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Influence of E-Tourism Policies on Travel Business Profitability in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract

The new information era has grown drastically overtime with key stakeholders giving considerable attention to adoption of e-commerce. Travel and Tourism businesses have increasingly adopted e-commerce, which has helped to link key market participants thus enabling easy gathering of information for both consumers and suppliers. E-commerce has brought about a revolutionary change in the way Travel and Tourism business is being conducted away from brick-and-mortar operations. This has changed the way consumers make decisions on personalized travel packages using websites to obtain roadmaps, accommodation, activity programming, air fares, restaurants, entertainment and calendars of local events. This study explored to establish the influence of e-tourism policies on travel business profitability in Nairobi City County, Kenya. This study adopted descriptive research design, which employed mixed method of collecting quantitative and qualitative primary data. The study was conducted in Nairobi City, Kenya's capital due to its robust economy. The study targeted 172 travel agents that use e-tourism in their travel businesses. The study also targeted travel agent professionals whose docket is marketing, ICT and management of travel businesses. Slovin's formula was used to calculate the sample size of 120 travel agents. Simple random sampling using the list of registered travel agents under the Kenya Association of Travel Agents as the sample frame was used to select the travel agents to be enrolled in the study. Purposive sampling was employed to select three (3) managers from each sampled travel agent giving a total of 360 managers. Semi-structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data primary data from the sampled managers. A pre-test of the questionnaires was carried out involving travel agents that were not sampled for the main study to determine its reliability. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, modes, means, variances and standard deviations was used to analyse quantitative data using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 22. Hypothesis testing using Chi Square test analysis revealed that the significance value 0.484 is greater than 0.05, and hence the null hypothesis is accepted and alternative hypothesis is rejected. This implies that measures e-tourism policies do not influence travel

business profitability. The study concluded though e-tourism policies do not influence travel business profitability is critical in the development of e-tourism in Kenya.

Keywords: *E-commerce, e-tourism, Travel and Tourism business, Tourism Policy, & Profitability*

1.1 Introduction

Tourism and travel industry plays an essential role in the generation of employment, which contributes immensely to global wealth. A report by The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) notes that by 2018, Travel and Tourism industry recorded a growth of 3.9% (WTTC, 2019). This growth contributed US$ 8.8 trillion equivalents to 10.4% of global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018 while providing jobs for more than 319 million people globally. According to the WTTC (2019) report, USA and China have the world's largest Travel & Tourism economies whose GDP accounted for 35.2% in 2018. The report also predicted that China would overtake USA over the next decade as the world's largest Travel and Tourism economy. The growth was attributed to increased domestic travel occasioned by increase of young people adopting e-tourism, availability of disposable income and the desire to travel and explore (Jucan & Jucan, 2013). Africa region was second in growth after the Asia-Pacific region registering a 5.6% growth in 2018 (UTTC, 2019). International tourist arrivals in Africa in 2019 grew by 4.9% reaching 67 million overnight travellers amidst major challenges (UNWTO, 2020; Kimeria, 2019). Demand for travel products reduced after the tragic Covid 19 outbreak in 2019 further decreasing by 73% in 2020. The industry is gradually recovering after registering a 4% growth in 2021 due to increased vaccination rates, easing of mobility restrictions in different regions as well as reinstatement of travellers' confidence to travel again (UNWTO, 2021). Kenya's Travel and Tourism sector registered 870,465 international visitor arrivals a 53% increase compared to 567,848 visitors in 2020 post Covid recovery phase. According to the Kenya annual Tourism sector performance report 2021, the sector registered a 5% growth in 2021 and better prospects are anticipated in 2022 as international travel slowly picks up and normalcy is realized (TRI, 2021)

Kenya has distinguished herself as a key tourism hub in the East Africa region. It is also a leading technology hub due to its deep telecommunication penetration as compared to its regional neighbours. According to Kenya Association of Travel Agents (KATA), in 2017 tourism industry significantly contributed a total of 294.6 billion shillings (USD 2.9 billion) to Kenya's economy which accounted for approximately 3.7% of the total GDP (KATA, 2018). These gains were attributed to improved business environment occasioned by aggressive marketing, enhanced security, political stability, infrastructure development, high speed internet connectivity among others (GOK, 2018). These interventions have led to Kenya's tourism sector emerging the third largest in Sub-Saharan region after South Africa and Nigeria registering a 5.6% growth contributing a total of Ksh.790 billion in 2019 (Nyasuguta, 2019).

Electronic commerce is a business model which incorporates not just buying and selling but also innovating, communicating and discovering information over electronic networks (Schneider, 2016). Zwass (2003) defines e-commerce as the act of conducting business transactions through sharing of business information and maintaining of business relationships using telecommunication networks. He further explains that e-commerce activities involve inter-organization relationships processes referred to as business to business (B2B). Other relationships are consumer centred activities which are known as business to consumer (B2C) and Consumer to Consumer (C2C) interactions at different e-commerce levels. E-tourism can be defined as technology enabled tourism for use by hospitality and tourism organizations to

conduct business (Kipruto, *et al.,* 2011). Tourism and travel businesses however small have therefore immersed themselves into aggressive digital marketing campaigns and branding partnerships through social media platforms like goggle, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram after realization that technology is a vital component in today's travel business. According to (Beatrice, Cezah & Alexandra, 2013), the adoption of e-tourism through the internet, has made many travellers access travel packages promptly making informed decisions on their travel plans.

Technology has become an inevitable necessity in the travel and tourism ecosystem (Rahayu & Day, 2015). Elhaj and Barakeh (2015) explored the impact of E-commerce on travel agencies profitability in respect to their sizes in USA. The study established that large size travel agencies do not rely largely on e-commerce as it was found to account for 15.32% of the total sales. It was also established that large travel agents prefer face to face or telephone sales. However, this study did not specifically explore the impact of e-tourism but focused on the general e-commerce platform. This creates a gap of focusing specifically on the influence of e-tourism on the profitability of travel business. (Beatrice, Cezah and Alexandra, 2013) conducted a study on the impact and perspectives of the e-tourism at a global level. It was established that e-tourism presents numerous benefits like online booking and payments. It also provides effective marketing of products and services online. This study largely focused on the impact and perspectives of the e-tourism at a global level with no mention of Kenya or any country in Africa. Again, the study did not profile the influence e-tourism on travel business profitability.

Jonathan and Tarigan (2016) explored the effects of e-tourism to the development of tourism sector in Indonesia. Farkhondehzadeh, Karim, Roshanfekr, Azizi and Hatami, (2013), Bethapudi (2013) explored the role of ICT on the tourism industry. These three studies focused on the role of ICT and e-tourism on the development of the tourism industry. None examined the influence of e-tourism on the travel business profitability. Kiprutto, Kigio and Riungu (2011) conducted a study exploring evidence on the adoption of e-tourism technologies in Nairobi. The study established that the concept of e-tourism has revolutionized operations in Kenya. The study also found that e-tourism is a key ingredient in the growth of tourism industry through marketing, promotion, market research, finance, travel purchasing and feedback systems. This study focused on the adoption of e-tourism but did not explore its influence on the travel business profitability.

1.2 Study Objective

To establish the influence of e-tourism policies on travel business profitability in Nairobi City County, Kenya

1.3 Research Hypothesis

The null hypothesis was stated as follows:

H_0: E-tourism policies have no influence on profitability on travel business in Nairobi City County, Kenya

1.4 Scope of the Study

Tourism and travel businesses that have embraced e-tourism or any other form on e-commerce and have been using it for not less than one (1) year were targeted as the study site. The study only collected data on the influence of e-tourism ventures on travel business profitability in Nairobi County.

2.1 Literature Review

World Bank underscores the important role of African national governments in tourism policies formulation and implementation for sustainable tourism development (Christie, Fernandes, Messerli & Twini-Ward, 2014). Policies are meant to spur development of tourism by removing barriers and providing enabling environment for tourism business to thrive. E-tourism is one of the innovation and strategies that is employed by governments to promote and market travel products and services. According to Quian (2010), government as part of its mandate must take the centre stage in marketing tourism by dealing with political issues, provision of relevant information and development of policies, more so the ones that affect key stakeholders.

A study in Sweden by (Bethapudi 2013) on influence of governments on tourism, found that the state plays a critical role to stimulate or discourage its growth. United Kingdom after realizing the importance of online tourism developed a Tourism Sector Deal to guide it (UK, 2019). The policy guided on the content to be included in the e-marketing websites, domestic and international marketing and linkages with private websites. India has policies on online marketing under the "Incredible India's online campaign" (Sharma & Hazarika, 2017).

The Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife in Kenya is the main body that regulates implementation of the tourism policies (GOK, 2020). The mandate of the Ministry is to facilitate sustainable tourism for national development and posterity in line with its vision of making Kenya the destination of choice. It is also mandated to guide and coordinate policy direction with other state agencies such as Kenya Tourist Development Corporation (KTDC), Kenya Tourist Board (KTB), and Tourism Trust Fund (TTF) among others (GOK, 2020).

3.1 Research Design and Methodology

This section describes the research design adopted by the study, outlines the methods that were used and provides justification for their inclusion, study location, target population and sample selection, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, pre-testing and data analysis.

3.2 Research Design

Descriptive research design was adopted using a mixed method of collecting primary data. Descriptive design method enabled the study to describe the situation or phenomenon of the study the way it is at that time or duration (Kothari, 2013). In addition, according to Newby (2014) descriptive research design is appropriate in describing characteristics of respondents without manipulating the variables under study. In addition, descriptive survey design has the advantage of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswel, 2018). According to Creswell (2018), quantitative data approach measured numerical variables and is analysed by descriptive statistical procedures. This design was appropriate for this study as it helped in describing the characteristics of the sampled population and at the same time appropriate in generalising the findings to represent the entire population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Descriptive research design was used to guide data analysis techniques and type of statistics to be used to describe the factors that affected increase of fast-food outlets in the study area. The method has the advantage of determining the cause-and-effect relationship between the independent and dependence variables. It does not involve manipulating the human characteristics which means it describes the phenomenon the way it is.

3.3 Study Area

The study was conducted in Nairobi City, County, Kenya's capital city. It's relative proximity to several tourist attraction areas both in Kenya and East Africa makes it an asset of great

importance in the tourism sector. Nairobi boasts of hosting Kenyatta International Convention Centre which was voted as Africa's leading meeting and convention Centre at the World Travel Awards in 2021 same case to Kenya's pride of Africa Kenya airways which was crowned as the continents leading commercial airline with the best business class. Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA), a major hub for aviation in the region and the busiest airport in East Africa is located in Nairobi City coupled with other vibrant business ventures by international organisations which qualify the city as a serious economic powerhouse. This made Nairobi City an ideal locale of conducting this study since it serves as a nerve centre for travel business operations in Kenya and beyond.

3.4 Target Population

The study targeted 172 travel agents that are members of Kenya Association of Travel Agents (KATA) that have offices in Nairobi. The study also targeted travel professionals working for travel agents.

3.5 Sampling Technique

The number of travel agents (172) is quite large and scattered to enrol all in the study. The study used Slovin's (1960) formula; $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$ where "n"- is the desired sample size, "N" – is the population size (172) and "e" – is the margin of error (in this case 0.05). Using Slovin's formula $n = \frac{172}{1+172(e)^2}$ 120 travel agents will be sampled. A list of travel agents from KATA was used as a sampling frame to sample 120 travel agents out of 172 using simple random sampling method (lottery).

3.6 Sample size Determination for Managers

The study purposively sampled three (3) managers responsible for tours and travel, marketing and ICT. Since a total of 120 travel agents were sampled, the sample size of managers was 360 (120 travel agent's x 3 managers in each travel agent). Purposive sampling was employed to select the managers who were enrolled in the study.

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaires were used as the primary data collection instrument. The choice questionnaire was informed by the large number of the respondents sampled. Questionnaire data collection technique is appropriate for collecting data from a large sample size (Bourke, Kirby & Doran, 2016) and offers confidentiality (Kothari, 2013). It can also be self or assisted administered to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The instrument comprised of structured open and closed ended questions giving it advantage of soliciting as much information as possible (Sekaran & Bougie, 2011).

3.8 Pre- Testing

A pre-test of the questionnaire using a split half method was carried out to determine its reliability. Pre-testing of instruments involved travel agents that were not sampled for the main study. Cronbach Alpha coefficient analysis was used to determine reliability of the pre-tested instruments.

3.8 Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Validity is the extent (degree) to which results obtained from the analysed data collected in a study fully represents the phenomenon under study (Kothari, 2013). According to Veal and

Darcy (2012), validity of a study reflects the extent to which data collection instruments measures what they were meant. The study ensured content validity was maintained. Content validity of the questionnaires was ensured by verifying the questionnaire items meant to address specific objectives. This was done by seeking expert opinion from the supervisors and data analyst. Validity of the instruments was also ensured by using simple language to avoid ambiguity and promote accurate responses by the respondents. Reliability is a measure of the extent to which a research instrument yields constant results after repeated trials (Newby, 2014). Reliable instruments ensure collection of the intended data thus making the analysis valid. Reliability of instruments was determined by conducting a pre-testing exercise. Cronbach's Alpha analysis score of above 0.7 found that the instruments were reliable.

3.9 Data Collection Techniques

Questionnaires were used to collect primary data. Questionnaires were preferred since they have the advantage of reaching large number of respondents and save time. Due to the large number of the participants (360 respondents in 120 travel agents) eight (8) research assistants were recruited and trained on administration of instruments. The researcher with the help of the research assistants distributed questionnaires and covering letters to each respondent. Respondents were informed on the purpose of the study and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. The respondents were issued with the questionnaires to fill. Those who were unable to fill readily were allowed to fill at their own time and collected later.

3.10 Data Analysis

Primary data collected with questionnaires were cleaned, coded and put into a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. SPSS was used to analyse descriptive statistics and cross tabulations between independent and dependent variables. Four elements, people (tourists), money (expenditure) time (stays and travel durations) and space (distances, length of trips) were used to measure the influence e-tourism travel business profitability. Analysed data was presented in tables and charts. Pearson Chi square statistics was used to test the null hypothesis.

4.1 Findings

Gender, Age and Level of Education

Table 1 tabulates gender, age and level of education characteristics of the respondents'

Table 1: Gender, Age and Level of Education

Gender	N=360	
	N	**%**
Male	123	34.2
Female	237	65.5
Total	**360**	**100.0**
Age		
18-25	13	3.6
26-33	127	35.3
34-41	168	46.7
42-49	35	9.7
50-56	17	4.7
Total	**360**	**100.0**
Education		
Secondary	18	5.0
Tertiary	173	48.1
Undergraduate	138	38.3
Post-Graduate	31	8.6
Total	**360**	**100.0**

Source: Research data (2021)

Findings in Table 1 shows that minority 123(34.2%) of the respondents were males while the rest were females. The findings found that most 168(46.7%) of the respondents were in the ages between 34-41 years. Finally, the study established that most 173(48.1%) of the respondents had tertiary level of education.

Respondents Designation

Table 2 presents the study findings on designation demographics characteristics of the respondents'

Table 2: Respondents Designation

Designation	Frequency	Percent
Travel consultant	105	29.2
Marketing executive	72	20.0
Ticketing and reservation officer	49	13.6
Managing director	34	9.4
Accountant	19	5.3
Operations manager	19	5.3
Office manager	18	5.0
Reservation officer	16	4.4
Proprietor	11	3.1
Customer care	9	2.5
Sales and marketing assistant	8	2.2
Total	**360**	**100.0**

The analysed data in Table 2 presents the distribution of the designation of the respondents interviewed. The study evenly covered wide range of cadres of staff who were relevant for this study who provided relevant information regarding the influence of e-tourism on travel business profitability. The finding shows the wide distribution of the interviewed staff implies that data collected was valid and rich for making appropriate inferences.

Work Experience

The study sought to establish work experience of respondents in the travel industry and in the current firm. The study findings are presented in Table 3

Table 3: Work experience in years

	Travel Industry
Mean	9.78
Median	10.00
Mode	12
Lowest	1.0
Highest	25

Source: Research data (2021)

The study found out that majority (mode=12) had an experience of 12 years in the travel industry. The average working age is 9.78 years. The study established that highest experience is 25 years while the lowest was one year.

4.2 E-Tourism Policies on Travel Business Profitability in Nairobi City County, Kenya

The findings on the influence of e-tourism policies on travel business profitability are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Influence of E-Tourism Policies on Travel Business Profitability

	E- Tourism Policy (E-Commerce)	Profitability			
		Yes		No	
		f	%	f	%
a.	Online payments	342	95.0	18	5.0
b.	Mobile money payment	338	93.9	22	6.1
c.	Online air ticket buying	338	93.9	22	6.1
d.	Online tourism marketing policy	336	93.3	24	6.7
e.	Online booking policy	335	93.1	25	6.9
f.	Online platform on tourism research information	326	90.6	34	9.4
g.	Online visa application (E-Visa)	326	90.6	34	9.4
h.	Online distribution of tourism products and services	316	87.8	44	12.2
i.	Tourism information systems	189	52.5	171	47.5

Source: Research data (2021)

Findings in Table 4 indicate overall the E- tourism policies explored have a positive influence on travel business profitability. This is confirmed by high percentage of 95% approval. However, it was noted that the influence of policies on tourism information systems was not as high as compared to the rest since the score was the lowest at 52.5%.

Suggested E-Tourism Policies

The study sought suggestions from the respondents to indicate the e-tourism policies. This was necessary to assist the stakeholders in developing and regulating the travel industry. Percentage of cases analysis was used to as the focal point of discussing the results. Findings are presented in Table 5

Table 5: Suggested E-Tourism Policies

Suggested E-Tourism Policies	Responses		Percent of Cases
	Count	Percent	
Boost innovation and knowledge in travel business	162	17.1	46.2
Review of Taxes	162	17.1	46.2
Supporting marketing campaigns supporting tourism	143	15.1	40.7
Partnership with small business owners	126	13.3	35.9
Combat cyber crimes	92	9.7	26.2
Curb unfair competition	91	9.6	25.9
Coping with emerging trends	49	5.2	14.0
Adoption of sustainable tourism	45	4.7	12.8
Boost operations in the industry	35	3.7	10.0
Standardization of travel services in the county	20	2.1	5.7
Detailed description of products and services	10	1.1	2.8
Linkage with social media	10	1.1	2.8
Uphold destination image	5	0.5	1.4
Total	**950**	**100.0**	**270.7**

Source: Research data (2021)

Analysed results in Table 5shows that varied policies were suggested. The policies bordered on taxation, partnership, linkages, marketing, standardization, security among others.

Overall Influence of E-Tourism Policies on Travel Business Profitability

Respondents were asked to indicate the overall influence of e-tourism policies on travel business profitability in their firms. The results are presented in Figure 1.
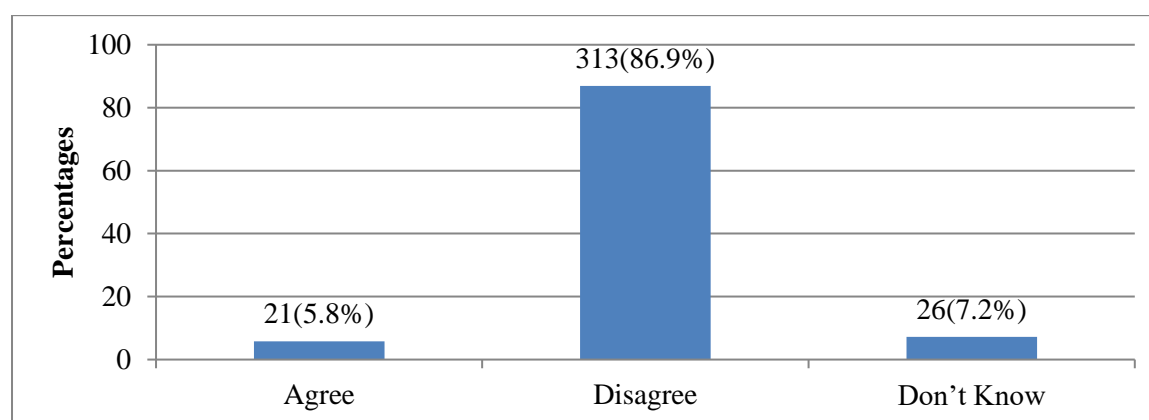
Figure 1: Overall Influence of Measures for E-Tourism Success on Travel Business Profitability

The findings above reveal that the larger majority 313(86.9%) disagreed that e-tourism policies influence travel business profitability. The remainders tied by either agreeing or were not sure at 26(7.2%) score.

Hypothesis Testing on the Influence of E-Tourism Policies on Travel Business Profitability

The null hypothesis was tested using Chi Square analysis. The null hypothesis was stated as follows:

H0   E-tourism policies have no influence on profitability on travel business in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Results for Hypothesis Testing for Objective Three

Pearson Chi-Square Tests		
Overall influence of E-Tourism Policies on Travel Business Profitability		
Influence	Chi-square	3.457
	df	4
	Sig.	.484[a]
Results are based on nonempty rows and columns in each innermost sub-table.		
*. The Chi-square statistic is not significant at the .05 level.		

Source: Research data (2021)

Interpretation of Table 6 results it is revealed that the significance value 0.484 is greater than 0.05, and hence the null hypothesis is accepted and alternative hypothesis is rejected. This implies that measures e-tourism policies do not influence travel business profitability.

4.3 Discussions of the findings

The study objective sought to establish the influence of e-tourism policies on travel business profitability in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Findings in Table 4 indicate overall the E- tourism policies explored like online platform on tourism research information, online payments, online tourism marketing policies, online booking policy and online distribution of tourism products and services have a positive influence on travel business profitability. This is confirmed by high percentage (over 86%) approval by majority of the respondents. Further, the results revealed the policies that should be adopted in order to assist tourism stakeholder in developing and regulating the travel industry at a score of (40.5%) as innovation and knowledge in travel business, review of taxes and supporting marketing campaigns supporting tourism (Table 5).

The findings imply that just like any other business, providers of e-tourism business need policies and regulations that spell out their code of conduct and operation by enabling environment for them to thrive and be profitable. These findings are in agreement with the sentiments by Christie, et al. (2014) who pointed out that the role of governments in carrying out tourism research, regulating online payments and controlling the distribution of tourism products and services and finally reviewing of tourism taxes as critical factors in the success of tourism business. These results also concur with the findings by Bethapudi (2013) who underscored the importance of policy in e-businesses by indicating that guidelines should be part of the content to be included in the e-marketing websites, domestic and international marketing and linkages with private websites. Further to support these findings Quian (2010) indicates that it is the mandate of governments to take the centre stage in marketing tourism by

dealing with political issues, provision of relevant information and development of policies, more so the ones that affect key stakeholders.

Considering that the respondents suggested wide range of e-tourism policies to be formulated and implemented is an indicator that e-tourism in Kenya has room for development. The policies suggested are geared to improve the operations of e-tourism and to protect it from undesirable elements like cyber-crime and undue competition. The policies suggested provide a way of standardising the e-tourism and linkages with social media. The suggested policies are in line with those implemented in India, UK and South Africa which has helped to promote travel business resulting in high profitability in these countries.

Overall findings disagreed that the e-tourism policies available have greatly influenced travel business profitability. This observation is confirmed by the hypothesis testing which established that there is no significance influence of e-tourism policies on travel business profitability. These findings have important implications for the government. The government must put in place policies that ensure fair use of the online space among all tourism service providers. The government should enforce laws and guidelines on the terms and use of e-tourism platforms to avoid penalties, cyber-attacks, fraudsters and to ensure transparency among all the users of online space. The government should play its role by formulating policies and implementing them, in order to ensure sustainable profitability of all travel businesses. The policies should spur e-tourism development and enabling avenues for e-tourism business to grow.

5.1 Conclusion and Recommendation

The study established that the new policies require be formulated and implemented to assist in development of the e-tourism. Though the e-tourism is in place in Kenya, the government has not deliberately come up with policies to guide it as compared to other countries like South Africa. Apparently, this could be the reason why available e-tourism policies did not significantly result in travel business profitability in Kenya.

The study revealed that various e-tourism policies have been established. However, it can be noted that there lacks a clear guideline on the application of these policies on the e-tourism businesses. The study recommends the government, and other tourism policy decision makers to development standard operating procedure for all e-tourism businesses, develop clear policies regarding provision of online services and products.

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