

Tourist Motives and Behavioural Intentions Towards Bawa Falls in Butterworth, South Africa: Recommendations for Rural Tourism Development

Penitence Ndebele¹ 

AFFILIATIONS

¹Department of Tourism, Hospitality and Sport Management, Faculty of Management and Public Administration Sciences, Walter Sisulu University, Butterworth, South Africa.

CORRESPONDENCE

Email: pndebele@wsu.ac.za*

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Abstract: As rural communities diversify their economies, rural tourism development is at the centre of the shift away from predominantly agricultural communities. Through tourism, communities benefit from infrastructural development, conservation of cultural and natural resources, as well as job creation, while tourists experience different cultures and interact with community members. There are tourist-related factors that drive tourists to destinations (push factors) and destination-related factors that lure tourists to specific locations (pull factors), both of which are important for the competitiveness and success of the destination. Studies have primarily focused on rural tourism as a strategy for economic development, the challenges faced, and the various role players involved in this development. This study aimed to understand the motives and behavioural intentions of rural tourists, as well as to ascertain destination attributes from the tourists' perspective. The study employed qualitative approach, distributing a self-administered open-ended questionnaire via Facebook and WhatsApp groups to tourists who visited Butterworth, Eastern Cape Province, a local municipality in South Africa. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were utilised to obtain data, and the results reveal that tourists were

more driven by destination attribute motives than by internal factors. Destination attributes such as infrastructure and accessibility were portrayed negatively by respondents. The study also found that the attraction appears to be abandoned. This indicates a need for efforts to focus on improving and maintaining destination attributes, as they contribute to tourists' perceptions and satisfaction.

Keywords: Rural tourism, development, motives, accessibility, destination awareness.

1. Introduction

Rural areas have the potential to be developed into viable tourism destinations through local economic development initiatives and consultations with relevant communities (Wijijayanti et al., 2020). Rural tourism destinations are usually located in smaller, less popular towns that still require development, making the perspectives of those who visit these attractions important. As indicated by Liu et al. (2023) in their rural tourism contribution model, communities benefit from entrepreneurial, investment, and employment opportunities, as well as gaining a sense of community identity and pride, cultural preservation, and the restoration of historical buildings. This highlights the significant socio-cultural and economic contributions of rural tourism development in rural communities.

The community is an integral part of rural tourism development, as they own the natural, human, and cultural resources necessary for this development (Sadeghi & Seidaiy, 2023). They also tend to gain from job creation, thus alleviating levels of poverty (Leu, 2019). Rural tourism activities can be leveraged for economic development and may lead to infrastructural improvements due to the influx of tourists to these destinations (Ozkan & Gurbuz, 2023). Rural communities are rich in heritage and culture; therefore, these resources can potentially be commercialised into tourism products (Phori,

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2024). While rural communities are the hosts and custodians of rural tourism resources, tourists are part of this value chain as consumers of rural tourism products (Sadhedi & Seidaiy, 2023). It is, therefore, important to understand consumer behaviour, such as the motives of tourists visiting rural destinations.

Destination awareness is an important pre-trip attribute that influences destination choice (Etuk, 2021). Junaedi and Harjanto (2020) found that destination awareness positively affects tourists' intention to visit a destination, with aspects such as word of mouth mediating the relationship between travel intention and destination awareness. Yumna and Roostika (2022) highlight that destination awareness indirectly influences the intention to visit by shaping tourists' perceptions of the destination. Information about the destination from various sources creates the desire to travel; therefore, this study introduces Dann's (1977) push and pull motivation theory to examine rural tourists' motivations and behavioural intentions. In relation to the push and pull theory, Pektas (2020) suggested that cognitive image, which relates to destination awareness, can be classified as a pull factor, as it showcases the destination's available attributes and activities on offer. Once tourists become aware of a potential destination, their motives for visiting become important, as these motives influence the overall experience at the destination. Güzel et al. (2020) reveal that internal factors driving tourists towards a destination positively influence tourist satisfaction, cementing the significant role of push motivation in tourism experiences. Depending on the type of tourism engaged in, these motives may differ (Poruțiu et al., 2021), making it essential to examine tourists' motivations based on the type of destination and activities undertaken.

An integral part of tourism is the destination attributes, commonly referred to as pull factors from the push and pull motivation theory by Dann (1977). These attributes are the resources available at the destination that draw tourists and create experiences for them (Dann, 1977). Therefore, the available destination attributes will influence the type of attractions and activities at a destination. Pektas (2020) classified intangible elements of the destination, such as scenery, friendliness of local people, value for money, appeal of local food, and cultural differences, as pull factors, while aspects like infrastructure, transportation, and attractions and activities were identified as tangible pull factors. Both push and pull factors influence destination selection, according to the findings of Sukrana et al. (2025), who examined the impact of these factors on eco-resort selection. Push and pull motives are integral to the tourists' experience, as they play a significant role in evaluation and influence behavioural intentions. The experience at the destination affects future behavioural intentions, and in support of this, Zhenbin et al. (2024) found that memorable tourism experiences positively influence behavioural intentions towards rural tourism. Thus, it is important to measure the experiences of tourists at rural destinations to develop tailored experiences that encourage positive behavioural intentions.

1.1 Problem statement

The Eastern Cape province in South Africa is well endowed with both cultural and natural resources that can aid in economic growth through rural tourism development; yet, it remains one of the most economically disadvantaged provinces in the country (Songca et al., 2021). Ramukumba and Setoke (2024) state that, to effectively understand and conceptualise rural tourism, which differs by location and context, the motives of tourists visiting these rural destinations should be understood. While Amoah and Amoah (2019) focused on the motives of tourists to two popular coastal rural destinations through a quantitative study. Amoah and Amoah (2019) call for more studies focusing on rural tourism in the Eastern Cape province to expand the available literature and increase the potential for generalisation of findings on rural tourist behaviour. This study aims to identify tourist motives for a destination with less visibility on social media and in mainstream media via an exploratory pilot qualitative study, thereby obtaining information from the perspective of the tourists without pre-conceived ideas. Understanding how tourists discovered this destination, what

motivated them to visit, and what destination attributes attracted them is crucial for informing rural tourism development strategies. Through rural tourism development, the province has the potential for economic growth, employment creation, and opportunities for local communities to preserve and share their culture with tourists. However, to fully realise the potential of rural tourism attractions, it is essential to understand tourist behaviour towards these attractions, as well as the existing resources and attractions.

1.2 Research objectives

This study is guided by the following research objectives:

- To identify rural tourists' motives and behavioural intentions towards Bawa Falls.
- To determine tourists' perceptions and assessment of available pull factors and the destination.
- To provide indicative suggestions to aid in the future development of the attraction.

1.3 Review of destination awareness

Destination awareness refers to tourists' ability to recognise a tourist destination and the top destination on their minds when deciding on a trip (Junaedi & Harjanto, 2020). Vila et al. (2021) state that consumer awareness is a prerequisite for the consumption of products. Thus, in terms of tourism, destination awareness plays a role in motivating tourists to choose a particular destination. As found by Duong et al. (2023), the information available about a destination affects the attractiveness of its pull factors. Therefore, the information available about a destination communicates to potential tourists what resources and activities are available and how they have been crafted to satisfy push factors. Tourists may become aware of a destination through various sources such as mainstream media, social media, and word of mouth. Marketing efforts combined with destination-specific attributes create destination awareness that inspires tourists to act on their desire to consume certain products (Xu et al., 2022). This highlights the importance of the initial information that tourists learn about a destination in their decision to travel and actual destination choice. Vila et al. (2021) found that destination awareness has a positive influence on film tourists' intention to visit a destination featured in a TV series. Meanwhile, Etuk (2021) examined the effect of destination awareness strategies on destination choice, and the findings confirm the positive influence of destination awareness on that choice. Destination awareness can therefore be said to be related to the pull factors of a destination that are used in destination selection to satisfy identified push factors. For the purposes of this study, destination awareness is identified as an antecedent of travel motivation and destination choice, using aspects of the push and pull motivation theory.

1.4 Motives to travel- Push and pull motivation

Travel motivation is an essential part of travel decision-making, and some studies have found a relationship between travel motivation and intentions to travel (Dhungana & Sharma, 2024). Push motivation refers to the internal desires related to satisfaction and the arousal of certain emotions experienced during a trip, while pull motivation pertains to the external resources beyond tourists' control that attract them to a destination. These pull factors are often utilised in the provision of tourism services and activities. The main pull factors in rural tourism are the natural, cultural, and human resources available at the destination (Sanagustin-Fons et al., 2018). The topic of motivation is complex, as it varies based on the type of tourism engaged in, the destination, and the tourists themselves; hence, it is important to continually measure motives, as they may differ due to these factors. Ezeuduji and Dlomo (2020) state that domestic tourism can lead to international demand, identifying socialisation, relaxation, exploration, visiting friends and family, and escape as travel motives for domestic tourists to a local municipality in KZN.

While examining motives for rural tourists, Ramukumba and Setokoe (2024) identified motivations related to rest and relaxation, enjoyment, visiting friends and family, as well as business reasons.

These motives appear to correlate with the push factors connected to what the tourist aims to achieve from their experience. According to a study by Farmaki (2012), domestic tourists to a rural coastal destination in Cyprus were primarily motivated by push factors such as escape and relaxation, driven by an internal desire for a change of environment from their daily routine. In contrast to domestic tourists, foreign tourists were more motivated by destination-specific attributes (pull factors) such as cultural and historical attractions, landscapes and scenery, and nature-based activities like hiking and long walks. Among foreign tourists, those motivated by cultural and historical aspects surprisingly interacted less with locals than those attracted by nature-based attributes. Relaxation and escape, novelty and adventure, as well as romantic getaways were the motives driving senior tourists to visit a rural destination (Lewis & D'Alessandro, 2019). The most prevalent motives for rural tourism are the push factors of rest and relaxation, indicating that these destinations serve as a perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of tourists' everyday lives. The push and pull motivation theory is significant as it provides destinations with a demand-and-supply perspective on destination choice (Lwoga & Maturo, 2020). Thus, destinations can meet tourists' needs generated by push factors using the pull factors identified as important to tourists.

The effect of push and pull factors on behavioural intentions, such as word-of-mouth recommendations and revisit intentions, is mediated by satisfaction (Nguyen & Mai, 2021). The authors found that if tourists are satisfied with the pull factors at the destination and the needs generated by push factors are met, they are likely to revisit the destination and engage in positive word-of-mouth recommendations. It is important to understand that not all pull factors influence revisit intentions. Aspects related to climate, culture, and heritage, as well as push factors, had no influence on revisit intentions, while adventure and the friendliness of local people positively influenced the behavioural intentions of international tourists (Baniya et al., 2017). However, the findings of Baptista et al. (2020) contradict these results, revealing that only push factors positively influenced tourists' revisit intentions, while pull factors had no influence. To emphasise the complexity of push and pull motivations and behavioural intentions, there is a weak relationship between these motivations and behavioural intentions, with push factors having the most influence. It can be concluded that push and pull factors are important influences on behaviour, but their impact is not uniform across motivations and tourists.

There is limited literature regarding pull factors such as accessibility, amenities, and accommodation in relation to rural tourists. These factors are, however, important aspects of the destination for tourists and may attract or deter them from a destination, although they may not be the main reason for travel. The Eastern Cape Province has poor infrastructure leading to rural destinations, and therefore it will be interesting to find out if these aspects hold any significance for tourists visiting a rural attraction such as Bawa Falls.

2. Method of Research

The focus area for the study was Bawa Falls in the Eastern Cape, an attraction that has the potential to aid in economic growth through rural tourism development. This study followed an exploratory research design, which does not seek to provide generalisable findings but rather offers an overview of tourists' motives and behavioural intentions at the destination under study. A qualitative research approach was adopted, using open-ended questionnaires to collect data. A combination of two non-probability sampling techniques were used, purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on specific pre-determined criteria to recruit individuals who possess knowledge crucial to the research question (Tongco, 2007). Snowball sampling occurs when potential respondents are asked to recruit other respondents within their social circles (Naderifa et al., 2017). For inclusion, respondents needed to be over the age of 18 and have visited Bawa Falls. Due to a lack of visibility of the attraction on social media and mainstream media, local hiking groups on Facebook were contacted to distribute the questionnaire among their members. The link to the

questionnaire was then shared via WhatsApp groups by administrators of these groups, who were identified on Facebook. Respondents were encouraged to share the link with others in their social circles who may have visited Bawa Falls but were not part of hiking groups, constituting the snowball sampling aspect of the study. These respondents were deemed to have knowledge useful for achieving the main objectives of the study.

The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions to obtain details about the experience from the respondents' point of view and to minimise researcher bias. It was distributed online via social media, and a total of 11 responses were obtained. Although this sample size may be considered small, it is deemed sufficient for exploratory qualitative research. Patton (2015) states that researchers should focus on the power of information in qualitative studies rather than on statistical representativeness. Supporting this, Wutich et al. (2024) indicate that data saturation, where no new information emerges, can be achieved with as few as 9 participants who share similar experiences. When exploring under-researched concepts, small purposive samples are considered a valid line of inquiry (Bouncken et al., 2025). Given the purposive nature of this study and the specific knowledge possessed by the participants, the sample size was adequate to provide meaningful indicative insights regarding tourists' motives and behavioural intentions of visitors to Bawa Falls. The collected questionnaire data was transferred to a Microsoft Excel file, and common words and narratives were identified from respondents' statements through manual reading. These common words and narratives were then grouped into various themes, and a description of demographic information was included.

2.1 Ethical considerations

The study involved collecting data from human participants, and ethical clearance was obtained from the author's institution (protocol number: 04/01/29/2025/PG). The ethical clearance addressed issues of informed consent, and respondents were informed that participation in the study was entirely voluntary; they had the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. The respondents' data was treated with the utmost confidentiality, having been anonymised to ensure that no personal information could be identified. This data is accessible only to the researcher.

3. Presentation of Results and Discussion

This section provides an overview of the study's results, revealing a mixture of demographic characteristics among respondents. Typical of small rural destinations, the primary source of information for destination awareness was word-of-mouth from friends, family, and other social circles. The results also highlight push factors such as socialisation and pull factors like activities, nature, and accessibility in rural tourism. Additionally, the findings indicate infrastructural challenges affecting the destination. Mixed views regarding satisfaction emerge due to the condition of the pull factors. Recommendations include improving infrastructure and increasing the involvement of authorities in rural tourism development.

Most respondents were females aged between their mid-twenties and mid-thirties (25-35) and late thirties to late forties (39-47). All respondents had visited the falls within the past two years (2023-2024), enabling them to provide a more recent overview of the state of the falls.

3.1 Destination awareness

The main source of information indicated by respondents was word of mouth from friends, family, and social groups, as well as the fact that some had grown up in the area. Word of mouth is the primary driver of marketing in rural tourism destinations, and tourists to these areas typically consist of friends and family members. Some of the sample responses, as shown below, reflect these results:

Respondent 1: There is a group of hikers known as Mmquma hikers that organises hikes to different places every year, so last year I went on the hike to Bawa Fall with them.

Respondent 2: There was a hike organised by a group called Gcuwa Adventures and they took us hiking there.

Respondent 3: I am from around the area and that is how I got to know about the falls.

Respondent 9: Having grown up in Butterworth, it was amongst the greatest tourist attraction sites within the Mnquma Local Municipality.

The reliance on traditional word of mouth indicates a lack of formal marketing structures for the destination, as well as the fact that word of mouth is a trustworthy source of information, being an account of someone else's experience. Respondents 1 and 2 attribute their awareness to their social groups, while Respondents 3 and 9 indicate that they are natives of the destination. These results frame travel to remote rural destinations as an activity for close kin.

Finding: There is a lack of visibility of the attraction in formal marketing efforts and on social media platforms. In line with the findings of this study, Cheng et al. (2022) found that most tourists to a rural destination relied on word-of-mouth recommendations from family and friends as a means of obtaining information. Similarly, Lwoga and Maturo (2022) highlight word of mouth as the major source of information for rural tourists. Thus, tourists trust the positive recommendations of others who have experienced the destination, in comparison to the formal marketing methods employed by organisations. Technology and the internet should be integrated into the marketing of rural destinations to supplement the lack of available official information, enabling tourists to share pictures and videos of their experiences on various social media platforms (Cheng et al., 2022).

3.2 Motives

Understanding why tourists travel is important as it indicates what they seek to gain from their travel experiences and enables the provision of satisfactory, tailor-made experiences. Tourists are either pushed towards a destination by internal factors or pulled towards it by external factors related to the destination.

3.2.1 Push and pull factors

In relation to the objective of identifying motives for visiting Bawa Falls, respondents indicated pull factors related to destination attributes such as nature, hiking, and scenery. These pull factors are important because they serve as resources to create satisfactory tourist experiences. Some respondents were motivated by social needs, such as meeting people, spending time with family, and relaxing with their social circle. These sentiments are reflected in the sample responses provided below:

Respondent 3: I am a person who maintains an active lifestyle, so hiking seemed like a good idea.

Respondent 6: I wanted to see the beautiful view of the waterfalls and be in a relaxing environment with fresh air.

Respondent 5: The coordinators of the hiking group motivated me to visit.

Respondent 8: Adventure activities like hiking, beautiful nature and peaceful environment

Respondent 11: I wanted to meet and interact with new people with similar interests as mine.

The results show a combination of internal and external factors for rural tourism, indicative of the integration of destination resources to satisfy intrinsic motives through the availability of activities and a relaxing atmosphere. Respondent 3 highlights how hiking aligns with their active lifestyle, hence their visit to the destination. In agreement, Respondent 8 mentions hiking as a motive related to adventure, as well as the beautiful nature and peaceful environment, which relates to Respondent

6, who was motivated by the view of the Falls and a relaxing atmosphere. This indicates a combination of activities and intangible pull factors tied to the destination as motivators for visiting. For Respondents 5 and 11, their social circles and the need to form new social connections with like-minded people informed their decision to visit the destination.

Finding: As indicated by the results, destination factors were dominant motives for visiting the attraction, showing that destination factors are also an important part of travel motivation, in addition to push factors. In contrast to the findings of this study, Botezatu (2014) revealed that rest, relaxation, and leisure were motives for rural tourism among international rural tourists in Moldova. In a study of a rural tourism destination in South Africa by Ramukumba and Setoke (2024), rest and relaxation emerged as the most important motive for engaging in rural tourism, followed by visiting friends and relatives, and lastly enjoying the freedom of being in the countryside. Lwoga and Maturo (2020) found that for international tourists, discovering and learning about the traditional way of life in rural villages was the main motivator to visit, followed by relaxation, curiosity and learning, interest in traditional farming methods, socialisation between tourists and hosts, the natural environment, authenticity, and contributing to the community. Regardless of geographical origin, intrinsic motives emerge as significant factors in rural tourism motivation in the literature, which contrasts with this study. The possible reason for the discrepancy between the literature and this study is that this study may focus on a less developed attraction, lacking the infrastructure to provide leisure or relaxation activities while serving a more localised profile of visitors motivated by nature and willing to overlook infrastructural challenges.

3.3 Assessment of pull factors

In line with answering the second research question, this section provides an overview assessment of destination attributes by the respondents.

3.3.1 Accessibility

Bad roads and overgrown, bushy pathways indicate difficulties in accessing Bawa Falls. Also related to accessibility is the issue of signage, with respondents noting that there was little to no signage to and around the destination. Respondents observed damaged, barely visible, and even fallen signage, which indicates maintenance issues at the site. Sample statements are presented below:

Respondent 2: The place is not easy to get to, roads are dilapidated, and buildings have been vandalised.

Respondent 7: Not that easy, the place is bushy, with stone and a stream, no trail markings.

Respondent 4: Yes, there was signage, but all signage and information boards have fallen.

Respondent 5: The road was so bad, even the buildings there were vandalised... I thought I was going to see something that is well developed since it was one of the heritage sites.

Respondent 9: There is currently one vandalised sign board.

Tourism destinations are geographically bound, necessitating accessibility to these locations. Accessibility and signage are critical considerations for travellers before visiting destinations, as getting lost while on a tour can be very frustrating. Respondents 2, 5, and 9 highlighted vandalism and difficulty of access due to the poor state of the roads, while Respondent 4 indicated a lack of visible signage. These issues suggest possible abandonment of the attraction and a lack of maintenance. Based on most responses, it can be concluded that the attraction is not easily accessible due to poor roads and inadequate signage to and at the site. The low statistics on visits to the Bawa Falls may therefore be attributed to inaccessibility. Poor road infrastructure and inadequate signage can deter the growth of rural tourism.

Finding: The destination is not easily accessible due to poor roads and barely visible signage. This finding corroborates existing literature, which states that rural destinations in South Africa lack the infrastructural development and maintenance support needed to ensure seamless accessibility (Ramukumba & Matyile, 2024). Ramukumba and Matyile (2024) also indicated that these attractions lack the financial resources for infrastructural development. Road quality and maintenance emerged as significant issues for domestic tourists in South Africa, with respondents mentioning that the roads were of poor quality and posed safety concerns, as noted in a study by Giddy & Kelso (2025). Mhlabane et al. (2023) also highlight the prolonged poor state of road infrastructure and signage in some rural destinations. Internationally, signage and transportation to an Indian rural destination were considered barriers to rural tourism development (Vachhani, 2024). Similarly, Zaril (2024) emphasises that poor road infrastructure leading to rural destinations, combined with adverse weather conditions such as rain, exacerbates accessibility challenges and makes tourists reluctant to visit. The similarities between the literature and this study highlight that accessibility challenges are systematic across rural destinations, both local and international, and are not unique to one specific rural area. The lack of adequate infrastructure also affects local businesses; if tourists cannot access the area, it results in a loss of potential revenue (Rogerson & Sixaba, 2022).

3.3.2 Activities and facilities

Attractions cannot function as standalone components of the tourism experience; they require support services and additional activities beyond the main attraction. In relation to objective 2 of this study, the results show that there are limited activities available at the attraction, with hiking and viewing the falls being the only mentioned options. Furthermore, there is a lack of supporting facilities, apart from buildings intended for accommodation that have since been vandalised. These sentiments are reflected in the sample responses indicated below:

Respondent 1: The activity I participated in was hiking seeing as I went with a hiking group.

Respondent 5: There are no activities to do at the falls apart from the view of the falls which is the main attraction.

Respondent 7: There are various activities such as hiking, mountain climbing, and lunch next to running waters. There are some old rondavels that were meant for tourism.

Respondent 2: There are visibly vandalised buildings which seem like they were meant to be overnight accommodation.

Respondent 3: It doesn't seem like the place is still functional because it looks abandoned with dilapidated buildings.

Respondent 4: I did not see any facilities at the place.

Respondents 1 and 7 highlight activities related to the landscape of the destination, while Respondent 5 disagrees, stating that there were no activities apart from the view of the falls. The difference in opinion may stem from varying motives for visiting. Responses from Respondents 2, 3, and 4 indicate that the destination shows signs of abandonment, as there are vandalised buildings and a lack of facilities in the area. This clearly suggests a deficiency in support services and infrastructure related to the core attraction, thereby alienating those not drawn to the destination by the main attraction.

Finding: It is evident from the results that the attraction offers limited activities and lacks supporting establishments such as facilities (accommodation, ablution, picnic areas, entertainment areas). As indicated by Eja and Eneyo (2018), tourism support services are significant contributors to economic growth in terms of employment and opportunities for entrepreneurship. Having a variety of activities is essential for the sustainability of a destination, and the absence of facilities such as accommodation and food shops may hinder the growth of these destinations (Giddy & Kelso, 2025).

3.4 Satisfaction and behavioural intention

Respondents expressed mixed views regarding their satisfaction. While some indicated that they were satisfied and enjoyed their experience, others were not entirely satisfied, noting that the place needed maintenance. Those who mentioned enjoying their experience at the falls attributed their satisfaction to pull factors such as the view. There was also a hint of uncertainty when one respondent indicated they were unsure about their experience. Some respondents stated they would revisit the falls, while others strongly expressed that, due to unmet expectations, they would not return. Sample responses are provided below:

Satisfaction

Respondent 1: I really enjoyed my experience at the falls; I would describe it as my most enjoyable moment.

Respondent 2: The scenery at the place is very beautiful with a nice view of the falls and the mountain but it also needs maintenance for it to be better.

Respondent 10: I am not sure if I can say I was satisfied or not, I guess it was okay.

Behavioural intention

Respondent 2: Yes, most definitely, the place is naturally beautiful, and I would like to experience that again.

Respondent 4: Yes please, but I'm pleading with the local municipality to fix the route and make sure that the site is in good condition.

Respondent 5: It was very nice to be there, very elegant view and perfect joint to be very happy to visit place again

Respondent 6: I would not visit the place again, my expectations about the place were not met. I was expecting more from the experience

As indicated by the responses, tourists evaluate their experiences based on the attributes, motives, and expectations formed about an attraction or destination. Respondent 1 exhibits high levels of excitement and satisfaction, while Respondent 2 praises the natural beauty of the destination but hints at the need for improvements to encourage revisits. For a more enjoyable experience, Respondent 4 expresses the desire to revisit but emphasises the need for development and maintenance of the destination. In contrast to other respondents, Respondent 6 expresses unmet expectations and a lack of desire to revisit the destination. This highlights the influence of negative pull factors at the destination on satisfaction and future behavioural intentions.

Finding: Despite the infrastructural and accessibility challenges, tourists seem generally satisfied with their experience at the falls, which may indicate that, depending on their motives for visiting, a tourist may be satisfied with an experience even though challenges were present. Contrary to the findings of this study, Amoah et al. (2019) found that the majority of tourists who visited two coastal rural destinations in South Africa exhibited satisfaction with all realms of experience (education, escape, aesthetics, entertainment, and peace of mind) and indicated positive behavioural intentions. However, it is important to note that the study by Amoah et al. (2019) was conducted at destinations with better infrastructure and facilities; hence, tourists were able to rate all realms of experience positively. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that satisfaction may be subjective to the motives and expectations held prior to the visit; thus, some may indicate satisfaction despite challenges. The core attraction of the destination may be strong enough to draw first-time visits, but repeat visitation is dependent upon the overall experience. This shows that the gap between expectation and reality determines satisfaction and subsequent visits.

3.5 Infrastructural challenges and maladministration

Respondents noted that the attraction featured beautiful scenery; however, issues of vandalism, lack of maintenance, and poor management were also evident from its condition. To address these negative observations, respondents suggested improvements in infrastructure, tourism product development, and maintenance of the attraction. Some respondents expressed the following statements:

Respondent 4: Everything was fine, but the site was vandalised. By the time we were there the waterfalls were drying out, I assume it was because of the hot weather.

Respondent 5: Lovely drive and scenery all around then finally reach this hidden gem. Bawa falls hence its natural heritage site it's out of nowhere beauty hands down.

Respondent 6: Mquma municipality must create activities to do because it a very nice place it just needs some development.

Respondent 7: Maintenance of the hiking trail, renovation of the old rondavels, use the place for tourism.

Infrastructure and superstructure are central to daily living, and the development and maintenance of these structures are essential for rural tourism. Respondents 4 and 5 describe the state of the destination with conflicting views, one stating vandalism and dry falls, while the other presents a more positive outlook on the scenery and beauty of the area. Both Respondents 6 and 7 highlight the need for the involvement of authorities in the redevelopment and maintenance of the destination site. A common sentiment among the responses is the lack of maintenance, which leads to vandalism of the available structures.

Finding: There are no formal structures in charge of developing and maintaining the attraction, as evidenced by the lack of facilities, activities, security, and maintenance of the vandalised accommodation rooms that were meant for tourism. The area needs refurbishment, including re-fencing, security personnel to maintain the site, more tourism-related activities, marking of the hiking trail, and improvements to infrastructure such as roads to ease access to the destination. Strategic partnerships between the private and public sectors can aid the economic development of Bawa Falls. Several studies in the literature concur with the findings of this study, highlighting that rural destinations are plagued by dilapidated road infrastructure and limited access to basic services such as water and sanitation, which negatively impacts communities and ultimately rural tourism development (Giddy & Kelso, 2025; Mhlabane et al., 2023; Ramukumba & Matyile, 2024; Zaril, 2024). The South African Human Rights Commission (2023) notes that the state of the road network in most rural communities in the Eastern Cape province infringes upon human rights due to the inaccessibility of basic services, highlighting the urgency with which accessibility challenges must be addressed. Pillay (2023) also notes the dire state of infrastructure in rural areas and suggests engaging various stakeholders for investment and partnership opportunities. The findings of Rogerson et al. (2022) reinforce this study's conclusions regarding the lack of maintenance of infrastructure in rural municipalities, which negatively affects tourism development and lowers community confidence in governing structures.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study sought to identify the motives and behavioural intentions of tourists visiting a small rural destination. Both push and pull factors were identified, and while pull factors stood out the most, they were also the most criticised. Interestingly, satisfaction was linked to the push factors as well as to positive behavioural intentions, provided there is improvement in the pull factors. This presents destination management with opportunities for service recovery during tourists' next visits. The study shows that the destination has ample potential; however, for this potential to be fully realised, significant infrastructural, marketing, and support service gaps should be addressed.

Word of mouth emerged as an important part of destination awareness, closely related to the social push factors identified in the study. This reinforces the view that tourists trust experiential sharing more than traditional marketing promotions. It is recommended that Facebook pages such as Gcuwa Hikers, Mquma Hikers, and Mquma Tourism be used to actively share information about rural destinations, which will generate electronic word-of-mouth with a wider reach beyond kin and social circles.

Pull factors in the form of destination attributes were more prevalent in the study compared to push factors. However, the assessment of these pull factors was negative; thus, although there is potential for revisit intention and positive word-of-mouth, the state of pull factors such as accessibility, activities, and support services hinders the full realisation of tourism development potential. Provincial authorities, such as the Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC), should be leveraged to obtain financial investment for the improvement of roads and other facilities and infrastructure at the destination. Surrounding communities should be engaged as labour and entrepreneurs to provide some support services, such as catering for an onsite restaurant during the improvement of the destination, including marking the hiking trail and serving as security personnel.

Issues regarding the management and maintenance of the attraction create reluctance regarding positive future behavioural intentions. Although tourists mentioned satisfaction, they also highlighted concerns related to lack of maintenance and safety, particularly the absence of visible security personnel and a fenced perimeter around the attraction. There is a visible lack of formal structures in the management and maintenance of the attraction; therefore, it is necessary for the municipality to be actively involved in the refurbishment of Bawa Falls through investments in infrastructure and personnel to manage the attraction.

Although pull factors need maintenance and development, some pull factors, such as scenery and hiking, were linked to satisfaction. Incorporating these suggestions and recommendations may lead to a fully functional and vibrant tourism destination, capable of attracting tourists from beyond the province and borders of South Africa.

The major limitation of the study is the small sample size, which makes generalisability of findings difficult. Thus, for future research, larger sample sizes using a quantitative approach could be useful in drawing concrete conclusions. The author also suggests that research be conducted at rural attractions that are still functional and receive regular visitors to obtain a more balanced view of rural tourism development in the province. The study also found satisfaction and positive behavioural intentions despite negative pull factors. Future studies could, therefore, explore the relationship between satisfaction and behavioural intention in settings where dissatisfaction factors exist, using motivation and expectations as mediating factors.

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