

From ‘Zimbabwe Africa’s Paradise to Zimbabwe A World of Wonders’: Benefits and Challenges of Rebranding Zimbabwe as A Tourist Destination

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Abstract

The Zimbabwe’s tourism sector is taking various initiatives to bring in the visitor to earn Zimbabwe the much needed foreign currency earnings through destination rebranding. The paper explores the reasons why the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) rebranded the Zimbabwe destination from Zimbabwe Africa’s Paradise to ‘a World of wonders’. It also aims at determining the benefits and challenges this has brought. Between 2000 and 2008, Zimbabwe’s image was badly damaged and it received many negative safety reports in various media. The destination was perceived more dangerous than some war-torn countries. With regard to the former brand, ZTA had the hardest sell in the world with political and economic instabilities from 2000 to 2008, which was characterised by a hyper inflationary environment, repeat cholera epidemics, and violent elections. This predicament was worsened by the global financial recession of 2008. Cumulatively, this resulted in a massive decline of tourist arrivals in Zimbabwe. As a result, this motivated the ZTA as a destination marketer to look for a strategy to reinstate the confidence of tourists so that they could reconsider Zimbabwe as a preferred holiday destination. The research used a descriptive research design. Data were collected through an interview survey with three ZTA branch managers. Results found that, the new brand replaced an out-dated brand, and aimed at moving with the times, providing peace of mind to tourists by building confidence and trust, as well as sharing of common vision among the stakeholders. ZTA is lacking adequate resources in form of financial resources, skills and technology. As well, political challenges are still present thus hindering the successful rebranding and marketing. A key conclusion is that the changeover from the old brand to a new brand was a way of admitting that there was no paradise over the past decade in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: Destination branding, Macro environment, World of wonders, Paradise, Zimbabwe Tourism Authority.

1. Introduction

The Zimbabwean economy is one of the most-tourism dependent ones in Southern Africa. Tourism is regarded as one of the four pillars of the Zimbabwean economy together with agriculture, mining and manufacturing sectors. The tourism and hospitality sector makes a significant contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employment, investment and export earnings. In 2011, the Zimbabwe tourism and hospitality industry managed to contribute nine percent to Gross Domestic Product. It also accounted for forty-two thousand and five hundred jobs directly and another fifty- one thousand indirectly (WTTC, 2012). The country is endowed with a unique set of attractions coded as the country’s own seven wonders. According to the country’s ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry (*Newzimbabwe*, 2010) these are: Zimbabwe’s wonderful people and culture, rich history and heritage, Great Zimbabwe- the Grand Medieval Palace, The Majestic Victoria Falls, Pristine wild life and nature, The mystique of the Eastern highlands and The Mythical Kariba as the best attractions to travel to Zimbabwe.

The destination suffered from negative publicity during the crisis period between 2000 and 2008. The tourist arrivals declined to 1.8 million in 2008 from a 2.4 million recorded in 2004 (UNWTO, 2011). Tourism demand declined because of pressure on consumer discretionary incomes and a reduction on travel expenditure by both locals and foreigners. This was also worsened by the poor image of the country portrayed in the traditional source markets. Other source markets, such as Japan, United States and Germany, issued travel warnings to the country on the pretext that the situation in Zimbabwe was no longer supportive to the continued patronage of their citizens. Thus, they posited that the destination was no longer a paradise for both local and foreign travellers.

The notion of Zimbabwe as a paradise, as explained by the former brand manager (Ben R Ncube, an executive responsible for China, Asia and the Pacific markets) at ZTA was religious. As he says, a paradise is ‘a religious term for a place in which existence is positive, harmonious and timeless.’ His sentiments echo the biblical definition of a paradise: ‘there is only peace, prosperity, and happiness’ (*Genesis 2 v 8*). This analogy was in

direct contrast with the situation that prevailed in Zimbabwe where the macro-environment from 2000 to 2008 was hostile. The destination was no longer a paradise; literally it was like a hell with a series of upheavals (Raftopoulos, 2009). The destination was at a decline stage in line with tourist arrivals into the region. Thus, there was a mismatch of the theme with the situation that prevailed on the ground, especially from the perceptions of the traditional source markets. The country's image suffered from political and economic paralysis, as well as the accompanying politically-related violence that worked together in making Zimbabwe an unsafe destination. This impacted tourist arrivals because most tourists are motivated to visit destinations that are considered safe for security reasons.

The Zimbabwe's tourism sector began to recover under the 2009 Unity Government. Among others, the unity government introduced the multi-currency regime, which reduced and stabilised inflation. It also worked seriously to restore political normalcy. To this extent, in 2009 and 2010, the inflation rate was seven percent and four percent respectively (Zimbabwe Trade Policy Review, 2011), a far cry from the 231 million percent of 2008. This stable macro-political-economic environment was thus supportive of the re-emergence of tourism and hospitality sector back into prominence.

Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to explore reasons why ZTA rebranded the destination into 'Zimbabwe, a world of wonders'. It also aims at determining the benefits and challenges of rebranding Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. To achieve the set objectives, I intend to make a commentary of the Zimbabwe's tourism industry from independence to 1990, from 1990-2000, from 2000-2008 and 2009 to 2012. The first three phases happened when the ZTA's brand was 'Zimbabwe, Africa's Paradise' and the latter occurred under the new brand, 'Zimbabwe, a world of wonders'. A discussion of the benefits derived from using the new brand and challenges faced by ZTA when marketing the destination's attractions follows and ends with a key conclusion.

2. An overview of Zimbabwe's tourism industry

The tourism sector in Zimbabwe has undergone tremendous shifts and developments from the time of the colonisation of the country in 1890 right up to the present day. Broadly, based on obtaining political and economic policies, there are two distinct periods that are discernible; the colonial phase to the post-colonial era. These have shaped the branding and development of tourism in the country. However, the major thrust of this discussion is mainly hinged on the post-independence developments especially relating to the emergence of two brands for the Zimbabwean tourism. Specifically, focus will be the reasons for shifting from Zimbabwe: Africa's paradise to Zimbabwe a World of Wonders.

2.1 Zimbabwe's tourism from independence to 1990

The Zimbabwe's tourism industry soon after independence in 1980 witnessed many challenges, including neglect by the central government. Primarily this was during the immediate aftermath of the bloody war of independence. Due to the exigencies of the time, the Government of Zimbabwe embarked on the rebuilding of the war-ravaged economy by prioritising the revival of the agriculture, mining and manufacturing sectors that were considered to be the backbone industries (Nangati and Nyaruwata, 1994) for the revivification and growth of the economy. Consequently, other sectors were thus neglected, including tourism. The case of the tourism sector was worsened by the exodus of key white entrepreneurs and employees who left the country mainly to apartheid South Africa and Australia as part of the general white emigration inspired by the uncertainties the black majority independence brought to the country. Because of this, the national white population dropped from 250 000 to 100 000 (<http://www.zimembassy.se/history.html>).

Realising the impact of the emigration on the country, the government had to focus on the tourism industry to safe guard the employees and the sector and as a means to forge a new image of the country. In 1981, the government formed the Zimbabwe Tourism Development Corporation (ZTDC). Its mandate was to invest in the tourism industry on behalf of the government. ZTDC was later dissolved and was replaced by the ZTA in 1996, which was mandated to professionally market Zimbabwe's tourist destinations locally, regionally and internationally. This saw the government owning some of the tourism enterprises, for instance, the Rainbow Tourism Group of hotels. The government also owned National Museums and Monuments and the National Parks, which constituted some of the key tourist destinations in the country. The government also bought shares in some hospitality enterprises like the Zimbabwe Sun hotels now (Africa Sun Hotels).

Furthermore, and in an attempt to woo rural communities and to change these communities' perceptions to tourism, the government amended the 1975 Parks and Wildlife Act in 1982. This amendment enabled the local people to participate and derive benefits from wildlife through the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE). This saw areas like Masoka Village, Binga District and Nyaminyami District (Globaleye, undated) and Mahenye in Chipinge (African Resources Trust, 2002) for example, participating and benefitting from sustainable utilization of wildlife resources.

The tourism industry was also affected by the 1982 to 1986 *gukurahundi* disturbances in parts of the Matebeleland and Midlands Provinces. The civil strife in these provinces resulted in an unsafe destination tag for the country. Problems affecting tourism in the 1980s were compounded by the drought of 1982 that affected most parts of the country Zimbabwe as well as the world recession of the early 1980s. Overall, these factors affected the plans for a rapid growth of the tourism industry as the funds were redirected to drought relief programmes and towards the war efforts in Matebeleland and the Midlands provinces.

Further evidence to show that the political and economic discords that ravaged the country seriously watered down attempts at reviving the tourism sector can be provided by the inadequate budgets the ZTDC received from the state. To exemplify, in 1989, ZTDC requested for Z\$9 million for a marketing budget but it received less than ten percent (Nangati and Nyaruwata, 1994:26). This made it difficult for ZTDC to achieve its set marketing goals.

2.2 Zimbabwe's tourism from 1990 to 2000

The period from 1990 to 2000 had events that profoundly shaped the development of tourism in Zimbabwe positively and negatively. The government of Zimbabwe introduced The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1991. This was an attempt to solve some of the problems the economy was undergoing. The government of Zimbabwe pursued policies involving the privatisation of some companies that were state owned, for example Rainbow Tourism Group (RTG) and Meikles hotel.

Globally, there were other factors fuelling the negative performance of the tourism industry. In 1990, there was Gulf war between Iraq and Kuwait. This political instability derailed positive performance in the global tourism and hospitality sector as a result of safety fears. The continent was perceived as unsafe to travel as the Northern Africa was also affected with the Gulf war. Furthermore, Zimbabwe experienced a drought in 1992 and the wildlife resources were under threat, as were most related sectors. The Victoria Falls resort for instance, lost some of its lustre as a result of reduced water discharge over the falls. The general economy also faced food shortages thus the government of Zimbabwe embarked on food hand-outs to rescue the local people. As a result, little attention was given to the tourism industry in terms of funding.

Mass stay-aways and mass demonstrations dominated the Zimbabwean landscape between 1996 and 1998 (Zeilig, 2002). The national government workers' strike in August 1996 affected all parts of the country and crippled the government operations. This immensely affected the tourism industry because the government workers contribute greatly to the economy. The government employees contributed significantly to business tourism in Zimbabwe's hospitality industry. Food riots were also experienced in January 1998 as a result of price increases, the sales tax and development levy that had been imposed in late 1997. In addition, the government of Zimbabwe entered the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998. Related to this, South Africa invaded Lesotho in 1998 and there was war in Angola until 2002. At the continental level, the political situation on the African continent discouraged many tourists from visiting the destinations in the region. The continent was perceived as unsafe destination to visit.

On a positive note to the development of the tourism industry, Zimbabwe hosted Harare Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 1991 from 16-21 October. A retreat was done in Victoria Falls. This led to tourist massive infrastructural and superstructural development in the resort town of Victoria Falls. To this end, for instance, the Kingdom Hotel was rebuilt; a golf course, an airport and sewerage ponds were built. This positively resulted in a significant rise in tourist arrivals in the country. In 1995, Zimbabwe hosted most of the 6th All Africa games and resultantly a thirty-five percent increase in tourist arrivals was recorded.

2.3 Zimbabwe's tourism from 2000 to 2008

Zimbabwe as an economy entered a period known as a 'crisis' (Hammar, *et al*, 2003). This was due to a combination of both political and economic decline that was largely precipitated by the land invasions from 2000. The rather chaotic and violent land reform programme negatively impacted the tourism sector. *Inter alia*, this resulted in some national parks being invaded like the Gonarezhou in Masvingo province. Other conservancies experienced human-wildlife conflicts for instance Save valley conservancy, Bubiana conservancy and Chiredzi river conservancy. Thousands of the black farmers turned to poaching the wildlife as a source of food, income, trapping animals for their own security in the parks or conservancy areas. The most targeted animals were the elephants, kudus, impalas, buffaloes, giraffes, leopards, zebras and wildebeests. Moreover, during the land invasions, trophy hunters, illegal safari operators and biltong hunters from South Africa and other countries took advantage of instabilities in the Zimbabwean economy, bribing their way into protected areas at a pittance to shoot elephants, cheetahs, leopards, lions, rhinoceros and other animals (Unti, 2005). This led to a loss of eighty percent wild animals in wildlife conservancies and game farms and sixty percent of wild animals in Zimbabwe's national parks. This greatly affected the backbone resource of the tourism industry.

The negative image of the country, which further pushed tourists away, was the intermittent politically inspired violence that rocked the country from the period immediately following the February 2000 constitutional referendum. Further violence was witnessed in the run-up to and following the June 2000 Parliamentary elections the 2002, presidential elections, and the 2008 presidential election re-run. The impact of this violence and political intimidation was to further tarnish the image of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination.

On a positive note, the government of Zimbabwe targeted other markets as tourists from the traditional source markets tourist continued to drop. For example, there was a marked drop in this segment of up to thirty-six percent during the first half of 2003 (*Zwnews*, 2004). Foreign travellers were no longer giving business to the tourism industry in Zimbabwe. In 2003, the Zimbabwe government officially declared the controversial Look East Policy. On 15 June 2004, according to the Asia Africa Intelligence Wire (2004), Zimbabwe got an Approved Destination Status from the Chinese market. This Memorandum of Understanding between Zimbabwe and China allowed the Chinese population to travel to Zimbabwe. This resulted in the number of Chinese tourists to Zimbabwe increased by two hundred and forty-five percent in comparison with the same period of the 2003 (*Zwnews*, 2004).

In 2003, Zimbabwe hosted some of the matches of 2003 Cricket world cup together with South Africa. This had a positive impact to the economy. In addition, the ZTA launched promotional campaigns like the Miss Tourism and Miss Malaika in 2004. In February 2005, ZTA hosted Ms Tourism World. Some semblance of publicity was achieved from the hosting of these events. On the whole, however, there were no major long-term benefits from the hosting of these. Significantly, the image of the country remained scarred in the Western community. For the Miss Tourism World in 2005, this was in part due to a boycott by the West; hence it could not yield much positive change for the country. Regarding the Cricket World Cup (CWC), the situation was confounded by the demonstration against alleged human rights by the government by senior players and the boycott of the country by the Australian national side.

In 2007, the country suffered from cholera epidemic, and the 2008, post- election violence made the country unsafe to visit. The country was no longer a paradise to the local, regional and international travellers. This continued decline in tourist arrivals is clearly marked by the total of 1, 8 million tourists, a far cry from the 2,4 million received in 2004 (UNWTO, 2011). The environment was highly unstable, characterised by hyperinflationary rates reaching 231 million percent in July 2008, severe shortages of electricity, fuel, foreign currency and water and recurrent droughts. Price controls and an overvalued exchange rate regime, transport problems and the negative publicity the country was facing also contributed to the decline of tourist arrivals and receipts. Foreign airlines withdrew their services/flights into the country Zimbabwe. Tourism was on unstable path, with fluctuations performances in line with deteriorating local economic conditions and global crisis in 2008. The demand for travel declined due to pressures on travellers' incomes. As a result of this, both locals and foreign travellers cut down their travel expenditures. The supply side was not an exception, due to economic instability; no new facilities were constructed and the tourism product was highly priced. The existing facilities were not also well-maintained or refurbished.

2.4 Zimbabwe's tourism performance from 2009 to 2012

The Unity Government ushered in a new dispensation. Politically the consummation of the GNU was a way of creating a genuine, viable and a relatively-sustained solution to the Zimbabwe crisis. It also heralded positive developments to the economy. Inflation was stabilised from 2009 following the adoption of the multicurrency regime. Average annual inflation for 2009 and 2010 was 7.7% and 4%, respectively. The unity government again positively impacted the tourism sector. Regarding the tourism sector and in its support, the first national budget under the inclusive government gave incentives for investment into the tourism sector, such as exempted duty payments on capital goods used by registered designated tourist facilities (Ndlela, 2012). This also included exemption of duty on equipment used for expansion, modernisation and renovation of tourist facilities.

According to *Afrolnews* (2010) the effects of the unity government which was established in February 2009 and the consequent lifting of travel warnings against Zimbabwe by some of the country's major source markets such as Japan, the USA and Germany contributed to the increase in tourist arrivals. Zimbabwe's tourist arrivals increased by seventeen percent in the third quarter on the back of restored confidence from the country's source markets (*Radiovop*, 2012).

Government through ZTA has implemented various measures to enhance tourism promotion and development through image enhancement and rebranding, marketing, upgrading and diversification of the tourism product, streamlined customs and immigration formalities and promotion of domestic tourism. In 2010, according to the ZTA's Executive Director Destination marketing, Zimbabwe tourism was keen to reclaim its European markets. This was as a result of the deep historical ties that exist between Britain and Zimbabwe from colonial and missionary years. This saw ZTA, launching the new brand 'Zimbabwe a world of Wonders' in Madrid in mid-

January 2011 during the annual international tourism expo to regain the lost market (*Newzimbabwe*, 2010). The new brand, 'Zimbabwe a world of wonders' that replaced the old brand 'Zimbabwe, Africa's Paradise', was also launched in Brazil in 2012. The rebranding was done in an effort to redefine and design a refreshed brand identity for the country.

Furthermore, ZTA embarked on an on-the-location marketing. To this end, it brings to Zimbabwe travel writers to see first-hand, the situation in Zimbabwe. This resulted for example, in the Dubai-based British journalist, Iranian group of journalists (journalists and photojournalists), and the Japanese delegates being hosted by the Zimbabwe government. Furthermore, in May 2012, ZTA hosted a congress of Africa Travel Association (ATA) where 500 delegates from around Africa attended the congress in Victoria Falls. The main thrust of the conference was on learning, networking and demonstrating the global cross-industry interest in leveraging tourism opportunities in Africa.

Additionally every year, the ZTA hosts a travel expo in October where both international and local sellers and buyers meet at Rainbow Towers in Harare. The Sanganai expo had a positive impact to Zimbabwe's tourism as it aimed at showcasing destinations, products and services, establishing strategic business partnerships with different world tourism players. ZTA took advantage of the 2012 Sanganai/Hlanganani Travel Expo to showcase its new Brand 'Zimbabwe, a world of wonders'. The fair targeted National Tourism boards, embassies, international airlines, tourism destinations, leading hotel chains of the world, car hire and transport operators, leading tour operators, travel agents and suppliers of goods and services to the tourism industry, investors and government ministries. As a measure of regaining confidence of the international scene, the expo managed to attract about ninety-five international buyers and media personnel representing twenty-two countries from all seven continents attended the fair (Muguwu, 2012). The attendance of international buyers was not a representative of the entire world, because many were from China, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, United States of America, United Arab Emirates and France among others. As such, the ZTA has to embark on aggressive marketing the upcoming travel expo in 2013 for the purpose of bringing the world to Africa.

The Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry formulated a National tourism policy in 2012 to guide the tourism sector's development. The policy recognizes that the entire Zimbabwe is a potential tourism development zone. This opens up new opportunities to develop new tourism niche products such as cultural tourism, culinary tourism, medical tourism, industrial tourism, mega-eventing, agro-tourism, sports tourism, religious tourism, township tourism and historical and heritage tourism. This will overall enhance the competitiveness of the destination in the region (National Tourism Policy, 2012). The ZTA has managed to implement some aspects of the National Tourism policy through the introduction of township tourism in 2012.

From the above discussion it is noteworthy that the prevailing economic and political stability in the country seem to support the development of tourism in Zimbabwe. The rebranding of the destination, hosting of events such as Sanganai/Hlanganani travel expo and ATA, and the implementation of the National Tourism policy in 2012 contributed positively to the efforts of ZTA to regain its lost markets in the regional, local and international communities.

3. Methodology

The research is documented through interviews with three ZTA branch managers in Masvingo, Gweru and Beitbridge. The branch managers were selected because they are on the ground where most of the activity is taking place. A non-probability sampling was used. Convenience sampling was preferable due to the limited finances and time at the disposal of the research. An interview guide was used to ensure consistency in the interview content. The interview guide consisted of the open and closed-ended questions. The researcher questioned branch managers on the benefits and challenges faced by ZTA with the new brand of 'World of wonders.' The researcher further probed for clarification where it was deemed necessary. All interviews were digitally recorded (using a digital voice recorder) and later transcribed. An inductive and deductive approach was used to analyse the data.

4. Findings and discussion

The researcher enquired about the period when 'Zimbabwe, Africa's paradise' was in use in the tourism industry. The Zimbabwe Tourism Authority had been using Zimbabwe's Africa paradise for the last thirty years. The brand was introduced when Zimbabwe gained independence from the whites. This was when the political and economic situation in the country was perceived conducive for tourism development in the country. Zimbabwe's tourist source markets were Germany, Japan and United States of America. The tourism sector was mainly supported by international travellers before the Zimbabwe Crisis.

Regarding the benefits derived from the new brand, the respondents pointed out that the new brand is correcting an out of date, inaccurate or unbalanced perception that accompanied the former brand. ZTA as a destination marketer is moving with the times. The destination was no longer a 'paradise' with both political and economic instabilities that were facing the country as a tourist destination. There was a mismatch of the old brand with the situation that was prevailing in Zimbabwe from 2000-2008. The brand was no longer giving Zimbabwe as a tourist destination the room to grow due to negative publicity/ image. Zimbabwe a 'World of wonders' is now allowing a faster recovery for the destination that was affected by a crisis. The brand is adding value to the country's efforts to boost the country's tourism industry.

The respondents highlighted that, there was an improvement in Zimbabwe's image in the international community and the country was positioned as a good destination for tourism and investment in the Sub-Sahara region. The new brand was welcomed by UK, Germany, South Africa and China amongst other countries. There is increased destination awareness internationally, regionally and locally. Locally, the ZTA managed to open offices in various towns like Gweru, Masvingo, Kariba and Mutare in a bid to spread tourism development across the country. The ZTA embarked on road shows to educate the Zimbabweans about the new brand of 'World of wonders'. It attended a nine day road show in the United States of America from September 4 to 13, 2012 across Orange County, Boston, Atlanta, Denver and Greenwich. Internationally, ZTA successfully penetrated the Brazilian market by opening an office in Sao Paulo in 2011. This was aimed at co-ordinating trade, investment and tourism activities between Zimbabwe and Brazil.

The change in branding of the destination alerted travellers about the major shifts that had taken place. Tourists in the entire world would be inspired to find out more about the 'World of wonders'. The new brand reinforces and recognizes our wonderful people and culture as the first wonder. The cultural aspect creates authentic and distinctive appeal on the global tourism market. Resultantly, it would also generate loyalty through encouraging more repeat tourists and word-of mouth referrals about the hospitality of the Zimbabwean people. This had boosted tourist arrivals in the region. For instance, according to the first quarter ZTA's report the average hotel occupancy levels increased to forty-two percent in the period (2012) up from thirty-six percent the previous year (ZNCC, 2012).

ZTA's respondents highlighted the sharing of a common vision between ZTA and the tourism and hospitality stakeholders. ZTA got support from different stakeholders to achieve their goal. For instance, Africa Sun managed to accompany ZTA to attend a nine-day road show in the United States of America in 2012 that was being co-ordinated by South Africa Airways in collaboration with the On Show Solution to allow the African tourism industry to maximise business in the US. Additionally, some hospitality service providers (Africa Sun Limited, Rainbow Tourism Group and Meikles Limited) are renovating their infrastructure or modernising their facilities to draw international audience for instance Victoria Falls hotel, Meikles Hotel, Rainbow Towers and Conference Centre amongst others (Ndlela, 2012). The Africa Sun Limited introduced the Intercontinental hotel group franchise which resulted in the relaunch of Holiday Inn Bulawayo and Harare and the rebranding of the Mutare and Beitbridge hotels to African Sun Amber Hotel and Beitbridge Express hotel respectively. The support from different stakeholders assisted the destination marketers to professionally market the destination because they are sharing the same vision.

The ZTA representatives pointed out that, there is buy-in from the government in line with the national brand. In support of this, the Minister of Tourism and Hospitality Industry read a speech from the Vice President Cde Mujuru at Pandari lodge at a Sanganai, 2012 cocktail party. Part of the speech reads 'The government of Zimbabwe is fully behind the development of tourism, not only in our nation but also in the region...The strength of tourism as a people-to-people phenomenon that can bring about international understanding cannot be overemphasized'. The President of Zimbabwe also criticized senior officials for invading and grabbing the lucrative safari holdings in the Save conservancy area (Zimbabwe expedition, 2012). But practically, it seems as if the government's initiatives to help the Zimbabwe tourism sector have been largely rhetorical although the industry contributes significantly towards a broad economic base.

Furthermore the ZTA respondents revealed that, the destination with a healthy and respected brand identity can be a catalyst for leaders, businesses and citizens are being welcomed in the right circles gaining seats on the right committees, attracting awards and winning bids to host events and attracting conferences and meetings. This implies that it is now easier for the destination to be in any competitive setting because Zimbabwe is seen to have qualities and benefits that are good to be associated with. This was evidenced by the winning of Zimbabwe to co-host UNWTO General Assembly in August 2013 with Zambia and the hosting of ATA conference in May 2012.

Overall, the respondents pointed out that rebranding of the Zimbabwe tourism destination provides psychological safety to tourists by building confidence and trust about the destination. If travellers invest their

money and time into Zimbabwe as a tourist destination, the service should meet the brand on offer. Their positive emotional response that is triggered by a strong brand is the first step in building this trust. These findings affirm Morgan and Pritchard's (2000) observation that, 'the battle for customers...will be fought not over the price but over the minds and hearts- in essence...branding will be the key to success'. Zimbabwe has managed to rebrand its destination at the country level in order to attract more tourists from other competing destinations. Zimbabwe through its aggressive destination marketing had seen major airlines commencing their services to Harare in 2012. This had improved connectivity, enhanced the capacity and competitiveness of the country thereby further promoting Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. This saw four airlines namely Namibia Airlines, Mozambican Airlines, United Arab Emirates and KLM Dutch Airlines servicing the country.

The respondents highlighted that, they are facing challenges with the implementation of the new brand. There is still a limited budget to support their marketing and promotional activities. While noting the efforts of the government towards reviving the tourism sector, they felt that the government could still allocate more funds for the ZTA's international marketing campaigns. They felt, for example that the national 2013 budget allocation to the sector of six million dollars for UNWTO preparations could have been more. To them, the hosting of the UNWTO was indirectly related to destination marketing and it is further projected that the hosting of UNWTO will contribute to an increase in tourist arrivals into the region. The results also marry with the study done by Szondi (2006:19) who asserts that 'most tourism destinations have limited budgets but they are expected to market globally, competing with other destinations as well as with other global brands'. Thus, there is need for the government to provide adequate resources to ZTA to develop necessary skills and technology to better access the way that modern world researches, communicates about and books leisure travel these days.

Furthermore, ZTA representatives pointed out that when it comes to marketing the destination political pressures still exist. One of the respondents highlighted that whilst tourism players are busy creating a perception package around the country's beautiful resorts and conservancies some of the senior politicians are busy invading these areas for instance the Save conservancy, thus inevitably undoing the efforts of the tourism industry players through poor brand management. Therefore one can conclude that, the country's politics, the legal, social environment and its economy all contribute enormously to national identity and the image. The respondents are also not certain about the upcoming presidential elections in the country although there was peace on the recent concluded referendum.

The economy is still facing challenges to boost domestic tourism due to poor disposable incomes that limited local people from visiting local leisure sites. Efforts to create awareness and synergies with the private sector will be stepped up to give holiday packages to the domestic market but still the locals cannot afford to spend more.

5. Conclusion

It is worth noting that destination rebranding is a powerful tool for repositioning Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. The study found out that the old brand; 'Zimbabwe: Africa's paradise' was contradictory to the crisis that was experienced in the country over the past decade. Its dismissal was a way of admitting that there was no longer a paradise in the country. The new brand 'Zimbabwe, a world of wonders,' has managed to build confidence and trust in the international community. The new brand is also moving with the times and so far has managed to counter the old brand's performance that was no in sync with prevailing situation in Zimbabwe from the year 2000 to 2008.

The rebranding of Zimbabwe as a world of wonders contributed significantly to the revival of the tourism and hospitality industry. Travellers are increasingly becoming more optimistic about Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. The rebranding gave Zimbabwe an opportunity to regain its lost traditional source markets over the past decade and generate other markets. Travellers are motivated to visit and witness a brand that complements the destination positively. The ZTA's marketing efforts are also supported by various stakeholders. The major leading hotel groups in the country like Africa Sun hotels, Rainbow Tourism Group and Meikles are supporting the brand through superstructural refurbishments. Infrastructure and superstructural developments have to complement the destination's image and message to enable travellers to get value for their money.

Besides the rebranding of the destination, there are other factors that have contributed to the re-establishment of tourist's confidence to visit or revisit Zimbabwe such as peace, stability, the returning of major airlines that have boosted connectivity, hosting of mega events such as ATA, Sanganai/Hlanganani Travel Expo, and the UNWTO General Assembly conference which the country will co-host with Zambia from 24-29 August 2013. However, the ZTA is still facing cash challenges to adequately market the new brand world-wide. In addition, political conflicts and contestations still haunt the Zimbabwean economy thus making it difficult to penetrate other source markets.

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