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Vitalis Basera
Department of Tourism and
Hospitality, Manicaland State
University of Applied Sciences,
Zimbabwe

Rudorwashe Baipai
Department of Tourism and
Hospitality, Manicaland State
University of Applied Sciences,
Zimbabwe

The online marketing strategies of Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs), South Africa Tourism (SAT) Southern Africa benchmark

Vitalis Basera and Rudorwashe Baipai

Abstract

The determination of this study was to compare the online marketing strategies of Southern African countries with respect to Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa. The study sought to establish the online marketing approaches implemented by ZTA, BTO and SAT coming from the context that a number of DMOs websites in Africa lack interactive web facilities and have partial knowledge on the importance of information, communication and technology (ICT) in tourism marketing. The fact that tourism has been branded the fastest growing industry world over, in Zimbabwe it is not like that while just across the Limpopo River in South Africa tourism is steadily developing and moderately in Botswana it is booming which prompted the researcher to compare the ZTA, BTO and SAT online marketing strategies. The objective was to benchmark the countries online marketing strategies. The study adopted comparative design as a way of drawing recommendations useful to ZTA, BTO and SAT. Information appropriate to this study was drawn from a systematic examination of the organisations websites and social media platforms. A modified website evaluation model ICTRT was used to compare the websites. The results confirmed that Zimbabwe and Botswana have a lot to improve and South Africa is setting the pace but a lot desires attention to improve their online marketing strategies.

Keywords: tourism, marketing, online marketing, Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), South Africa Tourism (SAT), Botswana Tourism Organisation

Introduction

The tourism industry is viewed as one of the main industries in the world contributing approximately 10.4% of the global gross domestic product (GDP) and offering employment to over 313 million people whereas serving 1.4 billion travelers globally (WTTC, 2018) [42, 43], a number which analyst and researchers expect to increase to 2 billion by the year 2030. The conventional economic sectors (mining, agriculture and manufacturing) are performing poorly, the travelling industry has emerged as the major contributor of the GDP since the turn of the new millennium in many African nations and is at present regarded as the only hope for revolutionising African economies. Suggestion from Signé & Johnson (2018) [31], UNWTO (2018) [40] and WTTC (2018) [42, 43] all facts to an encouraging development of the tourism industry through the adoption of information, communication and technology systems. World over governments have since setup Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) which are standalone organisations responsible for promoting tourism (Bonifacio, 2015) [4]. The DMOs use mutually the conventional marketing and the ICT based marketing approaches which includes the use of the internet – online marketing. The organisations use social media and their official websites to promote tourism in their respective countries and worldwide. It is important to note that the organisations works together with other private, public, and intercontinental bodies to promote tourism. Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) is responsible for marketing tourism in Zimbabwe, South Africa Tourism (SAT) is responsible for marketing tourism in South Africa and Botswana Tourism Organisation (BTO) is responsible for marketing tourism in Botswana. The study objective was to establish and benchmark the online marketing strategies used by ZTA, BTO and SAT. Coming from the background that most DMOs in Africa lack interactive web facilities and have limited understanding on the implication of ICT in tourism marketing (Maswera & Edwards, 2008) [18] it is prudent to benchmark. The best practice DMO in this case was SAT as it is more aggressive online presence.

Corresponding Author:
Vitalis Basera
Department of Tourism and
Hospitality, Manicaland State
University of Applied Sciences,
Zimbabwe

Background

Destination Management Organisation (DMO) enables the considerate of the full economic and social measurement of tourism in terms of supply and demand, in so doing controlling tourism planning and policy formulation whereas providing a valuable petitioning instrument to national tourism (UNWTO, 2018) [40]. DMO own official websites to support its function in marketing the destination. As a part of the DMO, government official websites along with official websites of the ministry of Tourism at national level, play a critical role in promoting the destinations as well as the individual services and facilities of a destination. Therefore, website's features should be carefully selected and designed (Subandi & Putra, 2017) [36]. The social media and websites today are major marketing tools, the better the level of superiority, the better the effect (Oji, *et al.*, 2017) [23].

Many studies have dealt with assessing social media marketing, website marketing and the excellence of websites in general, which consist of hotel websites, destination website, airline websites, and travel agency websites, each by their own different approach to evaluation (Law, Buhalis & Qi, 2010; Xavier University Library, 2017; Nevares & Hayman, 2012; Li & Wang 2010; Ip, *et al.*, 2011; Tsokota *et al.*, 2013) [15, 2, 16].

Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa are found on the

Southern part of the African continent with relatively similar developmental history as they are all former colonies of Britain. Regionally, the countries are situated in Southern Africa and only South Africa have sea ports. The countries have a diversified economy based on primarily on mining, agriculture, manufacturing and tourism. Tourism is one of the key industries which earns the countries' much needed foreign currency, offers jobs to thousands and contribute to gross domestic product. Tourism has remained the fastest growing industry in with notable economic impact in Southern Africa, table 1 shows the economic impact of tourism in the respective countries and the forecast for 2028. With the improved online marketing practices the forecasted impact of tourism is realistic above all in positive trajectory of tourism business environment (WTTC, 2018) [42, 43]. In developed countries like Canada, Britain and Spain tourism is still a beacon in the country's economic activities (UNWTO, 2018) [40]. Tourism in Canada contributed 7% to GDP which was highly attributed to discounts and personalisation of products offered through the website marketing (Commission, 2010) [7]. A number of services are now being distributed online and making sales is now just a matter of a click of a button. Developing countries can benefit a lot if they are to embrace the use of ICT in today's global market (Maswera & Edwards, 2008) [18].

Table 1: Tourism impact in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Botswana.

	Botswana			South Africa			Zimbabwe		
	2017	Forecast		2017	Forecast		2017	Forecast	
		2018	2028		2018	2028		2018	2028
2018 GDP Direct Contribution (US\$ million); % of Total	687.5; 3.8%	727.4	1,131.8; 3.9%	2,570.1; 3.2%	2,673.0	3,890.0; 3.6%	5.123; 3.0%	5.278	678.5; 3.3%
GDP Total Contribution (US\$ million); % of Total	2,072.9; 11.5%	2,174.5	3,363.0; 11.7%	8,272.3; 10.4%	8,603.2	12,450.1; 11.7%	1,199.8 7.1%	1,225.0	1,556.3 7.6%
Employment Direct Contribution; % of Total	26,000; 2.6%	27,118	42,000; 3.4%	118,454,000; 3.8%	121,296,896	150,139,000; 4.2%	27,500; 1.6%	28,435	33,000; 1.7%
Employment Total Contribution; % of Total	76,000; 7.6%	78,500	10200; 8.3%	313,221,000; 9.9%	322,666,000	413,556,000; 11.6%	69,000; 4.4%	69,000	81,000; 4.0%
Visitor Exports (US\$ million); % of Total	686.6; 7.4	725.7	1,137.0; 7.6%	1,494.2; 6.5%	1,552.5	2,311.4; 6.9%	214.9; 4.7%	227.4	363.8 5.7%
Investments (US\$ million); % of Total	443.3; 8.3%	457.9	709.5; 8.6%	882.4; 4.5%	920.3	1,408.3; 5.1%	97.1 ;4.7%	101.7	121.7; 4.7%

Source: WTTC, 2018 [42, 43]

Online Marketing

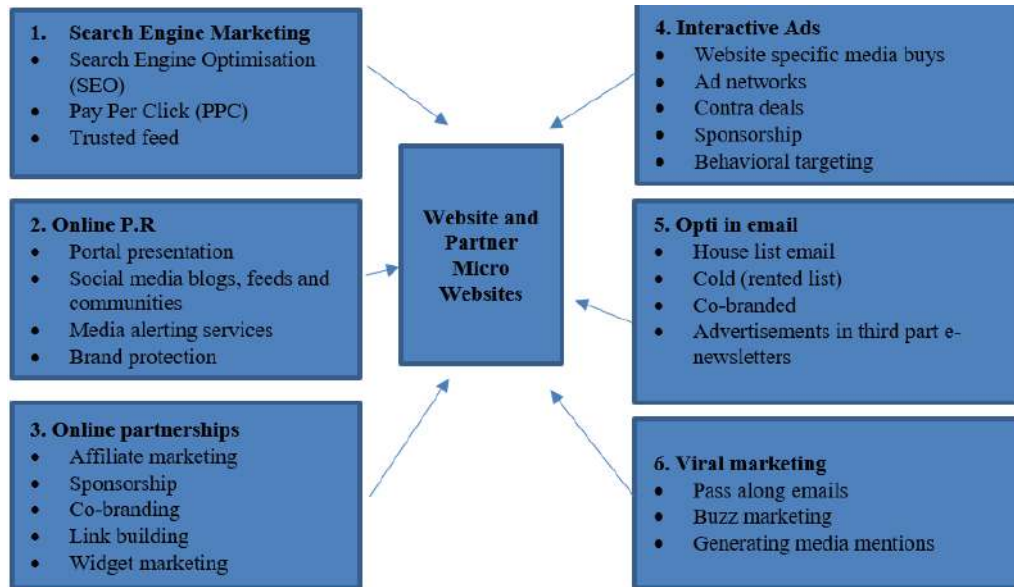
Marketing pertains a relationship called an exchange relationship (Zimmer, 2017) [46] and online marketing is an approach that gives an organisation or individual the capability to reach customers by launching advanced practices, merging technology with conventional marketing strategies. Online marketing is defined by Chaffey (2002) as use of digital technologies which include online channels (e-mail, website, database) to back marketing activities meant at attaining profits and retaining of clients through usage of unified targeted communications and online facilities that meet their distinct needs.

Online marketing has brought with it a number of advantages and challenges to either the customers, businesses and society. United States economy has

experienced a shift in the economy driven by online marketing contributing 4.7% to gross domestic product in 2010 and expected to grow by 10% per annum (Roberts & Micken, 2015) [27]. Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán (2016) [25] noted that online marketing aids organisations attain their marketing goals through creating a relationship between mass distribution and customisation. With the speedy development of technology in society, the embracing of online marketing strategy is more important than ever as the world's population of internet users is ballooning (Internet World Stats, 2018). Innovative technologies have enforced companies to review marketing strategies (González Romo, *et al.*, 2017) [12] and they further explained the adoption of technology in marketing will help marketers reach young audience that massively use mobile gadgets

regularly. Use of online marketing will move companies out of there luxury zone noted (Slade, 2016; Armitage, 2015) [33, 31] and is expected to grow in the future revamping ways orgnitions do business (Longo, 2016) [17]. Online marketing also has advantages as low cost, flexibility and convinience and easy analytics (Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2016) [25]. Chaffey (2003) summarised online marketing benefits as 6Cs giving them as cost reduction, capability, competitive advantage, communication improvement, control and consumer service improvement.

Online marketing uses various media communication channels shown in Figure1. The six types of online media communications channel (search engine optimisation, online public relations, online partnership, interactive ads, opt in e-mail and viral marketing) and the good use of these methods inconjunction with a better website can assist companies to increase traffic as well as achieving the marketing objectives they have set up (Chaffey, 2003).



Source: Chaffey (2003)

Fig 1: Six online communications tools for media communications

Objective and research question

The objective of this study was to draw useful lessons in online marketing strategies hinged on website marketing being adopted by DMOs in Southern Africa specifically Zimbabwe, Botswana benchmarking with South Africa which seem to be performing well inferring from the economic impact of tourism in the country (Table 1).

The subsequent research question was postured in this research: What online marketing strategies are being used by the ZTA, BTO and SAT?

Methodology

A case study strategy was followed in study in which ZTA, BOT and SAT online marketing strategies were compared. Netnography was used to gather data. The study implemented the websites assessment techniques as postulated by (Li & Wang, 2010) [16], Information dimension, Communication dimension, Transaction dimension, Relationship dimension and Technical dimension model (ICTRT) for data collection, analysis and presentation. The ICTRT model was the most appropriate model which allowed the study to compare the websites of ZTA, BTO and SAT than Extended Model of Internet Commerce Adoption the (EMICA) and Balanced Score

Card (BSC) approaches. On one hand, the BSC was not suitable for this type of study because of logical sequence limitation (Qin *et al*, 2013) while the EMICA fall short because of the phase approach which remains inconsistent with variations regarding to business level by which the websites are developed (Schmidt *et al*, 2008). The DMOs social media platforms were also critically examined according to social media specific dimensions. A panel of five experts in online marketing and information technology experts critically compared the online marketing strategies.

Results and Discussions

The research results showed that ZTA, SAT and BTO use a number of online marketing techniques as ways of promoting tourism. The DMOs use search engines such as Google, Yahoo, MSN; website marketing; email marketing; blogs; social media (Facebook and Twitter), YouTube and online forums. South Africa is the only country which use pay per click, flicker, pinterest and Instagram. The DMOs have official websites www.zimbabwetourism.net, www.southafrica.net and www.botswanatourism.co.bw. Table: 2. Shows online social media marketing strategies used by ZTA, SAT, BTO.

Table 2: Online marketing strategies used by ZTA, SAT, BTO.

Facebook	ZTA	SAT	BTO
Page name	Tourism Zimbabwe @TourismZimbabwe	Love South Africa @SouthAfricaTourism	Botswana Tourism @BotswanaTourism
Likes	12829	138751	40553
Follows	13279	141997	41637
Twitter	ZTA	SAT	BTO
Page name	#VisitZimbabwe @tourismzimbabwe	#MeetSouthAfrica@GoToSouthAfrica	#BotswanaTourism@BotswanaTourism
Tweets	3815	892	2471
Following	535	14.6k	243
Followers	22K	491K	21.6k
Likes	3061	5323	882
Lists	2	12	0
YouTube	ZTA	SAT	BTO
Page name	Zimbabwe Tourism	Meet South Africa	---
Subscribe	153	12556	---
Videos	18	660	1
Views	2442	2935578	20307

Source: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter; (2019)

When using search engines; Yahoo, Google and Bing the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority is poorly ranked, it is ranked below third on the search results, South Africa Tourism and Botswana Tourism Organisation are highly ranked on first, second or third. ZTA website conflicts with a number of websites when searching for it on search engines. BTO use social media as part of their online marketing using Facebook only while ZTA and SAT uses Twitter and YouTube linked to their official websites. However, BTO have a twitter account and from the perspective of online marketing it is not recognised as it is not linked to the DMO gateway of online marketing which is a website. It is also important to highlight that the SAT had gone a step further by using other strategies such as Pay per Click, Instagram, Flickr and Pinterest which places the organisation on a

more competitive edge than ZTA and BTO. SAT is far ahead of ZTA in terms of social media marketing as its social media pages have many followers and likes. ZTA and SAT joined twitter in the same year of 2009, ZTA joined YouTube in 2009 and SAT in 2008 but still marketing efforts of ZTA are falling far below the age of their pages. The social media pages of SAT have links with one another thus increasing the spectrum of the pages. ZTA social media pages do not have links to other social media pages and they are not highly interactive as there are old posts with very few comments

Accordingly, DMOs website were compared on five extents, including information, communication, transaction, relationship and technical merit as postulated by (Li & Wang, 2010) [16].

Table 3: Information, Communication, Transaction, Relationship and Technical merit (ICTRT model)

Information Dimension	ZTA	SAT	BTO	Transaction dimension	ZTA	SAT	BTO
Activities information	✓	✓	✓	Online reservation	✓	✓	✓
Accommodation information	✓	✓	✓	Events tickets		✓	
Attraction information	✓	✓	✓	Attraction tickets	✓	✓	✓
Events calendar	✓	✓	✓	Shopping carts		✓	
Entertainment information		✓	✓	Web seal certification		✓	✓
Maps and directions	✓	✓	✓	Relationship Dimension	ZTA	SAT	BTO
Restaurant information		✓	✓	Privacy policy	✓	✓	✓
Travel packages		✓		Deals and discounts		✓	
Travel guides/brochures	✓	✓	✓	Personalisation		✓	✓
Transportation information	✓	✓	✓	Cross-selling opportunities			
Photo gallery	✓	✓	✓	Incentive programs/contests		✓	
Links to regional/city/area pages				Customer loyalty programs		✓	
Shopping information		✓	✓	Technical Dimension	ZTA	SAT	BTO
Information by market segment		✓		Link workability	✓	✓	✓
Visitor center information	✓	✓	✓	Load time	Slow	Fast	Fast
Travel tips	✓	✓	✓	Search engine recognition	Poor	Good	Excellent
Local weather information	✓	✓	✓	Visual appearance	Excellent	Good	
Virtual tours	✓	✓	✓	Navigation	Good	Excellent	Excellent
Communication Dimension	ZTA	SAT	BTO	Webpage design	Good	Excellent	Good
Search function		✓	✓	Site map		✓	✓
Contact information	✓	✓	✓				
Brochure request capabilities		✓					
Destination image communication (logo, etc.)	✓	✓	✓				
Multiple language versions							
Email newsletter	✓	✓	✓				
Links to social media (YouTube, blog)	✓	✓	✓				
Feedback forms	✓	✓	✓				
Surveys		✓					
Frequently asked questions		✓					

Modified ICTRT model (Li and Wang 2010) [16]

Comparison of the ZTA, SAT and BTO websites showed some variations among the websites with differences in respect of attributes effectiveness. The results showed that each DMOs website had its own strengths and weaknesses. The results show that there are a number of similarities on the ZTA, SAT and BTO websites with differences on certain content. The results showed that there is no entertainment information, restaurant information, travel package, shopping information as well as information categorised by segment on the ZTA and BTO website. The information content of ZTA and BTO falls short compared to SAT website. Wang and Russo (2007) ^[41] argued in their study that the success of DMOs' websites depends on the ability of the website to provide up-to-date and accurate destination information. The findings appear to be consistent with tourism information search whereby important information sought when planning a trip is functional rather than hedonic (Soteriades, 2012) ^[34, 35]. That is, travelers focus more on product attributes such as location, price and availability not on sensory and emotional aspects of the product that is information availability on a website is very important. The information content on ZTA website is not regularly updated as it has stale news on its newsletters and events but SAT and BTO has latest information on its website.

The results from the study show that the ZTA and BTO are less interactive than the SAT website. The ZTA website has no search function which is very critical for visitors to easily access information from the website. On the other hand, the ZTA and BTO website do not have the brochure request capabilities which are essential for visitors to easily get information about the destinations. There is also the absence of surveys and frequently asked questions (FAQs) on the ZTA and BTO website which leaves common questions answered therefore creating a barrier. In addition, the absence of multiple language versions from the website removes the user friendliness which is essential for effective communication as the world travellers are the target market. SAT website is more interactive than the ZTA and BTO website considering that the SAT website is linked to a number of online forums which are not there on the ZTA and BTO website such as Flickr, Instagram, and Pinterest. Similarly the findings seem to concur with the conclusions by (Guðmundsson, 2010) ^[13] that the communication function is critical on a website as it involves all areas of promotion and marketing research. The website might create a link for transactions between the consumers and the DMOs, unlike traditional advertising media can (Dahlen, Rasch, and Rosengren 2008). The results show that the ZTA, SAT and BTO websites have online reservations, events tickets and attraction tickets. On the ZTA website the reservation and ticketing is not always active as at times it's not functional and not all events tickets are sold online. Contrary, the ZTA and BTO website seems to be falling short on the shopping carts and web seal certification. It is however important to highlight that the transaction dimension is pivotal as it allows visitors and buyers to make their reservations in advance before they even embark on the planned visit. Reservations on the website are highly linked to parastatals on the ZTA website and private businesses reservations are not active.

According to Li and Wang (2010) ^[16] the transaction function enables DMOs to generate revenue for both internal and external stakeholders. A fully-fledged DMO

website should have facilities to enable online transactions to take place. In terms of transaction dimension, the results show that the websites are lagging behind in performing transactions this concurs with research of (Eshtaev, 2017; Soteriades, 2012; Guðmundsson, 2010; Maswera & Edwards, 2008) ^[10, 34, 35, 13, 18] on E-commerce adoption of travel and tourism organizations.

The results from the study showed that the SAT website is more advanced than the ZTA and BTO website in that it offers deals and discounts online as well as personalisation options which are not there on the Zimbabwe Tourism Website. All websites do not have the cross-selling opportunities which are important in DMOs. According to Canada Tourism Commission (2010) ^[7], tourism in Canada contributed 7% to GDP which was highly attributed to discounts and personalisation of products offered through the website.

ZTA, SAT and BTO websites have good link workability and search engine recognition. Though on the search engine recognition there are other websites with same domain names with ZTA and SAT. The one that has the same name with ZTA do not open and the other one for SAT is not for the destination marketing organisation it is for tour operators of South Africa. The results also show that the ZTA website's load time is slow as compared to the SAT and BTO website which is fast. On the website design best practices Subandi & Putra, (2017) ^[36] highlighted that too many big pictures reduce website load time and many internet users are impatient in using such a site. On the visual appearance, BTO website looks better than ZTA and SAT, SAT website looks like a blog on home page while ZTA home page is too big with no useful content. There seems to be absence of a localised site map on the ZTA website. ZTA and BTO uses google maps while SAT website have a site map which is localised.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that ZTA, SAT and BTO use various online marketing strategies to promote tourism. SAT use more social media networks and have a superior website than ZTA and BTO. There is need for DMOs to embrace advanced technical aspects on their websites so that they overcome the short comings of their website technical dimensions. Li and Wang (2010) ^[16] advocated that, it is important for DMOs to progress to additional classy level of technology use to give a balanced and wider collection of features and functions in their websites to satisfy the diverse needs of potential visitors. Navigation and web design are very crucial part of the technical merit dimension towards meeting potential visitors' needs. ZTA and BTO should use their websites as a point of sale like SAT. The study also recommends that the DMOs should focus on improving the quality of their websites than concentrating on the quantity of the ineffective services they offer. Quality can be improved by removing too much graphical and pictures content and use clearly labelled functional links. ZTA and BTO should join more social media networks so as to increase their online visibility. They should use offline campaigns like posters and pamphlets to redirect its potential customers to find them online. The social networks should be linked to one another on their pages like that of SAT.

The social media is a very powerful marketing tools and there is need to research on the possibility of conversation

of likes, followers and tweets into units of rewards in tourism and hospitality sector.

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