

Tourism Safety and Destination Choice in Nairobi County, Kenya: The Mediating Role of Tourist Behavioral Characteristics

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Abstract

Destination choice is influenced by attractions, accessibility, and perceived safety. Kenya's low safety and security score of 3.4 out of 7, reflecting crime, terrorism, and political instability, affects tourist decisions. Nairobi County, as the capital and a major tourism hub, has experienced security incidents, making it perceived as unsafe. Although prior research has established a direct link between perceived safety and destination choice, the intervening mechanisms through which tourist behavioral characteristics operate within this relationship remain theoretically and empirically underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining the mediating role of tourist behavioral characteristics on the relationship between tourism safety and destination choice in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study was anchored on perceived risk theory and Theory of Planned Behaviour. Pragmatist research paradigm with concurrent explanatory research design was adopted. The target population was 2,279 tourists and 53 managers in charge of security from fifty-three star rated hotels in Nairobi County. Systematic random sampling and purposive sampling were used to select the respondents. Quantitative data was collected from 340 tourists using questionnaires while qualitative data was collected using interviews from 11 managers. Quantitative data was analyzed using multiple linear regression for hypothesis testing and Process Macro for mediation while qualitative data used thematic analysis. Findings show that tourism safety strongly influences destination choice ($\beta = 0.465$, $p < 0.001$). Tourists place high value on safety factors such as crime prevention, health protection, and emergency preparedness when selecting destinations. Behavioral characteristics recorded high mean scores but did not significantly mediate the relationship between tourism safety and destination choice ($\beta = 0.0033$, 95% CI [-0.0145, 0.0252]). Qualitative results confirmed that tourists prioritize visible safety measures over motivational or attitudinal factors when making

travel decisions. The study concludes that tourism safety is a primary determinant of destination choice in Nairobi County, while behavioral characteristics play a limited mediating role. The findings support Perceived Risk Theory and refine the Theory of Planned Behavior in high-risk tourism contexts by showing that safety perceptions can override internal behavioral processes. The study recommends strengthening safety systems, improving tourism infrastructure, enhancing communication of safety information, and improving destination image management to enhance Nairobi's competitiveness as a tourist destination. This research contributes to knowledge by highlighting that behavioral characteristics do not mediate the relationship between tourism safety destination choice.

Keywords: Tourism Safety, Destination Choice, Behavioral Characteristics, Perceived Risk, Star-Rated Hotels, Nairobi County

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Introduction

Tourism remains a vital economic sector for numerous countries in the 21st century, yet the industry faces persistent challenges from natural disasters, environmental hazards, health crises, and climate-related risks that disrupt global tourism operations (Nas, 2024; Anichiti et al., 2021; Kibe & Ngari, 2024). Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic originating in Wuhan, China in December 2019 severely affected the Kenyan tourism industry, underscoring how health-related safety concerns can destabilize destination attractiveness (Kinyua, Kangai, & Njoroge, 2022). Additionally, floods have increasingly emerged as significant safety threats across many nations due to

intensifying climate change impacts, with Kenya experiencing periodic flooding events during the 1997/98 El Niño and subsequent episodes in 2003, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, and more recently in 2024 (Okaka & Odhiambo, 2018; Ngome & Yeom, 2024). These occurrences highlight the growing reality that tourism destinations are increasingly exposed to environmental and health-related risks that require adaptive safety management strategies.

Empirical evidence demonstrates that tourists are highly sensitive to perceived safety risks and routinely factor physical and environmental safety into their travel decisions (Anichiti et al., 2021;

Zou & Yu, 2022). For instance, a global survey cited by Imbeah and Bujoso (2018) indicates that a majority of tourists consider safety as a key determinant when selecting destinations, sometimes even outweighing cost and destination reputation. Similarly, studies across diverse contexts confirm that safety constitutes an integral component of destination quality, encompassing health safety, environmental conditions, and physical infrastructure integrity (Ryglova et al., 2015; Morshed, 2023). Within Sub-Saharan Africa, tourism performance is influenced by various contextual factors including environmental and health-related safety dynamics, with global events illustrating how safety disruptions in one region can generate wider economic implications for tourism flows (Florido-Benítez, 2024; Yang & Nair, 2013).

Destination choice, defined as the process through which tourists select a preferred destination from a range of alternatives (Mim et al., 2022), is influenced by both internal motivations and external destination attributes. Internal factors include the desire for relaxation, adventure, and social interaction, while external factors relate to destination attractiveness, infrastructure, and perceived safety. Tourist motivation remains a key driver of behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2017), with the push-pull framework widely used to explain how internal desires interact with destination attributes (Cohen & Sherman, 2014).

Kenya's tourism industry has recorded consistent growth in both domestic and international tourist arrivals since 2012 (KNBS, 2023), underscoring its importance to national development. As the capital city of Kenya, Nairobi serves as a major tourism hub and gateway, hosting a wide range of tourism activities including business, conference, and urban tourism.

However, despite this growth trajectory, the competitiveness of Kenya's tourism sector remains closely tied to global perceptions of safety and security, which continue to present a complex and evolving challenge.

Global benchmarking reports such as the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017 and the Travel and Tourism Development Index 2024 indicate that Kenya's performance in safety and security, although improving, remains moderate relative to other destinations. This positioning highlights a critical issue: improvements in actual safety and security measures do not always translate into equally strong positive perceptions among tourists. Scholars argue that tourist decision-making is more strongly influenced by perceived risk rather than objective conditions (Korstanje, 2011; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005), suggesting a persistent gap between reality and perception that may undermine destination competitiveness.

While Kenya has made significant efforts to strengthen its disaster preparedness and health-related safety systems, the tourism sector remains sensitive to environmental and health-related disruptions. Past natural disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic (Kinyua et al., 2022), and environmental challenges including recurrent flooding (Okaka & Odhiambo, 2018) have demonstrated how external shocks can shape destination image and influence travel behavior beyond their immediate impact. Importantly, such events often generate prolonged perception effects that may not accurately reflect current conditions, yet continue to influence tourist choice.

Despite extensive literature on tourism safety, existing studies tend to treat safety constructs and destination choice in isolation, focusing either on risk mitigation, disaster management, or

tourist perception (Kuulis-Bosimin & Chan, 2018; Nsizwazikhona, 2018; Al Haji et al., 2016). Other studies emphasize tourist behavior and motivation in destination choice (Decrop & Kozak, 2014; Hsu et al., 2009), but fail to integrate these perspectives into a unified framework that examines how safety perceptions interact with behavioral characteristics to shape destination decisions. Consequently, there is limited empirical work examining how tourist behavioral characteristics mediate the relationship between tourism safety and destination choice, particularly within urban tourism contexts in developing countries.

In Nairobi, where tourism operates within a dynamic urban environment characterized by diverse environmental and infrastructural risks, understanding this relationship is particularly important. While the city continues to attract a significant number of tourists, there remains inadequate empirical evidence on how safety-related factors influence destination choice and how these factors interact with tourist behavior to shape decision-making processes. Therefore, this study addresses both theoretical and contextual gaps by examining the influence of tourism safety on destination choice and the mediating role of tourist behavioral characteristics in this relationship. Through integrating these dimensions, the study provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding destination competitiveness and offers understandings for enhancing both actual safety conditions and perceived safety in Kenya's tourism sector, particularly in Nairobi County.

Theoretical Framework

Perceived Risk Theory

Perceived Risk Theory, as proposed by Raymond Bauer (1960),

explains that individuals make decisions under uncertainty and tend to avoid choices associated with potential negative outcomes. In tourism, five categories of risks have been identified; natural disasters, health risks, crime political instability, and terrorism. These five risk categories are particularly interesting because they represent risk factors which could lead to a physical injury of tourists and will have a strong influence on tourist decision-making and tourism flows. Rather than objective risks, it is rather the tourist's individual and subjective perception of these risks that mostly influence destination choice.

Perceived risk reduction has been examined in many disciplines such as cognitive psychology, marketing, and sociology (Slevitch & Sharma, 2008). Yet perceived risk theory has not been integrated into the hospitality and tourism literature. While most academics and practitioners agree that tourism and travel thrive only under conditions that provide tourists with maximum safety and protection, few attempts have been made to examine cognitive issues related to risk and safety in destination management. However, tourists' behavioral characteristics, such as risk tolerance and travel experience, influence how risk is perceived and managed.

Consequently, destinations perceived as low-risk are more likely to be selected, while those associated with high risk are often avoided. Thus, perceived risk serves as a key factor linking tourism surety and behavioural characteristics to destination choice. Hence, attempts to integrate perceived risk concepts into destination management are important because perceived risks that potential travellers associate with specific destinations, not actual risks, directly affect their purchasing and purchase intentions. Additionally, tourists select their destinations primarily on the basis of

perceived personal safety, therefore, efforts to understand how perceived risk influence travelers' decision making will help destinations to attract more tourists.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control shape behavioural intentions, which in turn determine actual behaviour. In tourism research, TPB provides a robust framework for explaining how tourist behavioural characteristics guide destination choice, particularly under conditions of perceived safety risk (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005).

Attitudes toward destination safety reflect tourists' beliefs about a location's ability to protect them from harm, directly influencing whether intentions to visit are positive or negative (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011). Subjective norms incorporate social influences such as recommendations from peers, online reviews, travel advisories, and media coverage that validate or discourage travel to a particular destination (Anichiti et al., 2021; Zou & Yu, 2022). Perceived behavioural control captures tourists' perceived ability to manage risks, including access to reliable information, emergency response confidence, and personal coping resources; low perceived control reduces travel intention even when destination attitudes are favourable (Ajzen, 1991; Seabra et al., 2020).

In this study, TPB serves as the core explanatory mechanism for the mediating role of tourist behavioural characteristics. It posits that tourism safety does not influence destination choice directly; rather, safety perceptions are filtered through tourists' attitudinal evaluations, social influences, and perceived control capacities before crystallizing into destination decisions.

Thus, TPB illuminates how foundational safety needs are cognitively and socially translated into concrete destination choices, bridging the gap between environmental conditions and tourist behaviour.

Empirical Review and Hypothesis Development

Tourism Safety and Destination Choice

Destination choice is conceptualized as the process through which tourists evaluate alternatives and select a preferred location (Mim et al., 2022; Morshed, 2023). Empirical evidence consistently identifies safety as a critical external determinant of this decision, with tourists demonstrating high sensitivity to health, environmental, and personal safety risks (Toker & Emir, 2023; Zou & Yu, 2022; Nas, 2024). Health safety has gained particular prominence following the COVID-19 pandemic, with studies showing that perceived health risks and hygiene standards significantly alter travel intentions and destination evaluations (Kinyua et al., 2022; Rasethuntsa, 2022; Alkier et al., 2021). Similarly, environmental safety concerns exemplified by recurrent flooding in Kenya and climate-related disruptions have been shown to negatively affect destination image and tourist confidence (Dube et al., 2024; Ngome & Yeom, 2024; Okaka & Odhiambo, 2018). Personal safety, encompassing protection from accidents and physical harm, further shapes destination attractiveness; tourists routinely avoid locations where they perceive elevated physical risk, regardless of cultural or scenic appeal (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006; Tarlow, 2023).

Recent studies confirm that these safety dimensions collectively function as decisive pull-factor filters, leading tourists to either include or eliminate destinations

from their consideration sets (Anichiti et al., 2021; Fotiadis et al., 2021). Global benchmarking reports such as the Travel and Tourism Development Index 2024 indicate that destinations with stronger safety performance consistently outperform competitors in attracting international arrivals. Scholars further argue that tourist decision-making is more strongly influenced by perceived risk than by objective conditions, suggesting that safety perceptions can override traditional motivational drivers (Korstanje, 2011; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). Despite this evidence, limited research has examined how safety operates within the specific urban context of Nairobi County, where tourism functions within a complex environment of environmental and infrastructural risks. This gap emphasize the need for empirical investigation into whether tourism safety directly influences destination choice in this setting.

H₀₁: Tourism Safety has no effect on destination choice of Nairobi County, Kenya

Tourist Behavioral Characteristics as a Mediator

Tourist behavioral characteristics including motivation, attitudes, beliefs, and information-processing patterns constitute the internal mechanisms through which external destination attributes are interpreted and acted upon (Ajzen, 1991; Murphy, 2013). The push-pull framework posits that internal desires generate travel motivation, while destination attributes determine final selection (Dann, 1977; Anantamongkolkul et al., 2017; Chon, 2014). However, contemporary research acknowledges that these forces do not operate in isolation; rather, behavioral characteristics mediate how safety perceptions are translated into concrete decisions (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Seabra et al., 2020). According to the Theory of

Planned Behaviour, attitudes toward destination safety, subjective norms derived from social networks and digital platforms, and perceived behavioural control jointly shape travel intentions (Ajzen, 1991; Leong, 2011; Pop et al., 2022). Tourists rely on heuristics, past experiences, and word-of-mouth to reduce uncertainty, meaning that identical safety conditions may produce divergent destination choices depending on individual behavioural profiles (Kotler et al., 2017; Litvin et al., 2008).

Empirical studies further indicate that behavioural factors such as risk aversion and motivation strength significantly influence how safety information is weighted during destination evaluation (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006; Prebensen et al., 2013). For instance, tourists with strong internal motivations may persist with travel plans despite moderate safety concerns, whereas risk-averse individuals may abandon identical destinations based on the same safety signals (Zou & Yu, 2022; Nas, 2024). This suggests that tourism safety does not influence destination choice uniformly; instead, its effect is filtered through the mediating lens of tourist behavioural characteristics. Nonetheless, the mediating function of these behavioural characteristics in linking tourism safety to destination choice remains underexplored, particularly within Sub-Saharan urban tourism contexts such as Nairobi County. This study therefore seeks to test whether tourist behavioural characteristics transmit the influence of tourism safety on destination choice.

H₀₂: Tourist Behavioral characteristics have no mediating effect on the relationship between tourism safety and destination choice of Nairobi County, Kenya.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) shows the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. In this study, independent variable was tourism safety. Safety was conceptualized as health safety, personal safety, and environmental safety. The mediating

variable was behavioral characteristics which was conceptualized as motivations, attitudes, values and beliefs. Tourist destination choice was conceptualized as the atmosphere and first contact with the chosen destination which is characterized by decision making process (consideration, relevant set, booking option, visit, and recommendations).

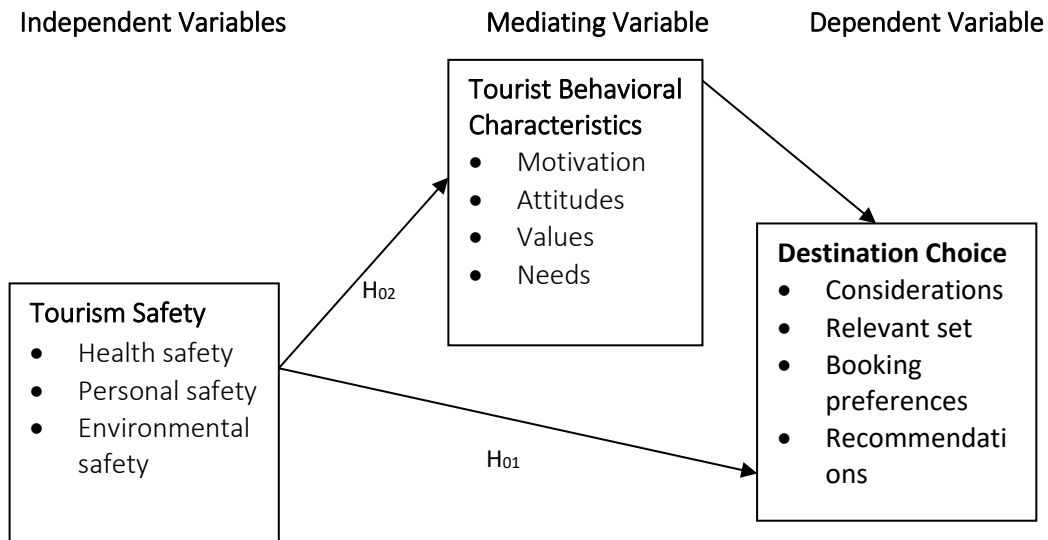


Figure 2: Conceptual framework

Source: Adopted and Modified from Xie et al., 2025; Agarwal, Page, & Mawby, 2021; Polas et al., 2022 & Mim et al., 2022

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Nairobi County, Kenya. As the capital city and primary economic hub, Nairobi serves as the main entry point for international tourists via Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. It features a high concentration of star-rated hotels, tour operators, and diverse tourism products, including business, urban, and wildlife tourism. Nairobi was selected because its well-developed hospitality industry provides an ideal setting for examining tourism safety. Furthermore, its history of urban security challenges offers a realistic context for

assessing how safety measures influence tourist confidence and destination choice. This study is grounded in the pragmatist paradigm and employs a mixed-methods research approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Pragmatism recognizes that knowledge is constructed through experiences and interactions with a complex environment, making it suitable for combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods (Saunders et al., 2023). This dual approach allowed the researcher to simultaneously answer confirmatory questions regarding tourism safety, tourist behavioral characteristics,

and destination choice in Nairobi County (Elgeddawy & Abouraia, 2024).

The study adopted a concurrent explanatory research design, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches within a single phase of data collection (Sidharth, 2023). Greater priority was given to the quantitative component to establish measurable, generalizable relationships through regression analysis, while the qualitative component offered deeper insights into participants' real-world experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The concurrent nature of this design allowed both data types to be collected within the same timeframe, reducing the study duration and ensuring contextual consistency (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Triangulation of the findings facilitated cross-verification of evidence, thereby reducing bias and enhancing the validity and reliability of the results (Saunders et al., 2019).

The target population was 2,279 international and domestic tourists and 53 security managers of the 54 star rated hotels currently operating in Nairobi county, Kenya as per the data from Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA) (Musembi & Ragui, 2021), where one hotel was excluded because it does not have either rooms or beds. Target population for the tourists was obtained using a formula used to estimate the guest population mostly used in social science studies. This is shown below;

Target Population = (Number of beds available (B)) x (occupancy rate (O)) x (numbers of days data were collected (D))/average number of stay per guest (L).

The total bed capacity was 9,116. The average occupancy rate was 25%, while the average length of stay for tourists was 3 days. The researcher considered a period of 30 days for data collection. Therefore, the target population of

tourists during the study period was estimated as follows:

$$B \cdot O \cdot (D/L) = 9116 \cdot .25 \cdot 30 / 3 = 2,279 \text{ respondents.}$$

Information from the Kenya Tourism Police Unit (KTPU) was not directly collected as primary data in this study. However, the study acknowledges the critical role played by the Kenya Tourism Police Unit in enhancing tourism safety within key destinations such as Nairobi County.

Using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula for calculating sample size for proportions, at a 95% confidence level and a precision level (P) of 0.05, the required sample size was computed as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where;
 n = the sample size,
 N = the population size,
 e = the acceptance sampling error
 = $2,279 / 1 + 2,279 \cdot (.05)^2$
 = 340 respondents

From the target population of 2,279 tourists, the researcher used proportionate sampling to select 340 respondents.

Stratified random sampling was used to categorize respondents across hotel star ratings (5-star to 2-star), with each rating serving as a stratum to ensure accurate subgroup representation. Within the hotels, systematic random sampling was deployed to select the 340 tourists based on their assigned room numbers. Purposive sampling was used to select the managers in charge of safety and security. A 20% sample of the 53 managers was targeted, resulting in a sample size of 11 security managers across the strata.

Primary quantitative data was gathered from tourists using structured, closed-ended questionnaires. The items were designed on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 5= strongly agree to 1=

strongly disagree) to capture precise behavioral and perception data, minimize information bias, and facilitate statistical analysis.

Qualitative data was gathered from the 11 hotel security managers using semi-structured interview schedules. This format allowed for a fluid conversation while ensuring responses could be systematically compared across the different hotel categories.

A pilot study was conducted in Eldoret, Uasin Gishu County, chosen for its comparable urban tourism profiles and mix of 4-star, 3-star, and 2-star hotels. Selecting a separate but similar location prevented respondent contamination in the main Nairobi study area. The pilot involved 40 tourists and 5 hotel managers, representing approximately 10% of the active sample size, which is methodologically sufficient for testing instrument clarity and logistical constraints (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Face validity (language clarity and presentation) was checked during the pilot study. Content validity was established through expert judgment, seeking technical reviews from a panel of senior lecturers at the School of Tourism, Hospitality and Events Management (STHEM), Moi University, to ensure the instruments comprehensively mapped onto the study objectives. Construct validity was established quantitatively using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). EFA examined the underlying factor structure of the quantitative items to confirm that variables loaded appropriately onto their respective constructs (Field, 2009).

The internal consistency and scale reliability of the quantitative instruments were assessed using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha. In alignment with social science conventions, a Cronbach's alpha threshold of ≥ 0.7 was established as the benchmark for satisfactory internal

consistency (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). Reliability analysis yielded coefficients above the 0.7 threshold for all sub-scales (Tourism Safety, Behavioral Characteristics, and Destination Choice), confirming that the items were free from random error or contextual ambiguity and structurally sound for multivariate modeling.

Quantitative data were analyzed via SPSS using descriptive statistics, multiple linear regression (for direct pathways), and the Hayes PROCESS Macro (Model 4) for parallel mediation analysis. Multiple linear regression was deployed to test Hypotheses H₀₁ and H₀₂ by estimating the collective and individual predictive power of the independent variables on destination choice. This model determines the coefficient of determination (R²) to assess overall explanatory variance, alongside standardized beta coefficients (β) to establish the relative weight and directional influence of each predictor at a significance threshold of $p < 0.05$.

The direct relationships were modeled as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + e \dots\dots\dots \text{Model 1}$$

Mediation Regression Model

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 M + e \dots\dots\dots \text{Model 2}$$

Where:

Y: Tourist destination choice

X₁: Tourism Safety

M: Tourist Behavioral Characteristics (Mediator)

β_0 : Constant

$\beta_1 - \beta_2$: Regression coefficients

e: Error term

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics for Tourism Safety, Tourist Behavioral Characteristics and Destination Choice

Descriptive statistics, specifically overall mean scores and standard deviations, were computed to assess the

distribution and central tendency of respondent agreements regarding the primary constructs. Interpretation of the mean scores was based on a 5-point Likert scale, where higher mean values signify

stronger agreement. The summary statistics for the independent, mediating, and dependent variables are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

| Study Variable | Number of Items | Overall Mean | Std. Dev. |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------|
| Tourism Safety | 20 | 4.48 | 0.60 |
| Tourist Behavioral Characteristics | 21 | 4.34 | 0.51 |
| Destination Choice | 9 | 3.68 | 0.87 |

Source: Data Analysis (2025)

The findings in Table 1 indicate that respondents highly valued tourism safety in selecting destinations within Nairobi County, as reflected in the highest overall mean score of 4.48 (SD = 0.60). Interviews revealed that safety in Nairobi is generally considered moderate to good, with improvements noted in key tourist areas.

Manager 1 reported, *“Tourism safety in Nairobi County can be rated as moderate and improving. While the county faces security challenges, significant efforts by security agencies and stakeholders, including increased police patrols, surveillance systems, private security involvement, and collaboration with tourism stakeholders, have enhanced safety for visitors, particularly in major hotels and parks.”*

Manager 4 rated Nairobi 5 out of 10, stating, *“On a scale of 1–10, Nairobi can be rated a 5 due to issues such as smuggling, especially in the Central Business District, and high population density in smaller estates.”*

The interviews further identified common safety concerns reported by tourists.

Managers 1, 3, 4, and 5 noted, Petty crimes, such as pickpocketing, bag snatching, phone theft, and occasional harassment by street vendors, particularly in crowded areas, are frequently encountered. They also highlighted Taxi-

related scams and fraud, including fake tour operators, overpriced fares, and counterfeit currency exchanges, were also noted as recurring issues.

More serious crimes, such as carjacking, armed robbery, and kidnapping, were reported by Managers 2, 5, 6, and 7, with isolated terrorism threats noted by Managers 5 and 7.

Overall, these findings suggest that while Nairobi offers relatively safe experiences in designated tourist areas, visitors remain exposed to minor and occasional major risks, highlighting the need for preventive measures and guidance.

Tourist behavioral characteristics also recorded a high mean score of 4.34 (SD = 0.51), suggesting that motivational, attitudinal, and value-related factors strongly influenced tourists' decisions. Managers consistently reported that tourists make decisions based on convenience, accessibility, urban-wildlife interactions, and cultural experiences.

Manager 1 stated, *“Tourists choose Nairobi County because it offers a unique combination of urban life and natural attractions.”*

Manager 7 emphasized, *“Tourists visit Nairobi because of its rich cultural diversity, wildlife and conservation efforts, and accessible education resources and infrastructure.”* Managers also noted that tourists respond to perceived safety and

security cues. Manager 6 explained, “Tourists are sensitive to security; favorable conditions and good safety measures increase their likelihood of visiting.” Managers 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8 emphasized that visible safety measures, credible information, and proactive security enforcement influence tourists’ decisions and behavior in Nairobi.

Destination choice recorded a comparatively lower mean of 3.68 (SD = 0.87), indicating moderate influence of recommendation-based destination selection factors. Manager interviews revealed that tourists are attracted by a combination of urban and natural experiences.

Manager 1 said, “Tourists choose Nairobi County because it offers a unique combination of urban life and natural attractions. Nairobi National Park allows visitors to experience wildlife within a capital city. The city is a major transport and business hub with good hotels, conference facilities, shopping malls, museums, and cultural sites. Nairobi also

acts as a gateway to other tourist destinations in Kenya, enhancing convenience for travelers. Its cultural diversity, entertainment options, and accessibility further strengthen its appeal to tourists.”

Manager 8 highlighted, “Nairobi County has unique attractions, organized and trustworthy tour operators, travel agencies, and a strong hotel and hospitality industry. The city’s security measures reassure visitors and mitigate concerns about safety.”

Interviews also revealed the influence of travel advisories. Managers 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8 noted, travel advisories often result in reduced tourist arrivals, lower hotel occupancy, and decreased revenue, and they can negatively impact the city’s image and investor confidence.

Reliability Analysis

The study used Cronbach’s alpha to assess the internal consistency of the study variables, and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability Results

| Variable | Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items | Comment |
|----------------------------|------------------|------------|----------|
| Tourist destination choice | .849 | 9 | Reliable |
| Tourism safety | .911 | 20 | Reliable |
| Behavioral characteristics | .893 | 21 | Reliable |
| Overall | .955 | 50 | Reliable |

Source: Data Analysis (2025)

Table 2 indicates that all study variables attained high Cronbach’s alpha coefficients, including tourist destination choice (0.849), tourism safety (0.911), and behavioral characteristics (0.893). The overall reliability coefficient for the 50 statements was 0.955, indicating excellent internal consistency; since all coefficients exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Królikowska et al., 2023), the instrument was considered reliable and suitable for data analysis.

Validity for the Constructs

The instrument was refined through supervisor review, then tested using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity to confirm suitability for factor analysis. The results show strong sampling adequacy across all variables, with tourism safety recording the highest KMO value (0.918), followed by behavioral characteristics (0.879) and destination choice (0.849). All Bartlett’s tests were significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming sufficient inter-item

correlations for factor extraction. The results indicate that all constructs were

valid and suitable for further statistical analysis.

Table 3: Factor Analysis for Study’s Variables

| Variable | N of Items | KMO Measure | Bartlett’s Test (Sig.) | | | Decision |
|---|------------|-------------|------------------------|-----|------|----------|
| | | | Chi-Square | df | Sig. | |
| Tourist destination choice | 9 | .849 | 1072.699 | 36 | .000 | Retain |
| Tourism safety Behavioral characteristics | 20 | .918 | 3916.886 | 190 | .000 | Retain |
| | 21 | .879 | 2844.146 | 210 | .000 | Retain |

Source: Data Analysis (2025)

Hypothesis Testing

Effect of Tourism Safety on Destination Choice

To assess the empirical validity of the research objective, multiple linear regression analysis was executed to determine the predictive capacity of the independent variable on the dependent construct. The null hypothesis H_{01} posited

that there is no statistically significant effect of tourism safety on the destination choice of tourists within Nairobi County, Kenya. The derived unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients, alongside their associated significance values, standard errors, confidence intervals, and collinearity diagnostics, are structured and presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | 95.0% Confidence Interval for B | | Zero Order Correlations | | Collinearity Statistics | | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|------|------|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|---------|-------------------------|------|-------|
| | B | Std. Error | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | Partial | Partial | Tolerance | VIF | |
| 1 (Constant) | .772 | .282 | | 2.73 | .007 | .216 | 1.328 | | | | | |
| Tourism Safety | .497 | .052 | .465 | 9.48 | .000 | .394 | .600 | .483 | .482 | .463 | .994 | 1.006 |

a. Dependent Variable: Destination Choice
Source: Data Analysis (2025)

The findings indicate that tourism safety has a positive and statistically significant effect on destination choice ($B = 0.497, \beta = 0.465, t = 9.48, p < 0.001$). This implies that a one-unit improvement in tourism safety increases destination choice by 0.497 units in Nairobi County.

Since the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that tourism safety significantly influences tourists’ destination choice. The findings agree with previous studies that identify safety as a major determinant of destination selection (Pizam, 1999;

Mansfield & Pizam, 2006; Karl, Birgit & Ritchie, 2020). Similarly, Xie et al. (2025) noted that tourists evaluate safety across physical, psychological, and environmental dimensions when selecting destinations.

Qualitative findings supported these results, as respondents emphasized visible health measures, safe infrastructure, and emergency preparedness as major factors influencing travel decisions. The findings also support Perceived Risk Theory, which explains that tourists make travel decisions based on perceived levels of risk (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Fuchs & Reichel, 2011). Destinations perceived as unsafe are likely to be avoided, while destinations with

visible safety measures are more likely to attract tourists.

Mediating Effect of Behavioral Characteristics on Tourism Safety and Destination Choice

The study examined whether behavioral characteristics (motivation, attitude, values, and needs) mediate the relationship between tourism safety and destination choice in Nairobi County, Kenya. The hypothesis H₀₂ tested stated that behavioral characteristics have no significant mediating effect on this relationship. PROCESS Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrap samples was used to estimate direct, indirect, and total effects.

Table 5: Specific Indirect Effects (Mediators)

| Mediator | Effect (β) | Boot SE | 95% CI Lower | 95% CI Upper | Significance |
|------------|--------------------|---------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Motivation | 0.0001 | 0.0053 | -0.0112 | 0.0117 | Not Significant |
| Attitude | -0.0013 | 0.0047 | -0.0116 | 0.0080 | Not Significant |
| Values | 0.0006 | 0.0042 | -0.0056 | 0.0118 | Not Significant |
| Needs | 0.0040 | 0.0076 | -0.0099 | 0.0223 | Not Significant |

Source: Data Analysis (2025)

The results show that tourism safety has a strong and significant total effect on destination choice ($\beta = 0.5159$, $p < 0.001$). The direct effect remains significant after inclusion of behavioral characteristics ($\beta = 0.5126$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that tourism safety independently drives destination choice decisions. The total indirect effect ($\beta = 0.0033$) is not significant, and its confidence interval includes zero (-0.0145 to 0.0252), indicating that behavioral characteristics do not mediate the relationship between tourism safety and destination choice. Similarly, all specific indirect paths through motivation, attitude, values, and needs are statistically insignificant, confirming the absence of mediation effects. These findings indicate that tourists in Nairobi County rely

primarily on direct assessments of safety when selecting destinations, rather than processing safety perceptions through motivational or attitudinal mechanisms.

Qualitative responses reinforce this pattern, with participants consistently prioritizing visible safety indicators such as security presence, emergency readiness, and low perceived risk. Many respondents reported avoiding destinations perceived as unsafe, even when such destinations offered strong attraction or leisure value. The results align with Perceived Risk Theory, which argues that individuals base decisions on subjective risk evaluation rather than objective destination attributes (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Fuchs & Reichel, 2011). In this context, safety perceptions function as immediate decision filters, reducing the influence of

internal cognitive factors such as attitudes and motivations. The findings also indicate limited explanatory power of the Theory of Planned Behavior in high-risk tourism contexts. While the theory suggests that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control shape intentions (Ajzen, 1991), the results show that safety concerns override these pathways. Tourists appear to bypass evaluative cognitive processes when safety risk is salient, relying instead on direct risk appraisal. Similar patterns have been observed in studies of risk-based decision-making, where individuals simplify judgments under uncertainty (Slovic, 2000; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).

Conclusion

The study established that tourism safety strongly shapes destination choice in Nairobi County, Kenya. Respondents rated tourism safety highly, indicating that crime prevention, health protection, emergency readiness, and environmental safety significantly guide travel decisions. Interview findings confirmed that tourists prioritize destinations where safety risks remain low and visible safety measures are present, particularly in key tourist zones.

Tourist behavioral characteristics also recorded high ratings, showing that motivation, attitudes, values, and needs influence travel decisions through factors such as convenience, accessibility, urban-wildlife experiences, cultural attractions, and hospitality services. However, these characteristics do not operate independently in determining destination choice when safety concerns are present.

Destination choice recorded a moderate mean score, indicating that tourists rely on a combination of safety conditions and destination attributes such as attractions, infrastructure, and accessibility when selecting Nairobi as a travel destination. Interview responses

further confirmed that Nairobi's attractiveness stems from its unique blend of wildlife, urban facilities, cultural diversity, and strategic location as a regional tourism hub.

Regression analysis confirmed a significant positive relationship between tourism safety and destination choice, indicating that improved safety conditions increase the likelihood of selecting Nairobi as a destination. Mediation analysis further revealed that behavioral characteristics do not significantly mediate this relationship, showing that tourists respond directly to safety conditions rather than processing them through motivational or attitudinal pathways.

Recommendations

Implications to Practice

The strong influence of safety on destination choice suggests that tourism operators, hotels, and authorities should prioritize the implementation and communication of safety measures. Visible security practices such as regular police patrols, surveillance systems, and emergency response mechanisms not only reduce actual risks but also enhance tourists' perceived safety, thereby increasing their likelihood to visit and engage in tourism activities.

Theoretical Implications

The study strongly supports Perceived Risk Theory, demonstrating that tourists' decisions are largely influenced by their subjective assessment of risk rather than objective conditions alone. The significant direct effect of tourism safety and security on destination choice indicates that when a destination is perceived as safe, tourists are more likely to choose it. Conversely, perceived risk can deter travel even when actual conditions are adequate. This highlights

the importance of managing both real safety conditions and how they are communicated to tourists.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides the behavioral mechanism linking these perceptions to actual decisions. The findings suggest that tourists' intentions to visit Nairobi are shaped by their attitudes toward safety and security, subjective norms such as information from peers or media, and perceived behavioral control, including their ability to manage risks. However, the weak mediating role of internal psychological factors indicates that in safety-sensitive contexts, external factors (actual and perceived safety) may override internal attitudes, suggesting a contextual limitation of TPB.

Policy Recommendations

1. Tourism authorities should enhance safety in key tourist areas through increased police patrols, tourist police units, surveillance systems, and effective emergency response mechanisms. These measures directly improve perceived safety and support destination choice.
2. Investment in roads, transport systems, lighting, signage, and access routes to major attractions should be prioritized to reduce risk exposure and improve ease of movement for tourists.
3. Tourism institutions should provide accurate and timely safety information through official platforms, hotels, and tour operators to reduce uncertainty and support informed destination decisions.
4. Targeted communication should promote safe tourism zones and positive visitor experiences to strengthen Nairobi's image and enhance tourist confidence.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study shows that tourism safety is a direct and dominant determinant of destination choice in Nairobi County, while behavioral characteristics (motivation, attitudes, values, and needs) do not significantly mediate this relationship.

It strengthens Perceived Risk Theory by confirming that tourists rely heavily on safety perceptions when selecting destinations. It also shows that safety can override motivational and attitudinal factors in destination decision-making, refining the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior in tourism contexts.

Overall, the study establishes tourism safety as the primary driver of destination choice, with behavioral characteristics playing a limited explanatory role.

Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies should replicate this research in other counties to improve generalizability. Additional research should test other mediators such as destination image and perceived risk, and apply longitudinal or mixed-method designs to capture changes in tourist behavior.

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