International Host Communities: A Positioning Platform for Zimbabwe Tourism Brand

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Abstract

The study investigated the strength of showcasing Zimbabwe tourism destination offerings at international platforms to its tourism brand performance. This was mainly based on the fact that the Zimbabwe tourism destination authorities are investing more in selling the country's tourism brand at international platforms but not gaining a huge mileage in positioning the brand. The study employed a mixed methods research design combing both quantitative and qualitative approaches in extracting data from respondents. An in-depth interview was employed first as a qualitative technique in order to find the most common showcasing platforms from Zimbabwe tourism brand. This was done to senior managers and experts in the Zimbabwe tourism industry. Their responses revealed the platforms as carnivals, road shows, indabas, regional magazines and international interactive websites. A quantitative research was therefore done using survey questionnaires that were distributed to foreigners and local in order to assess the most dominant platform for positioning Zimbabwe's tourism brand. The results show that indabas are the most effective platforms to brand Zimbabwe tourism brand. This is followed by international interactive websites and regional magazines. The research recommended that internationlising brand showcasing does not yield more on its own. There is a need to start with intensive local acceptance then go regional and international.

Keywords: brand, Zimbabwe tourism, positioning, international, regional, local, showcase

1. Introduction

At the center of the international tourism is the processing of service that satisfies expectations of the international customers (Kusluvan, 2003). The variety existence of destination markets has resulted in a need to develop an effective brand more than before (Pike, 2005). The Zimbabwe tourism brand has changed for three times between the year 1980 and 2011. The first tourism brand was "Discover Zimbabwe" which was launched soon after independence in 1980 (Mirimi, Utete, Mapingure, Mumbengegwi, & Kabote, 2013). This was followed by "Africa's Paradise" in 1996 (Ndlovu, 2009) and "Zimbabwe A World of Wonders" in the year 2011 (Chibaya, 2013). There were various reasons subjected to this transition in the Zimbabwe tourism brand. Mainly the previous brands have failed to perform in attracting and positioning the country's tourism destination as a prime place of business and holidaying. In years between 1980 and 1999 the Zimbabwe tourism brand (Discover Zimbabwe) has injected vibrancy witnessed by favourable arrivals and positive publicity about the state of affairs associated with the destination. In 1996 the new tourism brand was launched "Africa Paradise" with an aim to stabilize the brand statement in line with maximum stakeholder involvement. Reportedly, the "Discover Africa" brand was formulated in a rush without invitation and contribution of crucial stakeholders (Ndlovu, 2009). However, the "Africa Paradise" failed to uplift the destination in the required state especially in the years after the year 2000. The most contributing factors to this failure have been identified as to have aligned to changes in the socio-economic and political state of the country. The internal environment was associated with social unrest as witnessed by high poverty levels, diseases and other associated issues. Economically the country has been labeled as highly insolvent due to hyperinflation, increased rate of unemployment, budgets and balance of payment deficit. Politically, the country saw a drift spearheaded by political parties' fights and the highly announced land reform program. In 2011 the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) then rebranded to "Zimbabwe A World of Wonders". This is the current tourism brand for the country. The brand has been launched in various international markets including Brazil. Special events have been recognised as a tool for enhancing tourism destinations in various countries (YANG, ZENG, & GU, 2010). Getz (1997) also acknowledged that mega-events can help in improving publicity of tourism destinations. Various expos and indabas have been hosted so as to promote the new brand. There are huge expectations by the authorities responsible for marketing Zimbabwe tourism destination that international host platforms will rejuvenate and sustain the country's tourism brand. The study therefore analysed the effect of these international host communities in strengthening the brand position of Zimbabwe tourism industry.

2. Problem Statement

International platforms and bodies have been seen a key drivers for promoting tourism destination brands. Zimbabwe tourism destination has engaged in various international showcasing platforms but is still facing and underperforming brand. This can be seen from the efforts that have been done by Zimbabwe Tourism Authority in showcasing the tourism brand at various international platforms such as carnivals, indabas and tourism conferences targeting international tourism buyers and sellers. However even with the immense effort the

country's tourism destination has not reverted to the popularity levels as a prime tourism destination it reached especially in the 1980s after its colonial independence. The question is whether the international brand promotion can be strengthened as an ingredient to rejuvenate and reposition Zimbabwe tourism brand. The study investigated the effect of international brand promotions in positioning the Zimbabwe tourism brand.

3. Literature Review

Brands are being used to as main communicators on the global market (Kuhn & Alpert, 2009). These brands have the supremacy of improving identity and position of a tourism destination on the international tourism market. Those tourists' brands that are strong on the market create immense thoughts and emotions in the awareness of tourists (Morgan & Pritchard, 2001). This is because these brands can exist in the memory of tourists for some time such that at any given time the tourists can retrieve the brand knowledge. The hosting of mega events has both negative and positive effects which are long term to the host communities (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000). Tourism activities can therefore be regarded as long-term drivers to the operating environment of the hosting communities. Tourism has affected many countries both positively and negatively to the socio-economic state and physical environments. The mega events include world expo which has benefited the economic and social welfare of host communities such that more cities are following the bandwagon (Yang, Zeng, & Gu, 2010).Various impacts have been classified as effects of mega events and these include political, physical, economic, socio-cultural, tourism and psychological. Also through an intensive analysis of the tourism industry one will realise that it has an effect in our lives intermingling host community including regions and countries (Cooker et al., 2008). According to Soutar & McLeod (1993) an investigation on the effect of America Cups during and after their host to the perception of residence revealed a positive perception and that they contributed to better standards of living to the host community populace. Also Jeong (1998) research on the attributes influencing the perception of residents during a host of the international expo in City of Daejeon showed that the event improved urban development and the historical international image of the hosting city. The literature gap shows that there has not been a comprehensive literature on the effects of international showcasing platforms to the tourism brand and in particular for the Zimbabwe tourism destination.

4. Methodology

The research was based on a sequential mixed method by first establishing showcasing platforms through in-depth interviews with top level managers in the tourism and hospitality industry. These top level managers were identified using a purposive judgmental sampling based on their years of experience and expertise. The identified platforms were then analysed on their effectiveness in positioning and rejuvenating Zimbabwe tourism brand using survey questionnaires as quantitative instruments. The respondents to the research were 25 foreigners and 45 locals making a total population of 70 respondents. The research used a stratified random sampling to determine both locals and foreigners respondents. Foreigners were identified from various embassies and foreign owned tourism businesses in Zimbabwe. Local respondents came from those in the accommodation and travel tourism sectors.

5. Findings and Discussions

The research initiated with in-depth interviews focusing on finding out the international platforms that are commonly engaged in the Zimbabwe tourism destination. The respondents were senior managers and experts in the Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality and Zimbabwe Tourism Authority. They divulged that the most popular international tourism showcasing platforms include carnivals, road shows, indabas, regional magazines and international interactive websites. A quantitative research was then carried out to establish the most competitive showcasing platform and the respondents were local and foreign tourism operators. The statistical results from the research are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1. Responses on the most effective events by locals and foreigners

Respondents	Carnivals	Road Shows	Indabas	Regional Magazines	International Interactive Websites
Locals	2.913	1.315	1.212	1.923	2.003
Foreigners	1.034	2.833	1.161	1.872	1.667
Total Mean	**3.947**	**4.148**	**2.373**	**3.795**	**3.67**
Average Mean	**1.974**	**2.074**	**1.187**	**1.898**	**1.835**

Note. The average mean are in a range of 1-5 (1= Strongly Agree; 5=Strongly Disagree).
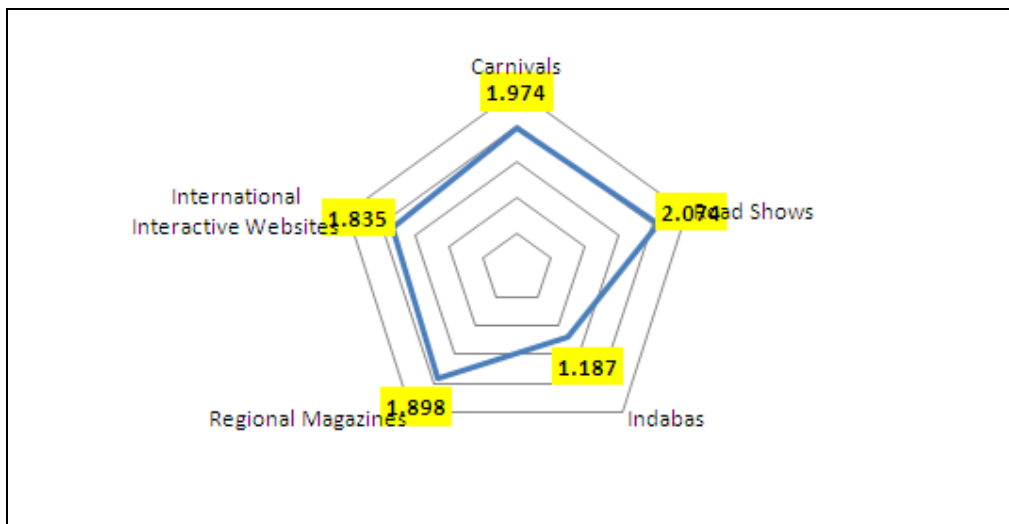
Source: Research Survey (2015).

Figure 1. Responses on the most effective events by locals and foreigners

Note. The average mean are in a range of 1-5 (1= Strongly Agree; 5=Strongly Disagree).

Source: Research Survey (2015).

The statistics in table 1 and figure 1 shows that indabas have the lowest average meaning (1.187) reflecting their competitiveness as Zimbabwe international tourism brand showcasing platform. These are interactive tourism showcasing markets where buyers and sellers across

the globe meet and exchange business. Various tourism operators display their offering targeting their specific type of tourism buyers whether in niche or large markets. These indabas will have a great impact to the country's tourism brand if they are launched locally. This is because various people will have an opportunity to come and witness the moment of truth about Zimbabwe tourism destination. It helps as a mechanism to do a brand image clean- up campaign for the currently perceived hostile Zimbabwe destination. Also local people will have an opportunity to buy-in the tourism brand positioning campaign.

Therefore, to engage multi-showcasing strategy to the tourism branding in Zimbabwe, international interactive websites and regional magazine promotions with average mean of 1.835 and 1898 respectively have proved to be other strong platform to enhance Zimbabwe tourism brand position. It is with these statistics that a consideration of local brand showcasing platform, regional platform and international platform are required to improve the brand status quo for Zimbabwe tourism destination.

6. Recommendations

The research recommended a model for positioning the Zimbabwe tourism brand which comprise of international, regional and local showcasing. An amalgam these three elements are critical in promoting, positioning and rejuvenating a strong Zimbabwe tourism brand. International platforms will not yield brand mileage when the owners of the brand who are the locals do not appreciate its existence. Locals should be both participative and supportive to these brand positioning campaigns. They are the ones who deal direct with the tourists the moment they arrive in the Zimbabwe tourism destination. Their hospitality and ability to welcome is of most significance to the country's tourism destination. Also regional and international attractiveness of the brand is achieved through local owners support. Therefore, it begins with the local involvement to regional and international levels for a brand showcase to yield high equity. This is reflected in the tourism brand showcasing triangle presented in figure 2 below.
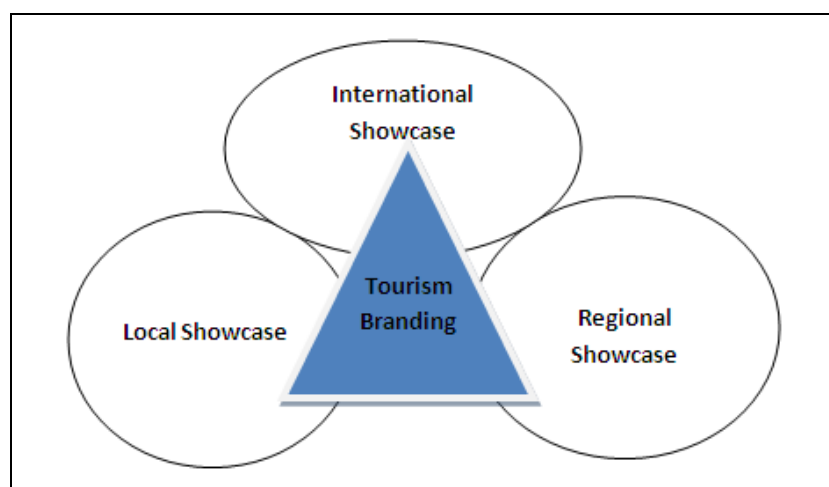

Figure 2. Tourism destination showcasing triangle

Source: Research Design (2015).

7. Conclusion

There is a lack of commonality when hosting brand promotion at international platforms. Various participants come with their own agenda and might even compete silently with their co-hosts. Zimbabwe tourism destination brand has faced numerous negative issues that cannot be resolved by a single stone throw. International brand marketing platforms can be a part of other crucial strategies that can improve on Zimbabwe tourism destination. Therefore indabas play the most competitive platform for Zimbabwe tourism brand positioning. This platform can be enhanced when it is locally staged in order to bring in buy-in of the local people. Also a diversified multi-campaign involving local, regional and international brand promotion will complete the campaign effort.

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