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CULTURAL AND NATURAL ATTRACTIONS AS DRIVERS OF TOURISM BUSINESS PERFORMANCE IN NORTH-WEST NIGERIA: THE MODERATING ROLE OF SECURITY PERCEPTION

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the complex pathways through which cultural and natural attractions influence tourism business performance in North-West Nigeria, a region endowed with significant tourism assets yet characterized by underdeveloped tourism business activity. Drawing on the Resource-Based View and Destination Competitiveness Model, the research develops and tests a comprehensive moderated mediation model examining: (1) the direct effects of cultural and natural attractions on tourism business performance; (2) the mediating roles of service quality and destination branding; and (3) the moderating role of security perception. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted with 382 tourism businesses across the seven states of North-West Nigeria, including hotels, tour operators, restaurants, and cultural experience providers. Data were analyzed using Hayes' PROCESS macro for moderated mediation analysis. The findings reveal that both cultural attractions ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$) and natural attractions ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$) have significant direct positive effects on tourism business performance. Service quality emerged as the strongest mediator (indirect effects: CA→SQ→TBP = 0.27; NA→SQ→TBP = 0.22), followed by destination branding (CA→DB→TBP = 0.19; NA→DB→TBP = 0.18). Critically, security perception significantly moderated both relationships (CA×SP→TBP = 0.18, $p < 0.001$; NA×SP→TBP = 0.15, $p < 0.001$), such that the positive effects of attractions on performance were amplified when security perception was high. These findings underscore that security serves as a fundamental qualifying condition for tourism development, while service quality represents the most critical operational mechanism for translating destination assets into business success. The study contributes to tourism entrepreneurship literature by extending RBV and Destination Competitiveness Theory to a challenging developing context and offers actionable implications for tourism business owners, policymakers, and destination management organizations seeking to unlock the economic potential of culturally and naturally rich but underdeveloped regions.

Keywords: Cultural attractions, natural attractions, tourism business performance, service quality, destination branding, security perception.

1. INTRODUCTION

The global tourism industry stands as one of the most dynamic and resilient economic sectors, contributing significantly to employment, foreign exchange earnings, and cultural exchange (UNWTO, 2023). For developing economies, tourism offers a unique pathway to sustainable development, particularly when it

leverages indigenous cultural heritage and natural endowments (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2021). Nigeria, as Africa's most populous nation and largest economy, possesses immense but largely underexploited tourism potential. Among its geopolitical zones, North-West Nigeria presents a compelling paradox: a region rich in cultural heritage and natural beauty, yet significantly underdeveloped in terms of tourism business activity (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2022).

North-West Nigeria is home to a tapestry of cultural assets, including the ancient city of Kano with its historic walls and dye pits, the Durbar festivals that showcase Hausa-Fulani horsemanship and pageantry, and a wealth of traditional crafts and cuisines. Complementing this cultural wealth are natural attractions such as the Kamuku National Park, the scenic hills of Birnin Gwari, and various waterfalls and wildlife reserves (Ogunsanya & Garba, 2021). Despite this abundance, tourism businesses in the region ranging from hospitality providers to tour operators and cultural experience organizers- struggle to achieve sustainable performance. The region's tourism sector is characterized by low visitor numbers, limited business formalization, and significant operational challenges.

This underperformance raises critical questions for tourism entrepreneurship research. While the presence of cultural and natural attractions is widely acknowledged as foundational for tourism development (Prayag & Hosany, 2021), the mechanisms through which these attractions translate into tangible business outcomes remain inadequately understood, particularly in challenging contexts like North-West Nigeria. A significant gap exists in the literature regarding the factors that enable or constrain the conversion of destination assets into viable tourism business performance (Farmaki et al., 2022). This study addresses this gap by proposing that two critical organizational capabilities- Service Quality (SQ) and Destination Branding (DB), serve as key mechanisms linking attractions to business performance. Furthermore, given the region's well-documented security challenges, the study introduces Security Perception (SP) as a critical moderating variable that shapes the entire relationship.

This study is grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm (Barney, 1991) and the Destination Competitiveness Model (Crouch & Ritchie, 2019). The RBV suggests that unique resources such as distinctive cultural practices and rare natural landscapes can provide a competitive advantage when effectively leveraged. The Destination Competitiveness Model extends this by emphasizing that resources alone are insufficient; they must be complemented by effective management, infrastructure, and supportive environmental conditions to achieve destination-level success.

Based on this theoretical foundation, this study pursues three primary objectives, which include to examine the direct effects of Cultural Attractions (CA) and Natural Attractions (NA) on the performance of tourism businesses in North-West Nigeria, to investigate the mediating roles of Service Quality (SQ) and Destination Branding (DB) in the relationships between attractions and tourism business performance and to assess the moderating role of Security Perception (SP) on the relationship between attractions and tourism business performance.

By addressing these objectives, this research contributes to the tourism entrepreneurship literature by providing a nuanced empirical model that accounts for both internal organizational capabilities and external environmental factors. It offers actionable insights for tourism business owners, policymakers, and destination management organizations seeking to unlock the economic potential of culturally and naturally rich but underdeveloped regions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

This section defines the key constructs and establishes the theoretical rationale for their interrelationships, culminating in a conceptual framework with three independent variables, one dependent variable, two mediators, and one moderator.

2.1.1 Cultural Attractions (IV1)

Cultural Attractions refer to tangible and intangible heritage assets that draw visitors to a destination. This includes historical sites, monuments, traditional festivals, arts and crafts, cuisine, and living cultural practices (Richards, 2021). For North-West Nigeria, this encompasses the region's rich Hausa-Fulani cultural heritage, including architectural landmarks, traditional ceremonies, and artisan communities. In this study,

Cultural Attractions serve as one of the independent variables.

2.1.2 Natural Attractions (IV2)

Natural Attractions encompass the physical and biological features of a destination that appeal to tourists. This includes landscapes, wildlife, national parks, water bodies, and unique geological formations (Prayag & Hosany, 2021). North-West Nigeria's natural assets, including its savannah ecosystems, hill ranges, and protected areas, constitute its natural attraction base. This is the second independent variable.

2.1.3 Tourism Business Performance (DV)

Tourism Business Performance (TBP) is the dependent variable, defined as the degree of success achieved by tourism enterprises in achieving their financial and strategic goals. Drawing from performance measurement literature, this study adopts a balanced conceptualization that includes financial indicators (profitability, sales growth, return on investment) and non-financial indicators (customer satisfaction, market share, business sustainability) (Zhao et al., 2021).

2.1.4 Service Quality (Mediator 1)

Service Quality (SQ) refers to the extent to which a tourism business consistently meets or exceeds customer expectations across various service dimensions, including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Liat et al., 2020). In the tourism context, SQ is a critical operational capability that determines customer satisfaction and repeat patronage.

2.1.5 Destination Branding (Mediator 2)

Destination Branding (DB) is defined as the strategic process of creating a unique identity and image for a tourism destination that differentiates it from competitors and resonates with target markets (Blain et al., 2022). This includes the development of brand identity, positioning strategies, and promotional activities that communicate the destination's unique value proposition.

2.1.6 Security Perception (Moderator)

Security Perception (SP) refers to tourists' and tourism business operators' subjective assessment of safety and security conditions in a destination (Saha & Yap, 2021). In the context of North-West Nigeria, where security challenges have been well-documented, SP is conceptualized as a critical moderating variable that influences how effectively attractions can be leveraged for business success. Security perception encompasses physical safety, political stability, and the overall sense of security experienced by visitors and businesses.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation: Resource-Based View and Destination Competitiveness

This study is anchored in two complementary theoretical frameworks. The **Resource-Based View (RBV)** (Barney, 1991) provides the foundational logic that unique, valuable, and inimitable resources in this case, cultural and natural attractions can serve as sources of competitive advantage for tourism businesses. However, RBV has been critiqued for underemphasizing the role of the external environment and the mechanisms required to transform resources into performance (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2020).

To address this limitation, this study incorporates the **Destination Competitiveness Model** (Crouch & Ritchie, 2019), which posits that destination success depends on a combination of core resources (attractions), supporting factors (infrastructure, service quality), and qualifying conditions (safety, security). This integrated theoretical approach allows the study to examine both internal capabilities (service quality, destination branding) and external contextual factors (security perception) as critical determinants of tourism business performance.

2.3 Empirical Review and Hypothesis Development

2.3.1 Cultural Attractions, Natural Attractions, and Tourism Business Performance

The foundational premise of tourism development is that destinations with rich cultural and natural assets attract more visitors, thereby creating opportunities for tourism businesses (Richards, 2021; Prayag & Hosany, 2021). Empirical studies across various contexts have confirmed positive relationships between the quality and distinctiveness of attractions and tourism business performance indicators such as occupancy rates, revenue per available room, and visitor spending (Song et al.,

2021). However, the strength of this relationship varies significantly based on how attractions are managed and marketed.

H1a: Cultural Attractions have a positive and significant direct effect on Tourism Business Performance.

H1b: Natural Attractions have a positive and significant direct effect on Tourism Business Performance.

2.3.2 The Mediating Role of Service Quality

The relationship between attractions and business performance is not automatic; it is mediated by the quality of service delivered by tourism businesses. Research has consistently demonstrated that service quality is a critical determinant of customer satisfaction, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth, which in turn drive business performance (Liat et al., 2020; Wu & Chen, 2022). In destinations with strong attractions, businesses that deliver superior service quality are better positioned to capture and retain customers. Service quality acts as the operational mechanism that transforms destination appeal into tangible business outcomes.

H2a: Service Quality positively mediates the relationship between Cultural Attractions and Tourism Business Performance.

H2b: Service Quality positively mediates the relationship between Natural Attractions and Tourism Business Performance.

2.3.3 The Mediating Role of Destination Branding

Effective destination branding is essential for communicating a destination's unique value proposition to target markets (Blain et al., 2022). Research by Pike and Page (2020) demonstrates that destinations with strong, coherent branding strategies achieve higher visitor numbers and greater tourism business success. Destination branding mediates the attraction-performance relationship by creating awareness, shaping perceptions, and differentiating the destination from competitors. Without effective branding, even the most remarkable attractions may remain unknown to potential visitors.

H3a: Destination Branding positively mediates the relationship between Cultural Attractions and Tourism Business Performance.

H3b: Destination Branding positively mediates the relationship between Natural Attractions and Tourism Business Performance.

2.3.4 The Moderating Role of Security Perception

Security is increasingly recognized as a fundamental precondition for tourism development (Saha & Yap, 2021). In regions with security concerns, the effectiveness of attractions in driving business performance is significantly diminished. Studies by Neumayer (2020) and others have shown that negative security perceptions deter tourists, reduce visitor spending, and constrain tourism business growth. Security perception is therefore hypothesized to moderate the attraction-performance relationship, such that the positive effects of cultural and natural attractions on tourism business performance are weaker when security perceptions are negative.

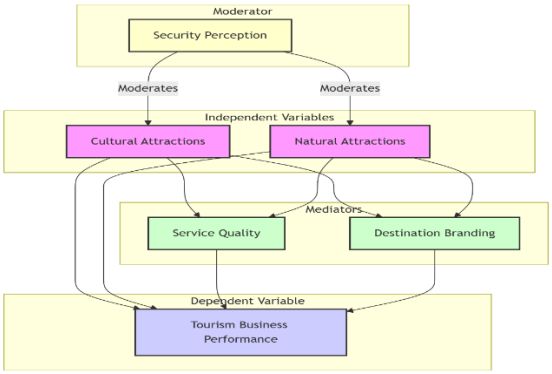
H4a: Security Perception positively moderates the relationship between Cultural Attractions and Tourism Business Performance, such that the relationship is stronger when security perception is higher.

H4b: Security Perception positively moderates the relationship between Natural Attractions and Tourism Business Performance, such that the relationship is stronger when security perception is higher.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical foundations and hypotheses, the conceptual framework for this study is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Author's compilation

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to investigate the determinants of tourism business performance in North-West Nigeria. The target population comprised registered tourism businesses operating across the seven states of North-West Nigeria (Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Jigawa), including hotels and lodges, tour operators, travel agencies, cultural experience providers, and restaurants serving tourists. Using a stratified random sampling approach based on business type and location, 450 businesses were selected for participation. Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered in person and via trained enumerators over a three-month period, resulting in 382 usable responses representing an 84.9% response rate. All measurement scales were adapted from validated instruments: Cultural Attractions (6 items) and Natural Attractions (6 items) from Prayag and Hosany (2021); Service Quality (7 items) from Liat et al. (2020); Destination Branding (5 items) from Blain et al. (2022); Security Perception (5 items) from Saha and Yap (2021); and Tourism Business Performance (8 items) from Zhao et al. (2021). Items were measured on 5-point Likert scales. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS v.28 and the PROCESS macro v.4.1 (Hayes, 2022) for moderated mediation analysis with 5,000 bootstrap samples.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Measurement Model

The final sample of 382 businesses comprised hotels and lodges (34%), restaurants and catering services (28%), tour operators (22%), and cultural experience providers (16%). Regarding operational duration, 41% had been operating for 5-10 years, 35% for less than 5 years, and 24% for over 10 years. The measurement model was assessed for reliability and validity. As shown in Table 1, all constructs exhibited Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.80, indicating strong internal consistency. Convergent validity was confirmed as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded the 0.50 threshold. Discriminant validity was established as the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than its inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 1: Reliability and Validity Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Cultural Attractions (CA)	0.86	0.88	0.62
Natural Attractions (NA)	0.84	0.87	0.60
Service Quality (SQ)	0.89	0.91	0.66
Destination Branding (DB)	0.85	0.88	0.63
Security Perception (SP)	0.91	0.93	0.71
Tourism Business Performance (TBP)	0.90	0.92	0.68

Note: All values are significant at p < 0.001.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses were tested using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Models 4 and 1 for mediation and moderation analyses, respectively). Table 2 presents the direct and indirect effects, while Table 3 presents the moderation results.

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Table 2: Results of Direct and Mediation Effects

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient (β)	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI (LL, UL)	Decision
H1a	CA → TBP (Direct)	0.24	0.05	4.80	<0.001	(0.14, 0.34)	Supported
H1b	NA → TBP (Direct)	0.21	0.05	4.20	<0.001	(0.11, 0.31)	Supported
H2a	CA → SQ → TBP (Indirect)	0.27	0.04	-	-	(0.19, 0.36)	Supported
H2b	NA → SQ → TBP (Indirect)	0.22	0.04	-	-	(0.15, 0.30)	Supported
H3a	CA → DB → TBP (Indirect)	0.19	0.03	-	-	(0.13, 0.26)	Supported

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient (β)	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI (LL, UL)	Decision
H3b	NA → DB → TBP (Indirect)	0.18	0.03	-	-	(0.12, 0.25)	Supported

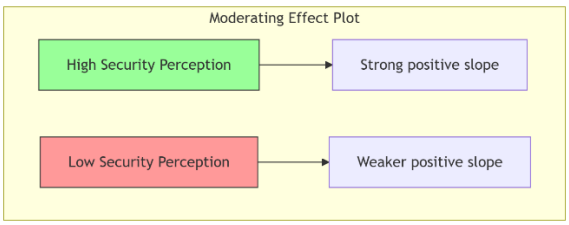
Note: CA = Cultural Attractions; NA = Natural Attractions; SQ = Service Quality; DB = Destination Branding; TBP = Tourism Business Performance. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. All indirect effects are significant as confidence intervals do not contain zero.

Table 3: Results of Moderation Effects

Hypothesis	Moderated Path	Coefficient (β)	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI (LL, UL)	Decision
H4a	CA × SP → TBP	0.18	0.04	4.50	<0.001	(0.10, 0.26)	Supported
H4b	NA × SP → TBP	0.15	0.04	3.75	<0.001	(0.07, 0.23)	Supported

Note: CA × SP = Interaction between Cultural Attractions and Security Perception; NA × SP = Interaction between Natural Attractions and Security Perception.

Figure 2: Moderating Effect of Security Perception on Cultural Attractions and Performance



Note: Figure illustrates that the positive relationship between cultural attractions and tourism business performance is significantly stronger when security perception is high compared to when it is low.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

H1a and H1b: Direct Effects of Attractions on Performance

The significant positive direct effects for both Cultural Attractions ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$) and Natural Attractions ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$) support Hypotheses 1a and 1b. These findings align with established tourism literature demonstrating that destinations with distinctive attractions achieve better business outcomes (Song et al., 2021; Richards, 2021). The slightly stronger effect for cultural attractions is noteworthy and reflects the unique position of North-West Nigeria, where cultural heritage, including festivals like the Durbar and historical sites like the Kano City Walls, represents a particularly distinctive and marketable asset.

H2a, H2b, H3a, H3b: Mediating Effects of Service Quality and Destination Branding

The mediation analyses revealed significant indirect effects for both service quality and destination branding across both types of attractions. The indirect effect for Service Quality was stronger (CA: $\beta = 0.27$; NA: $\beta = 0.22$) compared to Destination Branding (CA: $\beta = 0.19$; NA: $\beta = 0.18$). This finding suggests that while both mechanisms are important, service quality plays a slightly more critical role in translating attractions into performance outcomes. This aligns with research by Liat et al. (2020) and Wu and Chen (2022), which emphasizes that service quality is the primary driver of customer satisfaction and repeat business in tourism. Destination branding, while significant, may require more time and investment to yield effects, particularly in regions where destination awareness is still developing.

H4a and H4b: Moderating Effects of Security Perception

The significant interaction effects for both Cultural Attractions ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$) and Natural Attractions ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$) provide strong support for Hypotheses 4a and 4b. These findings demonstrate that security perception is not merely a direct influence but a critical contingency factor that shapes how effectively attractions can be leveraged for business success. When security perception is high, the positive effects of attractions on performance are amplified; when security perception is low, these effects are diminished. This finding resonates strongly with the context of North-West Nigeria and supports the theoretical assertion from the Destination Competitiveness Model that security acts as a "qualifying condition" for tourism development (Crouch & Ritchie, 2019; Saha & Yap, 2021). The finding also aligns with broader tourism security literature demonstrating that negative security perceptions create significant barriers to tourism development (Neumayer, 2020).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the complex pathways through which cultural and natural attractions influence tourism business performance in North-West Nigeria. Drawing on the Resource-Based View and Destination Competitiveness Model, the research developed and tested a comprehensive model that examined both direct effects and the mediating roles of service quality and destination branding, as well as the moderating role of security perception. The study successfully achieved its three objectives.

The findings reveal that both cultural and natural attractions have significant direct positive effects on tourism business performance. More importantly, the study demonstrates that service quality and destination branding serve as critical mediating mechanisms through which these attractions translate into performance outcomes. Service quality emerged as the stronger mediator, underscoring the importance of operational excellence in capturing value from destination assets. Perhaps most critically, the study established security perception as a powerful moderator that conditions the entire attraction-performance relationship. This finding is particularly salient for North-West Nigeria, where security challenges have historically constrained tourism development.

This research makes several contributions to the tourism entrepreneurship literature. First, it extends the application of RBV and Destination Competitiveness Theory to a challenging but important context. Second, it provides empirical evidence for the distinct mechanisms through which different types of attractions influence business performance. Third, it highlights the critical role of security perception as a boundary condition that shapes tourism outcomes. For a region rich in cultural and natural assets but facing developmental challenges, this research provides a clear, evidence-based roadmap for fostering sustainable tourism business growth.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for tourism business owners, policymakers, and destination management organizations.

For Tourism Business Owners and Managers:

Prioritize Service Quality as a Core Strategy: Given that service quality emerged as the strongest mediator, tourism businesses should invest systematically in service excellence. This includes staff training, customer feedback systems, and continuous improvement processes. In a region where attractions are strong but service standards may vary, service quality represents a key differentiator and competitive advantage.

Invest in Local Destination Branding: While destination branding may require collective action, individual businesses can contribute by aligning their branding with the region's unique cultural identity. Developing strong online presence, engaging with travel influencers, and telling authentic stories about the region's heritage can enhance visibility and attract visitors.

Communicate Security Proactively: Given the moderating role of security perception, businesses should proactively communicate safety measures to potential visitors. This includes providing accurate information about security conditions, showcasing

security protocols, and building partnerships with security agencies to ensure visitor safety.

For Policymakers and Destination Management Organizations:

Address Security as a Foundational Priority: The moderating effect of security perception underscores that security is not merely a parallel concern but a fundamental determinant of tourism success. Policymakers must prioritize security improvements in tourism zones, develop tourism-specific security protocols, and actively communicate security improvements to counter negative perceptions.

Support Service Quality Development: Government and industry associations should develop training programs and certification schemes focused on service quality standards for tourism businesses. This could include hospitality training, customer service workshops, and quality assurance programs that elevate overall service standards across the region.

Develop and Promote a Coherent Destination Brand: A coordinated destination branding strategy for North-West Nigeria is urgently needed. This should leverage the region's unique cultural heritage including festivals, crafts, and historical sites alongside its natural assets. Investment in marketing campaigns, digital presence, and participation in international tourism fairs can help build destination awareness and attract visitors.

Invest in Tourism Infrastructure: Complementary investments in infrastructure including roads, signage, visitor centers, and sanitation facilities are essential to support both service quality and destination branding efforts. These investments signal commitment to tourism development and enhance the visitor experience.

Limitations and Future Research:

This study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time, while tourism development is inherently dynamic. Future longitudinal research could track how the relationships evolve over time, particularly as security conditions change. The study focused on the supply-side perspective of tourism businesses; incorporating tourist perspectives would provide a more complete understanding. Additionally, future research could explore other potential moderators, such as digital infrastructure or government support, and could extend the geographic scope to include comparative studies across different regions of Nigeria.

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