EFFECTIVENESS OF USING DIGITAL MARKETING AS A DESTINATION BRAND STRATEGY IN THE TOURISM SECTOR: A TOURISM PLAYERS’ PERSPECTIVE.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this piece of work to Mkundie Praise Makosa and her mother.
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ABSTRACT

The study was on the effectiveness of digital marketing as a destination branding tool, focusing on the Zimbabwe tourism players. More specifically, the analysis investigated the relationships between digital marketing and a destination’s image through empirical research. To achieve a broader understanding of the concepts of destination branding and digital marketing, qualitative methods were used. The macro-economic and political challenges experienced in Zimbabwe in the last decade negatively impacted on the competitiveness of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination, hence the need to reposition the destination. The need for digital marketing plays an important role in the tourism industry wherein customers have instant access to all kinds of information on the latest offers and best prices. Today digital marketing plays a critical role in the success of each business which exists in the tourism industry. In a bid to regain its lost share of both the regional and global tourism cake, Zimbabwe has pursued a number of strategies, key among then being destination branding and specifically digital marketing among other interventions.

The main objective of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of using digital marketing on a destination’s brand image, using the tourism and hospitality industry players. Given the exploratory nature of some of the objectives, the researcher used both exploratory and descriptive research design. In light of what the researcher sought, the inductive approach was selected as it allowed the process of beginning with observations which led to goals such as discovery and exploration, which assisted in answering the question under study. The interpreted data was collected through distribution of 80 questionnaires and conducting of 20 interviews from a sample frame of officials from the Ministry of Environment, Tourism and Hospitality Industry, Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority and members of the Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe. Data was gathered from questionnaires and semi structured interviews of key informants. The results showed that the key challenges affecting the tourism sector is negative media publicity, destination inaccessibility, unfavourable pricing and the shortage of basic commodities. In light of the above, a number of interventions were implemented, and these include the engagement of the international community, lobbying for the removal of sanctions, destination rebranding and the MICE strategy. As one of the intervention, the implementation of the digital marketing strategy has played a pivotal role in destination branding, creating a new impression about the destination. However, we can conclude that digital
marketing is an effective strategy but it needs to be complemented with other strategies. The paper proposes that interventions to be taken include; investing in events and multi-purpose conferencing facilities, fully exploring the hosting of more conferences and the MICE route, pursuing mega sporting events, expos, incorporating the leisure traveler, fully embracing the concept of digital marketing and availing resources to it, investing in media and perception management programs, and consideration of investing in ICTs.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION .................................................................1

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY ..............................................1

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM ...........................................2

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES .....................................................3

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....................................................3

1.5 PROPOSITION .................................................................4

1.6 RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS ..................................................4

1.7 JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH .....................................4

1.8 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY ...................................................4

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY ...........................................5

1.9.1 The Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry/Zimbabwe Tourism Authority .........................................................5

1.9.2 Institutions of higher learning and the academia ..........................5

1.9.3 Organisations in the Zimbabwe tourism and hospitality industry ...............6

1.9.4 Marketers and marketing organisations ..................................6

1.9.5 The Researcher .............................................................6
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION
2.1 TOURISM SECTOR PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW
   2.1.1 Global overview
   2.1.2 Regional overview
   2.1.3 Country overview
2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
   2.2.1 Destination branding
      2.2.1.1 Destination competitiveness
      2.2.1.2 Economic impacts of tourism on a destination
   2.2.2 Digital Marketing
3.5 RESEARCH STRATEGY .................................................................................42

3.6 TIME HORIZON ..........................................................................................43

3.7 DATA COLLECTION .......................................................................................43

  3.7.1. Secondary data ....................................................................................43

  3.7.2. Primary data .......................................................................................44

3.8 POPULATION SAMPLE AND SIZE .................................................................44

  3.8.1. Sample Designs and Technique ..........................................................45

3.9 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT AND JUSTIFICATION .........................................46

  3.9.1 Secondary Sources ..............................................................................47

  3.9.2 Primary data collection ........................................................................47

    3.9.2.1 Questionnaires ..............................................................................48

    3.9.2.2 Interviews ....................................................................................48

3.10 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE, ADMINISTRATION AND ANALYSIS ........49

  3.10.1. Data Analysis ...................................................................................50

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ....................................................................50

3.12 LIMITATIONS ............................................................................................51

3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY ....................................................................................51
CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.0 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................53

4.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES .....................................................................................53

4.2 RESPONSE RATE ................................................................................................53

   4.2.1 Questionnaire Response Rate .................................................................54

   4.2.2 Interview Response Rate .......................................................................54

4.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY ..............................................................................................71

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................72

5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS .....................................................................................72

5.2 CONCLUSIONS .......................................................................................................74

   5.2.1 Effectiveness of digital marketing as a destination branding tool ...............74

   5.2.2 Challenges and measures for the Zimbabwe’s tourism sector ......................74

   5.2.3 Best strategy Zimbabwe can use in its destination branding and image building exercise ........................................................................................................75
5.2.4 How digital marketing contributes to improving the image and appeal of a destination like Zimbabwe .................................................................75

5.2.5 The role of digital marketing in today’s tourism industry .........................75

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS .............................................................................75

5.3.1 Investing in Multi-purpose facilities ......................................................76

5.3.2 Fully exploring the hosting of more conferences and the MICE route ..........76

5.3.3 Consideration of hosting mega events and Expos .................................76

5.3.4 Investing in ICTs and fully embracing the concept of digital marketing ..........77

5.3.5 There is need for considering nation rebranding as a priority and investing in Media and Perception Management programs .........................................................77

5.4 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .............................................78

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY .............................................................................78

REFERENCES ..............................................................................................79

APPENDICES ..............................................................................................85

Appendix 1: Questionnaire ..........................................................................85

Appendix 2: Interview guide .........................................................................89

Appendix 3: Request letter to carry out research ............................................92
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Destination Branding Framework/Model and Components considered by past studies
.................................................................................................................................................15

Table 3.1: Sample composition ........................................................................................................45

Table 4.1: Administration and response rate of questionnaires ..................................................54

Table 4.2: Distribution of respondents on challenges that have negatively affected tourists’ arrivals
......................................................................................................................................................57

Table 4.3: Distribution of responses on measures that have been put in place to address the challenges affecting tourist arrivals .................................................................................................58

Table 4.4: Distribution of respondents on other measures which can be put in place to address the challenges affecting the tourism sector .................................................................................................60

Table 4.5: Distribution of respondents on the role of digital marketing in today’s tourism industry
......................................................................................................................................................63

Table 4.6: Distribution of respondents on the platforms of digital marketing the Zimbabwean tourism players are using to market products and services they offer ........................................65

Table 4.7: Likert scale responses by the tourism sector employees .................................................66

Table 4.8: Distribution of respondents on factors affecting the implementation of the Digital Marketing Strategy .................................................................................................................................69

Table 4.9: Distribution of respondents on recommendations for the destination branding and image building exercise ...........................................................................................................................................70
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework for the effects of Digital Marketing as a destination branding strategy ........................................................................................................................................25

Figure 4.1: Distribution of respondents by Age .......................................................................................................................55

Figure 4.2 Distribution of residents by level of Education attained ..........................................................55

Figure 4.3 Distribution of Respondents by sector of operation ........................................................................56

Figure 4.4: Distribution of respondents on whether the identified measures are addressing the challenges at hand ...................................................................................................................................59

Figure 4.5: Distribution of respondents on the most commonly used platforms to communicate the branding and positioning of Zimbabwe as a destination .........................................................61

Figure 4.6: Distribution of respondents on whether digital marketing is effective as a destination branding tool ........................................................................................................................................62
LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire .................................................................................................................. 85
Appendix 2: Interview guide .................................................................................................................. 89
Appendix 3: Request letter to carry out research ................................................................................... 92
**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DMOs</td>
<td>Destination Management Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>DMS</td>
<td>Digital Marketing Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICTs</td>
<td>Information Communication Technologies</td>
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<td>METHI</td>
<td>Ministry of Environment, Tourism and Hospitality Industry</td>
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<tr>
<td>MICE</td>
<td>Meetings, Incentives, Conferences &amp; Exhibitions</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOS</td>
<td>Mobile Operating System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTOs</td>
<td>National Tourism Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEO</td>
<td>Search Engine Optimisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBCZ</td>
<td>Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNWTO</td>
<td>United Nations World Tourism Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTTC</td>
<td>World Travel &amp; Tourism Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZIMPARKS</td>
<td>Zimbabwe Parks &amp; Wildlife Management Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZTA</td>
<td>Zimbabwe Tourism Authority</td>
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the context of the study will be presented in order to better understand the whole work. This chapter represents the bare bones of the research as it discusses the background of the study, the rationale which has driven the researcher to choose this topic, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, assumptions, delimitations and limitations within this research project.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Tourism has become one of the largest and fastest growing industries globally and is currently a source of employment and livelihood for many. Globally, tourism plays a leading role in driving economic growth, creating jobs and alleviating poverty. In the new global economy, the rapid growth and diversification of tourism over the years has become a worldwide phenomenon and affected significantly national economies. According to forecasts by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), international tourist arrivals are expected to triple over the next two decades. According to Anholt (2010), Tourism is one of the six pillars of nation branding which needs to be considered in the destination branding strategy or the rebranding exercise.

Traditionally tourism was marketed using the traditional marketing approaches. With the emergency and popularization of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), tourism is now on a new drive, with ICTs at the core of its drive. With the launch of internet technology, the rules of marketing have been redefined world over. The internet has upended how consumers engage with brands. It is transforming the economics of marketing and making obsolete many of the function’s traditional strategies and structures. For marketers, the old ways of doing business are now unsustainable (Edelman, 2010). This has made competition more intense as destinations now compete at a global level. In addition, Wang et al, (2012) assert that, globalisation has intensified the competition among destinations for markets, investments and business as well as tourists. In a highly competitive market, destinations have to create a positive image and differentiate themselves. Marketing the destination’s unique culture, history, comfortable living
and lifestyle is widely practised to attract more resources in a competitive environment (Evans, 2003). As a result, most destinations are investing in destination branding as a way to counter the intense competition, as well as a way to create destination image and awareness.

Today’s visitors have a large selection of destinations to choose from, but less time to make a buying decision. In order to be successfully promoted in the targeted markets, a destination needs to be favourably differentiated from its competitors. With the advent of superior internet technologies, newer avenues for reaching out to target audiences have evolved. The development of information and communication technologies and their increasing use has radically changed the relationship between the destinations and their visitors. The growing role of social media in tourism is undeniable, and leveraging on social media to market destinations has proven to be an excellent strategy.

Destination branding has also gained popularity, with most destinations investing in it. Digital marketing is one key strategy that has also gained popularity in destinations’ bid to grow its destinations’ brand awareness and popularity. According to Kaur (2017) digital marketing today has become an indispensable part of every business irrespective of its nature and size. In addition, Batinic (2015) asserts that digital marketing today has become one of the key focus areas for businesses all over the world. The increasing role of digital marketing has affected the way businesses promote their offerings to existing as well as new customers. The need for digital marketing has been felt like never before in the tourism industry wherein customers have instant access to all kinds of information on the latest offers and best prices. Today digital marketing plays a critical role in the success of each business which exists in the tourism industry.

Despite the significance of destination branding in both academia and industry, literature on its conceptual development is limited. The current study aims to assess the effectiveness of using digital marketing as a destination branding strategy, which integrates the concepts of the branding and destination image.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Internet information is now one of the important influences to the customer decisions in many major markets. As a result, most destinations have begun investing heavily in digital marketing. The number of internet users in 2018 was 4.021 billion, up by 7 percent year-on-year
This increased focus on digital marketing is acknowledgement of the effect that digital marketing plays on a destination’s image. In light of these developments, destinations need to find the solution of remaining relevant and useful to potential visitors in the digital age. The question is if destinations are investing heavily on digital marketing, is digital marketing an effective tool in destination marketing. The use of digital marketing is however at its infancy in the Zimbabwean industries, tourism included. Research indicates that there are numerous opportunities in Zimbabwean tourism industry but they are not yet fully exploited and more marketing is needed to create more destination awareness.

An information gap exists in the Zimbabwe tourism industry, pertaining to the role of digital marketing in enhancing Zimbabwe as an attractive and safe tourist destination. The research problem may thus be summarised as the need to understand the value of digital marketing in promoting the tourism industry.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of digital marketing as a destination branding tool in the tourism sector: A tourism players’ perspective.

**Sub objectives**

- To explore the challenges that affect the Zimbabwe tourism sector and measures which were put in place to counter them.
- To explore on the best strategy Zimbabwe can use in its destination branding and image building exercise.
- To analyze the role of digital marketing in today’s tourism industry.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question of this study is to find out if digital marketing is effective as a destination branding tool?
Sub research questions

- What challenges have affected the Zimbabwe tourism sector and what measures were put in place to counter them?
- What is the best strategy Zimbabwe tourism players can use in the destination branding and image building exercise?
- What role does digital marketing play in today’s tourism industry?

1.5 PROPOSITION
Digital marketing enhances a destination’s branding appeal.

1.6 RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

- All respondents gave authentic and reliable information on the information sought.
- The sample used was representative
- The instruments used in the study had validity and reliability
- All protocol was observed and the researcher had access to all records relevant for the study

1.7 JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH

The internet has revolutionized communication in the tourism industry. According to Griffith (2013), technology is playing an increasingly important role in the tourism industry. Within the past 10 years, the number of worldwide internet users has more than tripled. The number of internet users in 2018 was 4.021 billion, up by 7 percent year-on-year (wearesocial.com). This new landscape has radically altered the way tourism business is conducted. A new marketplace is evolving that is at once more accessible to the consumer and more competitive for the supplier. Review of the current literature revealed that previous studies have examined the role of information technology in tourism, but still there is a lack of study to reveal how effective digital marketing is in promoting a destination. The study seeks to establish the applicability of the concept in developing countries, and is also looking at the digital marketing concept in its wholesome.

1.8 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of using digital marketing as a destination
branding strategy, a Zimbabwe tourism players’ perspective.

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE/IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The knowledge of the effectiveness of using digital marketing as a destination branding strategy goes a long way in helping all interested parties on the necessary interventions. This study will be of significance to the following:

1.9.1. The Ministry of Environment, Tourism and Hospitality Industry / Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA)

Following the paradigm shift in tourists’ preference and the intensified competition among destinations for markets, investments, business as well as tourists, globalisation has brought, destinations have to shape a positive image and differentiate themselves. By gaining an understanding of the breadth and depth of the opportunities and potential benefits from investing in digital marketing, the Ministry and ZTA can become equipped with a powerful instrument for destination transformation.

The findings of this study will also contribute in the development of appropriate marketing strategies to better the image of Zimbabwe as a destination. It will also assist policy makers in considering whether there is need to avail more resources for the development of digital marketing. Responses from the respondents will help the ZTA to strategise its policies in line with the desires of the lead Ministry. Hopes are also that the study will help assist policy makers come up with necessary interventions and implement them accordingly in order to better the image of Zimbabwe as a destination.

1.9.2. Institutions of higher learning and the academia

This study seeks to help students and academic boards to understand the relationship between digital marketing and destination branding in the tourism sector. It also seeks to equip other students doing research on digital marketing and destination branding. The study will be of value through theoretical addition to existing knowledge on the effectiveness of using digital marketing as a means of improving a destination’s image. It will also assist students with an interest in this area with an insight for future research into the link between digital marketing, travelling fans' host country experience and a destination’s image.
1.9.3. Organisations in the Zimbabwe tourism and hospitality sector

It will assist the organisations to appreciate the benefits of the destination branding exercise that the nation is going through, and how best they can also chip in as a sector. It will also give insights on the importance of digital marketing and the role they have to play. Hopes are that the findings of this study will give an insight to the organisations in the tourism sector on what best needs to be done from their side to compliment the efforts of rebranding that is on-going, and how they can leverage on digital marking.

1.9.4. Marketers and Marketing organisations

This study hopes to equip marketers understand the effects of digital marketing on a destination’s image. This investigation also intends to give insights to marketers to come up with improved and effective marketing strategies for reaching the target clientele.

1.9.5. The researcher

The study helped the researcher to acquire and develop essential research skills. The research process was an enlightening experience to the researcher as it accorded the researcher an opportunity to appreciate the research process. It was also a good chance to apply theoretical concepts in to practical situations. It was also of benefit to the researcher in that it is in partial fulfillment to acquire the Master in Business Leadership.

1.10 DELIMITATIONS

The research study precisely focused on tourism players organisations with representation in Harare or Victoria Falls. The study focused on the opinions of officials from the Ministry of Environment, Tourism & Hospitality Industry, ZTA, Zimparks, Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe, management and staff of tourism players on the effectiveness of using digital marketing as a destination branding strategy. Management and staff from the tourism players are the target population, and were used because they are responsible for both destination marketing and digital marketing. Questionnaires and interviews were used for gathering data from 100 respondents. The study precisely focused on the effectiveness of using digital marketing as a destination branding strategy in the Zimbabwe tourism sector.
1.11 LIMITATIONS

The researcher encountered a couple of challenges during the process of trying to put together the research. Challenges encountered included:

- Some respondents felt that the information being sought was a bit sensitive hence some participants were not reluctant to express themselves and divulge information about the organisation. The researcher assured the respondents that proper ethical guidelines will be used and all information gathered will be treated with privacy and confidentiality.

- It was possible that some respondents can exaggerate, or give false and inadequate information. In order to obtain reliable information, the researcher tried to convince the participants that the information being sought is of great importance and will in the long run benefit them, their organisation, the tourism sector and the nation at large.

- In obtaining the information, the ideal situation was to interview every member of the target group and come up with a specific sample. However, this was not possible for the researcher because of the sheer size of the task, cost and time involved. As a result the researcher used purposive and snowball sampling, and only used participants resident in Harare.

- Some respondents might not have taken the study seriously and therefore could have possibly give incorrect information. The researcher made follow ups to make sure that all questions are understood and were answered properly. In addition, the researcher also made sure that the participants are informed on the purpose and the significance of the study.

1. 12 DEFINITION OF TERMS

**MICE** - The MICE industry, which refers to Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions, is one of the major sectors within the global tourism industry, which is growing and maturing at a rapid rate. The global tourism industry can be divided between leisure tourism and business tourism. MICE looks mostly at the business component of tourism.

**Mega event** – A mega event is ‘a one-time or infrequently occurring event of limited duration that provides the consumer with a leisure and social opportunity beyond everyday experience. Such
events, which attract, or have the potential to attract tourists, are often held to raise the profile, image, or awareness of a region’.

**Travel advisories** – these are restrictions a country gives to its citizens for entry into certain countries. There are sometimes referred to as travel bans.

**Destination branding** – A set of marketing activities that support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and that reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk. Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice.

**Brand image** - is the “set of beliefs held about a particular brand”. It is the consumer’s perception of the brand.

**Digital marketing** – It is the marketing of products or services using digital channels to reach consumers. The key objective is to promote brands through various forms of digital media. It extends beyond internet marketing to include channels that do not require the use of the internet. It includes mobile phones (both SMS and MMS), social media marketing, display advertising, search engine marketing, and any other form of digital media.

### 1.13 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The study is comprised of five chapters. This chapter looked at the background to the research, statement of the problem, research objectives, limitations and delimitations. The second chapter discusses the literature review on destination branding and digital marketing. The chapter also gives an overview of the study area, tourism sector performance overview. In the third chapter, the methodology is presented. The chapter explains the sampling procedure, data collection procedure and the variables considered. It further clarifies on the method of data analysis, pointing out the reasons for choosing such analytical methods. In the fourth chapter, data collected will be presented and analysed. Finally, chapter five presents the summaries, conclusions and recommendations. It is important to appreciate that the five chapters cannot be considered separately.
1.14 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the introduction of the study, which also provided an overall view of the research. It gave an outline of the background of the study which outlined the events that lead to the problem under study. A statement of the problem was also presented to highlight the focus of the study. In order to achieve the stated objectives, several research questions were posed. Significance of the study followed, to give an insight on why the study must be done and how significant the research is to stakeholders. Delimitations and limitations of the study were also highlighted, so as to highlight boundaries and probable short comings of the study. The next chapter deals with the literature review.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the theoretical and empirical literature review. It introduces fundamental issues as well as empirical and theoretical arguments surrounding the research topic in existing literature. The aim is to familiarise the researcher with converging and diverging issues from authoritative sources on the topic. A review of relevant articles, books and journals form the cornerstone of this chapter. It outlines the theoretical framework on destination branding and digital marketing, providing a link between existing knowledge and the problem under study. Specific attention will be paid to contributions by various authors on the concept of destination branding, destination competitiveness, destination marketing and digital marketing. The theoretical basis discussed has also made a huge contribution to the design of the study as well as show knowledge gaps.

2.1 TOURISM SECTOR PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

The tourism industry has continued to expand and diversify over the past sixty years, becoming one of the biggest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world despite the financial crisis. In addition, it is a primary source for employment and generation of foreign exchange. Since 1950 the international tourism industry has grown exponentially and is now widely recognized as the world’s largest and most diverse industry (Rogers, 2003). The tourism industry plays an important role in international commerce, with its revenue supporting the economies of several developed and developing countries (Bierzynski, 2011). It is undeniably an important and profitable investment that countries around the world are starting to realize.

Tourism, as defined by the World Tourism Organization, is the “activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one year for leisure, business and other purposes” (Middleton, et al., 2009:3). One of the chief reasons why governments support and promote tourism throughout the world is that it has a positive impact upon economic growth and development. It generates employment and income, leads to a positive
tourism balance of payments, stimulates the supplying sectors of tourism, and leads to a general increased level of economic activity in the country. This has contributed to the continued growth and development of the industry.

As the industry grows so too does the competition between destination countries, as they compete to attract potential visitors. This competition has resulted in destinations rethinking their tourism promotion strategies. To survive the competition, destinations have had to analyse not just the experiences they offer, but ways in which these experiences would make them stand out.

2.1.1 Global Overview

Globally, tourism plays a leading role in driving economic growth. As one of the world’s largest economic sectors, travel & tourism creates jobs, drives exports, and generates prosperity across the world, accounting for 10.4% of global GDP and 313 million jobs, or 9.9% of total employment, in 2017 (WTTC Travel & Tourism Economic Impact, 2018: 4). Most developed countries have accumulated a great deal of their wealth from tourism while least developed countries are looking up to tourism development to play a meaningful role in economic development.

Growing its contribution to the world for the seventh consecutive year, the travel & tourism sector outperformed the global economy, and in 2017 was the fastest growing broad economic sector globally, showing stronger growth than all sectors including manufacturing (4.2%), retail and wholesale (3.4%), agriculture, forestry and fisheries (2.6%) and financial services (2.5%)(www.treadright.org). Forecasts for 2018 suggest that growth will continue, albeit at a slower rate than in 2017 as a result of higher oil prices. According to the WTTC Travel & Tourism Global Economic Impact & Issues (2018:9) travel & tourism forecasts over the next ten years also look extremely favourable, with predicted growth rates of over 4 percent annually, which continues to be higher than growth rates in other sectors. Furthermore, the sector is expected to outperform the global economy throughout the forecast period and increase its share of global economic activity across each of GDP, employment, exports and investment. The growth in the number of middle income ‘new travelling’ households, who are willing and more able than ever to travel both within and beyond their boarders, will be a major underpinning driver of travel & tourism growth. Capitalising on the opportunities for this travel & tourism growth will require destinations and regional authorities, particularly those in emerging markets, to create favourable business climates.
for investment in the infrastructure and human resources support, necessary to facilitate a successful and sustainable tourism sector. The sustained demand for travel & tourism, together with its ability to generate high levels of employment continues to prove the importance and value of the sector as a tool for economic development and job creation (WTTC Travel & Tourism Economic Impact, 2018). The long-term outlook to 2028 remains unchanged, with average growth of 3.8% per year over the next decade.

2.1.2 Regional Overview

Regionally, tourism has been a central sector, particularly in Africa, where it accounts for an increasing number of jobs, community development projects, as well as investment and export earnings. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) Tourism Highlights 2018, in 2017 international tourist arrivals in Africa are estimated to have increased by 9% and receipts at the same level (+8%). Results were driven by the continued recovery in North Africa and the solid growth in most destinations that reported data. Growing demand from European source markets and a more stable environment contributed to the sub-region’s positive results.

In 2017 Africa received about 5 percent of tourists in the world, translating to US$37 billion (UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2018). Okharedia (2017) adds that the need to promote tourism in developing economies remains a key priority. Unfortunately much has been said but very little has been done in promoting tourism in developing economies, Africa included. Tourism in Africa continues to be affected by; poverty and the pervasive inability of government to act on any policy it has promulgated; terrorism; structural imbalances, and the cultural clash over tourism in respect of different cultural behaviour. To add, Sharpley (2009) asserts that a number of factors have undermined tourism development in many African regions. These factors include poor infrastructure, such as roads, electricity and water supplies; insufficient accommodation; unsatisfactory public health services; poor telecommunication facilities, and in a number of cases security problems. Furthermore, delays in applying more efficient management systems and the persistence of practices that impede their competitiveness have also contributed to slow development of the tourism industry. This is particularly evident in the pricing of tourism services and inability to set up sound financial systems. The above-mentioned hamper tourism prospects in
most African countries and continues to dampen prospects for its growth. The development and maintenance of requisite tourism infrastructure such as robust transport systems, information communication technologies, among other key enablers of tourism remain a key priority which most African destinations need to consider.

2.1.3 Country Overview

Like most Southern African countries, Zimbabwe regards tourism as an integral part of its economic development (National Tourism Policy, 2012). The tourism industry makes a significant contribution to the Zimbabwean economy and the government has recognised the sector’s importance by elevating the tourism portfolio as one of the four pillars of Zimbabwe’s economy, alongside Agriculture, Mining and Manufacturing, contributing immensely to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the nation. According to Turner and Mitchan (2018), in 2017, tourism contributed US$1,199.8 million translating to 7.1 percent to the GDP, supporting 69,000 jobs, which is 1.7 percent of the total employment.

Zimbabwe as a destination has much to offer, drawing visitors from afar, as well as within our shores, to enjoy the diversity of our tourism experiences that ranges from our pristine wildlife to our iconic cultural and historical sites. With a fairly developed tourism infrastructure and an abundant array of tourist facilities in place, Zimbabwe's competitive advantage in tourism clearly lies in its authentic natural resources and a number of man-made prime tourism attractions such as Victoria Falls, Great Zimbabwe, Kariba, Matopos and the Eastern Highlands, among others. However, new investment and reinvestments in tourism infrastructure and superstructure are necessary to spruce up the standards of facilities which have suffered over the years. With the projected increase in tourist arrivals, there is need for more investments in accommodation and conference facilities in major cities and resorts. Despite the significant growth experienced in tourism over the last two decades, the sector continues to face a number of challenges which need to be addressed for the sector to achieve its full potential. Okharedia (2017) adds that the need to promote tourism in developing economies remains a key priority. Zimbabwe like most African destinations is not spared of challenges belittling tourism performance in Africa. The key challenges facing the sector are; inadequate skilled human resources worsened by skills flight over the past 10 years; dilapidated tourism facilities in dire need of refurbishment; few direct flights to
and from major tourism source markets, and flights for intra-connectivity; tourism remains inadequately resourced and funded. This has been compounded by the unavailability of long term loans due to liquidity challenges facing the country, and negative perceptions in the source markets.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of destination management has gained increasing attention as a means of enhancing a destination’s competitiveness. Destination branding is widely recognised as an effective strategy to enhance a destination’s competitive advantage. In a highly competitive market, destinations have to shape a positive image and differentiate themselves. Tourism marketing is essential for destinations and products to distinguish themselves from competitors and encourage visitation. Destination branding has become widely recognised as an effective strategy to enhance a destination’s competitive advantage. In a highly competitive market, destinations have to shape a positive image and differentiate themselves. As a result, most destinations are opting to use digital marketing as a way to counter the intense competition, as well as a way to create destination image and awareness. Without a distinguished brand identity it is difficult to stand out as a destination. Country image, destination image, country of origin image and product image are some of the main concepts regarding image from the marketing perspective and those concepts are connected, closely related and they affect each other, directly and/or indirectly (Gibson, Qi, and Zhang, 2008). Places depend on their reputations for almost everything in the modern world: tourism, foreign investment, the respect and interest of the international media, attracting talented immigrants and students, cultural exchanges, engaging peacefully and productively with the governments of other places. Due to the intense competition for destination visitorship, destinations have been called to come up with radical innovations in destination marketing. Destinations need to invest in programs which will fish them out among many other similar destinations.

As a result, most destinations are investing in digital marketing as a way to counter the intense competition, as well as a way to create destination image and awareness. The rise of digital technologies has transformed digital marketing. Modern marketers are facing a constant proliferation of social media channels, the growing power of the connected customer, and an
explosion of new digital tools, making it essential for the marketers to possess a certain understanding level of digital marketing paradigm.

The existence of united groups of online consumers interacting has shifted knowledge and power from marketers to consumers. In support, Kavoura and Stavrianea (2015) add that the more online consumption members communicate with one another through the internet, the bolder they feel about challenging marketers and marketing claims. Scott (2009) realized that the ‘old rules’ of marketing were ineffective in a web 2.0 world. As a result marketers have to work harder as consumers now control their media content. Research shows that there is a growing proclivity among web users to tune out ‘corporate speak’ (Kavoura, 2014). Kumar, Kumar and Mishra (2015) note that, unlike in the old days, internet is no longer just a static page, but a dynamic platform which allows consumers to independently generate their own content, share with other users and pass on their own experience. Marketers also need to realize that online consumers are much more ‘active, participative, resistant, activist, loquacious, social and communitarian.’ (Wang and Kim, 2017). Traditional marketing for tourism brands focused primarily on print, television, radio and billboard with tour operators and travel agents serving as gatekeepers between destination brands and potential travelers. The increased accessibility of digital marketing has provided an alternative cost efficient way for tourism businesses and destinations to reach the consumer. When used effectively, digital marketing can supplement traditional efforts to reach target markets.

**Table 2.1 Destination Branding Framework/Model and Components considered by past studies.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors (Year)</th>
<th>Framework (Model)</th>
<th>Components covered (Past studies)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Porter (1990)</td>
<td>Diamond model</td>
<td>Destination competitive advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaker (1991)</td>
<td>Equity framework</td>
<td>Brand equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghemawat (2001)</td>
<td>CAGE model</td>
<td>Destination image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cai (2002)</td>
<td>Destination branding</td>
<td>Brand identity and brand image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laws (2002)</td>
<td>Destination branding model</td>
<td>Market audit, track and review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaplanidou &amp; Vogt (2003)</td>
<td>Destination branding model</td>
<td>Brand identity, image, brand, culture, brand soul, personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giannopoulos, Piha, &amp;</td>
<td>Destination brand model</td>
<td>Management and destination brand maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avlonitis (2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qu, Kim, &amp; Im (2011)</td>
<td>A model of destination</td>
<td>Brand associations behavioural intention and destination image</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2.1 Destination Branding

In recent years, marketers have coined the term ‘Nation Branding’ as an attempt to position countries in a new light, in order to attract perceived financial investments from abroad, revitalize local economies and of course, create economic opportunities for the advertising industry. According to Blain, Levy and Ritchie (2005) destination branding is a set of marketing activities which: (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word, mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; (3) serves to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination and that (4) reduces consumer search costs and perceived risk. Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice.

From the above definition it is clear that the process of developing an effective destination brand is complex and requires all aspects of brand management to be considered. Five phases have been recognized in destination brand building. The first phase involves market investigation, analysis and strategic recommendations. During this phase the core values of the destination and its brand must be established, and they should be relevant, durable, communicable and salient (Morgan et al., 2010:68). The second phase is brand identity. According to the authors, “once the brand’s core values have been established, they should underpin and imbue every component of the brand identity, from photography, colour, typography and tone of voice to the brand marquee, so that the brand values are cohesively communicated” (ibid). Phase three is brand launch and introduction, which is communicating the vision (ibid). The fourth phase is brand implementation where every step taken through any form of media contributes to maintaining the brand presence, and the fifth phase is monitoring, evaluation and review (ibid).
According to Hankinson (2009) the marketing of places and in particular, the practice of place branding has grown significantly over the last quarter century. Many cities, regions and countries are now actively marketing themselves using techniques normally associated with the creation of classical product brands. This phenomenon has manifested itself in several ways with varying degrees of success. It is worth to note that tourism brands are more than logos and taglines. They are the composite sentiment that others feel about a destination or a place. Most people form opinions of a place or product based on what they’ve seen on TV or heard from a friend (Pike, 2009). While it is impossible to completely control a brand, it is possible to positively influence it. It is developed over a long period of time by creating positive associations between the destination or company’s best assets—tangible and intangible—and the potential traveler. Key tourism brand components are:

- **Brand Promise**: A simple statement that guides all marketing messages.
- **Brand Values**: Intangible, unique qualities or selling points that distinguish the brand from competitors.
- **Brand Messages**: Key stories to be communicated to the audience.
- **Brand Identity**: The visual elements of the brand, including the colors, design, logo type and name.

A brand strategy is a long-term plan to strengthen positive associations around a select set of images, colors, phrases and emotions. This strategy provides the structure for all marketing activities, ensuring that the messaging and methodologies employed to attract visitors are consistent. Consistency reinforces, enhances, and strengthens the brand in the long term. Destinations need to invest and reinforce these associations for destinations to stand out among others.

As a concept, destination branding is still relatively new in terms of research and application of the framework, but as Anholt (2007) suggests, tourism promotion has long been an element in the Competitive Identity Framework. As seen in the *Hexagon of Competitive Identity*, Tourism is a key component in the development of a competitive identity strategy. The tourism industry is an avenue through which a country can build its national reputation since the stakeholders in the industry are able to brand the country directly. Tourism is also one of the reasons why a country would see the need to develop a nation branding or competitive identity strategy. According to
Anholt (2007:19) a country’s need to stand out amongst tourism competitors is maximized by the “falling cost of international travel, the rising spending power of a growing international middle class and its constant search for new experiences compels more and more places to market themselves as the must visit tourist destinations.”

The concept of destination management has gained increasing attention as a means of enhancing a destination’s competitiveness. Destination branding is widely recognised as an effective strategy to enhance a destination’s competitive advantage. In a highly competitive market, destinations have to shape a positive image and differentiate themselves. As a result, most destinations are investing in digital marketing as a way to counter the intense competition, as well as a way to create destination image and awareness. According to Tsai, Song and Wong (2009) the competitiveness of industry and firms has been one of the most important themes of research in the fields of economics and business studies. Although the concept of competitiveness of nations was initially proposed by economists like Porter, the term has also gained importance as a subject of study among management scholars during the last decade. As the tourism and hotel industry continues to prosper in the global economy, competition becomes fiercer. Possessing competitive advantages becomes a key to success. Destinations that have successfully implemented branding strategies understand the ways destination branding can “help bridge any gaps between a destination’s strengths and potential visitors’ perceptions” (Morgan et al., 2010:65).

According to Kavaratzis (2009), a destination can be a country, region, city, hotel, an event or an attraction. The branding of a country has implications that go way beyond tourism and the revenues that the tourism industry brings in. There is a need to encompass beliefs that can be both rational and emotional if a destination is to draw visitors. Many factors will go into the creation of these beliefs. It affects political attitudes, commerce, as well as financial investments. A tourist’s perception of any country will be coloured by his own personal experience if he has been there before, by what other people say and what the media have to say about that destination. It is also affected by how the country chooses to present itself, the only thing that the country has total control over. As a result, branding a country can be complex and multi-layered (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005).

This competition in itself is nothing new, however, the acceptance of this phenomenon and the consequent launch of organisations and mechanisms endeavouring to foster the competitiveness
of territories is (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005). This competition of cities and nations around the favour of the tourists and investors is a long-known phenomenon. The best way to foster this competitiveness of a territory is to create a powerful brand reflecting the identity of the territory in a way that is appealing to potential consumers and channels the countless, albeit disperse, promotion efforts are made by public and private bodies. Kavaratzis and Ashworth, (2005) postulate that nowadays it is clear that marketing and branding have become activities which, aside from being common, are vital for cities, regions and countries world over. Nowadays destinations are fighting for increasingly discerning tourists in search of the impressive and interesting places to visit and as such, it was inevitable for Zimbabwe to rebrand (Mirimi et al., 2014). Successful branding exercises have frequently resulted in increased sales, more tourists, more hotel bookings, more conventions and greater spending (Tan, 2008).

According to Morgan et al., (2010), destination branding provides the framework for the differentiation that destinations seek. In the same way that strong consumer product brands can influence behavior and perceptions, and create expectations of quality, so too can a positive destination brand establish the destination as a place worth visiting. The tourism promotional material of a destination must not just list the available activities but capture the essence of the destination as well. Creation of the destination branding strategy and product development are not the only ways that stakeholders can be involved in the development and promotion of the destination brand. Everyone who comes in contact with the visitors is part of the strategy to make the brand promise a reality. The citizens of the destination, from the bus drivers and hotel employees to the friendly person on the street offering directions are just as important and have an impact on the destination brand image as the attractions and activities that are promoted as part of the destination brand (Freire, 2007).

Morgan et al., (2010) argue that since tourists are increasingly seeking lifestyle fulfillment and experience as opposed to seeing differentiation in the more tangible elements of the destination product such as accommodation and attractions, understanding this is of paramount importance because it provides an insight into what the destination as a brand should take cognizance of. The ultimate goal of any destination must be to ensure that visitors’ experiences of that place – from the time when they are first exposed to its online and offline marketing communications to when they return home – is a positive one that encourages repeat visits and creates enthused ambassadors
for the destination (ibid). In order to achieve this, the brand promise has to be prominent through all forms of communication whether online, in print or in person. However, a challenge often encountered by destinations is bringing life to the destination brand so that visitors experience the promoted brand values and feel the authenticity of a unique place (Morgan and Pritchard, 2007). In order for a destination brand to be successful, Hankinson (2009:111) argues that, “destination brands must go beyond the communication of an image and make the brand promise a reality”. To do this the destination must maintain a “competitive advantage in its delivery of a quality visitor experience” (Kumar, Kumar and Mishra, 2015). This underscores the importance of stakeholder involvement to invest in the destination’s physical environment, such as buildings, infrastructure and the overall tourism product.

2.2.1.1 Destination Competitiveness

People now live in a global village, hence places compete for visitors. In order for a place to be transformed to a place destination, the creation of branding is required, for example, visiting a place for its world famous wines or its architecture, thus, creating a tourist identity. This identity is also called ‘competitive brand’ and is based on the elements of the place identity (Anholt in Dinnie, 2008). The issue of competitiveness of tourism destinations has become increasingly important, particularly for countries and regions that rely heavily on tourism (Ndlovu and Heath, 2013). Kavoura (2013) denotes that destinations need to safeguard their sustainability, to raise the numbers of visitors and to have economic viability, promoting the resources they have while implementing their policies in order to communicate their messages to the related target groups.

Morrison (2010) argues that tourism destinations world over need to appreciate the importance of their brand as the source of their international competitiveness. Competitiveness is increasingly being seen as a critical influence on the performance of any tourist destination in an increasingly competitive global market (Enright and Newton, 2005). According to Tsai, Song and Wong (2009) a destination may be considered competitive if it can attract and satisfy potential tourists. Not only does the competitiveness of a destination directly affect tourism receipts in terms of visitor numbers and expenditures, but also it indirectly influences the tourism-related businesses, such as the hotel and retail industries in that destination, to a certain extent.

According to Parvez et al., (2018) destinations need to understand why people buy holiday packages; what influences them to buy these packages (their motivation); who the customers are
(such as market segments); and where they come from. In addition, Kavoura and Stavrianea (2015) postulates that the modern consumers are more sophisticated, demanding and knowledgeable, and due to the fact that they are more and more familiar with emergent technologies, they require specialized, flexible, accessible and interactive products and effective communication. As a result, tourism firms need to implement innovative methods to become more competitive.

Tourism destination competitiveness, in particular, has become an area of growing research interest among tourism scholars as evidenced by the works of Hassan, (2000); d’Haeser, (2000), Faulkner, Oppermann, and Fredline, (1999); Crouch and Ritchie, (1999); and Chon and Mayer, (1995). Destination competitiveness has “... tremendous ramifications for the tourism industry and is therefore of considerable interest to practitioners and policy makers” (Ritchie and Crouch, 2000:6). This perspective was further buttressed by Dwyer et al., (2000:10) who state that it is “...useful for the industry and government to understand where a country’s competitive position is weakest and strongest...”. Pearce’s study (1997) summarised that tourism destination’s capabilities and shortcomings will become crucial given that tourism worldwide is becoming increasingly competitive.

2.2.1.2 Economic impacts of Tourism on a Destination

Tourism contributes to the economies of many countries in a number of ways. George (2007) argues that it is generally difficult to measure in exact terms the extent to which tourists’ consumption of local goods and services supports domestic activities, but one thing for certain is that it contributes. George (2007) adds that, tourists contribute by paying for their accommodation in hotels, going on safaris, eating in restaurants, buying curios, paying for their travelling, visiting attractions and even participating in recreational and adventure activities. An example of direct revenue is the levies paid by tourists, such as departure taxes, while indirect revenue could include the taxes levied on the income generated by businesses from tourists (Ndlovu and Heath, 2013). Therefore, virtually all the activities in which tourists participate have an impact on the economy, either directly or indirectly. The impact can be either positive or negative. The positive impacts of tourism may be manifested in the form of employment creation or maintenance of jobs (directly or indirectly), payment of taxes to the local and regional governments and generation of income for the local businesses that are service providers (Wang et al., 2012). In addition, George (2007), asserts that the growth in tourism does not only have a positive impact on the tourism industry, but
also influences many other sectors of the economy like infrastructural development, improvement on transport networks and superstructure and could even improve the general quality of life of the local residents.

Due to the fact that tourism is an enabler driven industry, it can result in job creation across various other industries. Successful destination branding and marketing has also been considered to be a tool with which to target unemployment and create employment. As the number of tourists increases, the labour force also increases, thereby increasing the propensity to generate more employment than in other sectors. According to Li (2005), tourism has a threefold expansionary effect on employment, namely:

- Because it is a labour-intensive sector, it does not require highly professionalised skills. Tourism provides a large number of jobs for unskilled persons who would probably not find other appropriate employment.

- Tourism relies heavily on the supply and co-operation of many other related fields such as agriculture, the food industry and banking. Therefore, all these sectors could be stimulated by the ripple effect of an increase in the number of tourists who arrive and the money that they spend.

- On a macro-economic level, the investment that is stimulated by the demands made by the expanding tourism sector and the tourist-related sectors increases the gross domestic product and stimulates the creation of new jobs.

The permeating influence of tourism is explored in greater detail by Lickorish & Jenkins (1997) who identify the following economic benefits of tourism:

- Generation of income for the local economy.

- Creation of employment opportunities.

- It can lead to an improvement in the country’s Balance of Payments (BOP).

- Encourages entrepreneurial activity.
2.2.2 Digital Marketing

A number of definitions have been put across to explain the meaning of digital marketing. Chaffey (2013) defines digital marketing as the process of building and maintaining customer relationships through digital technologies such as the web, e-mail, databases, social networks and mobile application platforms, to facilitate the exchange of ideas, products, and services that satisfy the goals of both parties. The application of the digital tools in combination with traditional communication between industry and customers to accomplish marketing goals of the company is known as digital marketing (Chaffey and Chandwick, 2012). Furthermore, Stokes (2013) argues that digital marketing is the marketing of products, brands or experience via one or more forms of electronic media such as personal computers or smartphones to engage with stakeholders. Digital marketing, also known as online marketing and e-marketing, is the process of communicating, promoting and selling products and services on the internet (Armstrong & Kotler 2009). On another note, Ward (2016) argues that digital marketing can also be referred to as internet marketing, web marketing, internet marketing or e-Marketing, and is an all-inclusive term for marketing products and/or services online. It is the promotion of products or brands via one or more forms of electronic media, and it differs from traditional marketing in that it uses channels and methods that enable an organization to analyze marketing campaigns and understand what is working and what isn’t – typically in real time (Faulkner, 2013).

From the above definitions, digital marketing in premised on the following; access platforms or hardware which include PCs, mobile phones and interactive digital TV and these deliver content and enable interaction through different online communication tools such as organisation websites, portals, search engines, blogs, e-mail, instant messaging and text messaging. Secondly, it should not be the technology that drives digital marketing, but the business returns from gaining new customers and maintaining relationships with existing customers. Digital marketing does not occur in isolation, but is most effective when it is integrated with other communications channels such as phones, direct mail or face-to-face. The role of the internet in supporting multi-channel marketing is another important element in supporting different customer communications channels and distribution channels. Digital marketing can be understood as a well-targeted, conversion-oriented, quantifiable, and interactive marketing of products or services by utilizing digital innovation to acquire the customers, and transform them into clients in a sustainable fashion.
(Parvez et al., 2018). The whole concept and functionalities of digital marketing are more competent, effective, result-oriented and measurable, which makes it very different from traditional marketing.

Digital marketing is changing the way society consumes and contributes to the creation of information. The modern society is way too much different from what we could see twenty, ten or even five years ago. We live in an age of global era where we must understand the fact of broader and deeper communication. Gradually internet has become the most important source of communication for most people. Today network, mobile services and communication apps are available for us everywhere in the world. Kaur (2017) asserts that it has become one of the key focus areas for businesses world over and as well an indispensable part of every business irrespective of its size and type. The increasing role of digital marketing has affected the way businesses promote their offerings to existing as well as new customers. The need for digital marketing has been felt like never before in the tourism industry wherein customers have instant access to all kinds of information on the latest offers and best prices. Furthermore, Kaur (2017) asserts that today digital marketing plays a critical role in the success of each business which exists in the tourism industry.

The possibilities of digital marketing are considerably endless. Kavoura (2014) describes digital marketing as a fast and low cost way for a businesses to reach its public either for the promotion of brands or the promotion of products and services. Whereas traditional marketing involves collecting data through the process of market research and then analyzing the same to help understand the audiences better, the digital nature of the internet technology provides a comprehensive and detailed insight into the characteristics of consumers and their behaviour in the electronic environment (Batinić, 2015). Every campaign launched digitally can be tracked in terms of its reach, engagement and conversion. Resultantly, this information has transformed the way business decisions are being made. The impact of each and every marketing initiative can be studied in real-time along with being customized for each and every customer. This has given a whole new meaning to the marketing research exercise, helping to understand the needs of the customers like never before. Thus, the need to include digital marketing in the overall marketing strategy of the business will contribute to the better achievement of the overall marketing and
business goals by enabling brands to gain insights about consumer behaviour and better satisfy their needs.

**Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework for the effects of Digital Marketing as a destination branding strategy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Effects</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobile marketing</td>
<td>Destination Brand (Image)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Marketing</td>
<td>Destination Management</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Email Marketing</td>
<td>Destination Brand Equity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Search Engine Optimisation</td>
<td>Destination Reputation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Media Marketing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Website/ Online Marketing</td>
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**2.2.2.1 Characteristics of a Successful Digital Marketing Campaign**

Post understanding what digital marketing is all about, it is also important to understand the top characteristics of a successful digital marketing campaigns (Kaur, 2017):
2.2.2.1 Quality Website

A quality website today is a prerequisite before establishing a business online. It does not only help a business to transcend geographical boundaries to reach newer prospects, but it also works as a digital destination where one’s audiences can access it 24x7. They work as digital destinations for the audiences wherein a business can define their brand’s experience. Destinations should develop attractive websites, find a way to attract customers to visit the website, keep them there for a while and make them frequently come back to their website (Kotler et al, 2010).

It should have all the relevant information and clearly listed services that the destination offers (Kaur, 2017). High-resolution images of various services being offered like hotel rooms and spa will also aid in the making of an informed decision by the consumers. A good website must be built in a way that allows the users to make a purchase without the need of any kind of assistance. Regular updates which keeps customers informed in view of the changing customers’ needs, interests and preferences, with a clear option for deals/packages to avoid an increase in the bounce rate will be an advantage. It reflects the quality the business stands for and thus it should be developed and maintained keeping in mind the functionality of the industry.

2.2.2.1.2 Strong Social Media presence

According to Kaur (2017) social media is a new marketing tool that allows one to know their customers and prospects in ways that were previously not possible. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and WhatsApp enable businesses to reach out and talk directly to their users. Presence on these platforms not only helps brands to establish credibility, improve customer services but also assist in appreciating insights on what your customers are up to (Chaffey and Chandwick, 2012). Presence on these platforms is not just about promoting the latest packages and facilities, it is much more than that. Focusing on posting content which adds value to the audiences’ lives will help improve the engagement rate. A destination shouldn’t consider all these platforms as one, instead each of them comes with its own set of USPs. However, Facebook and Instagram should be the top two platforms for a tourism business.

2.2.2.1.3 Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

In addition, Kaur (2017) notes that SEO is an integral part of digital marketing today. It plays a very important role in determining the website traffic. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is adopted as the practice of optimizing a website in order to rank higher on the search engine results
pages. Strokes (2013) postulates that, SEO involves working with the parameters set by search engines to ensure that search engines index it when people enter a search term that is relevant for a product. The online ranking of a business on various search engines determines the online popularity and helps increase website visits. There is a lot of misconception that SEO efforts would lead to immediate results. It is important to understand that SEO is an ongoing process and takes time to show results. Businesses need to ensure that a dedicated team works on ensuring that both on-page and off-page SEO initiatives are undertaken. The focus should be on creating quality backlinks rather than just increasing their numbers. Parvez, *et al.*, (2018) denotes that search engine marketing is the most important thing in the hotel industry, as it leads to the development of many new business offer on the website.

### 2.2.2.1.4 Email Marketing

E-mail Marketing isn’t all about bombarding the inbox of your audiences with emails. It creates the opportunity to offer any potential interested guest to arrive at the right time at the minimum cost, and the results of such activities must be measurable, which creates a basis for decisions on future marketing activities (Straker, Wringley and Rosemann, 2015). E-mail marketing is a form of direct marketing that uses electronic means to deliver commercial messages to an audience (Stokes, 2013). According to Kavoura and Stavrianea (2015) e-mail marketing is one of the primary ways to strengthen association with customer and relationship building with the customers after the transaction has been completed. It is an effective way to retain your customer, it saves time and paper. It needs to be planned and executed well to ensure maximum returns. Organisations should strive to customize offers and communication for various user groups based on where they lie in your business relationship cycle.

In such a volatile environment, e-mails have been one of the web tools that has best adapted to change, both in content and in scope and penetration. Therefore, e-mail marketing becomes one of the main tools in a digital strategy. At present, the e-mail is the first internet service ahead of social media (Wang and Kim, 2017). This is a communication tool used to attract new customers or make those that one already has loyal to the brand. It allows the company to communicate with the customer at personal level as well as at mass scale, proving to be one of the most powerful universally accepted digital medium according to Ryan and Jones (2012). Sending personalized
emails to users increases the chances of getting instant replies along with showing that a business cares.

2.2.2.1.5 Engaging Content

Kaur (2017) denotes that content is the essence of digital marketing. Good quality content must be engaging and value adding to the everyday lives of the audiences. Khan (2015) defines content marketing as “a marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience, with the objective of driving profitable customer action”. In addition, Kaur (2017) adds that because digital marketing platforms appeal to a variety of groups and are significantly less expensive to access than traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, television, and radio, digital marketing content can be much more adaptable and varied at a lower cost. As niche markets seek more specific information, tourism marketing requires a more customized approach. Content used across various online platforms should lead to increased engagement rates, and ultimately conversion. Businesses need to ensure that they post relevant content across various platforms at the right time. Blogging is an excellent way to engage with audiences and move beyond than just selling products. In the tourism industry, videos and infographics are an interactive content type to get noticed and engage the users.

2.2.2.1.6 Mobile-Friendly

As smartphones, tablets and other portable devices with internet access are becoming more and more popular and grabbing increasing amount of attention, it seems to be logical for small businesses to have a closer look at mobile marketing strategies which will place them in front of their competitors. According to Kaplan (2012:131), mobile marketing is specifically described as "any marketing activity conducted through an ubiquitous network to which consumers are constantly connected using a personal mobile device". Emerging numbers of smartphones users has also supported this phenomenon. Of the 6.8 billion people on the planet, about 4 billion of them own a mobile phone, most of which are smartphones (www.Hubspot). Smartphones have increasingly become the mobile device of choice among users world over. Mobile technologies have become an essential component of our daily lives, and mobile devices have altered the way people communicate and interact with one another. The increasing number of mobile device users has resulted in a growing opportunity for mobile communication and promotion (Kavoura, 2014).
Furthermore, mobile technologies have significantly influenced modern management by enhancing the effectiveness of the execution of marketing activities (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Majority of online users today access the internet on their mobile phones and this should reflect in every aspect of online marketing considerations. Over the past few years mobile marketing has opened up new opportunities for firms to communicate and engage with their target audience in a more effective way (Munar, Gyimothy and Cai, 2013). With the availability of several different MOS (Mobile Operating Systems) and the costs for designing a mobile application which can work, MOS might be expensive. Despite its costly price, mobile apps seem to be worth the investment for the benefits it brings to the business itself. Indeed, mobile apps allow the company to connect the company with on-the-go customers and thus facilitate to generate new or repeated sales. For the website, updates on social media, emails, SEO or any other aspect of digital marketing, being mobile-friendly is a prerequisite in today’s times.

2.2.3 Digital marketing and the tourism industry

Globalisation and changes of visitors’ needs and attitudes have increased the volume of information that destinations have to analyse and package in order to stay competitive in a continuously changing tourism market. Digital Marketing today has become one of the key focus areas for businesses world over. Understanding the characteristics of online marketing tactics and social media, and confronting them with efficient strategies may contribute to developing more attractive tourism products and create more innovative tourism campaigns. Parvez et al., (2018) assert that digital marketing has made a remarkable change in the marketing industry and opened new channels for selling products, like Social Media Marketing (SMM), internet and mobile applications and Search Engine Optimization (SEO), to advertising on Google and online magazines by Search Engine Marketing (SEM).

Zsarnoczky (2018) postulates that digitalization is among the most important changes in our rapidly evolving world. Digital innovations and technological novelties are engines of development and show their impact everywhere, especially in the field of manufacturing, ICT and other service industries. Given the fact that tourism is based on the cooperation between a wide range of services and products, the benefits of the digital revolution in the sector are quite obvious. Today digital marketing plays a critical role in the success of each business which exists in the tourism industry (Kaur, 2017). Nguyen and Wang (2011) add that digital marketing has become
an increasingly important means of promoting and distributing tourism services. Furthermore, Parvez et al., (2018) state that tourism is an industry that is at the forefront of internet use and online transactions. Due to its huge network connections, digital marketing has a wide audience reach globally, with non-geographic barriers and time zone constraints, allowing companies to easily reach out and target profitable niche segments (Ryan and Jones, 2012). It has taken tourism and travel booking experiences to a new level. It enables visitors to communicate not only with the destinations but also with visitors who have experienced the destination they are considering to visit. Through the use of social media, visitors can gather first-hand information from other visitors and make decisions about the destination or the experience.

Tourism today is far from being similar to what was called tourism centuries ago. Before the launch of digital marketing, the role of people who rendered these services was indispensable to the success of the business. The rapid development of the digital world brings novel and innovative solutions into the digital tourism spaces by the day (Zsarnoczky, 2018). Furthermore, Zsarnoczky, (2018) asserts that previously, tourism used to be an industry based on personal relations and connections, where the trends - and therefore travelers’ decisions - were set out by a limited number of large international tourism and travel enterprises. As a result of the digital revolution, the transparency of "hidden markets" has been revealed and numerous other factors have to be taken into account. Furthermore, (ibid) notes that peer-to-peer communication is outstandingly important in the technological environment of tourism. This type of communication, together with the spreading of smart devices have revolutionized scheduling, administration and finances, and also opened new horizons for the introduction of innovative sales and marketing technologies in the whole tourism industry. Hotels are interested in making required steps to customize their approach in guest interaction to develop a new marketing competence and it will be helpful in enhancing guest satisfaction (Wang and Kim, 2017). As a result of the digital revolution, the international development trends in tourism have opened the way for novel solutions like cloud-based booking sites or information and experience sharing via digital platforms. Users can now purchase services related to tourism online at the click of a button while comparing amongst businesses from all over the world.

Tourism is also an information-intense industry, thus it is essential to trace transformations in technologies and consumer culture influencing the distribution as well as accessibility of travel-
related information (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). The adoption of digital marketing is of paramount importance in the tourism and hospitality industry for several reasons. Firstly, many products offered in the tourism and hospitality sector are intangible, which makes it impossible to evaluate them before consumption, hence word-of-mouth plays important role here. Secondly, many of the tourism products are considered with high risk, the introduction or advices from reference groups can contribute to the decision-making process. Thirdly, there is intense competition within the tourism industry, and social media strategy might become one important competitive advantage for early adopters. However, it is important to learn how to control, not being controlled by this new powerful digital force (Wang and Kim, 2017). To add, Khan (2015) argues that research shows that a dissatisfied customer is twice more likely to give online review than satisfied customer. So, if any hospitality service provider has happier customers, its reputation can go down only by few unhappy customers, so online reputation is the gatekeeper of the business management team should take it seriously.

Chaffey (2013) clarifies that compared to traditional media like TV, post and radio, new digital media such as website and mobile commerce have significant advantages. These advantages are simplified as the “6 I’s” by McDonald and Wilson (1999):

1. **Interactivity**: This is the most important characteristic of social media, which creates two way communications between the company and customer. It helps the company to change their traditional push marketing communication technique to more effective pull marketing communication.

2. **Intelligence**: Internet provides the platform for companies to carry out marketing research and gather customer information at a very low cost. From these data, companies can easily analyze and use them to implement new marketing strategies.

3. **Individualization**: Unlike traditional media where the same message is sent to the whole population, new digital media enables companies to send tailored information to audiences according to their personal preferences.

4. **Integration**: Different methods can be used to integrate between the company and the consumers, such as E-mail, phone, mail and website.
5. **Industry restructuring**: The status of disintermediation, re-intermediation and counter-intermediation should be considered in restructuring in the first place based on the feature of e-marketing.

6. **Independence of location**: Companies are not restricted to certain locations; digital media paves a way for companies to go global.

With the above mentioned advantages, digital marketing platforms are slowly diffusing across every aspect of people’s daily life. In the tourism industry, the use of digital marketing is transforming the way of people’s travel completely. Nowadays, consumers’ decision journey has become more complicated as digital marketing has more and more impact to consumers who spend their life more on the online world. Zsarnoczky (2018) adds that in line with the new trends of travelling, there is a dynamically growing demand for special tailor-made offers beyond mass tourism, as conscious consumers expect personalized solutions that answer their individual needs. More and more tourists are using digital marketing platforms to share their tourism experiences, formulate travel plans and even develop business. Kavoura and Stavrianea (2015) assert that tourists are eager to belong to an online travel community that will allow them to share experiences and ideas with other online members. This enables new kinds of tourism interaction, which improves and extends the physical travel experience in various ways (Munar, Gyimóthy, and Cai, 2013). However, these online communities cannot be found only in social media but also in several other interactive websites that provide information required by the tourists. Statistics show that travel review websites are most influential element in the travel planning process, 69% of travelers will check travel review websites before they make a decision, 57% of people use online travel agencies, 56% use travel provider sites and 43% of people ask advices from their friends and relatives before they travel (Minazzi, 2015). All this points to the fact that digital marketing has become more and more popular among the travelers. In light of the changes of consumers’ preferences, tourism organizations need to take actions to include digital marketing in their marketing strategy, in order to communicate with consumers and enhance company’s reputation.

### 2.2.4 Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the Tourism industry.

According to Griffith (2013) technology is playing an increasingly important role in the tourism industry. Within the past ten years, global internet usage has risen exponentially giving way to a
thriveing environment of information and commerce. This new landscape has radically altered the way tourism business is conducted by increasing connectivity between consumer and supplier, while creating new opportunities for sales. According to Zsarnoczky (2018) as of today, the vast majority of tourism market stakeholders have access to detailed information on their consumers and can closely follow and track consumer behavior and its changes. Pitana and Pitanatri (2016) postulate that the revolution of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) has enabled consumers to search for destinations worldwide more easily. Furthermore, Kewsuwan (2014) denotes that the explosive growth of online marketing has changed the consumers’ purchase decision from the past. It is now possible to have access to the visual impact of the destination on the social media sites and the internet sites without necessary being physically at the destination. With the invention of ICTs, travelers have become increasingly knowledgeable and sophisticated as they can now know about a destination before arriving at the destination. The internet has redesigned the way information related to travel and tourism is distributed and the way that tourists plan their trips (Hays, Page and Buhalis, 2012). Newer avenues for reaching out to target audiences have evolved. Ivars-Baidal et al., (2017) assert that the impact of ICTs on tourism and their foreseeable future evolution seem to be shaping a new scenario for destination management. The internet and other new technologies have changed most of the industries from the service industries to the business sector on an unprecedented scale, and tourism is not an exception. Technology now allows individuals to easily contribute their thoughts, opinions and creations to the internet. Internet information is now one of the important influences to the customer decisions in many major markets (Leitie and Azevedo, 2017). ICTs enable tourists to have access to reliable information and to make reservations in a quicker and more convenient manner, consequently improving the quality of service and contributing to higher customer satisfaction (ibid). Fyall and Garrod (2005) postulate that the growth of the internet has allowed the hospitality industry to embark on various social networking sites providing an effective competitive advantage. ICTs have also gradually changed tourist’s behavior in finding information from asking travel agent’s advice to that of asking friends and peer reviews, word of mouth through social media networking websites and other sources from the internet. Due to its huge network connections, internet marketing has a wide audience reach globally, with non-geographic barriers and time zone
constraints, allowing companies to easily reach out and target profitable niche segments (Ryan and Jones, 2012). It has also been found to be an effective medium to drive the company's branding strategy. As a result, the internet and new information technologies have become a priority for both tourism enterprises and DMOs.

The tourism industry, in particular, has been disrupted as a whole with the rapid development of the internet. The rules of marketing have been redefined all over the world. For marketers, the old way of doing business is unsustainable (Edelman, 2010). Interactivity, as the main feature of the internet, has enabled a new dimension of connection between all the participants in the market (Batinić, 2015). Internet users today interact not just with each other but also with their preferred brands. This has opened an opportunity for brands to talk directly with their users and to know them better. The internet has upended how consumers engage with brands. It is transforming the economics of marketing and making obsolete many of the function’s traditional strategies and structures. The use of ICTs in the tourism industry allows destinations to contact visitors at a relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency that cannot be achieved with most traditional communication tools (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

In light of the globalized village, if destinations want to compete globally, they must be distinguishable from their competitor. Social media can help destinations to remain competitive if they present interesting content, use creativity and support and motivate interactive communication. Social media also has a growing impact on the tourism industry and changes the way tourists travel. More and more tourists, in particular the young people, take advantage of social media for their travel decision-making. They use social media platforms to find out about tourist destinations, design travel plans, share their experience and even directly communicate with the tourist sites administrators (Yang and Wang, 2015). ICT-based tourism marketing solutions have an increasingly important role in extending the brand and creating brand equity. Billions of opinions and observations are shared on online platforms. These conversations are the currency of online media and are often used as key metrics for ICT-based tourism marketing.

A digital marketing strategy operates on multiple channels, to distribute information from producer to consumer. However, the proliferation of channels and their changing use by creative marketers has made the digital ecosystem increasingly challenging, creating new barriers to successful participation for small and medium enterprises and destinations. Tourism marketers need to be
increasingly savvy in order to reach out to their target markets. In addition to the challenge of developing an effective digital presence in our rapidly evolving landscape, tourism businesses and organizations must have an ICT infrastructure that allows for quick, consistent access to the global information network. Businesses must keep pace with technology as it changes and ensure that staff has the technical capacity to manage new systems. This can place a significant burden on small and medium enterprises as well as emerging destination marketing organizations that lack capital or access to a technically skilled workforce.

2.2.5 Empirical Studies

Hays, Page and Buhalis (2012) carried a study in 2012 on Social media as a destination marketing tool: its use by National Tourism Organisations (NTOs). The aim of the study was to explore the usage of social media among the DMOs of the top 10 most visited countries by international tourists. The study used content analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine the usage and impact of social media marketing strategies and identified a framework of best practices for other NTOs to learn from. Key findings from the research were that the majority of the examined DMOs are not currently utilising social media to their full effectiveness when it comes to the ability to interact and engage with consumers. Secondly, social media is still not widely recognised and/or respected as a vital tool in marketing strategies, and thus is frequently underfunded and/or neglected. Lastly, DMOs could benefit from becoming even more innovative and creative when it comes to their social media strategies, in order to fully differentiate these efforts from traditional marketing methods.

Furthermore, Leite and Azevedo (2017) carried a research on the role of digital marketing: A perspective from Porto Hotels’ managers. The study adopted a qualitative methodology comprising of an analysis of the online presence - website, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Booking.com and TripAdvisor - of the 59 four and five star establishments of Porto. The study made use of semi-structured interviews which were conducted to managers and marketers of the 32 hotels in study. Although adopting a case-study approach, the paper provided an extensive assessment of digital marketing communication mix regarding the luxury segment of hotel industry. Moreover, the assessment was made for all units within a city scale. The findings were that digital marketing tools provide numerous benefits to the hospitality industry. However, managers still do not take advantage of their full potential. In digital marketing, the performance
indicators are always evolving. Although the data was collected at the end of 2016, the authors think that the conclusions and recommendations still are up-to-date and relevant. Also, Krebs (2004) carried a study on the effectiveness of the internet as a marketing tool in tourism. The research explored the motivation and decision making process within tourism and how the internet is used during stages of travel preparation, planning and activities. It also explored tourist preferences for novelty and familiarity in three dimensions; travel services, social contact and destination choices, and examined how these are associated with internet use. Findings indicated that novelty-seekers were found to be the most frequent group of internet users, and were also the most likely to consult a wider variety of information sources when making travel-related decisions. Results also found out that internet use for travel varies according to seasonality and destination choices rather that primary activity.

If the destination is to compete on the highly competitive global tourism market, it must be distinguishable from the competition. Destination competitiveness has “tremendous ramifications for the tourism industry and is therefore of considerable interest to practitioners and policy makers” (Ritchie and Crouch, 2000:6). This perspective was further buttressed by Dwyer et al., (2000:10) who stated that it is “…useful for the industry and government to understand where a country’s competitive position is weakest and strongest…” In addition, the findings from the Nielsen Global Survey of New Product Purchase Sentiment (2013), which surveyed more than 29,000 respondents with internet access from 58 countries about new product awareness, found out that almost sixty percent (59%) of respondents said they were much more or somewhat more likely to purchase a new product after learning about it through active internet research. Therefore, it is highly necessary for all business industries and marketers to understand the changing global online market and use these new digital marketing channels to approach and communicate to target market in the most effective way.

Siakalli, Masouras and Papademetriou (2017) also carried a research on E-marketing in the Hospitality Industry: Foundations and Strategies. The study examined the way internet marketing strategies and practices are used in the hotel industry. It explicitly investigated the level at which the traditional marketing mix model which comprises five dimensions i.e. the traditional 4P’s (Product, Place, Price, Promotion) and the Customer Relations (C) is used as an e-marketing strategy. A random sample of several hotels located in Cyprus was collected in order for a
quantitative analysis to be conducted. Even if results illustrated that the hotel industry uses the traditional 4Ps and customer relations on their e-marketing strategies, not all dimensions were equally weighted. The study revealed that hotels implement comprehensive effective marketing strategies but at the same time it underlines that they should further explore internet potentials in order to reach ultimate profitability.

Despite the significance of digital marketing in destination branding in both academia and industry, literature on its conceptual development is limited. Furthermore, most of the research that has been carried to date has focused on the western countries, with very little research done and published on digital marketing in destination branding in Africa. In addition most research solely looked at the use of social media as the basis of the study. Although digital marketing is thought to be an important contributor to a host destination's brand, the most effective means by which to leverage them in order to build that brand are poorly understood. Therefore, further research is necessary related to the effectiveness of using of digital marketing to improve a destination’s image, in its entirety. The current study aims to assess the effectiveness of using digital marketing on destination branding, which integrates the concepts of destination branding and destination image. Furthermore, this study will be done in Africa and Zimbabwe in specific, where conditions may be different from those in the developed countries.

2.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed literature from various authors and writers on the research topic. An overview of the tourism sector from a global level to the Zimbabwean context was done as a starting point. The chapter analyzed the concepts of destination branding, destination competitiveness, destination marketing and digital marketing. An analysis of the relationship of digital marketing and destination branding was also done. Studies from various authors and publications were also reviewed in order to identify the converging and diverging ideas as well as gaps which can be addressed by the research to manage a destination’s image through use of digital marketing. The information will also form the foundation of recommendations to the Zimbabwe tourism sector. The next chapter shall present the research methodologies employed in this research in gathering data and information.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter dealt with the question of what the research is trying to find out. This chapter will try to answer how the research was conducted and what data is necessary to answer the research questions. This chapter outlines how this qualitative study was executed, the research design, sampling strategy, data collection and analysis plan. It identifies the various methods and procedures that were used to gather the relevant data for the research, and this involves an analysis of the methods, rules, procedures and postulates used in a research. This chapter focuses on research methodology used in the study and procedures to undertake the research. It outlines the research instruments, data collection procedures, data presentation and data analysis procedures.

3.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Bajpai (2011) asserts that a research philosophy deals with the source, nature and development of knowledge. In addition, Bryman (2012) denotes that a research philosophy refers to the set of beliefs concerning the nature of the reality being investigated. It is the underlying definition of the nature of knowledge. In simple terms, a research philosophy is belief about the ways in which data about a phenomenon should be collected, analysed and used. Therefore, understanding the research philosophy being used can help explain the assumptions inherent in the research process and how this fits the methodology being used. There are four main research philosophies, namely positivism, realism, pragmatism and interpretivism, and this study used the interpretivism philosophy.

The researcher interpreted elements of the study, thus interpretivism integrated human interest into a study, which is an important element in the discharge of this research. The researcher also chose this philosophy because the researcher assumed that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments”. Considerate of the qualitative nature of the research, the philosophy was chosen. In addition, interpretivism studies usually focus on meaning and may employ multiple
methods in order to reflect different aspects of the issue, which was necessary for this research. According to Gray (2013) interpretivist approach is based on naturalistic approach of data collection such as interviews and observations. In light of the above, interviews and questionnaires were used in the process of data collection. In this type of studies, meanings emerge usually towards the end of the research process, which was the case for the research. (Dudovskiy, 2018). Primary data generated via interpretivism studies can be associated with a high level of validity because data in such studies tends to be trustworthy and honest.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

Research approach is essentially divided into two categories, namely approach of data collection and approach of data analysis or reasoning. Given the exploratory nature of some of the objectives, the researcher used qualitative approach, with a focus on inductive approach. Creswell (2013) adds that those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation. In light of what the researcher sought, the inductive approach was selected as it allowed the process of beginning with observations which led to goals such as discovery and exploration, assisting in answering the question under study. The researcher began with detailed observations of the world, which moved towards more abstract generalisations and ideas. The researcher developed empirical generalisations and identified preliminary relationships as he progressed through his research.

In addition, participant observation and open ended interviewing were the key data gathering methods, which are also the bedrock of the qualitative method. The researcher used qualitative research as the research involved small numbers of respondents who provided descriptive information about their thoughts and feelings that are not easily projected to the whole population. In addition, case studies, on the other hand, are often seen as prime examples of qualitative research which adopts an interpretive approach to data, and studies objects within their context and considers the subjective meanings that people bring to their situation.

According to Myers (2013), research approach is a plan and procedure that consists of the steps of broad assumptions to detailed method of data collection, analysis and interpretation. It is therefore, based on the nature of the research problem being addressed. The inductive approach was also
used because it does not involve formulation of hypotheses. It starts with research questions, aims and objectives that need to be achieved during the research process. According to Goddard & Melville (2004) the inductive approach, also known as inductive reasoning, starts with the observations and theories are proposed towards the end of the research process as a result of observations. The researcher started by data collection which was the premise of making conclusions and recommendations thereof. Inductive studies follow the route below:

![Observations/Tests → Pattern → Theory]

It is important to stress that inductive approach does not imply disregarding theories when formulating research questions and objectives (Anderson, 2010). This approach aims to generate meanings from the data set collected in order to identify patterns and relationships to build a theory; however, inductive approach does not prevent the researcher from using existing theory to formulate the research question to be explored (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

3.3 RESEARCH CHOICE

Research choices broadly fall into the mono method, the mixed method, and the multi-method (Kothari, 2008). The research used a mono method, focusing on the qualitative approach. Given the exploratory nature of some of the objectives, the researcher will provide detailed qualitative information. Qualitative research enabled developing explanations of social phenomena such as the behavior and how communities are affected by digital marketing. Bryman and Bell (2015) state that qualitative research is often an “inquiry from the inside” as the researcher has to be immersed in order to understand the subject better. In addition, qualitative research was preferred for its ability to expose meaningful and culturally salient meanings which are often unanticipated by the
researcher. Furthermore, it is rich and explanatory in nature while offering flexibility (Guest et al., 2005).

Qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative, does not focus just on statistical measurements, but relies upon the understanding, explanation and interpretation of empirical data, which was of use to the researcher. Furthermore, qualitative research makes extensive use of projective and enabling techniques, unstructured, non-legislative ways to ask questions that helped the researcher to discover the motives, beliefs, attitudes, preferences, values, satisfaction and problems, of the respondents with respect to the subject under study. Projective techniques enabled the researcher communication, verbalization of feelings and attitudes, identification of latent motives, implicit attitudes and feelings.

To enable a successful conduct of this research professionalism of the interviewer was exercised, through creating a comfortable environment and not pressuring the interviewees. However, there are some shortcomings that are inherent in qualitative research, chief among them being that the results of the study may not be generalizable to a larger population due to selection of subjects. In addition, Saunders et al., (2009) add that it places great emphasis on the methods used to collect or generate data. However, it places less emphasis on the analytical techniques to interpretation of data. Research quality is also dependent on the skills of the individual and rigor is more difficult to assess and demonstrate (Anderson 2010). To counter the shortcoming of qualitative research the research made use of a representative sample.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is an exposition or plan a researcher decides to use to execute the formulated research problem so that the validity and reliability of the findings are maximised (Creswell, 2013). The researcher used exploratory and descriptive research designs. Exploratory research is the initial research conducted to elucidate and define the nature of the problem (Myers, 2013). The researcher chose this approach in order to find out more about digital marketing and destination branding. The aim was to gain more insight on the issues for more rigorous investigation. Malhotra (2004) argues that the exploratory research method is characterised by flexibility and versatility. This enabled the researcher to explore and search through the problem and get a clear understanding of the intricacies in digital marketing and destination branding.
Cognisant of the shortfalls of the exploratory research design, the researcher had to compliment exploratory research design with descriptive research design. Descriptive research design goes further than exploratory research in examining a problem. It was done to establish and describe the characteristics of the phenomena. It addresses the, who, what, when, where and how questions. As the name implies descriptive design describes characteristics of objects, people, groups, organisations or environments (Hennink, Hutter and Balley, 2011). It helped the researcher clearly identify participants of the research, the information to be collected, where it could be obtained from, the timing to collect the information and in what way the researcher would want the information from the respondents. More importantly, it assisted in creating an understanding of why the study is being conducted, thus ensuring that the researcher did not lose thrust of the research problem.

3.5 RESEARCH STRATEGY

The research strategy is how the researcher intends to carry out the work (Saunders et al., 2009). A Research Strategy is a step-by-step plan of action that gives direction to the researcher’s thoughts and efforts, enabling one to conduct research systematically and on schedule to produce quality results and detailed reporting (Gray, 2013). This enables one to stay focused, reduce frustration, enhance quality and most importantly, save time and resources. The researcher used a case study in the exercise of this research. Saunders et al., (2012) emphasise that the choice of research strategy is guided by research questions and objectives. Similarly the extent of existing knowledge, the availability of amount of time, as well as philosophical underpinnings are also important. A case study was used for its ability to analyze specific issues within the boundaries of a specific environment, situation or organization. Case study research is the assessment of a single unit in order to establish its key features and draw generalisations (Creswell, 2013). The research strategy for the research is the case study approach with the use of a survey questionnaire. The researcher distributed questionnaires to tourism and hospitality industry players in his quest to gather information.

In addition, it enabled the researcher to do an empirical investigation of the subject matter under study through use of multiple sources of evidence (Robson, 2002). Case study is opposite to
experimental strategy which is not bound to a context. It is most suitable when seeking to gain in-depth insight of the research context.

3.6 TIME HORIZON

The time horizon is the time framework within which the project is intended for completion (Saunders et al., 2009). Study design depends greatly on the nature of the research question. Two types of time horizons are specified, namely, the cross sectional and the longitudinal (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Due to the changing dynamics in the IT world, this research used the cross sectional time horizon which focuses on a relatively shorter period of time as opposed to the longitudinal time horizon. This research study is classified as a cross-sectional study because the data is collected over a short period of time. The researcher used a cross-sectional study design as it allows researchers to compare many different variables at the same time. In addition, given the timelines, the researcher used cross sectional study as it can be done more quickly than longitudinal studies.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

The process used at this stage of the research has a significant bearing to the study’s overall reliability and validity (Saunders et al., 2012). Regardless of the approach used in the project, the type of data collected falls broadly into two categories: secondary and primary. The most effective distinction of the two types of data is perhaps established by the use to which it is put in a study, rather than to an inherent characteristic of the data itself.

3.7.1. Secondary data

A search for secondary sources was done to fine tune the objectives and better understand the problem and how best to forge ahead. The secondary sources which the researcher went through include journals, books, magazines, newspapers and the internet among others. The desk research assisted the researcher in understanding the trends of the tourism industry and providing the researcher with statistics on arrivals and occupancies, the usage and the adoption of digital technologies. It also helped to figure out how the industry and the sector has been performing. The
information gave the researcher a basis upon which to develop literature review and the introduction.

However, it is important to note that the conclusions of a research article can constitute secondary data because it is information that has already been processed by another. Likewise, analyses conducted on statistical surveys can constitute secondary data (Kothari, 2008). However, there is an extent to which the data is defined by its use, rather than its inherent nature (Myers, 2013). Therefore, application of appropriate set of criteria to select secondary data to be used in the study plays an important role in terms of increasing the levels of research validity and reliability. These criteria include, but not limited to date of publication, credential of the author, reliability of the source, quality of discussions, depth of analyses, the extent of contribution of the text to the development of the research area etc.

3.7.2. Primary data

When conducting a qualitative analysis, the researcher may wish to use at least some original material. Primary data is data which is derived from first-hand sources. This can be historical first-hand sources, or the data derived from the respondents in a survey or interview data (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The collection of primary data, known as empirical data, involved consulting primary sources of information comprising, conducting interviews of key informants such as captains of the industry, and officials from the Ministry of Environment, Tourism and Hospitality Industry (METHI), Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), Parks and Wildlife Authority Management (Zimparks) and the Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe. According to Gray (2013) primary data is data collected by a researcher specifically for a research assignment. It is original in nature and directly related to the issue or problem, and is current data. The primary data is therefore best understood as the data that is being analysed as itself, rather than through the prism of another’s analysis. The researcher collected the primary data through interviews and questionnaires.

3.8 POPULATION SAMPLE AND SIZE

The research targeted population are all tourism players, which is infinite. Due to time and financial constraints the researcher used purposive sampling, and made use of Management and staff of tourism players registered with the Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe (TBCZ),
officials from the Ministry of Environment, Tourism & Hospitality Industry, Zimbabwe Tourism Authority and Zimparks. Sample size as defined by Hussey & Hussey (1997) is a subject of population and should represent the main interests of the study. A sample of 100 respondents was used for the research. Of the 100, 80 respondents were given questionnaires on a convenience basis and the remaining 20 were given to members of the management who were interviewed.

Table 3.1: Sample composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Environment, Tourism and Hospitality Industry (METHI)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (Zimparks)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe (TBCZ)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captains of the tourism and hospitality industry</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source- Case study respondents (2018), Harare

3.8.1. Sample Designs and Technique

According to Cooper and Schindler (2007), a sampling frame is a list of elements in which the sample is actually drawn. Sampling involves the selection of a number of study units from a defined study population. In addition Myers (2013) asserts that it is a process of drawing or selecting a part of a population. The research sample was hundred participants. Of the hundred, eighty were given questionnaires on a snowball and convenience basis and the other twenty are the captains of tourism industry who were interviewed. In this research the researcher used snowball and purposive sampling methods so that they could complement each other.

To ensure that the population was representative the researcher made use of the Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe, which is an umbrella body for the tourism and hospitality industry to gather data. Creswell (2013) advocates that the information obtained from sampling will not be of much use if the wrong people are used. Choosing the sample of people to interview or give a questionnaire is therefore of paramount importance. In order to curb this problem, the researcher ensured that the sample used was representative.
i) **Snowball sampling**

Snowball sampling entails approaching selected people. The researcher identified a small number of individuals who had the required characteristics. The selected individuals were used as informants to identify others who qualified for inclusion into the research, and these in turn identified others. In this case, the researcher approached persons who are involved in destination marketing/promotion, and digital marketing. Referrals given to the researcher were quite motivating in the sense that each time the researcher was referred, more information was obtained. Through a referral system, the study reached out to other persons for interviews to get in-depth information. Accordingly, the identified individuals ultimately constituted sample snowballs until satisfactory and relevant data was gathered. It is pleasing to note that a chain of individuals referred to were key stakeholders and are involved in destination promotion and digital marketing.

ii) **Purposive sampling**

Purposeful sampling, also known as target sampling, is a systematic way through which lists of specified individuals in a geographical area are selected to obtain adequate information representing the whole, that one is examining (Suanders et al., 2012). Purposive sampling was preferred in the selection of individual members for interviews. Bryman and Bell (2015) note that purposive sampling embodies target sampling. The dividing line between purposive sampling and target sampling is immaterial, thus the terms are used interchangeably. Literature recognises and so does this study that these two techniques co-exist in many respects and their differences are viewed as insignificant to cause distortions. The purposive sampling strategy therefore ensured that resource persons identified for interviews were respondents with rich information, and conversant with the subject matter. By so doing the target sample provided relevant information needed in the study.

**3.9 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS AND JUSTIFICATION**

The reliability and validity of data is highly dependent on the sources chosen in gathering information. Myers (2013) encourages researchers to be judicious on data collection techniques they use as this affects the quality and validity of their findings. Failure to observe this reality may result in the research’s failure to answer the research questions (Hennink, Hutter and Balley, 2011).
3.9.1 Secondary Sources

A search for secondary sources was done to fine tune the objectives and better understand the concepts of digital marketing and destination branding. The researcher gathered information from specialised books, topical articles, statistics reports, journals, government publications, the internet and media. In concurrence, Dudovskiy (2018) asserts that this is data obtained from already existing sources of information; written, published and unpublished data, and sources of information include but are not limited to books, survey reports, academic research papers, government publications, internet and media. The desk research also assisted in understanding the trends of the tourism sector and provided the researcher with statistics on arrivals and occupancies, adoption and usage of ICTS in the tourism and hospitality sector. In addition, it also assisted the researcher to figure out how the industry and the sector has been performing. This assisted the researcher with background knowledge on the research topic, which gave the researcher flexibility and confidence in asking questions and directing interviews.

Saunders (2004) acknowledges and stated that written documents can be important raw data sources in their own right. However this source has the disadvantage of time consumption as one has to go through huge volumes of information. The researcher was cognisant of the fact that some sources of information can be misleading especially media thus there was less reliance on media. Having background knowledge from the above mentioned sources made the researcher well prepared for not only writing the dissertation but also for conducting interviews.

3.9.2 Primary data collection

In finding the effectiveness of digital market as a destination branding strategy, the researcher used questionnaires and interviews as his research instruments. Primary data is data collected directly by the researcher for the study. The collection of primary data, known as empirical data, involved consulting primary sources of information comprising, conducting interviews of key informants such as captains of industry, officials from METHI, ZTA, TBCZ and Zimparks. The researcher used questionnaires and interviews as they suffice the requirements of the data needed for the researcher to approach reality in an unbiased manner and be able to come up with concepts that can be further refined. The research instrument used has a bearing on the findings, as a result, selection of appropriate research instruments becomes very important when providing answers to
research questions and proffering solutions in the end. In view of the above, interviews and questionnaires were used as primary data collection instruments in the study.

3.9.2.1 Questionnaires

Creswell (2013) defines a questionnaire as a fact gathering device to which the respondent gives answers in writing to specific questions. It is a document which contains a list of questions that the researcher intends to ask the respondents. The researcher distributed 80 questionnaires, 40 at the Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe (TBCZ), 10 to officials from the Ministry of Environment, Tourism & Hospitality Industry, 20 at Zimbabwe Tourism Authority and 10 at Zimparks, using a drop and pick strategy. In a deliberate effort to elicit more information, the researcher used both open and close ended questions. Closed ended questions were relevant where a specific response was required, and an alternative answer to choose was given where options were available. Open ended questionnaires allowed respondents to express their views and opinions. Questionnaires also enabled the researcher to solicit more information and new ideas from the respondent in solving the research problem. In addition, the questionnaire was used for its ability to collect large amounts of information at a low cost per respondent.

All the questions on the questionnaires were directly linked to the study’s objectives so that any information obtained would not deviate from the purpose and aims of carrying out the research. Limitations in relation to the use of questionnaires were taken into consideration, as the researcher assisted other participants in giving clarifications, where they faced challenges.

3.9.2.2 Interviews

For purposes of gaining more knowledge on digital marketing and destination branding, the researcher carried out qualitative structured interviews with captains of the tourism and hospitality industry, to gain deeper insights on their perception on the effectiveness of the use of digital marketing as a destination branding strategy. The researcher made appointments to conduct the interviews at times which were convenient for the respondents, to counter their unavailability. Bryman and Bell (2015) define an interview as a two-way conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining relevant research information and focused on the researcher’s objective. The interviews were in the form of semi-structured and structured interviews. The interviews certainly complemented the questionnaire technique. Respondents had valuable
information which was not covered in the questionnaire, which was captured during interviews. Interviewees needed assurance that they would not be identified with their responses to the interviews, as such assurance was given and through one to one engagements additional crucial information was gleaned from key persons through seeking clarification on important issues and this allowed for effective interpretation of responses.

As the research was held in an inter-disciplinary field it was important for the researcher to combine different methods of research. The essential characteristic of this method is a targeted, specified social and psychological contact with the respondents. Face to face interactions allowed for clarification of misunderstood questions. In instances where the interviewee failed to grasp the question, respondents sought clarification. In addition, researcher opted for interviews as it afforded the researcher a chance of observing non-verbal reactions from the respondents.

However, one disadvantage of interviews is that the respondents may find it difficult to create ample time to entertain the researcher. Interviewees may not have enough time to entertain the researcher. To counter this challenge, the researcher ensured that he kept the discussion focused so that it would end within the time set for each interview. In addition, the researcher ensured that the respondents appreciate the significance of the study to both the individual and the sector at large.

3.10 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE, ADMINISTRATION AND ANALYSIS

According to Saunders et al., (2012) data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes. While methods vary by discipline, the emphasis on ensuring accurate and honest collection remains the same.

A pilot study was conducted to test the questionnaire wording, question sequencing, and to test the questionnaire layout. According to Brinkman (2013) the size of the pilot group may range from 20 to 100 subject. For this study, the pilot survey was conducted by personally visiting and getting the questionnaire filled in by at least 20 respondents and conducting 5 interviews. Observations from the pilot survey were taken note of and effected on both the questionnaires and the interview guide.
Regardless of the field of study or preference for defining data, accurate data collection is essential to maintaining the integrity of research (Anderson, 2010). Both the selection of appropriate data collection instruments (existing, modified, or newly developed) and clearly delineated instructions for their correct use reduce the likelihood of errors occurring (Kothari, 2008). After the observations from the pilot survey were taken note of, the researcher began by seeking approval to conduct research from the heads of the different institutions which were involved in the research. After approval was granted, dispatching of questionnaires, and making appointments for interviews with the various respondents followed. The researcher distributed the questionnaires to respondents personally. Interviews and questionnaires’ respondents were all addressed face to face, and consent was sought from respondents before distribution of questionnaires and conducting interviews, highlighting their right to participation, which meant their right to participate or withdraw from the research. Participants were advised not to record any names on the questionnaires. On completion the researcher kept all the returned forms to ensure total retrieval of information.

3.10.1. Data Analysis

Bar graphs, pie charts and tables were used to present data collected from the interviews and the questionnaires. The researcher edited and arranged data found in the study to facilitate identification and analysis of the subject. Editing was first carried out manually, as any mistakes that were made in writing down facts during interviews or from questionnaires were rectified. Analytical packages were used by the researcher as an analysis tool to tabulate and make graphical presentations of the data. Pie charts gave easier comparison of dimensions, bar graphs portrayed overtly differences in quantities or values and tables simplified and gave logical arrangement to data. Analytical packages made it extremely easy for arithmetic deductions.

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical Considerations can be specified as one of the most important parts of the research. Bryman and Bell (2015) postulated that, ethics are norms or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and relationship with others. The overall goal of ethics in social research is to ensure that no one is harmed or suffers adversely from the research activities. The researcher took all the possible steps to ensure that:
Confidentiality and anonymity of the subjects was guaranteed upon soliciting information from respondents so as to remove fear of victimization.

Full consent was obtained from the participants prior to the study.

There was no cause of discomfort, emotional stress and humiliation to the subjects.

There was no duress in eliciting information from the respondents.

Respondents were treated with dignity and respect.

Anonymity of individuals and organisations participating in the research was ensured.

All forms of communication in relation to the research were done with honesty and transparency.

3.12 LIMITATIONS

Generally, there were complaints from some respondents that the questionnaire had too many questions and some questions could have not been answered, thus the researcher had to plead with some respondents to answer all the questions. While the decision to use open ended questions in interviews was motivated by the need to generate more qualitative data, respondents ended up giving unnecessary information and this meant that the researcher had to seat down and sieve the information. There were some delays in receiving responses from other organisations and this was attributed to work pressures.

3.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the research design and the design methodologies that were employed to gather information. The research philosophy was also presented, which guided the assumptions inherent in the research process. The research approach was also discussed, which was informed by the nature of the research study. A description of the research design was also done to spell out how the research was undertaken. It covered the methodology used in the research, elaborations on the population, the sample frame and techniques, research instruments and their justification,
data collection procedure and administration and ethical considerations implemented to assess the subject under study. It also afforded the researcher an opportunity to unravel the sources of data as well as the data collection instruments used in the study. The next chapter presents the study findings and also delves into the analysis and discussion of research findings.
CHAPTER FOUR
DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present, analyse, interpret and discuss findings from the research. As mentioned earlier, the research was a combination of both exploratory and descriptive research designs as it provides answers to questions such as who, what, when, where and how of the topic under study via questionnaires, administered by means of the drop-and-pick tactic, and interviews, as data collection procedures. Views from different players of the tourism and hospitality industry are presented in this chapter. The chapter gives an analysis of the data through the use of tables, pie charts and graphs explaining the results based on the research problem in chapter one.

4.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To evaluate the effectiveness of digital marketing as a destination branding tool.
- To explore the challenges that affect the Zimbabwe tourism sector and measures which were put in place to counter them.
- To explore on the best strategy Zimbabwe can use in its destination branding and image building exercise.
- To analyze the role of digital marketing in today’s tourism industry.

4.2 RESPONSE RATE

The researcher conducted interviews with captains of the tourism and hospitality industry and distributed questionnaires to officials from the Ministry of Environment, Tourism and Hospitality Industry, Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe and National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority. The breakdown of the questionnaires and their response rates is illustrated in table 4.1 below.
Table 4.1: Administration and response rate of questionnaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Environment, Tourism and Hospitality Industry</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe Tourism Authority</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captains of the tourism and hospitality industry</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Case Study Respondents (2019), Harare*

4.2.1 Questionnaire response rate

The 100% response rate realised from this study is attributable to the design of the survey as well as the interest the respondents had in the subject matter. Respondents were highly motivated to respond and return the questionnaires.

4.2.2 Interview response rate

The researcher managed to conduct 20 interviews out of 20 that were scheduled giving a response rate of 100%.

**Figure 4.1: Distribution of respondents by Age (see figure below)**

From the responses given, most of the respondents are 31 years and above, accounting for more than 60% of the respondents. The age group with the highest respondents is 31 - 40 years, with 37.5% followed by 41 and above with 30.5% of the respondents. From the responses given, most of the respondents are 31 years and above, accounting for more than 60% of the respondents.
**Case Study Respondents (2019), Harare**

**Figure 4.2 Distribution of residents by level of Education attained.**
Degree holders constitute 38% of the respondents. These are followed by Diploma holders, Masters holders, High school and lastly doctorate holders accounting for 27%, 18%, 12% and 5% respectively. Majority of the stakeholders are holders of either an undergraduate or post graduate degree. Results show that the tourism industry of Zimbabwe has learned people.

Figure 4.3 Distribution of Respondents by sector of operation

Case Study Respondents (2019), Harare

Most of the questionnaires were deliberately given to TBCZ and its affiliate organizations. Collectively, the TBCZ accounts for 50% of the respondents, which is followed by the Zimbabwe
Tourism Authority which accounts for 25%, and last the Ministry of Environment, Tourism and Hospitality Industry and Zimparks which account for 12.5% each. The distribution was deliberately biased towards the Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe (TBCZ) and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) because they drive the destination promotion exercise and the Digital Marketing Strategy.

Table 4.2: Distribution of respondents on challenges that have negatively affected tourists’ arrivals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative media publicity / negative perceptions in the source markets</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited tourism products</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination inaccessibility/few direct and intra flights</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of pro tourism policies</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dilapidated tourism facilities in need of refurbishment</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited fiscal space/ government support for the sector</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An expensive destination, prices are not competitive</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash crisis and shortage of basic commodities</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case Study Respondents (2019), Harare

From the factors highlighted as the factors/challenges affecting the tourism sector, and arrivals thereof, above are the frequently highlighted factors. The mostly highlighted challenge is negative media publicity/negative perceptions in the sources markets, which was cited by 90% of the respondents. This concurs with Sokwanele (2004), who asserts that, traditionally, western source markets formed the bedrock of Zimbabwe's tourism markets due to past colonial ties with the West. This means if they form a negative impression of the destination they are likely not to visit the destination. This is followed by destination inaccessibility, cash crisis and shortages of basic commodities, which was cited by 85% of the respondents. Destination accessibility is a key
challenge which has affected the tourism industry, currently evidenced by pulling out of major airlines in to the country. Domestic routes are currently serviced by two airlines, which could be a sign that the sector is mostly looking at international tourists as compared to domestic tourists. Other key challenges cited include; an expensive destination, dilapidated tourism facilities and infrastructure which are in dire need of refurbishment, limited tourism products, lack of pro tourism policies and limited fiscal space, cited by 80%, 80%, 77.5%, 75% and 75% respectively. This concurs with Sharpley (2009) who asserts that a number of factors have undermined tourism development in many African regions. These factors include poor infrastructure, such as roads, electricity and water supplies; insufficient accommodation; unsatisfactory public health services; poor telecommunication facilities, and in a number of cases security problems.

Table 4.3: Distribution of responses on measures that have been put in place to address the challenges affecting tourist arrivals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Destination rebranding</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings, Incentives, Conferences &amp; Exhibitions (MICE) route</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of SI units 10/2018 &amp; 159/2017 for duty rebates on tourism goods and vehicles</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement of the International community and lobbying for removal of travel advisories</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media personnel engagement</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case Study Respondents (2019), Harare

Above are the factors identified as measures put in place to address the challenges cited as affecting the tourism sector. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents highlighted that destination rebranding as well as engagement of the International community and lobbying for the removal of travel advisories are some of the measures that have been put to address the challenges affecting tourists arrivals. In concurrence, Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005), assert that destination branding is widely recognised as an effective strategy to enhance a destination’s competitive advantage. The objectives of destination management can be raising the competitiveness, attracting inward
investment, improving its image and well-being of its populace. Without a distinguished brand identity it is difficult to stand out as a destination. MICE route is also amongst the key interventions cited. This is supported by Kavaratzis (2009), who argues that as a result of the intense competition that globalisation has brought, most destinations are opting to host events as a way to counter this competition, as well as a way to create destination image and awareness. This could also show that the sector is benefiting mostly from groups who come for workshops, seminars and conferences and individuals travelling for personal purposes. The other prevalently cited measure is the introduction of Statutory Instruments SI 10 of 2018 & 159 of 2017, which waivers duty on tourism goods and vehicles. This has assisted the tourism and hospitality industry to retool and refurbish its products and services. Media personnel engagement has also been one of the key intervention. This is amongst the efforts to counter the negative media publicity so that the media personnel can retell the story of Zimbabwe as a destination of choice. This has also seen Zimbabwe rated as the 3rd must visit destination in the world for 2019.

Figure 4.4: Distribution of respondents on whether the identified measures are addressing the challenges at hand.

Are the measures identified addressing the challenges cited

Case study Respondents (2019), Harare
Seventy percent of the respondents do agree that the measures identified are addressing the challenges at hand, with 30% in disagreement. Majority may have agreed because to them the measures are addressing the challenges affecting them, and might have begun to realise significant improvement as a result of the introduction of these measures. The 30% might still have challenges that are not yet addressed, or the measures identified are not affecting or benefiting them in any way.

### Table 4.4: Distribution of respondents on other measures which can be put in place to address the challenges affecting the tourism sector.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hosting of more conferences and events</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive packages (Value for money)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in the Digital Marketing Strategy</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price reviews</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intra destination connectivity</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Case Study Respondents (2019), Harare_

The most cited measures, cited by 90% of the respondents are price reviews and intra destination connectivity. Intra destination connectivity is a key challenge for the tourism sector, evidenced by the absence of domestic flights to service most of the local destinations. This concurs with literature, which notes few direct flights to and from major tourism source markets, and flights for intra-connectivity as one of the key challenges affecting the destination. Currently, there are two routes being serviced by Air Zimbabwe and Fast Jet, and these are Victoria Falls and Bulawayo. However, Air Zimbabwe has proved to be unreliable at times, resultantly people have lost trust in it. The development and maintenance of requisite tourism infrastructure such as robust transport systems, information communication technologies, among other key enablers of tourism remain a key priority for most African destinations (UWTO Tourism Highlights 2018). The destination is also considered to be expensive, as a result tourists have opted for destinations bordering Zimbabwe, as they are seen as cheaper, hence the need for price reviews. To add on, Sharpley
(2009) asserts that delays in applying more efficient management systems and the persistence of practices that impede their competitiveness have also contributed to slow development of the tourism industry. This is particularly evident in the pricing of tourism services. In a bid to increase the contribution of tourism, consideration of hosting more conferences and events was also cited. This is supported by Evans (2003), who argues that as a result of the intense competition that globalisation has brought, most destinations are opting to host mega events as a way to counter this competition, as well as a way to create destination image and awareness. Other key cited measures are offering competitive packages and investing in the Digital Marketing Strategy.

Figure 4.5: Distribution of respondents on the most commonly used platforms to communicate the branding and positioning of Zimbabwe as a destination.

Case Study Respondents (2019), Harare
Findings show that the most cited platforms are the internet and social media, cited by 72/80 of the respondents. This could also show that the destination is moving with times and is migrating into the digital space. This concurs with literature. According to Griffith (2013) technology is playing an increasingly important role in the tourism industry. Within the past 10 years, the number of worldwide internet users has more than tripled. This new landscape has radically altered the way tourism business is being conducted. A new marketplace is evolving that is at once more accessible to the consumer and more competitive to the supplier. Other commonly used platforms are brochures and Word of Mouth. Other frequently cited platforms are press/print media and Travel Expos/Fairs. Billboards and digital billboards are the lowest, with only 16 respondents citing them. This could be a sign that as a destination the concept of digital billboards has not been embraced. It could also be communicating that the technologies are a bit expensive and only a few can afford them, hence their unpopularity. Websites, Radio/Tv and Travel catalogues also rank lowly. This could also be a sign to show that the platforms could be a bit pricey hence organisations cannot afford them.

Figure 4.6: Distribution of respondents on whether digital marketing is effective as a destination branding tool.
Sixty-five percent of the respondents highlighted that digital marketing is an effective destination branding tool, with 35% of the respondents in disagreement. The 65% could be a sign that organisations in the tourism industry are slowly embracing digital marketing and seeing its benefits to their operations. Digital Marketing today has become one of the key focus areas for businesses all over the world. Understanding the character of online marketing tactics and social media, and confronting them with efficient strategies may contribute to developing more attractive tourism products and create more innovative tourism campaigns. Furthermore, Kaur (2017) postulates that today digital marketing plays a critical role in the success of each business which exists in the tourism industry. The 35% who disagree cited other issues that need to be addressed in order for the digital marketing to pay off. They cited that unless the issues are addressed, the digital marketing exercise is in vein.

**Table 4.5: Distribution of respondents on the role of digital marketing in today’s tourism industry.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A cost effective means to reach customers</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assists to distinguish destinations and products</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows businesses to track user behaviour</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aids in decision making</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct interface with the consumer (Interactive)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 hour accessibility</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global reach and access to the international community</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Case Study Respondents (2019), Harare*

Above are the factors identified as the role digital marketing is playing in today’s tourism industry. The most cited benefit is its 24hour accessibility, cited by 89% of the respondents. The increased accessibility of digital marketing has provided an alternative, cost efficient way for tourism businesses and destinations to reach the consumer. Kaur (2017) argues that the need for digital
marketing has been felt like never before in the tourism industry wherein customers have instant access to all kinds of information on the latest offers and best prices. Users can now purchase services related to tourism online at the click of a button while comparing amongst businesses from all over the world. Digital marketing aids in decision making, and it enables direct interface between supplier and consumer, as highlighted by 88% of the respondents. Hays, Page and Buhalis (2012) add that more and more tourists use digital marketing platforms to share their tourism experiences, formulate travel plans and even develop business. This enables new kinds of tourism interaction, which improves and extends the physical travel experience in various ways (Munar, Gyimóthy, and Cai, 2013). Also, Kewsuwan (2014) denotes that the explosive growth of online marketing has changed the consumers’ purchase decision from the past. Nowadays, consumers’ decision journey has become more complicated as digital marketing has more and more impact to consumers who spend their life more on the online world, pointing to the fact that digital marketing has become a popular phenomenon among the travelers.

Another role that digital marketing plays is that it’s a cost effective means to reach customers. The whole concept and functionalities of digital marketing are more competent, effective, result-oriented and measurable, which makes it very different from traditional marketing. One of the main reasons for the success of digital marketing over traditional marketing is the fact that the former allows businesses to track user behaviour in real-time. Every campaign launched digitally can be tracked in terms of its reach, engagement and conversion. This has given a whole new meaning to the marketing research exercise, helping to understand the needs of the customers like never before. Other roles cited are its global reach and access to the international community and its ability to assist to distinguish destinations and products. Furthermore, Zsarnoczky (2018) asserts that the adoption of digital marketing is of paramount importance in the tourism and hospitality industry for several reasons. Firstly, many products offered in the tourism and hospitality sector are intangible, which makes it impossible to evaluate them before consumption, hence word-of-mouth plays important role here. Secondly, many of the tourism products are considered with high risk, the introduction or advices from reference groups can contribute to the decision-making process. Thirdly, there is intense competition within the tourism industry, and social media strategy might become one important competitive advantage for early adopter.
Table 4.6: Distribution of respondents on the platforms of digital marketing the Zimbabwean tourism players are using to market products and services they offer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochure</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email marketing</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-Travel magazine</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tv/Radio</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print/Press Media</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billboards</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital billboards</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Case Study Respondents (2019), Harare*

The most cited platform, indicated by 90% of the respondents is the brochure. Most organisations in the tourism and hospitality industry are using the brochure to market their offerings. Another commonly used platform is the Social Media, cited by 85% of the respondents. Of prominence also are Short Message Service (SMS) and email marketing, cited by 80% and 75% of the respondents respectively. On the lower end of the platforms are Billboards, digital billboards and TV/Radio with 15% of each. This is followed by print/press media with 19%. This could be a sign that the platforms that the industry should have been using are not the ones they are using for reasons like cost and unavailability of the platforms.
### Table 4.7: Likert scale responses by the tourism sector employees

**KEY:** SA – STRONGLY AGREE; A – AGREE; N – NEUTRAL; D – DISAGREE; SD – STRONGLY DISAGREE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA (%)</th>
<th>A (%)</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
<th>D (%)</th>
<th>SD (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The use of various digital marketing platforms has better positioned destination Zimbabwe?</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital marketing has changed the negative tag that was on Zimbabwe as a tourist destination?</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital marketing has been a destination endorsement strategy?</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of various digital marketing platforms has assisted to position the destination Zimbabwe on the global map?</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The digital marketing strategy the Tourism sector is pursuing is the most appropriate route?</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The introduction of the Digital Marketing Strategy has created an opportunity to counter the negative publicity labelled against the destination?</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Marketing now drives the tourism industry world over</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Zimbabwe as a destination invested enough in Digital Marketing to achieve the desired outcomes.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The benefits of investing in digital marketing out-weighted the costs?</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Eighty-five percent agree that the use of the various digital marketing platforms has better positioned Zimbabwe as a destination. This could be a clear indication that organisations in the tourism industry have begun to realise the benefits of using the various digital marketing platforms. However, 10% are still not convinced that the platforms can better position Zimbabwe as a destination.

Sixty-five percent of the respondents cited that digital marketing has changed the negative tag labelled on Zimbabwe. While it is impossible to completely control a brand, it is possible to positively influence it. Morgan *et al.*, (2010) denote that the destinations that have successfully implemented branding strategies understand the ways destination branding can help bridge any gaps between a destination’s strengths and potential visitors’ perceptions. To add, Tan (2008) postulates that successful branding exercises have frequently resulted in increased sales, more tourists, more hotel bookings, more conventions and greater spending. Digital marketing enable tourists to have access to reliable information, thus countering the negative media publicity about the destination. On the other hand 35% cited that it has not changed the negative tag on Zimbabwe. This could be a sign to show that the concept of digital marketing has not yet been fully embraced by the industry.

Eighty percent of the respondents noted that digital marketing has been a destination endorsement strategy. Media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and WhatsApp enable businesses to reach out and talk directly to their users. Presence on these platforms not only helps brands to establish credibility, improve customer services but also assist in appreciating insights on what your customers are up to.

Eighty-five percent highlighted that the use of the various digital marketing platforms has assisted to position Zimbabwe a destination on the global map. This concurs with Kaur (2017) who notes that because digital marketing platforms appeal to a variety of groups and are significantly less expensive to access than traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, television, and radio. Digital marketing content can be much more adaptable and varied for a lower cost. These platforms have been used to reach out and retelling the true story of Zimbabwe.

Thirty percent of the respondents cited that the digital marketing strategy that Zimbabwe is pursuing as a destination is not the best strategy at the mean time. Seventy-five percent of the
respondents noted that the introduction of the digital marketing strategy has created an opportunity to counter the negative publicity which was labeled against the destination.

Digital marketing now drives the tourism industry world over, as cited by 70% of the respondents. Due to its reach and appeal to a variety of groups at a significantly lower cost than traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, television, and radio, digital marketing has become the way to go.

Most of the respondents admit that Zimbabwe as a destination has not invested enough resources to achieve the desired outcome. In addition to the challenge of developing an effective digital presence in our rapidly evolving landscape, tourism businesses and organizations must have an ICT infrastructure that allows for quick, consistent access to the global information network. Businesses must keep pace with technology as it changes and ensure that their staff have the technical capacity to manage new systems. This can place a significant burden on small and medium enterprises as well as emerging DMOs that lack capital or access to a technically skilled workforce (COMCEC, 2015).

The Benefits of investing in digital marketing out-weigh the costs incurred, as cited by 70% of the respondents. Nowadays, consumers’ decision journey has become more complicated as digital marketing has more and more impact to consumers who spend their life more on the online world. It is no longer necessary for the individuals to wait to interact physically to be able to understand the actual situation of a destination that they wish to travel to for the purposes of tourism. It is now possible to have access to the visual impact of the destination on the social media sites and the internet sites.

Table 4.8: Distribution of respondents on factors affecting the implementation of the Digital Marketing Strategy (see table below)

One major impediment in the implementation of the Digital Marketing Strategy (DMS) is the cost of internet/connectivity charges. Ninety percent of the respondents noted that the implementation of the DMS is being affected by the internet/connectivity charges. This could mean to say the costs of internet are being a major pull back factor to the full implementation of the Digital Marketing Strategy. The other challenge cited by most of the respondents is lack of supportive infrastructure,
Factor | Frequency | Percentage (%)  
--- | --- | ---  
Lack of supportive infrastructure | 86 | 86  
The concept of Digital Marketing has not yet been fully embraced | 85 | 85  
Internet/connectivity charges | 90 | 90  
Limited applications to support the Digital Marketing Strategy | 86 | 86  
Limited fiscal space/ government support for the initiative | 75 | 75  
Few organisations in the tourism and hospitality industry have invested in Digital Marketing | 80 | 80  

Case Study Respondents (2019), Harare

and limited applications to support the DMS. In the absence of supportive infrastructure and the necessary applications, the implementation of the strategy will be difficult. Other major challenges affecting the implementation of the Digital Marketing Strategy are that the concept of Digital Marketing has not yet been fully embraced, few organisations in the tourism and hospitality industry have invested in Digital Marketing. In addition there is limited fiscal space/ government support for the initiative.

Table 4.9: Distribution of respondents on recommendations for the destination branding and image building exercise.

Above are the recommendations that came from the respondents as measures to complement the efforts that the tourism sector is pursuing. Key among the recommendations given is the consideration of investing in events and multi-purpose facilities, as highlighted by 90% of the respondents. Another key intervention that will be needed to compliment the current efforts is to invest in Media and Perception Management programs.

The MICE strategy that is being currently pursued is mostly focusing on the business component of events, there is also need to incorporate the leisure component through vying to host mega sports events like the African Cup of Nations (AFCON), All Africa Games and the Youth Games among
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consideration of hosting Expos</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration of Nation Branding as a priority and investing in it accordingly.</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration of hosting Sporting Events e.g. AFCON, All Africa Games, Youth Games</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in Events and Multi-purpose facilities</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in Information Communication Technologies (ICTs)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering Social events and not solely focusing on Business and conferences</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in Media and perception management programs</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully embracing the concept of Digital Marketing and availing sufficient resources for it.</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Case Study Respondents (2019), Harare*

others. This concurs with Kurtzman (2005), who argues that sports attract a global audience and are usually longer in duration. Girod (2009), asserts that the organization of European Football Championship can attract tourists who otherwise would not have come.

Another cited measure is the hosting of expos, which was cited by 84% of the respondents. Girod (2009), noted that one of the most successful tourism events with cultural meaning is the large public exhibitions named as Expo or World’s Fair. Expos have significant regional benefits, which include, infrastructure development, business development, enhanced international relations and increased tourism. The greatest advantage cited for expos is its duration, which can be as long as six months. Consideration and investing in Nation rebranding is another factor highlighted as a direly needed action for the destination branding exercise to yield fruits. If a nation’s brand is not attended to, then any destination branding effort is in vein. Other noted measures include fully
embracing the concept of Digital Marketing and availing sufficient resources for it and investing in Information Communication Technologies (ICTs).

4.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter focused on the presentation and analysis of findings from the data collection process and discussion of findings. Data presentation, analysis and interpretation in relation to literature reviewed in Chapter 2 was done. The researcher applied qualitative analysis in thematic presentations to answer interview questions. The research investigated the effectiveness of using digital marketing as a destination branding strategy. Comparison was done on the findings from the study with existing literature review to find if findings are in concurrence with existing literature or not in concurrence. The next chapter will provide further discussions with a focus on the conclusions and the recommendations emerging from the findings.
5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus on summaries and conclusions of findings and as well as proffering recommendations. Research based conclusions generated from the analysis and interpretation of collected data will be given. Recommendations are given to the tourism sector on ways to enhance the performance of the sector. At the end, the chapter gives direction for further research.

5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

From the findings, the most prevalent challenge affecting the tourism sector is negative media publicity, which has also affected arrivals from Zimbabwe’s traditional source markets which are the western countries. Destination inaccessibility/few direct and intra flights is another key challenge affecting the destination in terms of tourists arrivals, as cited by 85%. Due to limited fiscal space/government support for the sector, this has resulted in the destination being very expensive and offering prices that are not competitive as alluded to by 80 percent. The destination has also been heavily affected with the cash crisis and shortage of basic commodities. Key interventions to the above-mentioned challenges were the engagement of the International community and lobbying for removal of travel advisories, Destination rebranding and the MICE strategy.

A number of other measures which can also be put in place to address the challenges affecting the tourism sector were also given. Chief among them are price reviews and intra destination connectivity. Intra destination connectivity is a key challenge for the tourism sector, as there are no domestic flights to service most of the destinations. This has also had a negative bearing on visitations to most destinations in the country, as well as poor performance of domestic tourism. Another key intervention is the hosting of more conferences and events. The hosting of big events has a bearing on the image of the host destination. If successfully hosted it has a positive bearing on the destination’s image and if not successfully hosted it has a negative bearing on the image of
the host destination. It is an opportunity to better the image of a destination through high media coverage that follows some of these events.

The mostly used platforms to communicate about Zimbabwe as a destination are social media and the internet, as cited by 90% of the respondents. To note is that the use of digital billboards, travel magazines and travel catalogues are not being fully utilised. In addition, due to the cost of print and press media, the platforms are also not being fully capitalised and leveraging on to their full reach.

The digital marketing strategy is an effective and appropriate strategy for Zimbabwe’s tourism sector as it was highlighted by 85 percent of the respondents as one of the measures that needs to be invested more in, in Zimbabwe’s bid to the address the challenges affecting the tourism sector.

With regards to the role and benefits of digital marketing, key issues raised are its 24 hour access, aids in decision making, allows direct interface between consumers and suppliers. If these are fully utilised, the destination can benefit immensely from the strategy. The increased accessibility of digital marketing has provided an alternative, cost efficient way for tourism businesses and destinations to reach the consumer, which Zimbabwe as a destination also needs to leverage on to better position the destination on the global map.

The most commonly used platforms of digital marketing are brochures and word of mouth, with digital billboards and Tv/radio with the lowest respondents. This could be a reflection on the cost element ascribed to Tv/Radio platforms. The destination is still a bit wayward, hence the prominence of the use of brochures and Word of Mouth as platforms used. It is worthy to note that the use of Social media and the internet have gained popularity and organisations in the tourism and hospitality industry need to capitalize on their reach and impact. It is important to note that presence on these platforms not only helps brands to establish credibility, improve customer services but also assist in appreciating insights on what your customers are up to.

The use of the various digital marketing platforms has better positioned Zimbabwe as a destination, as cited by the majority of the respondents. Resultantly this has changed the negative tag labelled on Zimbabwe. In light of the above, digital marketing has been effective as a destination endorsement strategy. The use of the various digital marketing platforms has assisted to position Zimbabwe as a destination on the global map.
Key factors affecting the implementation of the Digital Marketing Strategy are internet/connectivity charges, lack of supportive infrastructure and limited applications to support the Digital Marketing Strategy. The implementation has also been affected by the fact that the concept has not yet been fully embraced, few organisations in the tourism industry have invested in it and lastly due to limited fiscal space/government support of the initiative.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

The research has explored, in depth, the effectiveness of digital marketing as a destination branding strategy, focusing on the tourism and hospitality players. Primarily the main objective of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of digital marketing as a destination branding strategy, and the conclusion is that the use of digital marketing is a very effective strategy based on research findings and related studies. Below are the conclusions that the researcher made.

5.2.1 Effectiveness of digital marketing as a destination branding tool

Digital marketing is an effective destination branding tool, as cited by majority of the respondents. Destinations which have invested in digital marketing have started to reap its benefits. Digital Marketing today has become one of the key focus areas for businesses world over. In addition, understanding the character of online marketing tactics and social media, and confronting them with efficient strategies contributes to developing more attractive tourism products and create more innovative tourism campaigns. However, it should be noted that they are other issues which also need to be attended to, to complement digital marketing in the destination branding exercise.

5.2.2 Challenges and measures for the Zimbabwe’s tourism sector

Negative perceptions in the sources markets were cited as the greatest challenge on tourist arrivals. From the prevalence of the effects on negative media publicity, and the resultant shying of the traditional source markets, it can be concluded that negative media perception has an adverse effect on the arrivals. The perception that is formed about a destination is a key contributor to allow or prevent arrivals to a destination. The inadequate funding for the sector has resulted in dilapidated tourism facilities in dire need of refurbishment. As a result, the destination becomes expensive, offering prices which are not competitive.
5.2.3 Best strategy Zimbabwe can use in its destination branding and image building exercise.

The digital Marketing strategy though useful is not being seen as such and resultantly not being fully utilised. However, it should be noted that there are other issues that also need to be addressed in order for the digital marketing to pay off. In addition, from the findings, digital marketing alone is not sufficient, hence it can be concluded there is need to interrogate other alternative options.

5.2.4 How digital marketing contributes to improving the image and appeal of a destination like Zimbabwe.

The increased accessibility of digital marketing has provided an alternative, cost efficient way for tourism businesses and destinations to reach the consumer. The more consumers can reach out to potential suppliers, the more the consumers can get to appreciate the various products a destination offers as well as counter the negative media publicity. Due to the fact that digital marketing is a cost effective means to reach customers, destinations can reach out to a larger clientele base, making the destination and its products and services known worldwide.

5.2.5 The role of digital marketing in today’s tourism industry

The diversity of the responses of the role digital marketing in today’s tourism industry are a sign that it has a key role to play in the tourism industry. The whole concept and functionalities of Digital Marketing are more competent, effective, result-oriented and measurable, which make it very different from traditional marketing. The adoption of digital marketing is of paramount importance in the tourism and hospitality industry for several reasons. The importance of Digital Marketing lies in the intangibility of the tourism service, which makes it impossible to evaluate before consumption, making word of mouth and reference groups important or an aid in decision making. Lastly, with the intense competition within the tourism industry, the digital marketing strategy might become one important competitive advantage for early adopters.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of effectiveness of using digital marketing as a destination branding tool, the recommendations that can be drawn are not exhaustive. The following recommendations are based on findings and the above conclusions. In this regard, it is envisaged that;
5.3.1 Investing in Multi-purpose facilities.

There is need to invest in multi-purpose facilities. Destinations which have made it in bringing people to their destinations have been able to do so because they have the requisite infrastructure. Currently Zimbabwe only boasts of Harare International Conference Centre (HICC) as its sole conferencing facilities. However it has its own challenges, hence the need for more modern multi-purpose facilities to cater for the different market needs across the entire globe.

5.3.2 Fully exploring the hosting of more events and the MICE route.

Since the sixties, this MICE market has grown significantly to become a very important sector of the tourism industry. Today the industry is one of the major sectors within the global tourism industry, which is growing and maturing at a rapid rate. In addition, MICE related travel is one of the fastest growing sectors of the global tourism industry. Because of the benefits associated with this route, it is imperative to fully explore the hosting of more events and conferences. For the success of this strategy there is need to invest in the request facilities and services such as conference facilities and requisite personnel with the desired skills. Having a unified MICE destination image is therefore a prime necessity to counter the ever increasing competition amongst destinations. Fully exploring this route therefore stands as a necessity. Though the MICE route seems to be one of the most prominent driving forces for the sector at the moment, a mix of both business and leisure events will do well for the destination to cater for both the leisure and business traveller.

5.3.3 Consideration of hosting of mega events and Expos

Hosting major sports events is of significance for many countries since it can provide an important catalyst for growth and development. More importantly for marketers and businessmen, mega sports events in recent years have had the reputation of having significant sponsorship rights, international television viewership in billions, and lucrative advertising slots tagged along. South Africa was able to receive the exposure that it needed and was able to sell itself to the whole world on what it had to offer, by hosting the 2010 FIFA World Cup, over a period of about a month. Though the MICE route currently employed is yielding positive results for the destination Zimbabwe, there is also need to consider expos as a compliment to the MICE strategy. Expos are usually of a longer duration and also have a bigger audience compared to the MICE route. In
addition, to complement the MICE route that the destination is currently pursuing in particular, mega sports events could also assist. Mega sports events to pursue include hosting the African Cup of Nations (AFCON), All Africa Games and Youth Games among others.

5.3.4 Investing in Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and fully embracing the concept of digital marketing

The most significant purpose of destination branding is to increase competitiveness between tourist destinations and strengthen their appeal in potential or actual markets. A destination can be developed by a variety of ways, most obviously in advertising, through direct marketing, personal selling, on websites and in brochures, but also through public and media relations, and through cooperation with DMOs. In light of the technological age that we are living in, there is serious and urgent need to consider investing in ICTs for the concept of digital marketing to be fully embraced.

Furthermore, the concept of digital marketing has not yet been fully embraced by the industry, and resultantly a few organisations in the tourism and hospitality industry have invested in Digital Marketing. Reasons for not being fully embraced being the internet charges, lack of supportive infrastructure, limited applications to support digital marketing and limited fiscal space/government support for the initiative. The above-mentioned reasons need to be addressed for the concept to be fully embraced.

5.3.5 There is need for considering nation rebranding as a priority and investing in Media and Perception Management programs.

Destination branding only considers the tourism component of the six pillars of nation branding. For it to yield meaningful results, there is need to address the other five pillars of nation branding which are namely; Governance, Exports, Investment & Immigration, Culture & heritage, and People. In order for digital marketing to achieve the much needed goals, nation branding also needs to be considered seriously, as it feeds or ultimately affects the outcomes of any destination branding exercise in a way. In the destination rebranding exercise, Media personnel engagement becomes a key intervention. It offers an opportunity to counter the negative media publicity so that the media personnel can retell the story of Zimbabwe as a destination of choice. If the destination is to brand itself as destination of choice, there is need to invest in media and perception management programs.
5.4 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research focused on the effectiveness of digital marketing on a destination’s branding, which integrates the concepts of the branding and destination image. In addition it only considered the tourism players’ perspective. There is need for future research which may look into both the tourists and the players, and find out how it has affected Zimbabwe’s image as a destination. This research only used local respondents, there is also need in future research to make use of exit surveys, where tourists exiting the country are interviewed or given questionnaires to fill in, than solely relying on opinions of the locals. This research was more qualitative, future research might need to include the quantitative component through use of regression analysis and correlation for comparison basis.

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter expounded on the major findings from the research. The researcher sought to establish the effectiveness of digital marketing as a destination branding strategy. Research based conclusions were generated from the analysis and interpretation of collected data. The researcher concluded that digital marketing is an effective destination branding strategy. Recommendations were given to the tourism sector on ways to enhance the performance of the sector. Lastly, the researcher recommends direction for further research.
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UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2018 Edition, World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), Spain


Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Desmond Makosa student number B1747712 and I am a final year MBL student at Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE). In partial fulfilment of the above mentioned programme, I am required to do a research project. It is against the aforementioned that I am therefore, kindly requesting for your time, to assist in answering my research topic. My research topic is: Effectiveness of using digital marketing as a destination branding strategy: A tourism players’ perspective.

Please note that, this exercise is purely academic and shall not be used for any other purposes, and all information will be treated with confidentiality. Should you require any additional information do not hesitate to contact me on makosadesmond@gmail.com or 0772 320 325/ 0716 331 510.

Desmond Makosa
RESEARCHER
QUESTIONNAIRE: TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY EMPLOYEES

Instructions

Please kindly answer the questions below by putting a tick (✓) in the box or by writing your answer in the space provided.

1. Gender
   - Male [ ]
   - Female [ ]

2. Age
   - 18 - 20 years [ ]
   - 21 - 30 [ ]
   - 31 - 40 [ ]
   - 41 - 55 [ ]
   - over 55 [ ]

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High School or less [ ]
   - Diploma [ ]
   - Undergraduate [ ]
   - Masters [ ]
   - Doctorate [ ]
   - Other (Specify) ……………………………………

4. Sector / industry of Operation
   - ZTA [ ]
   - Ministry official [ ]
   - TBCZ [ ]
   - Hotelier [ ]
   - Taxi Operator [ ]
   - Tour Operator [ ]
   - Travel Agent [ ]
   - Car Hire [ ]
   - Safaris [ ]
   - Parks & Wildlife [ ]
   - Other (Specify) ……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..

5. In your own opinion what are the challenges that negatively affected on tourists’ arrivals?
   ………………………………………………………………………
   ……………………………………………………………………………
   ……………………………………………………………………………
   ……………………………………………………………………………

6. What measures have been put in place to address these challenges?
   ……………………………………………………………………………
   ……………………………………………………………………………
   ……………………………………………………………………………
   ……………………………………………………………………………

7. Are the measures identified addressing the challenges as desired
   ……………………………………………………………………………
   ……………………………………………………………………………
   ……………………………………………………………………………
   ……………………………………………………………………………

8. What other measures can be used to position the destination strategically to attract attention and the desired visitorship?
   ……………………………………………………………………………
   ……………………………………………………………………………
9. In your opinion, what do you think are the most commonly used platforms to communicate the branding and positioning of Zimbabwe as a destination to both the domestic and international tourists? Please indicate your answer with an (√) in all applicable.

- Social media
- Website
- Brochures
- Word of Mouth
- Travel magazines
- Travel Agent
- Travel catalogue
- Press/Print media
- Digital billboards
- Travel expo
- Internet
- Billboards
- Other (Specify) _______________________________ __________

10. Digital marketing is one of the strategies being implemented in the destination branding efforts by the destination, what do you understand by the term digital marketing?

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12. What role does digital marketing play in today’s tourism industry?

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13. How does digital marketing contribute to improving the image and appeal of a destination like Zimbabwe?

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14. Which platforms of digital marketing are the Zimbabwe tourism players using to market the products and services they offer? Please indicate your answer with an (√) in all applicable.

- Social media
- Website
- e-Brochures
- Word of Mouth
- Travel magazines
- Travel Agent
- Travel catalogue
- Guide book
- Tv/Radio
- Billboards
- Promo videos
- Print/Press media
- Digital billboards
- Travel expo
- Internet
- Billboards
- Other (Specify) __________
15. Indicate your level of agreement to statements below, in the Likert scale provided below:

Key: **SA** – Strongly Agree; **A** – Agree; **N** – Neutral; **D** – Disagree; **SD** – Strongly Disagree

| The use of various digital marketing platforms has better positioned destination Zimbabwe? | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| Digital marketing has changed the negative tag that was on Zimbabwe as a tourist destination? |
| Digital marketing has been a destination endorsement strategy? |
| The use of various digital marketing platforms has assisted to position the destination Zimbabwe on the global map? |
| The digital marketing strategy the Tourism sector is pursuing is the most appropriate route? |
| The introduction of the Digital Marketing Strategy has created an opportunity to counter the negative publicity labelled against the destination? |
| Digital Marketing now drives the Tourism industry world over? |
| Has Zimbabwe as a destination invested enough in Digital Marketing to achieve the desired outcomes. |
| The benefits of investing in digital marketing out-weighed the costs? |

16. In your view, what is affecting the implementation of the digital marketing strategy?

17. What recommendations would you give to Zimbabwe tourism stakeholders in their destination branding and image building exercise?

Thank you for your co-operation
Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Desmond Makosa student number B1747712 and I am a final year MBL student at Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE). In partial fulfilment of the above mentioned programme, I am required to do a research project. It is against the aforementioned that I am therefore, kindly requesting for your time, to assist in answering my research topic. My research topic is: *Effectiveness of using digital marketing as a destination branding strategy: A tourism players’ perspective.*

Please note that, this exercise is purely academic and shall not be used for any other purposes and all information will be treated with confidentiality. Should you require any additional information do not hesitate to contact me on makosadesmond@gmail.com or 0772 320 325/ 0716 331 510.

Desmond Makosa
RESEARCHER
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MANAGEMENT STAFF

1. How many years have you been working in the sector? ............................................

2. How many years have you worked for the organisation? ............................................

3. Which department or section do you head? ............................................................... 

4. There has been a decrease from the contribution from the tourism cake, what could be the challenges affecting the destination?

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5. What measure have been put to address these challenges?

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6. Digital marketing is amidst the efforts to better position the destination against the background of a decrease in tourist arrivals. What do you understand by the term digital marketing?

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7. What role does digital marketing play in today’s tourism industry?

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8. How does digital marketing contribute to improving the image and appeal of a destination like Zimbabwe?

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9. How can the use of digital marketing contribute to improving the image of Zimbabwe as a destination?

10. What benefits and opportunities accrue from the use of digital marketing?

11. In your own opinion do you think the use of digital marketing in the destination branding efforts works for Zimbabwe? Justification.

12. What other are measures can be used to position the destination strategically to attract attention and the desired visitorship?

13. In your view, what is affecting the implementation of the digital marketing strategy?

14. What recommendations would you give to Zimbabwe tourism stakeholders in their destination branding and image building exercise?