

Challenges to Sustainable Tourism Marketing Operations in Zambia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to establish the challenges to sustainable tourism marketing in Zambia. For several years, Zambia's economic recovery trajectory has been anchored on the travel and tourism sector. However, the industry has faced a number of challenges which among others could be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of borders and other travel restrictions as a result of the pandemic caused the reduction in the number of international visitors to the country. The reduction in the number of tourists have had far-reaching consequences to the sector and the economy at large. Thus, this paper sought to understand these dynamics. During this study, some of the identified challenges to the tourism sector included inadequate transformative implementation mechanisms, inadequate human resources, technical and financial resources, inadequate accommodation and transport infrastructure, limited investments, reduced international tourist arrivals, unemployment, lack of recreational activities, and inadequate tourism marketing. Arising from the challenges, it is recommended that the travel and tourism industry should be supported by financial, technical and human resources to ensure adequate implementation of the Zambia Tourism Master Plan and sustainable tourism. In addition, key stakeholders should collaborate in order to improve and construct tourism-related infrastructure, facilitate local and foreign investment into the tourism sector, encourage diversification and eco-tourism to boost tourism marketing and investment promotion in order to make the industry more lucrative and sustainable. Further, more research on the travel and tourism industry amidst the COVID-19 pandemic is recommended to provide more information for policy making and decision making in relation to the concepts of marketing research and operations research. COVID-19 exposed a lot of lacunas in the tourism sector and moving forward, Zambia would do better to ensure that policy, practice as well as legislation are supportive of a robust sector capable of thriving during pandemics.

Keywords: Tourism, Marketing Research, Operations Research, Challenges, Sustainability, Zambia

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the mainstays for Zambia's economic recovery trajectory and has been one of the pillars for sustainable economic development [16, 19]. At the apex, the tourism sector is managed by the Ministry of Tourism and the Zambia Tourism Agency, a statutory body under the Ministry, which is charged with the responsibility of promoting Zambia as a top eco-tourism destination in Southern Africa. Marketing the tourism potential is a key factor which requires good planning, execution, monitoring and evaluation in Zambia. This requires conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of the tourism main activities through the media and other platforms in order to provide relevant information that will allow more visitors into the country enabling their satisfaction and experience with the tourism facilities in Zambia. The motivation behind the paper is to give insights of Marketing Research within the context of the Tourism Sector in Zambia. The role that Marketing Operations plays within the Sector will provide the basis for discussing the challenges within the tourism industry.

The article provides the statement of the problem followed by definition of marketing research and provides a contextual meaning of the tourism industry. Marketing Operations will also be defined in order to establish the ideal system for marketing within the Tourism Sector in Zambia. Literature has been reviewed from a global perspective and regional as well as from the national performance perspective specifically in reference to the Tourism Sector in Zambia. In addition, the challenges faced within the tourism sector are highlighted and plausible recommendations are made on how the tourism industry could harness its developmental prospect in order to improve the economic status of the nation and better the lives of the many Zambians wallowing in abject poverty.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Zambia's tourism sector has been of tremendous significance in as much as the attraction of visitors to the country is concerned and has yielded the much-needed revenue and foreign direct investment from the Tourism Sector from 2002 to 2019. However, the industry has faced challenges to attain significant growth and transformation largely attributed to slowed marketing efforts. This was evidenced through the increment in the number of tourist arrivals to Zambia as indicated in the Figure 1 below:



Figure 1: Source: The World Bank, 2021

From the graphical representation above, it is evident that Zambia's tourism industry had reflected a steady increase in international tourism arrivals over the years. In fact, the industry contributed 7% of GDP (USD 1,701 million) and 7.2% of total employment in the year 2019 [1,2,4]. However, the tourism industry has been at risk due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This can be attributed to the closure of borders not necessarily by Zambia but other nations like South Africa, the United States of America, China, the United Kingdom just to mention a few, which are the major sources of international guests to Zambia. The closure of borders and other travel restrictions resulted in the decline in the number of international visitors to the country. The reduction in the number of tourists has far-reaching consequences to the sector and the economy at large. In addition, there could also be other challenges that the tourism sector has been faced with and therefore, the paper discusses challenges to the sustainability of the travel and tourism industry of Zambia.

General Objective

The main objective of the study was to identify the challenges to the travel and tourism industry in Zambia.

Specific Objectives

- i. To identify the challenges to the Tourism Sector in relation to marketing research operations.

- ii. To review the marketing mix and how it had benefitted the tourism industry.
- iii. To establish how the Operations Research system had aided the tourism industry to remain attractive and profitable.
- iv. To establish the coordination mechanisms that were implemented in order to sustain public institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

- 1. What is the tourism outlook at the global level?
- 2. How is the performance of Zambia's tourism industry at regional level?
- 3. What is Marketing Research in the context of the tourism industry in Zambia?
- 4. How has Operations Research impacted Zambia's tourism?
- 5. What are the challenges to the tourism Sector in Zambia?
- 6. What are the sustainable ways that can boost Zambia's potential as an eco-tourism destination?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism at Global Level

At the global level, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) is the United Nations specialized agency mandated with the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) defines tourism as a "social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes". Tourism involves transportation, accommodation, eating and drinking establishments, retail shops, entertainment businesses, and other hospitality services are among the activities, services, and industries that provide a travel experience for individuals or groups traveling away from home.

A global picture is provided by the UNWTO regarding the reduction in international tourist arrivals 72% in the first ten months of 2020 over the same period last year, curbed by the slow virus containment, low traveller confidence and important restrictions on travel still in place. By implication, the decline of international tourist arrivals translates into a loss of export revenues from international tourism.

With the reduction in the COVID-19 pandemic and uplifting of lockdowns, the global picture has slightly seen some improvement in international arrivals in 2021. If the situation continues on this trajectory, it is envisaged the Tourism Value Chain System will contribute to the various economic benefits is travel services, transportation, accommodation and other tourism product services.

Tourism at the Regional Level

Under the Southern African Development Community (SADC), it is observed that there are partnerships and targets to achieve within the tourism sector at regional level. The Tourism initiative are implemented taking cognizance of global and continental tourism programmes including the United Nations World Tourism Organisation's (UNWTO) Agenda for Africa, African Union's Agenda 2063, East African Community's (EAC) tourism programmes and Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa's (COMESA) tourism initiatives [2, 8, 12, 17-18]. Some of the notable benchmarks include: improving and defending the region's tourist

reputation and image; promoting tourism in transfrontier conservation areas; improving the quality of visitor experiences and satisfaction levels; and optimizing tourism partnerships and collaboration.

At regional level Zambia is depicted as an underdog within the Regional Tourism Organisation of Southern Africa (RETOSA). RETOSA is a concept that brings together the 14 fascinating countries of the Southern part of Africa – Angola, Botswana, DR Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe to offer a unique opportunity to discover the natural wonders and splendors of the region. Zambia's major competitors in tourism are South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia. The numbers of international arrivals in the named countries are much higher than Zambia and this could be attributed to lack of direct flights to Zambia by the international travelers. It is a well-known fact that Zambia does not have a national airline and this has contributed significantly to restrictions in internal arrivals.

Zambia's Travel and Tourism Industry

Tourism is recognized as an essential economic sector for economic diversification, foreign exchange, and job generation in Zambia's Vision 2030 and the Seventh National Development Plan 2017-2021 (7NDP). The National Tourism Policy of 2015, from a policy standpoint, lays the course for future tourism growth and development. Zambia's Vision for 2030, in light of tourism is to achieve the middle-income status and to become one of Africa's top five tourist attractions.

Market Research becomes a viable tool that would necessitate the country's aspirations of being among the best tourist destinations by being competitive in the marketing of tourism, supporting efforts aimed at researching the needs of tourists in targeted markets. It is acknowledged that there is political will supported by policies and the institutional arrangements in the travel and tourism industry of Zambia's that aim for the success of the industry. The Ministry of Tourism through the Zambia Tourism Agency (ZTA) formerly known as the Zambia National Tourist Board has the major responsibility for marketing the countries tourism potential.

For developing countries like Zambia, tourism is becoming one of the most significant socioeconomic sectors. Globalization, mobility, and information reach and richness are all aspects of the information society that are included into tourism. A national tourist office, such as the Zambia Tourism Agency, is critical to the tourism industry's success. The advancements in information Communication Technology as a global phenomenon has had a significant impact on tourism as an emerging electronic commerce sector in the Zambian tourism industry. It is through e-tourism that there are offerings of major opportunities for all tourism destinations. Zambia has significant prospects for tourism and offers affluence in natural tourism resources. Zambia's tourism assets include natural phenomena like 20 national parks, rivers, lakes, swamps, Heritage sites and game management. Zambia has the most freshwater resources of any country in Southern Africa. This is due to the country's diverse range of rivers, both large and tiny, which can be found throughout the country. More than twenty awe-inspiring waterfalls flow from these rivers, making Zambia a waterfall hotspot [3,13-15]. One of the marvels is the Victoria Falls, which is one of the world's Seven Natural Wonders. Zambia also has a rich and diverse culture, with over 30 colorful traditional ceremonies held each year.

A quick check on the ZTA website provides evidence that there is a laid down Tourism Marketing System which could have only been possible through Operations Research. The system touches on the advertising of tourism prospects of Zambia that include natural resources, heritage, cultural, wildlife, adventure and eco-tourism. The system actually provides a marketing of the mentioned products, the locations, distribution networks, and transport facilities available. In addition, accommodation is inclusive of pricing and reservations. This sits well within the concept of operations research because there is value addition in the decision making for the customers who wish visit the country with the availability of accurate and relevant information.

What are the Challenges to Zambia's Tourism Industry?

Some of the major highlights of the challenges in Zambia's tourism sector stem from The Tourism Master plan. It was noted that Zambia in the past from 1978 to 2017 lacked a comprehensive strategic framework to facilitate systematic exploitation of the country's vast tourism assets [4, 10-12]. A Tourism Master Plan was developed in 2018 with the prospects of strengthening the systematic development of the country's vast tourism resources and be viewed as a "Master Guide" for both tourism planning and development across the country. The researcher hastens to indicate that having a Masterplan would bring focus to the tourism sector. However, developing a Plan may be one milestone that still requires adequate human, technical and financial resource support which are major challenges to the tourism Sector in Zambia.

Another challenge is perhaps the underdeveloped tourism-related infrastructure which is related to accommodation, the various heritage sites and transport infrastructure. Sustainable development of tourism industry requires that the various tourist destination is accessible by road, rail and air. Infrastructure in tourism also includes board and lodging facilities which are critical for tourist stay but may be inadequate or non-existent in some areas.

The operational budget for the tourism sector gives it limited scope for implementing key strategic interventions for project implementation across all its divisions, including all national parks, heritage sites, tourism promotion, etc [5, 20-21]. The sector is further incapacitated by limited investment by both local and foreign investors.

Certain tourism destinations like the upcoming Northern Corridor may have limited tourism product offering range and scope. It is one thing to have beaches situated in Samfya but this should be supported by other adventurous activities and commodities to make the locations more exciting and satisfying to tourists. Therefore, sector lacks more recreational facilities to motivate tourists to visit the country.

The ZTA has tried its level best to market tourism however there is inadequate tourism promotion and marketing in comparison to the tourism packaging embarked on by other competitors like South Africa. For instance, one would assume that the mighty Victoria Falls is right in South Africa because of the comprehensive packaging.

The tip of the challenges as at now is the havoc raged by the COVID-19 pandemic on the travel and tourism industry. The impact of the pandemic on the sector has result in the closure of businesses among them the hospitality industry. Because of lack of tourist arrivals most lodges

and hotels were not able to sustain their operations and paying their employees which resulted in operations at a minimal capacity and staff redundancies.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The research design was descriptive and exploratory in the sense that a desk review of available literature was employed for the study. The research utilised qualitative research methodologies were mainly explanatory and narrative based. Data was collected from reliable sources such as books, government document, research journals and online publications. Data analysis was structured in the context of a discussion of finding in relation to the specific research objectives and the conceptual framework. Data validity was enshrined in the authenticity and integrity of secondary sources of data.

The paradigm in this study is the shift from the old type of marketing of goods and services to the contemporary marketing mix of employing marketing research and operations research to facilitate decision making and application of scientific principles. In that context, the major variables will be as follows: marketing, Marketing research, Operations research and sustainable tourism. Marketing research and Operations research were the independent variable and the dependent variable was sustainable tourism with marketing as the moderator variable. It is expected that the study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge about the Tourism Value Chain as in the perspective of Zambia. Further, the study is expected to yield information that may be useful to policy makers in ensuring that the tourism sector is sustainable and that it will significantly contribute to the economic development of the country. Finally, the study would meet the author's aspirations in the completion of an academic Doctoral degree in Business and Management which will be beneficial for personal career development, and contribute to the academic body of knowledge.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Objective 1: Challenges to the Tourism Sector

It was observed from the literature reviewed that a Tourism Master Plan was developed in 2018 with the prospects of strengthening the systematic development of the country's vast tourism resources. However, while drafting a plan is a significant step forward, it still requires appropriate human, technical, and financial resources, all of which are big difficulties for Zambia's tourism sector. The sector is further hampered by a lack of investment from both domestic and international firms. In comparison to competitors in the region, there is little tourism promotion and marketing. Businesses in the hospitality industry have closed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the industry. The industry is further affected by infrastructure inadequacies in accommodation and transport to support local and foreign tourism.

The challenges highlighted stem from a global perspective and reality that most economies have had a negative impact in the tourism sector in the past two years and Zambia's tourism industry has not been exempted from the global effects. Tourism is a contemporary issue across the world and can be bridged through using modern phenomena in marketing and operations research which is a process that seeks to identify problems in the sector and follows a scientific application of modelling and seeking best optimal solutions to problems like the ones identified above.

It can thus be concluded that the study managed to adequately tackle the first objective which was the identification of challenges to the Tourism Sector in relation to marketing research operations.

Objective 2: Tourism Marketing Mix

According to [1, 6] is that the marketing tools are classified in four broad categories which are the product, price, place and promotion. It is incumbent upon the government and institutions assigned to the tourism sector to ensure that the marketing mix is achieved in order to ensure sustainable tourism as the dependent variable. As a result, a Tourism Value Chain is essential in the processes of creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging valuable services for customers, clients, partners, and society as a whole, as a result, a Tourism Value Chain is essential in the processes of creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging valuable services for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.

In order to deliver the value proposition in the tourism sector, there is need to create a satisfying marketing of product offerings. As earlier observed Zambia is endowed with abundant natural resources as indicated in Figure 2 which is capable of assuring tourists of the experience and satisfaction of their lives. Zambia's tourism products include 20 national parks, 34 game reserves, rivers waterfalls and several heritage sites and museums [1,2-3].



Figure 2: 3D Map of Zambia, 2011 Source: [www. Vidiani.com](http://www.Vidiani.com)

Marketing Research is useful for identifying tourism marketing opportunities, generating marketing actions, monitoring marketing strategies and improving the understanding of the marketing process. In the marketing mix it is inevitable to price the commodity to ensure that the industry is profitable and this has been adequately embarked on by charging cost effective rates for site visits to the various locations and also ensuring that there are tourism levies on accommodation facilities. The distribution is another important component which necessitates how to make the product available to the customers which address the issue of transport infrastructure. As indicated earlier, Zambia may have inadequate air, road and rail transport and infrastructure in order to make the tourism sector more viable. In addition, accommodation may not be adequate and the ones available may not be fairly priced especially for the local

tourists. The final aspect in the tourism mix is the promotion of the tourism products and it has been observed that the sector has improved in marketing and advertising Zambia's tourism potential but a lot more could be done to encourage more international arrivals.

The benefits of the tourism marketing mix in the highlighted Tourism Value Chain System has significantly contributed to the various economic benefits is travel services, transportation, accommodation and other tourism product services. The tourism services, hospitality and infrastructure all present prospects investments. The country's Gross Domestic Product has continued to improve with the contribution from the tourism industry more so from the international tourist arrivals and also from export earnings from tourism products. It was concluded that the tourism marketing mix has benefitted the tourism industry in Zambia and that addressed the second objective of the study.

Objective 3: Operations Research and Value Addition

The significance of the Operations Research in as far as tourism is concerned is the value added in the application and interdisciplinary in nature of the tourism system. It is a holistic approach through interactions of the whole system through integration. We observed that there are institutional arrangements at global level (UNWTO), regional level (SADC, RETOSA) and at local level through the Ministry of Tourism and the Zambia Tourism Agency that have been established to ensure that the tourism industry is championed. The systems at all the different levels are integrated as evidenced through the World Wide Web and the varied statistical data available. This could only point to the fact that mathematical and analytical models are at play in the tourism sector as well.

It is through the modelling process which is an image or representation of the actual real system [6-7] that projections of tourism arrivals using advancements in information Communications Technology that Operations Research system has aided the tourism industry to remain attractive and profitable.

Objective 4: Recommend Possible Interventions

The recommendation of possible interventions that can boost the tourism industry in Zambia to make it more sustainable will be addressed in the next section.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following were the recommendations arising from the identified challenges in the tourism industry of Zambia:

The travel and tourism industry should be supported by financial, technical and human resource to ensure adequate implementation of the Zambia Tourism Master Plan and sustainable tourism.

The Government through Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Infrastructure, Housing and Urban Development, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, and other key stakeholders should collaborate in order improve and construct tourism-related infrastructure, such as roads, lodging facilities, airstrips, heritage sites etc.

The Government should create an enabling environment that will facilitate local and foreign investment into the tourism sector which will benefit the economy.

There is need for more diversified tourism products and services in order to encourage tourists to visit the unfrequented heritage sites which will boost tourism revenue.

Eco-tourism should be promoted to highlight the abundant nature and wilderness that Zambia is endowed with for tourism marketing and investment promotion.

There is need for the Ministry to strengthen and prioritize research and development to ensure that they have accurate and up to date data for informed decision making.

There is need to repackage the promotion and marketing of Zambia's tourism potential through ICTs, e-tourism and social media platforms in order to encourage more international arrivals and investment opportunities.

Further research on the travel and tourism industry amid the COVID-19 pandemic is recommended to provide more information for policy making and decision making.

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