

**INFLUENCE OF GUESTS' ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCT DESIGN
DECISIONS ON GASTRONOMIC EXPERIENCES IN SELECTED COFFEE
GROWING FARMS OF CENTRAL KENYA**

PURITY KANYUA MURITHI


**A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Hospitality Management of Chuka University**

**CHUKA UNIVERSITY
OCTOBER, 2024**

DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS


Declaration

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for an award of diploma or conferment of degree in any other university or institution.

Signature.....  Date..... 28/10/2024.....
Purity Kanyua Murithi
ND20/45824/20

Recommendations

This thesis has been examined, passed and submitted with our approval as university supervisors

Signature.....  Date..... 28/10/24.....
Dr. Lemmy Mureti Muriuki
Chuka University

Signature.....  Date..... 28/10/2024.....
Dr. Peter Onyonje Osiako
Dedan Kimathi University of Technology



COPYRIGHT

©2024

All rights reserved. No part of this thesis may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means of mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission in writing from the copyright owner or Chuka University.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Late OGW, Mr. Elias Njagi Njoka (Former Director of Education), Mrs. Damaris Nyaga, My Mother Mrs. Elosy Ciangai Nyaga, and my late father Mr. John Nyaga Muchara and my late father-in-law Mr. Jason Riungu M'Iruba whose guidance, support, love, encouragement made this endeavor possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I acknowledge the Almighty God for making this dream a reality.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors Dr. Lemmy Muriuki and Dr. Peter Osiako for their continuous support, patience, and expert guidance throughout the duration of my research. Their insightful feedback and encouragement have been invaluable in shaping this thesis, and their unwavering belief in my abilities kept me motivated even during the most challenging times.

I am also deeply grateful to the faculty members and administrative staff in the faculty of Environmental studies at Chuka University whose knowledge and assistance have greatly contributed to my academic development. Special thanks to Prof. Gilbert Nduru and Dr. Jafford Njeru Rithaa for their advice and inspiring conversations that enriched my research.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my fellow researchers Mr. David Muchiri & Ms. Kiboro Lynnette and my research assistants and friends Mr. David Gitonga, Ms. Violet Kanini and Duncan Memba, particularly for their collaboration, companionship, and moral support throughout this journey. Our discussions, brainstorming sessions, and shared struggles made the entire process more enjoyable and fulfilling.

I thank all the Managers, supervisors and researchers from the visited coffee farms and factories in Mt. Kenya region for their support during field work. Special thanks go to the staff of Coffee research institutes and in particular Mr. Arusha the Human resource manager and Madam Jackline.

To my family, especially my hubby Rev. Patrick Murithi Jason and our Children Grace Nyawira, Winsharon Mwende and Emmanuel Murimi. I cannot thank you enough for your unconditional love, encouragement, and sacrifices. Your belief in me has been my driving force, and without your support, this achievement would not have been possible.

ABSTRACT

Coffee farming contributes to direct incomes to farmers while accelerating infrastructure growth in many developing counties. However, being a key agricultural commodity, coffee is affected by high supply variations causing fluctuations in price. In response to this situation, coffee farm managers are exploring other income generating activities in coffee growing areas such as venturing in gastronomic tourism. The purpose of this study was to evaluate guests' activities, product design decisions and gastronomic experiences in selected coffee growing farms of central Kenya. The study sought to assess the influence of coffee visitor activities on gastronomic experiences; to establish the influence of product design decision (branding) on gastronomic guest experiences, to determine the influence of product design decision (packaging) on gastronomic guest experiences ; to determine the influence of product design decision (pricing) on gastronomic guest experiences, and to evaluate the mediating influence of guest profiles on gastronomic guest experiences in selected coffee growing farms of Central Kenya. The study employed descriptive survey design targeting a population comprising of tourists visiting coffee factories and estates and managers in of these places. The target population was 384 tourists and 124 managers. Stratified sampling, purposive sampling, simple random sampling and convenient sampling were used to come up with the selected samples of the coffee estates and factories, and of respondents. Data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires using a Likert scale type structure. Data was coded and analyzed using SPSS where general information of the respondents was done using descriptives while inferential statistics involved factor analysis and Categorical Regression. A significant positive relationship was established between guest activities and gastronomic experiences in selected coffee growing farms of Central Kenya. This was a clear indication that the coffee tourism activities carried out in the area of study had a bearing on the experiences that coffee tourists derived from their gastronomic tours. Hence, objective one was achieved and the respective null hypothesis (H_{01}) was rejected. Categorical regression was used to assess the influence of guest activities on gastronomic experiences in coffee growing areas of Central Kenya. Three main activities were considered as independent variables; Coffee tourism activities, coffee factory visits, coffee farm visits and coffee tasting while the dependent variable included; gastronomic experiences. The model fit scores were highly significant ($R^2= 966$, $F= 275.377$, $p= 0.000$). This means that the model explained more than 96.8% of the variance that was sought in the relationship. All the coefficient scores of the independent variables were also highly significant ($p = 0.000$). In objective two, it was established that product design decision elements and gastronomic experience had a significant positive relationship and H_{02} was rejected. Categorical regression was used to decipher the relationship between three product design decisions (branding, packaging and cost), and gastronomic experiences in coffee growing areas of central Kenya region. The model fit was robust with values of ($R^2= 911$, $F= 171.484$, $p= 0.000$). Out of three product initiatives branding ($B=0.835$, $df=3$, $F= 118.955$, $P= 0.000$) and packaging ($B=0.205$, $df=2$, $F= 3.694$, $p = 0.000$) emerged significant. Categorical regression was further used to determine the major coefficients in the independent list (factor that explained the product design decisions). The model fit was robust (R^2 change= 0.970, $F= 723.669$, $p= 0.00$) showing that it could represent more than 97% of the relationship sought by the researcher. All the coefficient variables were significant. The pricing factor was not significant ($B=0.027$,

df=1, 0.272, $p = 0.603$). To assess the mediating effect of guest profiles on gastronomic experience half of the eight socio-demographic factors had a significant mediating influence on gastronomic experiences of guests while the other four ha no significant effect. The study concludes that elements of guest activities and product design decisions are key in enhancing coffee tourism gastronomic experience in the area of study. It is hence recommended that they be enhanced.

