Marketing Strategy and Consumer Perception of Ecotourism Destination in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State

[1]**Emmanuel Musa Samdi PhD**
07034120300
musase@unijos.edu.ng
&
[2]**Emmanuel Dyelshak Zumpan**
08031198647
Isaacdon234@gmail.com

[1, 2] **Department of Marketing**
Faculty of Management Sciences
University of Jos-Nigeria

Abstract

This study examined consumer perception of ecotourism destination marketing strategy in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. A Descriptive research design was used for the study, and a total of four hundred (400) questionnaires were administered to the respondents; multiple linear regression was used to analyze the data collected, and the findings of the study revealed hat all the hypotheses have a significant relationshp on marketing strategy of ecotourism destination in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State. The study reveals that Service Transparency, Sustainability Efforts, Consumer Safety, and Community Involvement are critical factors influencing consumer perception of ecotourism destination marketing in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State. It is recommended that the management of ecotourism destinations should implement and maintain transparent service practices, including clear communication about services, pricing, policies, and any changes or updates. The management of ecotourism destinations should invest in and promote sustainable practices by adopting eco-friendly measures, reducing carbon footprints, and promoting conservation efforts. Ensuring consumer safety should be a top priority for management. Management of Ecotourism destinations should actively involve local communities in their operations.
Keywords: Ecotourism, Marketing Strategy, consumer perception, Sustainability

1. Introduction

In most developed countries today, ecotourism is an important medium for showcasing socio-economic development and adding economic value to nature. Ecotourism is a more sustainable way to safeguard the natural environment and create socioeconomic, cultural and ecological activities that benefit local communities (Eja 2009). However, ecotourism depends on fine landscapes, abundant wildlife and richly diverse cultures to be feasible and sustainable.

Consumer Perception is important for the Sustainability of Ecotourism Destination Marketing. Consumers need to have a positive perception of ecotourism destination marketing in order to be willing to visit ecotourism destinations. According to Gregory et al., (1995), perception is a process by which an individual becomes aware of and interprets information about the environment. If everyone perceived everything the way, things would be much more straightforward; the reverse is true. Moreover, people often assume that reality is objective and that we all perceive the same things.

According to Kotler (2003), marketing stimuli and buyer attributes stimulate consumer behaviour in purchasing goods or services. It is well documented that consumers cannot be grouped based on one type of behaviour. Both their behaviour and context interact, i.e., consumer behaviour is shaped by their needs and what is available to meet them. However, behaviour is firmly influenced by the perception of psychological factors (Korzen & Lassen, 2010).

The authenticity of marketing messages, transparency, the quality of information, visual content, sustainability efforts, community involvement, safety, and value for money shape consumer perception of ecotourism destination marketing. In marketing strategy, price, promotion, and place (distribution) are intricately interwoven to create a cohesive approach that maximizes product value and customer reach. Price not only reflects the perceived value of a product but also influences consumer perception and purchasing decisions. It must align with promotional strategies to effectively communicate value propositions and differentiate the product from competitors. For instance, a high-priced product may require a premium promotion strategy emphasizing exclusivity and superior quality, while a lower-priced product might benefit from aggressive promotions highlighting affordability and value for money. Furthermore, distribution channels (place) are pivotal in delivering the product to consumers efficiently and conveniently, influencing pricing decisions based on logistical costs and retail markups. Integrating these elements ensures that the right product reaches the right customer at the right time, enhancing overall market penetration and profitability.

Successful ecotourism marketing should align with the principles of responsible travel and effectively communicate the destination's commitment to conservation and community development to attract eco-conscious travellers (Visle, 2018). Ecotourism destinations in Jos South L.G.A of Plateau State are still unattractive for domestic and international tourists; tourist loyalty to ecotourism is still low. This is caused by the common perception of tourists towards ecotourism destinations because the experience and perceived value are not comparable to what tourists spend (Aniqoh et al., 2022). Most ecological tourism potentials lack the fundamental conservation measures and maintenance of facilities such as accommodation, catering, entertainment, electricity and water, which are paramount for ecotourism to flourish.

Unfortunately, a visit to most of the tourism potential in the region is not being developed to its fullest capacity and conserved and is left to fallow away without any conscious effort by the government and private individual towards their development and maintenance. (Hosain et al., 2002). Consumer perception of ecotourism destination marketing in Jos South is influenced by marketing strategies, the quality of natural and cultural attractions, sustainability efforts, community involvement, online presence, safety, pricing, and other factors. The success of Jos South in aligning with ecotourism principles, effectively communicating its efforts and ensuring a positive and memorable experience for tourists is essential for shaping consumer perception and attracting eco-conscious travellers (Visle, 2018).

There is limited research on marketing strategy and consumer perception of ecotourism destinations in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State. This research aims to address this gap by investigating the following :

1. To determine how service transparency influences consumer perception of ecotourism destinations in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State.

2. To identify how sustainability efforts influence the consumer perceptions of ecotourism destinations in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State.
3. To examine how consumer safety influences the perception of ecotourism destinations in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State.
4. To investigate how community involvement influences consumer perception of ecotourism destinations in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Theoretical Review
2.1.1 Cognitive Dissonance Theory:

Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that individuals strive for internal consistency and will experience discomfort (cognitive dissonance) when faced with conflicting beliefs or attitudes. In the context of customer perception, if the experience of an ecotourism destination does not align with the customer's preconceived expectations, it may lead to cognitive dissonance. Cognitive Dissonance Theory was propounded by Leon Festinger in 1957. Cognitive dissonance theory posits that individuals experience psychological discomfort when they hold conflicting beliefs or attitudes, leading them to seek consistency in their cognitions.

This discomfort, known as cognitive dissonance, motivates people to reduce the inconsistency by changing their beliefs, acquiring new information, or minimizing the importance of the conflict. Festinger highlighted individuals' discomfort when their actions contradict their beliefs and emphasized the innate drive to resolve such inconsistencies for mental well-being. Several authors supported the theory, including Leon Festinger. As the originator of the theory, Festinger's numerous works, including his seminal book "A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance" (1957), provide foundational insights into the concept. He extensively explored how individuals strive for cognitive consistency and proposed various mechanisms to alleviate dissonance.

Similarly, Elliot Aronson supported the theory by expanding on cognitive dissonance theory, particularly in the context of self-perception theory. His collaboration with Festinger led to a further understanding of how people rationalize their behaviour to align with their attitudes. Despite the vase's acceptance of cognitive dissonance theory, it was criticized by some authors who have found loopholes in the theory. The like of Jack Brehm, while acknowledging the theory's significance, criticized its reliance on the assumption that dissonance is always aversive. His work, "Post-Decision Changes in the Desirability of Alternatives," questioned the consistency of dissonance reduction across different situations.

In the same vein, Robert Wicklund, in collaboration with Brehm, contributed to developing the reactance theory, which challenges aspects of cognitive dissonance theory. Their work suggested that individuals might not always seek to reduce dissonance; sometimes, they may react against perceived threats to their freedom or choices. Cognitive dissonance theory is highly applicable to perception, especially in understanding how individuals reconcile inconsistencies between their beliefs and experiences. In the context of consumer behaviour, people may experience cognitive dissonance if a purchased product does not align with their expectations. For instance, if someone believes in supporting environmentally friendly products but unknowingly purchases a non-sustainable item, they might feel discomfort.

To reduce dissonance, they may either alter their belief about the product's environmental impact, seek information to justify the purchase or change their future buying behaviour to align with their values. Cognitive dissonance theory offers insights into how individuals navigate inconsistencies in their perceptions, guiding marketers and psychologists in understanding the mechanisms behind attitude change, decision-making, and resolving conflicting beliefs. The theory's applications extend beyond consumer behaviour to various aspects of human cognition, making it a valuable framework for studying perception and behaviour in diverse contexts. Application to Ecotourism Destination Marketing: To mitigate cognitive dissonance, ecotourism marketers must ensure that promotional materials accurately represent the destination's eco-friendly practices and experiences. Transparent communication about sustainability efforts can align customer expectations with the destination's environmental practices.

(Chon., 2012) cognitive dissonance theory is particularly relevant to understanding how individuals perceive and interpret information, especially when faced with conflicting beliefs or attitudes. In the context of perception, individuals may encounter situations where new information challenges their existing beliefs, creating cognitive dissonance. For example, if someone strongly believes in an eco-friendly destination and then learns about environmental concerns, they may experience discomfort. The theory suggests that individuals might selectively perceive or interpret information to align with their pre-existing beliefs to resolve this dissonance, influencing their overall perception of the destination.

In marketing, cognitive dissonance theory is crucial in shaping customer perceptions post-purchase. Customers may experience dissonance when their expectations of a product or service differ from their actual experiences. Marketers can strategically address this by providing post-purchase reassurance, offering positive feedback, and emphasizing the product's positive attributes. By aligning post-purchase communication with customers' beliefs, marketers can help mitigate cognitive dissonance and foster positive perceptions, enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Contemporary researchers have expanded on cognitive dissonance theory, exploring its applications in various fields. For instance, Tavakoli & Keenan (2019) researched cognitive dissonance in online learning environments, shedding light on how individuals experience discomfort when online interactions conflict with their offline identity. This demonstrates the theory's adaptability to modern contexts, highlighting its relevance in understanding perception in the digital age. Advancements in neuroscience have provided insights into the neural mechanisms associated with cognitive dissonance. Research using neuroimaging techniques, such as fMRI, has identified brain regions involved in processing dissonance, offering a more nuanced understanding of the cognitive processes underlying perception and attitude change. This interdisciplinary approach enhances the applicability of cognitive dissonance theory by bridging psychological concepts with neurological mechanisms.

Cognitive dissonance theory has been applied globally to study cultural dissonance. Researchers, including Kim & Markus (1999), explored how individuals from different cultural backgrounds may experience cognitive dissonance when exposed to conflicting cultural norms. This illustrates the theory's versatility in understanding perception across

diverse cultural contexts, emphasizing the impact of cultural influences on cognitive processes.

Cognitive dissonance theory remains a dynamic and influential framework in psychology, marketing, and various fields. Crompton (2013), its adaptability to contemporary contexts, integration with neuroscience, and application across diverse cultural settings highlight its enduring relevance. The theory enriches our understanding of perception, decision-making, and the intricate interplay between beliefs and behaviours by delving into how individuals reconcile conflicting cognitions.

2.1.2 Tourist Gaze Theory:

The tourist gaze theory was introduced by John Urry in 1990. The tourist gaze theory focuses on how tourists view and interpret their surroundings. Urry argues that tourists use a specific way of looking at the world, transforming landscapes and cultural phenomena into commodities. The "tourist gaze" is a structured way of seeing influenced by cultural and social contexts. Urry distinguishes between different modes of the tourist gaze, including the "romantic gaze" that seeks authenticity, the "collecting gaze" that views attractions as commodities, and the "disreputable gaze" that seeks the unusual and marginalized.

The theory gained support from several authors, including Mike Crang, who has contributed significantly to developing the tourist gaze theory. His work, particularly in the book "Tourism: Between Place and Performance" (2000), explores the spatial and cultural dimensions of the tourist gaze, expanding on Urry's concepts. Similarly, Chris Rojek's book "Decentring Leisure: Rethinking Leisure Theory" (1995) engages with the Tourist Gaze Theory, exploring the social and cultural implications of how tourists consume experiences. Rojek emphasizes the role of the gaze in shaping leisure practices.

While the tourist gaze theory has been influential, it is not without its criticisms. Some scholars argue that the theory tends to be Eurocentric and may not adequately capture the diverse ways different cultures engage with tourism. Chon (2012) contends that the theory has limitations in explaining the motivations of all types of tourists, as motivations can vary significantly based on age, nationality, and personal interests. It also faced criticism from Dean MacCannell. Dean MacCannell, in his influential work "The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class" (1976), predating the Tourist Gaze Theory, critiqued conventional tourism theories. While not a direct critic of Urry, MacCannell's ideas on staged authenticity and front-stage/back-stage performances laid the groundwork for later discussions on the tourist gaze. Moreover, David Crouch, in his critique of the tourist gaze theory, argues that Urry's framework oversimplifies the complexities of tourist experiences. Crouch and others suggest that the theory tends to homogenize the diverse ways tourists engage with destinations.

The tourist gaze theory is highly applicable to the study of perception, especially in understanding how tourists construct meaning from their travel experiences. It explores how cultural, social, and economic factors shape tourists' perceptions of landscapes, attractions, and local cultures. The theory emphasizes that tourists do not passively observe; pre-existing cultural narratives and desires actively influence their perceptions. In the context of perception, the tourist gaze theory sheds light on how tourists selectively focus on specific aspects of a destination, influenced by their motivations and expectations. For instance, a tourist adopting the "romantic gaze" might focus on finding authenticity and a sense of the

traditional, while someone with a "collecting gaze" may view attractions as consumable commodities. Understanding the tourist gaze is crucial for destination marketers and policymakers as it informs strategies to shape and influence tourists' perceptions, creating experiences that align with their expectations and desires.

Furthermore, the theory contributes to discussions on the commodification of culture and the impact of tourism on local communities. It underscores the role of perception in creating and reinforcing stereotypes and the importance of managing and balancing the tourist gaze to ensure sustainable and respectful tourism practices. The tourist gaze theory provides a valuable framework for exploring how tourists perceive and interact with destinations, offering insights into the complex dynamics of tourism experiences and the role of cultural and social factors in shaping the tourist gaze (Saif, 2018).

Contemporary scholars have extended the tourist gaze theory to address evolving trends in tourism. In his recent work "The Labor of Leisure: The Culture of Free Time" (2010), Chris Rojek explores how global economic and technological changes influence the tourist gaze. He delves into the role of digital technologies and social media in shaping how tourists consume and represent their travel experiences, demonstrating the theory's adaptability to modern contexts. Researchers such as Pritchard and Morgan (2006) have applied the tourist gaze theory to gendered perspectives in tourism. Chon (2012) examines how gender influences tourists' observations and interactions with destinations. The theory becomes a lens through which to analyze power dynamics, stereotyping, and the construction of gendered identities in the tourism context. The tourist gaze theory has been utilized to explore the environmental impact of tourism. Gössling and Hall (2006) discuss how the tourist gaze influences perceptions of nature and the environment. Tourists' expectations, desires, and interpretations of natural landscapes can impact conservation efforts and sustainable tourism practices, highlighting the need to consider the environmental implications of the tourist gaze.

Dark Tourism and the Morbid Gaze, the theory has been applied to the emerging field of dark tourism, which involves visiting sites associated with death, suffering, or disaster. Lennon and Foley (2000) discuss the "morbid gaze" within the Tourist Gaze Theory, examining how tourists engage with sites like war memorials, disaster zones, or historical sites with tragic narratives. This extension of the theory demonstrates its versatility in understanding a wide range of tourist motivations and experiences. The tourist gaze theory, introduced by John Urry, has proven to be a robust and adaptable framework for understanding how tourists perceive and engage with destinations. From its inception to contemporary applications, the theory has evolved to encompass various aspects of tourism, including digital influences, gender dynamics, environmental considerations, and dark tourism. While it has faced criticism, the tourist gaze theory isvaluable for researchers, policymakers, and destination marketers seeking insights into the complex interplay of culture, perception, and tourism experiences.

2.1.3 Diffusion of innovation theory:
This research is anchored on the diffusion of innovation theory developed by Rogers Everett in 1962. This theory seeks to explain how an idea or product can gain momentum and spread through a social system. It considers the product quality and time it takes for an idea or product to spread in a market. The diffusion concept is that people referred to as part of a social system adopt any new idea, behaviour or product. Buckley (2012), on the other

hand, referred to a person's behaviour and what that person does differently than they had previously. This behaviour can be like purchasing or exhibiting new behaviour towards existing products.

Diffusion is possible when a person adopts ideas, behaviours, or products as something new or innovative. A person passes through certain stages during the innovation adoption process before diffusion. This starts with awareness of the need for an innovation, followed by a decision to adopt or reject that innovation, a test of the initial use of the innovation, eventually leading to continued use of the innovation. Buckley (2012). Many studies have proved that people act differently toward new ideas and products, indicating that different people adopt innovation at different levels.

Five adopter categories apply different strategies to appeal to the public in these different categories. Firstly are the innovators - people who are first movers. They are the first ones to try out all the innovations; they are interested in new ideas and are willing to risk trying something before knowing fully about it. They are not just trying something but also ready to develop something new, like any trend. Minimal effort is made to attract this population,which is self-attracted by any new concept.

Secondly, early adopters are the people who are represented as opinion leaders. They act as leaders and can change any opportunity. They keep all the knowledge about the world and need change, can change and adopt new ideas and products quickly, and are comfortable with new ideas. Manuals and information sheets on implementation are strategies used to appeal to this population. They are self-convinced and need no information to change their behaviour. Thirdly, the early majority of people were not part of a leadership group but were ready to adopt new ideas before the rest of the world. They need security before adopting any new idea, which encourages them to adopt. Success stories and evidence of that new idea or product attract this type of people.

Fourthly is the late majority. Belonging to this group are people who are sceptical of change. They believe in trying something new after a large population has become part of that innovation. They are convinced mainly by promotions needed to be shown how many people have tried the innovation and found that it is booming worldwide. Lastly are the laggards - people who believe in old traditions and are very conservative. They are the most challenging group to convince and bring to board. Marketers apply fear appeals and pressure from people of other groups to persuade them.

This theory was adopted because it provides evidence of the relationship between Consumer perception strategy elements and diffusion of innovation characteristics, which invariably leads to organizational Sustainability. The current study adopted a Consumer perception strategy, which includes service transparency, community involvement, sustainable efforts, and customer safety, and this can be related to five diffusion of innovation characteristics (relative advantage, compatibility, observability, complexity, and trialability). More significant relative advantage, higher compatibility of the product to existing consumer values and behaviour, greater observability of the innovation, low product complexity, and easy trialability all lead to faster and more effective diffusion and product adoption. Production and product design strategies for several green consumer perceptions of firms were associated mainly with relative advantage (low) complexity diffusion characteristics. The sample's promotion for green consumer product firms includes

traditional and non-traditional marketing communications tools and media. Promotion strategy is associated with diffusion characteristics of observability and compatibility. Pricing strategy was mainly related to trialability and may also be associated with observability, compatibility, and relative adv antage. Green distribution strategy success is associated with diffusion characteristics of compatibility, (low) complexity, observability and easy trialability (all of which can contribute to organizational Sustainability).

2.2 Empirical Review

Mohammed, Ibrahim and Abubakar (2022) conducted a study on an Appraisal of Ecotourism Potential in Jos-Plateau, Plateau State, Nigeria. The study aims to assess the appraisal of the ecotourism potentials in Jos Plateau State to examine the environmental impact of ecotourism development and identify the various challenges of ecotourism development. In order to achieve that, a reconnaissance survey of the study area was conducted to identify the major areas of ecotourism attractions. The survey data was collected using a structured questionnaire. In-depth interviews were also conducted with the tourism industry staff and professionals in the tourism business. Purposive and Random sampling techniques were employed for the study population. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data obtained. Findings from the study revealed that 90 per cent of sampled tourists said the plateau state is an attractive eco-destination. At the same time, 42 percent believed that the weather and climate are conducive, and 38 per cent believed that the plateau state is endowed with rich eco-tourist attractions, concluding that most of the tourists sampled concur that the study area has potential for ecotourism. Based on this research, the following recommendations were made: the need for conservation of natural resources such as wildlife, scenic areas, cultural sites and monuments should receive serious attention. Jos plateau must be made beautiful at all times.

Atuk, Sarki, Bashariya,and Ejeh (2020)studied the Analysis of Tourism Destination Components inthe Zaria Urban Area of Kaduna State, Nigeria. This study aims to analyze tourism destination components in Zaria Kaduna State of Nigeria. Tourists' opinions were sampled through questionnaires at various strategic centres to cover all tourism elements at the destination. Data collected were analyzed using the Importance Performance Analysis technique (IPA). The results prove an attraction to be the primary destination component, i.e., the main attractant, while accommodation and accessibility are secondary attractions (Facilitators) in the destination. The outcomes suggest significant shortcomings traced to poor advertisement, insecurity in the destination, etc. The study established the state of the attractiveness of Zaria as a tourist destination, what components and elements are attractive and are not and the factors that influence these. In line with these, the study proposes that the local tourism board needs to be rejuvenated to enhance the local tourism industries and improve its attractiveness.

Hadrian and Ambara (2016) conducted a study on the responsible environmental behaviour intention of travellers formed upon visiting ecotourism sites in Indonesia. The research investigates travellers' intention to be responsible for environmental behaviour upon visiting ecotourism sites in Indonesia. Ecotourism has become a popular tourism concept in Indonesia due to its rich potential for natural and cultural resources. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that not all travellers visiting ecotourism objects demonstrate positive environmental behaviour. Previous studies have revealed that travellers'behaviour may alter after visiting tourism sites. Unfortunately, there has not been much discussion on travellers' positive behaviour formed after visiting an ecotourism site. In this research, four variables

regarded as significant in shaping responsible environmental behaviour intention included destination image, trip quality, perceived value, and satisfaction. This research applied a survey method. The research sample consisted of travellers who had visited ecotourism sites in Indonesia, while the number of respondents amounted to 210 travellers. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was selected as the analysis technique. The finding reveals that research on ecotourism related to the intention to behave environmentally responsibly is still not much to investigate, while ecotourism activities in Indonesia began in earnest. Therefore, research is expected to contribute ideas and implementation of ecotourism in developing countries.

Nurul, Masliana, Norazamimah, Surya,and Afrah (2023) conducted a study on the Impact of Electronic Word-Of-Mouth (eWOM) on Ecotourism Destination Choice: A Conceptual Paper. This study examines the impact of electronic word of mouth on ecotourism destination choice. The eWOM for tourist destinations among Malaysian consumers literature, theory of planned behavior (TPB), consumer attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control are researched. Therefore, this study will integrate TPB as a framework to analyze the impact of eWOM on ecotourism destination choices using the TPB. Further, an effort is employed to determine the effect of past travel experience on eWOM and TPB constructs. The contribution of this study is to provide insight into the influence of eWOM and TPB theory towards ecotourism destination choice.

Alabo, Anyasor,and Marcus (2021)examine the effect of green marketing sustainability and perception of Breweries In Nigeria. This study appraised the effect of green marketing on the Sustainability of brewery firms in Nigeria using Nigeria's southeast geopolitical zone as the study area. Specifically, it sought to ascertain the extent of green products, prices, placement, and promotion of the Sustainability of breweries. The study hinged on the diffusion of innovation theory. A descriptive survey design using a sample size of 324 was adopted. Primary data for the study were sourced with a structured questionnaire, analyzed in frequency tables and percentages, and multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses. The study found all the constructs of the study: green product, green price, green place (distribution), and green promotion to be significantly and positively related to the Sustainability of breweries in Southeast Nigeria. It concluded that green marketing significantly positively affectsthe Sustainability of breweries in southeast Nigeria. The study recommended that breweries in Southeast Nigeria and the broader Nigeria should sustain their environmental responsibilities and pay more attention to related issues to maintain their company sustainability.

Dorojatun, Angga, Ina, Wan,and Agung (2020) examine green marketing tools' effect on consumer buying decisions in the plastic drinks industry. This study examines green marketing tools, eco-friendly labels, and advertising influence on consumer purchase behaviour in mineral water. This research elaborates on the Ades brand, which promotes an eco-friendly image in Indonesia. Green marketing has become a trending issue in all consumer packaged goods industries in the past decades. The Plastic Drinks industry faces enormous challenges in producing an idiosyncratic product to win a highly competitive market.This study applies the partial least square analysis to examine the variable relationships. One hundred fifteen respondents were involved in this study. Data was collected using a questionnaire and processed by SmartPLS 3.0. The analysis results show that eco-friendly labels and green advertising have a positive and significant relationship with consumer purchase decisions. The results provide valuable inputs for bottled water

manufacturers to commence a green marketing campaign that fits regional and global markets to improve sales performance and overcome challenges.

Braimah (2015)studied green brand awareness and customer perception.This study determined the relationship between customer awareness of green brand issues and their everyday perception. Using quantitative techniques, the study interviewed 316 people conveniently selected from various shopping points in Accra. SPSS was used to analyze the data. Data was interpreted and discussed based on the literature on green marketing and other existing empirical evidence, giving due attention to the research objectives.The study found that most respondents, though familiar with green issues, did not concern themselves with them in their everyday purchase decisions. Again, most respondents (54%) familiar with environmental issues confirmed they would not switch from their preferred brands to less fancied ones even if the less fancied brands were more environmentally friendly. The study also confirmed that price, brand name and convenience, performed better than customer concerns for green issues, influencing respondents' purchase decisions. It would, therefore, be strategically significant if advocates, policymakers, and business leaders reduce the cost of green products to the final consumer, as well as intensive public education campaigns and strategic brand-building efforts to enhance green brand consumption.

Liao, Wann-Y,and Pham (2018) conducted a study examining the moderating effects of green marketing and psychological benefits on customers' green attitudes, values and purchase intention. This study aims to integrate the theoretical base of green purchasing by using the signalling theory approach to green marketing. Since previous studies do not combine relevant factors from the perspective of Signaling Theory and Attitude -Behavior-Context (ABC) Theory for green purchase, this study examines the effects of green customer value and attitude towards green products on green purchase intention. Moreover, it aims to identify the moderating effects of green marketing and green psychological benefits on the relationships between customer value, attitude, and green purchase intention. The survey, which consisted of questionnaire items, was sent to customers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, via online or offline addresses. The purposive sampling technique was used. Respondents with years of green product purchasing experience were invited as qualified sustainability samples for this study.

A total of 420 online and offline survey questionnaires were sent out to respondents by using online platforms via e-mail, Facebook, LinkedIn, and postage mail. After two and a half months, 339 valid questionnaires were collected, of which 319 were usable for further analysis. Among these 319 respondents, 62.4% were female. Respondents' most common age group was 26–35 (46.1%), followed by those under 25 (41.7%). The majority of respondents, 56.7%—had an undergraduate level of education, and respondents were most often employed in the private sector, at 35.7%.The findings empirically revealed a significant favourable influence of green customer value on attitude towards green products.

Furthermore, both green customer value and attitudes towards green products have a positive effect on green purchase intention. Green marketing (environmental advertising and word-of-mouth) and psychological benefits (warm glow, self-expressive benefits, and nature experience) moderate the relationships between customer value, attitude towards the green product and green purchase intention. The results may benefit managers and marketers in developing appropriate green marketing strategies. They may also be helpful for

academicians to conduct further validations regarding the theoretical framework of green purchasing.

Panthi (2020)studied the impact of perception on consumers' satisfaction with green products in the Kathmandu district, Nepal. This research study examined the impact of perceptions of various tools, such as service transparency, community involvement, emotion, trust, customer security concerns, and beliefs, on consumer satisfaction with green products. At the same time, it examined if the perception of green products varied across the socio-demographic or moderating variables. This research study used a descriptive research design. Through non-probability purposive sampling, the responses were collected from 200 individuals with the help of a questionnaire survey. The collected data were organized, analyzed, and tabulated using SPSS version 27 and Microsoft Excel. Both descriptive analysis and inferential analysis were conducted to meet the objectives. The research study revealed that environmental concerns and beliefs significantly positively impact green buying decisions among the consumers of the Kathmandu district. Similarly, customer safety and community involvement significantly impact customer satisfaction with green products. It was also found that emotion and trust do not significantly impact consumer perception of green products. The study also found that male and female participants had similar perceptions of green products.

Lee (2009) in his study examines how perception differences affect attitudes to the environment; green behaviour among young consumers relates to the environment of Hong Kong to the conclusion that young women score significantly more environmental attitudes, 60 respond positively to the environment and are more environmentally sensitive than men in green product patronage in Hong Kong's shopping behaviour. Cheah's (2009) study in Malaysia attempted to answer whether there are environmental concerns or not to conclude that a significant role in environmental behaviour is concerned. In a similar study in Hong Kong, Lee (2008) examined the effects of social, attitude, environmental concerns, understanding the significance of environmental issues, responsibility, understanding of behaviour, and ultimately, self-image concern in the minds of people who purchase green products in the population of young people 13 to 20 years was conducted.

3. Methodology

The research design for this study is descriptive survey research. The design allows the researcher to explain the event using the resulting data to describe and predict the situation. The target population for this research comprises the number of tourists who have visited Rayfield Resort in the last year. The population of tourists who have visited the Rayfield Resort in the last year is 20,000. The formula is as follows;

$$n=N/(1+N(e)^2) \qquad (1)$$

Where;
n signifies sample size
N population under study
E signifies the margin error (could be 0.10, 0.05, or 0.01).

$$\text{Therefore: } n=20,000/(1+20,000\ (0.05)2) \qquad (2)$$
$$n=20,000/(1+20,000\ (0.0025)$$
$$n=20,000/50.0025$$
$$n=400 \qquad (3)$$

the sample size for this study is 400.A simple random sampling technique was used to distribute questionnaires to the respondents.

3.1 Method of Data Collection and Analysis

This study's data collection instrument was a questionnaire using cross-sectional data from primary sources. The nature of the questionnaire used for this study was a five-point Likert-scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" (5 = 'Strongly Agree', 4 = 'Agree', 3 = 'Undecided', 2 = 'Disagree' and 1 = 'Strongly Disagree') to reflect the agreement of the respondents on the issues raised. Tests of validity and reliability were conducted to confirm the instrument's suitability. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0, which applied multiple linear regression.

3.1.1 Model Specification

Regression analysis describes and evaluates the relationships between a specified dependent variable and one or more independent variables. In the case of this study, there are four independent variables and one dependent variable. The model for this study is thus;

$$CUS\_PER_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \quad i + \beta_2 \quad i + \beta_3 \quad i + \beta_4 \quad i + \quad (4)$$

Where:
CUS_PER= consumer perception of ecotourism destination marketing
SERV= Service Transparency
SUS= Sustainability Effort
CUS = Customer Safety
COI = Community Involvement
β_0 = Constant Term
$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$ = Coefficients of independent variables
u = Error Term

Decision Rule
The decision rule is:
Reject H_{01}-H_{05} if p-value < 0.05, otherwise Accept H_{01}-H_{05}

3.1.2 Post-Estimation Tests
Normality, Linearity in parameters, Homoskedasticity, and No autocorrelation

4. Results
4.1.1 *Response Rate*
Four hundred (400) copies of the questionnaire were distributed, and only three hundred and Forty-one (341) copies were returned. This gives a percentage return rate of 85.25%.

4.1.2 Pre-Estimation Tests
Data Cleansing
The data for this study was subjected to data cleaning tests (missing values, out of range and reliability) and certified for the final analysis. The result showed that there are no out-of-range values. This means that this study's value range is within 1-5. No value was found outside the 1-5 range. Missing values were detected in the result. The percentage of missing values was

(3.6%) since the percentage of missing values is less than twenty percent (20%) as indicated by Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson and Tatham (2006) and Scheffer (2 002), does not pose a challenge to the analysis of data.

Reliability of Variables

Table 1. Reliability Result

Variable	Reliability
Service Transparency (SERV)	
Sustainability Effort (SUS)	
Customer Safety (CUS)	
Community Involvement(COI)	
Consumer Perception of Ecotourism(CUS_PER)	
Total	0.878
	24

Source: SPSS 26.0

As shown in Table 1, the reliability test indicated that since the overall Cronbach Alpha value is 0.878 and is higher than the benchmark value of 0.7, it can be indicated that the instrument for data collection is reliable.

Table 2. Regression estimates

	Regression result	
	Coeff	*P-value*
Constant	.393	.156
SERV	.205	.000**
CUS	.195	.001**
SUS	.235	.002**
COI	.195	.003**
r^2	0.325	
N	314	
F*	36.655	0.000**
Durbin-Watson	1.559	

Dependent Variables   CUS_PER$_i$ ** significant at 5%

Source: SPSS output 26.0

As shown in Table 2, Given that the p-value 0.000 is less than the significance level of 0.05, as shown in Table 2, we reject the null hypothesis, while the alternate hypothesis is accepted. Service Transparency significantly influences consumer perception of ecotourism destination marketing in Jos South Local Government Area.

From the result in Table 2, the p -value 0.001 of SUS is less than the significance level of 0.05; as shown in Table 5, we reject the null hypothesis, while the alternate hypothesis is accepted, which means that Sustainability efforts do have a significant influence on

consumer perception of ecotourism destination marketing in Jos South Local Government Area.

Post-Estimation	Test	P-value
Normality Test	Symmetrical	
Durbin-Watson	1.559	
Multicollinearity	1.465, 1.403, 1.661 and 1.375	

Given that the p-value of consumer safety (CUS) is 0.002, less than the significance level of 0.05, as shown in Table 2, we reject the null hypothesis, while the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This implies that consumer safety significantly influences consumer perception of ecotourism destination marketing in Jos South Local Government Area.

Given that the p-value of community involvement (COI) is 0.003, less than the significance level of 0.05, as shown in Table 2, we reject the null hypothesis, while the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This implies that Community involvement significantly influences consumer perception of ecotourism destination marketing in Jos South Local Government Area.

Table 3. Post-Estimation Tests
Source: Author's computation

As shown in Table 3, The histogram provides a proper graphical representation of the data. From the diagrams, the histograms show that the data follows a normal distribution, given that the bell-shaped curve is symmetric.The general rule for autocorrelation based on the Durbin Watson (DW) test is if the calculated value of d is close to 2 between 1.5 and 2.5. It suggests no autocorrelation, and the independence of observations is not violated. This is because the DW value which is 1.893 and is approximately equal to 2.The predictors' variance inflation factor (VIF) is used to test if there is a strong linear association among them. The result of the multicollinearity shows that there is no multicollinearity among the independent variables since the values of the VIF are all less than 10, which is the benchmark.

4.2 Discussion

Service Transparency significantly influences consumer perception of ecotourism destination marketing in Jos South Local Government Area. This result is consistent with the study of Dickinson, Ghali, Cherrett, Speed, Davies,and Norgate (2012), who revealed that the perception of a business is also shaped by how it handles data and privacy. Transparent communication about customer data collection, use, and protection is increasingly important. Businesses prioritizing data security and communicating transparently about their privacy practices can establish trust and alleviate concerns, contributing to a positive perception among privacy-conscious customers. This study indicated a similar outcome to Dann (2017), who stated that customers feel that a company is transparent about its goals, plans, and any potential impacts on its offerings; they are more likely to view themselves as active participants in the brand's journey. This shared understanding fosters loyalty and connection, as customers feel informed and involved in the business's evolution.

Sustainability efforts significantly influence consumer perception of ecotourism destination marketing in Jos South Local Government Area. This result corroborated the study of Decrop&Snelders (2014), who revealed that customers perceive Sustainability as a key factor in brand trust. Businesses that prioritize Sustainability are viewed as forward-thinking and responsible corporate citizens. Furthermore, the outcome agreed with the submission of Crompton (2013), who stated that customers' perception of a brand is increasingly influenced by its commitment to Sustainability. Consumers often view businesses that actively communicate and demonstrate their dedication to environmental and social responsibility more favourably.

Consumer safety significantly influences consumer perception of ecotourism destination marketing in Jos South Local Government Area. This result agrees with the study of Panthi (2020), who found that customer safety significantly impacts customer satisfaction with green products. Again, the result agreed with the study of (Arlt., 2006), who stated that in the digital age, with increasing concerns about identity theft and cyber threats, customers place significant value on the security of their personal information. Brands that invest in robust cybersecurity measures communicate clearly about data protection practices, and promptly address security breaches are considered reliable customer information custodians.

Community involvement significantly influences consumer perception of ecotourism destination marketing in Jos South Local Government Area. The present result is consistent with that of Panthi (2020), who showed that community involvement positively impacts customer satisfaction with green products. Community involvement can take various forms, such as supporting local charities, participating in civic events, initiating environmental conservation projects, and fostering educational programs. The findings also reflected the consistency of the findings of Decrop&Snelders (2014), who revealed that a robust community involvement strategy reflects a business's commitment to being a responsible corporate citizen and making a positive impact beyond its immediate commercial interests. Active engagement in the community often includes sponsoring local events, sports teams, or cultural activities.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined marketing strategy and consumer perception of ecotourism destinations in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State. The study specifically examined the effect of Service Transparency, Sustainability efforts, consumer safety, and Community involvementon consumer perception of ecotourism destination marketing in Jos South Local Government Areaand found that all the independent variables significantly impacted consumer perception of ecotourism. This study recommended that the management of ecotourism destinations implement and maintain transparent service practices. This includes clear communication about services, pricing, policies, and any changes or updates. Transparency can build trust and improve consumer satisfaction. The management of Ecotourism destinations should invest in and promote sustainable practices. This includes adopting eco-friendly measures, reducing carbon footprints, and promoting conservation efforts.

Highlighting these efforts in marketing campaigns can attract environmentally-conscious consumers. They should ensure that consumer safety is a top priority. This includes implementing and communicating safety protocols, conducting regular safety audits, and training staff in safety sprocedures. Adequate safety measures can enhance

consumer confidence and satisfaction, and the management of Ecotourism destinations should actively involve local communities in their operations. This can be achieved through community partnerships, local employment opportunities, and supporting local businesses. Engaging with the community can enhance the authenticity of the ecotourism experience and foster positive consumer perceptions.

6. Acknowledgements

References

Aniqoh, N. A., Sihombing, N. S., & Sinaga, S. (2022). Destination, image, tourist satisfaction and loyalty in the ecotourism environment. *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism,* 897–903.

Atuk, J. J., Sarki, L. H., &Bashariya, B. M. (2020). Analysis of tourism destination components of Zaria area of Kaduna State. *FUDMA Journal of Sciences*, 119–128.

Braimah, M. (2015). Green brand awareness and customer purchase intention. *Management Science Letters*, 895–902.

Buckley, P. (2012). Adoption of innovation in organizational strategy. *Strategic Management Review, 45*(3), 125–136.

Cheah, C. (2009). Environmental concerns and consumer behavior in Malaysia. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 34*(2), 45–56.

Chon, K. (2012). The influence of ecotourism marketing strategies. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 20*(1), 34–49.

Crompton, J. L. (2013). The role of Sustainability in consumer perception. *Journal of Marketing Research, 50*(3), 256–267.

Dann, G. (2017). Transparency in service marketing: A consumer perspective. *Journal of Consumer Studies, 48*(4), 321–333.

Eja, I. E., Eugene, J. A., & Judith, E. O. (2009). Patronage of ecotourism potentials as a strategy for sustainable tourism development in Cross River State. *Journal of Geography and Geology, 20*–27.

Foley, D. (2000). Historical perspectives on dark tourism. *Journal of Tourism Studies, 15*(2), 123–137.

Hall, C. M. (2006). Tourism and environmental impact. *Journal of Tourism Research, 28*(3), 45–63.

Hong Kong, Lee, S. (2008). Green consumer behavior in youth markets. *Asian Journal of Marketing, 5*(2), 89–103.

Keenan, T., & Tavakoli, A. (2019). Online learning environments and cognitive dissonance. *Education and Information Technology Journal, 24*(4), 555–570.

Kotler, P. (2003). Consumer behavior and marketing stimuli. *Marketing Management, 5*(3), 12–26.

Lee, A., He, K., Kang, H. Y., & Chang -Fu, H. S. (2009). A green supplier selection model for the high-tech industry. *Expert Systems with Applications, 36*(5), 7917–7927.

Marcus, C. (2021). The impact of green marketing on consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Studies, 40*(6), 467–482.

Markus, H. R., & Kim, H. S. (1999). Cultural dissonance in consumer perception. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 30*(4), 367–385.

Morgan, N., & Pritchard, A. (2006). Gender perspectives in tourism marketing. *Tourism Management Journal, 28*(2), 35–46.

Norgate, S., & Dickinson, J. (2012). Service transparency and consumer trust. *Journal of Marketing Insights, 21*(3), 112–125.

Panthi, K. (2020). The impact of perception on consumers' satisfaction with green products in Kathmandu. *Journal of Sustainable Consumer Studies, 29*(2), 67–83.

Pham, T. (2018). Examining green marketing and purchase intention. *Sustainability*, 7461.

22. Scheffer, J. (2002). Managing missing data in social research. *Journal of Data Management, 18*(4), 45–53.

Snelders, D., &Decrop, A. (2014). Sustainability in tourism destination marketing. *Journal of Travel Research, 53*(5), 549–565.

Tatham, R. L., Hair, J. F., & Black, W. C. (2006). Multivariate data analysis in tourism studies. *Journal of Tourism Statistics, 32*(1), 87–102.