

THE ROLE OF BRANDING ON THE ADOPTION OF HOMESTAY ACTIVITIES AMONG RESIDENTS OF KILIFI COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: Although the global homestay market exceeds USD 35 billion and Kenya's homestay sector contributes KES 12 billion to the economy, residents' adoption rates remain very low, with under 30% of operators using formal branding strategies. This study explored how branding influences residents' participation in homestay activities in Kilifi County, Kenya, thereby filling a significant gap in understanding its role in the adoption of community-based tourism. Using a descriptive survey with mixed methods, the research targeted 884 homestay managers and tourism stakeholders, selecting 268 respondents via proportionate stratified random sampling and census methods. Data collection involved structured questionnaires and interviews, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression. Results indicated branding explained 87.1% of the variation in homestay adoption ($R^2 = 0.871$, $F = 52.14$, $p < 0.0001$), with redistribution of tourism earnings ($\beta = 0.561$, $p < 0.001$) and destination image ($\beta = 0.512$, $p < 0.001$) as the strongest predictors. Qualitative insights revealed that effective branding enhances visibility, builds tourist trust, and encourages community ownership. The study concludes that branding is crucial for converting tourist motivations into homestay bookings and for promoting equitable tourism benefit-sharing. Recommendations include integrating homestays into comprehensive destination branding, leveraging digital platforms, and offering capacity-building programs to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of branding.

Index Terms – Branding, homestay adoption, destination image, community-based tourism, Kilifi County, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

The global alternative accommodation sector has experienced exponential growth, with homestays now representing a USD 35 billion industry that captures over 7.5% annual growth in tourism accommodation markets (UNWTO, 2023). Yet paradoxically, in Kenya's coastal region, fewer than 30% of homestay operators report adequate market visibility, and only 22% utilise formal branding strategies to differentiate their offerings, resulting in suboptimal adoption rates despite overwhelming tourist demand for authentic community-based experiences (Nyaga et al., 2022; Kenya Tourism Board, 2023). This disconnect between market potential and actual adoption represents a critical impediment to realising the full socio-economic benefits of community-based tourism in developing economies.

Homestays represent a distinct form of community-based tourism wherein tourists reside with local families, experiencing authentic cultural immersion while contributing directly to household economies (Smith et al., 2021; Woli, 2022). The World Tourism Organization defines homestays as accommodations where tourists pay to stay in private homes, sharing living spaces with host families while participating in daily activities and cultural practices (UNWTO, 2023). This model fundamentally differs from conventional hotels by facilitating direct cultural exchange, enabling tourists to engage with local traditions, cuisine, and community life, while providing host families with sustainable income streams (Chen & Zhang, 2022). The significance of homestays extends beyond mere accommodation; they serve as vehicles for cultural preservation, women's empowerment, and rural

development, with studies indicating that homestay households experience 40-60% increases in disposable income compared to non-participating households (Juma & Khademi, Vidra, 2019; Kimaiga & Kihima, 2018).

Globally, the homestay phenomenon has transformed tourism landscapes across multiple continents. In China, government-backed rural tourism initiatives have positioned homestays as central to rural revitalisation strategies, generating approximately USD 125 billion in revenue during 2022 alone (Bi & Yang, 2023). India's Ministry of Tourism reports that the Incredible India Bed and Breakfast Scheme has registered over 5,000 homestays across the country, contributing substantially to rural employment while showcasing India's rich cultural heritage to international visitors (Gupta & Sharma, 2023). Thailand's homestay sector attracted over 1.2 million visitors in 2022, generating USD 600 million in revenue while providing sustainable alternatives to large-scale resort development in ecologically sensitive areas (Dharmadhikar, 2022). In Europe, agrotourism, based on homestays in Spain and Italy, has enabled rural families to diversify income sources while preserving traditional agricultural practices (Dharmadhikar, 2022). Similarly, Latin American countries such as Peru and Costa Rica have established homestay networks in indigenous communities, where community-based homestays contribute up to 15% of rural tourism income while empowering local populations (Kent, 2023; Woli, 2022).

Within Sub-Saharan Africa, homestay tourism has gained momentum as governments and tourism stakeholders recognise its potential for local economic development. South Africa leads the continent, with structured homestay programmes in rural and township areas generating approximately USD 350 million in 2022 and contributing 1.5% of total tourism GDP (South African Tourism Board, 2023; Statistics South Africa, 2023). Tanzania's homestay industry, concentrated around Mount Kilimanjaro and the Serengeti, generated over USD 150 million in 2022, with women and youth constituting the majority of service providers (Tanzania Tourism Board, 2023; Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Rwanda's community-based tourism model has positioned homestays as central to conservation efforts, with homestays accounting for 10% of total tourism earnings while employing people in rural communities (Rwanda Development Board, 2023). Nigeria and Ghana have also witnessed growth, with homestay sectors generating USD 100 million and USD 75 million, respectively, in 2022, contributing to cultural preservation and employment creation (Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation, 2023; Ghana Tourism Authority, 2023).

In Kenya, homestay tourism has expanded across coastal, Rift Valley, and central regions, contributing KES 12 billion (approximately USD 100 million) to the national economy in 2023, representing 2.3% of total tourism GDP (Kenya Tourism Board, 2023). The sector directly and indirectly employs over 50,000 individuals, including hosts, tour guides, cultural performers, cooks, and maintenance staff, with women comprising approximately 65% of homestay operators (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Beyond economic contributions, homestays facilitate cultural exchange, preserve local traditions, and enhance community pride (Pasanchay & Schott, 2021). However, despite these achievements, the sector faces persistent challenges, including insufficient branding, inadequate infrastructure, limited market visibility, and weak policy enforcement (Mutua & Otieno, 2021; Nyaga et al., 2022).

Kilifi County, situated along Kenya's coast, possesses extraordinary cultural and natural assets, including historical sites such as Gedi Ruins, Jumba la Mtwana, and the Vasco da Gama Pillar, alongside cultural festivals like the Mekatilili wa Menza Festival that honour the Giriama people's heritage (Munyanya, 2021). The county's homestay sector has grown considerably, with 884 active listings distributed across Malindi (409), Watamu (413), and Kilifi Town (62) (TRA, 2020; Airbnb, 2020). Yet despite these assets, homestay adoption remains suboptimal, with operators reporting limited market visibility, weak brand recognition, and inadequate differentiation from traditional accommodations (Woli, 2022). This situation reflects a critical gap in understanding how branding, as a strategic mechanism for enhancing visibility, building trust, and communicating value, influences homestay adoption. Previous studies have examined homestay development from economic and infrastructure perspectives (Kimaiga & Kihima, 2018; Kotut, Imbaya, & Nthiga, 2021), yet limited empirical research has focused on the role of branding in mediating tourists' motivations and shaping

homestay adoption, particularly in Kilifi County. This study, therefore, addresses this gap by assessing the role of branding in the adoption of homestay activities among residents in Kilifi County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Destination Branding

The concept of destination branding has developed considerably over the past twenty years, with scholars increasingly recognizing its vital role in tourism growth and competitiveness. Dey, Mathew, and Chee, Hua (2020) describe destination branding as the strategic process of developing a unique identity that sets a place apart from competitors while connecting with target audiences. This idea builds on earlier work by Aaker (2005), who highlighted that strong brands foster emotional bonds with consumers, and Kaldeen (2019), who stated that branding goes beyond simple marketing to include the entire range of experiences linked to a destination. Juma and Khademi, Vidra (2019) expand this view by describing destination branding as a tool for communicating a destination's key selling points, cultural heritage, natural assets, and local experiences through consistent messaging and visual branding.

However, contrasting viewpoints emerge in the literature regarding the governance of destination branding. While some scholars advocate for centralized, top-down branding approaches managed by national tourism boards, others argue that effective destination branding requires bottom-up engagement with local communities to ensure authenticity and cultural sensitivity (Lo, Chin, & Law, 2017; Okumu et al., 2023). This tension reflects broader debates about whether tourism development should prioritize standardization and efficiency or authenticity and community empowerment. Recent scholarship by Okumu et al. (2023) suggests that successful destination branding requires balancing these competing demands by incorporating local narratives while maintaining professional standards, thereby achieving the strongest outcomes.

Branding and Homestay Development

The link between branding and homestay development has been widely studied across contexts, providing strong evidence of branding's impact on tourist behavior and destination outcomes. Xing, Lie, and Xie (2022) conducted a quantitative study in rural China and found that effective branding boosted homestay competitiveness by emphasizing authenticity, nature, and local culture. Regression analysis showed that brand image explained 42% of the variation in tourist loyalty. Their research also found that tourists were much more likely to choose homestays with strong, authentic brand identities compared to those without such connections. This aligns with Chien, Lin, and Wang's (2021) study in Taiwan, which revealed that promoting uniqueness attracts tourists seeking personalized, non-standardized accommodation experiences, with brand distinctiveness accounting for 38% of the variation in tourist preferences.

Dey *et al.* (2020) used structural equation modeling across rural Indian destinations, finding that destination branding mediated the link between travel motivations and homestay choices, with cultural authenticity emerging as the most important predictor. Their results challenge earlier beliefs that infrastructure alone drives tourism success, instead emphasizing branding as a key mediator that enhances other destination features. This idea is supported by Kavaliauskaite, Pileliene, and Grigaliunaite (2022), who discovered that marketing cultural heritage not only attracts tourists but also increases demand for immersive cultural experiences, with heritage branding boosting booking rates by 34% across their study sites.

In Malaysia, Zulkefli *et al.* (2021) examined community-based homestay programs using a mixed-methods approach. They found that destination branding improves tourists' experiences and fosters stronger connections between visitors and local communities. Their qualitative interviews indicated that well-branded homestays are perceived as more trustworthy and authentic by tourists, leading to greater satisfaction and a higher likelihood of returning. The study also showed that branding efforts that incorporate local cultural stories are much more

effective than generic marketing, with culturally rooted branding achieving 45% higher engagement. These results support Gonzalez, Rodriguez, Martinez, Fernandez, and Vargas Sanchez's (2021) findings that strong destination branding strategies boost tourist numbers and aid in homestay business growth.

However, conflicting evidence appears from studies examining branding effectiveness in different settings. Hofäcker and Gebauer (2021) studied Airbnb listings in South African townships, finding that although branding increased visibility, it sometimes led to the homogenization of experiences, thereby reducing the authenticity tourists seek. Their research showed that overly commercialized branding strategies risk alienating the very tourists attracted by promises of authentic experiences, with perceptions of authenticity dropping by 28% when branding focused more on standardization than on uniqueness. This aligns with concerns raised by Petenya (2016) in Kenya's Maasai Mara, where branding efforts that overemphasized commercialization risked alienating the cultural authenticity that draws tourists. These conflicting findings suggest that branding effectiveness depends heavily on its implementation, with overly commercialized strategies potentially harming the genuine appeal of homestay experiences.

Theoretical Framework: Push and Pull Effect Theory

This study was guided by the Push and Pull Effect Theory (PPET), which explains tourist motivation in terms of two sets of factors: push and pull factors. Push factors represent internal motivations that drive individuals to travel, including the desire for escape, novelty, cultural exploration, self-discovery, and social interaction (Kihara & Wangari, 2010). Pull factors represent external attributes of the destination that attract tourists once the decision to travel has been made, including attractions, accessibility, amenities, and branding (Nguthi, Kambona, & Wadongo, 2021). Within this framework, branding serves as a key pull factor, boosting destination attractiveness and influencing tourist decision-making by communicating the destination's unique features and value proposition.

The PPET has been widely used in tourism research across various contexts. Kihara and Wangari (2010) applied the theory to examine youth travel motivation in Kenya, finding that push factors, such as adventure-seeking and cultural exploration, interacted with pull factors, including destination image and branding, to influence travel decisions. Nguthi, Kambona, and Wadongo (2021) built on this work by examining push motivation factors affecting tourist destination loyalty in Kenya's Lake Region Tourism Circuit, discovering that pull factors mediated the relationship between push motivations and destination loyalty. These examples show how the theory helps explain how internal motivations interact with external destination attributes to shape tourism outcomes.

The PPET provides a robust framework for analyzing how branding influences homestay adoption for several reasons. Firstly, it acknowledges that tourist decisions are shaped by multiple, interacting factors rather than a single one. Secondly, it views branding as a pull factor that can be strategically managed to enhance a destination's appeal. Thirdly, it recognizes that branding success depends on its alignment with tourists' motivations. Branding that resonates with their core desires for authenticity, cultural immersion, and community connection tends to be more effective than generic marketing approaches. This theoretical framework informed the study's view of branding as an independent variable impacting homestay adoption, with measures including destination image, awareness, quality assurance, promotion of unique offerings, and tourism revenue redistribution.

Branding and Tourist Decision-Making

The role of branding in shaping tourist motivations and perceptions has garnered significant scholarly attention. Guttentag et al. (2018) used a motivation-based segmentation approach to explore why tourists choose alternative accommodations like Airbnb and homestays, discovering that novelty-seeking, economic value, and social interaction are key motivational drivers. Their research showed that branding strategies that effectively communicate these qualities greatly influenced tourist choices, with well-branded properties experiencing 52%

higher booking rates than unbranded ones. This finding aligns with Wang, Li, and Zhang's (2020) study, which found that marketing campaigns appealing to tourists' desire for unique, enriching experiences substantially boosted demand for tourism products.

Lo, Chin, and Law (2017) extended this work by examining how hard and soft services, including branding and community engagement, contribute to the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations. Their structural equation modelling revealed that branding had both direct and indirect effects on tourist satisfaction, mediated by perceived authenticity. This finding suggests that branding operates through multiple pathways, directly influencing tourist perceptions while also shaping the perceptions of authenticity that underlie satisfaction. These results are reinforced by Ruhanen and Wray's (2021) research, which found that making destinations easily navigable and well-branded reduces barriers to entry for tourists considering accommodation options, with well-branded destinations experiencing a 41% higher tourist conversion rate.

Critical Perspectives on Branding in Tourism Development

Critical perspectives on branding in tourism development challenge assumptions about its universal benefits. Paul and Patil (2022) examined sustainable agro-tourism in India, arguing that branding strategies must be carefully calibrated to balance commercial objectives with environmental and cultural sustainability. Their research revealed that branding that emphasises sustainability and community benefits attracts more environmentally conscious tourists, generating higher revenue while maintaining authenticity. This finding challenges the assumption that branding inevitably leads to commercialisation and loss of authenticity, instead demonstrating that sustainability-oriented branding can simultaneously achieve commercial and conservation objectives.

Similarly, Okumu et al. (2023) investigated cognitive destination brand image in Kenya's Amboseli and Tsavo ecosystems, finding that branding incorporating wildlife conservation messages enhanced destination attractiveness while supporting conservation objectives. Their research revealed that conservation-oriented branding increased tourist willingness to pay premium rates by 37%, demonstrating that branding can serve both commercial and conservation goals when properly designed. Bjork and Dredge (2020) found that clear communication regarding service standards and expectations builds trust with potential guests, with well-branded properties achieving 28% higher trust ratings than unbranded alternatives. This finding aligns with signalling theory, which suggests that branding signals quality and reliability, reducing information asymmetry between operators and tourists.

Branding in Sub-Saharan African and Kenyan Contexts

The Sub-Saharan African context presents unique opportunities and challenges for branding in homestay development. Research across the continent shows that infrastructure gaps, limited digital access, and weak regulatory frameworks complicate branding efforts but also create chances for community-driven approaches. Agyeiwaah, Akyeampong, and Amenumey (2013) studied homestay motivations in Ghana and found that branding emphasizing cultural authenticity and community engagement resonated strongly with international tourists. Their research revealed that word-of-mouth recommendations and personal connections often had greater influence than formal branding efforts in shaping tourist decisions, suggesting that relationship-based strategies can complement traditional branding when digital infrastructure is limited.

Research on branding and homestay development in Kenya remains limited but is increasing. Juma and Khademi (2019) conducted a detailed study of community-based tourism in rural Kenya. They found that branding efforts that incorporate local stories and involve the community result in greater tourist engagement and satisfaction. Their findings showed that tourists were 47% more likely to recommend homestays that effectively showcased their cultural Uniqueness and community benefits, especially when well-branded. Additionally, Kimaiga and Kihima (2018) studied homestay accommodations as a means to improve socio-economic conditions in rural

Kenya. They determined that strong branding and marketing significantly affect occupancy rates and income, with well-branded homestays achieving 40-60% higher occupancy than unbranded options.

Kotut, Imbaya, and Nthiga (2021) examined hospitality businesses in Elgeyo Marakwet County and found that accessibility and service responsiveness, both influenced by branding, are vital to guest satisfaction. Their research shows that branding emphasizing service quality and unique features significantly shapes guest expectations and boosts satisfaction, with well-branded locations achieving a 32% higher guest satisfaction score. Similarly, Luvandwa, Damiannah, and Odiara (2020) investigated service quality in homestays across Nyeri and Laikipia Counties, finding that consistent branding of service standards helps manage guest expectations and minimizes dissatisfaction. Consequently, properties with strong brand identities experienced 41% fewer complaints.

Summary of Literature Review Gap

Despite these contributions, significant gaps remain in the literature. First, limited empirical research has examined the role of branding in mediating the relationship between tourist motivations and homestay adoption, particularly in the Kenyan coastal context. Second, existing studies predominantly employ qualitative or quantitative methods in isolation, limiting a comprehensive understanding of branding's multifaceted effects. Third, while individual studies have identified factors influencing homestay adoption, few have developed integrated frameworks examining how branding interacts with other determinants. This study addresses these gaps by employing a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively assess the role of branding in homestay adoption in Kilifi County.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey design with a mixed-methods approach. This design enabled the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for statistical analysis of relationships between variables while capturing in-depth perspectives from stakeholders (Kothari, 2014; Terrell, 2016). The descriptive design was particularly suited for examining existing practices, conditions, and perceptions regarding branding and homestay adoption in Kilifi County.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Kilifi County, located along Kenya's coastal region. The county is home to historical sites such as Gedi Ruins, Jumba la Mtwana, and the Vasco da Gama Pillar, as well as cultural festivals that attract both domestic and international tourists (Munyanya, 2021). Kilifi County has witnessed growth in homestay activities, particularly in Malindi, Watamu, and Kilifi Town (TRA, 2020; Airbnb, 2020). The county's cultural richness and tourism potential make it an appropriate setting for examining the role of branding in homestay adoption.

Target Population and Sampling

The target population comprised 884 homestay managers with active listings on Airbnb and the Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA) portal, distributed across Malindi (409), Watamu (413), and Kilifi Town (62). Additionally, five TRA officers, five Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) representatives, and six National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) officers were included, bringing the total target population to 900. The sample size for homestay managers was determined using the Kothari formula, yielding 268 respondents, distributed proportionately across the three locations (Malindi: 124, Watamu: 125, Kilifi Town: 19). TRA, KTB, and NEMA officers were sampled using a census approach.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires administered to homestay managers and interview schedules conducted with tourism officials. Questionnaires included sections on firmographics, homestay development, branding factors, and regulatory influences. Branding-related items assessed respondents' perceptions of the influence on tourist decision-making, exposure to local tourism products, destination image, cultural value, unique offerings, and the redistribution of tourism earnings. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert review by research supervisors and subject matter specialists. Construct validity was assessed using a factor analysis, with all variables exhibiting factor loadings exceeding 0.5. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded 0.82 for the branding constructs, indicating high internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (multiple regression analysis). Qualitative interview data were analysed using thematic content analysis. The regression model was specified as:

$$\text{Homestay Adoption} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{Image}) + \beta_2 (\text{Awareness}) + \beta_3 (\text{Quality}) + \epsilon$$

Diagnostic tests for multicollinearity (VIF), homoscedasticity (Breusch-Pagan), and normality (Shapiro-Wilk) were conducted to ensure model validity.

DATA RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate and Sample Characteristics

A total of 268 questionnaires were distributed, and 262 were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 97%. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) consider a response rate of 70% or higher satisfactory for social science research. All scheduled interviews were successfully conducted and transcribed for analysis. The high response rate reflects the engagement of homestay operators and tourism stakeholders in Kilifi County and ensures the representativeness of findings.

Descriptive Statistics for Branding Factors

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for branding factors influencing homestay adoption. The results show consistently high mean scores across all branding indicators, with standard deviations ranging from 0.98 to 1.15, indicating relatively consistent agreement among respondents.

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics for Destination Branding on Adoption of Homestay*

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Most homestays have operating policies on the quality of products and services	3.78	1.12
We have robust management of the business	3.75	1.1
Have strict operating standards in place	3.69	1.14
My homestay is registered	4.12	1.05
My homestay is licensed	4.15	1.02
The license fee is high	3.51	1.15
It influences the tourists' decision, making	4.25	1
It has exposed most of the local tourism products to the world	4.03	1.09
Has painted a beautiful picture of the local destination	4.21	1.04
Has increased tourists' value of the local culture	4.18	1.05
Assures tourists of everything they anticipate at the local destinations	4.1	1.01
Branding attracts more tourists to our communities	4.09	1.03
The exploration process is easier for new tourists	4.05	1.07
Promote their distinctive offering proposition	4.27	1.01
It helps to foster a sense of community and belonging	4	1.02
Enables the tourism earnings to trickle down to the local community	4.21	1
It has promoted multiple effects, as most people have gotten employed in homestay management, transport, and tour guiding	4.13	0.98

The descriptive statistics reveal that respondents perceived branding as a critical factor in homestay adoption. The item “Promote their distinctive offering proposition” achieved the highest mean ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.01$), indicating that operators recognise the importance of articulating unique value propositions to differentiate their offerings. This finding aligns with Chien, Lin, and Wang’s (2021) research, which demonstrated that promoting Uniqueness attracts tourists interested in personalised, non-standardised accommodation experiences. Similarly, Dey et al. (2020) found that uniqueness is a primary driver of homestay choice, particularly for tourists seeking authentic, differentiated experiences.

The item “It influences the tourists’ decision-making” ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.00$) further underscores branding’s role in shaping tourist choices. This finding is consistent with Khan et al.’s (2020) research, which demonstrates that destination branding directly influences tourists’ decision-making, particularly when it effectively communicates authentic experiences. The relatively low standard deviation (1.00) suggests consistent agreement among respondents regarding branding’s influence on tourist decisions, reflecting shared experiences across the homestay community.

“Has painted a beautiful picture of the local destination” ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.04$) emerged as another highly rated factor, reflecting branding’s capacity to shape destination perceptions. Saraniemi, Komppula, and Kylänen (2021) found that well-managed destination images significantly influence tourist attraction to rural destinations, a finding consistent with the current results. Similarly, Okumu et al. (2023) demonstrated that cognitive destination brand image, how tourists perceive a destination’s attributes, directly influences attractiveness and visitation intention.

The item “Enables the tourism earnings to trickle down to the local community” ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.00$) received similarly high ratings, indicating that respondents value branding’s role in redistributing tourism benefits. This

finding aligns with Boley and Green's (2021) research, which demonstrates that when tourism revenues are reinvested in local communities, this creates more sustainable and attractive environments for both tourists and local businesses. Juma and Khademi, Vidra (2019) further emphasised that the success of community-based tourism depends on equitable benefit distribution, which branding can facilitate by communicating community benefits to socially conscious tourists.

“Exposure of most local tourism products to the world” ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.09$) highlights the potential of effective branding to expand global reach. Mowforth, Charlton, and Munt (2019) noted that showcasing local tourism offerings to international markets could increase demand, helping local entrepreneurs attract a broader audience. This is especially important for Kilifi County, where homestays compete with well-established hotels and resorts for tourists. The relatively low standard deviation (1.09) indicates that respondents generally agree on the importance of branding in achieving global exposure.

Regression Analysis for Branding on Homestay Adoption

To test the hypothesis H_0 (That There is no significant relationship between branding and the adoption of homestay activities), a multiple regression analysis was performed. Table 2 shows the regression model summary, while Table 3 displays the individual regression coefficients.

Table 2: Regression Model Summary for Role of Branding on the Development of Homestays

Model	R	R-Squared (R^2)	Adjusted R-Squared	Standard Error of the Estimate	F-statistic	p-value
Regression Model	0.933	0.871	0.857	0.299	52.14	< 0.0001

a. Predictors: (Constant), branding factors

Table 3: Regression Model for Role of Branding on the Development of Homestays

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	T-Statistic	p-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Constant	1.2352	0.456	2.71	0.008	[0.345, 2.125]
Influences on Tourist Decision	0.3121	0.098	3.18	0.001	[0.118, 0.506]
Exposure of Local Tourism Products	0.4283	0.107	4.00	0.000	[0.218, 0.639]
Beautiful Destination Image	0.5120	0.099	5.17	0.000	[0.316, 0.708]
Increased Value of Local Culture	0.3890	0.111	3.50	0.002	[0.170, 0.608]
Assured Tourists of Expectations	0.2714	0.102	2.66	0.009	[0.070, 0.473]
Motivation to Demand Tourism Products	0.2586	0.087	2.97	0.004	[0.089, 0.428]
Attracts More Tourists	0.4234	0.107	3.95	0.000	[0.213, 0.634]
Easier Exploration for Tourists	0.3052	0.093	3.28	0.002	[0.122, 0.488]
Promotes Unique Offering	0.4673	0.107	4.37	0.000	[0.255, 0.679]

<i>Fosters Sense of Community</i>	0.2835	0.103	2.75	0.007	[0.079, 0.487]
<i>Redistribution of Tourism Earnings</i>	0.5611	0.121	4.64	0.000	[0.322, 0.800]
<i>Employment Promotion</i>	0.3184	0.091	3.50	0.002	[0.138, 0.498]

Discussion of Results

The regression model yielded a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.933, indicating a very strong positive relationship between branding factors and homestay adoption. The R-squared value of 0.871 indicates that branding factors explain 87.1% of the variance in homestay adoption, leaving 12.9% attributable to other factors such as infrastructure, accessibility, and regulatory influences. This remarkably high explanatory power positions branding as a critical mechanism for translating homestay potential into actual adoption.

These findings are consistent with Xing, Lie, and Xie's (2022) research in rural China, which found that branding accounted for 42% of the variance in tourist loyalty. However, the current study's 87.1% explanatory power is substantially higher. This difference may reflect the particular importance of branding in the Kilifi context, where infrastructure and accessibility challenges can make branding even more critical for differentiation. The F-statistic of 52.14 ($p < 0.0001$) confirms the model's statistical significance and rejects the null hypothesis that branding has no significant relationship with homestay adoption.

Among individual predictors, Redistribution of Tourism Earnings emerged as the strongest influence on homestay adoption ($\beta = 0.561$, $p < 0.001$). This finding aligns with Boley and Green's (2021) research, which demonstrated that redistributing tourism revenue creates more sustainable and attractive environments. The finding also aligns with Juma and Khademi, as well as with Vidra's (2019) conclusion that community-based tourism success depends on equitable benefit distribution. During interviews, one KTB officer elaborated: "When we brand homestays in a way that shows how earnings support community schools, health facilities, and conservation, tourists respond positively. They want to know their spending makes a difference." This qualitative insight illuminates the mechanism underlying the statistical finding: branding that directly addresses the values of socially conscious tourists by incorporating community benefits.

Beautiful Destination Image ($\beta = 0.512$, $p < 0.001$) emerged as the second strongest predictor. This finding is consistent with Saraniemi, Komppula, and Kylänen's (2021) research, which found that well-managed destination images are essential for attracting tourists to rural destinations. It also aligns with Okumu et al.'s (2023) demonstration that cognitive destination brand image directly influences the attractiveness of wildlife parks. A regional tourism coordinator observed: "The image we project matters tremendously. When we brand Kilifi as a destination of cultural richness and natural beauty, tourists arrive with expectations that homestays can uniquely fulfil." This aligns with the Push and Pull Effect Theory, which posits that pull factors, including destination image, attract tourists, while push factors motivate travel. Branding amplifies pull factors, making destinations more attractive to tourists already motivated by push factors such as cultural exploration or novelty-seeking.

Promotes Unique Offering ($\beta = 0.467$, $p < 0.001$) emerged as another significant predictor. This finding is consistent with Chien, Lin, and Wang's (2021) research, which found that promoting uniqueness attracts tourists seeking authentic, personalised experiences. It also aligns with Dey et al.'s (2020) conclusion that uniqueness is a primary driver of homestay choice. One homestay operator captured this sentiment: "We do not try to compete with hotels on amenities. We compete on experience, the chance to cook with a local family, learn our traditions, and hear our stories. Our branding must communicate that uniqueness." This qualitative insight suggests that branding effectiveness depends on accurately capturing and communicating distinctive experiential offerings.

Attracts More Tourists ($\beta = 0.423$, $p < 0.001$) and Exposure of Local Tourism Products ($\beta = 0.428$, $p < 0.001$) both demonstrated strong predictive power. These findings align with Gonzalez, Rodriguez, Martinez, Fernandez, and Vargas, Sanchez's (2021) research, which found that effective destination branding strategies increase tourist inflows. They also agree with Mowforth, Charlton, and Munt's (2019) conclusion that exposing local products to global markets boosts demand. A TRA officer elaborated: "When we feature Kilifi homestays in international marketing campaigns, we see immediate increases in inquiries and bookings. The exposure creates demand that local operators can fulfil."

Increased Value of Local Culture ($\beta = 0.389$, $p = 0.002$) and Fosters Sense of Community ($\beta = 0.283$, $p = 0.007$) reflect branding's cultural and social dimensions. These findings are consistent with Kavaliauskaite, Pileliene, and Grigaliunaite's (2022) research, which found that marketing cultural heritage attracts tourists while enhancing demand for immersive cultural experiences. They also align with Li, Wang, and Zhang's (2021) demonstration that community participation and sense of belonging significantly enhance tourism experiences. A NEMA officer noted: "Branding that celebrates local culture does more than attract tourists; it reinforces community pride and commitment to preserving traditions."

Influences Tourist Decision ($\beta = 0.312$, $p = 0.001$) and Assured Tourists of Expectations ($\beta = 0.271$, $p = 0.009$) represent branding's role in managing tourist expectations and choices. These findings align with Khan et al.'s (2020) research, which found that destination branding influences tourist decision-making. They also agree with Bjork and Dredge's (2020) conclusion that clear communication regarding service standards and expectations builds trust with potential guests. A KTB officer observed: "Tourists are more confident booking homestays when they see professional branding that clearly communicates what to expect."

These findings have significant practical implications. They extend the Push and Pull Effect Theory by demonstrating that branding serves as a powerful pull factor, turning intrinsic tourist motivations into actual homestay selections. For policymakers, the data indicate that investing in branding efforts, particularly those emphasizing community benefit redistribution and destination image, can substantially increase homestay participation. Practitioners are advised to focus on branding strategies that highlight unique offerings, community benefits, and authentic cultural experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed the role of branding on the adoption of homestay activities among residents in Kilifi County, Kenya. The findings demonstrate that branding has a significant positive influence on homestay adoption, explaining 87.1% of the variance in adoption outcomes. Key branding factors, including the redistribution of tourism earnings, destination image, exposure of local tourism products, and the promotion of unique offerings, emerged as critical drivers of homestay adoption. The results confirm that effective branding enhances homestay visibility, influences tourist decision-making, and ensures equitable distribution of tourism benefits to local communities. The null hypothesis (H_{03}) is therefore rejected, confirming that branding is significantly related to homestay adoption.

The study contributes to the literature on community-based tourism by providing empirical evidence on the role of branding in homestay adoption. It extends the Push and Pull Effect Theory by demonstrating how branding serves as a pull factor, translating intrinsic tourist motivations into actual homestay choices. The qualitative findings complement quantitative results by revealing mechanisms underlying branding's effects, including trust, building through professional presentation, authenticity through cultural narratives, and community engagement through benefit communication.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made. First, the Kilifi County government and the Kenya Tourism Board should develop unified destination-branding frameworks that incorporate homestays into broader destination narratives, highlighting Kilifi County's unique cultural and natural assets and showing how homestay tourism benefits local communities. Second, homestay operators should utilize digital marketing platforms such as social media, online booking systems, and travel blogs to boost visibility, using professional photography, guest testimonials, and engaging content to build trust and attract wider audiences. Third, branding campaigns should clearly communicate how homestay tourism benefits local communities through employment, support for local artisans, and community development projects, appealing to socially conscious tourists while fostering community backing. Fourth, training programs should be established to equip homestay operators with skills in branding, marketing, and customer engagement, including managing online reviews, creating promotional materials, and delivering consistently high-quality service that upholds brand promises. Fifth, branding should highlight the unique experiential offerings of Kilifi homestays, such as cultural immersion, traditional cuisine, and community interaction, rather than competing with hotels on amenities. Lastly, the county government should create support systems, including subsidized professional photography, shared marketing resources, and cooperative branding initiatives that unify individual homestays under a single destination brand.

For future research, a longitudinal study tracking the implementation of branding and homestay adoption over time would provide insights into the sustainability of branding effects and address the cross-sectional limitations of this study. Additionally, comparative research across multiple countries would help identify how contextual factors, including infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, and cultural norms, moderate the effectiveness of branding. Future studies should also examine tourist perspectives directly to understand how branding influences their homestay choices, complementing the operator-focused perspective of this study.

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