

Developing Event Tourism in Zimbabwe: Opportunities and Challenges Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was felt by several industries, including the events sector, an important sub-sector of the tourism industry. In response to the devastating pandemic, governments instituted lockdown measures to control and prevent the further spread of the pandemic. These measures presented both opportunities and challenges to the events tourism industry. The current study examines how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted a selected developing country. It also evaluates the recovery strategies adopted to minimise the impact of the pandemic by examining different tourism events hosted in Zimbabwe. To achieve this, a review of related literature examining the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism events, response strategies to the impact of the pandemic on tourism events and sustainable management of events is undertaken. The current study highlights the value of stakeholder collaboration in event tourism development. In addition, recovery strategies can be proposed through stakeholder engagement, resulting in sustainable events that can grow tourism.

Keywords: Event tourism; COVID-19 pandemic; sustainability; stakeholder theory; Zimbabwe

Introduction

Despite the catastrophic impact of COVID-19, which severely affected the tourism and events industry, destinations continue to see events as developmental tools. Many nations, including the Global South, recognise the importance of promoting tourism events to benefit from the myriad of associated benefits (Swart et al., 2018). The hosting of events bring in several opportunities which nations can use to grow their economies and develop tourism (Liu, 2014; Liu et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2020). When successfully planned and hosted, events present the potential to expand the visitor economy, offer media exposure, enhance destination development, stimulate infrastructural development, and foster mutually beneficial partnerships (Getz, 2014; Getz & Page, 2016; Lu et al., 2020). Hosting events at different levels, such as local, national and international, presents unique opportunities to reposition

destinations (Stipanovich, 2018). For this reason, many countries have adopted the strategy of using events as catalysts for tourism development and destination branding. Furthermore, tourism developers promote the hosting of events as they work as vehicles for economic growth and development (Drummond & Snowball, 2019; Oklobdžija, 2015). Consequently, tourism bodies find it imperative to devote resources to attract and support major events as part of a broader tourism strategy.

It is undeniable that tourism remains one of the fastest-growing industries contributing significantly to national economies as well as socio-cultural aspects of nations (Wolf et al., 2021). The tourism industry, which is closely linked to events, is a huge economic sector with the potential to grow and remain resilient regardless of global crisis (Ibanescu et al., 2020; Rokou, 2022). However, it is important to note that only certain types of tourism, such as community-based tourism, generate socio-ecological resilience if they meet the criteria of economic complementarity and community consolidation. In most cases, tourism, especially when it becomes the main and sole economic activity, has enormous consequences on the destination, especially when adverse external forces exert pressure on the economy. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and experiences from other global crises seen in the past provide evidence of the resilience of the sector and its ability to recover from the crisis. In 2019, global tourism numbers grew by 4% compared with the previous year reaching 1.5 billion (UNWTO, 2020). These figures represent not only the economic strength of the tourism industry but the capacity and potential of the industry to address some of the pressing challenges faced by countries, including unemployment, poverty and many others. Because of this, many countries view tourism as an important sector with the ability to enhance development.

Events form part of tourism and thus one of the fastest-growing sectors of the tourism industry. They are part of the tourism system and are often used to attract visitors as well as to profile and position a destination in the market (Fytopoulou et al., 2021; Hemmonsbey et al., 2021; Wang & Jin, 2019). In addition, events are seen as tools to increase tourist traffic (Lopes et al., 2021) to a particular area, which could lead to several economic opportunities to be identified and exploited. Mandal et al. (2022) highlight that tourism events have the potential to enhance destination image and can improve economic development (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021) of countries. Events also serve as important destination marketing proposition for places and attractions (Jamaluddin & Ghani, 2022), thus increasing global competition in attracting visitor spending (Getz & Page, 2016). Some cities use events to redefine their status and, at times, show socio-economic and political power (Ormerod & Wood, 2021). Swart and Turco (2020) thus agree that event bidding, organisation and hosting are integral components of the tourism product of several host destinations.

This paper examines the event tourism industry of a selected developing country in southern Africa. More specifically, Zimbabwe was used as a case study to understand how the country can expand its event tourism industry in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It further examines the event tourism recovery strategies that have been implemented to limit the extent of the COVID-19 impact. A multi-dimensional conceptual and theoretical framework that could be suited to develop the event tourism industry is presented. The paper describes the methodological reflections, literature review, theories and concepts guiding the study and finally offers a discussion and conclusion.

A note on methodology

This conceptual piece was created by reviewing and analysing scholarly literature sources (published and unpublished) relevant to the subject being investigated. The concepts emanating from a review of these sources were used to build proposals for reimagining event tourism in post-COVID-19 Zimbabwe. A multi-dimensional conceptual and theoretical framework linked

to stakeholder theory, event tourism, event sustainability, resilience and recovery theory was used to support and guide the study process. The above concepts were relevant for the study and therefore utilised as the key theories to guide the research and provide suggestions for future research.

Literature review

An overview of the Zimbabwean event tourism industry

Zimbabwe is endowed with many natural resources, which are the major drawcards for tourists who come from various international markets. Zimbabwe has been marketed as the ‘world of wonders’ (Kwanisai & Vengesayi, 2016) mainly because of the massive Victoria Falls, which has become the country’s prime tourist destination. Vast national parks occupying approximately 13% of the country’s land area also bring in hundreds of thousands of tourists who come for wildlife viewing (ZimParks, 2017). In 2018, the country received 957 752 visitors (local, regional & international) to its national parks, with bigger numbers visiting the Rainforest of Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe Tourism, 2020). According to ZimParks (2017), the country’s protected areas are visited mainly by domestic clientele, mostly individuals, families and church groups (Kabote et al., 2019; Mutanga et al., 2017). Another aspect of tourism that the country effectively markets is culture encompassing the national museums and monuments, with the Great Zimbabwe Monument being a major attraction. The Zimbabwean Government, more specifically the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), the national tourism board responsible for tourism marketing and promotion, has recognised the potential of other forms of tourism, including religious, community and event tourism.

Zimbabwe’s tourism industry has grown over the years, from 80 000 visitors in 1980 to over 2.5 million in 2018 which was a 6.0% increase from the 2 422 930 recorded in 2017 (Zimbabwe Tourism, 2020). Despite the challenges Zimbabwe faces, the Government, in collaboration with various stakeholders, is working to continue growing the industry by attracting more tourists so as to benefit from the associated positive impacts. Zimbabwe’s tourism industry forms part of the country’s identified four pillars of the economy, together with mining, agriculture and manufacturing (Grieves-Cook, 2016). These four pillars contribute significantly to the national economy, and in 2017, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), reported that the tourism industry contributed USD1 199.8mn to the economy, constituting 7.1% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (WTTC, 2018). In terms of employment opportunities in the tourism industry, in 2017 alone, 27 500 new jobs were supported, and the number was anticipated to continue increasing with projections to reach 33 000 jobs by 2028 (WTTC, 2018). However, these projections were unexpectedly affected as the industry is faced with a global crisis - a devastating health hazard, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In responding to this pandemic, governments across the globe implemented restrictions to limit the movement of people as they intended to contain the spread in the country. The event tourism industry remains one of the most affected sectors, with several planned events cancelled, postponed or reimaged.

Up to the early 2000s, event tourism was an obscure phenomenon in Zimbabwe, with only two major events existing before 2000, and these were the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF) and Harare Agricultural Show. However, it is important to note that some of the events the country has hosted over the years cannot be directly associated with tourism benefits. These events include Independence Day, Defence Forces Day, Heroes Day, National Unity Day, and the national ruling party’s annual congress. Several music and art festivals are hosted across the country, with the *Jenaguru* Music Festival being the biggest (Africa Press, 2017). In the new millennium, event tourism took a massive leap with numerous events being introduced. The ZITF and Harare Agricultural Show have now matured to higher standards attracting

several international exhibitors. The Harare Agricultural Show has been in existence for a period exceeding a century (Zimbabwe Agricultural Society, 2022) while the ZITF has been running for more than three decades (Shereni et al., 2021).

Having noticed the importance of event tourism fifteen years ago, the ZTA started hosting events that have more focus on tourism, for example, the *Sanganai/Hlanganani* World Tourism Expo. This World Tourism Expo is similar to the Harare Agricultural Show, and ZITF but mostly centred on tourism and its stakeholders (Shereni et al., 2018). The birth of events such as the Harare International Festival of Arts (HIFA) in 1999 changed the face of event tourism in Zimbabwe (Samhere, 2017). In 2013, the Harare International Carnival was introduced and was highly anticipated to be hosted every year (Njerekai, 2016). This event, unfortunately, was discontinued after being hosted for only five years. In 2009, the Victoria Falls Carnival was launched, and three years earlier, the Victoria Falls Marathon had been established, bringing in more activity in the country's major tourism hub.

As Zimbabwe continues to grow in importance and popularity as a tourism destination, the country now possesses a growing calendar of tourism events that are hosted throughout the year. Generally, event tourism has been on the rise, and the 2000s have witnessed remarkable growth and importance to this industry, with a wide variety of events coming into existence, and these include international music shows, awards ceremonies (including the Zim-Dance-Hall Awards and Zim-Hip-hop Awards usually popular with the young generations), religious gatherings, revivals and conferences, and sporting festivals (including the Cottco Schools Rugby Festival, currently the Dairiboard Schools Rugby Festival hosted each April, boxing matches, swimming competitions, cricket matches, soccer, cycling and marathons). However, this continued growth of the event tourism industry could be hampered by erratic external forces which include global trends such as pandemics, terrorism, climate change, and others. Despite the growth of the Zimbabwean event tourism sector, the emergence of external forces such as global pandemics (e.g., COVID-19, Ebola, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome – SARS etc.) continue to affect the industry's growth. As such, several adjustments and recovery plans have been implemented as they are necessary for the sustainable survival of the sector. It is therefore within this paradigm that this proposed study seeks to examine how a developing country's tourism can continue to grow despite the impact of a crisis of different nature. It also seeks to examine the recovery plans which can be adopted to minimise the impact of the crisis by looking at different tourism events so that a framework suited for event tourism development could be proposed.

Like many other African countries, Zimbabwe's tourism has chiefly been focused on wildlife and nature-based tourism (Mbaiwa, 2018; Muchapondwa & Stage, 2013). The country has for many years relied mostly on its natural heritage as key tourist attractions, taking advantage of the extensive vegetation and wildlife, the eastern highlands, Great Zimbabwe Monuments, *Matobo* Hills, as well as the Victoria Falls (Marunda & Chaneta, 2014). However, as from the early 2000s, the country has realised the importance of using events together with the existing tourist products for the growth of the tourism industry. It is therefore important to examine if this growth in events will contribute meaningfully to the growth of the tourism industry, especially noting the challenges facing the country, which include a lack of funding, shortage of foreign exchange, or liquidity crunch, a high-risk country perception, policy inconsistency, effects of sanctions, high costs of doing business, and lack of skilled personal (brain drain) among other matters (Zhou, 2018). Considering these existing challenges, it presents the country with difficulties of achieving developmental goals.

Zimbabwe's event tourism industry seems to be performing well which is evidenced by the high numbers of attendees and participants (mostly local) to events hosted across the country. Despite the growth of the country's event tourism, the full performance is restricted

because of some of the challenges mentioned above. In 2013, the ZTA, with the assistance of the Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality, added to the country's event calendar a cultural event which was to become the 'biggest street party in southern Africa' (New Telegraph, 2017; Njerekai, 2016). This event, the Harare International Carnival, was created with the intention to grow domestic tourism (New Telegraph, 2017). Some of the other objectives of this Carnival included increasing destination awareness and brand visibility, increasing tourism revenue, promoting local tourism products, and creating domestic tourism awareness through school competitions (Njerekai, 2016).

The Government of Zimbabwe showed its commitment to making this Carnival event a success through the provision of funding, and necessary support for the event to continue (New Telegraph, 2017). This, however, did not go a long way as the event suffered several challenges including underfunding from the Government, the limited extent of buy-in by public and private stakeholders, and underrepresentation of some key stakeholders in the organising committee (Njerekai, 2016). Because of a cholera outbreak in the capital, Harare, the Government resorted to banning public gatherings, and this impacted the Carnival's continuation thus threatening the potential contribution of this event to people's livelihoods. In addition, in trying to quell tension between different political parties, especially after the Operation Restore Legacy which saw Robert Mugabe's presidency coming to an end, large gatherings were restricted/forbidden and at times the process of getting approvals for event gathering became difficult. However, the emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic did not have any direct contribution to this event's early departure since it had already vanished before the pandemic period.

Having noticed the rate at which the COVID-19 pandemic was spreading, the Zimbabwean Government had to quickly respond by placing the country on nationwide lockdown which saw several economic activities closed. Closure of the country's borders and banning of gatherings were some of the measures taken by the Government to curb the spread of the pandemic. These measures severely affected the tourism and events industry which thrives when there is movement and gathering of people. This then prompted several event organisers to come up with strategies to help lessen the impact of this pandemic on the event sector. Some of these strategies included cancellation of events, postponement of events to a later date, consideration of hybrid events, and virtual events. Lessons can be drawn from the Harare International Carnival event especially on strategies that can be implemented to organise, host and manage tourism events sustainably so as to ultimately not follow the same path taken by this event.

Event tourism and the COVID-19 pandemic

Global disasters can manifest themselves in a variety of ways, all of which have the potential to have an impact on tourism growth. Pandemics, natural catastrophes, political instability, and terrorism are just a few of the well-known events that have the potential to transform and disrupt the event tourism industry. In most instances, when severe disasters occur, individuals tend to postpone or reschedule their already planned visits, primarily as a result of the panic induced by such events (World Economic Forum, 2015). Typically, this leads to economic costs for the traveller arriving at the destination as well as for local businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the global travel and tourism business (Gössling et al., 2020). As the number of daily infections, as well as the number of deaths, climbed dramatically, a number of restrictions and actions were enacted by governments as part of their efforts to curb the spread, with the primary focus being on limiting the mobility of people. As a result of these restrictions, foreign tourist receipt was predicted to decline by 20% to 30% in 2020 (equivalent to around \$300 billion to US\$450 billion) (UNWTO, 2020). Also because of

COVID-19, numerous jobs in the tourism industry have been lost as a result (Gössling et al., 2020). Given that most countries were under lockdown and had limited movement, it followed that any event involving a large number of people was not permitted. Because of the restrictive decision on the movement of people, hundreds of billions in anticipated revenue for the industry was lost. In order to continue operations when the epidemic is ended, it is necessary for the event tourism industry to develop recovery strategies that would assist in reigniting the industry.

Several measures can be implemented to deal with global crises at different stages of crises - pre, during and post. Lee et al. (2021) assert that before a crisis emerges, there need to be a crisis management plan which could be used to minimise the severity of the crisis. However, during a crisis, tourism stakeholders can do a number of activities and operations to help towards recovery such as financial support could be directed to businesses and employees (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020; Shipway et al., 2020), collaboration and cooperation between businesses to share experiences (Chen et al., 2022), and formulation of public policies such as institution of travel bans (Gössling et al., 2020). In the post- crisis period, event tourism stakeholders could work towards restoring market confidence (Jones, 2020), conducting recovery marketing, enhance intergovernmental and stakeholder cooperation (Liu & Chang, 2020). Shipway et al. (2020) argue that the impact of global crises on the events industry can be curtailed with the implementation of integrated planning and procedures. The global responses to the devastating pandemic have shown an ever-increasing importance of community-based approaches to deal with crises and foster resilience (Miles & Shipway, 2020).

Event sustainability

Sustainability in event management is a principle, a philosophy that takes three critical factors into account: economic progress, social growth and environmental protection (Mair, 2019). Event organisers are usually seen pursuing an enduring function of ensuring that the negative impacts (social, economic and environmental) are minimised. The main aim for this is undertaken in order to leave a positive impact, a better operation, and a positive difference in the running of events. Getz and Andersson (2008) use organisational ecology and resource dependency to look at the long-term viability of festivals, both individually and as a group. In the event world, one of the things that make things sustainable is the ability to continue. However, as Getz and Andersson (2008) point out, even though an event must be able to last, that does not mean that a viable event will help with any other part of sustainability. So, the focus is on the long-term quality of viability, but there is also strong emphasis on how the event can help the community (socio-cultural, economic and environmental) that hosts it.

Instead of attempting to run ‘sustainable events,’ event organisers should concentrate on how their activities may contribute to the long-term development of the communities in which they are held (Mair, 2019). At the end of the day, social, economic, and environmental consequences are all intertwined in a variety of intricate ways. Economic consequences can have an impact on environmental and social consequences, and vice versa, and as a result, the whole is bigger than the sum of the individual parts. As a result, it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the interactions and interdependencies that exist between the various parts of the event.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

Getz (2012) highlights that a holistic understanding of event impacts is imperative, especially when planning for sustainability. Bazzanella et al. (2019) weigh in supporting The Cultural Policy of Zimbabwe (2007) which recognises the importance of stakeholder involvement as

critical for unlocking the socio-economic impacts of events in the country. Without a doubt, with the support and total commitment of relevant stakeholders, event tourism can be expanded and utilised as a strategy to promote tourism growth, particularly in Zimbabwe.

The successful planning, hosting and management of events usually depend on the combined efforts from various individuals whom Freeman (1984) calls ‘stakeholders.’ Event stakeholders possess varying interests and relations, and differing degrees of cooperation and can be noticed in the organisation of events (Luštický & Musil, 2016). Because of this, event stakeholders can potentially impact, or are impacted by event production and management. The majority of event stakeholders fall into two categories: primary and secondary (Andersson & Getz, 2008). The primary stakeholders are those on whom the event is dependent (Todd et al., 2017) including the event organisers, sponsors, attendees, spectators, participants, suppliers, employees and volunteers. Secondary stakeholders include the host community of events, media, tourist organisations, Government, essential services and businesses (Andersson & Getz, 2008).

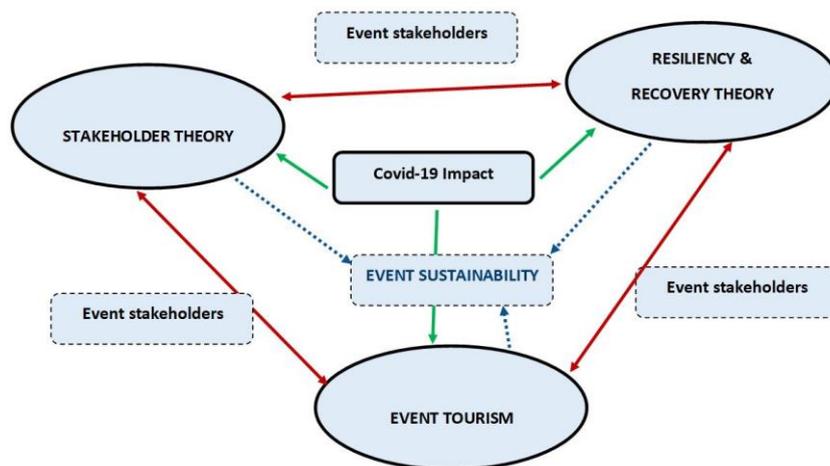


Figure 1: Multi-dimensional Conceptual Framework.
 Source: Researchers' construction

Because the process of organising and hosting events is a responsibility of multi-stakeholder groups, it is considered worthwhile to include stakeholder theory as part of a conceptual framework that could assist in directing an event study. Stakeholder theory has been utilised in a variety of sectors, including strategic management, corporate ethics, tourism and others (Van Niekerk & Getz, 2019). The adoption of stakeholder theory and its implementation as a framework suited for assessing satisfaction levels among stakeholder groups permits event organisations to monitor, and enhance interactions with stakeholders, resulting in increased efficiency and effectiveness (Xu et al., 2019). The application of stakeholder theory to event planning has the potential to provide an edge to event organisers in the competitive landscape (Pedrini & Ferri, 2019). Stakeholder theory has been identified as relevant because of the large number of individuals and organisations who are involved in event production and management. Each stakeholder group in the planning and hosting of events has expectations and wants, which normally result in different experiences, and attaches potentially different meanings to the event (Alanzeh et al., 2019).

The concept of resilience is becoming popular as a framework for understanding global systems. The theory of resilience was established in the early 1970s to predict changes in ecological systems, and it was later extended to include integrated socio-ecological systems as well (Cochrane, 2010). It has been investigated in a variety of anthropogenic contexts,

including contemporary uses in the field of tourism, among others (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021). Resilience theory was identified as an applicable tool to understand events in times of crisis as it offers practical guidelines to help the event tourism industry especially on how to limit potential future crises. In addition, it offers ways of overcoming the negative impacts caused by the external environment and proposes recovery strategies from the impact of the crisis and ensure the success of future events. In short, the concept of resilience captures the ability and capacity of organisations and individuals to adapt, improvise, and recover from any crisis (Boin et al., 2010; Van Breda, 2018).

McCartney et al. (2021) suggest practices and strategies of resilience to overcome challenges and troubles in the face of adversity. The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the most recent severe adversities faced by the event tourism industry. This necessitates the development of practical strategies to help save the industry from the crisis and recover from the adverse impact. The crafting and implementation of recovery strategies is only successful when there is collaborative effort by various stakeholders who should work towards the same goal. Figure 1 above illustrates the multi-dimensional conceptual framework which would guide and direct event tourism development for tourism destinations as is the case in Zimbabwe. The framework includes the stakeholder theory, resiliency and recovery theory and event tourism. Because of the pandemic impact, event production requires the execution of strategies that would lessen the extent of the impact on the tourism industry and this depends on the existence of a coherent team that share the same vision. With this conceptual framework in mind, this research argues for event sustainability.

Discussion

The Coronavirus, described as the “...first real global health emergency experienced by many members of today’s society” has devastated several industries including the events sector (Jamal & Budke, 2020:182). Because of the outbreak of the pandemic, travelling and gathering was prohibited thereby negatively impacting economies worldwide (Yang et al., 2020). The performance of the tourism industry and its associated sectors was not spared. With the closure of industries and absence of activity in tourism, several people were left with no jobs, adding to the already high rate of unemployment in Zimbabwe (Mhlanga & Ndhlovu, 2021). On the other hand, the pandemic presented opportunities for scholars to engage in more in-depth discussions about how tourism relates to capitalism; the sustainable measures selected by tourism organisations; and the establishment of models to assess triple bottom line implications of tourism.

Despite the fact that COVID-19 has not yet been fully contained, countries such as Zimbabwe have eased the lockdown restrictions and movement of people. National borders have been re-opened in order to allow for the resumption of international travel. In addition, events have been successfully hosted in the country in 2021 (such as the Harare Agricultural Show, ZITF, *Sanganai/Hlanganani* World Tourism Expo, Victoria Falls Marathon etc.), and more have been successfully hosted in 2022. This has been possible because of the increased pressure particularly from corporate and political leaders to open economies as quickly as possible, thus the relaxation of restrictions (Woyo, 2021). Destinations created tourism recovery strategies in anticipation of the resumption of travel, a sector that contributes significantly to GDP of most developing economies. In 2020, Zimbabwe embarked on a strategy to help the tourism industry recover. This was aimed at encouraging local travel, a strategic choice and means of increasing destination resilience (Woyo, 2021).

Although the impact of the pandemic was felt throughout Zimbabwe, the tourism industry has proved to be one of the sectors with the potential to quickly recover, and mainly because of the resilient capability of this industry (McCartney et al., 2021). If the travel sector

is managed properly, it could be utilised to further support the development and progress of a destination and its people. Effective recovery strategies are therefore required in order for this to occur (Ibanescu et al., 2020), as they will steer the restoration of the event tourism industry thus allowing resilience especially during times of crisis. For the future management of event tourism, several recommendations can be proposed, including the incorporation of COVID-19 action plans (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021), the dissemination of information about risks to the public (Mollah et al., 2021), multi-stakeholder collaboration, community engagement, and the creation of risk mitigation techniques (Hemmonsbey et al., 2021; Shipway, 2018).

As a result of the pandemic, several event organisers opted for virtual or hybrid events (Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2022). These events have been successfully hosted and could indicate the future of events. They can thus supplement future events (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021). Events that combine virtual and face-to-face formats allow the spectators and participants to engage with an online/virtual event environment from any location. Looking into the future, it is expected that virtual events could become the new normal in the event tourism industry, necessitating the development of new and specialised skills. Technological innovations would go a long way in making this a reality and efficient. However, a clear understanding of whether hybrid events format will be accommodated or dominate the existing event tourism strategies post-COVID-19 or whether these new events could necessitate the development of new event tourism strategies is essential among event tourism stakeholders. Individuals' high enthusiasm to attend future tourism events also suggests that this sub-sector could recover quickly following the pandemic, indicating that the event tourism sub-sector is resilient and can be sustained to withstand future crises (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021).

The emergence of virtual events (including meetings and seminars) could threaten the demand for 'other' tourism services such as accommodation and transport at destinations. This is mainly because people would still conduct business meetings and attend events in a virtual space without having to travel to the event tourism destination (Matikiti-Manyevere & Rambe, 2022). In this case, suppliers of various travel components such as venues, accommodation, transport, catering and others would have less demand for their offerings. Thus, destinations must carefully and cautiously embrace the new changes the pandemic brought, especially on how events are produced and consumed. In 2021, ZTA launched the 'Meet in Zimbabwe' campaign to revive the tourism sector by promoting the meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) industry to be more active in the country (Mandovha, 2022). This campaign is intended to attract different types of events to the country especially following the setback created by COVID-19. Zimbabwe considers MICE events best suited to propel tourism through visitor attraction and hence markets the country as the 'ideal meeting place' (Zimbabwe National Convention Bureau [ZNCB], 2022).

Conclusion and future research direction

The COVID-19 pandemic had devastating impact on the event industry mainly because of the imposed control measures. Restrictions on people's movement and cancellation/postponement of events severely costed the event tourism industry as there was no revenue coming. However, through strategic planning and adoption of various strategies, it has enabled the industry to stay afloat. Nevertheless, the success of event tourism strategies depends on collaboration which is essential as many players are involved in this specialised sub-sector of the tourism industry (Pedrini & Ferri, 2019). As a result, additional research is required to determine how different event stakeholders can work together to implement event tourism plans and programs effectively (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021). Although collaboration has been long recognised and been an important aspect of tourism and events management, especially in the pre-pandemic period, most studies on this subject have focused greater attention on large-scale events such

as Olympic Games and World Cup (Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2019; Wang & Jin, 2019). In light of this, research on how the various event stakeholders can collaborate in the planning, hosting and managing of small-scale tourism events needs to be undertaken (Gibson et al., 2012).

Finally, future studies on event tourism development, particularly in developing contexts, should emphasise multi-stakeholder engagement (Shipway, 2018), event sustainability, and resiliency as these would help to effectively navigate the emerging and future crises (Shipway et al., 2020). Since the current study was literature based, some limitations would be expected. In light of this, future studies could incorporate an empirically based methodology or case study approach to investigate how developing countries can effectively use tourism events to grow tourism. This would assist in advancing the current study with evidence-based assertions on event tourism development highlighting the practical strategies which can be applied during times of crisis.

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