TOUR GUIDES: ARE THEY TOURISM PROMOTERS AND DEVELOPERS?

CASE STUDY OF MALAWI

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ABSTRACT

The rapid rise in need for travel in tourism industry over the past few years has increased the demand for intermediaries to link up travellers with experience. The study identifies and evaluates roles of tour guides in creating a good destination image, establishes the need for tour guides' training to aid in tourism promotion and development, investigates challenges faced by tour guides and identifies possible solutions to challenges tour guides face in Malawi. Semi-structured open ended questions were employed to bring together data for the study by interviewing both tour guides and tourists who involve tour guides in Malawi. The study revealed that the roles such as leadership, interpretation and education, information giving, mediation and representation were critical in building a destination image. It was again established that tour guides lacked professional training. The study also revealed that challenges such as inadequate training, professionalism, facilitating tourist experience, industry related and other challenges were faced by tour guides. Hence, it was recommended that through establishment of a nationwide tour guides' association, introduction of basic formal training and registration and certification of tour guides could contain such challenges.

KEYWORDS: Tour Guides, Tour Guiding, Destination Image, Tourism and Malawi

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the pleasure and business activity which involve people travelling to destinations outside normal place of residences for over short of time (Chilembwe, 2010). On the same, The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2009) interprets tourism as activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than on consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of any activity remunerated from within the place visited.

Travelling as one of the core aspects of tourism has emerged as a necessary leisure activity in the 21st century due to increased paid holidays as a result many people are involved in travel and tourism (Cimacio *et al*., 2009). Many people across the world nowadays participate in leisure activities for variety of reasons. They try to make savings and draw plans as to where they want to spend their holidays. Page, (2007) reveals that there are intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive people to travel. Intrinsic factors include; self-realization and boasting one's ego whereas extrinsic factors are those that shape individuals' attitudes, preferences and perceptions from external environment. Cimacio *et al*., (2009) add that people travel from one place to another for physical and health-related, enjoyment, educational and recreation reasons. Other individuals travel for learning new cultures and places, however, they achieve self-fulfillment as travelling contributes to personal development and elevation of social stance.

The rise in need for travel in the tourism industry has increased the demand for intermediaries to link up travellers with what they want to consume as they travel. Travel agents and individuals involved in travel intermediation create courtesy statements which also play a role in motivating a person in decision making to travel one day and an example of such statements is:

A well-travelled person has a wider outlook in life; more often than not they are also looked up by others. Travel, after all is considered a natural teacher and a bridge to understanding people (Cimacio et al., 2009: 30).

This therefore, creates demand for individuals to make interesting and informative commentaries as a result tour guides come in to play their role as well. Travelling becomes more enjoyable when a well-trained guide is present. Tour guides are knowledgeable like teachers hence impart knowledge and give travellers right information about a destination. This process satisfies travellers and eventually induces growth in tourism as a whole (Mancini, 2001).

Malawi is a country that depends on agriculture as a source of revenue for her economy. The country is almost entirely dependent on the tobacco industry, which accounts over 60 percent of foreign earnings thereby contributing to 10 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (DGP) (ICEIDA, 2014). However, the growing global campaign by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Framework on Tobacco Control Convention (FTCC) against smoking (Davis, 1992), put forward frightening challenges to the economy of Malawi. Nevertheless, as Malawi government is attempting to encourage diversification into other cash crops and the sectors to prevent the economy from decline, it has identified that tourism has potential in contributing significantly to the economy hence a call for developing the tourism industry (Ministry of Tourism (2006). In response, various strategies have been suggested and tourism is among the five priorities and strategies are being implemented to develop tourism more in Malawi.

From the observation, it has been noted that the focus of tourism development is concentrated on the physical development of the supply side in terms of physical assets such as accommodation units, for example; Bingu International Conference Centre (BICC), Presidents Hotel in the Capital City of Malawi, Lilongwe, Mpale Cultural Village and Sunbird Nkopola Lakeshore International Conference Centre in Mangochi (MCV) and upgrading of some of resorts' roads to tarmac level. In addition, the development of other forms of tourism like ecotourism destinations namely, Lilongwe Wildlife Centre (Natural Sunctuary), Majete Wildlife in Chikhwawa, Kande Beach in Nkhata-Bay, Likhubula Falls in Mulanje, Maleri Island and Manchewe Falls. There is little or no attention has been put forward to see how tourists interact with the destinations especially with individuals who act as an interface between tourists and host and how the tourists-hosts interaction affects the image of the destination. Furthermore, limited research or no research on the Malawi setting has been done to ascertain the contribution of tour guides to the promotion of a tourist destination and tourism as a whole. Therefore, this current research focuses on tour guides in Malawi and tries to evaluate how tourism destinations are promoted and developed through interactions with tourists.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The overall objective of the study was to examine tour guides' roles in promoting tourism in Malawi as tourism destination. Therefore, the specific objectives were to identify and evaluate roles of tour guides in creating good image of a Malawi; to establish the needs for tour guides' training in promoting tourism in Malawi; to investigate challenges tour guides encounter in their professionalism; and to identify and recommend solutions to challenges tour guide encounter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Description of Tour Guides and Tour Guiding

Tour guiding has been an area of research activity for the past years. Robotic (2010: 214) explains that "the origin and evolution of the role of tour guide was expounded by Cohen (1985), who was a pioneer of making tourists guiding a matter of scientific attention". Consequently, various attempts have been made to describe tour guides and guiding professionalism. Tour guides mean different people. Hu (2007) says that tour guides are also known by titles like tour leaders, tour managers, tour escorts, local guides, docents and interpreters. Cruz (1999) adds that other names of a tour guide include tourist guide, local guide, and city guide but for the people outside the tourism industry call tour guides as tour managers, docents or interpreters. This misunderstanding has been taken into account and various academic researchers have provided typologies of the guiding field. It is, therefore, beyond the scope of this paper to outline the typologies.

The complex nature of tour guides' functions provide no single identified description of tour guides. For example, Cruz (1999) says that "it is hard to utilize solely a single description for tour guiding due to a diversity of functions undertaken by them (tour guides)". Upon basing the argument on the following facts;

Some guides are self-employed, create and market their own tours, others are employed by the travel industry and conduct predesigned tours while others are employed by corporations or organisations (p. 2).

In this regards, it is apparent to verify some extent the complexity and miscellaneous of the transactions made by tour guides.

Mancini, (2001) defines a tour guide as someone who takes people on sightseeing excursions of limited duration. Whereas Collins (2000: 22) defines as an individual who directs the way; who heads others on a trip or tour; and one who directs or serves as the model for another in his conduct, career. Looking at related perspective, a tour guide is seen as someone who leads groups of visitors within a town, museum or any other place of interest. The guide gives precise and right information on the facilities, activities and history of the area (Cruz, 1999). These definitions point out that a tour guide is responsible for directing and leading tourists on a tour or sightseeing.

World Federation of Tourist Guide Association (2005) defines a tour guide as a person who guides visitors in the language of their choice and interprets the cultural and natural heritage of an area which person normally possesses an area-specific qualification usually issued and or recognised by the appropriate authority. Pond (1993), therefore adds that a skillful guide is someone of the most valuable assets a tourism company can have because in many ways, guides are in the forefront of a business or company since are the ones who interact with visitors as often as possible. Despite many definitions of a tour guide, an internationally accepted definition is given by the International Association of Tour Managers and the European Federation of Tourist Guide Association (EFTGA, 1998) and defines tour guide as a person; Who guides groups or individual visitors from abroad or from the home country around the monuments, sites and museums of a city or region; to interpret in an inspiring and entertaining manner, in the language of the visitor's choice, including the cultural and natural heritage and environment (Ap & Wong, 2001: 551).

In this regard, it describes the job of the tour guides as leading, interpretative, inspiring and entertaining in an unambiguous geographical or environmental setting in which their specialised knowledge of various languages is applied

and therefore it is the one this paper follows. However, other definitions put their central focus on the importance of personality and conduct of the guides as essential ingredients that constitute the work of the tour guide. For example, as outlined by the Professional Tour Guide Association of San Antonio, a tour guide is defined as a person who possesses a good blend of enthusiasm, knowledge, personality qualities and high standards of conduct and ethics that help them lead groups of people or individuals to the important sites while providing interpretation and commentary. Ap and Wong (2000) further say that the tour guides provide an important part of interface between the host destination and visitors since are front-line employees who are very much responsible for the overall impression and satisfaction with the tour services offered by a destination.

TYPES OF TOUR GUIDES

Different authors have outlined various categories of tour guides. Some have classified tour guides based on the geographical boundaries in which tour guiding operations are conducted while other authors put emphasis on the required qualifications, abilities and type of activities performed. However, a number of types of tour guides have been reviewed and these include; on-site guides; docents, personal or private guides; city guides, specialised guides, regional or provincial guides and tour guides.

Mancini (2001) states that on-site guides conduct tours for specific duration (an hour or more) at a specific setting such as building, limited area or an attraction. Tours are usually done by or through a vehicle whereby the guide conducts guiding roles on board as tourists travel around an area. The Kwa Zulu Natal Guide Newsletter (2007) adds that on-site guides do have minimum requirements such as knowledge of the area and it serves as pre-requisites to guide within that specific area. On-site guides are further divided into subgroups and these are docents and personal or private guides (Mancini, 2001).

Docents are those guides who conduct interpretations and offer explanatory services in confined places such as museums, and historic buildings. Docents might also be called "In-house guides" (Collins, 2000), considering the fact that they work in safely homes, historic houses, castles, cathedrals, factories, and other venues for tourists. Docents usually work on free of charge basis because most of them work as volunteers. However, due to the growth of professionalism in the travel and tourism industry, in-house guides are now being paid (Collins, 2000). Personal or private guides are usually accompany tourists within boundaries of limited geographical area and have deeper and wider knowledge base of the area in which they execute their duties (Mancini, 2001).

ROLE OF TOUR GUIDES IN TOURISM

Tour guides are known to be playing an important role in tourism. Prakash and Chowdhary (2010) ascertain that "tour guiding and interpretation is a basic activity in tourism value chain". The importance of guiding therefore cannot be undermined even though tour guides may be expected to assume different roles in different contexts. Zhang and Chow (2004) point out that the success of the tourism industry most of the times relies on the performance of tour guides in various destinations because tour guides provide the required information to visitors. Tour guides are also known to have the powers to make a trip enjoyable or boring. It is further argued that when tour guides are able to produce quality service to guests or visitors, the image and reputation of the destination improves. Not surprising, tourist experience can be shaped by the way in which tour guides execute their functions. Obviously, what guides can decide to perform or not perform can either make or break a tour (Yu *et al.*, 2004).

Due to diversity in the functionality of tour guide sand complexity of tour guiding, notable roles with much relevance to tourism are summarised in the table 1 below:

Table 1: Indicates the Roles of Tour Guides

Tour management (focus on group)	**Geographical**	**Social**
	Organiser or manager	Entertainer Facilitator or sale representative
Experience management (focus on individuals)	**Interactional**	**Communicative**
	Leader Cultural broker	Educator Information giver
Resource management (focus on environment)	**Motivate**	**Environmental interpreter**
	Motivator or mentor	Interpreter or mediator

Source: Khalifah, Z. (2007) and Prakash *et al*., (2010).

Randall and Rollins (2009) state that interpretation is a form of education that concentrates on meanings and relationships through employing original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media unlike communicating through factual information. On the other hand, interpretation is said to be a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual linkages between audience interests and the meanings inherent in the resource (Rabotic, 2010).

Mason (2003) argues that tourists' response to interpretation is twofold thus mindless and mindful involvement. Mindless response is characterised by mental passivity and behavior whereas mindful involves active mental processing. Moscardo (1996) emphasises the importance of promoting a mindful tourism through interpretation programs. It is, therefore, argued that a mindful tourism can be promoted well with personal interpretation method because it involves the main interaction between visitors and guides. Eventually, provision of the key role to inform and educate visitors in the process of interpretation is achieved (Mason, 2002).

TOUR GUIDES AS SALES REPRESENTATIVES

"Tour guides are tourism promoters and they sell the next tour" (Hu, 2007: 22). Weiler and Ham (2001b) affirm that tour guides as employees are expected to offer service that is high in quality to boost not only satisfaction of visitors but also profits margins. It is confirmed that tour guides becomes representatives of their employees from the commencement of every tour and their performance influences not only current visitors' experiences but also potential visitors' intention to buy products because of effect due to word-of-mouth (Hu, 2007). It is, therefore, argued that interaction between tour guides and visitors, especially during interpretation and education, can provide chances of tour guides to have great impacts on tourists as regards to promoting attractions in the destination area. It is said that interaction can lead to personal selling as a means of promotion. Geva and Goldman (1991) stress that the responsibility to make customers be satisfied mostly relies on the tour guide because they are involved with tour participants in a continuous and intense contact throughout the whole tour.

TOUR GUIDES AS REPRESENTATIVES OF A REGION

Modlin *et al*., (2011) describe tour guides as an indispensable crossing point between tourists and destinations. They continue to add that tour guides constitutes a strategic factor in as far as representation of a destination is concerned. Despite the fact that tourists can make their extreme perceptions about a destination, tour guides can exert great influence on the way an activity, place or destination is interpreted and experienced (Baum *et al*., 2007).

CHALLENGES OF TOUR GUIDING PROFESSION

Literature reveals that like any other profession, tour guiding profession is faced with a number of challenges that affect this field in one way or the other. The following are some of the challenges that tour guides face;

- Management of tourist experience due to shortage or unavailability of required facilities to support tourist experience (Robotic, 2010).

- Training of tour guides (Cimacio *et al.*, 2009).

- Professionalism due to lack of knowledge and communication skills (Ap & Wong, 2000).

- Seasonality; for example low or shoulder times, hence low revenue or income due to unfavourable weather conditions (Page, 2007).

- Unethical industry practices pose some risks to the profession (Chowdhary & Prakash, 2010).

- Image of tour guides who sometimes perceived with negative image, unpleasant job and low pay (Ap & Wong, 2000; Prakash *et al.*, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

Semi-structured personal interviews with tour guides and tourists were done to solicit views regarding the subject matter. The method was chosen because it gives the chance of seeking clarification and explanations (Finn *et al.*, 2000). It also allows the researcher to have control over the line of questioning depending on what needs to be known (Creswell, 2009) and it enables the researcher to focus on new insights as they occur during the course of research unlike in structured interviews (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

All questions, except two, were open-ended and on average, each interview took about thirteen minutes. The researcher wrote down the guides' and tourists' responses. Tour guides were asked about their motives for and expectations from taking the guiding occupation, their own ideas about their roles and duties on tour, their evaluations of the job, including both satisfactory and unsatisfactory aspects, and , as a tour guide, their functions in supporting promoting and developing tourism in Malawi. These enquiries were designed to ascertain the local guide' cognition of the guiding profession and its connection with shaping the image of the image of the destinations as well as to probe factors that rise as challenges and barriers in the guiding industry. It was hoped that such kind of information could help provide clues or explanations for the guides' conduct observed in their guiding practices. Observation supplemented the interviews. According to Creswell (2009), field notes were gathered through observing as an observer during the process of interviews and even outside the interview setting. Observations are advantageous because they provide the researcher with the opportunity to record information as it occurs.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The presentation of the major findings of the study was undertaken to examine the roles of tour guides in promoting tourism in Malawi. The findings and factors underpinning them are discussed in relation to theories and concepts and information presented in the literature review. The main findings have been categorized into groups to build structure of this part of current study namely; the characteristics of respondents followed by the major findings in

accordance with the objective of the study and discussion of the findings follows after each and every main findings.

Table 2: Shows Age of Respondents

Age	Tour Guides Frequency	Tourists Frequency
15 - 24	7	13
25 – 35	11	9
36 – 40	5	4
41 and above	1	3

GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

The tour guide group comprised thirty (24) male respondents because female tour guides were not encountered during the course of the study. However, the tourists group consisted of forty-nine (29) respondents. Eighteen were males while eleven were female tourists.

ROLE OF TOUR GUIDES IN CREATING DESTINATION'S IMAGE

Tour guides' role is very complex such that it encompasses a lot of undertakings within which are factors that help improve the image and reputation of a destination (Zhang & Chow, 2004). There are also different roles that are performed by tour guides. The study identified roles that help build good image and reputation of the destination from the perspective of tour guides and the tourists studied.

Tour guides were asked "What do you (tour guides) do to make tourists enjoy their visit to various places of tourists' interests in Malawi?" All tour guides (24) indicated that one of the most important roles of tour guides is interpretation of tourism product. Tour guides highlighted that during a tour they are able to explain to tourists what they (tourists) see, the background and history of the place, meanings of words, signs, symbols and other things that deemed to be of interest. As one informant from the group responded in Chewa language in Salima saying:

"….timapelekezaalendoosiyanasiyanakumaloochititsachidwiukotikufotokozerankhani,chiyambichake, ndikumasulirazinthuzosiyanasiyanazimenealendoakuziwonakomansozolembedwandikuyankhamafunsoawo…"

Interpreted in English as:

"….we escort tourists to different places of tourists' interests explaining various things such as what they see, words, traditional dances, while telling them stories, history and also attending to their questions…."

Tourists also confirmed that a large component of their experience is influenced by the way guides interpret tourism assets in destination areas. This is so because by explaining the assets tourists are able to grasp the real essence of the product being interpreted. For example; one tourist when asked what he liked about tour guides, had this to say:

"….he [Tour guide] led me to some places I could not go on my own, see, am a visitor, I don't know the meaning of many local things …. Guides explained things I did not know and could not know if not interpreted to me…"

INFORMATION GIVING AND EDUCATION

Literature emphasizes the importance of tour guides as information givers and educators. Robotic (2010) agrees with some authors such as (Ang, 1990; Pond, 1993; Howard *et al*., 2001; Hillman, 2006) that tour guides' role involves

providing the right and required information that will fill the information gap of tourists, this therefore asks for the need to have knowledge in many aspects of the destination area. The guides' way of doing their job revealed that they do provide information and to a great extent educate tourists. Some of the guides put it in words:

"…I organise what tourists want to experience, I tell them where they can find good food, traditional dances, sometimes I take them and teach them how to swimming stories while they watch …" (Guide 1)

"…I welcome tourists, give them instructions on activities such as rock jumping and village walks and sometimes I tell them village history and answer any question from tourist…" (Guide 2)

It was observed that most of tour guides are residents of the places such as Salima, Mangochi, Nkhata-Bay and Mulanje and they possess some basic background information about the destinations in Malawi. It is believed that providing the required information helps satisfy tourists' needs and eventually they instill tourists the liking for the destination.

MEDIATION

Mediation simply means to act a medium for a process or effect (Yu *et al.,* 2004). Findings from interviews with tour 19 guides out of 24 and 27 tourists out of 29 revealed the importance of tour guides' mediatory role. Overall, both visitors and tour guides testified that to be a mediator, tour guides are supposed to mediate access, information and encounters. This, therefore, suggest that tour guiding role not only facilitates tourists to observe and experience cultural dissimilarities but also deepens the understanding of the host area through interactions between hosts and guests. Rabotic (2010) points out that mediation is a central position in creating tourist experiences and a guide aids tourists to have a good experience by selecting and explaining cultural distinctiveness. This process, in agreement with the findings, is achieved through a two-way communication that is barrier-free between tour guides and tourists.

LEADING

Leadership is concerned with dynamic interaction between a leader and followers which leads to an acceptance of leader-follower roles by group members (Jordan, 1996). All tour guides (24), disclosed that one of the roles in guiding is to lead tourists on a tour. Guides were asked to describe what the tour guiding job involves and they were quick to mention that they lead and direct group of tourists to places of interest. For instance; one guide clearly stated that he escorted tourists to Lake Malawi National Park and some days to Nyika National Park. It was his duty to lead the way, provide safety and security and solve any problems related to the tour that arose during the course of travelling. The way through which these duties are discharged by a tour guide affects the tourists' perception of the guide as well as the destination. As one tourist verbalises;

"…the moment I went to Usisya, eerr the guide ferried us all the way from here [Nkhatabay District] to that side [Usisya] on boat. Despite the challenges on the way, he managed to reach us there… we enjoyed the voyage … the guy [tour guide] was really an expert …"

Therefore execution of leadership role of tour guide has the potential to make the experience of tourists interesting or not. This is linked to what Howard *et al*., (2001) describe as instrumental and social roles in the guiding leadership realm.

REPRESENTATION

Tour guides act as representatives in their transactions. Hu (2007) and Modlin *et al.,* (2011) separately confirm that representation is in form of sales representatives and destination representatives. The study revealed that all tour guides help to promote tourism through the way they transacted their roles. It was evident that tour guides isolate and concentrate on issues that help pull more visitors to a destination. Eighteen tour guides clearly articulated that they try as much as possible to include unique things that arouse tourists' interest during a tour. Some of the things pointed out were extending time of interesting activities, selling curios at affordable prices and going to the villages with tourists to sample out cultural dances. The researcher observed that during guides-tourists interaction, tour guides deliver services in order to satisfy tourists and consequently influence good word of mouth once tourists go back home.

On the other hand, it was found that three tour guides have websites such that they use websites to advertise and sell Malawi as a destination through the internet. This means that some of the tourists could be booked through these websites. Through the process of making bookings, tour guides provide good information about the destination that has the potential to arouse interest of the potential visitor. In so doing, it is believed that the tour guides contribute to tourism marketing and promotion in Malawi.

THE CURRENT STATE OF GUIDES' PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

When asked about professional training tour guides undergone, data collected however, revealed that 16 (66%) of the guides had never attained any formal training as regards to the guiding profession. Only 8 (35%) of guides confirmed to have attended a seminar organised by the Ministry of Tourism, Flemish Government through partnership Malawi Institute of Tourism about five years ago and certificates were presented but no licenses were issued. The research further revealed that 6 (25%) of tour guides confirmed that their being in the profession was influenced by interests and passion, opportunity in the profession and influence from friends yet over 18 (75%) of tour guides joined the profession due to unemployment and lack of required qualifications to exploit opportunities in other fields. It was easy to play trade in tour guiding because *"all one needed to do is meeting tourists, convince them and understand history about the destination…"*elaborated one tour guide.

CHALLENGES IN THE GUIDING PROFESSION

The interaction with tour guides and tourists revealed many issues and problems encountered in guiding profession. The third objective of the research was to investigate challenges faced by tour guides in executing their duties and the following were established:

TRAINING OF TOUR GUIDES

The research revealed that Mangochi and Mulanje constitute 14% of trained tour guides. When asked how they managed while others not and where they got training, they responded:

"…it was through individual effort to raise funds and pay for training facilitated and hosted by Malawi Institute of Tourism in collaboration with Flemish Government and Malawi Government through Ministry of Tourism…"

However, most of the tour guides in Salima and Nkhata-Bay lack professional training and this negatively affects tour guiding practices. Guides' answers about training indicated that lack of the required training provides a disadvantage

in discharging their duties. Therefore, tour guides recognised the need for training but access to such nature of formal training was a challenge. For instance; in responding to why most of guides did not attend some formal basic training, 62% of tour guides were not aware if such training was provided in the country. Others (38%), however, said that tour guiding was regarded as an informal and underpaid job by various stakeholders and there was no need for one to get professional training. Nevertheless, tour guides emphasised that training was worthwhile because some of issues for example, learning a new foreign language can be facilitated better with formal training.

Unavailability of institutions providing basic tour guiding training in Malawi was seen to be one of the main factors that contributed to the deficiencies in tour guiding profession. When there were no institutions to offer such formal training, it became hard for guides to attain the required formal skills unless scholarships were provided to get training abroad. On contrary, it was discovered from guides that getting professional qualifications without incentives such as certificates to secure a job could be discouraging even if training institutions were available.

PROFESSIONALISM

This concerns competence or skill expected of a professional guide in delivering customer services. The interviews conducted revealed that professionalism was a challenge amongst tour guides especially in Salima and Nkhatabay as compared to Mangochi and Mulanje where some guides were properly trained. Their response revealed that tour guides were required to have good knowledge of tourism product, good interpersonal skills that include proficiency in various languages and ability and willingness to offer quality standards of services. Good interpersonal skills and offering of quality standards are believed to be much dependent on training. However, due to limitation of training opportunity that comes into existence because of absence of formal tour guiding basic courses and lack of incentives, tour guides did not have an avenue through which they could acquire the required skills to improve professionalism.

MANAGEMENT OF TOURIST EXPERIENCES

The study revealed that tour guides meet numerous challenges as regards to facilitating good tourist experience. Through interviews conducted, tour guides asserted that tourist attraction areas have inadequate facilities that can in-house all various kinds of tourists. One guide had this to narrate;

"…Salima, Nkhata-Bay, Mangochi and Mulanje Townships have limited number of attractions, apart from the lake; seasonal traditional dances and mountains, there are very few things that tourists can enjoy, you know some of these places do not have animals, no hotels apart from lodges and the road networks are poor, so it was very difficult to provide what tourists want…"

Bearing in mind that modern tourism is no mass tourism and that tourists anticipate and demand customised and personalised services, it is hard for tour guides to fulfill the diverse desires of tourists. The researcher believes that tourists need a variety of options and alternatives of attractions as regards to fulfilling their expectation; this however is supported by an outstanding infrastructural base that can assist in facilitating good visitor experience. Chowdhary and Prakash (2010); Prakash *et al.*, (2010) also confirmed that lack of sufficient infrastructure base to support tourism in a destination creates pressure of use on the few available resources.

SEASONALITY, BAD PRACTICES AND IMAGE

Tourism is a seasonal industry such that tourists' arrivals at a destination fluctuate with times of the year (Page, 2007). Tour guides affirmed that the seasonal nature of the industry brings forward both the good and bad things in as far as the profession is concerned. Tour guides emphasised that during off-peak period they experience low business and this affects their day to day life as most of them rely on guiding as a source of income. Prakash *et al.,* (2010) and Prakash *et al.*, (2011) note that survival based on tour guiding alone is difficult to be achieved especially considering the fact that tourism is seasonal and usually restricted to six months of operations. On bad practices, about 50% (12) of tour guides expressed concern over some of the unethical practices by some people who pretend to be tour guides. It was articulated that practices such as stealing tourists' valuables, charging exorbitant prices, and forcing visitors to buy things were some of challenges that tarnish the profession of tour guiding.

The researcher believed that unscrupulous individuals give distorted information to tourists with the aim of ripping-off tourists' valuables and this is suggested to be enhanced by lack of identification of tour guides around Salima, Mangochi, Nkhata-Bay and Mulanje. It was observed that a tour guide could easily be recognised since over 58% (14) guides who were asked during the research could not produce valid identification card because they confirmed that such material was not produced for them. This concurs with Cimacio *et al.*, (2009) who said that sometimes the safety of the tourists could be threatened by individuals who might deceive tourists in the destination and could lead to bad tourists' experience. It was further established that tour guides were not associated with good image. Tour guides confided that local residents do not respect them because of the profession they are in. 88% (21) of tour guides complained that they were called various names such as *chamba smokers, rastas and thieves*. It was believed that disgusting names pull tour guides down and therefore negatively affecting provision of required services to tourists.

CATEGORIZATION OF GUIDES

The research revealed that there was no clear classification of tour guides. Through interviews conducted with both guides and tourists, it was evident to note that their roles were cross-cutting as a result it was difficult to categorise them depending on the duties performed. Additionally, it was believed difficulty in categorizing them due to lack of professional standards that could help distinguish them; for example, an on-site guide from a specialised guide.

GENDER MISREPRESENTATION

The study has discovered that guiding was dominated by male individuals. This was manifested through responses from tour guides and tourists asked during research. 14 (58%) of tour guides agreed that the unavailability of female guides provide a deficiency in satisfying tourists' experiences. For example, three female tourists commented that they had expectations of interacting with female guides; unfortunately, they were dismayed to find no female guides to escort them during the tour. From the sentiments, it was deduced that tourists have the desire to be serviced by female guides as well in additional to males; however, they were left with no options but to be handled by male guides. The misrepresentation was arguably, therefore, thought to be influenced by the bad perceptions people have about tour guides and lack of effort by private and public sectors in promoting tour guiding as a formal profession. This was, however, not encountered in the reviewed literature and therefore can be regarded as a new finding in this regard.

TOURISTS' FEEDBACK

21 out of 24 tour guides interviewed complained that they do not get constructive criticism from tourists to enable them change if need be in order to satisfy visitors. The challenge to get comments come in because there was no system put forward for tourists to channel their grievances and obviously due to lack of time by tourists to route complaints. The unavailability of such a channel gives guides no opportunity to improve if they were underperforming. Although, this was the case, literature points out that during interactions between guests and tourists, feedback is given and this includes criticisms and appreciation of the role played by tour guides (Baum *et al*., 2007). Not getting feedback or criticism on the other hand could mean that the services offered were rightly delivered. Additionally, considering the fact that some tour operating companies have websites such that tourists' comments or feedback and tourists book, the researcher believes that tourists could easily give feedback even online.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES

The last study objective was concentrated on identifying possible solutions to overcome the challenges as recommended by both tourists and tour guides. The suggestions were arrived at and also critically analysed after understanding the roles of tour guiding and tourism, the challenges they encounter and how the challenges could be abated. Some suggested were as follows:

TRAINING

A good number of informants stressed on the need for training of tour guides, as a result, they were of the view that training institutions need be established (if not established) and ensure that access to these institutions was provided. Accessibility should be focused much on the affordability of fees and pre-requisites requirements for one to undergo training. On the other hand, it was also suggested that incentives need to be provided to motivate individuals attain profession training because it was essential in the guiding profession. Incentives could be in terms of establishment of tour companies that can offer guides secure and long-term jobs.

PROFESSIONALISM AND MANAGEMENT OF TOURIST EXPERIENCE

Regarding professionalism 89.6% (26) of tourists interviewed proposed that there was need for relevant authorities to introduce basic formal courses that will be focused on tour guiding issues. The proposal was also supported by tour guides. It was further advised that upon completion of such courses, participants should be examined and given certificates of recognition. Additionally, respondents underlined the need for a good infrastructural base to support tourists' experience. These developments such as good road networks linking tourist attractions, development of attractions and setting standards for delivery would help to facilitate tourists' experience. In agreement to Prakash *et al*., (2011), heavy inflow of tourists in a destination creates high demand for tourism infrastructure. It was, therefore, essential to provide for tourism infrastructure to enhance good management of tourists' experience.

BAD PRACTICES, IMAGE, COMMENTS, AND GENDER MISREPRESENTATION

Findings have proved that it was obvious to observe that the perceived bad image of tour guides come into existence because of unethical practices that are performed by dubious individuals pretending to be tour guides. 17 out 24 of respondents confirmed by saying that it is hard for tourists to distinguish pretenders from authentic tour guides

because there is no such provision by local authorities regulating the industry. However, the image that tour guides were painted was seen to have a further impact on tour guiding because it was believed that it impeded participation of female guides. Therefore, to curb the challenges, it was recommended that there was need for the relevant authorities to promote tour guiding as a formal field or profession. It was also stated that if standards could be established, tour guides were registered and given licenses to operate in a destination area and provision of civic education to local residents about the roles of tour guides in tourism was made, such challenges will subside. In agreement, Ap and Wong (2000) say that in order to improve the image and status of tour guiding profession, there was a need to promote greater community awareness and participation of the services delivered by tour guides.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research was to examine tour guides' roles that contribute to tourism promotion in Malawi as a tourism destination. To develop structure of this research, the theoretical discussion in literature review first described some of the most important concepts significant to this study. The reviewed literature clearly demonstrated that tour guiding was very complex in nature. Due to the aspect of complexity, it was not easy to settle for one universal definition that could encompass all aspects of tour guiding. It was discovered that the tour guides are classified into different categories depending on the way they undertake their roles. The image of the destination to a greater extent is influenced and determined by tour guides. As comprehended in the literature review many researchers lay emphasis on the importance of tour guides' roles such as interpreting and education, representation, leading, information giving and mediation for building a good image of any destination. Challenges that tour guides come across in the profession were also discussed. It was seen that challenges were influenced by many factors within and outside the guiding realm. Results were derived from analysis of experiences by tour guides and tourists. Several factors were identified. It was ascertained that tour guides roles can either break or build a repute of a destination. That is why there was an emphasis to exert much attention on the role of tour guides in the tourism industry. Other findings revealed that tour guiding challenges if left unattended to can darken the growing image of a destination. Hence there was an urgent need to address these challenges to foster guiding professionalism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings of the study, it was proposed recommendations for curbing the challenges existing in the tour guiding profession:

TRAINING

To ensure that tour guides are professionally trained, there was need for introducing a compulsory basic training to be taken by all practicing and new entrant guides. The introductory course for guides entering the field needs to comprise some of the important issues such as local history, geography of destination, local economy, customer care skills, health and safety management and basic emergency aid. The training can be handled and managed either by the regional tourism offices, local tourist office or other players such as training institutions like Mzuzu University (MZUNI) and Malawi Institute of Tourism (MIT). Other countries realise the need for providing training to tour guides. A good example is United Kingdom where tour guides are required to complete some courses and take examinations which enable them to wear the highly respected Blue Badges as required by the law. The trend is the same in Austria, Canada, New Zealand and

Australia (Pond, 1993; Christie & Mason, 2003). Tour guides need to be equipped with diversity of skills to effectively deliver services, it is therefore, recommended further that the skill-based courses should be provided through vocation education and training. In this regards, it is suggested that technical education and training providers such as the Technical, Entrepreneurial, Vocational Education and Training Authority (TEVETA) could partner with tourism regulating bodies or associations to address the issue of tour guides training.

ESTABLISHMENT OF TOUR GUIDES' ASSOCIATION

Due to various challenges tour guides face, a good representation of their grievances and complaints would help to channel their views and opinions to relevant authorities such as government. Such being the case, information of a national tour guides' association to represent interests of tour guides to government would be as essential remedial action. The association could also develop codes of ethics and conduct to be followed by its members and this may help guides to accomplish their expected roles and improve on their performance. Malawi may use best practices such   The National Association of Interpreters (NAI) in United States of America, Australia Interpretation Association (AIA) in Australia and Hong Kong Association of Tour Coordinators (HARTCO) in Hong Kong where a wide range of services such as codes of conduct and awards of excellence programs are practices (Pond, 1993; Ap & Wong, 2000; Black & Weiler, 2005).

CERTIFICATION AND LICENSING OF TOUR GUIDES

Tour guides are supposed to be registered, certified and given licenses of performance. This approach could not only categorised and install confidence in tour guides since they would be distinguished from dubious guides, but also ensure minimum standards of professionalism that would help improve service quality thereby enhancing both tour guides' and destination's image. In Scotland, for instance; tour guides build up units of competence to prove their capability of doing job. Upon completion of course units, tour guides are nationally recognized to show that they have practical skills to work in the industry. According to Collins (2000) certification and licensing, therefore is done after attaining the National Vocational Qualification (NVQs).

FUTURE RESEARCH

Suggestions for research would be to focus on finding out the current status of tour guiding in Malawi by looking at various famous tourist attractions areas to give an overview of the professional in Malawi. Secondly, it will be very important to extend this type of study in other setting within Malawi where a representative sample could be used to generalise the findings about issues affecting tour guides performance of duties in the tourism industry. Another proposition could be concentrated on how best tour guides can establish a national association to look at and address challenges prevailing in the professionalism. Lastly, future researchers can also interrogate in detail the status of female representation in tour guiding in other setting within Malawi and cope up with justification should there be minimal or no female representation in the tour guiding profession.

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