

The Influence of Scenic Beauty Investment on Competitive Advantage in Kenya's Adventure Tourism Sector

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Abstract

Despite Kenya's exceptional natural assets, the strategic role of scenic beauty investment in creating sustained competitive advantage within adventure tourism has not been adequately examined. Consequently, the extent to which scenic resources function as strategic assets capable of driving destination competitiveness has received limited empirical attention. This study examined the impact of scenic beauty investment on competitive advantage within Kenya's adventure tourism sector, utilizing a theoretical framework that integrated the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Expectation Disconfirmation Theory (EDT). The research sought to determine whether natural aesthetics functioned merely as a baseline requirement or as a strategic resource capable of driving long-term differentiation. Employing a convergent mixed-methods research design, primary data were gathered from 400 active hikers across Kenya's primary trail regions in Greater Nairobi and the Central Highlands. These quantitative data were complemented by qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews conducted with twelve key stakeholders, including trail operators and tourism officials. Quantitative analysis via Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) indicated that scenic beauty was a statistically significant and substantively strong predictor of competitive advantage ($\beta = 0.522$, $p < .001$), with the final structural model explaining 53.1% of the variance. Qualitative findings further highlighted that while Kenya's scenic resources were a primary competitive asset, fragmented governance and inconsistent service standards hindered the sector's full potential. The study concluded that scenic beauty functioned as a "strategic resource" that necessitated active management. The study recommended institutionalizing structured scenic resource management frameworks, including national trail grading systems and policies aimed at protecting visual capital as a strategic tourism asset.

Keywords: *Adventure tourism, scenic beauty, competitive advantage, hiking trails, Kenya*

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1. Introduction

Beyond its social impact, the tourism industry serves as a fundamental pillar of global GDP growth and workforce development (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2025). Hiking has solidified its position as a central pillar of the adventure tourism market. Current demand is driven by a shift toward nature-based engagement, where travellers seek a deliberate equilibrium between intense physical challenge and psychological or spiritual recovery (Zhou et al., 2023). No longer categorized as a simple recreational pastime, hiking now functions as a vital catalyst for regional development, triggering extensive economic multipliers via

localized visitor spending (Lukoseviciute et al., 2023). Sustaining market relevance in this sector depends on a destination's capacity to curate superior user experiences. The professionalization of the sector demands that trail management move beyond ad hoc, reactive maintenance in favor of formalized, integrated investment frameworks. Adopting such models is a prerequisite for stabilizing visitor retention rates and expanding organic market presence through high-impact referral networks (Ng, 2024).

Scenic beauty is widely recognized as a primary determinant of a destination's market appeal. The inherent environmental attributes, from topographic complexity to wildlife density, shape the hiker's perception of quality and determine the degree of emotional attachment hikers develop and their subsequent likelihood of returning. Research by Kahangirwe et al. (2025) in Uganda's Kalinzu Central Forest Reserve highlighted that natural features are primary determinants of visitor satisfaction. Kenya's geographic endowment provides the structural foundation for its adventure tourism sector. The combination of afro-alpine moorlands, volcanic craters, and montane forests forms a specialized natural portfolio. The inherent inimitability of these landscapes creates a high-barrier competitive asset, offering a level of topographic scarcity that is nearly impossible for regional rivals to replicate.

Despite this world-class natural wealth, the infrastructure on the ground has often failed to keep pace. Issues such as neglected trail maintenance, littering, and a lack of designated viewpoints have begun to actively devalue these assets. This has resulted in a critical disconnect where the polished digital image of Kenya, often curated on social media, fails to match the physical reality of the trail. Such a discrepancy triggers "negative disconfirmation," a psychological state that erodes visitor loyalty and weakens the country's long-term competitive standing (Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, 2022; Kenya Tourism Board, 2024).

Global research suggests that strategic management, not just the presence of natural assets, is the primary determinant of a destination's success (Woyo & Slabbert, 2021). Rwanda provides a clear example of this. By combining strict environmental conservation with a well-developed trail network, the country has positioned itself in the premium tourism market (Durydiwka et al., 2023). However, there is still limited empirical research examining scenic beauty as a strategic investment variable, particularly in developing tourism economies such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa. This study therefore examined how investment in the aesthetic and experiential quality of trails contributes to competitive advantage in Kenya's adventure tourism sector. It also aimed to provide practical guidance for managing these resources and improving coordination between the public and private sectors.

1.1 Problem Statement

The tourism industry has long served as a major driver of the global economy, with hiking playing an important role in supporting regional development. However, Kenya's adventure tourism sector faced a significant challenge: resources allocated to trail development were not consistently directed toward areas of highest impact. Although scenic beauty is widely recognised as a primary factor influencing destination choice, there was limited investment in the preservation and enhancement of the visual and ecological quality of hiking trails. This imbalance disproportionately affected the broader hiking market, as funding tended to prioritise high-altitude, technically demanding routes rather than visually immersive trails that attract a wider segment of visitors. This misalignment posed a strategic concern, as destination competitiveness depends on the ability to deliver experiences aligned with visitor expectations.

Empirical evidence on this imbalance remains limited; however, sector reports (Tourism Research Institute, 2025) indicate uneven allocation of tourism development funds, with a disproportionate focus on flagship attractions at the expense of wider scenic trail systems.

The effects of this imbalance were evident across the Kenyan hiking circuit, where many trails lacked basic viewpoint infrastructure and experienced inadequate environmental management, including unmanaged littering. This contributed to a disconnect between the curated digital image of Kenya as a pristine nature destination and the actual on-site visitor experience. If unaddressed, such inconsistencies risk undermining visitor satisfaction, reducing repeat visitation, and weakening the country's competitive positioning. In this context, Kenya faced increasing pressure from regional competitors that more effectively integrate natural assets into well-managed tourism products.

Despite the established relationship between scenic attractiveness and visitor satisfaction, limited empirical research has examined the direct link between scenic beauty investment and competitive advantage within the Kenyan context. This study addressed this gap by analysing how investment in the visual and ecological integrity of hiking trails influenced competitive outcomes. The findings provide an evidence-based foundation to inform investment prioritisation and strategic management of scenic resources within Kenya's adventure tourism sector.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to evaluate how investment in scenic beauty influences competitive advantage in Kenya's adventure tourism sector.

The corresponding null hypothesis tested was:

H₀: There is no statistically significant relationship between investment in scenic beauty and competitive advantage in Kenya's adventure tourism sector.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

This research integrated the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Expectation Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) to establish a dual-level analysis of destination competitiveness. This synthesis provided the conceptual foundation for evaluating the strategic significance of scenic assets and their capacity to drive destination differentiation through the visitor experience.

2.1.1 Resource-Based View

The RBV suggests that a firm's success depends on its ability to leverage unique, inimitable resources (Penrose, 1959; Wernerfelt, 1984). Modern applications of the VRIO framework confirm its continued relevance in explaining how specific organizations maintain a market lead (Barney & Hesterly, 2020). For the adventure tourism sector, where the "product" is inseparable from the landscape, the RBV offers a rigorous rationale for treating scenic beauty as a strategic rather than merely a decorative asset.

Within the RBV framework, scenic beauty functions as both an inimitable and non-substitutable strategic asset. While regional competitors may replicate physical trail infrastructure, the idiosyncratic topographical variations, Afro-alpine moorlands, and unique volcanic landscapes of the Kenyan hiking circuit remain fundamentally irreproducible. This inherent distinctiveness satisfies the "rarity" and "inimitability" criteria of the VRIN/VRIO model. Furthermore, proactive management comprising preservation, infrastructure enhancement, and aesthetic curation transforms these natural endowments into a "planned

resource" capable of sustaining long-term competitive advantage (Chin et al., 2025). Consequently, the stewardship of scenic assets transcends traditional conservation; it becomes a strategic imperative for destination differentiation.

However, critics of the RBV argue that it tends to underemphasize external environmental dynamics and market conditions, which are particularly relevant in tourism contexts characterized by fluctuating demand and environmental vulnerability.

2.1.2 Expectation Disconfirmation Theory

Originally conceptualized by Oliver (1977, 1980), Expectation Disconfirmation Theory contends that visitor satisfaction is a function of the cognitive comparison between pre-consumption expectations and post-consumption perceptions of performance. Positive disconfirmation occurs when the perceived experience exceeds initial expectations, fostering high satisfaction, repeat visitation, and advocacy. Conversely, negative disconfirmation, where performance fails to meet anticipated standards, results in dissatisfaction and brand erosion (Yuwono et al., 2024).

In the context of Kenya's hiking sector, EDT provided a critical framework for evaluating the impact of scenic beauty investment. Hikers' expectations are primarily shaped by Kenya's global reputation, digital media portrayals, and the commercialization of its natural landscapes. Consequently, scenic beauty becomes a high-stakes variable; elevated expectations increase the risk of dissatisfaction should hikers encounter environmental degradation or unmanaged aesthetic quality. Strategic investment in scenic assets, encompassing the preservation of ecological integrity and the development of structured viewpoints, directly determines whether the hiking experience validates or invalidates these prior expectations. By ensuring that the physical reality meets or surpasses the "digital promise," Kenya can secure the positive disconfirmation necessary to drive long-term loyalty and competitive positioning (Orden-Mejia et al., 2025; Schiebler, Lee, & Brodbeck, 2024).

Despite its explanatory strength, EDT has been critiqued for its emphasis on cognitive evaluation processes, potentially overlooking the emotional and experiential dimensions that are central to nature-based tourism experiences.

The integration of the RBV and EDT created a dual-level framework for understanding destination competitiveness. While the RBV focused on the supply side by identifying Kenya's unique landscapes as "inimitable resources," EDT addressed the demand side by explaining the psychological process through which hikers evaluated those resources. In this study, the two theories interacted: RBV provided the strategic rationale for investing in the preservation of scenic assets, while EDT determined whether these investments successfully translated into visitor satisfaction and market differentiation. By bridging these frameworks, the research demonstrated that a competitive advantage was not merely inherited from natural beauty but was earned through management that consistently met or exceeded hiker expectations.

2.2 Empirical Review

Landscape aesthetics, often defined as scenic beauty, act as a powerful pull factor that determines where hikers choose to go and how a destination is positioned in the market. As the global demand for immersive nature-based tourism grows, the value of these environmental assets has shifted from being a minor "extra" to a core part of what visitors actually pay for. For instance, research by Kahangirwe, Vanclay, and Arts (2025) in Uganda's Kalinzu Central Forest Reserve demonstrated that biophysical features, such as primary forests and riverside

views, were the primary drivers of visitor satisfaction. Their findings suggest that these natural elements are the actual foundation of the experience in protected areas.

This focus on aesthetic quality is further supported by Zhu, Davis, and Carr (2021), who found that landscape preferences carry significant weight in travel decisions and how a destination is perceived. Their work showed clear improvements in the visitor experience when management intervened to preserve "view corridors" and restore natural ecological features. Similarly, Noor and Sharma (2024) linked service quality to the regulation of environmental conditions, suggesting that managing the natural setting is required to meet visitor expectations. This reinforces the principles of EDT, where the strategic care of visual and ecological integrity acts as the main trigger for a positive visitor experience.

Within the African context, Rwanda's use of its volcanic landscapes provides a strong example of resource-based competitiveness. Durydiwka, Zajadacz, and Duda-Gromada (2023) illustrated how Rwanda leveraged its unique geological and biological assets to secure a premium spot in the global ecotourism market. Their analysis revealed that when well-maintained trails meet active conservation, a destination can successfully attract higher-spending visitors. In a similar vein, Boatbil, Yorose, and Yiran (2024) highlighted the role of community-led environmental care in Ghana, finding that local conservation efforts made nature-based sites both more attractive and more resilient in the market.

In Kenya, while the country's scenic appeal offers immense potential, there are significant gaps in how these assets are managed. Richard (2024) examined sustainable tourism in Kenya's coastal regions and noted that while "green" projects help economic growth, they often struggled due to poor infrastructure and a lack of local expertise in sustainable practices. This suggests a barrier to turning natural beauty into a truly competitive product. Furthering this, Huang et al. (2024) argued that effective environmental oversight depends on targeted spending on trail design and visual improvements that highlight a site's unique scenic features. The evidence reveals a striking paradox: despite its world-class scenic beauty, Kenya's hiking sector is held back by a disconnect between its raw natural wealth and the way its trails are managed.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that while scenic beauty is consistently linked to visitor satisfaction, translating these natural assets into sustained competitive advantage depends on structured management interventions, thereby justifying the present study.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework is built on the structural relationship between Scenic Beauty Investment as the independent variable and Competitive Advantage as the primary dependent variable. The independent variable, Scenic Beauty Investment, was operationalized through three critical dimensions that collectively represent the aesthetic and ecological value of the hiking destination. First, Natural Views captured the visual allure and inherent attractiveness of primary biophysical attributes, such as montane forests, riparian features, and volcanic ecosystems. This was complemented by Environmental Care, which refers to the systematic maintenance of ecological integrity through litter-free trails, the preservation of natural rectitude, and the strategic adequacy of curated viewpoints. Finally, the construct incorporated Biodiversity, representing the perceived richness and variety of endemic flora and fauna encountered by hikers along the Kenyan circuit. Together, these dimensions provided a comprehensive measure of how landscape management serves as a precursor to competitive advantage.

Competitive Advantage was evaluated as a multidimensional construct comprising hiker satisfaction, revisit intention, trail uniqueness, and overall value perceptions (Yuwono et al., 2024; Noor & Sharma, 2024).

Theoretically, the framework was anchored in the Resource-Based View, which characterizes scenic beauty as an inimitable and non-substitutable strategic asset, and Expectation Disconfirmation Theory, which elucidates the psychological mechanism through which landscape investments translate into visitor satisfaction and market differentiation. This integrated model provided the framework for the study’s instrumentation, the structural analysis of path relationships, and the subsequent triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings.

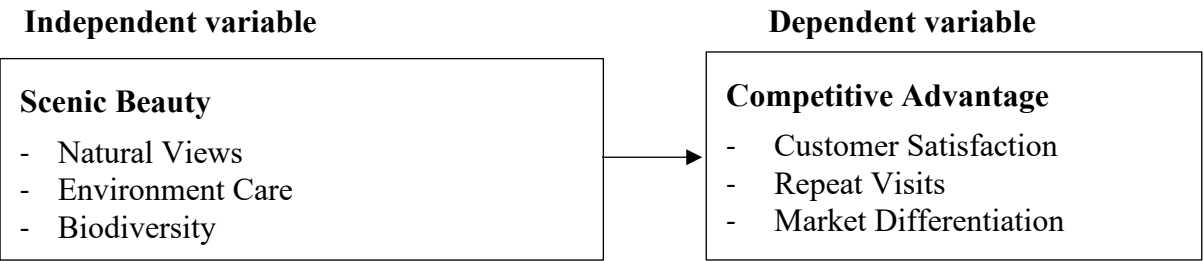


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

This study adopted a pragmatist philosophical paradigm, utilizing a convergent mixed-methods design to integrate quantitative and qualitative datasets. This approach facilitated a holistic understanding of the research problem, ensuring that the findings were both empirically rigorous and practically applicable (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Within the quantitative component, a cross-sectional explanatory design was employed to examine the influence of scenic beauty investment on competitive advantage. The hypothesised relationship was evaluated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). This non-experimental design enabled the investigation of relationships among the study variables within their natural setting, thereby enhancing the ecological validity of the findings.

To facilitate the quantitative analysis, a structured questionnaire was deployed via Google Forms, targeting a sample of 400 active hikers across the Greater Nairobi and Central Highlands circuits. The study identified a target population of 205,499 individuals, derived from a synthesis of data from 25 regional stations and industry reports by the Travel and Trade Association (2022) and the Tourism Research Institute (2025). To determine the requisite sample size for this population, the Yamane (1967) formula was applied. Although the statistical parameters suggested a baseline of 400 respondents, the study utilized a convenience sampling approach facilitated through registered adventure companies. This non-probability technique was selected to ensure access to participants who were both reachable and demonstrably active within the Kenyan hiking circuit, aligning with the practical and logistical constraints inherent in high-altitude research (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). However, this sampling approach introduces potential selection bias and limits the external validity of the findings, although it remains appropriate for exploratory and context-specific analysis.

The survey instrument operationalized "scenic beauty investment" through a four-item construct measured on a five-point Likert scale. These items evaluated multidimensional aesthetic and operational attributes, including the visual allure of the natural landscape, the maintenance of trail integrity and litter-free conditions, the adequacy of designated viewpoints,

and the fulfillment of pre-visit scenic expectations. A pilot study was conducted with a subsample of hikers to test the research instrument. Preliminary reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.779 for the scenic beauty investment construct, confirming the instrument was ready for full-scale data collection.

To complement the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of twelve key informants, including policymakers, conservation officers, senior tour operators, and community leaders. This strategy was used to ensure the inclusion of stakeholders with specialized expertise and decision-making authority within Kenya's adventure tourism sector. Data collection was facilitated through a combination of in-person and video conferencing, with all sessions audio-recorded following explicit participant consent. These recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim to maintain the integrity of the respondents' insights. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review structures, and all participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

Qualitative data were analyzed using the thematic analysis framework established by Braun and Clarke (2021). This process involved generating initial codes and developing thematic categories to characterize the strategic management of scenic assets. Quantitative data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM 4.0), supported by descriptive statistics. PLS-SEM was selected because it is suitable for complex models and effective for prediction-oriented research. The dependent variable, competitive advantage, was measured as a multidimensional construct encompassing hiker satisfaction, revisit intention, trail uniqueness, and overall value perception.

To ensure statistical validity, the data were subjected to a two-stage assessment within the PLS-SEM framework. First, the measurement model was evaluated to confirm the reliability and validity of the constructs. Second, the structural model was estimated to test the hypothesized relationships and the predictive power of the research framework. Data normality was assessed via skewness and kurtosis statistics, with all constructs falling within the acceptable range of ± 2 . In addition to normality checks, the study verified that the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) stayed within conservative thresholds, ensuring the absence of multicollinearity among the predictors. Finally, the two data components were integrated at the interpretative level, allowing for the triangulation of findings. This mixed-methods synthesis provided an evidence-based understanding of the link between scenic beauty investment and destination competitiveness in the Kenyan hiking circuit.

4. Findings

4.1 Descriptive Analysis of Scenic Beauty Investment

The construct of Scenic Beauty Investment was evaluated through three dimensions: Natural Views, Environmental Care, and Biodiversity. These were measured using a four-item scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The arithmetic means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Scenic Beauty Investment

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
The trails offer visually stunning and memorable natural scenery	3.68	1.40
The trails are well-maintained and free from litter	3.19	1.18
There are adequate viewpoints or clearings to appreciate the scenery	3.45	1.17
The overall scenic beauty of the trails met my expectations	3.75	1.15
Construct Mean Score	3.52	0.94

The aggregate (construct-level) mean score for Scenic Beauty Investment was 3.52, indicating a moderate but not optimal perception of scenic investment quality. At the item level, the highest-rated attribute was the overall scenic beauty meeting expectations ($M = 3.75$), followed by the presence of memorable natural scenery ($M = 3.68$). The sufficiency of vantage points recorded a mean of 3.45. Environmental Care, specifically trail maintenance and litter-free conditions, received the lowest valuation ($M = 3.19$).

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment (Reliability and Validity)

In line with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) requirements (Hair et al., 2022), the measurement model was evaluated prior to structural analysis to ensure the reliability and validity of all constructs. The assessment focused on internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Reliability and Validity Analysis

Following the main data collection ($N = 400$), the final reliability analysis for the Scenic Beauty Investment construct indicated acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.766 and a Composite Reliability (CR) of 0.850. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was 0.588, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50 and thereby confirming convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Although the Cronbach's alpha was moderate, the Composite Reliability surpassed the recommended 0.70 threshold, confirming construct reliability in line with established PLS-SEM guidelines (Hair et al., 2022).

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT). The results indicated that each construct was empirically distinct, as the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations with other constructs, and all HTMT values fell below the conservative threshold of 0.85. These findings confirmed that the constructs measured conceptually distinct phenomena and that multicollinearity was not a concern at the measurement level.

Summary of Measurement Model

Overall, the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity across all constructs. Both the independent variable (Scenic Beauty Investment) and the dependent variable (Competitive Advantage) met the required thresholds for internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Having confirmed the adequacy of the measurement model, the study proceeded to evaluate the structural relationships between constructs.

4.3 Structural Model Analysis (Hypothesis Testing)

To evaluate the predictive power of the framework, the study tested the following null hypothesis:

H03: Investment in scenic beauty does not significantly influence the competitive advantage of hiking destinations in Kenya.

A structural model was estimated using PLS-SEM to determine the extent to which Scenic Beauty Investment (the predictor) explained the variance in Competitive Advantage (the criterion). The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: PLS-SEM results for scenic beauty investment and competitive advantage

Metric	Value
Path Coefficient (β)	0.522
Coefficient of Determination (R^2)	0.531
Adjusted R^2	0.526
Standard Error	0.048
t-statistic	10.821
p-value	< .001

Note: t-statistics were derived from a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples.

The structural model revealed a statistically significant effect of scenic beauty investment on competitive advantage ($\beta = 0.522$, $t = 10.821$, $p < .001$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.531$) indicated substantial explanatory power, demonstrating that the model accounted for 53.1% of the variance in competitive advantage. The findings therefore supported the alternative proposition that scenic beauty investment exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on competitive advantage within Kenya’s adventure tourism sector.

4.4 Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of stakeholder interviews corroborated the quantitative data. Participants characterized Kenya’s scenic assets as “world-class,” specifically citing the diversity of Afro-alpine moorlands and volcanic lakes as rare, inimitable resources. However, stakeholders also identified significant vulnerabilities, noting that uncontrolled littering and the absence of formal vantage points were actively causing a “perceptual decline” in the sector’s visual capital.

4.5 Discussion

The findings of this study provided significant empirical support for the role of scenic beauty as a primary driver of destination competitiveness. The R^2 value of 0.531 was particularly noteworthy, as it indicated that the overall model explained just over half (53.1%) of the variance in a destination’s competitive position. This suggests that a moderate-to-substantial proportion of what makes a Kenyan hiking destination competitive was determined by the strategic configuration of its natural assets. The results confirmed that when scenic beauty is

managed as a "strategic resource" rather than a passive backdrop, it becomes the most influential factor in securing a market advantage.

From a Resource-Based View perspective, the qualitative data confirmed that Kenya's diverse ecosystems functioned as "inimitable resources" that are difficult for regional competitors to replicate. However, the descriptive results ($M = 3.19$ for environmental care) suggested that these resources were underutilized. This aligned with the Expectation Disconfirmation Theory framework: while the "Natural Beauty" met hiker expectations, the "Managed Environment" (litter and maintenance) often fell short. This disconnect created a "negative disconfirmation" that prevented the sector from achieving a "high-performance" status (above 4.0). This reinforces the RBV assertion that resource value alone is insufficient without effective organizational deployment.

These results mirror the findings of Kahangirwe et al. (2025) in Uganda, where biophysical features were identified as the leading drivers of satisfaction. Furthermore, the gap between Kenya's raw natural wealth and its operational execution supports the arguments of Huang et al. (2024) regarding the need for targeted capital outlays in trail architecture.

Unlike the Rwandan model described by Durydiwka et al. (2023), which successfully turned volcanic landscapes into a premium product through strict conservation, the Kenyan context treated scenic beauty as a "natural endowment" rather than a professionally managed strategic asset.

5. Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate how investment in scenic beauty influenced the competitive advantage of hiking destinations in Kenya. By bridging the Resource-Based View and Expectation Disconfirmation Theory, this research established that while Kenya possessed world-class natural wealth, its competitive edge was not guaranteed by beauty alone, but also earned through the strategic management of that beauty.

The study concluded that scenic beauty investment was the strongest predictor of competitive advantage within Kenya's adventure tourism sector. This was empirically supported by the structural model results, which demonstrated a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between scenic beauty investment and competitive advantage ($\beta = 0.522, p < .001$). Within the broader structural model, 53.1% of the variance in competitive advantage was explained ($R^2 = 0.531$), with scenic beauty emerging as the most influential predictor among the variables examined. The magnitude of the path coefficient confirmed that scenic beauty exerted a stronger influence on competitive advantage than the other trail attributes included in the model. These findings provided sufficient evidence to reject the third null hypothesis (H_{03}) and demonstrated that investment in scenic beauty constitutes a critical strategic resource for enhancing destination competitiveness within Kenya's adventure tourism sector.

From the perspective of the Resource-Based View, the findings indicated that Kenya's scenic landscapes constitute an "imperfectly imitable" and "non-substitutable" strategic resource. Within the VRIN framework, these assets satisfied the criteria of Value (consistently prioritized by hikers), Rarity (high ecosystem diversity), and Inimitability (natural heritage that cannot be artificially replicated). However, the study also pointed to a gap in the Organizational dimension, which suggested that the structures and capacity needed to turn these raw resources into a sustained, professionally managed competitive advantage were still not fully in place.

The application of Expectation Disconfirmation Theory suggested that scenic beauty functioned as a high-sensitivity resource. Because Kenya's global reputation set a high "scenic bar," any exposure to environmental degradation or litter led to immediate negative disconfirmation. This management failure actively eroded hiker satisfaction and weakened the destination's long-term market differentiation.

The evidence from this research indicated that while scenic beauty remained Kenya's most potent competitive pull factor, its sustainability as a strategic advantage was fragile. At the time of this study, the sector's competitiveness was largely inherited from its natural endowment rather than optimized through management. To transition from a resource-dependent destination to a global market leader, the sector needed to shift its paradigm, repositioning scenic beauty as a "managed strategic asset" rather than a "passive backdrop." Achieving a premium competitive position requires a deliberate transition from reliance on raw natural beauty to investment in professionalized "managed aesthetics" that hikers travel across the world to experience.

6. Recommendations

These recommendations are directly derived from the empirical finding that scenic beauty emerged as the strongest predictor within a structural model that explained 53.1% of the variance in competitive advantage. The significant explanatory power of scenic beauty ($R^2 = .531$) necessitates a transition from passive resource ownership to active Scenic Resource Management (SRM). Trail operators and private conservancies should formally integrate SRM into their annual strategic plans by allocating a specific percentage of operational budgets, treated as a capital investment rather than a maintenance cost, toward the enhancement of visual assets. This proactive approach aligns with Trišić et al. (2023), who demonstrate that the competitiveness of protected areas depends on the "active improvement of natural values" and the implementation of specific management models rather than reliance on natural presence alone. This should include Bi-Annual Visual Audits to identify "perceptual decay" factors such as litter, erosion, and invasive flora. To convert these findings into a competitive advantage, the "Organization" dimension of the Resource-Based View should be activated through the construction of permanent, low-impact viewing decks and the placement of interpretive signage at regular intervals. These targeted infrastructure interventions help reduce visitor dissatisfaction, improve the overall experience, and strengthen the destination's competitiveness through more effective resource management (Dewu & Nyaupane, 2023; UNWTO, 2022).

At the national level, the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, in coordination with the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), should move beyond general conservation rhetoric to enforce Spatial Scenic Zoning (SSZ). This requires the gazettment of "Visual Buffer Corridors" extending a minimum of 500 meters on either side of established high-altitude trails. Such corridors reflect the recent IGAD (2024) regional framework, which advocates for "Regional Tourism Quality Standards" to protect breathtaking landscapes from industrial encroachment. Protecting these scenic views is an economic necessity. As the National Park Service (2024) highlights, areas with iconic views need strict zoning to prevent the kind of visual damage that leaves hikers disappointed and ultimately devalues the destination's brand. To prevent this, the state should protect trail-side land by using 'Restrictive Covenants.' This legal shield will protect these views from short-term industrial projects and ensure that Kenya's natural beauty remains a permanent economic asset.

The professionalization of the sector requires a National Trail Quality Framework (NTQF). Central to this is the "Aesthetic Integrity Certification (AIC)" scheme, which serves as a formal quality signal. Following UNWTO (2022) standards for international trail management, this certification should be tied to a bi-annual audit system where operators are scored on debris management and viewpoint infrastructure. To ensure the viability of these standards, the National Treasury should introduce "Natural Capital Tax Credits," allowing private investors to offset tourism levies against documented expenditures in trail-side restoration.

By adopting these fiscal and regulatory measures, Kenya will shift from a strategy of 'resource luck' to one of deliberate excellence, securing a competitive advantage that regional rivals cannot easily replicate.

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