The potential contribution of Film Tourism to Zimbabwe's destination image

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Abstract

The basis of this paper is a study on image and performance of a tourist destination. This study sought to explore the potential contribution of on - location film - induced tourism to Zimbabwe's tourist destination image. The problem which motivated the study was that as a tourist destination, Zimbabwe has been battling a negative image for some time now without much success. Rebranding and numerous traditional forms of tourism promotions which are associated with low market credibility, have been used several times with a view to improve Zimbabwe's image. Autonomous image change agents such as film which are associated with high market credibility and are known to have a strong influence not only on the tourist decision - making for short-term holiday, but on tourism revenues and long-term prosperity of destinations, are yet to be fully embraced especially by the developing world. In light of this, the study's objectives were to establish the current level of use of film tourism in improving Zimbabwe's tourist destination image, to assess the potential contribution of film tourism to Zimbabwe's tourist destination image, and to suggest strategies for enhancing the contribution of film to Zimbabwe's tourist destination image. A qualitative research methodology which included the observation of some films and in - depth interviews, was used to collect data from twenty five participants in Harare. The participants comprised tourists, filmmakers, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (Television) and Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) personnel. The findings suggested that there was potential for using on - location film - induced tourism for improving destination image despite that the concept is still in its infancy in Zimbabwe and should overcome a number of challenges. Strategies to improve the potential contribution of film to improving destination image were high-lighted.

Keywords: On - location film - induced tourism, potential contribution, destination image, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Travel and tourism has become the world's largest and fastest growing industry, and its growth shows a consistent year to year increase (UNWTO, 2013). The sector contributes directly to 5% of the world's GDP, one in 12 jobs globally, and is a major export sector for many countries, both in the developing and developed world (UNEP, 2012). The increase in global tourism numbers (1

billion in 2012) compared to 710 million in 2000 (UNWTO, 2000) has resulted in intense competition between destinations to grow their market shares (Navickas & Malakauskaite, 2009; Blanke & Chiesa, 2013; Pearce & Schänzel, 2013). This implies that the issue of destination image should be taken more seriously by destinations across the globe if they are to survive the stiff competition. Lwegaba (2013) identified Africa's 'unfortunate' image as an obstacle to the region's competitiveness in the global tourism market, ascertaining that there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that Africa faces a huge challenge in counteracting the continent's prolonged negative image and perceived risks as a tourist destination.

Zimbabwe has a weak tourist destination image. There is a strong market perception that the destination is not price competitive and that the overall product is tired (ZTA, 2015). A Visitor Exit Survey conducted recently by ZIMSTAT (2016) found out that the main factors that contributed to negative visitor perception of the country included high prices, harassment by the police, poor facilities, poor infrastructure and poor service quality. The negative perception of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination is most likely to adversely affect Zimbabwe's tourism economy. Destination image is viewed as an important factor in travel decision-making in that it affects the individual's perception and consequent destination choice (Mohoho - Minni, 2016). Kyalo and Katuse (2013) held that negative perceptions of a tourist destination leads to poor performance of the tourism sector. Hanafiah *et al.,* (2016) also highlighted the connection between destination image and tourism performance. Destination image is viewed as an important factor in travel decision-making in that it affects the individual's perception and consequent destination choice (Mohoho - Minni, 2016). The Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) has made efforts to react to the tarnished image through various promotions focusing on rebranding as an exceptional ingredient in order to give the country's tourism a facelift (Chigora and Zvavahera, 2015). This has seen Zimbabwe as a tourist destination rebranding three times between 1980 and 2011 (Chigora and Zvavahera, 2015). The 20th edition of the UNWTO General Assembly which was co - hosted by Zimbabwe and Zambia in Victoria Falls in 2013 was believed to have potential for positive ripple effects in rejuvenating the tourism sectors of the two countries (Njerekai, 2014). However, it appears that the negative image has remained in place, well after the hosting of the highly touted UNWTO General Assembly. This was happening against a backdrop of films playing a key role in other destinations in influencing people's images and perceptions of the destinations especially prior to their arrival at the destination (O'Connor *et al.,* 2010).

The concept of film tourism

The concept of film tourism is part of the pop culture phenomena which includes books and music (Lee *et al.,* 2015). Despite the rising popularity of pop culture (e.g. film, music) and pop culture induced tourism on a global scale, not all tourists are equally involved with tourism experiences. This means that there is need to establish the numbers of film tourists who visit a tourist destination. Film – induced tourism is regarded as a complex and dynamic concept and success depends on a number of factors beyond the control of Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) (Hudson and Ritchie, 2006). These factors include government's prioritization of the tourism sector, destination attributes and film specific factors. Juskelyte (2016) stated that contemporary tourists' organic images of places are shaped through the vicarious consumption of film and television without the perceived bias of promotional material. This means that filmmakers, culture policy makers and other stakeholders can use films as a means to promote destination image without making the audience think that it is a commercial of a certain place. In in other words we can think of the image of a country or a specific region as some sort of *placement.* Product placement has been defined as the planned entries of products into movies or television shows that may influence viewers' product beliefs and/or behaviours favourably. The

information technology such as social media and online videos on YouTube plays an essential role in spreading pop culture including the concept of film tourism across the world (Murray & Overton, 2015). This corroborates Macionis' (2004) view that a film is actually equivalent to an advertisement which can be potentially viewed by millions of people who may be tempted to become film induced tourists. However, film is deemed more credible than traditional promotional methods (Gartner, 1996).

Literature Review

Global tourism is constantly increasing, creating fierce competition between tourist destination proponents (du Plessis and Syman, 2014). Because of this, film tourism which is also referred to as cinematographic tourism, screen tourism or even as a media pilgrimage (Horrigan, 2009), is one strategy which can be used to improve tourist destination image. Hudson and Ritchie (2006) refer to film tourism as movie-induced or film-induced tourism. In this study it is used to mean tourist visits to a destination or attraction as a result of the destination being featured on television, video, or the cinema screen. Canada and the Bahamas, for example, have engaged Weber Shandwick, one from the most important personalities in public relationships in the world, in order to achieve their region's maximum possible appearance in films (Vagionis and Loumioti, 2011). After the terrorist act of 11th September the local organisation of tourism of New York used movie stars, among others for the reinforcement of tourism in the city (Vagionis and Loumioti, 2011). This amply demonstrated the importance of film in improving a tourist's destination image.

In recent years, the tourist authorities of Barcelona have included the positioning of the destination through the cinema in their strategic plans (Campo et al., 2011). Barcelona's positioning as a tourist destination was greatly enhanced by the feature film *Vicky Cristina Barcelona.* This came in the wake of New Zealand's successful use of the film The *Lord of Rings.* The impact of *The Lord of the Rings* on New Zealand's international tourist numbers has received much attention (Croy, 2010). This impact is often highlighted in all - encompassing phrases such as "Lord of the Rings sent a huge wave of British tourists scurrying to New Zealand" (Grihault, 2003, p. 1), "tens of thousands of fans [were attracted] . . . to the twin antipodal islands to see the movie locales first -hand" (Houpt, 2003), and "the three films created a massive tourist industry in New Zealand" (Croy, 2010, p. 25). The developed world has tended to dominate in terms of providing locations for film tourism. It seems that although the developed world has sites for film tourism, it is financially in limbo. The UK has been the filming location for over 100 international films and television dramas, comprising some very successful productions like *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *Braveheart* (1995), *Rob Roy* (1995), *Loch Ness* (1995), *The Full Monty* (1997), *Notting Hill* (1999) and *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), which have attracted international tourists to the screened locations (O'Connor *et al.,* 2010). O'Connor *et al.,* held that Australia had expanded its recognition considerably worldwide as a tourist destination after quite a few successful films like *Mad Max (*1980), *The Man from Snowy River* (1982) and *Crocodile Dundee* (1986).

According to Hoffmann (2015), film – induced tourism is a relatively new field of study that has recently emerged under the larger umbrella of heritage and cultural tourism. Hoffmann, further noted that globally, the latter is currently one of the fastest growing fields and macro - niches in the tourism domain. As a subsection of the film - induced tourism micro - niche, on - location film - induced tourism is also becoming a fast growing and popular phenomenon.

Film tourism can be seen as a form of cultural tourism (Yen and Croy, 2016). To this end, Zimbabwe could actually use film as a double – edged sword – to manage image and to grow

cultural tourism which is arguably under exploited despite it being a popular niche across the world. Cultural Tourism, as the name suggests, is the point at which *culture*, which defines in large part our identity as a society, meets *tourism*, which is a leisure activity pursued by people with an interest in observing or becoming involved in that society (Ireland National Tourism Development Authority, 2005).

Film tourism success factors

According to Hudson and Ritchie's (2006) model film tourism will depend on five factors namely, destination marketing activities, destination attributes, film-specific factors, film commission and government efforts, and location feasibility. They contended that theirs is the first theoretical model to present the key influences on film tourism. Most destinations have a short term focus that facilitates film production, concentrating on the associated economic impacts (Croy and Walker 2003), but some are becoming active in encouraging producers to make films in their region to benefit from the long-term tourism impacts. DMOs in Britain, Kansas, and Singapore are examples. VisitBritain has been targeting Indian film producers for some time in the belief that they can be persuaded to use British locations for Bollywood films and thereby generate significant economic benefits for Britain's tourism industry (Woodward 2000). Hudson and Ritchie (2006) indicated that there are activities which need to be undertaken before and after the release of the film. For example, before releasing the film there may be need to provide images for media or tour operators to use in promotions (on cd rom or Web site) and after release, it may be important to host events that continue the pull of the film beyond its natural audience peak and to create electronic links to the destination on the film Web site.

Government efforts in this process are central. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2017), Zimbabwe is ranked 105 out of 136 destinations in terms of prioritization of its travel and tourism sector, scoring a low mark of 3.88 out of 7 in this pillar. Meanwhile, Namibia is ranked a high 61 out of 136, scoring a high 4.64 out of 7 and Botswana: 70 out of 136, 4.58 out of 7. The statistics suggest that Zimbabwe is the worst in this case with regards to prioritizing the tourism sector. This may have implications for the growth of its film tourism and its use to manage destination image.

Destination image

Destination image is defined as an attitudinal concept consisting on the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a tourist holds of a destination (Frias *et al*., 2013). Destination image is a multidimensional construct formed by two primary variables: cognitive and affective. The cognitive component relates to "beliefs and knowledge of the physical attributes of a destination, and the affective component refers to the appraisal of the affective quality of feelings towards the attributes and the surrounding environments" (Hosany *et al.,* 2006, p.639).The role of destination image is critical in the selection of a destination and determines which destination remains in the opportunity set and the realizable set for further evaluation and consideration into the choice set and eventually into the holiday set (Esu, 2015). Destinations with positive images have a high probability of succeeding than those with negative destination images (Mbiyu, 2014). A positive image is an added advantage when competing for international tourists especially in developing countries in Africa which have similar tourist products (Mbiyu, 2014; Esu, 2015;

The Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) have made efforts to react to the tarnished image through the use of various promotional strategies including events while focusing on rebranding as an exceptional ingredient in order to give the country's tourism a facelift (Chigora and Zvavahera, 2015). This has seen Zimbabwe as a tourist destination rebranding three times between 1980

and 2011 (Chigora and Zvavahera, 2015). The 20th edition of the UNWTO General Assembly which was co - hosted by Zimbabwe and Zambia in Victoria Falls in 2013 was believed to have potential for positive ripple effects in rejuvenating the tourism sectors of the two countries (Njerekai, 2014). However, it appears that Zimbabwe's negative image has remained in place notwithstanding the relentless efforts by ZTA to shake it off. Zimbabwe's tourism arrivals and receipts indicate that the sector has been on an unstable path in the last decades, with fluctuating performances in tandem with the deteriorating local economic conditions and the global economic crisis in 2008 exacerbated by the global economic crisis/credit crisis which affected mostly developed world tourism markets (Zhou, 2013). This has led to many traditional tourists cutting back on their travel and leisure expenditure (Zhou, 2013).

Govers and Go, (2007) have argued that as tourism destination products and services cannot be tested prior to purchase, consumers have to build images of them and make their purchase decision based on those images. This makes the tourist image of the product not only a fundamental component of the decision-making process, but also a key determinant of the performance of the tourist destination. On the other hand, film can augment the destination image and increase the awareness of the destination (Tuclea and Nistoreaunu, 2012). Previous research (Kim & Richardson, 2003) suggests that those who are exposed to film have more favorable destination image towards destinations featured through film than those who are not exposed to it. Given that destination image, and potentially film, plays an important role in the travel decision-making process (Yen and Croy, 2016), it is worthwhile especially for suppliers of tourism services including tourism marketers in developing destinations such as Zimbabwe to jump onto the band wagon and utilize film to influence the tourists' decision - making processes.

Methodology

This study sought to explore the potential contribution of film tourism to Zimbabwe's tourist destination image. To generate the required empirical data, a phenomenological strategy of enquiry was used. Phenomenology is a theoretical perspective that uses relatively unstructured methods of data collection (Gray, 2009). One of the key advantages of phenomenology is that, because of its emphasis on the inductive collection of large amounts of data, it is more likely to pick up factors that were not part of the original research focus. To reflect further, it is also capable of producing 'thick descriptions' of people's experiences or perspectives within their natural settings (Gray, 2009). A qualitative (induction) research methodology was used as the study sought to assess participants' perceptions on the potential influence of a phenomenon (film tourism) on another (destination image). Similar previous researches on destination image (Kassave, 2013; Mbiyu, 2013; Avraham and Ketter, 2016) adopted a quantitative methodology. Qualitative research aims to develop an understanding of the context in which phenomena and behaviours take place (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008). The semi - structured interview and observation were the data collection techniques while the thematic approach was used for data analysis.

Findings

Response rate

Ninety percent of the tourists returned useable questionnaires, 90% of the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) and Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) personnel returned usable questionnaires, and 70% of film makers were successfully interviewed (Table 1).

Response rate refers to the actual number of respondents who managed to complete questionnaires divided by the total number of expected respondents (Dillman, 2011). Saunders *et al*., (2009) defined response rate as the percentage of survey invitations that result in a

response. A high response is good for the reliability and validity of results (Carteny, 2012). The response rate that every researcher seeks is 100%, however in reality it is rarely attainable (Sivo *et al*, 2006). The standard return rate that is therefore acceptable starts from 60% (Sivo *et al.,* 2006). The response rate that every researcher seeks is 100%, however in reality it is rarely attainable (Sivo *et al*, 2006). The standard return rate that is therefore acceptable starts from 60% (Sivo *et al.,* 2006).
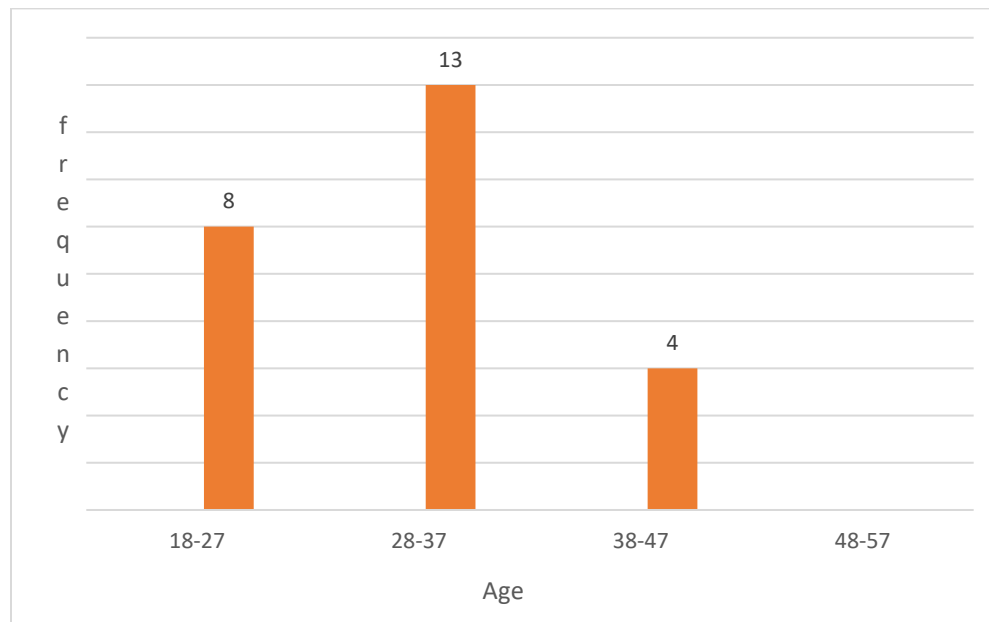
Table 1: **Response rate**

Table 2: Attributes which attracted tourists to destinations in Zimbabwe

Respondents	Sample size	Responses (absolute frequency)	Responses (relative frequency)
Tourists	10	9	90%
Film makers	10	7	70%
ZBC & ZTA	10	9	90%
Total	30	25	83.3%

Source: Primary data

There were more male respondents (93%) than females (7%). According to Rolfes (2009), African women are underrepresented in theoretical work as well as in the practice of African cinema. 2 % of the respondents were foreigners and 98% were Zimbabweans. The merit in this ratio is that sustainable development of the concept of film tourism in Zimbabwe was almost guaranteed.

Respondents' Age distribution

Source: Primary data

The age category 28-37 years was the dominant range with 52% of the respondents; comprising 90% males and 10% females. Kara *et al* (2012) espoused that this age group is dominant in the business sector. Given that this age range is economically active and that the film industry is part

of the business sector, it did not come as a surprise that males were more prevalent than their female counterparts. The age categories 18 - 27 and 38 - 47 together comprised 42% of the respondents. The age range 48 – 57 was not represented. According to Wong *et al.,* (2013), one of the key reasons why more young people as opposed to older ones are the majority in industry and commerce had something to do with the older employees taking retrenchment packages and leaving behind the young and more active workforce in charge. Younger people are associated with higher levels of enthusiasm and energy as compared to the older generations (Wong *et al*, 2013). This, coupled with the fact that the youths tend to be more techno savvy than their older counterparts, made the youths a more preferred group especially in a vibrant industry such as the film industry.

Respondents' academic qualifications

The majority (62%) of the respondents held either a University degree or diploma whilst 34% were either 'O' or 'A' level graduates and 0.5 % were doctorate holders. The findings indicated that the respondents were educated and this implied that their responses were well informed. Baum (2013) noted that the respondents' levels of education were important in so far as they give assurances in terms of the relevance and credibility of the data gathered from them. Educated people are well informed and knowledgeable.

Knowledge of film tourism

Sixty eight percent of the respondents indicated that they knew what film tourism was. This showed that there was a fair knowledge of film tourism among the respondents, although 22% of the sample was ignorant of film tourism. Interviewee number 6 remarked that film tourism entailed tourists visiting Zimbabwe in order to view places which were shown in music videos and films. This definition resembles that provided by Pristidianita, (2016) who defined film tourism as a tourist activity of visiting a particular location which appeared in films or/and television series. People are interested in sites they have spotted in the movies and can be influenced to visit them (Pristidianita, 2016). Thus, a movie can act as a push factor for tourists to go to particular places. The Scotland National Tourism Organisation (2010) defines film tourism as a business where visitors are attracted to the area through the storylines in a film or through the portrayal of a place in film or on television.

Film-induced tourism refers to the role of film as a motivator, attractor and demanded experience for the tourist, which implies a causal relationship between film and travel (Croy, 2011). Alternately, in the broader film tourism, having more subtle relationship and roles, rather than the causal one of film-induced tourism, destination exposure, through film, can achieve high market penetration, stimulate interest and change the perceptions of the destination image (Connell, 2005; Croy, 2010; Kim & Richardson, 2003). Destination image, referring to the 'sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination' (Crompton, 1979, p. 18), is a key antecedent of travel intention (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2011), and satisfaction and loyalty (Hernandez-Lobato, Solis-Radilla, MolinerTena, & Sanchez-Garzia, 2006). Therefore, destination image, and potentially film, plays an important role in the travel decision-making process.

Polianskaia *et al.,* (2016) pointed out that there is a difference between 'film tourist' and 'film location tourist'. Both types of tourists are inspired to visit a destination by film, but the film tourist has no intention of visiting the actual filming locations. For instance, people who like watching *The Sex and the City* series might want to visit New York but they do not have any intention to visit the actual filming locations (Polianskaia *et al.,* 2016). In the case of Zimbabwe however,

tourism marketers would be indifferent whether the tourist visited the filming location or any other tourist destination in the country. The country simply needs tourists as they will contribute towards tourist arrivals which will help to improve image and destination competitiveness and eventually tourism performance. Tourism competitiveness is the antecedent of tourism performance. Hanafiah *et al.,* 2016). Hanafiah *et al.,* (2016) argued that performance is correlated with competitive advantages, and achieving an advantage will automatically result in higher performance.

Current level of usage of film for enhancing destination image

According to 85% of the respondents, the level of use of film for improving Zimbabwe's image as a tourist destination was very low. Respondent 15 remarked that: *Zimbabwe's film industry is poorly developed due to funding problems and there are very few, if any productions that promote Zimbabwe as a tourist destination.* This was corroborated by literature which indicated that the Zimbabwean film industry in general was viewed as not so functional at present (Chenga, 2014). In fact, some twelve years ago the Zimbabwe film industry was considered to be a basket industry that was largely driven by Non - Governmental Organizations (NGO) (Hungwe, 2005). It therefore did not come as a surprise that film was not being extensively used for improving destination image given the invisibility of the country's film industry. This scenario mirrors a critical shortage of filmmakers in Zimbabwe; there are only two notable filmmaking organisations - Women Filmmakers of Zimbabwe (WFoZ) and Zimbabwe International Film Festival (ZIFF).

Mboti (2016) argued that the Zimbabwean film industry, like most in Africa, is necessarily a work in progress. That is, it is constantly adapting to social, political and economic conditions in the search for a sustainable model or growth. Mboti noted that since 1980, the industry has been in a prolonged search for itself. The points to the largely invisible nature of Zimbabwe's film industry. After independence the Zimbabwean government had a keen interest to develop the local film industry (Hungwe, 2010). This was evidenced by the effort they made to attract Hollywood studious to film in Zimbabwe. They included Cannon which was the first Hollywood studio to shoot in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Mboti observed that a general feature has been the search for ways with which to replace thirty-year old colonial heritages of filmmaking, distribution and exhibition. The underutilisation of film for improving destination image can partly be traced to a lack funding from the non-governmental sector (Zulu, 2000). This view is corroborated by Mboti (2016) who postulated that funding, distribution and profitability are still sore points. For the first time, however, what seem like true foundations are being laid although the future remains an unknown x. Given that the concept of film itself is still trying to 'find itself' in Zimbabwe, it did not come as a surprise that the study found out that the quality of the existing movies on Zimbabwe was deemed poor.

A general starting point for assessing whether or not Zimbabwe has a film industry is to probe the realities of the route to market (Mboti, 2016). Does the local film industry produce enough volumes to satisfy a significant percentage of the 15 million Zimbabweans? Do the films made by local filmmakers reach a majority of the 15 million Zimbabweans? Is money being made from making films? Who is making money from making films? How do the films reach audiences? The question about whether or not Zimbabwe has a film industry partly rests on the answers to the first three questions. If answers to these set of questions are in the affirmative, then it would seem that a film industry of one form or another does exist in Zimbabwe. A negative set of answers, however, would indicate that things are not so optimistic. According to the study findings, the answer is negative. The response is in line with Chenga's (2014) observation that generally, Zimbabwe's film industry was non - functional.

Perceived quality of Zimbabwean films

According to 75% of the respondents, the quality of the movies was very poor. The choreography, graphics, presentation and video quality was described as old fashioned. The country's film industry is perceived as undeveloped; it is a far cry when compared with the film industries of Nigeria and South Africa, for example. Respondent 12 reported that: *Zimbabwean film writers lack innovation. There is nothing new about their movies because they seem to be always in a hurry to make money from the production of poor films.*

A movie may generate and sustain interest in a destination in a way which destination marketers cannot afford to do (Tooke & Baker, 1996). However, the quality of the film is known to determine the potential tourist's interest to visit the destination presented in the film. According to Polianskaia *et al.,* (2016), in the 1980s, many American tourists travelled to Australia after they watched some top quality Australian movies which include *Mad Max*, *The Man from Snowy River*, and *Crocodile Dundee I and II.* Implied here is the need for innovation in film – making so that the film can captivate the audience and influence destination image*.* Many people have visited destinations after watching movies because they were interested in the landscapes shown in those movies. In this regard, Jewell and McKinnon (2008) observed that movie tourism is actually another form of cultural landscape. The audience is more interested in the history of the cinematography and they elect to visit the actual place depicted in the film in order to experience it (Schofield, 1996). At the same time films are a passive involvement entertainment form, rarely employed as a promotional device primarily to enhance the awareness, appeal, and profitability of tourist destinations (Ozdemir and Adan, 2014).

The study found out that there were not many places used for film in Zimbabwe, let alone film tourism and the few sites used did not feature many of the ZTA - recognised tourism centres, namely Bulawayo, Gweru, Kariba, Chiredzi, Masvingo, Beitbridge, Mutare, Victoria Falls and Harare. This however, does not mean that all films on Zimbabwe should be shot only in these tourist destinations. In fact, film could be used to generate awareness of little known places in Zimbabwe which, despite the little regard given them, have tourism potential. Such destinations as Chinhoyi which have the Chinhoyi Caves, the Seven Heroes (named after the first heroes of the country's liberation struggle), numerous rich farm lands (with potential for agro - tourism), and other unsung tourist destinations of Zimbabwe, could be promoted via films. The study found out that the areas which were mostly featured in Zimbabwean films were Domboshava hills, Matopo hills, as well as Harare and Bulawayo central business districts. The current situation of film tourism in Zimbabwe was found to be unimpressive. This can be illustrated by a quotation from film maker number 2 who said: *Most of the films are shot in town and indoors or in front of houses.*

The researchers also noted that there was indeed a limited use of film by Zimbabwe's tourism marketers and planners to deliberately promote tourist attractions. Instead, as noted by Ndlovu (2009), Zimbabwe's tourism marketers tended to place more emphasis on expos to promote tourism and improve destination image.

Furthermore, film makers tended to concentrate on the western culture which was unlikely to work in attracting tourists of the same culture to visit Zimbabwe. Implied here is that the movies filmed in Zimbabwe have not played a great role in bringing out the country's best attractions, let alone re - imaging the destination. However, the series *Tiriparwendo* by Aaron Chiundura Moyo managed to showcase part of the beautiful sceneries, diverse and rich culture, which are some of Zimbabwe's tourism resources.

The potential contribution of film tourism

A slight majority (54%) of the respondents were of the view that film had the potential to contribute towards improving Zimbabwe's image as a tourist destination. For example, respondent number 15 indicated that: *Film tourism is very important as it offers unsolicited destination endorsements that cut across culture and age.* According to Gartner (1994), unsolicited organic destination image formation agents refer to people who give information and opinions about the place to potential tourists based on previous experience without being requested to provide such information. The antithesis of this is solicited organic agents who are people who give information and opinions about a destination to potential tourists based on previous experience in a solicited way. Gartner (1994) has been credited for developing a destination image - formation model which highlighted that films as examples autonomous destination image - formation agents, are highly regarded as information sources. Buhalis & Law, (2008) argued that tourists who share their travel experiences or pictures and videos in a virtual travel community have high credibility among other members, mainly because 'consumers increasingly trust better their peers, rather than marketing messages'. Nonetheless, the fact that different tourists might value their experiences differently is a source of potential misunderstandings. Therefore, if the reader feels that a particular virtual community is somehow, exclusively used by people with a similar taste, the credibility will be higher still (Stepchenkova *et al.,* 2007; Qu & Lee, 2011).

This view was corroborated in literature by Xu and Ye (2016) who noted that some autonomous agents, especially films (or movies), have been shown in studies to be effective in influencing destination image (Gartner & Shen, 1992; Kim & Richardson, 2003). They are purported to have greater impact when they depict dramatic events occurring at a destination such as disasters or other world events that are exposed to large audiences through media, possibly leading to swift image change (Gartner, 1993; Gartner & Shen, 1992). In other words, autonomous agents can change an image quickly if its information is accessible and differs substantially from images held previously, or gradually if the information is less overwhelming but received steadily over a period of time (Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

According to the ZTA (2014) Zimbabwe as a destination suffers negative perceptions across the source markets. It is indeed a destination which is desperate for a turnaround with regards to its image and fortunes. Although number of promotional strategies including several rebranding initiatives, have been implemented by the ZTA in a bid to create a positive image which could see the country's tourism economy rising sustainably, the destination is still grappling with both a poor image and performance of its tourism sector. Also, contrary to ZTA's (2014) claim that the destination brand "Zimbabwe a World of Wonders" remains largely unknown and invisible locally and in source markets, Zimbabwe has received a high global awareness as a tourist destination but is still failing to gain its previous position as an attractive place of visit (Chigora and Zvavahera, 2015). Chigora and Zvavahera observed that International Carnivals and the hosting of a number of international conferences have not had a notable impact on destination image and tourism performance. It is argued in this study that it seems that film tourism, as a tool which has proved that it can contribute towards improving destination image, needs to be given a chance in Zimbabwe.

The use of film *per se* may not be the panacea to the destination's image problem. For optimum results, it seems that there is need to use film tourism in conjunction with other strategies. This could be important especially given that image expresses itself via many factors which include the country's history, pricing, politics among other variables. According to Ndlovu & Heath (2013) the Zimbabwe tourism destination brand image has suffered under negative socio - economic and political performances. Appropriate strategies may therefore be required to improve Zimbabwe's

socio – economic and political environments. This observation also implies that even if the country' film industry was very well developed, its effectiveness and potential contribution as a tool for improving destination image, was still going to be stifled by the under – performance of the above - mentioned environments.

Strategies for improving the potential contribution of film

Research and development

Sixty seven percent (77%) of the respondents indicated that initially, focus should be put on developing a successful film tourism product and research and development was identified as the critical pillar in this regard. The need for research on film tourism was echoed by Tuclea and Nistoresnu (2011) who noted that despite the fact that statistics concerning the impact that films have had on tourism are limited, there are still some remarkable figures. Countries like UK, Australia, and New Zealand have an increasing interest in exploring film tourism and tourist destination perceptions. They added that although film and television tourism (or "screen tourism") is a phenomenon which has long been acknowledged and reported, few in – depth studies of it have been published.

Research by Mboti (2016) which explored the state of affairs in Zimbabwe's film industry divided the discussion into four sections, focusing on the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and the present. The trajectory of the Zimbabwean film industry itself has tended to settle, loosely, into those four ten-year periods, with some noticeable overlaps. Each period has been characterised by a more or less dominant film industry model. All the models that have been experimented with have, at base, been distinctly motivated by funding issues. Where is the money going to come from? Who is going to pay the piper? The issue of who was going to fund the piping was connected intimately with distribution and exhibition. Who watches the content? Where and how do they watch it? What is the nature of the return on investment? Who controls the route to audiences? Control of the route to market meant control over who saw what, when, how and for what purpose. Mboti concluded that the narrative of the Zimbabwean film industry is in a larger sense an attempt to provide sufficient answers to these questions.

Funding

The study found out that there is need to improve funding for film tourism if it is to contribute meaningfully towards turning around Zimbabwe's destination image. To illustrate the extent to which film tourism is underfunded in Zimbabwe, Mboti (2016) pointed out that the use of the term "film industry" does not, and ideally should not, mean a single thing to everyone. If one applied the definition used in the economically privileged contexts of film industries in the United States and Europe, or even in neighbouring South Africa, there would be no Zimbabwean film industry to talk about. The implication is that Zimbabwe's film industry is a far cry of that found in South Africa, Europe and America. Funding is one of the key determinants of the quality of any film which is normally considered in conjunction with the film location. According to Hudson and Ritchie (2006), the cost and other resources found at the film location influence the film's ability to promote a destination. In this study one respondent commented that: *Zimbabwe's film industry is poorly developed due to funding problems'.*

This remark by the respondent is actually supported by literature. Ozdemir and Adan (2014) found out that although films can influence the travelling preferences of individuals and can ensure that essential information on a destination reaches many persons in a short space of time, one important factor is always the budget that is committed in order to achieve this.

Interviewee number 12 stated that '*It's no secret that our industry is dogged by controversies about the abuse of funds, the actors and crew don't get paid because the producer wants to buy an ex-jap with money that should be used for film, now for that very individual to go look for more funding - let's just say it is futile.'*. From her response, there should be a funding scheme that is well monitored to see if the money is really being used for film making. Corruption is a major challenge that can continue to hamper the success of film making in Zimbabwe thereby implying that corruption continues to hamper the development of the film tourism phenomenon.

Respondent number 11 also highlighted that one of the major issues which was adversely affecting the use of film in improving destination image in Zimbabwe was funding: '*The development of the film industry is hampered by lack of funding – efforts must be made to secure funding'.* He emphasised that there should be a money lending scheme that will help the revival of the film industry because the production of good films may also promote Zimbabwe as a tourist destination.

Funding the film sector whilst combining it with the tourism sector is vital because it helps to put the image of Zimbabwe on the same page with the other destinations regionally and beyond. For example in South Africa, the Durban Development Film Fund was launched in 2011, in a bid to promote the local film industry so that it could become more competitive. Such a gesture is indicative of an appreciation of film tourism and the benefits it can give to destination image (Rolfes, 2009).

Staff training and development

The study found out that Zimbabwean film makers usually made use of amateurs who did not really have experience in film acting and hence they needed to be trained before acting in films. Some of the local universities are now offering degree studies in film and theatre arts. This serves to improve personnel skills and the same skills should be utilised to grow film tourism which has been successfully used by destinations like South Africa, New Zealand, Canada, UK, Australia, and others, to improve images of their destinations. The Midlands State University's Department of Film and Theatre Arts this year won an award at the joint Zimbabwe International Film Festival (ZIFF) and International Images Film Festival (IIFF) in the Hi - 5 category for their short film, *Things We Do for Love.* This suggests that universities, as learning centres, provide a human resource base which can be trained, developed and motivated to use film for tourism purposes and specifically for improving tourist destination image. Respondent ten commented that: *There is need to identify the right talent in schools and higher and tertiary institutions across the country and then develop it*. Trained personnel is less likely to misrepresent facts of the destination by highlighting barbarism and cannibalism in the film.The level of backwardness, barbarism and cannibalism portrayed in the film - *King Solomon's Mines* is not the true reality of Africans and Zimbabweans. Respondent 8 remarked that: *The movie does not seem to add anything positive to Zimbabwe's destination image.*

Conclusions and implications

This paper contributes to knowledge by highlighting the need to tap into film tourism as a tool which can be harnessed by tourism marketers to improve the images of developing destinations including Zimbabwe's image. Film tourism has been used by a number of destinations across the world to achieve the same and Zimbabwe may need to jump onto the band wagon and take

advantage of film in order to influence potential tourists to put Zimbabwe in their consideration set of destinations and eventually to select it as their destination of choice.

The study found out that film tourism had potential to enhance Zimbabwe's image as a tourist destination. The implication is that ZTA should consider to undertake research on the use of film to improve destination image. A number of destinations in Africa and beyond have used film to spruce up their images with impressive results. These can be good case studies for Zimbabwe.

The study found out that in a large measure, Zimbabwe's film industry was non – functional. There was therefore need to ensure that the industry was working before thinking of using it to improve destination image. The poor state of the film industry in general and film tourism in particular could be traced to poor funding of the film industry.

The poor funding of the film industry is closely associated with the general poor quality of films which have been produced in Zimbabwe. The researchers recommend that film tourism be done for selected destinations in the country in the short term. However, in the medium to long term, there is need to improve Zimbabwe's political and economic environments and this is likely to attract more foreign direct investment to Zimbabwe. Some of the investors may be attracted by the tourism sector given its huge potential and may invest in niche products such as film tourism.

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