Factors Influencing Tourism Competitiveness of Northern Tourist Circuit Nature-Based Destinations in Tanzania from the Tourists' Perspective Abstract

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Abstract

The extent to which a country can benefit from its tourism industry is increasingly being defined by the competitiveness of its nature based destinations. Despite many efforts to improve tourism competitiveness, the Tanzania's nature based destinations in the Northern Tourist Circuit (NTC) operate below their potentials when compared with other destinations with similar attractions. This study aimed to provide an understanding of kinds of factors and their significant impact on the competitiveness of NTC nature-based destinations in Tanzania. Primary data was collected from a survey of 373 domestic and foreign tourists. The findings revealed that awareness of tourism products, service quality at tourist facilities, variety of nature based activities, conservation of wildebeest migrations and the Big five, airport capacity for international and local flights, variety and quality tourists' accommodations, awareness of tourism products; value of prices at tourist accommodations, and safety and security are the most factors influencing competitiveness of Northern Circuit. In an ever increasing competition, strong collaboration between national parks and tourism firms such as tour and hotels in maintaining or enhancing the factors found most influential on competitiveness is vital in order to enhance visitors' overall tourism experience. This can have positive impact on competitiveness of the northern tourist circuit in Tanzania and make it the preferred tourist destination in the eyes of tourists.

1.0 Introduction

Tourism is an important sector widely known by its contribution to economic growth of a country in many aspects such as foreign currency earnings and job creation (Anderson, 2011). This contribution has attracted the attention of governments worldwide to harness the potential of tourism for accelerating economic growth (Gupta and Singh, 2015). In this context tourist destinations are trying their best to heighten attractiveness of natural resources at their disposal meanwhile the countries are striving to heighten attractiveness of their tourism industries in order to compete successfully in tourism market.

However, the tourism industry worldwide is confronted with fierce competition in tourism market. In the industry, a number of new nature based destinations, with improved tourism products are constantly growing in tourism market (Engelbretch, 2015). As a result, competition has been enormous. Each destination is striving to get a higher market share of tourists (Omerzel, 2005). This indicates that only competitive destinations can survive in the market.

As tourist destinations, nature based destinations in Tanzania are not exempted from the competitive environment in which tourism operate today, taking into account their survival is largely dependent on tourist arrivals. The destinations must be competitive if they are to survive and grow sustainably in tourism market. However, despite the laudable natural resources, tourism competitiveness of Tanzania lags behind other tourist destinations which offer similar tourism attractions such as South Africa, Kenya, Botswana and Namibia (WEF, 2013). This is evidenced by small market share of tourists and revenue. For instance, the market share of tourism receipts for Tanzania from all tourists came to Africa was 5.5 percent and for South Africa was 27

percent (UNWTO, 2014, page 11). Likewise, average stay of tourists in northern circuit nature destinations is seven days whereas in neighbouring destination such as Kenya is fourteen days (Okello and Yerian, 2009; Ngugi, 2011). The question that comes up is what factors influencing competitiveness of nature-based destinations? Little is known about the answer to this question due to limited research works that have been undertaken in this area of study. However, in addressing this question tourism studies have been carried out in Tanzania but studies on areas of tourism competitiveness have been given little attention. For instance, few studies such as Wade and Eagles (2003), Okello and Yerian (2009) and Kaltenborn *et al*. (2011) have tried to associate shorter stay of tourists as a result of low competitiveness caused by many factors such as infrastructure - hard and soft, quality of human resources, marketing and promotions. Apparently, these studies have been unable to show how these factors influence destination competitiveness.

From global perspectives, empirical studies on destination competitiveness such as that of Lee and King (2010) and Dragicevic *et al*. (2012) identified competitiveness determinants as factors important in achieving destination competitiveness. However, little has been done to examine significant impacts of these factors on the performance of a tourist destination (Goffi, 2013).

International and local empirical studies show that, there is still a question on significant impact of competitiveness determinants on performance of a tourist destination. On the other hand, research works on tourism competitiveness are scanty (Azzopardi, 2011) and much less in Tanzania. Moreover, most previous studies have focused on supply side of tourism such as service providers to examine tourism competitiveness. As such, little attention has

been given to examine factors influencing competitiveness from the tourists' perspective. It is clear that, tourists and their needs are the basic driving force which influences competitiveness and competition of a tourism destination (Meng, 2006). Therefore, the aim of this study is to assess factors influencing competitiveness of Northern Tourist Circuit nature based destinations focusing on protected areas in Tanzania from tourists' perspective. The rest of the paper is organised in the following order: review of the literature both theoretical and empirical, methodology, data analysis, discussion of findings, followed by conclusion and policy implication.

2.0 Literature Review

In this study, nature-based destinations are referred to as protected areas which involve national parks and conservation area. Eagles (1999) mentioned that nature-based destinations such as national parks and conservation reserves constitute the largest components of nature based tourism in Tanzania. The two nature-based destinations are termed as protected areas in the definition of IUCN where national parks fall under category II and conservation area like Ngorongoro fall under category V (Dudley, 2008).

Furthermore, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) mentioned that protected areas can be classified as tourist destinations due to the large number of tourists they attracts, the unique wildlife experiences they offer and the number of activities in which tourists can participate. So, as tourist destinations, protected areas must be competitive in nature based tourism in order to increase tourist spending while increasingly attract tourists to longer stay in a destination. This supports the widely held view that a destination can be said to be competitive if its market share, measured by number of tourists and tourism receipts are constantly emerging

(Hassan, 2000). However, ability of tourist destination to compete is challenged by high competition in tourism market as number of tourist destinations are constantly emerging with improved tourism products. Due to high competition in the market, several tourist destinations worldwide have experienced decline in tourism competitiveness resulting from decrease in market shares of tourist arrivals, receipts as well as tourist length of stay (Craigwell, 2007; Gupta and Singh, 2015; Maingi *et al.,* 2014).

In response to increasing competition in tourism industry many researchers have carried out studies to develop Tourism Destination Competitiveness (TDC) models (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999; Hassan, 2000; Ritchie and Crouch, 2003; Dwyer and Kim, 2003; Azzopardi, 2011; Khin *et al.,* 2014; Engelbretch, 2015).

The Crouch and Ritchie (1999) model is the most detailed work and is the basis for the development of Ritchie and Crouch (2003) model and subsequent competitiveness models such as Dwyer and Kim, 2003 and Azzopardi, 2011. The models provide guidance to tourist destinations and also help to determine the strengths and weakness points of the tourism industry (Dragicevic *et al.,* 2012). Crouch and Ritchie model proposed thirty six attributes which they categorised into four determinants. The researcher asserts that tourism competitiveness is a function of four determinants: core resources and attractors, supporting factors and resources, destination management and qualifying determinants.

Empirical tourism studies have applied TDC models to analyse destination competitiveness (Dragicevic *et al*., 2012; Omerzel, 2005; Armenski *et al.,* 2011) while others used the models to guide the development of conceptual model for the studied destinations (Lee, 2006; Khin *et al.,* 2014; Azzopardi, 2011;

Engelbretch, 2015). For instance, basing on TDC models, Lee (2006) developed conceptual model to investigate factors determining the competitiveness of Taiwan's Hot Springs Tourism Sector. Engelbretch (2015) developed model and used it to investigate competitiveness of Kruger National Park, of which factors such as wildlife experience, marketing and branding, accommodation and retail, superstructure and amenities were identified as competitive advantages of the national park.

However, tourism literature indicates that there are still limited studies on destination competitiveness (Azzopardi, 2011, Engelbretch, 2015) and this is also the case with Tanzania where researches on the topic are scarce. Furthermore, the competitiveness determinants in TDC models though are necessary, they are not sufficient to examine competitiveness of specific segment in the industry such as nature based destinations (Lee, 2006; Dragicevic *et al.*, 2012; Engelbretch, 2015). The fact is that competitiveness models were designed to measure tourism competitiveness at national level (Azzopardi, 2011; Khin *et al.*, 2014).

This study, therefore, applied major factors in TDC models and particularly that of Crouch and Ritchie (1999) in order to develop conceptual framework (Figure 1). The factors in the conceptual model are tourism resources and attractors, supporting factors, management activities and conditional factors. In order to suit the purpose of this study the, variables in each factor were modified basing on literature from previous empirical studies on nature-based destinations (Wade and Eagles, 2003, Okello and Yerian, 2009, Kaltenborn *et al.*, 2011 Maingi, 2014, and Engelbretch, 2014/ 2015). Table 1 shows the comparison of the determinants of competitiveness by Crouch and Ritchie (CR) model (1999) and the current conceptual model.

Table 1: Comparison of CR's model and current conceptual model

The Crouch and Ritchie Model	**Current conceptual framework**
Core resources and attractors	**Tourism resources and attractors**
Physiography and climate	Abundant of the Big Five in national parks
Culture and history	Unique wildlife species including wildebeest migration
Market ties	Unspoiled nature
Mix of activities	Cultural attractions
Special events	Variety of nature based activities for tourists (bird watching, bush walking, camping)
Entertainment	Recreational activities
Superstructure	Variety of endangered species such as wild dogs that can be viewed in the parks
Supporting factors and resources	**Supporting factors**
Infrastructure	Quality and variety of tourist accommodations
Accessibility	Food services variety/quality
Facilitating resources	A well designed wilderness 4wheel drive tour vehicles
Hospitality	Efficient internets connectivity
Enterprises	Electricity supply
	Adequate ATM and credit cards facilities

	Airport capacity for international and local flights
	Cleanliness at tourist facilities
	Variety of cultural shopping facilities
Destination management	**Destination management**
Marketing	Awareness of tourist destination and products
Finance and venture capital organisation	VAT charged on tourism services
Human resources development	Responsiveness of tourism staff on visitors complaints
Information/research	Guidance and information/tour guides services
Quality of service	Quality of service at tourist facilities
Visitor management	Well maintained park roads, picnic sites
Resource stewardship	
Qualifying and amplifying determinants	**Conditional factors**
Location	Value of prices at tourist accommodations
Interdependencies	Favourable prices of food and beverages
Safety/security	Favourable park entry fees
Awareness/image/brand	Cost of local cultural tourism goods
Cost/value	Ensured security of visitors in tourist destinations
	Incidence of crimes in tourist sites/facilities

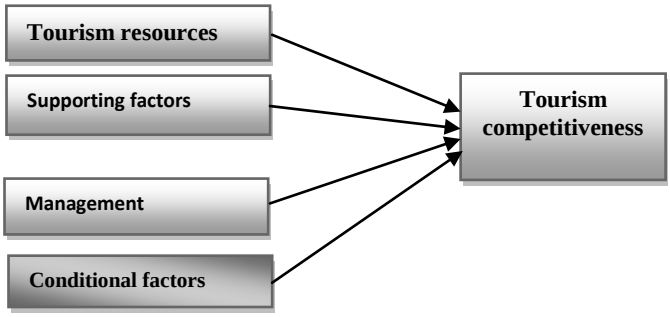

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Source: Adopted from TDC models (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999, 2003; & Dwyer and Kim, 2003)

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) portrays the relationship between destination competitiveness and the four factors. The NTC destinations are competitive if they can increase revenue to attract not only number of tourists but also their duration of stay and this competitiveness is determined by tourism resources and attractors, supporting factors, management activities and conditional factors (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999, 2003; Dwyer and Kim, 2003; Azzopardi, 2011). Therefore, basing on the relationship presented in the conceptual model, the four main hypotheses are proposed to guide this study.

H1: There is positive relationship between resources and attractors and tourism destination competitiveness.

H2: There is positive relationship between supporting factors and tourism destination competitiveness.

H3: There is positive relationship between management activities and tourism destination competitiveness.

H4: There is positive relationship between conditional factors and tourism destination competitiveness.

3.0 Methodology

In order to achieve the study objective, cross sectional research design was carried out in Northern Tourist Circuit which covers three regions of Tanzania, namely; Arusha, Manyara and Mara regions. The three regions are well known to have unique and abundant of resources in protected areas more than other regions in Tanzania and each year they receive large number of both domestic and international tourists (Wade *et al.*, 2003).

In Tanzania, tourism is divided into four tourist circuits: Northern, Southern, Easter and Western Circuits. This study has focused on northern tourist circuit which comprises of seven protected areas. So, out of seven, five protected areas wildlife based in the northern circuit were used as study population. These are four national parks Manyara, Tarangire, Serengeti, Arusha and one conservation, Ngorongoro Conservation Area. The five protected areas are in the same route and they are usually sold together in tourist tour package.

The study population was defined by tourists both domestic and international. The rationale for using these respondents is that, international tourists for instance, are at a better position of analysing factors influencing competitiveness of Tanzania's nature destinations with reference to competitor destinations they had already travelled. On the other hand, domestic tourists have experience on the entire portfolio of existing tourism attractions,

policy and regulations of the destination. So, both domestic and international tourists are necessary as their different views, on what influences competitiveness, complement each other (Formica, 2002).

Sample and sampling procedures

Due to lack of sampling frame of tourists visiting the nature destinations, the historical evidence approach which is information from previous researchers was used to establish the sample size. In this case, sample size of 400 cases as recommended by Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010) were employed in this study. The non-probability focusing on quota sampling technique was used to collect data from a target of 400 tourists.

The data was collected from tourists by using self-administered questionnaires where respondents had to rate factors on a five point scale ranged from 1 = less important to 5 = very important. The administration of questionnaire was carried out at tourist accommodations and restaurants that are inside and around Serengeti National Park and Ngorongoro Conservation Area. These two areas were strategically selected because in these areas tourists do stay longer days due to vast number of activities and their wide geographical coverage compared to other three parks (Arusha, Manyara and Tarangare) in the route. Evidently, Serengereti and Ngorongoro are protected areas which are normally visited last in the route as a result they gave the tourist ability to judge their overall experience in all the five national parks (Kaltenbon *et al.,* 2011). So, out of 400, 373 questionnaires were usable while some of unusable ones were returned blank and others with substantial missing values.

3.2 Methods of Data Analysis

3.2.1 Preliminary examination of data

Before analysing the data, preliminary examination of data was carried out which included test of normality of data distribution and factor analysis. These preliminary analyses were important in order to verify the appropriateness of data and also enhance quality of data for the study.

3.2.1.1 Test of normality of distribution of study data

It was necessary to ensure that there were no violations of the assumptions of normality and whether parametric or non-parametric test can be used on this study. This analysis was important in order to establish statistical tests that are available for analyses basing on the characteristics of data that are being measured (Kapuscinski, 2014). For this purpose, Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was employed which recorded a significance value less than conventional p-value 0.05 ($p<0.05$). This implies that statistical procedures which assume normality cannot be used as this would bias the results. Therefore, non-parametric technique in this case count data regression was considered appropriate for study data analysis. The technique is specific for dependent variable which is in count form (Cameron and Trivedi, 2013).

In order to identify the appropriate count data regressions between Poisson and negative binomial regressions, the Pearson Chi square and Likelihood ratio test was employed (Cameron and Trivedi, 2013). The Pearson Chi-square tests indicated that study data do not follow Poisson distribution whereas Likelihood test showed that data was over-dispersed (see appendix one). Hence, the negative binomial regressions considered more appropriate

than Poisson regressions. The negative binomial regressions allow for over-dispersion of data (Cameron and Trivedi, 2013).

3.2.1.2 Factor analysis

The aim of using factor analysis in this study was to identify a set of items that were summarised into smaller set of components/factors in order to have manageable variables for further analysis. As a criterion for selecting the factors, a minimum Eigen value of one was used to determine the number of factors to be retained. In order for the item to be considered important for competitiveness and being taken for further analysis it must load not below 0.3 (Field, 2009); otherwise, the item was dropped.

The adequacy of the sample size was first determined through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic. This was followed by Bartlett's Test of Sphericity to show whether variables are related and suitable for structure. The result showed KMO index to be above 0.60 for each factor which means that the sample size was sufficient and thus initial condition for undertaking factor analysis was met. On the other hand, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (0.0001) indicating that correlation matrix of factors shares some common underlying relationships (Table 2).

Thereafter, principal components analysis was performed on items in order to identify dimensions. The principal components factors with an Eigen value of one or greater were rotated by the varimax analysis. Following this rotation seven factors that summarise the various variables of tourism competitiveness were identified. The varimax rotation indicated the factor loading of each factor on all the seven factors (Table 2). The loading of items in each Factor was above 0.3 (Field, 2009) suggesting that respondents regarded all items to be important in determining the destination tourism

competitiveness. Further, the results show that Cronbach alpha values on all cases are acceptable according to Hair *et al.* (2006), as they were above 0.7.

Table 2: Factors analysis results

Items	Factor loading	Eigen value	%of variance explained	KMO	Battlett's test	alpha
Factor 1: Range of activities in national parks		**2.680**	**38.285**	**.75**	**.0.00**	**.74**
Variety of nature based activities for tourists	.834					
Cultural activities and entertainments	.822					
Recreational activities	.735					
Factor 2: Natural attractions		**1.208**	**17.251**	**.73**	**0.00**	**.71**
Unique wildlife species (eg.wildebeest migration)	.744					
Abundant of the Big Five in national parks	.743					
Unspoiled nature of national parks	.634					
Variety of endangered species eg. wild dogs	.514					

Factor 3: General infrastructure		**2.891**	**36.139**	**.81**	**0.00**	**.75**
Airport capacity for internl. and local flights	.736					
Adequate ATM and credit cards facilities	.734					
Efficient internets connectivity	.686					
Efficient electricity supply	.678					
A well designed wilderness tour vehicles	.666					
Cleanliness at tourist facilities	.628					
Diversity of shopping items for tourists	.561					
Factor 4: Tourism infrastructure		**1.218**	**15.220**	**.69**	**0.00**	**.72**
Quality tourist accommodations	.807					
Food services quality/variety	.715					
Factor 5: Destination management		**3.079**	**51.309**	**.84**	**0.00**	**.81**
Guidance and information (Guides' services)	.751					

Awareness of tourism products	.749					
Service quality at tourist facilities	.725					
Responsiveness of staff on visitors requests	.717					
Well maintained national park roads	.711					
VAT charged on tourism services	.640					
Factor 6: Value for money		**2.139**	**37.812**	**.78**	**0.00**	**.72**
Value of prices at tourist accommodations	.858					
Favourable price of food and drinks	.817					
Favourable park entry fees	.567					
Cost of local cultural tourism goods	.472					
Factor 7: Safety and security		**1.718**	**20.382**	**.82**	**0.00**	**.71**
Ensured security of visitors in tourist sites	.869					
Incidence of crimes in tourist sites/facilities	.854					

The new Factors were labeled accordingly, basing on the characteristics of items involved in each Factor. Using SPSS software summated scores was created for each of the seven factors. These factors were used later as independent variables in the regression analysis.

4.0 Data analysis and results

Following the results of factors analysis we consider that tourism competitiveness in northern circuit is a function of the seven factors.

$$TC = f (Natt, Ract, Gi, Ti, Dm, Vfm, Ss)$$

Where:

TC = Tourism Competitiveness. The dependent variable was measured by tourists' length of in accommodations that are in and around the protected areas. This variable was adopted from Craigwell, (2007), Goffi, (2013) and Sanchez and Lopez (2015).

Natt = Natural tourism attractions. The variable was measured by four items (see Table 1) adopted from previous tourism empirical studies which include (Engelbretch *et al.*, 2014; Okello and Yerian, 2009; Kaltenborn *et al.*, 2011).

Ract = Range of tourism activities. The variable was measured by three items adopted from previous empirical studies which include (Okello and Yerian, 2009; Yuksel and Yuksel, 2000).

Gi = General infrastructure. The variable was measured by seven items adopted from previous empirical studies which include (Lee, 2006; Azzopardi, 2011, Meng, 2006).

Ti = tourism infrastructure. The variable was measured by two items adopted from previous empirical studies which include (Khin, 2014, Engelbretch *et al.*, 2014).

Dm = Destination management. The variable was measured by six items. These items were adopted from previous empirical studies which include (Engelbretch *et al.*, 2014, Yuksel and Yuksel, 2000).

Vfm = Value for money. The variable was measured by four items. The items were adopted from previous empirical studies which include (Yuksel and Yuksel, 2000).

Ss = Security and safety. The variable was measured by two items adopted from Engelbretch *et al.* (2014).

Having defined the variables in the model the negative binomial regression model in log linear is given in the following equation:

$$\left[E\left(y_i / x_i\right)\right] = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Natt + \beta_2 Ract + \beta_3 Gi + \beta_4 Ti + \beta_5 Dm + \beta_6 Vfm + \beta_7 Ss + \varepsilon_i$$

$$\text{var}\left(y_i / x_i\right) = E\left(y_i / x_i\right)\left(1 + \alpha\right)$$

Where:

Y = Tourism destination competitiveness: Natt = Natural attractions; Ract = Range of activities in national parks; Gi = General infrastructure; Ti = Tourism infrastructure; DM = Destination management; Vfm = Value for money; Ss = Security and safety; ε_i = random error term

$E\left(y_i / x_i\right)\left(1+\alpha\right)$ = conditional mean of the dependent variable given the value of explanatory variable of the i_{th} individual

α = dispersion parameter

4.1 Regressions results

Table three show the variables and their influence on the competitiveness of NTC nature-based destinations. The results basing on Wald chi-square test statistic had a value of 71.930 with p-value of 0.000. This indicates that the model fit is acceptable.

Table 3: Factors influencing tourism competitiveness

Variables	Negative binomial regressions			Collinearity statistics	
	Coef	Wald Chi-Square	Sig.	Tole	VIF
F1: Range of activities	.066**	6.64	.010	.764	1.31
F2: Natural tourism attractions	.063**	5,07	.029	.737	1.35
F3: General infrastructure	.041*	3.48	.062	.471	2.12
F4: Tourism infrastructure	.060**	4.27	.041	.764	1.30
F5: Destination management	.078***	7.34	.001	.514	1.94
F6: Value for money	.053**	4.11	.044	.775	1.29
F7: Security and safety	.051**	4.04	.046	.807	1.23
Constant		4.20	.040		

Wald Chi- sq=71.930, p-value = 0.000

From Table 3, results show that all variables had positive coefficient in influencing tourism destination competitiveness. However, except for general infrastructure which its significant

level was greater than the conventional value, the significant levels of the remaining six variables ranged from one percent to five percent indicating that they were stronger in influencing tourism competitiveness than the general infrastructure.

5.0 Discussion of the Findings

5.1 Natural attractions

The finding showed that the variable had positive coefficient in influencing tourism destination competitiveness. Further, regression results indicated that the variables influenced tourism competitiveness at five percent level of significance. The most important variables within this factor were wildebeest migration and the Big Five which had highest factor loading of 0.744 and 0.743 respectively in the factor analysis. The significance of natural attractions implies that the more the natural attractions are protected and conserved the more they will attract visitors and consequently enhance tourism competitiveness of the destination.

This finding is consistent with the findings of Wade and Eagles (2003) and Okello and Yerian (2009) that success of nature based destinations in northern circuit of Tanzania is largely influenced by abundance of natural attractions, beautiful national parks with variety and unique flora and fauna. The same is earmarked by WEF annual reports for competitiveness of world economies in the global tourism market that "Tanzania's biggest attraction for tourists remains its outstanding endowment in natural resources with several World Heritage natural sites, rich fauna and much protected land area" (WEF, 2013 page 27 & 41). In this report, Tanzania's tourism ranked 4th in natural attractions out of 141 countries in travel and tourism competitiveness.

5.2 Range of activities in national parks

The range of activities in national parks influenced tourism competitiveness positively and was also found to be statistically significant at five percent level in both methods of data analysis. This implies that a wide range of activities in the nature destinations is a strong predictor of tourism competitiveness. This is supported by Okello and Yerian (2009) that the mix of activities aggrandises the perceived added value of the parks, offering the tourist a wide choice and consequently they stay longer in the destination. This is because the tourists are increasingly seeking experiences that go beyond traditional products such as wildlife in northern circuit (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999). The nature based activities was the variable in range of activities factor which tourists considered to be most important as it was ranked first with factor loading of 0.834 while recreational activities ranked lowest with factor loading of 0.735.

In the highly competitive environment in which tourism business operate today variety of activities are required to enhance tourist experience. This lead Engelbretch *et al*. (2014) to conclude that mixed activities in the parks can not only improve tourism competitiveness but also help efforts of protecting nature, as tourists will be spread to variety of tourism activities in a destination.

5.3 General infrastructure

The findings showed that the variable had positive influence on the destination competitiveness. This provides strong evidence not to reject the research hypotheses. Further, findings show that the general infrastructure was significant at 6.2 percent. These results imply that the respondents considered this variable as not strong in influencing the destination competitiveness. Although the significance of this variable was less than other factors, the

Northern Circuit and the industry as a whole have limited accessibility in terms of air transports. This is also supported by previous studies such as Anderson (2011) where the researcher indicated that Tanzania as a tourist destination had challenges of inaccessibility due to limited capacity of airport and particularly for international flights.

However, there is on-going construction of the new airport terminal in Dar es Salaam which aims to improve airport capacity. The new terminal is designed to cater for the growth of international air traffic while leaving the existing two terminals for domestic flights. It is estimated that the terminal will facilitate six million annual passengers, parking lots, access roads, platforms and taxiways (Tanzania Affairs, January, 2017; URT, 2015).

Moreover, there is an increase of international airlines that have started their routes to Tanzania. These include ETIHAD Airways, Rwandair and Fly Dubai (Tanzania Tourism Sector Survey Report, 2016). The increase of international airlines can have positive impact on the growth of tourism since it will increase the number of international tourists. Recently the government has added two national airlines (Tanzania Affairs, January, 2017; URT, 2015) which are considered to improved transport within the country and particularly Southern Circuit national parks which were inadequately visited due to poor roads.

5.4 Tourism infrastructure

Tourism infrastructure involves specific needs of tourists that can enhance the attractiveness of the tourism destination (Dwyer and Kim, 2003). These include: accommodations, food services, festivals and events, special activities, entertainment and shopping. In this study tourism infrastructure had two items:

quality tourist accommodations and food services. The findings showed that tourism infrastructure had positive coefficient and was also significant at five percent in influencing the tourism competitiveness. This finding support the study of Sharpley (2006) that accommodation is the largest and most important sector in the tourism industry because most tourists spend a considerable time in their accommodations. In this context, the significance of these variables is important and which need to be maintained or enhanced for destination competitiveness. The quality tourist accommodations and food services can stimulate the desire of the visitors to stay longer and to engage in outdoor activities, and therefore spend more time in the destination.

5.5 Destination management

The destination management involves activities that can boost the appeal of the tourism resources and also strengthen the quality of the supporting factors such as infrastructure. The findings revealed that the factor had positive coefficient toward dependent variable and also influence tourism competitiveness at one percent level of significance. This result leads to research hypotheses not to be rejected. Basing on this finding it can be said that destination management was the strongest predictor of the destination competitiveness. Similar finding was that of Omerzel (2005); Dragisevic *et al*. (2011); Armenski *et al.* (2011) which found destination management as important factor for destination competitiveness. Within the destination management factor, guidance and information variable was the most important as it had highest factor loading of 0.751 in the factor analysis.

5.6 Value for money on tourism services

The findings show that value for money had positive coefficient with the tourism competitiveness and also was statistically significant in influencing tourism competitiveness. This provides strong evidence not to reject the research hypotheses. Basing on this finding, it shows that the higher the visitors received value for money on tourism experienced the higher the tourism competitiveness is influenced by this variable. The emergence of value for money as significant variable on competitiveness of Northern Circuit is also supported by previous researchers who suggested improvement of this variable as a result of tourist satisfaction. For instance, Anderson (2011) found that most tourism firms and particularly hotel accommodations lack value for money. The quality of services offered was considered not to be of the requisite standard to justify the price levels charged to customers. Consistently, Comin (2012) found that hotel accommodation rates and especially those of five star hotels in Tanzania are abnormally high with no good reasons. The most important variable in this factor was tourist accommodation prices as it had the highest factor loading of 0.858 while local cost of local goods had lowest factor loading in factor analysis.

5.7 Safety and security

The findings for the security and safety had positive and significant coefficient towards destination competitiveness. This finding supports Popescu (2011) that ensured security of visitors was an important determinant of destination competitiveness and that an encounter with a security problem can affect the tourist experience and also can displace them to alternative tourist destinations. Therefore, the statistical significance of this variable imply the higher the tourists feel safe and secure in Northern Circuit, Tanzania the higher the destination competitiveness of which will attract a number of tourists and longer stays.

6.0 Conclusion

Success of nature based tourist destinations are increasingly being defined by their competitiveness in tourism market. As tourist destinations, Northern Circuit nature-based destinations in Tanzania are not exempted from this competitive environment. They must be competitive if they are to survive and sustain growth in tourism. The aim of this study was to provide an understanding of significant factors in influencing the competitiveness of NTC national parks in Tanzania. The most significant factors for NTC competitiveness were six. Within these factors the most important variables as ranked by factor analysis were variety of nature based activities, conservation of wildebeest migrations and the Big five, variety and quality tourist accommodations; awareness of tourist destination and tourism products, value of prices at tourist accommodations and safety and security of visitors. Basing on factor analysis these variables had highest factor loadings. This indicates that NTC nature destinations need to first concentrate on these variables in order to enhance competitiveness of the destination, while other remaining variables will be worked out basing on level of their loadings. In an ever increasing competition, northern circuit needs to strive to enhance tourists' satisfaction on overall tourism experience. Otherwise tourists might travel to competitor destinations that offer similar products in a way that satisfies them better. In this context, strong collaboration on both managers in nature based destination and tourism firms such hotels and tours is vital in order to offer competitive tourism products that ensure tourists satisfaction. This can have positive impact on competitiveness of the northern tourist circuit in Tanzania and make it the preferred tourist destination in the eyes of tourists.

7.0 Policy/ Practical Implications

7.1 Range of activities in nature based destinations

In the competitive environment in which tourism operate today, the northern circuit destinations and the industry as a whole must understand that simply selling land scape, flora and fauna is no longer sufficient. It is vital for the nature based destinations and tourism firms to increase/develop variety of tourism products other than traditional product (wildlife) and expose them to potential visitors. The non-traditional products include cultural tourism and recreational activities.

Tanzania is endowed with local cultural traditions associated with many tribes in the country but only the M*aasai* culture is popularised. If this variable will be adequately developed it can differentiate tourism products from that of competitors as this variable is unique to each country.

Another area which can contribute in enhancing tourism experience is for national parks to introduce another way of viewing wildlife which involve night game drives. A night game drive has a unique and exciting atmosphere where tourists can get access to nocturnal species which are rarely seen during the day such as Leopard and Aardvarks. For instance, Kruger National Park in South Africa offers visitors game drives in the morning, at sunset and at night (Engelbetch *et al.,* 2014).

7.2 Guidance and information/Guides services

In Tanzania the Guides play an important role as tour guides. They are expected to be knowledgeable, and capable of presenting tourism information to tourists that is adequately meeting their visit expectations. It is therefore, recommended that government

in collaboration of private sectors such as hotels and tour companies, need to consider the Guides in its training policy by providing them seminars and short courses in line with their daily duties. This can make them up-to-date encyclopedia in providing vital information to visitors and capable of organising a successful tour by presenting tourism information in an interesting way. Besides, "it is the Guides who normally sell the next tour".

Another area to be considered is to create tourist centres in areas where there is high public gathering such as airports, bus stands and shopping malls. These centres will help to provide tourism information not only to international but also to domestic tourists. The staff in these centres preferably tour guides should be multilingual, knowledgeable and experience on tourism products and services in Tanzania.

7.3 Value of prices at tourist accommodations

When a tourist judges a product or service as of appropriate value for the price charged, the tourist is making a quality judgment in relation to the price paid. The value for money need to be seen by hotel visitors' right from the time she/he enters the hotels. For instance, efficiency for check in and check out in hotels and at national park entrances, responsiveness to visitors' complaints among others.

So, it is suggested that managers in private sectors and particularly, hoteliers must commit themselves to delivering a quality services. To achieve this they need to depend on highly qualified workforce capable of delivering services. Emphasis should be given to staff training on both long and short courses in order to equip service personnel with the knowledge and skills necessary to discharge their functions properly.

The nature destinations and tourism firms have almost related services like those of competitors; what can differentiate them is delivering exceptional services. Prices such as conservation fees or accommodation costs can be high but visitors looking for exclusivity would not mind paying more. It is little details that cause customer to rationalize paying more because she/he feels is getting more.

Contribution of the study

The empirical studies on TDC mainly have been carried out in developed countries (Kim, 2011; Crouch, 2007; Khalifa, 2011) while in less developed countries has received little attention. In this respect, this research adds into the empirical studies on TDC in least developed countries and in particular Tanzania where empirical research on the topic is scarce.

This study applied major determinants in TDC models to develop conceptual framework in order to assess factors influencing competitiveness of northern circuit destination in Tanzania. In this context, this study contributes in enhancing TDC models with particular reference to nature based destination focusing on protected areas.

8.0 Scope, Limitation and Future Researches

The focus of this study was limited to examine factors influencing overall competitiveness of NTC nature-based destinations in Tanzania. Future researches are recommended to assess factors influencing competitiveness of other tourist circuits in Tanzania in order to provide specific information as attached to the tourist circuit investigated.

This study employed a cross-sectional research design to assess factors influencing competitiveness of the NTC nature based destinations. The future studies can use time series data so as to provide different picture in this area of study as associated to different research design.

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Appendix one: Test of goodness of fit for a count data regressions

Statistics	Degree of freedom	Significant
Pearson Chi square = 730.6334	365	0.000
Likelihood ratio test of (alpha = 0) = 109.25	1	0.000
Alpha =0 .162729 Mean = 6.59 Variance = 15.44		