



## Private conservation funding from wildlife tourism enterprises in sub-Saharan Africa: Conservation marketing beliefs and practices

Ralf Buckley<sup>a,\*</sup>, Alexa Mossaz<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> International Chair in Ecotourism Research, Griffith University, Gold Coast 4222, Australia

<sup>b</sup> Rêves Afrique SA, Genève CH-1201, Switzerland



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### ABSTRACT

Conservation finance in many African countries relies heavily on tourism. Some commercial tourism companies provide substantial funding for private reserves, communal conservancies, and public protected areas, and for anti-poaching, breeding, and translocation programs. They also provide local employment, which generates community support for conservation. To generate funds, they must attract clients. This relies on marketing, which we analysed using staff interviews, marketing materials, and client comments. We found that they market: wildlife viewing opportunities first; luxury and exclusiveness second; and conservation projects third. They focus on flagship species such as the African big cats, and they market directly to tourists, and to specialist rather than generalist travel agents. In their view, conservation projects influence purchases significantly for some clients, but not for the majority, nor for travel agents. Therefore, maximum contributions to future conservation finance can be achieved through differential marketing to these two groups. Mainstream marketing is targeted at tourists who want the best wildlife viewing in the greatest comfort. Conservation marketing is targeted at tourists who purchase products that contribute to conservation. If these tourists were identified during marketing and booking, then conservation tourism enterprises could notify conservation trusts to seek donations.

### 1. Introduction

Conservation finance includes private enterprise and non-government organisations as well as public parks agencies (Conservation Finance Alliance, 2002). Governments raise funds principally through taxes, NGOs through donations, and private enterprises through sales. Sales depend on marketing. Conservation marketing by private enterprises (Caro and Riggio, 2013; Macdonald et al., 2015; Duthie et al., 2017; Veríssimo et al., 2014a, 2014b, 2017) has thus become a critical component of conservation worldwide, in parallel to conservation activism by NGOs, and conservation lobbying within governments. Conservation NGOs and public parks agencies also use marketing approaches, to solicit donations and boost support (Borrie et al., 2002). For private enterprises in particular, however, commercial marketing is essential for continued existence, and hence the ability to contribute to conservation.

Conservation finance has become a highly contested field of conservation policy during recent decades. This includes both the sources and mechanisms to raise funding (Dempsey and Suarez, 2016; Lennox et al., 2017) and the distribution of funding once obtained (Buckley, 2016, 2017; Miller et al., 2013; Waldron et al., 2013). In addition to

budget allocations from national and subsidiary-state governments, sources now routinely include bilateral and multilateral aid, donations, and ecosystem services payments (Ament et al., 2017; Fletcher et al., 2016; Jayachandran et al., 2017; Jupiter, 2017; Little et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2013). In addition, a variety of private sector funding options have been adopted or trialled. These fall into three main categories. The first comprises fees charged by parks agencies for various individual or commercial uses. The second consists of financial arrangements with commercial tourism enterprises, ranging from small donations, to large-scale leases (Buckley, 2017; De Vos et al., 2016). The third consists of full or partial privatisation of protected areas (African Parks, 2017; Wilson, 2017).

Private sector involvement in conservation is particularly significant in developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Parks agencies in many developing countries now receive the majority of their recurrent funding from tourism; and in a few countries, such as Botswana and the Seychelles, the proportion is > 80% (Buckley et al., 2012; Rylance et al., 2017). For some individual threatened species, > 80% of remaining global habitat (Morrison et al., 2012), or > 60% of remaining global populations (Buckley et al., 2012; Steven et al., 2013), are protected through funding raised from ecotourism,

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [r.buckley@griffith.edu.au](mailto:r.buckley@griffith.edu.au), [ralf.c.buckley@gmail.com](mailto:ralf.c.buckley@gmail.com) (R. Buckley).

with net gains for population viability (Buckley et al., 2016). Some private tourism enterprises play a substantial role in conservation finance, giving rise to the term conservation tourism (Buckley, 2010a, 2010b; Mossaz et al., 2015). Conservation tourism is a subset of ecotourism, itself a component of broader nature-based tourism.

Some of these African conservation tourism enterprises contribute substantial funding to conservation in public protected areas, communal conservancies, and private reserves (Buckley, 2017; Grünwald et al., 2016; Mossaz et al., 2015). Financial arrangements include leases, management contracts, profit-sharing, partnerships, and equity-transfer arrangements. Some also include NGOs, trust, donors, and local community organisations (Buckley, 2017; Grünwald et al., 2016; Mossaz et al., 2015; Van Wijk et al., 2015). Some African conservation tourism enterprises also fund, and/or operate: anti-poaching measures (Barichiev et al., 2017); breeding and translocation programs; veterinary services; disease and pest control; active management of individual species populations; fire and vegetation management; and health, education and employment opportunities that involve local communities in conservation (Mossaz et al., 2015). Conservation tourism enterprises also operate on other continents (Buckley, 2010b; Buckley and Pabla, 2012), but as yet, to a lesser degree than in Africa.

As private sector contributions to conservation have become increasingly important, analysis of conservation marketing has become a correspondingly critical component of conservation research (Macdonald et al., 2015; Duthie et al., 2017; Veríssimo et al., 2014a, 2014b, 2017). Social and financial aspects are critical in conservation (Dietsch et al., 2016; Lindsey et al., 2017; Manfredo et al., 2017; McClanahan and Rankin, 2016; Olive and McCune, 2017; Selier et al., 2016). Global biodiversity and threatened species populations continue to decline ever more precipitately (Ceballos et al., 2017; Estrada et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2017; Naidoo et al., 2016). Protected areas are increasingly critical for conservation (Gray et al., 2016; Hoffmann et al., 2015; Le Saout et al., 2014; Miraldo et al., 2016; Oldekop et al., 2015; Pringle, 2017; Watson et al., 2016); but suffer increasing pressures and threats (Allan et al., 2017; Aukema et al., 2017; Barnosky et al., 2017; Ripple et al., 2016; Scheffers et al., 2016; Moran and Kanemoto, 2017; Pacifici et al., 2015; Parsons et al., 2016; Pecl et al., 2017; Scheffers et al., 2016; Tilman et al., 2017). All of this creates a context where marketing, not historically relevant to conservation, has now become a core concern. Marketing brings clients, and clients bring revenue, and revenue funds conservation.

Here, therefore, we present the first known analysis of conservation marketing strategies by private conservation tourism enterprises. We analyse these strategies for five companies operating in sub-Saharan Africa: & Beyond, Wilderness Safaris, Great Plains Conservation, Robin Pope Safaris, and Okonjima Africat. The last two of these five enterprises are small and specialised, but contribute to conservation for particular species and sites. The first three are all large international firms. Between them, they operate 88 camps and lodges in 19 countries. These constitute about 30% of the wildlife safari camps and lodges in the entire region (Nolting and Butchart, 2016). They correspond broadly to the first of the four models outlined by Clements et al. (2016). These three companies make the largest financial contributions to conservation, across all land tenure types and in multiple countries. As one example, these three companies have recently combined forces to fund *Rhino Conservation Botswana* (2017) and *Rhinos Without Borders* (2017). These have successfully invested tens of millions of dollars to translocate black and white rhino from South Africa to Botswana, where anti-poaching measures are stronger.

All five of these companies are commercial tourism enterprises. They must maintain a continuing flow of paying guests to fund their operations, including contributions to conservation. Clients may select and book their holidays themselves, or more commonly, they may make their bookings via travel agents. Wealthy tourists pay well for opportunities to watch iconic wildlife species exhibiting natural behaviours at close range (Colléony et al., 2017; Hausmann et al., 2017; Lindsey et al.,

2007). Especially for wealthier tourists, specialist travel agents can exert a powerful influence on the choice of operator, camps or lodges, and itinerary (Buckley and Mossaz, 2016). The five conservation tourism enterprises studied here, therefore divide their efforts between marketing to specialist travel agents, and marketing directly to past and potential clients. In particular, how they market their conservation programs depends on how they think clients and travel agents choose tour operators. Decision processes of specialist travel agents have been examined previously (Buckley and Mossaz, 2016). Here we examine the conservation marketing strategies used by the conservation tourism enterprises themselves. We do so firstly, by interviewing them directly; secondly, by analysing the various marketing materials they produce and disseminate; and thirdly, by examining the responses of their past and potential future clients to those materials.

## 2. Methods

We examined conservation marketing for each of these enterprises, through three consecutive steps. First, we conducted 63 h of semi-structured workplace interviews with 28 senior executives (founders, CEO's etc); marketing managers; and conservation staff. No inducements were used, and interviews were recorded, with permission and prior informed consent. We asked about: conservation projects; marketing strategies; roles of travel agents; attitudes and motivations of individual tourists; relations with local communities, including community involvement in conservation projects; and the role of iconic species. Interviews were analysed using standard grounded-theory qualitative approaches (Bryman, 2016; Harrevelde et al., 2016; Silverman, 2016), with deconstruction of text to the smallest distinguishable concepts, and iterative reassembly to a hierarchical set of constructs. Second, we analysed images and text from marketing materials: print brochures produced for clients and agents respectively; the conservation sections of websites; and a one-month peak-season sample of Facebook® posts. We classified images and text paragraphs into four categories: wildlife viewing; facilities and service; direct conservation measures; and indirect conservation measures via local communities. Third, we compiled comments by past and potential clients, on each of these enterprises' Facebook® posts, and analysed them as for interviews. We started with current posts, and worked backwards by date until we had scanned > 1000 posts.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Staff beliefs about marketing conservation

Senior executives, conservation staff, and marketing staff from the five conservation tourism enterprises were generally all emphatic about the key role of conservation in their business models (Table 1), and the strong financial cross-links between the tourism and conservation components. They argued that: “without conservation, the product does not exist”; but equally, “we channel tourism revenues into conservation”.

In each of the five conservation tourism enterprises studied, there is a degree of division between conservation staff, responsible for managing the habitat and populations of the wildlife species that tourists come to see; and the marketing staff, responsible for making sure that the tourists do indeed come to see those wildlife. Conservation staff said that they must think long-term, and measure their success in terms of cumulative outcomes. Marketing staff said that they need frequent short dramatic news items. Examples include: the birth of new lion or leopard cubs, a territorial battle between rival lion prides, or the airlift of rhino as part of a translocation project. Conservation managers appreciated the requirements of conservation marketing, even though they were not directly involved. They said, for example, that: “the marketing team wants over-simplified information that sells”; so “we have to adapt our language for marketing purposes”. They add that: “the conservation team

**Table 1**  
Tourism enterprise staff perspectives on conservation marketing.

Theme	Specifics
Senior executives, conservation and marketing staff, overall strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Conservation third, after wildlife attractions and luxury service</li> <li>* Big cats sell best, for conservation as well as wildlife attractions</li> <li>* Positive PR is top priority, and conservation contributes</li> <li>* Only flagship species are of interest to individual tourists</li> </ul>
How conservation staff identify the various mechanisms by which they can and do contribute to conservation of threatened species and habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Habitat expansion and protection</li> <li>* Individual animal translocations</li> <li>* Veterinary assistance, captive breeding etc.</li> <li>* Anti-poaching and predator-compensation programs</li> <li>* Indirect influence on local communities</li> <li>* Programs with NGO partners</li> <li>* Education for nearby landholders</li> </ul>
How conservation staff think tourists see conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Research and monitoring</li> <li>* Don't appreciate practical complexities of conservation</li> <li>* Don't appreciate staff skills unless see them in operation</li> <li>* Can be taught more, but only some individuals interested</li> </ul>
How marketing staff they think travel agents see conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Generalist agents uninterested in conservation</li> <li>* Specialist agents interested but not well informed</li> <li>* Agents rarely see conservation projects on familiarisation trips</li> <li>* Agents rarely tell clients about conservation</li> </ul>
How all staff see internal company communications between their conservation and marketing personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Conservation yields long-term successes</li> <li>* Marketing needs frequent short events</li> <li>* Marketing needs "simple stories that sell"</li> <li>* Internal communications could improve</li> <li>* Especially difficult in large enterprises</li> <li>* With complex structure across countries</li> </ul>

[sometimes] forget about marketing aspects"; but that "the marketing team regularly ask us to feed them with wildlife stories".

Conservation managers mentioned a range of practical conservation mechanisms, especially protection of habitat, translocations, and active management of predators and prey. For example, they said that: "we manage our lion population at a level that is enough for tourism, but not in excess for cheetahs, as lions kill cheetahs". Indirect mechanisms involving education or employment of local private or communal landholders were also mentioned: "we decided to focus on education to change the next generation's perception of carnivores, so they can co-exist with carnivores on the land they share". Also mentioned were research and monitoring: "tourists pay for conservation by sponsoring the research".

Conservation managers argued that individual tourists' actual understanding of practical wildlife conservation in Africa is rather limited. They said, for example, that: "tourists do not realise that they want to see conservation"; since "the reality of what conservation means in Africa is too complex to grasp for tourists staying a short time." Clients appreciate their guides' personalities, but they do not see the conservation work behind the scenes, or recognise the enormous level of technical skill required to become a good guide. Tourists begin to comprehend guides' skills only when they see them explicitly in action: "guests learn about our peoples' skills while tracking rhinos". Only when tourists realise that their safety depends moment-to-moment on the guides' knowledge and capabilities, do they pay attention to these details.

Senior executives, conservation staff and marketing staff were all keen to promote conservation to their clients. They said, for example, that: "we want to have our guests wanting to know more about conservation"; and "we need to create a trigger for tourists so they want to know more about conservation". Conservation staff argued that: "each trip should have conservation messages promoted." They recognised that this is not always feasible at the marketing stage, but argued that: "once on-site, we can educate [travel] agents and tourists".

Senior executives, conservation staff and marketing staff all argued that flagship species play a key role in conservation marketing. They referred especially to rhino and to the big cats, lion, leopard and cheetah. They reiterated this message repeatedly, with statements such as: "big cats and rhinos get people's attention"; "Lion Genetics and Botswana

Rhino Reintroduction ... are high profile"; "cat conservation will always sell"; and "the release of the lions was widely promoted". They noted that: "there is much less interest for projects such as giraffe conservation", even though giraffe are also a threatened species.

The marketing staff stated that they do also market conservation to travel agents, but that they have limited expectations. They said, for example, that: "the conservation message is tricky to sell to agents, because they are here first for the service"; that "an eco-friendly holiday is a nice concept for them to use, but I am not sure how they feel really about conservation"; and indeed, that "travel agents ... do not know much about conservation". Marketing staff noted that: "agents only have a week to visit a large number of properties", and that this is too short to understand "the big picture of our conservation efforts", which includes "the size of the concessions", "the challenges of wildlife conservation", and "the reality of conservation practices in Africa." Similarly, conservation managers noted that when travel agents visit lodges, "agents must be informed about the camps and logistics first, so the conservation team rarely deal with them when they are on-site". Marketing staff said that for specialist African wildlife travel agents, it is worth "investing time and efforts in education about conservation." They also said, however, that even agents who are knowledgeable about conservation are unlikely to pass that information to clients.

### 3.2. Staff beliefs about conservation marketing to tourists and travel agents

The single most strongly recurrent theme, in operator discussions of their own marketing, is that big cats are the main attraction: "cats sell". They say that: "people want to hear about big cats"; "cats fascinate people"; and "big cats ... are the key attraction". Other Big Five species, namely elephant, rhino and buffalo, are also important iconic attractions; but lion, leopard and cheetah are the flagships: "big cats ... [are]... definitely the attraction"; "tourists want to see the big cats"; "lion is the big attraction"; "everybody wants to see lions". The big cats are also featured most frequently in marketing materials: "we use lions in our PR to attract tourists' attention"; "a lion attracts attention in a brochure"; "people want to see pictures of lions"; "the lions will help Malawi"; "brochure covers are all about big cats!".

**Table 2**  
How marketing staff perceive interactions with individual clients.

Theme	Specifics
What companies want to achieve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Tourists book company and individual lodge by name</li> <li>* Always positive reviews, to travel agents, TripAdvisor®, etc</li> <li>* No negative reviews ever</li> <li>* High repeat business and word-of-mouth recommendations</li> </ul>
What most tourists respond to in marketing materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Big cats, Big Five</li> <li>* Intangibles not tangibles; drama, excitement, stories</li> <li>* Focus on service and luxury</li> <li>* Tourists have short attention span, &lt; 2 mins</li> </ul>
What role tourists play in picking companies, lodges/camps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Word-of-mouth between tourists is effective, factor × 10</li> <li>* Tourists know where they want to go</li> <li>* Tourists approach agents, ultimately choice is up to tourist</li> <li>* If company PR strong, agents can't overrule tourist choice</li> <li>* Tourists choose wildlife viewing and luxury before conservation</li> </ul>

All of the companies see themselves as selling luxury and service as well as prime wildlife watching opportunities. They think that “tourists see only the service and luxury aspects” and that “an impeccable service is what tourists want, that’s why they come back with us”; and their goal is: “never a negative review”. To achieve this, they rely on the skill of their guides, and the inventiveness of their hospitality staff. According to our interviewees, marketing must: “keep a level of excitement”; and create “drama on the internet”. This contrasts with agents, who want facts and figures: “intangibles to the guest, and tangibles to the agent”. Attention spans are limited: “about two minutes per page on Facebook”. Direct positive face-to-face word-of-mouth recommendations are the single most effective marketing tool: “one person who is travelling with us, will at least tell 10 people around them”. In summary, tour operators believe that tourists respond to luxury, service, and dramatic images and stories about flagship wildlife species (Table 2).

Each of the five conservation tourism enterprises studied here had adopted different marketing strategies and distribution channels, but each of them received most of their bookings via travel agents rather than directly from clients. Marketing staff distinguished strongly between generalist and specialist travel agents. Generalist travel agents are high-volume mass-market agencies, competing principally on price, where decisions on destinations, providers and activities are made by individual tourists. Marketing staff mentioned these generalist agents only in broad terms: “we need travel agents to send us tourists”; “the agent organises the trip”; “the trade industry is vital for us”. To reach these generalist travel agents, the conservation tourism enterprises relied largely on trade shows, brochures and websites.

Marketing staff expressed very different attitudes towards individual travel agents specialising in luxury African wildlife tourism (Table 3). They noted that: “specialised agents are the ones that make a difference”; “specialised agents are more knowledgeable of the camps and

**Table 3**  
How marketing staff perceive interactions with travel agents.

Theme	Specifics
How to market to agents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Critical to make booking procedures easy</li> <li>* Agents principally interested in service</li> <li>* Agents want tangibles not intangibles</li> <li>* So provide easily comparable facts and figures</li> <li>* Focus on enumerable features, exclusivity</li> </ul>
Familiarisation trips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Specialist of generalist agents</li> <li>* Worth offering fam trips for specialists only</li> <li>* Expensive but necessary investment</li> <li>* Fam trips rushed, focus on facilities</li> </ul>
Role of agents in picking operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Agents have influence</li> <li>* So use multi-pronged marketing</li> </ul>

destinations”; and that “they ask far more questions”; and “they are critical for booking the guests”. Marketing staff knew these agents personally, and cultivated ongoing relationships with them. They said that they aim to: “make the conditions for the agent to book easily, and make them the hero”, so as to achieve “loyalty between us and the agent, and the agent and the client”. Conservation tourism enterprises pay to bring individual specialist travel agents on familiarisation trips, in order to provide first-hand experience of places and products. Marketing staff said that: “the specialist agent is worth ... time and effort”, so “we want to invite them over”. Marketing relies particularly on “agents that have been on-site.”

Marketing staff argued that tourists, rather than travel agents, ultimately decide which companies, camps and lodges they want to book. They said that “we create a demand so the clients will go see their agents to obtain information about our product”. In their view, “it’s the tourists that go to the agents”; “tourists already know where they want to go”; and ultimately, “if the PR is good enough, no agent will be able to deflect a client”. This view directly contradicts the view expressed by expert specialist travel agents who book clients for these same tour operators (Buckley and Mossaz, 2016). Those agents were adamant that they, rather than the individual tourists, made the booking decisions. We suggest that the process may depend on the relative experience of tourist and travel agent respectively. Where tourists use generalist travel agents, the agent expects the tourist to make the decision. Where inexperienced tourists use specialist travel agents, the agent expects to make the decision. Where experienced clients use specialist travel agents, both are involved: “agents make the call based on what an ever more informed public/guest wants”. Few tourists, however, have such breadth of experience as specialist travel agents.

3.3. Content of marketing materials

Marketing brochures included a substantial proportion of images and text relating to conservation, both direct and indirect, as well as to wildlife viewing and to luxury and service (Table 4). References to conservation relied principally on text. There were only twice as many text paragraphs as images related to conservation. This is a significantly

**Table 4**  
Content of conservation tourism marketing brochures.

Category	Images	Paras
Direct conservation actions by tour operator	111	291
Indirect conservation via local communities	113	184
Wildlife viewing, wildlife as attractions	187	212
Luxury and service, including client feedback	238	183
Total	649	870

**Table 5**  
Using marketing materials to distinguish conservation tourism beliefs.

If enterprises believe that:	Then we would expect that:
1. Tourists think that conservation is a management issue, not their concern.	Conservation would not be featured at all in marketing materials.
2. Tourists think of conservation projects as additional features.	Conservation would be mentioned occasionally, throughout materials.
3. Travel agents are interested in conservation projects, but not tourists.	Conservation would be emphasised in materials targeted to agents specifically.
4. Some tourists strongly interested in conservation, but most uninterested.	Conservation would be marketed via separate specialist marketing materials.

( $p < 0.0001$ ) higher ratio than for the other content categories listed in Table 4. We found similar patterns for websites. Across all five of the conservation tourism enterprises studied here, considered jointly, there were over twice as many text paragraphs (65) as images (27) referring specifically to either direct or indirect conservation measures. In addition to the relative proportions of text and images, there were also differences in placement between conservation content and other types of content, in all marketing materials. High-quality images of animals, especially big cats, were featured on the front covers of brochures and home pages of websites, and also in frequent Facebook® posts. Sections referring to conservation, in contrast, were smaller or shorter, and in less conspicuous sections of either brochures or websites.

The structure of these conservation marketing materials can be used to examine what the five conservation tourism enterprises studied here, believe about their clients' conservation interests. We suggest that there are four main options (Table 5), which can be differentiated using the data presented here. The first option applies if the conservation tourism enterprises believe that none of their clients care about conservation directly, but simply treat conservation as part of the company's internal operations, necessary to provide the wildlife attractions that the tourists want. If that is what these conservation tourism enterprises believe, they will not mention conservation in their marketing materials at all, but include wildlife only as attractions. The second option applies if conservation tourism enterprises believe that their clients treat conservation projects as one more feature included in an overall package, extra value-added. If that were the case, we would expect conservation projects to be featured in general marketing materials in a similar way to other exclusive features. That is, we would expect them to be scattered throughout marketing materials, together with details of wildlife attractions and luxury service.

The third option is that these conservation tourism enterprises might believe that their conservation projects are of greater interest or significance to travel agents than to individual clients. In that case, we would expect greater emphasis on conservation projects in materials distributed solely to travel agents, than in materials distributed to clients or the general public. According to Buckley and Mossaz (2016), at least some specialist travel agents do indeed give preference to tourism operations that fund conservation projects. The fourth option is that conservation tourism enterprises may believe that conservation is of little interest to the majority of clients, but that it has strong significance for a small subset, perhaps the same individuals who would donate to conservation trusts and projects in addition to purchasing holidays. If that is what tour operators anticipate, we would expect them to produce detailed marketing materials on conservation, featuring opportunities for donations; but that they would distribute such materials, or make them available, separately from more general marketing materials focusing on attractions, facilities and service.

Actual marketing materials matched the fourth of these options most closely. All the marketing materials used by these tour operators did include information on conservation, so option 1 was excluded. None of them contained conservation information prominently, so option 2 was excluded. Materials produced specifically for agents contained less detail on conservation than materials produce for individual tourists, so option 3 was excluded. Option 4, however, matched the evidence closely. Websites contained detailed information on conservation, but it took several specific menu steps to reach it. This

information would therefore be found only by tourists or agents already interested in that topic. Some operators produced specialist brochures about conservation specifically, either directly or through affiliated trusts or NGOs; but these were distributed only on demand, not *en masse*. Most clients would not have seen them before making a booking, but only once they reached their rooms. They were available to travel agents, but only agents who already have a direct interest in conservation were likely to read them.

### 3.4. Tourist comments

Comments by individual tourists, on Facebook® postings by these 5 tourism enterprises, broadly reflected the topics of the original postings. Where tourism enterprises posted about particularly memorable sightings, often including photographs by guides or former clients, then individual tourist comments were also related to memorable sightings. Where the tourism enterprises posted about food, service, tourism awards, etc., then the individual tourist comments referred to the same topics. Where the tourism enterprises posted about conservation projects, then individual tourists posted comments on conservation. In general, tourist comments were almost entirely positive. There were very few “troll” comments. This reflects the specialist nature of the posts. Individuals could only comment if they knew these companies existed, found their posts, and decided to add their own views. We do not know, however, what proportions of tourists used social media, and of those, what proportions left comments.

Tourists who did leave comments about the conservation contributions of these five conservation tourism enterprises were well informed, and glad to support them. Comments included: “love what you do for conservation”, “appreciate all you do”, “cannot say enough good things”, “well done”, “keep up the great work”, “great role model”, “always leaders in conservation”, “fortunate to be part of this”, “extremely professional”. For posts about wildlife sightings, many tourists left only very brief comments, using terms such as “amazing”, “splendid”, “awesome”, “gorgeous”, “incredible”, “magnificent”, “stellar”, “spectacular”, “beautiful”, “fantastic”, “stunning”, “wonderful”, and “breathtaking”. Others used phrases such as: “heaven on earth”, “forever engraved on my mind”, “never grow tired”, or “can't wait to get back.” Where individual animals were identifiable, especially individual lion or leopard, then tourist comments and tour operator responses often referred to individual animals by name.

In relation to luxury, service, hospitality, accommodation and food, tourist comments used phrases such as: “we had an amazing time”, “I'd love to go back”, “can we go back”, “never forget”, “fond memories”, “what's not to love”, “wonderful stay”, “so enjoyed our stay”, “perfect place to stay”, “food was great”, “the food was wonderful”, “quality of the food”, “the hospitality was amazing”, “everything was exceptional”, “peaceful and lovely”, “people were very nice”, “great guide”. In many comments, individual guides and other staff were mentioned by name.

## 4. Conclusions

The critical question addressed here, is how wildlife tourism enterprises that do contribute private funding to conservation, persuade clients to buy holidays at their lodges and camps, in preference to those run by competitors that do not contribute such funding. Opinions

expressed by staff of the enterprises concerned, the structure and content of their marketing materials, and views expressed by their past and potential clients in social media postings, all indicated a complex set of mechanisms involved in clients' travel decisions.

Several key themes reoccurred repeatedly. 1. Conservation education can wait until clients are on site: the aim of marketing is simply to get them there. 2. Successful marketing emphasises wildlife sightings first, luxury and service second, and conservation third. 3. Tourists are attracted principally by charismatic “flagship” wildlife species, notably the “Big Five”, and especially the three big cats, namely lion, leopard and cheetah. 4. Some individual clients have strong interests in conservation, but most do not. 5. Within these tourism enterprises, the conservation staff and the marketing staff recognise that while they share a common long-term goal, they have different short-term operational requirements, and their internal communications need to reflect this.

Except for the importance of Big Five and big cats, identified previously by Caro and Riggio (2013) and Baum et al. (2017), and by Macdonald et al. (2015) respectively, all these results are novel. Differentiation between tourists with individual personal interests in conservation, and those for whom conservation is a secondary concern, has previously been proposed, but not tested, for case studies in Madagascar and the Seychelles (Buckley, 2010a). Some previous studies (Buckley, 2010a; Duthie et al., 2017), have also suggested a particular role for human celebrities in conservation marketing but that aspect was not reflected in the current analysis.

All five of the conservation tourism enterprises studied here, distinguished experienced from inexperienced tourists, and specialist from generalist travel agents. All of them used multiple marketing communication channels, including mass and social media as well as websites and brochures. Individual enterprises emphasised particular channels, in line with specific strategies and comparative advantages. These enterprises believed strongly that even though most tourists book through travel agents, it is the individual tourists, not the agents, who choose destinations, operators and lodges. This conflicts with the view held by international travel agents specialising in African wildlife safaris. Those agents hold an equally strong view that it is they, not the individual clients, who choose the destinations, operators and lodges (Buckley and Mossaz, 2016).

All these enterprises focussed their marketing on intangible drama and excitement for individual tourists, but tangible facts and figures for travel agents. They believed that luxury facilities and prime wildlife viewing are guaranteed to boost sales, whereas conservation adds value for some potential clients only, and is hence a more risky marketing tool. In marketing their conservation projects, therefore, they targeted individual tourists rather than travel agents. Although conservation projects did feature in materials that distributed to travel agents, the operators did not rely on the agents to promote their conservation projects to individual tourists. They provided detailed information on conservation programs, in special sections of their websites and in specialist brochures produced either by the company itself, by an associated trust, or by an affiliated environmental NGO.

From a conservation perspective, in the short term it may not necessarily matter whether tourists care about conservation themselves, as long as they will pay to visit tourism enterprises that contribute effectively to conservation. From the perspective of those enterprises, however, it is critical to know how best to market their conservation projects to clients. The results presented here show that conservation tourism operators believe that most of their clients are motivated by wildlife viewing opportunities and luxury, but that there is a subset of clients who are indeed motivated by contributing to conservation. It would be possible to test this further, subject to ethical clearances, by tracking how individual clients access the different menu options on tour operator websites.

At a broader level, these patterns in marketing indicate that these five conservation tourism operators believe that their clients are

motivated principally by prime wildlife viewing opportunities, and that their conservation projects help to improve those opportunities. For operators using private or communally owned lands, conservation projects may provide operators with preferential opportunities to lease land in prime wildlife viewing areas. For those using privately owned reserves, conservation operations involve managing habitat and wildlife, including translocations and habituation, to maximise viewing opportunities.

In financing conservation through ecotourism, the principal practical implication of this study is that two separate marketing approaches are needed, aimed at different types of tourist. There is mainstream marketing, targeted at tourists who are concerned only to get the best possible wildlife viewing in the greatest comfort; and there is conservation marketing, targeted at tourists who purchase products in part because they contribute to conservation. Currently, the existence of the latter is recognised, but they are not identified individually during marketing and booking processes. Technology to identify them exists, and that would allow conservation tourism enterprises to notify their associated conservation trusts, to seek donations. This opportunity has not yet been explored.

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