



Do socio-demographic characteristics influence destination attractiveness perceptions after political turmoil: the case of Zimbabwe?

Erisher Woyo*

Orcid ID 0000-0002-0776-6645

Department of Marketing Management, International University of Management
Private Bag 14005, Bachbrecht, Windhoek, Namibia
Elishawoyo77@gmail.com / e.woyo@ium.edu.na
elisha.woyo77@gmail.com

Professor Elmarie Slabbert

Orcid ID 0000-0003-4311-6962

TREES, North-West University, Potchefstroom 2531, South Africa
Elmarie.slabbert@nwu.ac.za

Professor Melville Saayman

(May his soul rest in peace. Prof Saayman, passed on 14 March 2019)
TREES, North-West University, Potchefstroom 2531, South Africa

Corresponding author*

Abstract

The aim of the study was twofold, firstly to determine the destination attractiveness of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination that would enable a stronger position post-political changes; and secondly, it sought to analyse the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on tourists' perceptions of Zimbabwe's attractiveness as a tourist destination. Data were collected using a demand survey from international tourists that visited Zimbabwe. A total of 500 questionnaires were administered and data were analysed using exploratory factor analysis and one way analysis of variances. The results revealed eight attractiveness factors for Zimbabwe as a destination faced with political challenges, of which destination amenities were rated as the most important. Mixed results concerning the influence of socio-demographic characteristics and tourists' perceptions of destination attractiveness, were obtained. The most significant influencers were level of education and continent of residence with four direct influences on selected destination attractiveness factors. These findings contribute to the body of knowledge as this study is the first to document the influence of socio-demographic factors on the attractiveness of a destination in political turmoil. It can assist Zimbabwe, and similar destinations, in attracting selected markets based on the attractiveness of the destination.

Keywords: Socio-demographic characteristics, destination attractiveness, political turmoil, perceptions, Zimbabwe

Introduction

The influence of socio-demographic characteristics on travel behaviour is widely documented in tourism literature (Slabbert and du Plessis, 2013; Wei, Meng and Zhang, 2017) as these characteristics significantly influence travel preferences and behaviour (Otoo, Agyeiwaah,



Dayour, and Wireko-Gyebi, 2016; Van Vuuren and Slabbert, 2012). These included travel motivation (Aziz, Hussin, Nezakati, Yusof and Hashimi, 2018; Slabbert and du Plessis, 2013), destination choice (Mohsin and Ryan, 2004), expenditure (Saayman and Saayman, 2009), destination image formation, length of stay (Kruger and Saayman, 2014; Otoo *et al.*, 2016), destination attractiveness (Lee, Ou and Huang, 2009) and service experience perceptions (Banki, Dalil, Mohammed, and Santali, 2018). While there is further literature that explains the causal link between socio-demographic aspects and travel behaviour, there is limited literature with regard to the relationship between socio-demographic factors and attractiveness of a tourist destination (Hendrik, Jeurung and Haartsen, 2017), more so in the context of Zimbabwe, a tourist destination in political turmoil.

Zimbabwean tourism, starting from independence in 1980 up to 1999, was a major success (Manwa, 2003, 2007; Woyo, 2013). At its peak, Zimbabwe managed to attract more than two million tourists by the year 1999. During these years, Zimbabwe was the fourth most attractive destination in Africa behind Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt (Woyo, 2018) but this once highly successful and preferred destination lost its standing due to political activities (Mkono, 2010; Woyo and Woyo, 2019). Tourist numbers in Zimbabwe have declined over the past two decades (Woyo and Woyo, 2019) which can be mostly attributed to the brutal regime of Robert Mugabe who was deposed of power in November 2017, after 37 years. The change in government following a military coup could signal a new demand for Zimbabwean tourism. The current leader of Zimbabwe, President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, has been telling the world that Zimbabwe is “open for business”. Since Zimbabwe is now starting a new era that has been dubbed as “the new dispensation”, a renewed look and approach is needed if the country’s tourism is to regain lost ground. A more critical view of the demand characteristics is needed if Zimbabwean tourism is to grow through an “open for business” philosophy.

A study on the socio-demographic characteristics and destination attractiveness of Zimbabwe, at this point in time, could contribute towards a better understanding of tourism demand in the country’s “new dispensation”. Based on this, new markets can be developed and marketing messages can be more focused. The factors that influence attractiveness are unique to every destination (Du Plessis, Saayman and Van de Merwe, 2015; Woyo, 2018) and therefore it is important to assess the attractiveness factors in the empirical context of Zimbabwe. Literature shows that understanding the attributes that make a destination attractive could be important in assisting destination marketing organisations (DMOs) in identifying what motivates revisit intentions among tourists (Um, Chon and Ro, 2006) and destination planning. Furthermore, the socio-demographic aspects could also assist the destination in segmenting the tourist market in relation to perceptions of attractiveness.

Destination’s attractiveness factors change over time (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2015). Most of the previous studies on destination attractiveness have been conducted in the context of developed countries (Alvarez and Campo, 2014; Assaker and Hallak, 2013; Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin, 2015; Woyo, 2018). However, studies that have focused on measuring the influence of socio-demographic aspects on destination attractiveness, especially in destinations with political challenges, are relatively scarce.

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on how tourists perceive the attractiveness of Zimbabwe as a destination. Age, gender, monthly income after tax, level of education and continent of residence are the socio-demographic characteristics forming the basis of the analyses. An understanding of these perceptions could be important for



Zimbabwe and other destinations with political challenges because it will help stakeholders in identifying areas that are critical for increasing loyalty and positive word of mouth recommendations.

Literature review

Destination attractiveness

Destination attractiveness is concerned with the measurement of opinions of travellers with regard to the destination's perceived ability to satisfy the needs of the tourists (Formica, 2000; Hu and Ritchie, 1993; Vengesai, 2003). It is the destination's capacity to attract "touristic flows" (Fadda and Sørensen, 2017:1687). Destinations that are perceived as attractive enjoy higher repeat visit intentions (Buhalis, 2000; Formica, 2000; Owusu-Frimpong, Nwankwo, Blankson and Tarnanidis, 2013). Based on this, it is clear that destination attractiveness is an important aspect in destination planning and management as it influences travel behaviour (Lee *et al.*, 2009; Vigolo, 2015; Woyo, 2018).

Destination attractiveness in extant literature has been analysed by means of tourists' evaluations of the destination's attributes (Vengesai, 2003) and from the pull force that is normally generated by the destination's attractions (Formica and Uysal, 2006). Tourists' evaluations of a destination can either occur before or after travelling (Bianchi, Pike and Lings, 2014).

The constructs that are used in the measurement of destination attractiveness are not universal and they differ from one destination to the next, despite the growing stream of literature on the topic (Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin, 2017; Reitsamer *et al.*, 2016; Woyo, 2018). Vengesai (2003) argues that a destination's attractiveness could be assessed using three key constructs: destination attributes, support and facilities, and people-related factors. Kozak and Rimmington (1998) argue that, the natural attractions, historic attractions, facilities, services, infrastructure, hospitality and cost are key constructs that determine the attractiveness of a destination. Political problems influence the destination's attractiveness (Alvarez and Campo, 2014), though literature on this remains limited.

Fadda and Sørensen (2017:1688) mention that the factors that determine the attractiveness of a tourism destination can be classified into two major groups: "natural elements, such as cultural heritage, natural resources, and geographical and climatic features; and artificial elements, such as infrastructure, tourism supplies, and all aspects that generally support tourist needs in a specific location". The artificial elements of the destination are considered more important in determining a destination's attractiveness as compared to the natural attributes (Fadda and Sørensen, 2017).

Artificial constructs that determine the attractiveness of the destination are important in facilitating the destination's accessibility (Fadda and Sørensen, 2017), which has a multiplier effect on arrivals and length of stay. Multi-attributes and single item measures have been employed in numerous destination attractiveness studies (Vigolo, 2015; Woyo, 2018). In this study, multi-attributes were employed in the assessment of Zimbabwe's attractiveness and are summarised in Table 1.



Table 1: Destination attractiveness measurement items

Destination attractiveness	Source(s) where it was previously measured
Attractions	Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin, 2017; Lee <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Formica and Uysal, 2006; Vengesayi, 2003.
Amenities	Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin, 2017; Reitsamer <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Formica and Uysal, 2006; Lee <i>et al.</i> , 2009
Accessibility	Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin, 2017; Reitsamer <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Lee <i>et al.</i> , 2009;
Ambiance	Woyo, 2018; Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin, 2017
Environment	Vengesayi, 2003
Price	Cracolici and Nijkamp, 2009; Hu and Ritchie, 1993.

Sociodemographic characteristics of tourists

Competition among destinations is increasing (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2015), and this forces destinations to have better knowledge of their potential tourists. In order to have such a good comprehension, there is a need to understand the socio-demographic attributes of the tourists that visit a tourism destination (Owusu-Frimpong *et al.*, 2013). Thus, socio-demographic characteristics have been identified as critical in predicting tourists' intentions to visit (Um *et al.*, 2006; Owusu-Frimpong *et al.*, 2013). This could be important for destination marketers, especially in developing marketing messages aimed at specific characteristics of potential travellers.

Gender

Gender as a socio-demographic variable appears to have been well documented in literature in relation to travel behaviour (Meng and Uysal, 2008; Um and Crompton, 1990). This socio-demographic construct has been explored in the context of travel mobility (Tilley and Houston, 2016); travel behaviour (Simićević, Milosavljević and Djoric, 2016); willingness to adopt sustainable behaviour (Simićević *et al.*, 2016) and travel motivation and length of stay (Meng and Uysal, 2008). In the latter study, it was found that female travellers prefer to have "a price quote for their stay" when compared with their male counterparts (Meng and Uysal, 2008). However, findings from this study indicate that gender did not produce significant differences regarding the length of stay. Additionally, it was also found, though not statistically significant, that females are influenced more by nature-based activities when compared to male tourists (Meng and Uysal, 2008). This is contrary to what was obtained in a study conducted in Australia by McGehee *et al.* (1996). Key motivations for women travellers in Australia include unique cultural experiences, family bonding opportunities and prestige (McGehee, Loker-Murphy and Uysal, 1996). However, men are motivated by the need to explore a destination that satisfies their need for sport and adventure experiences (McGehee *et al.*, 1996; Meng and Uysal, 2008; Woyo and Amadhila, 2018).

The push and pull factors have also been examined from a gendered perspective in Australia (McGehee *et al.*, 1996). This study found that female and male tourists have varying opinions about the importance of push and pull factors (McGehee *et al.*, 1996). The results from this study indicate that women travellers consider push and pull factors to be more important compared to male travellers. The causality of gender and travel motivations among tourists was found to be significant in the Japanese travel context (Heung, Qu and Chu, 2001). This study showed that "female travellers rate benefits sought higher than male counterparts" (Heung *et al.*, 2001).



Mohsin (2008) investigated both the motivation of travellers and the destination attractiveness of New Zealand among Chinese tourists. Gender was found to be a significant predictor in terms of destination attractiveness and preferences of vacation. Mohsin (2008:26) found that female travellers “rated the eleven holiday features of New Zealand higher than their male counterparts”. In contrary to other studies that were reviewed in this study (McGehee *et al.*, 1996), Mohsin (2008) found that women perceive destinations with natural attractions like “beaches”, as more attractive.

In an effort to understand the destination attractiveness of Taiwan’s hot springs, Lee, Ou and Huang (2009) found the gender of the respondents to be a significant predictor of frequency of visit. The study found that males are more likely to re-visit the hot springs more frequently when compared with females. A further review of literature shows that gender, in a study conducted in the Caribbean, is not statistically significant in explaining travel motivations (Jönsson and Devonish, 2008). Mixed results were obtained in the UK when two studies were conducted between 2005 and 2016, though by different researchers. Women travellers in the UK were found to be more involved in long-haul distances compared to men (Tilley and Houston, 2016). Ten years before this study it was found that men were associated with long-haul travel (Pooley, Turnbull and Adams, 2005).

Limited studies were conducted in southern Africa regarding the correlation between travel motivation and gender (Slabbert and Du Plessis, 2013; Saayman and Saayman, 2009). In the context of South Africa, gender is a significant predictor of tourist spending among travellers visiting national parks (Saayman and Saayman, 2009). It is clear from the above that gender is a well-documented socio-demographic construct in other destination contexts apart from Zimbabwe and that previous research led to inconclusive results. The gender variable has produced mixed results in different destination contexts. Studies that have measured the relationship between gender and destination attractiveness in the context of countries with political challenges such as Zimbabwe, are scarce. It can therefore be deduced that gender can possibly influence tourists’ perceptions of destination attractiveness.

Age

The “age aspects of tourism have received a great deal of attention in social science” (Patuelli and Nijkamp, 2016:848). As a result, “age on tourism behaviour” is increasingly becoming a focal research area, particularly so in the last ten years (Patuelli and Nijkamp, 2016). Age has been investigated in a number of studies as a way of understanding the travelling patterns of tourists, more specifically for seniors (Moschis and U’nal, 2008; Nimrod, 2008; Nyaupane, McCabe and Andereck, 2008). In all these studies, age was found to be a critical socio-demographic aspect that determines how destinations might proceed with marketing segmentation. Older travellers appear to constitute a “specific market segment” that is interested in a tourism destination that offers “quiet, culture, environment, climate, quality of life and accessibility” (Patuelli and Nijkamp, 2016).

Tourism participation is strongly related to age (Page and Connell, 2006; Mohsin, 2008). Based on these variations, tour operators are able to segment holiday offerings by age. Age differences have been acknowledged in literature when measuring perceived attractiveness of a tourism destination (Mohsin, 2008). A study done in New Zealand shows that tourists between 31 and 39 years and those between 40 and 49 years perceive attractions and activities as the most important attractiveness factors, more than those in the 20 -29 years category. Bungee jumping and meeting



new friends is important for younger tourists (Mohsin, 2008). An earlier study in the UK showed that travellers between 16 and 24 as well as those that are older than 65 years “are more likely not to have a holiday” compared to other age groups (Page and Connell, 2006). However, aspects such as sightseeing, going to the beach and visiting of different places, is acknowledged in literature as being universal to all age groups (Mohsin, 2008).

Hendrik *et al.* (2017) note that proximity is not a problem among younger travellers as compared to seniors. Previous research studies show that senior travellers who perceive themselves as younger than their actual ages have greater intention to travel in the future (Shim, Gehrt, and Siek, 2005). In a study that was done to measure the attractiveness of Taiwan’s hot springs, age was found to be a significant predictor of frequency of visit (Lee *et al.*, 2009). Lee *et al.* (2009) found that “older people are more likely than younger people to visit hot springs on a regular basis”. In a study conducted in South Africa to understand the impact of socio-demographics on travel behaviour, age was not significant in predicting spending among travellers (Saayman and Saayman, 2009).

The role of age in explaining perceived destination attractiveness is inconclusive. An understanding of the influence of age in the context of Zimbabwe’s destination attractiveness is lacking, though it could be beneficial in terms of facilitating differentiation as well as offering a variety of the tourism product offerings (Patuelli and Nijkamp, 2016). There is no formal research that has investigated the influence of age on Zimbabwe’s attractiveness as a tourist destination, but it might have an influence and should be assessed.

Level of education

Level of education has been sufficiently explored as a critical determinant of destination image and choice. In a study conducted among tourists who visited the Spanish island of Lanzarote, it was found that the level of education is significant in explaining the influence on destination image (Beerli and Martin, 2004). The image of a destination is “partially influenced by the level of education, with higher levels of education being reflected by lower evaluations of the dimension of image” (Beerli and Martin, 2004:674). Education was found to be a significant factor influencing travel motivation among Japanese senior travellers to Thailand (Sangpikul, 2008). Research shows that perceived destination attractiveness is higher among travellers with tertiary education (well-educated) than those who are less educated (Mohsin, 2008; Chen, Huang and Cheng, 2009).

Chen *et al.* (2009) found that the level of education is a critical determinant of the lifestyle of tourists on vacation as well as their travel behaviour. The same concept was investigated on how it influences destination choice in Serbia, and was found not to be significant (Djeri, Armenski, Tesanovic, Bradić, and Vukosav, 2014). Previous studies on level of education as a factor, have produced mixed results, however it is an important variable to consider since it influences value perceptions, communication messages as well as the media chosen. It can therefore be deduced that level of education can possibly influence tourists’ perceptions of destination attractiveness.



Income

There are a limited number of studies that have directly investigated the relationship between destination attractiveness and income of the tourists. In a study done in Taiwan, Chen *et al.* (2009) investigated vacation lifestyle and travel behaviour and they found income to be an influencer. Travellers with a higher income tend to travel more frequently internationally and are likely to reside in luxury hotels (Chen *et al.*, 2009). However, travellers with less income tend to take frequent domestic vacations rather than international trips (Chen *et al.*, 2009). As a result, income is a crucial antecedent of destination choice (Mohsin and Ryan, 2004). In a study conducted in New Zealand, it was found that income has a significant influence on destination attractiveness. Tourists that have a higher level of income “are more likely to choose mass activities” (Mohsin, 2008:33). The activities that make a destination attractive from the income perspective of travellers include events/festivals, fishing, shopping, casino and investments. Mohsin (2008) notes that adventure activities are a preserve of lower income level tourists. Therefore, tourists that are found in the lower income bracket are generally more sensitive to the price of accommodation when compared with higher income level tourists (Mohsin, 2008). As a result, tourists are not likely to travel to destinations that they perceive to be more expensive (Mohsin and Ryan, 2004). This is yet to be investigated in the context of Zimbabwean tourism and to establish how far the industry is really “open for business”. From the literature, it is evident that income might influence tourists’ perceptions of destination attractiveness.

Continent of residence

The nationality of tourists has also been explored in tourism literature, especially in explaining travel motivation (Jönsson and Devonish, 2008; Kozak, 2002). Others have investigated the influence of nationalities in more than one destination (Kozak, 2002). The results in the study by Kozak (2002) showed that British are fun seeking tourists while the Germans are culture and nature oriented. Using a supply side perspective, it was found that significant differences exist between the nationality of tourists and their travel behaviour (Pizam and Sussman, 1995). However, the place of residence was found to be insignificant in explaining destination choice in the Serbian tourism context (Djeri *et al.*, 2014).

Hendrik *et al.* (2017) examined the influence of region of residence on attractiveness of a destination. Mixed results were obtained in a number of studies. Based on this, it shows that the consumer decision making process about destination choice is therefore not homogeneous. An understanding of the influence of nationality on the attractiveness of Zimbabwe could be crucial in segmenting the tourism market as a way of providing visitors with quality tourism experiences. It can therefore be deduced that continent of residence might influence tourists’ perceptions of destination attractiveness.

Marital status

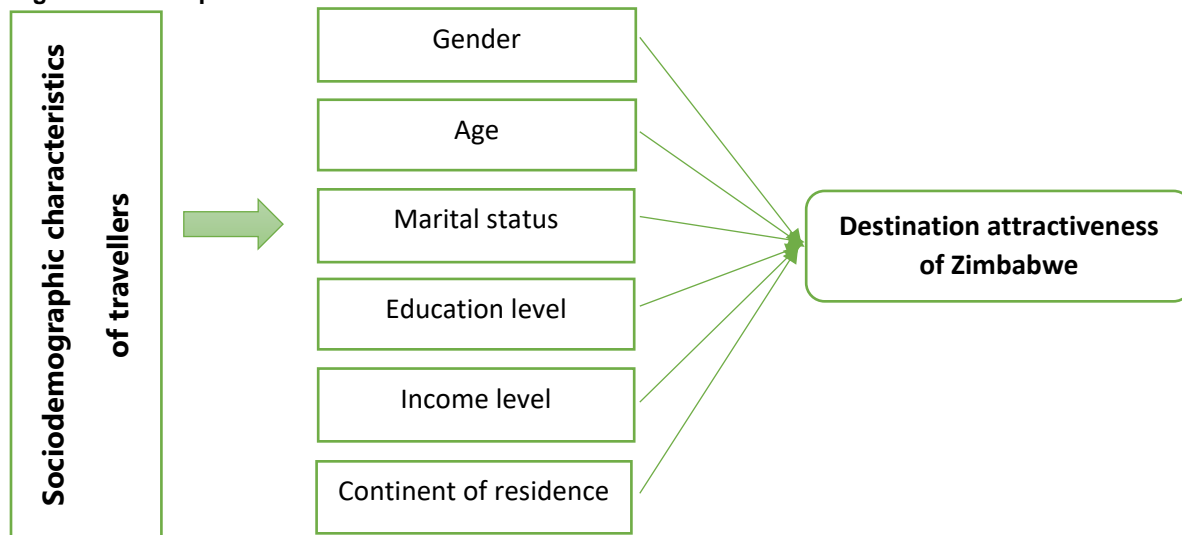
Mohsin (2008) investigated the attractiveness of New Zealand using the socio-demographic aspects of Chinese tourists. Results of this study showed that marital status “significantly affects scores for a number of New Zealand holiday features” (Mohsin, 2008:26). Non-married tourists indicated higher scores on attractiveness items such as “to go ballooning, to satisfy a sense of adventure, skiing, and visiting sites associated with famous films” (Mohsin, 2008). Tourists who are not married seek adventure activities in a destination more than married tourists while married

travellers perceive destinations with “resort and resort activities” to be attractive (Meng and Uysal, 2008). Adventure activities that makes a destination attractive, especially from the perspective of non-married travellers, include hunting, casino, skiing and making new friends (Mohsin, 2008). Literature on marital status and destination attractiveness is limited and should be assessed in the Zimbabwean post-political change context.

Given the importance of socio-demographic characteristics of travellers with regard to travel motivations, destination choice and travel behaviour, this paper explores how these factors (that is, age, gender, marital status, income, level of education, and continent of residence), influence the attractiveness of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination (Figure 1). Cracolici and Nijkamp (2009) note that, a destination’s attractiveness is a product of numerous elements and a crucial antecedent for the development of competitive tourism destinations (Woyo, 2018).

An understanding of the influence of socio-demographic aspects on destination attractiveness is therefore crucial in the development and management of Zimbabwe’s tourism product offering. Fadda and Sørensen (2017) maintain that, destinations that have a greater capability of attracting tourists, have a much bigger potential to provide tourists with the goods and services they need.

Figure. 1: Conceptual framework



Source: Developed by authors

Methodology

Data for this study were collected from tourists who visited Victoria Falls, Eastern Highlands, Harare and Great Zimbabwe. These tourism destinations are popular in Zimbabwe, based on the number of arrivals they receive per annum (ZIMSTAT, 2016). A quantitative research design was employed. The questionnaire focused on the socio-demographic aspects of the respondents including gender, age, marital status, education, continent of residence and income level by means of open and closed questions.



Secondly, the questionnaire assessed Zimbabwe's attractiveness as a tourist destination. A five point Likert scale was employed (1, *strongly disagree*; 5, *strongly agree*) in measuring the destination attractiveness constructs. The destination attractiveness constructs were adopted from literature (refer to Table 1 above).

A total of 500 survey questionnaires were administered between 21 November 2016 and 17 January 2017 by selected fieldworkers. Of the 500 questionnaires, 215 were distributed in Victoria Falls, 125 in Harare, 80 in the Eastern Highlands and 80 at Great Zimbabwe and its environs. The distribution of the questionnaires was also based on the tourism arrivals that each destination receives per annum. Generally, Victoria Falls receives more tourists, followed by Harare, Great Zimbabwe and Eastern Highlands (ZIMSTAT, 2016). A total of 468 completed questionnaires were returned. However, only 450 had usable responses, were correctly completed, and were used in data analysis (90% response rate).

Only tourists who indicated that they were not local/national tourists were considered part of the study's sample. Tourists either completed the questionnaires on the spot, in the bus as they were being driven to the airport and/or in the departure lounge of the airport.

Data analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 24. The study employed descriptive analysis, Spearman's rank order correlation and Analysis of Variance (ANOVAs) with Post Hoc Tukey Tests to examine the influence of socio-demographic factors on the attractiveness of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination.

Reliability of data

The constructs of destination attractiveness in the empirical context of Zimbabwe were assessed for reliability and validity by means of Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. The operationalisation of the measuring constructs of destination attractiveness were drawn from the literature and were tailored to fit the study's setting. In this study, eight dimensions of destination attractiveness were assessed: destination attractions ($\alpha = 0.83$; $\bar{x} = 3.74$), general amenities ($\alpha = 0.79$; $\bar{x} = 3.75$); tourism amenities ($\alpha = 0.71$; $\bar{x} = 3.72$); external access ($\alpha = 0.87$; $\bar{x} = 2.60$); internal access ($\alpha = 0.75$; $\bar{x} = 3.41$); destination ambiance ($\alpha = 0.89$; $\bar{x} = 3.93$); destination environment ($\alpha = 0.71$; $\bar{x} = 3.54$); and price ($\alpha = 0.80$; $\bar{x} = 2.45$). All the factors showed a strong discriminant and convergent validity with acceptable Cronbach's alpha values. These factors are summarised in Table 2.

Results

Results show that more female respondents participated than male counterparts in this study (56%). The majority of the travellers were aged between 56 -79 years (34.9%) and were married. (61.6%). Additionally, the sample indicated that the majority of tourists visiting Zimbabwe are highly educated and come from Africa and Europe. Respondents also indicated that their monthly income after tax is between USD\$1001 and USD\$3000 per month. These results are summarised in Table 2.



Table 2. Socio-demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Frequency (%)	Variable	Frequency (%)	Variable	Frequency (%)
Gender		Continent of residence		Monthly income after tax (USD\$)	
Female	252(56%)	Africa	148(32.9%)	<\$500	8(1.8%)
Male	198(44%)	Australia	12(2.7%)	\$501 - \$1000	36 (8%)
Age		Asia	61(13.6%)	\$1001 - \$3000	229(50.9%)
< 25 years	36(8%)	Europe	134(29.8%)	\$3001 - \$5000	128(28.4%)
26 -35 years	100(22.2%)	North America	81 (18%)	\$5001 - \$7000	37(8.2%)
36 – 55 years	147(32.7%)	South America	14 (3.1%)	\$7001 - \$9000	9(2%)
56 -79 years	157(34.9%)	Education level		\$9001 - \$10 000	2 (0.4%)
> 80 years	10 (2.2%)	No school	9(2%)	>\$10 000	1(0.2%)
Marital status		Non-degree	30(6.7%)		
Single	101(22.4%)	Diploma/degree	230 (51.1%)		
Married	277(61.6%)	Post-graduate	181(40.2%)		
Divorced	30(6.7%)				
Separated	7(1.6%)				
Widow	35(7.8%)				

The destination attractiveness factors of Zimbabwe as tourism destination

The study employed exploratory factor analysis to estimate the dimensionality of the destination attractiveness factors in the empirical context of Zimbabwe as a destination faced with numerous political challenges. The principal component analysis was employed to generate the factors underlying the many attractiveness factors. Regarding the sampling adequacy, the results generated a Kaiser-Meyer-Okin (KMO) greater than the recommended 0.60 (Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson, 2010) at 0.87 and the Bartlett’s test of sphericity reached statistical significance ($p = .000$). Therefore, these statistics indicate the adequacy of the sample that was used in the study and support factorability (Tabachnick and Field, 2007). The factor results are summarised in Table 3.



Table 3: Measurement of the study's constructs

Destination attractiveness constructs and elements	Mean	St. deviation
Factor 1: Destination attractions ($\alpha = 0.83$)		
Unique built attractions	4.21	0.56
Hospitality/friendliness of local people	4.21	0.680
Unique way of life of local people	4.12	0.678
Unique handicrafts/souvenirs	4.05	0.715
Excellent archaeological cultural attractions	3.93	0.786
Language of local people	3.74	0.824
Social interaction opportunities	3.59	0.794
Unique destination icons	3.58	0.800
Excellent historical cultural attractions	3.50	0.723
Unique cultural festivals	3.38	0.710
Factor 2: General amenities ($\alpha = 0.79$)		
Level of general services	3.77	0.578
Communication facilities	3.72	0.659
Destination transport facilities	3.66	0.632
Sports and activities	3.57	0.627
Excellent retail outlets	3.46	0.664
Destination marketing	3.46	0.778
Exchange rate facilities	3.37	0.916
Destination infrastructure	3.27	0.928
Factor 3: Tourism amenities ($\alpha = 0.71$)		
Destination food and beverage facilities and cuisine	3.97	0.709
Tourism friendly image	3.83	0.623
Destination accommodation	3.81	0.592
Quality destination facilities	3.78	0.604
Destination entertainment	3.61	0.693
Tourism support services	3.49	0.738
Factor 4: External access ($\alpha = 0.87$)		
Easy to access from country of origin	2.99	1.144
Frequency of transportation to destination	2.89	1.161
Airport route available from tourist's home country	2.77	1.179
Prices of transport and tourism services	2.69	1.072
Drive time between attractions at the destination	2.56	1.195
Access to Wi-Fi/Internet	2.17	1.127
Drive time to Zimbabwe from home country	2.13	1.330
Factor 5: Internal access ($\alpha = 0.75$)		
Wide access to tourist information	3.62	0.683
Ease of making reservations	3.62	0.696
Variety of public transport vehicles	3.59	0.720
Innovative tourist destination	3.41	0.777
Tourism friendly visa policies	3.39	0.966
State of the art technology	2.98	1.019
Factor 6: Destination ambience ($\alpha = 0.89$)		
Friendliness of residents	4.00	0.481
History and folklore	3.92	0.661
Levels of service delivery	3.90	0.529



Offers true African experience	3.90	0.577
Courtesy in the delivery of tourism services and amenities	3.48	0.799

Factor 7: Destination environment ($\alpha = 0.71$)

Safety and security	3.99	0.460
Commitment towards safety of tourists	3.97	0.512
Sanitation and hygiene	3.73	0.719
Destination environmental care	3.62	0.817

Factor 8: Price attractiveness ($\alpha = 0.80$)

Tax policies on tourist services	2.60	0.818
Use of multicurrency and vacation costs	3.08	0.868
Price of airport amenities	2.43	0.865
Prices of tourism services	2.14	1.053
Destination's price advantage	2.01	1.023

Notes: all variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 strongly agree)

The most important attractiveness factors that emerged were destination ambiance ($\bar{x} = 3.93$), destination attractions ($\bar{x} = 3.74$), tourism amenities ($\bar{x} = 3.72$), general amenities ($\bar{x} = 3.57$) and destination environment ($\bar{x} = 3.54$). An understanding of the factors that makes Zimbabwe attractive in the midst of political challenges is critical for the development of marketing messages.

The influence of socio-demographic variables on perceptions of destination attractiveness of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination

The influence of gender on perceptions of destination attractiveness

The independent *t*-tests show that there are no statistical significant differences between female and male respondents in terms of how they perceive the attractiveness of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination (Table 4). Both female and male respondents said more or less the same thing and thus, there are no significant differences. Both genders consider destination ambiance, tourism amenities and destination attractions to be important elements of destination attractiveness. This opens up opportunities for this country to attract both genders, even during times of turmoil. Therefore tourists' perceptions of destination attractiveness are not influenced by gender.

Table 4: Independent *t*-test results of gender on destination attractiveness factors

Variable	Gender	Mean	Std. Dev.	p-value
Destination attractions	Female	3.71	0.45	0.222
	Male	3.77	0.47	
General amenities	Female	3.56	0.47	0.585
	Male	3.58	0.42	
Tourism amenities	Female	3.74	0.46	0.516
	Male	3.71	0.42	
External accessibility	Female	2.60	0.84	0.909
	Male	2.60	0.92	
Internal accessibility	Female	3.38	0.54	0.296
	Male	3.43	0.51	
Destination ambiance	Female	3.93	0.47	0.736
	Male	3.92	0.45	



Destination environment	Female	3.54	0.45	0.97
	Male	3.53	0.47	
Price	Female	2.46	0.70	0.573
	Male	2.43	0.70	

* $p < .05$

The influence of age, education level, marital status, income, and continent of residence

The post-hoc Tukey results show that age is significant in explaining a destination's price attractiveness ($f = 3.33$; $p = 0.01$). Younger tourists perceive Zimbabwe as an attractive destination with regards to its price compared to those who were above 60 years old. The literature shows that most young tourists perceive destinations that offer them bungee jumping activities more attractive than those without (Mohsin, 2008). The price attractiveness of Zimbabwe could be explained by those who could perhaps have taken advantage of arbitrary pricing, a situation where one with US dollars would change money on the black market and receive "inflated" real time gross settlement (RTGS) balances for making transactions. This currency conversion makes goods and services cheaper because prices in Zimbabwe are pegged at 1:1 between the US dollar and RTGS balances. However, age does not influence other attractiveness aspects of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination such as attractions, amenities, accessibility etc. Therefore the results support the influence of age on price attractiveness.

Further analysis of the results show that the level of education is significant for a number of destination attractiveness factors. The level of education tested significantly when compared with tourism amenities ($f = 2.58$; $p < .05 = 0.04$); external access ($f = 5.46$; $p < .05 = 0.00$); destination ambiance ($f = 2.65$; $p < 0.05 = 0.04$) and destination environment ($f = 2.72$; $p < 0.05 = 0.04$). Tourism amenities, external access, destination ambiance and destination environment were rated highly by respondents holding a diploma/degree. Zimbabwe has been labelled an unsafe tourism destination since the year 2000 (Woyo, 2018) and this finding could mean that educated tourists are able to dissect issues and determine whether it is safe to visit a certain destination than simply following what the media says. Therefore the results support the influence level of education on tourism amenities, external access, and ambiance and destination environment as attractiveness factors.

Continent of residence is significant for a number of destination attractiveness factors. Tourists, especially from the Asian markets, perceived general amenities as a source of attractiveness of the destination ($f = 2.26$; $p < 0.05 = 0.04$); while those who indicated that they are from Africa perceived the external access to Zimbabwe as a source of destination attractiveness ($f = 3.08$; $p < 0.05 = 0.01$), probably due to proximity advantages; destination ambiance was rated as an important aspect of Zimbabwe's attractiveness by tourists from the American and Asian continents ($f = 2.16$; $p = 0.04$) as well as destination brand image ($f = 2.96$; $p < 0.01 = 0.01$). The results support the influence of country of residence on general amenities, external access and ambiance as attractiveness factors.

Marital status and income did not test significantly with any of the destination attractiveness constructs that were used in this study ($p > 0.05$).



Table 5: ANOVA results of main effects of leisure travellers' socio-demographic characteristics on destination attractiveness factors.

Attractiveness dimension	Age		Marital status		Education level		Continent of residence		Income	
	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Attractions	0.83	0.51	0.20	0.94	0.72	0.54	0.92	0.47	0.72	0.57
General amenities	0.87	0.48	1.78	0.13	0.28	0.84	2.26	0.04*	4.26	0.06
Tourism amenities	1.46	0.21	1.62	0.17	2.58	0.04*	1.30	0.26	2.30	0.29
External access	0.61	0.66	0.20	0.94	5.46	0.00*	3.08	0.01*	4.08	0.08
Internal access	0.65	0.63	0.42	0.79	1.09	0.35	1.44	0.21	3.44	0.41
Ambiance	0.78	0.54	1.43	0.22	2.65	0.04*	2.16	0.04*	0.86	0.09
Environment	1.39	0.24	0.49	0.75	2.72	0.04*	1.07	0.38	5.07	0.28
Price	3.33	0.01*	1.46	0.21	0.84	0.47	0.94	0.45	2.94	0.35

* $p < .05$

Discussion and implications

Destination attractiveness is an active area of research (Reitsamer *et al.*, 2016) though limited studies have been conducted to measure the influence of socio-demographic factors on the destination attractiveness of destinations in political turmoil. This is specifically so within the context of African tourism destinations (Woyo, 2018). Therefore, the results of this study contribute to literature by articulating the destination attractiveness factors of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination with political challenges.

From the results, a number of destination attractiveness factors that make Zimbabwe attractive, regardless of its political challenges, were identified; namely destination attractions, general amenities, tourism amenities, external access, internal access, destination ambience, destination environment and price. Though some of these factors were identified in previous studies (Lee, 2016; Reitsamer *et al.*, 2016; Vengesayi, 2003), it was the first time they had been analysed in the current context.

Destination ambience (most important factor), highlights the relevance of resident friendliness, history, service levels etc. This will be difficult to achieve in a country where the residents are not happy with the current state of the nation. Though not in a destination attractiveness context, past studies highlighted that there is a positive relationship between ambience and tourists' behavioral responses (Lee and Kim, 2014; AbuThahir and Krishnapillai, 2018). Therefore, should Zimbabwe seek to remain attractive to tourists in a way that influences the intention to revisit, there is a need to improve the destination's ambient factors. The development of a more positive destination ambience in Zimbabwe could encourage tourists to be more perceptive of the country's tourism attractions and help dismiss the safety and negative destination images that have been associated with the country since the year 2000. This could be helpful for a country that has shorter length of stay and poor re-visit intentions.

External access and pricing emerged as weak factors influencing the perceived attractiveness of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. External access is identified in previous research as an important element that influences destination attractiveness (Lee, 2016; Reitsamer *et al.*, 2016; Vengesayi, 2003). However, it did not emerge as important as other factors. This could be attributed to a lack of direct connections with many of Zimbabwe's prime attractions and weaker



coordination on part of the tour operators. More importantly, tourists did not perceive Zimbabwe as attractive from the perspective of the pricing factor. Previous studies on Zimbabwe show that the destination is expensive when compared with regional competitors like South Africa, Namibia and Botswana (Woyo, 2018; Woyo and Woyo, 2019). This could be explained by the lack of local currency and the arbitrage pricing that is happening in Zimbabwe at the moment.

The causal relationships between socio-demographic variables and destination attractiveness constructs were identified. Respondents in this study were highly educated and this is consistent with the literature (Mohsin, 2008; Chen *et al.*, 2009). For these highly educated tourists, Zimbabwe is attractive based on the destination's tourism amenities, ambiance, environment and external access. This finding is consistent with the results of previous studies (Mohsin, 2008; Chen *et al.*, 2009). Level of education is critical in explaining travel motivation and destination choice (Chen *et al.*, 2009; Djeri *et al.*, 2014; Sangpikul, 2008). This is something that could be useful for Zimbabwe in dealing with negative perceptions that have troubled the destination for close to two decades.

The study also found that young tourists perceived Zimbabwe as an attractive destination based on its pricing, though they were not part of the majority of visitors to the destination. Zimbabwe, though perceived to be price attractive, especially by youthful tourists, has been regarded as an expensive destination when compared with its peers such as South Africa, Botswana and Namibia (Woyo, 2018; Woyo and Woyo, 2019; Woyo and Slabbert, 2019). This finding contradicts the conclusions made from a study that was conducted in South Africa where age did not significantly predict spending (Saayman and Saayman, 2009). Concerning the continent of residence, the study found that based on the tourists' continent of residence, Zimbabwe is attractive based on general amenities, external access and destination ambiance.

Practical implications

The results of this study indicate the following several practical implications for destination managers and marketers for destinations that are suffering from political challenges. Destination attractiveness factors that were identified in this study are imperative for the development of both short-term and long-marketing efforts of Zimbabwe as a destination faced with political challenges. Marketing messages can be customised based on the most important factors that influence the attractiveness of Zimbabwe such as destination ambiance. Deliberate efforts should be made to use brand ambassadors from the pool of educated tourists that the country receives annually. This could be helpful for a destination that has received a lot of negative publicity. Literature shows that the development of effective marketing strategies is critical in a world where competition is growing.

External access is identified in previous research as an important element that influences destination attractiveness but it was ranked least in this study. The findings of this study show that Zimbabwe is perceived to be weak in terms of external access and this can be improved by means of increasing the number of airlines flying to Zimbabwe, especially scheduling the national airline to fly to the country's source markets.

Zimbabwe, though perceived to be price attractive, especially by youthful tourists, remains an expensive destination. Thus, in order to improve the destination's attractiveness, there is a need



for Zimbabwe to revisit its pricing model make it suitable for the low-to middle income market, in an attempt to attract many visitors and build loyalty.

Investment in more amenities is recommended if Zimbabwean tourism is to continue optimising its attractiveness ahead of its regional peers such as Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. Efforts must also be made to ensure there are direct flights to Zimbabwe's flagship destinations such as the Victoria Falls, Harare, Great Zimbabwe and the Eastern Highlands. Regarding destination ambiance, it is imperative for destination managers to co-create collaborative strategies that are aimed at consolidating Zimbabwe's positive perceptions. Destination ambiance is the most important attractiveness factor that destination managers can improve on for a country with political challenges.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to analyse the influence of socio-demographic variables on the destination attractiveness of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination with political challenges. In pursuit of this goal, a demand survey was conducted in Victoria Falls, Harare, Eastern Highlands and Great Zimbabwe (most popular tourist sites). This study demonstrates the importance of knowing attractiveness factors of destinations in political turmoil such as Zimbabwe. This understanding is critical because it helps destinations to rebuild their image. More importantly, the knowledge concerning the information on the relationship between socio-demographic aspects and destination attractiveness factors is important for informing marketing decisions and planning. Research studies on the causal relationship between socio-demographic variables and destination attractiveness are limited in destinations with political challenges, more so in the Zimbabwean tourism context, and therefore, further research is required.

Limitations of the study

The study has limitations regardless of the implications it has on marketing, optimisation of destination attractiveness and understanding travel behaviour. First, the sample consisted only of international tourists that could speak English. Tourists who could not respond in English were thus excluded from the survey. Therefore, generalisability is limited to international travellers who can speak English. Secondly, the study was conducted only in popular destinations in Zimbabwe. Future research must also be conducted in tourism spaces that are not as popular as the ones that formed the basis of this study.

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