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Assessing the Influence of the Visit Rwanda Campaign on the Promotion of Cultural Heritage Tourism: The Case of Ethnographic Museum Huye

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Abstract: This study assessed visitors' perceived influence of the Visit Rwanda campaign on their decision to visit the Ethnographic Museum in Huye and examined annual museum visitation trends. A quantitative-dominant, cross-sectional mixed-methods design was used. Structured questionnaires were completed by 123 visitors; three museum and tourism officials were interviewed, and two community participants took part in an exploratory discussion. Observation and Rwanda Cultural Heritage Academy administrative records for fiscal years 2023/2024–2025/2026 provided additional evidence. Of the surveyed visitors, 85 (69.1%) rated the campaign's influence on their decision to visit the museum as high or very high. The Visit Rwanda website was selected as an information a source by 64 respondents (52.0%), although respondents could select more than one source. Recorded museum visitation increased from 35,296 in FY 2023/2024 to 55,207 in FY 2025/2026, while reported revenue rose from RWF 49,206,349 to RWF 73,807,159. These administrative trends describe growth during the period examined but do not establish that the campaign caused the increase. The study highlights the need for closer coordination between national destination marketing and museum-level promotion, alongside systematic tracking of visitor referral sources and campaign exposure.

Keywords: *Visit Rwanda Campaign; Destination Branding; Cultural Heritage Tourism; Ethnographic Museum Huye; Museum Visitation; Rwanda.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Destination branding is a strategic process through which a place communicates its identity, distinctive attributes, and value to potential visitors. In tourism, branding can help a destination compete for attention, shape expectations, and influence travel consideration. Yet the effectiveness of destination marketing cannot be assessed solely through visibility or broad national tourism indicators; it also requires attention to how particular attractions are represented and whether potential visitors subsequently engage with them (Pike & Page, 2014).

Rwanda has used the Visit Rwanda campaign to strengthen international awareness of the country as a tourism destination. The Rwanda Development Board reported tourism revenue of USD 647 million and approximately 1.36 million visitors in 2024, followed by USD 685 million and 1.49 million visitors in 2025 (Rwanda Development Board [RDB], 2025, 2026). These national indicators establish the wider tourism context, but aggregate arrivals and revenue cannot identify which attractions benefited from campaign exposure. Voets (2023) analyses Visit Rwanda as an international public-relations and nation-branding initiative; such visibility can plausibly build awareness, but awareness should not automatically translate into attendance at a particular cultural institution.

This distinction is important for cultural heritage tourism. Rwanda's tourism offer includes wildlife and nature-based attractions as well as museums, historic places, material culture, traditional arts, crafts, and living cultural practices. The Ethnographic Museum in Huye is a nationally significant institution presenting collections and narratives related to Rwandan cultural life. Cultural heritage frameworks distinguish tangible heritage from intangible practices and expressions, both of which can contribute to the interpretation of place and identity (UNESCO, 1972, 2003).

Despite the visibility of Visit Rwanda, there is a need for attraction-level evidence on whether visitors perceive the campaign as influencing their decision to visit a cultural heritage institution. National tourism growth cannot automatically be interpreted as campaign-driven growth at a specific museum. The Ethnographic Museum in Huye offers a defined institutional setting in which to examine this issue through visitors' reported perceptions and administrative attendance records.

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This study assesses the influence of the Visit Rwanda campaign on visitor numbers at the Ethnographic Museum. It examines visitors' reported perceptions alongside the museum's annual visitation and revenue records. The analysis distinguishes perceived campaign influence from causal impact and does not infer causation from annual trends alone.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➢ *Theoretical Review*

- *Destination Branding Theory*

Destination branding provides the main theoretical lens for examining the relationship between national promotion and the visibility of a particular attraction. Destination marketing organisations coordinate brand messages to distinguish a place and communicate its offer to target markets. Pike and Page (2014) note that destination marketing involves multiple activities and stakeholders rather than a single advertising message. Applied to the present study, the Visit Rwanda campaign is treated as a destination-level promotional input, while perceived influence and museum visitation are site-level outcomes that require separate measurement.

Brand exposure does not necessarily translate directly into a museum visit. Visitors may encounter a destination brand but choose activities based on itinerary constraints, access, available information, travel purpose, time, or the perceived relevance of an attraction. Accordingly, the framework anticipates a possible relationship between campaign visibility and museum visitation while recognising that intervening conditions may strengthen or weaken this relationship.

- *Push-and-Pull Motivation Perspective*

Push-and-pull motivation theory distinguishes internal reasons for travel from destination attributes that attract visitors. Dann (1977) examined internal "push" factors in tourist motivation, while Crompton (1979) identified both socio-psychological motives and destination-related motives, including novelty and education. In cultural heritage settings, curiosity and learning may encourage travel, while museum collections, interpretation, location, and accessibility may influence the choice of a specific attraction. This perspective is relevant because a visitor may be influenced by Visit Rwanda when considering Rwanda as a destination, but the decision to visit the Ethnographic Museum may also depend on cultural interest and the museum's position within a travel itinerary.

- *Application of the Theoretical Perspectives*

Together, destination branding and push-and-pull perspectives support an analysis that does not equate general awareness with actual visitation. They direct attention to the campaign's visibility, the way visitors report its influence, and the institutional trends that can be observed at the museum. They also support cautious interpretation: visitor reports provide evidence of perceived influence, while administrative records document attendance but do not independently identify the cause of change.

➢ *Empirical Literature Review*

- *Destination Marketing and Attraction-Level Outcomes*

The destination marketing literature emphasises the coordination of brand identity, marketing communication, and stakeholder activity. Pike and Page (2014) review destination marketing organisations and show that destination marketing comprises multiple activities and relationships rather than a single advertising message. Empirical work in Kenya by Mafuta et al. (2022) found that cultural diversity can contribute to destination brand equity, but cultural products do not build brand equity simply by existing; they must be communicated and consumed. This supports the need to examine whether destination-level promotion is reflected in attendance at a specific cultural attraction rather than assuming that brand visibility automatically produces visits.

- *Visit Rwanda as a Nation-Branding Campaign*

Voets (2023) examines Visit Rwanda as a public-relations campaign and considers its intended role in shaping perceptions abroad. The campaign's international partnerships provide potential channels for destination exposure. However, exposure generated through sports or other international partnerships does not itself demonstrate that audiences noticed cultural attractions or visited them. Recent Rwanda-focused research by Muvunyi et al. (2026) discusses the role of culture-based nation branding in cultural visibility and sustainable development, while also identifying institutional coordination and investment as relevant conditions. These studies strengthen the rationale for testing the campaign's perceived relevance at a particular heritage institution.

Rwanda Development Board annual reporting provides important context on tourism-sector performance and promotional activity (RDB, 2025, 2026). The Board reported 1.36 million visitors and USD 647 million in tourism revenue in 2024, followed by 1.49 million visitors and USD 685 million in 2025. These figures indicate national sector growth but cannot isolate the effect of Visit Rwanda on attendance at the Ethnographic Museum. They should therefore be treated as context, not as evidence of a museum-level campaign effect.

- *Museum Identity and the Visitor Experience*

Museum branding research highlights that a museum's identity is communicated not only through external promotion but also through the interactions and experiences that occur at the institution. Ferreiro-Rosende et al. (2022) explore employee–visitor interactions as a means of conveying museum brand identity. Mokabe's (2025) study of three South African cultural heritage sites found that visitors' promotional preferences differed by site and recommended that visitor feedback inform promotional strategies. This empirical evidence suggests that national destination marketing and site-specific communication should be considered together, while recognising that a museum's visitor experience and institutional identity remain distinct from the national brand.

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Museum identity and destination branding are related but distinct. The national brand may raise awareness of Rwanda, whereas the museum's own interpretation, signage, information availability, and visitor services help translate interest into an attraction visit. This distinction informed the study's attention to the visibility of Visit Rwanda branding at the museum and the need for coordinated promotion.

- *Cultural Heritage within Destination Promotion*

Cultural heritage offers destinations opportunities to communicate history, identity, and living cultural practices. UNESCO's conventions establish international frameworks for the protection of cultural and natural heritage and for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 1972, 2003). These frameworks are not evidence that a marketing campaign increases museum attendance, but they clarify the breadth of heritage resources that destination promotion can represent. Rwanda-focused scholarship also discusses cultural heritage as a potential resource for nation branding and sustainable development (Muvunyi et al., 2026).

Further empirical work in South Africa has examined promotional factors for cultural heritage tourism. Mokabe (2024) identified visual and accessibility cues among factors associated with the promotion of selected heritage sites, while Mokabe (2025) emphasised visitor-centred promotional planning and feedback. Although these studies concern different contexts, they support the importance of site-level communication and monitoring. The relevant question in Huye is whether visitors perceive Visit Rwanda as influential in their decision to visit the Ethnographic Museum and how that perception relates to recorded attendance patterns.

➢ *Research Gap*

Three connected gaps inform this study. First, destination-level marketing discussions and national tourism statistics do not necessarily show whether a campaign influences visits to a specific cultural heritage attraction. Second, international campaign exposure does not establish that visitors connect the campaign with a museum or that such connection changes their behaviour. Third, museum attendance records document visitor volumes but, without campaign-specific tracking, do not identify the share of change attributable to a particular promotional initiative. Recent visitor-centred research on cultural heritage promotion also points to the value of site-specific visitor feedback and monitoring (Mokabe, 2025).

The study addresses these gaps through a focused examination of the Ethnographic Museum in Huye. It combines visitors' self-reported assessments of Visit Rwanda's influence with annual museum visitation and revenue records. The design does not claim to prove causation; instead, it provides site-level descriptive evidence that can inform future monitoring and more rigorous evaluation.

➢ *Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual framework proposes that Visit Rwanda campaign activities may influence the visibility of the Ethnographic Museum and visitors' reported decisions to attend. This proposed relationship is shaped by contextual factors such as visitors' prior awareness, cultural interests, travel itineraries, information sources, accessibility, and coordination between national promotion and museum-level communication. The outcomes examined are perceived campaign influence revenues and, recorded museum visitation trends. These contextual factors were not tested as statistical mediators; they inform the interpretation and future monitoring recommendations.

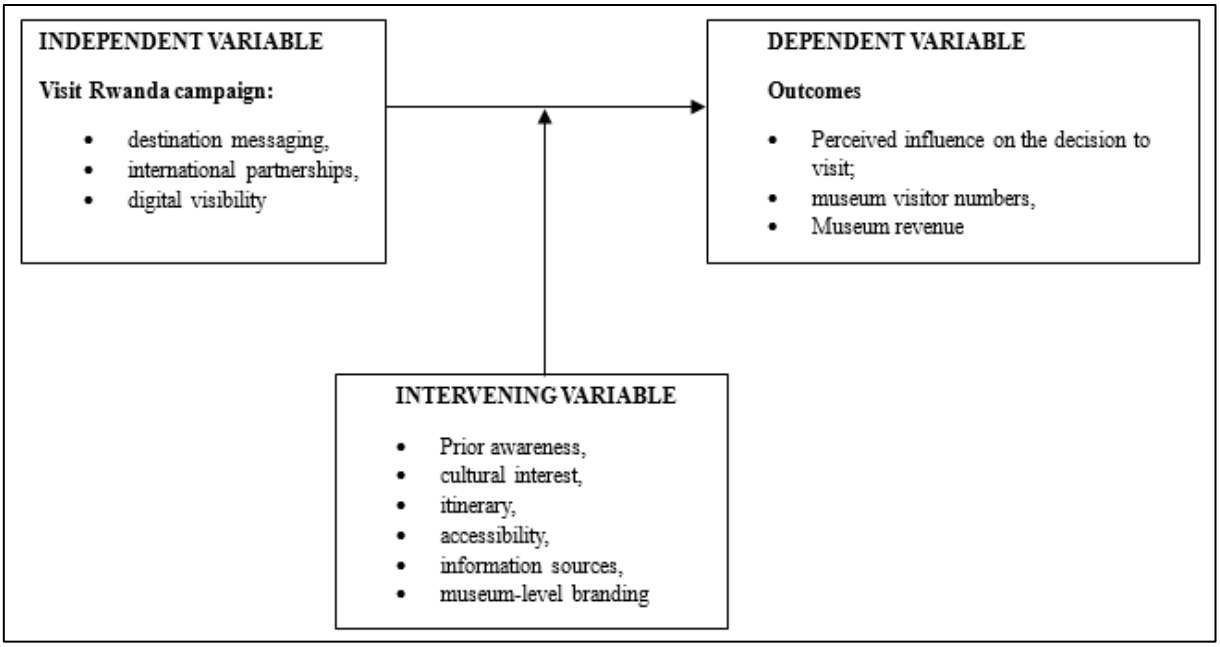


Fig 1 Conceptual Framework,
Source: Researcher (2026)

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III. METHODOLOGY

➢ *Research Design*

The study used a quantitative-dominant, cross-sectional mixed-methods design. The quantitative component provided descriptive evidence from a structured visitor questionnaire, while a small qualitative component supplied exploratory context from museum and tourism officials and community participants. Institutional records and observation were also considered. The quantitative and qualitative sources were analysed separately and brought together during interpretation; the small qualitative sample was not treated as representative.

➢ *Study Location*

The study was conducted at the Ethnographic Museum in Huye, and 123 people who had already chosen to visit it were surveyed. The findings cannot be generalised to all tourists in Rwanda or to all cultural heritage attractions. The on-site voluntary recruitment approach may have introduced self-selection bias, because people willing to respond may differ from those who did not participate. The cross-sectional questionnaire measured perceptions after arrival and did not establish whether campaign exposure preceded the decision to visit. Annual visitor and revenue records were descriptive and did not isolate the effects of Visit Rwanda from other influences. The qualitative component was small, comprising three stakeholder interviews and a discussion with two community participants, so it provides exploratory context rather than a saturated account. Finally, the study did not link individual survey responses to campaign analytics or administrative attendance records. These limitations mean that the findings demonstrate perceived influence and a concurrent upward visitation trend, not a causal estimate of campaign impact.

➢ *Participants and Sampling*

The quantitative dataset comprised 123 visitors who completed the structured questionnaire. The study used an average daily visitor volume of 178 as the planning population for the tourist survey and applied Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error to plan a sample of approximately 123. In practice, visitors present at the museum and willing to participate were recruited. The recruitment should therefore be interpreted as an on-site voluntary sample rather than assumed to be a fully probability-based sample. Three (3) museum and tourism officials participated in semi-structured interviews, and (2) two community participants took part in an exploratory small-group discussion. These qualitative accounts were used for context, not statistical generalisation.

➢ *Data Sources and Collection*

Primary data were collected during fieldwork recorded in July 2026. A structured questionnaire was administered to museum visitors and covered visitor characteristics, previous visitation, sources through which respondents heard about the museum or campaign, and perceived influence of Visit Rwanda on the decision to visit. Three semi-structured stakeholder interviews and an exploratory discussion with two community participants provided additional context. Observation was used to document selected features of the visitor environment, including visible Visit Rwanda branding at the entrance or ticketing area.

Secondary data comprised annual visitor and revenue records for fiscal years 2023/2024, 2024/2025, and 2025/2026 supplied by the Rwanda Cultural Heritage Academy (RCHA) for the Ethnographic Museum (RCHA, 2026). The records were used to describe changes in attendance and reported revenue over the period. These are institutional administrative data and were not linked to individual campaign exposure.

➢ *Data Analysis*

Questionnaire responses were entered and analysed in SPSS using frequencies and percentages. Annual visitor and revenue records were compared descriptively across the three fiscal years. Interview, discussion, and observation notes were reviewed thematically for contextual findings relevant to promotion and visitor pathways.

IV. RESULTS

➢ *Visitors' Reported Perception of Campaign Influence*

Of the 123 respondents, 85 (69.1%) rated Visit Rwanda's influence on their decision to visit the Ethnographic Museum as high or very high. Within this group, 71 respondents (57.7% of the full sample) selected "very high" and 14 (11.4%) selected "high." The remaining respondents rated the influence as lower or otherwise did not place it in the high/very-high categories.

Table 1 Respondents' Perceived Influence of the Visit Rwanda Campaign on their Decision to Visit

Measure	Number	Percentage
Very high perceived influence	71	57.7%
High perceived influence	14	11.4%
Moderate perceived influence	13	10.6%
Low perceived influence	5	4.1%
No perceived influence	20	16.3%
Total survey respondents	123	100%

Source: Primary Data, 2026.

These results show that a substantial proportion of surveyed museum visitors perceived the Visit Rwanda campaign as influential in their decision to visit. Since all respondents were already at the museum, the finding should not be interpreted as an estimate of the campaign's effect on all potential visitors or as proof that the campaign generated the visits.

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➢ *Information Sources and Campaign Visibility*

Respondents identified multiple sources through which they had heard about the Ethnographic Museum or encountered relevant tourism information. The Visit Rwanda website was selected by 64 respondents (52.0%), sports events by 53 (43.1%), and social media by 44 (35.8%). Television advertisements were selected by 16 (13.0%), tour companies by 12 (9.8%), and word of mouth by 6 (4.9%). Because respondents could select more than one source, these percentages are not mutually exclusive and should not be summed to 100%. The responses show that the Visit Rwanda website and sports-related channels were commonly selected sources among the surveyed visitors; they do not establish that these channels independently caused a museum visit.

The three stakeholder interviews provided exploratory context for interpreting this pattern. Participants described the campaign and its international sports partnerships as effective in increasing general awareness of Rwanda, but they did not identify a systematic mechanism for tracing that exposure to individual museum visits. One concern raised in the interviews was that international campaign imagery was more strongly associated with wildlife than with the museum's cultural offer. These accounts help explain why national visibility and museum attendance should be monitored separately; given the small qualitative sample, they are illustrative rather than representative.

The observation checklist indicated that Visit Rwanda branding was not visibly displayed at the museum entrance or ticketing area at the time of observation. This points to a possible continuity gap between destination-level promotion and the on-site museum experience. As this was a site observation rather than a systematic audit across dates or visitor routes, it is interpreted as a contextual finding, not proof that the brand was never displayed at the museum.

➢ *Annual Visitation Trends*

Table 2 Annual Visitation at the Ethnographic Museum, FY 2023/2024–FY 2025/2026

Fiscal year	Recorded visitors	Change from previous year
2023/2024	35,296	—
2024/2025	46,118	+10,822 (+30.7%)
2025/2026	55,207	+9,089 (+19.7%)

Source: Secondary Data (2026).

RCHA administrative records show that recorded annual visitation increased from 35,296 in FY 2023/2024 to 46,118 in FY 2024/2025 and 55,207 in FY 2025/2026. Visitor numbers increased from FY 2023/2024 to FY 2025/2026 by 19,911 visitors (approximately 56.4%). The annual pattern documents increased museum attendance during the period covered by the records.

The records do not identify visitors' exposure to Visit Rwanda, the proportion whose visits were influenced by the campaign, or other factors that may have contributed to changes in attendance. The increase must therefore be reported as a museum visitation trend rather than as a measured campaign effect.

➢ *Museum Revenue Trends*

Table 3 Reported Revenue at the Ethnographic Museum, FY 2023/2024–FY 2025/2026

Fiscal year	Reported revenue (RWF)	Change from previous year
2023/2024	49,206,349	—
2024/2025	61,656,875	+12,450,526 (+25.3%)
2025/2026	73,807,159	+12,150,284 (+19.7%)

Source: Secondary Data (2026).

RCHA administrative records show that reported revenue increased from RWF 49,206,349 in FY 2023/2024 to RWF 73,807,159 in FY 2025/2026. This is an increase of RWF 24,600,810 (approximately 50.0%) over the two-year interval. Revenue is presented as a complementary institutional indicator. The available records do not establish whether the change resulted from increased visitor volume, changes in ticket prices, visitor composition, other income streams, or campaign activity.

V. DISCUSSION

➢ *Perceived influence of Visit Rwanda*

The finding that 69.1% of respondents rated the campaign's influence as high or very high suggests that Visit Rwanda was salient to many people who visited the Ethnographic Museum. This is consistent with the role of destination branding in building visibility and shaping destination image (Pike & Page, 2014) and with critical analysis of Visit Rwanda as an international public-relations initiative (Voets, 2023). However, because the study surveyed existing visitors, the results describe their retrospective perceptions and cannot estimate the campaign's effect among people who did not visit. The result is therefore evidence of perceived influence among respondents, not a causal estimate of campaign effectiveness.

The results also underline the need to distinguish national awareness from attraction-level conversion. A visitor may recognise Rwanda through a national campaign yet decide to visit the museum for cultural interest, recommendations, itinerary convenience, or other reasons. The survey captures perceived campaign influence, while the administrative data capture annual attendance. These measures complement one another but are not interchangeable.

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➢ *Interpreting the Museum's Visitation Growth*

The increase in recorded visitation across the three fiscal years is an important institutional trend. It indicates that attendance at the Ethnographic Museum rose during the period examined. Nevertheless, temporal coincidence between the campaign's visibility and museum growth does not establish causation. Changes in travel markets, tour-operator itineraries, museum programming, access, visitor services, wider tourism recovery, and data-recording practices may also influence annual totals.

The evidence therefore points to two connected findings: most surveyed visitors perceived Visit Rwanda as influential, and the museum's annual records show increased visitation. The study cannot determine the proportion of the recorded increase attributable to the campaign. Future evaluation should connect campaign exposure to visitor decisions and compare attendance before and after defined promotional interventions.

➢ *Implications for Museum-Level Promotion*

The absence of visible Visit Rwanda branding at the entrance or ticketing area suggests an opportunity to strengthen the link between national destination marketing and the museum's visitor journey. Site-level branding should not replace the museum's own identity or interpretive purpose. Instead, coordinated messaging could clarify how the Ethnographic Museum contributes to Rwanda's cultural offer and provide visitors with consistent information before, during, and after the visit.

Museum branding research emphasises that the visitor experience and staff interactions can convey institutional identity (Ferreiro-Rosende et al., 2022). Visitor-centred studies of cultural heritage sites similarly recommend aligning promotional activities with visitor preferences and site-specific attributes (Mokabe, 2025). The practical implication for the Ethnographic Museum is that national destination marketing should be matched by accurate museum information, accessible interpretation, clear visitor pathways, and monitoring of referral sources. These actions would make it easier to assess whether increased brand visibility corresponds with increased interest and attendance.

VI. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

➢ *Recommendations to the Rwanda Development Board*

- Include the Ethnographic Museum and other cultural heritage attractions more consistently in Visit Rwanda digital content, itineraries, and campaign materials alongside wildlife and nature-based products.
- Track clicks, enquiries, itinerary inclusions, referral sources, and campaign-specific links that direct prospective visitors to museum information.
- Coordinate with museum management on campaign periods and define indicators that can be compared with site-level visitor records.

➢ *Recommendations to the Ethnographic Museum and Rwanda Cultural Heritage Academy*

- Introduce visible but contextually appropriate Visit Rwanda co-branding at the entrance, ticketing point, visitor information materials, and official digital channels.
- Record visitor referral sources and ask a short, consistent question about campaign awareness and influence during ticketing or visitor surveys.
- Maintain consistent monthly and annual visitor statistics, disaggregated where feasible by domestic/international status, group type, and referral source, while protecting visitor privacy.
- Use the museum's own interpretation and visitor services to communicate its cultural significance clearly and consistently.

➢ *Recommendations to Tour Operators and Travel Agencies*

- Include the Ethnographic Museum in appropriate cultural itineraries and describe the experience accurately, including its collections and interpretation.
- Share referral information with museum management where feasible so that the institution can identify which itinerary and marketing channels contribute to attendance.

➢ *Recommendations for Future Research*

- Use longitudinal site-level data to compare visitation before, during, and after clearly defined promotional activities.
- Where feasible, compare the museum with similar cultural attractions not exposed to the same campaign intervention, while accounting for differences between sites.
- Combine visitor surveys with campaign analytics and monthly attendance records to test whether exposure precedes a visit rather than relying only on retrospective perceptions.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study examined the perceived influence of the Visit Rwanda campaign on visitation at the Ethnographic Museum in Huye. A majority of surveyed visitors, 85 of 123 (69.1%), rated the campaign's influence on their decision to visit as high or very high. RCHA records also documented increased attendance, from 35,296 visitors in FY 2023/2024 to 55,207 in FY 2025/2026. These two findings are complementary but do not establish causation: the survey captured perceptions among people already visiting the museum, while annual records did not identify individual campaign exposure or isolate other drivers of growth. The study therefore supports strengthening museum-specific storytelling, visible and consistent visitor information, and the routine collection of referral-source data. A future evaluation linking campaign analytics to monthly museum attendance and visitor surveys would provide stronger evidence of the campaign's contribution to site-level visitation.

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