Zimbabwe tourism destination brand personality: Tourists' voices on the ground

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Abstract

Brand personality has evolved to be a contemporary marketing concept that breaks or make positive image through perception management in tourism destinations. This study focused on the personality of the tourists who patronise the Zimbabwe tourism destination, looking at how their personality conforms to the personality that is reflected by the tourism destination. Destination marketing organizations have a certain personality they portray to the outside world with regards to their tourists' destination, which contributes to an intention of visiting or not visiting that destination by the tourists. This study applied a QUAL to QUAN sequential mixed method, which started with a qualitative research then followed by a quantitative research. A qualitative research design helped in getting views and opinions from participants on the types of personalities they regard to be represented by most tourism destinations across the globe and contributed to the establishment of themes that were used in building a survey questionnaire for quantitative research. The results of the qualitative research revealed that personalities of tourism destinations can be categorized as being youthful, adventurous, aggressive, hostile, friendly and accommodating. A further quantitative research was carried out with a focus on the Zimbabwe tourism destination's personality and the results revealed that there is a contradiction of personalities as tourists have a friendly personality but they regard the tourism destination as being hostile. Also the results informed that the tourism destination is viewed by most tourists as accommodating through hospitable people in the country. Lastly the responses enlightened that the Zimbabwe tourism destination has an accommodating personality as it accepts and caters for the needs of all the types of tourists, regardless of their nationality and race. The study recommends that there is a need for improved perception management through improved positive media publicity that informs potential tourists about the friendly personality of Zimbabwe as a desired tourism destination. There is also need for destination marketers to partner with various international agents to sell and promote a positive personality of the Zimbabwe tourism destination and its brand to the world.

Keywords: Brand personality, image, perception, Zimbabwe, destination marketing organizations.

Introduction

The Zimbabwe tourism destination brand has failed to perform in the past years especially due to the negative media publicity in relation to the country's socio-economic and political upheavals (Ndlovu & Heath, 2013). The power of a destination brand is seen from its ability to attract potential tourists' inflows and revenue contribution to the development of the country. In this regards it is important to for destination managers to find the best tourism offerings for improved global identity and returns. From a market perspective there is need to reach to an equilibrium point intersecting the demand and supply between the tourists and tourism organizations' respectively. Tourism organizations should understand the needs of their tourists so as to customize their offerings accordingly. Thus, the role of Destination Marketing Organizations is to provide an effective supply chain that is able to attract the demand of tourists. It is therefore important to understand and fulfil the demand of the tourists at any given period in time.

The focus of this paper was to understand the perceived brand personality for the Zimbabwe tourism destination looking at the asymmetric and agreed standpoint of the tourists and tourism organizations. The thrust being that when tourists visit a tourism destination they want their experience to match with their personality. Tourism organizations in their brand formulation have a certain personality they intend to project to the world. For a profitable relationship, they should be an agreeable personality between the two parties. According to Ekinci and Hosany (2006) destination brand personality is more inclined to the set of human characteristics perceived from a tourist's perspective rather than the hosting destination. This is because their view of a tourism destination is based on their expectations in the form of who they are and their associates. Therefore, it is important to know the perceived personality of Zimbabwe's tourism destination brand in its target markets. This will help in adjusting and promoting that personality when showcasing and promoting the brand.

Branding has become a key strategic tool for the survival of a tourism destination. The concept of destination branding is increasingly become popular in building positive perception of destination and its brand (Patterson, 1999). Some strategists have used a marketing myopia approach focusing on their marketing self-projected marketing practices without considering the specific expectations of the existing and potential. However, in the current world of business it is important to ruminate on relationship marketing.

This study looked at personalities as a means to connect the tourism destination brand and its potential markets. Aaker (1995) concurred by postulating that even though brands are not human they partially possess human characteristics that help in communicating and their positioning on the market. There was a need to explore the personalities reflected by Zimbabwe tourism destination brand. In connection to the Zimbabwean situation Chen and Phou (2013) alluded that combining the image of a destination and its personality will help in crafting an effective strategy to differentiate the brand with those of competitors. There should be an approach to advertising in which brands strive to reach consumers in an honest way without subjectively aggrandizing and making deliberate untruths about their offerings. Marketing is fundamentally linked to a variety of ethical issues that necessitate serious consideration and a sense of moral idealism in which universal consumer rights are not flouted, and utilitarianism in which consequences of actions are carefully charted so that 'the greatest good for the greatest number' can be realised after assessment of the costs and benefits of the desired ethical marketing of a brand (Nicolaides, 2018).

Literature Review

Tourists' personality

A personality is set of traits and other dimensions that overrides and makes a character (Guilford, 1973). When faced with competing products a choice in consumption is made after a well consideration of the extent of similarity between personality traits of a product and the personality they wish to project for themselves (Zinkhan, et al., 1996). This is similar to how tourists make a decision to visit a tourism destination when looking at a wide range of destinations which are competing for visitors. Tourists always consider if the perceived destination personality matches with their own personality. It is important to understand that in their view of destinations tourists treat them as humans and Guthrie (1997) informed that humans do not feel comfortable with what is non-human. Therefore for a destination brand to be attractive it should reflect a personality that makes it human. Consideration of personality in consumer behaviour results in a process of personification (Dobni, 1990). Destinations should therefore understand the personality that is expected by the potential tourists so that they personify their offering and attributes to meet tourists' anticipation. When tourists travel they go through a process of personality adaptation (Gretzel et al., 2004). Also Aaker (1997) informed that consumers infuse brands with personality of humans such as being charming, cheerful, honest or tough. Kah, Vogt and MacKay (2008) went on to inform that there is a strong relationship between construct of a personality and information behaviour. Plog (1977) wanted to link personality traits directly with tourist behavior and discovered a relationship between tourists' personality and the behaviour. Therefore, a choice of a tourism destination can be perceived as a self-expressive device, a lifestyle and status indicator (Clarke, 2000). Self-concept which can be viewed as self-image is the totality of individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object (Rosenberg, 1979).In this view Sirgy et al. (1997), announced that the degree of consistency between consumer's self-concept and that of brand is referred to as self-image/product image congruity, self-image congruence or self-congruity for short.

Brands are an important element in building and portraying a certain personality to the potential tourists. As alluded by Wee (2004) that the personality traits associated with a brand, like those associated with an individual, tend to be relatively enduring and distinctive. There is need to build a unique personality within a brand so that it can be distinctive and competitive. Various researches of this era have shown that, the information that is needed by tourists in their immediate travel decisions is not only functional but other non-function related to a certain personality like aesthetic, innovation, hedonic, and sign needs (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998).

It is important to understand that the personality of a destination is generally understood through looking at perceived destination image and behaviors or attitudes of tourists (Crockett & Wood, 2002). In their research on Bodrum's destination personality Sop et al. (2012) discovered the destination's personality to be a combination of dynamism, sincerity, competence and sophistication.

The discussions in literature therefore call for a need to match tourists' personality and destination personality since it will result in an lasting and loyal relationship between the parties and thus tourism sustainability. As postulated by Lee and Allen (1999) people will have an attachment to a place when they visit it, but they are even some who will develop feelings for places they have not visited, meaning that a projected personality of a destination brand might even help in attracting new followers.

Destination brand personality

The first empirical scale for a brand personality was developed by Aaker (Klabi, 2012). According to Aaker (1997) a brand personality can be classified in the form of characteristics which are sincerity, excitement or competence. In line with these characteristics Santos (2004) announced that the personality attributes of Portugal as a tourism destination were "contemporary", "modern", "sophisticated" and "traditional" in the USA travel media. Uşaklı and Baloğlu (2011) developed a destination brand personality scale with five dimensions which are (1) vibrancy, (2) sophisticated, (3) competence, (4) contemporary, (5) sincerity. This shows that destination managers should be able to establish and classify their destination according to its personalities. According to Hosany et al. (2007) destination personality relates to personality traits associated with a destination. Ekinci and Hosany (2006) further informed that destination personality is a perception about the human characteristics that the destination carries in the mind of tourists rather than local individuals. It is in this view that Hosney et al. (2006) announced brand personality as a concept where human characteristics are matched to a destination.

A brand should be effective in ensuring a positive emotional relationship between a destination and the tourists (Morgan et al., 2002). It is important to establish some commercial brands and investigate their personalities and how they relate to the personality of their target customers (Motameny & Hormozy, 2013). In this case, the main area of concern is that brands carry a social and emotional value to the customers and have a personality that even speak to the users (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). The result of having a well-established brand personality is that it has a great influence on the preference of consumers and their patronage (Sirgy, 1982). As a focus of this study, tourists will follow a brand that reflects an attractive personality. To a greater extent brands are a differentiation tool that gives a promise of value such that they evoke, emotions, induce behaviours ultimately representing their own personality (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Brand personality has become one of the most relevant and metaphorical area to build brands for destinations which then helps to strengthen their identity (Ekinsi & Hosany, 2006). In agreement to this view Crask and Henry (1990) emphasised that places seek to be distinctive and it is with destination personality through which tourists' perception can be understood and it then helps to craft a unique destination identity. Freling and Forbes (2005) then discovered that a strong and positive brand personality can result in more brand associations that are also favorable, unique and strong.

As discovered with the most reputable international brands, personality plays an important role in their success such that a personality of coolness describes Coca-Cola, whereas of being young to describes Pepsi (Aaker, 1997), masculine describes Marlboro cigarettes (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006); sophisticated personality has helped to describe BMW (Phau & Lau, 2000) and being unique is a description for Dr. Pepper (Plummer, 1985). These types of personalities can therefore be applied to tourism destination brands. In this way brand personality will serve as a symbolic or self- expressive function (Keller, 1993). Artuğer and Çetinsöz (2014) therefore announced that there is cognitive image and destination personality, meaning that Zimbabwe as tourism destination brand that has suffered from the negative image in its personality and can be re-built through identifying a better personality to counter all the negative perception.

Statement of the problem

The aim of any tourism destination brand is to attract more tourists' to visit especially when operating in a highly competitive environment. The thrust of this study was driven by the fact that a tourism destination brand carries human characteristics, but there is a dirth of existing research

in this area. This notion was supported by Ekinci and Hosany (2006) who acknowledged that these characteristics are more perceived by the tourists rather than the brand owners. Zimbabwe tourism destination brand has been changed three times in three decades (Ndlovu, 2009) which might be due to failure by the brand to present a favourable and acceptable personality in the targeted markets. The personality brand influences the desire to purchase or not to purchase a product or services (Freling & Forbes, 2005). For the Zimbabwe tourism destination there is little research with regard to its destination brand personality and its marketing influence. Patterson (1999) also realized that most studies have failed to conceptualize destination brand image and brand personality, and this study concurred in its effort to close the gap form a Zimbabwean perspective. This study therefore looked at the demand and supply of the tourism product in line with the Zimbabwean destination brand personality. The main aim being to assess similarities and differences between the projected destination brand personality by the tourism organizations and the perceived personality by the tourists. Nicola and Sauer (2011) linked attributes and associations in developing a brand personality. Also Hosany and Ekinci (2006) acknowledged the validity of Aaker's brand personality scale to a destination, which encouraged this study to develop a destination brand personality scale for Zimbabwe as a tourism destination.

Research objectives

- To understand the Zimbabwe destination brand personality as perceived by the tourists.
- To determine the destination brand personality that is projected by tourism organizations in Zimbabwe.
- To recommend the Zimbabwe tourism destination brand personality as agreed upon by the tourists and tourism organizations .

Research methodology

The study adopted a pragmatic philosophy by combining both an inductive and deductive approach in a single study. It was therefore based on a sequential mixed methods which started with a qualitative research followed by a quantitative research.

In-depth interviews

The participants to the in-depth interviews were chosen using a purposive judgmental sampling. The basis for selecting the participants was their professional title, working experience in destination marketing and their educational background in destination marketing and branding. These participants were as follows: Destination Marketers (3); University Lectures (2); Safari Operators (3); and Travel Agency (2) totaling to n= 10.

Survey

The respondents to the research survey were selected using a stratified random sampling. This was achieved by classifying the respondents according to the tourism sectors they represent namely accommodation, travel and resorts. A further convenient sampling was applied in order to collect data from the respondents who were only available when the survey was being carried out. The samples for the survey became: Accommodation (45); Travel (15); and Resorts (27) resulting in n=87.

Data collection

Data for a quantitative research was done using a survey questionnaire and for qualitative research, the study used in-depth interviews to collect the data.

Data analysis

A content analysis was done in order to turn the qualitative data into themes. For quantitative data it was analyzed in the form of percentages which were presented as pie charts and tables.

Findings and discussions

Since the study was initiated using a qualitative research through in-depth interviews, It helped in coming up with the basis for the research thematically. The participants provided themes as shown in Figure 1.1 below.
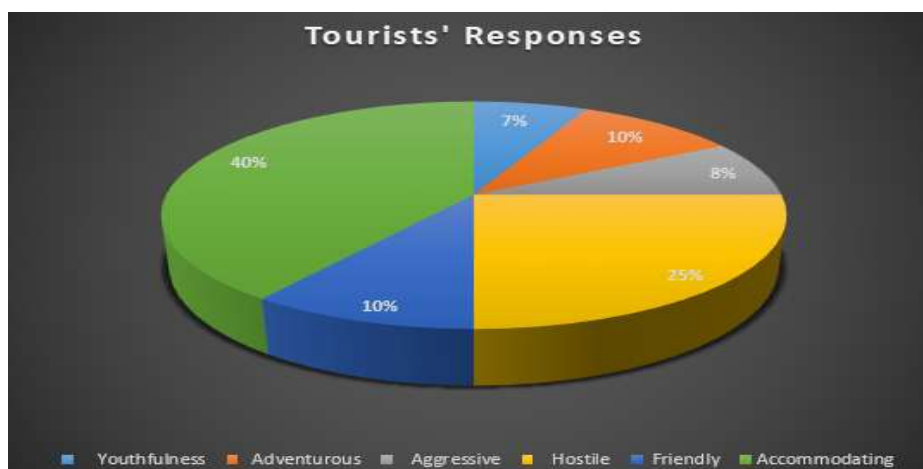

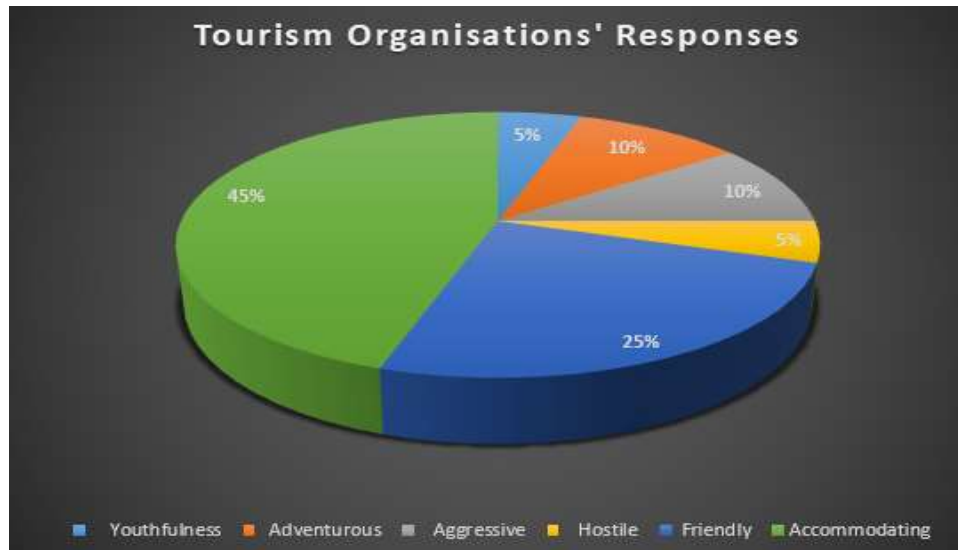**Figure 1.1 Themes for Zimbabwe tourism brand personality   Source**: Research Findings 2019

The presentation in Figure 1.1 above shows that the agreed personalities of the Zimbabwe tourism destination brand include the following: youthfulness; adventurous; aggressive; hostile; friendly; and accommodating. These became the basis for a further survey research which was done with the tourists and providers of tourism offerings across the three sectors of the tourism industry namely accommodation, travel and resorts.

Findings from the surveys

The responses on the most dominating personalities for the Zimbabwe tourism brand as viewed by the Tourists and Tourism organisations are as presented in Figures 1.2 and 1.3 respectively.

Figure 1.2 Tourists' view on Zimbabwe tourism destination personality   Source: Research Findings (2019)

Figure 1.3 Tourism organizations' view on Zimbabwe tourism destination personality Source: Research Findings (2019)

The responses presented in Figure 1.2 shows that the majority (40%) of the tourists regarded Zimbabwe tourism destination's personality as accommodating. This is a good reflection towards building a favorable personality. The reason for this responses might be due to the hospitable nature of locals in the country reflected when they interact with the tourists. The presentation in Figure 1.3 shows that the majority (43%) of tourism organizations agreed that Zimbabwe tourism destination has an accommodating personality which relatively agrees with tourists (40%) as shown in Figure 1.2. Comparatively, there is a link between the two parties which concludes that Zimbabwe tourism destination brand is currently viewed as an accommodating personality.

Also there was an agreement between the tourism organizations (10%) and tourists (10%) that Zimbabwe tourism destination brand reflects an adventurous personality. This might be due to the offerings available in the tourism destination such as the Big 5 animals, the majestic Victoria Falls and other natural gifts in flora and fauna.

However, there is a contradiction between the tourism organizations and tourists in various aspects as presented in Table1.2 below.

Table 1.2 Responses by Tourists and Organizations on destination brand personalities

Type of Personality	Responses by Tourists (%)	Responses by Tourism Organizations (%)	Variance (%)
Youthfulness	5%	7%	2%
Aggressive	10%	25%	15%
Friendly	10%	25 %	15%
Hostile	5%	25%	20%

The presentation in Table 1.2 shows that there is a small variance (2%) in the responses of the tourists and tourism organizations with regard to their view of the Zimbabwe tourism destination

as reflecting youthfulness. This confirms that Zimbabwe as a tourism destination can be viewed as youthful. This might be due to the fact that youth in Zimbabwe are dominating in most tourism activities across all the sectors.

Also the statistics in Table 1.2 show that there was a disagreement between the tourists (10%) and tourism organizations (25%), with a variance of 15% with regards to the destination to the destination having an aggressive personality. The reason might be due to the fact that the destination marketers are working extensively to promote and re-brand the tourism destination in its traditional and new markets. The tourism destination has faced a huge slump in the tourists' numbers from traditional source markets such as Britain, Germany and the United States of America, hence there is a dire need to have an aggressive brand personality.

According to Cai (2002), destination personality could be indirectly built through marketing programs of the place such as communication strategy, pricing strategy, infrastructure development or operation mode. However, the responses by the tourists shows that they see little effort being done by the Zimbabwean tourism brand in luring them to visit and consume the Zimbabwe tourism brand. Brand personality thus reflects consumers' emotions about brands (Keller, 1993). The responses in Table 1.2 reveals that there was a disagreement between the tourism organizations (25%) and tourists (10%) on the friendly personality of the Zimbabwe tourism destination brand. The gap might be due to the fact that providers of tourism offerings in Zimbabwe are working on rebuilding the tarnished image of the destination and its brand. At the same time the media and other sources have convinced the tourists that the tourism destination is as unfriendly as the brand. In agreement, a relatively greater percentage (25%) of tourists viewed the Zimbabwe tourism destination as having a hostile personality. This might also be as a result of socio-economic and political instabilities transpiring in Zimbabwe, dating back to 2000. As announced by Ndlovu (2009) these include fights over land reform and political parties fights over presidential elections making the tourism destination and its brand appear to be somewhat hostile.

Conclusion

The study concluded that there are some differences and also agreement between Tourism Organizations and Tourists in relation to the personality of Zimbabwe tourism destination brand. The parties agreed that the Zimbabwe tourism brand has an accommodating personality. Also there was a strong agreement by both parties that the Zimbabwe tourism destination brand has an adventurous personality. The tourists who are the receivers and the reason for branding have informed that the Zimbabwe tourism destination brand reflects a hostile and unfriendly personality.

Recommendations

The study recommends that there is a need for improved perception management through improved positive media publicity that informs potential tourists about the friendly personality of Zimbabwe as a tourism destination. Also there is need for destination marketers to partner with various international agents to sell and promote a positive personality of the Zimbabwe tourism destination and its brand to the world. The outcome of the study revealed that there was an agreement that Zimbabwe tourism destination brand is accommodating and adventurous. This means that the tourism destination marketer should sell the tourism destination as accommodating and highly adventurous in its target markets.

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