Full Length Research Paper

Re-branding of Zimbabwe to enhance sustainable tourism development: Panacea or Villain

Joram Ndlovu[1]* and Ernie Heath[2]

[1]School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard Campus, Durban, South Africa.
[2]Department of Business Management, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa.

The main purpose of this study was to explore the concept of "re-branding a destination" as a key element to enhance sustainable tourism development. The study sought to measure the destination's attributes that determine sustainable tourism development vis-a-vis the perceived tourists' image. The study concludes that the concept of re-branding a destination is vital in destination marketing. Cognizant of the strategic role of destination re-branding, the study notes that there are a number of non-tourism factors which are still prevailing, such as political, social and environmental issues, which can significantly impact negatively on brand equity and the overall destination's competitiveness. Furthermore, the study observes that the concept of re-branding a destination may become more of rhetoric than practice if authorities fail to embrace the holistic nature of destination branding. Whilst there has been stability on the economic front, there are contradictory political undertones which have a strong bearing on sustainable tourism development. As such, the bad image generated by such negative publicity has the potential to derail the re-branding process thereby rendering it ineffective. The study concludes that for sustainable tourism development to be realized, the destination needs to deal with some of the political hot spots of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) which have the potential to tarnish the image of a destination. The study recommends an integrated sustainable tourism development agenda, since re-branding alone may be unsustainable. It also needs to be nurtured and supported by all stakeholders. The study recommends urgent address of political, social and environmental issues. Finally, the study recommends a structured tourism growth strategy and a conducive environment for sustainable tourism development.

Key words: Re-branding, image, sustainable development, identity, tourism development.

INTRODUCTION

To understand the present day manifestations and character of Zimbabwe's politics is to place them historically and politically within the broader terrain of the development of the idea of Zimbabwe and the eventual configuration of the Zimbabwe Nation-State (Nqindi, 2012). Tracing back to the past four decades, the struggle for independence was founded on the principles of the land. As such, Zimbabwe is often pigeonholed and sometimes shelved from a reputation of being a land divided, with political progress and change perpetually hindered by demarcation (Coltart, 2012). The economy and the politics of the country are inextricably interwoven. The continued political quagmire has had a negative impact on sustainable development for past decade. In Zimbabwe, the causes of poverty and environmental degradation are inter-related, suggesting that approaching sustainable development requires the understanding of issues from many angles, not just an

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*Corresponding author. E-mail: Ndlovuj1@ukzn.ac.za, Tel: +27 312607503, +27 786463971.

environmentalist or economic perspective alone. Sustainable tourism development is often an over-used term, but goes to the heart of tackling a number of inter-related issues, such as poverty, inequality, hunger and environmental degradation.

In the Zimbabwean situation, in addition to the past decade, political and environmental meltdown, economic issues contributed significantly in creating a ''perfect storm''. These factors and their effects resulted in severe economic problems that have, among others, affected the image of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. The Brand "*Africa's paradise*" was marred by images of economic hardships and sanctions, political power struggles and erratically enacted and enforced regulations and laws. The continued economic malevolence negatively affected sustainable tourism development, which was the cornerstone of Zimbabwe's brand identity. As a result of all the problems mentioned above, the destination re-branded itself in 2011 to "*Zimbabwe: a world of wonders".* The purpose of this paper is to discuss the extent to which the economy and society of Zimbabwe was enhanced through re-branding from a tourism perspective.

THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the context of tourism, increasing attention is being directed toward the sustainability of destinations and their resources as travel and tourism continues to grow in many domestic and international markets (Butler, 1999). The term sustainable tourism development has been widely used and discussed ever since the 1980's and numerous definitions have been developed (Wheeller, 1993; Wood and Gray, 2002). International forums such as the third United Nations conference on least developed countries held in Brussels, 2001, the international Eco-tourism year held in Quebec, 2002 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, 2002 have focused on sustainable development agenda on varying dimensions (Stabler, 1997; Coetzee cited in Saayman, 2009). Even though the focus has been on meeting economic, social and aesthetic needs, there is a paucity of literature regarding how ecological processes, bio-logical diversity and life support systems can be incorporated into the branding initiatives. Previous perspectives on destination branding have focused mainly on economic profitability (Morrison and Anderson, 2002); as a determinant of competitiveness (Pike, 2009); and environmental quality, which is required in any leisure space continue to be down played (Middleton and Clark, 2001). The failure to manage destination brands to competitively contribute to sustainable tourism development has compromised the development of mechanisms aimed at favoring collaboration amongst different players in the tourism sector (Heath, 2007; Lee, 2009; Mugobo and Ukpere, 2011), and to establish better balance between the destination's attractions and the tourism services offered (Ward and

Gold,1999). Most tourists are not fixated on one particular characteristic of a destination (Pike, 2009), which implies that the choice made by tourists regarding a particular destination is influenced by a number of variables such as attractions, motivation, destination image, attitudes, perceived level of satisfaction and buying behavior.

In Zimbabwe, a number of destination branding factors embedded in tourism sustainability issues remain un-explored. In addition, the impact of re-branding a tourism destination has not been fully assessed in the current literature, especially in the Zimbabwean context.

Research questions

Based on the abovementioned problem statement, the following research questions are raised:

i) What is the role of destination branding in sustainable tourism development?
ii) What are the perceived attitudes and experiences of tourists regarding the Zimbabwean brand?
iii) To what extent can re-branding a destination enhance sustainable tourism development?
iv) What are the key drivers in rebranding a destination and how can these lead to destination competitiveness?
v) Is there a relationship between branding and sustainable tourism development?
vi) What measures should be observed to ensure the success of the re-branding process?

Research objectives

To address the preceding research questions, the objectives of this paper are as follows:

i) To explore the relationship between destination branding and sustainable tourism development.
ii) To examine the extent to which re-branding a destination can enhance a destination's competitive position.
iii) To assess the distinctive competencies necessary for a destination to achieve sustainable tourism development.
iv) To discuss the role of government in re-branding a destination and show the relationship between branding and sustainable tourism development.
v) To suggest strategies that can be adopted to ensure the successful implementation of the re-branding process and achievement of brand equity.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The branding concept

Branding can be traced back to the economic history and

it has evolved as a concept of ownership and identification (Blichfeldt, 2003). In its physical form, branding has been, and still is, used on livestock to identify and differentiate the owner's livestock from the livestock of other farmers (Middleton and Clark, 2001; Howie, 2003). Its use has since evolved to include other uses and meanings, for example the family names of well-known ranches have become guarantees of the quality of their beef or breeds. In some countries, the sheer power and influence of some global brands has resulted in increased political and environmental backlash against local products (Ambler and Styles, 1996). Destination branding has progressed a great deal over the past six decades. It has been developed as a communication strategy together with an awareness of the might of the mass media (Joachimsthaler and Aaker, 1997).

A brand creates a certain degree of awareness, reputation and prominence for the destination in the marketplace. Destination branding offers no tangible product or service; instead, it represents and encompasses a wide variety of factors and associations such as, place-geography, natural resources, tourist attractions, people /race and ethnic groups (Fan, 2006; Ndlovu and Heath, 2010). Furthermore, it incorporates the history of a country, its culture, language; politics and economic systems. Included are the social institutions, infrastructure and the famous people. As such this gives the destination a competitive advantage through non product-related means by creating consumer motivations and desires that are mostly concerned with visualisation and symbolism (Szondi, 2006; Badal and Sabhlok, 2008). There has, however, been a shift of emphasis from mere branding to brand management, which takes a more strategic stance regarding the brand management scene (Keller, 2003). Brands have been labeled as powerful entities, because they blend functional, performance-based values with emotional values (De Chernatony, 2006; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). Several scholars have advocated the use of branding as a management tool (Keller, 1998; Aaker, 1996). A brand projects a strong identity for the destination and signifies to the target audience that the destination has certain benefits that address their desires and expectations (Baker, 2007; Morrison and Anderson, 2002; Laws, 2002). By means of consistent and clear brand positioning that is supported by periodic product improvements, a brand can remain contemporary without distorting its fundamental promise.

Branding is now considered to be a marketing communication effort, which is, among others, done through advertising, sales or exhibitions and many organizations continue to place strategic emphasis on branding. The strategic importance of branding is also emphasized by most leading academics and consultants as a result of the complexities that prevail in the market place (Blichfeldt, 2003). By creating relevant and appealing images that surround their products, destinations come to occupy a niche position (Morgan et al., 2002; Keller,

2003) and the creation of such images entails the blending of all the various elements together in a unique way (Howie, 2003; Ndlovu et al., 2009). Since destination brands represent sustainability issues of a destination, therefore they reduce risks in respect of decisions that have to be taken regarding the place, attractions, politics, infrastructure and the economic system. Researchers (Anholt, 2003; Ambler and Styles, 1996; Ashworth and Vogt, 1990) concur that consumers prefer well-known destination brands, especially those destination brands with which they have had favorable experiences in the past.

The role of destination branding

While brands are regarded as being real phenomena, the reality is that they are entities that are bigger than products (Badal and Sabhlok, 2008) and they have become essential tools for creating value in the relationship between territorial entities and individuals (González, 2011). Successful product branding is determined by arbitrary, constraining conditions, because the equity of a brand is determined by the degree to which that brand occupies a defensible niche within a product category (Blichfeldt, 2003). Similarly, the name of a destination conveys certain images, values and cultures, and contributes to the evaluation of products and services (Anholt, 2009). Because brands are a combination of graphics, color, logos/signs and images, which represent certain qualities within the destination, they contribute towards increasing brand equity (Keller, 2003; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). By acknowledging that destination branding is not merely a rational marketing activity, but also a political act that is based on issues such as local pride, dignity and sustainable development, most governments have adopted this strategy in order to facilitate the growth of a country or city (Cheng and Taylor, 2007).

Linking branding to sustainable tourism development

Branding and sustainable development are two of today's hottest and most misunderstood business subjects (Skinner, 2005). A set of "green" actions along with a snappy new logo, tagline and advertising campaign does not necessarily mean that you are on the path to a meaningful and respected destination brand. Myriad small and large actions, many seemingly unrelated to marketing will impact a destination brand's long-term viability (Keller, 2003). These actions involve many individuals and organizations buying into new ideas, moving out of their comfort zones, changing behavior and systems and occasionally even agreeing with political foes. Whilst brands have benefits beyond being merely a sign or a symbol (Ambler and Styles, 1996) care has to be taken to develop brands that represent the destination's offering. They bring awareness and demand

a reaction by persuading customers to take note of the destination. This characteristic of a brand could result in customer loyalty as customers become strongly associated with the brand values, tangible assets and emotional benefits. The effect thereof could be an increase in commercial value, as the brand becomes a catalyst for the intention to travel.

In the context of destination brands, an understanding of the customer's existing perception of the nation becomes vital. Their assessment with regards to the nation in question may be based upon the following factors: personal experience (for example, visiting the country); level of education or knowledge; prior use or ownership a product made in that country; the depiction of the country through media channels; and even stereotypes (Fan, 2006). Based on these informed circles, opportunity is abundant and enhanced investment plentiful in Zimbabwe and this is seemingly inevitable. Unfortunately today, informed circles are difficult to come by, with larger ones more focused on the country's past than its present, its problems and not its potential. Thus, country branding is especially needed now when nations are competing for very limited resources as a result of the economic downturn (Mugobo and Ukpere, 2011). To remain competitive, there is need to concentrate on rewiring the power points that feed energy into the livelihoods of Zimbabweans as a people in general and a country in particular.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, a triangulation was chosen for conducting a research investigation where a combination of exploratory and descriptive designs was employed. The data collection was done through observation, interview sessions, and e-mail surveys with selected tourism stakeholders. The study population was divided into manageable groups within the tourism industry in order to select the sample frame of the study. Out of the 990 questionnaires distributed through e-mail surveys, 152 questionnaires were returned representing a 15% return rate, which was deemed satisfactory. The questions covered demographic information of the respondents and their assessment of the new destination brand. Likert Scale questions varied from discussing their understanding of the key elements of a brand to the relationship that exists between branding and sustainable development. With a key informant technique, five industry experts were interviewed. The interview schedule had structured, semi-structured and unstructured questions which sought to gather stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, motivation, and the perceived state of tourism resources. The structured questions sought to measure the following variables, namely; infrastructure and services, source markets, environmental factors, marketing budget, perceptions, brand selling points, the role of government and media and the key elements emphasised in the brand.

An analysis of all the information sources gathered from both primary and secondary was triangulated to other subgroups, tallied and presented using tables and figures.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The following section presents the results of the survey.

Firstly, the relationship between destination branding and sustainable tourism development is examined, particularly the extent to which re-branding a destination can enhance a destination's competitive position. Secondly, the factors affecting the destination's attractiveness and competitiveness are discussed and justified. Thirdly, the availability of marketing resources is presented and discussed. Lastly, the role of the media, as well as the government in re-branding a destination, is discussed.

Infrastructure and services to achieve sustainable tourism development

The majority of respondents viewed Zimbabwe as a magnificent tourist destination that has been caught up in a political quagmire and greed of the political leadership. However, respondents reflected varying emphasis on cultural richness; wildlife; scenery; natural attractions; and world heritage sites. Some of the features of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination that were expressed include its uniqueness; that it offers fascinating holiday experiences; is a land of extraordinary beauty; and has rich and diverse wildlife. Table 1 presents the respondents' views regarding matters that are responsible for pleasant and/or unpleasant experiences in the destination.

The country is considered to provide tourists with good recreational facilities and value for money. There was a high rate of responses preferring attractions and parks (82.9%), culture and events (93.4%), recreational activities (71.7%) and value for money (52%) on the pleasant experiences. The road infrastructure (49.3%), peace and security (48.7%) and value for money (48%) were seen as unpleasant, mainly due to the perceived political and economic circumstances in the destination.

Conducive macro environment

The study reviewed the macro environment from both the demand and supply sides and noted the following pleasant and unpleasant outcomes. High competitive rivalry (28%) and the availability of substitute products (24%) within the region were noted. However, the study notes that the destination offers value for money on the type of products and experiences provided (17%). It was observed that of late there has been an increase in the tourist movement (16%), which signifies a certain level of tourist satisfaction (9%). However, target markets are not perceived to be clearly defined (5%) in the brand strategy. As a result of poor brand identity (0.7%) tourist motivation (4%) to visit the destination is still low as shown in Table 2.

Adequacy of marketing resources

Respondents were asked to indicate whether the

Table 1. Matters responsible for pleasant and unpleasant experiences in the destination (n = 152).

Components	Pleasant surprises	Percentage	Unpleasant surprises	%
Attractions and parks	126	82.9	26	17.1
Road infrastructure and communication	77	50.7	75	49.3
Superstructure	81	53.3	71	46.7
Quality of service and people	85	55.9	67	44.1
Peace and safety	78	51.3	74	48.7
Culture and events	142	93.4	10	6.6
Recreational activities	109	71.7	43	28.3
Value for money	79	52	73	48

Table 2. Macro environment conducive to tourism (n = 152).

Demand components	High	%	Supply side	Low	%
Tourist movement	16	11	Peace and safety	40	26
Clarity of target markets	8	5	Cultural events	17	11
Tourist motivation	6	4	Recreational activities	15	10
Tourist needs met	13	9	Value for money	18	12
Identity	1	0.7	Transportation	21	14
Substitute destinations	37	24	Hospitality	11	7
Competitive rivalry	43	28	Auxiliary services	13	9
Value for money	26	17	Facilities	17	11

Table 3. Adequacy of resources for marketing Zimbabwe as a tourist destination (n = 152).

Marketing resource allocation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Adequate	6	3.9
Inadequate	138	90.8
Do not know	8	5.3
Total	152	100

resources that are allocated to the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority for marketing purposes are adequate. A total of 90.8% of the respondents indicated that the resources are inadequate. The respondents' views on the adequacy of marketing resources allocated for marketing and branding are listed in Table 3.

Negative comments that can erode brand equity

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the negative comments in the local and international media concerning Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. The responses are shown in Table 4.

A total of 47.4% of the respondents indicated that they agreed that Zimbabwe has experienced bad publicity in source markets in the past, while 55.3% strongly disagreed that the destination is guilty of poor service delivery. A total of 48.7% of the respondents strongly

agreed that the destination may not deliver on the new brand promise due to the polarised political environment and 77% strongly agreed that the destination is dependent on international tourism which makes immediate change difficult. Therefore embarking on a re-branding process requires a lot of commitment from all concerned stakeholders. The evidence presented shows that the political turmoil that existed in the past decade may impact negatively on the new brand if the situation is not managed well.

Zimbabwe's tourism brand selling points and its key brand considerations

The study shows that, there is a conflict between the perceptions held by potential or actual visitors, positioning and the brand. It seems as though the current positioning is not supported by realistic promotional strategies which dovetail with the brand. This is evident from the respondents' views regarding congruency between the brand, natural, social and economic values, where 78% of the respondents strongly agreed, 14% agreed to a large extent, 4% agreed, 3% agreed to a limited extent and only 1% disagreed. Whilst this matter appears to be obvious, it may be fraught with difficulties. The following figure shows perceptions regarding congruency between the brand, natural, social and economic values at the destination level. This being the case, extending the destination brand into the global

Table 4. Negative media comments regarding Zimbabwe as a tourist destination (n = 152).

Statements	Strongly disagree	%	Strongly agree	%	No comment	%
Bad publicity in source markets	54	35.5	72	47.4	26	17.1
Poor service delivery	84	55.3	67	44.1	1	0.7
Not delivering on the brand promise	61	40.1	74	48.7	17	11.2
Over dependency on international tourism	33	21.7	117	77	2	1.3
No defined tourism destination marketing strategies	17	11.2	134	88.2	1	0.7
No aggressive marketing in source markets	33	21.7	110	72.3	9	5.9

Table 5. The role of Government in re-branding a destination (n = 152).

Role of government	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Development of tourism attractions	36	24
Training of tourism attendants	28	18
Maintenance of the tourism environment	16	11
Marketing and communication	20	13
Coordination of branding efforts	52	34

sphere will be a very complex process considering that there is no detailed research undertaken to understand tourists' perceptions and expectations of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. Whilst the "new" brand has some meaning, it is questionable whether the world sees Zimbabwe as "*a world of wonders*". A great destination brand should have a strong and clear meaning that connects with the target audience emotionally by providing a complete sensory experience of the environment.

Considering that a destination brand is influenced by many factors, such as environmental factors, competing destinations, and consumer factors, ideally, communicating the brand to Zimbabwean citizens and local communities first is very important. Failure to create a conducive environment whereby the citizens of a country have a buy in into the brand can create a great deal of waste of resources on re-branding and imaging.

Sustainable tourism development and re-branding a destination

The study has revealed that the Government played a significant role in the development of the new destination brand. After all, each and every government knows its political ambitions, agendas and development strategies. However, 13% of the respondents were of the opinion that the Government should coordinate and control all the marketing and communication activities, while 34% felt that Government should co-ordinate all branding efforts %); 11% felt that Government should maintain the tourism environment; and 24% felt that Government

should be responsible for the development of tourism attractions, as shown in Table 5.

The role of the media in re-branding a destination

World-wide, the customer is exposed to newspapers and travel supplements, magazines, television travel programmes and guides books. Therefore, the tourist is bombarded with different stories, often with a negative tone and knowledge. Managing a tourism destination is different from managing products, while products can easily be taken off the market, destinations will always be there. Therefore, it is important not to under estimate the possible harm of any crisis and the possible scale and influence of the media. The table below shows the responses regarding preferred media in repositioning a destination. The results show that the destination has relied mostly on the website (34%), followed by travel guide books (28%). Most television and radio programmes were aimed at the domestic market (24%). Respondents were of the opinion that magazines (8%), travel supplements (5%) and national and international Newspapers (1%) were seldomly used in the rebranding process as shown in Table 6.
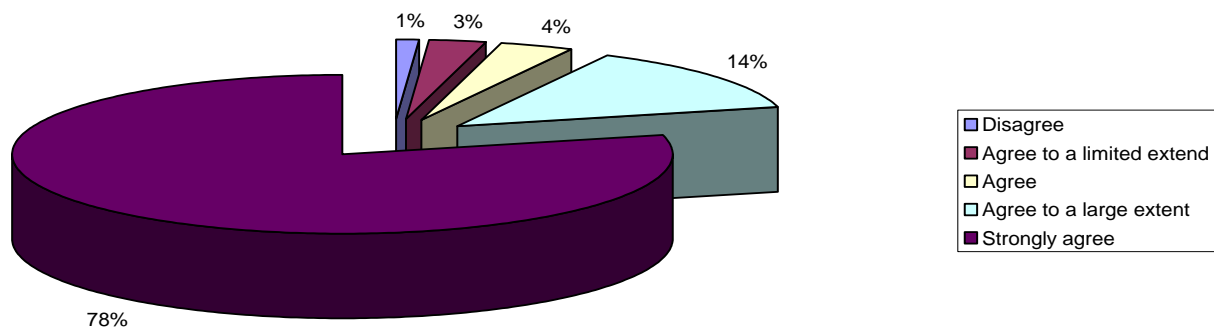
The aforementioned results show that there is a need to integrate the media, both nationally and internationally, in the re-branding process. In addition, the re-branding process has to be put into context, without being untruthful about the situation, but at the same time remaining positive. The media remains one of the most powerful tools in a destination and can be used in the image modification process.

Table 6. Type of media used in re-branding (n = 152).

Type of media used in re-branding	Frequency	Percentage (%)
National and international news papers	2	1
Travel supplements	7	5
Magazines	12	8
Radio /Television travel programmes	36	24
Travel guide books	43	28
Website	52	34

Table 7. Elements emphasized on the brand (n = 152).

Elements emphasized on the brand	Frequency	Percentage
Emotional appeal	74	48.6
Nostalgia	41	26.9
Key attractions	115	75.6
Out-door activities	44	28.9
Scenery and adventure	89	58.5
Services and facilities	10	6.5
Infrastructure	5	3.2
Peace and safety	21	13.8
Other. Friendly people	2	1.3

Figure 1. No congruency between the brand's natural, social and economic values at the destination level.

Key elements which are emphasized in the new tourism brand

Based on the results of the study, key attractions (75.6%), scenery and adventure (58.5%), emotional appeal (48.6%), outdoor activities (28.9%) and nostalgia (26.9%) were the major factors considered in the rebranding process as shown in table 7.

As it has been noted, re-branding a destination is a very complex task, which needs the involvement of all stakeholders. The aforementioned elements demonstrate the complementarities of destination branding to sustainable tourism. The results show that re-branding can lead to sustainable utilization of natural resources in a profitable manner.

DISCUSSION

It has been noted that the benefits of re-branding lie in the opportunities created. Re-branding a destination tends to summarise and translate a sustainable tourism development agenda into an intentional marketing program in a few short words or phrases. In turn this can help tourists to internalise the meaning and value of the destination in terms of what the brand stands for and what makes it unique and special (Lewis and Chamber, 2000). The results show that re-branding brings awareness and helps to reinforce the brand positioning and desired points of difference. This means that it acts as an image builder and carries meaning and relevance to the tourists (Baker, 2007). In Zimbabwe, the re-

branding process has been used as a base for developing a public catch phrase which is aimed at winning back tourists' loyalty that can ultimately result in increased commercial value. The results support the notion that a tourism destination consists of an amalgam of products and services, such as attractions, amenities, accommodation, activities and ancillary services (Buhalis, 2000). Tourists select destinations with the most appealing components. Since tourism attractions are the primary sources of tourist motivation to travel (Echtner and Ritchie 1991), these attractions should be more diverse, unique, appealing and attractive to the tourist. Based on the results of the study, the destination needs to give special attention to the management of attractions, so that they can retain their special appeal and build a positive brand image.

In Zimbabwe, where tourism has been recognized as a tool for employment creation, poverty reduction, and economic wellbeing, rebranding the destination should result in positive business growth and profitability. It can be seen that for a destination to come out of its unfortunate situation, it needs to invest resources in environmental protection, improved environmental practices and land-use planning. The case illustrates that re-branding was the most viable option for Zimbabwe. However, the destination needs to achieve acceptance from the international community, based on changed economic and political conditions in the destination. The study has shown that achieving environmental sustainability can become the basis for rejuvenating a destination. It is undeniable that branding is an extremely powerful tool, but it is equally important to realize that it is only one part of marketing strategy, which itself is a part of the overall tourism strategy. The evidence presented suggests that re-branding will not work effectively if other components of the strategy (environment, product and stakeholders) fail to deliver what the tourists want.

Furthermore, the study suggests fundamental changes in political, economic, environmental and social practices which can take many years. Some lessons to be learnt are that re-branding should not be the result of some wishful campaigns. If it is the case, destination branding may not yield the expected changes in the long run. Even though re-branding a destination can play a significant role in sustainable tourism transformation, its importance should not be exaggerated. Conventional wisdom would say that a destination must succeed in its own domestic environment before competing in the global marketplace. Telling the brand's story in an emotionally true, easily understood way is especially important in place branding because so many of the brand communications are through micro- communications and not only mass media (Stone, 2005). Similarly, for a brand to have creditability and integrity, the country must create the macro socio-economic and political climate required for nurturing sustainable tourism development, otherwise any attempts for a destination to exploit nation branding can sadly seem quixotic.

CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to the prevailing literature on destination marketing, particularly in the field of destination branding and sustainable tourism development. It shows a symbiotic relationship that exists between sustainable development and destination branding. The paper concludes that while destination re-branding is a strategic tool in repositioning a destination, the empirical evidence indicates that there are non-tourism factors, such as political, social and environmental issues, which can significantly impact negatively on brand equity and the overall destination's competitiveness. Re-branding is indeed a panacea to sustainable development but it cannot be discussed in isolation without touching on macro socio-economic issues. It is argued that the issue of sustainable tourism development will continue to feature more and more in branding literature. The study concludes that re-branding could be compromised if authorities fail to embrace the holistic nature of destination branding. Whilst there has been stability on the economic front, the study notes that there are contradictory political undertones which have a strong bearing on sustainable tourism development in Zimbabwe. The study endorses that for sustainable tourism development to be realized, the destination needs to deal with some of the political hot spots of the Global Political Agreement (GPA), which have the potential to tarnish the image of the destination again. Re-branding a destination alone may be unsustainable. It also needs to be nurtured and supported by all citizens.

The destination needs to look at its indigenization policies and show how they will benefit the masses without sending mixed messages which have the possibility of scaring away tourists rather than enticing them. The destination should continue to embrace sustainable tourism practices in its national tourism development plans, brand mantras and brand identity, bearing in mind that re-branding alone cannot guarantee success. For re-branding to be successful, a concerted effort has to be sought from all the stakeholders. Finally, the study recommends a structured tourism growth strategy to roll out the new brand and a conducive environment for sustainable tourism development.

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