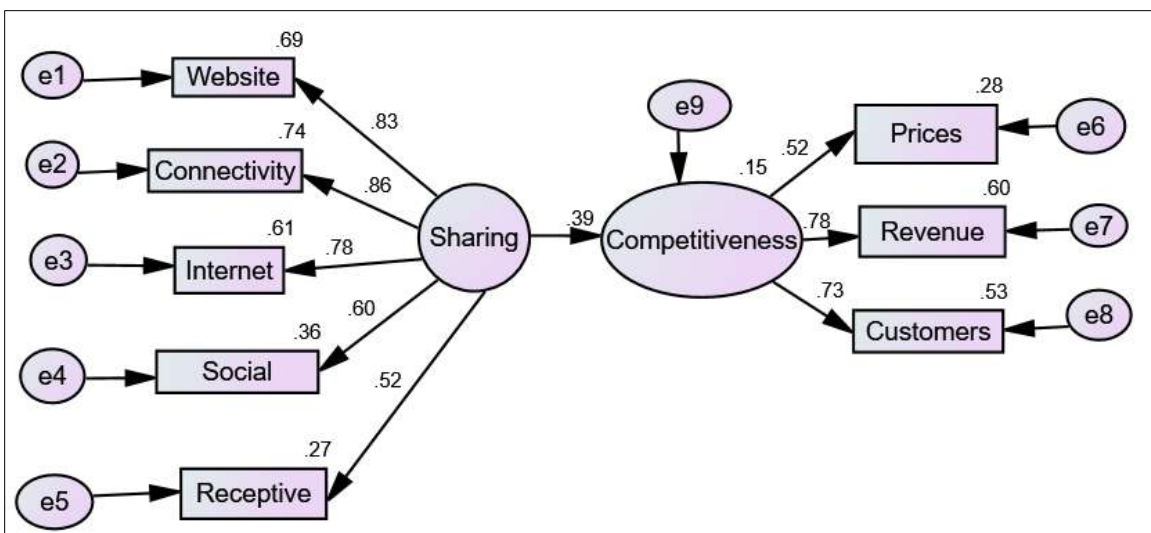


Figure 5: The Hypothesized Structural Model

Results of the analysis of moment structures of the hypothesized structural model indicated that the initial model had a Chi-square = 81.634. The hypothesized structural model had some poor fit indices to the data ($\chi^2/df = 4.297$; NFI = 0.893; RFI = 0.843; IFI = 0.916; TLI = 0.875; CFI = 0.915; RMSEA = 0.116).

Modification of Hypothesized Structural Model

In order to achieve a better structural model, fit modification indices (MI) suggested that the model fit could be improved. The initial model was therefore modified by correlating error terms as suggested by modification indices (Figure 6).

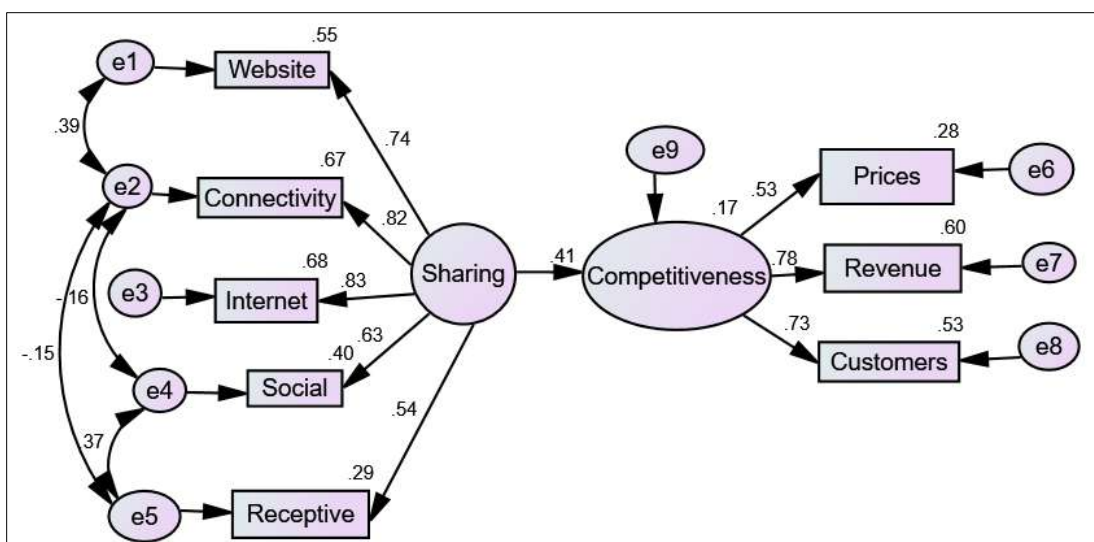


Figure 6: The Hypothesized Structural Model

The fit indices for the modified structural model indicated a perfect fit of modified model and the data ($\chi^2 = 16.558$; $\chi^2/df = 1.104$; NFI = 0.978; RFI = 0.960; IFI = 0.998; TLI = 0.996; CFI = 0.998; RMSEA = 0.021). The results indicated that the chi square value 16.558 was not statistically significant, $p > 0.05$, and likewise, fit statistics were within the acceptable limits. All the model fit indices were not violated and were within the recommended model fit indices.

Results of Hypothesis Testing

The final step in the data analysis was to test the null hypothesis. The hypothesis was tested by assigning the statistical significance of the path coefficients. This path was from Competitiveness <---sharing. Hence, the hypothesis was formulated to test the conceptualized relationships between knowledge sharing practices and destination competitiveness in the present study. The results revealed that the hypotheses were statistically significant (Table 3).

Table 3 Regression Weights (Default Model)

			Estimate	S.E.	Standardized Regression Weights	C.R.	P
Competitiveness	<---	Sharing	.451	.092	.411	4.898	***
Website	<---	Sharing	.743	.062	.744	11.899	***
Connectivity	<---	Sharing	.816	.064	.818	12.692	***
Social	<---	Sharing	.629	.064	.630	9.806	***
Internet	<---	Sharing	.825	.061	.826	13.501	***
Receptive	<---	Sharing	.537	.066	.538	8.086	***
Prices	<---	Competitiveness	.478	.063	.525	7.526	***
Revenue	<---	Competitiveness	.706	.067	.775	10.542	***
Customers	<---	Competitiveness	.661	.065	.727	10.134	***

Hypothesis H₀₁ postulated that knowledge sharing by primary stakeholders had no significant effect on destination competitiveness in Baringo County. The regression weight indicated that knowledge sharing had significant effect on destination competitiveness ($\beta = 0.411$; $t = 4.898$; $p < 0.05$). The findings indicated a noteworthy positive influence of knowledge sharing and tourism destination competitiveness in Baringo County thus, depicting that knowledge sharing influenced tourism destination competitiveness in Kenya. This agrees with Alavi and Leidner (2001) who observed that communication technologies are critical for all the key processes in knowledge management. The results also concur with Omotayo (2015) that creating, managing,

sharing and utilizing knowledge effectively are vital for organisations to take full advantage of the value of knowledge.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The finding of the study is critical as it underscores the significance assigned to knowledge sharing. It highlights the role of electronic media and emerging technologies in facilitating knowledge sharing. Through Knowledge sharing knowledge recipients are able to internalize knowledge, share their experiences, insights or knowledge with other individuals. In other words, Knowledge sharing is an exchange activity among individuals, groups and communities to share not only their knowledge, experience and skills, but also their interests (Wasko & Faraj, 2005).

Knowledge sharing evolves as a basic role in organization learning process, providing the organization with a relaxing learning atmosphere and free movement of knowledge, thereby enhancing the learning efficiency of internal employees. In tourism enterprises, employees can effectively disseminate information through effective knowledge sharing which can reduce transaction costs within the company and establish trust relationships among internal members, thereby enhancing organizational commitment and promoting the occurrence of innovative behaviour.

Sharing knowledge in the enterprise can improve the ability of the enterprise to acquire external knowledge and ultimately promote the competitive advantage of the enterprise. In practice, knowledge sharing in different dimensions also has different promotion effects on the generation of competitiveness. For tourism enterprises, knowledge sharing mostly occurs among employees as they share operational business knowledge. Such knowledge sharing improves employees' operational skills and consequently the level of customer service and customer relationship management which translate into more stable source of tourists for tourism companies. Knowledge sharing may be done externally when tourists desire to exchange their experiences with other travellers. Knowledge sharing in this way may be done over the internet which most probably attracts referrals for the destination.

The study concludes that the knowledge sharing affects the tourism destinations competitiveness. Knowledge sharing can reduce the cost and time of information transfer, improve the timeliness of decision-making, and promote the occurrence of knowledge innovation. On this basis, knowledge sharing promotes the innovation of tourism enterprises and enables them to gain competitive advantage. At the same time, effective knowledge sharing behavior can lay the foundation for excellent customer relationship management and internal revenue management and become an important source of competitive advantage for the

tourism destination. It is worth noting that knowledge sharing is more necessary for the hotel industry due to higher costs and high staff turnover in the hotels.

The study recommends that organizations should adopt more ways of sharing knowledge among employees in order to improve their knowledge management capacities. The alignment of knowledge sharing policy to the organizational strategy is to act as a guideline on how knowledge should be disseminated within the tourism organizations and other stakeholders within the sector.

LIMITATIONS

The study limited itself to Baringo County of Rift Valley region in Kenya mainly because similar studies had not been conducted in the area. Baringo being one of the vibrant tourism destinations in the country presented itself as a good starting point to conduct the study. Secondly, perusal of existing research reports revealed that very limited investigations had been done on knowledge management practices in Kenya specifically within the tourism sector.

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