

Measuring the Effectiveness of Zimbabwe Tourism Authority Website

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ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) is expansively using internet to promote destination Zimbabwe, few studies have been conducted to assess the effectiveness of ZTA website. The study applied the ICTRT (Information, Communication, Transaction, Relationship and Technical Merit) model the same as proposed by Li and Wang to evaluate the effectiveness of Zimbabwe Tourism Authority website through content analysis by expert evaluators. The objective of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of ZTA website and investigate its functional features. The objective was achieved by content analysis of the website regarding its five functions (ICTRT) by expert evaluators. The results indicated that ZTA website was averagely effective and more on information and communication. The website is not effective on complex and sophisticated functions like transactions and relationship management. Website complexity was found to be the major determinant of effectiveness. Conclusion and recommendations were provided based on research findings and expert knowledge to improve the effectiveness of ZTA website.

Keywords: Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO); Website effectiveness; ICTRT model; Marketing tourism; Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

Since the invention of printing press, the internet has become the most momentous development in communication that has radically changed the way in which we communicate [1]. Globally, the number of internet users exceeds 4 billion while in Africa it is estimated in more than 460 million. In Zimbabwe it is estimated in more than 7 million and it is still growing [2]. In Zimbabwe internet has been the fastest growing communications medium ever that is being promoted by the development of mobile phone technology which is compatible to World Wide Web [3].

Background

Technology has been used for many years in tourism industry; since establishment of Computerised Reservation Systems, Information and Communication Technology have universally altered tourism industry [4,5]. Marketing of tourism (travel packages, seats, stays, food and beverages) is being promoted by the use of internet. Stimuli to promote the purchase of a tourism product can be triggered by the internet due to the availability of pictures, multimedia and wealth of information. Information and Communication Technology have improved effectiveness of tourism industry and better competitiveness of tourism organisation and destinations. Internet has interactive facility which has made it an essential marketing tool in the tourism industry, according to a study by Wilgen [6], in USA there was a 35% increase of travelers who plan

their trips using internet. Thus, tourism destination marketing organisations must enhance their websites presence to satisfy customer's needs in order to achieve their goals.

The execution and use of website is a compound and active process [7], as today's customers are highly educated and sophisticated. Organisations can track their performance through website evaluation and facilitate continuous improvement. Destination marketing organisations (DMOs) are increasing their online presence. DMOs are meant to represent specific destinations such as city or country but not for profit and plays a role of an economic catalyst, partner, marker and developer [8]. Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) is the DMO for Zimbabwe that caters for tourism promotion, planning and development, research and the enforcement of standards and services. ZTA is there to manage and market Zimbabwe as a leading tourist destination in Africa and the world at large. Through the use of websites, DMOs can enhance service quality, customer satisfaction, overcome traditional barriers of marketing, and save on their marketing budget [9]. However DMOs have been failing to adopt and manage the benefits of internet technology to business operations (DMAI 2018). ZTA has employed various marketing ways to attract tourist which include a web presence in the form of a sound and informative website Figure 1 below [10].

Research into website effectiveness is limited and no accepted standard has been developed. Researchers create different

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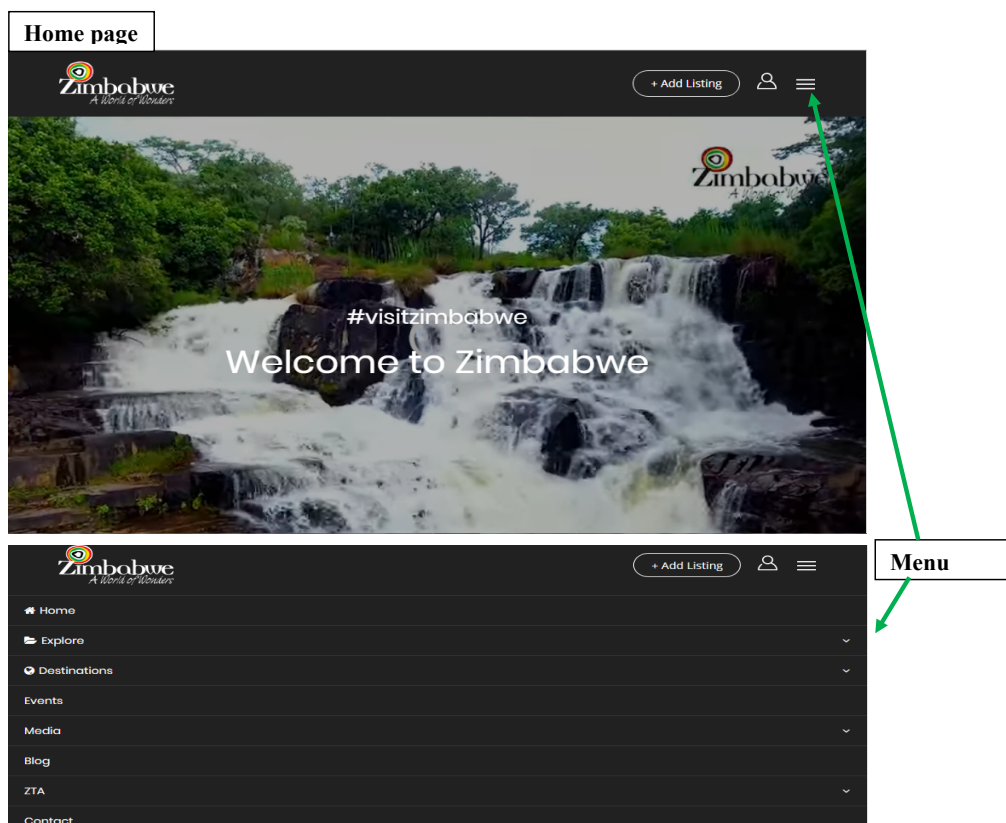


Figure 1: Zimbabwe Tourism Authority Website.

evaluation models to measure website effectiveness, the researchers adopted ICTRT model as proposed by Li & Wang [11] to measure the effectiveness of ZTA website. It is important for DMOs to measure effectiveness of their websites from time to time so that they can track performance of their website with a standard approach over a certain period of time [12].

Objectives

The main aim of this work is to evaluate the effectiveness of ZTA website and investigate its functional features. The obtained results are expected to benefit the ZTA, tourism organisations and other destination with better website marketing efforts.

LITERATURE

Destination Management Organisation (DMO) facilitates the understanding of the full social and economic dimension of tourism in terms of demand and supply, thereby guiding tourism policy and planning while providing a useful lobbying tool to national tourism [13]. 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 [14]. The website today is a major marketing tool, the greater the level of sophistication, the greater the impact. In terms of website marketing, the development of a website is not a once-for-all practice. As websites grow from lower stages to higher stages, level of functionality and interactivity is developed, and thereby the effectiveness of website is improved.

Many studies have dealt with measuring the quality of tourism

websites in general, which include hotel websites, airline websites, destination websites, and travel agency websites, each using their own approach to evaluation. There are some methods or approaches used to evaluate, analyse and measure the quality of tourism websites, Law, Buhalis & Qi [9] summarised the methods as follows in classes of counting (counting the number of features and information that a tourism website offers), automated (uses software applications to record website usage metrics), numerical computation (formulae or mathematical modeling to measure or predict a website's performance), user judgment (soliciting users' feedback and measuring their satisfaction levels with a Likert Scale) and combined methods (two or more approaches at once). There are standardised forms for website evaluation used by different organisations using different criteria. Common criteria found on website evaluation forms are accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, coverage, and usability of website document [15]. Table 1 shows some of the different models of website evaluation criteria and their postulators.

According to Kaplan & Norton [16] the BSC covers dimensions of finance, internal business processes, customers, learning and growth of an organisation. BSC model was used to compare USA and China Websites [17] using dimensions of marketing strategies, web page design, marketing information and technical qualities. BSC falls short of a best evaluation tool as it covers limited dimensions [11].

The eMICA model was used to evaluate development of websites in New Zealand [18]. The model has three levels of business processes; promotion, provision and processing. The model failed to recognise the importance of customers' relationship management and rich functionality. Wang & Russo [19] in their study argue that a website depends on integrative application of four dimensions of website; information, communication, transaction and relationship. The

Table 1: Website evaluation criteria.

Website Evaluation Model	Postulators
Website features, information and Currency	Subandi & Putra 2017
Content Analysis or Web Quality Index (WQI)	Miquek-Gonzalez et al.,
Modified Balanced Scorecard (BSC)	Kaplan, Feng et al.,
Eight tips	Shriner
Six criteria for website analysis	Dalhousie University, (2016); Cornell University Library (2015); Xavier University Library, (2017)
The extended Model of Internet Commerce Adoption (eMICA)	Schmidt et al., Doolin et al.,
Information, Communication, Transaction, Relationship and Technical Merit (ICTRT) model	Li & Wang, Wang and Russo

Source: Literature

model failed to include any technical aspects of the website [11]. Accordingly they postulated that a website need to be evaluated based on five dimensions including; information, communication, transaction, relationship, and technical merit (ICTRT model). The effectiveness of the other four marketing dimensions is directly affected by technical dimension. Information function has to be sufficiently implemented followed by communication function then the transaction function which enables development of relationships function. Websites are increasing in number and consumer's attention to websites is much scarcer than website content, websites are purposed to draw and retain consumer's attention. The overall effectiveness of the website relies on the technical merit dimension.

Many studies have attempted to measure the quality of destination websites, in particular. As a result, some tools measure attributes that others do not measure, which makes some studies appear lacking in contrast to other studies that measured more attributes. This apparent lack of agreement as to the holistic set of website attributes makes it difficult to compare the findings of one study to another. Likewise, this study used ICTRT model to evaluate the effectiveness of ZTA website as it was also used by Tsokota et al. [20-26] when they were analysing ZTA website. This enables comparability if any on the website. By using ICTRT model it gives more comprehensive evaluation of a destination website.

METHODOLOGY

The research used the ICTRT models as proposed by Li & Wang [11], to assess the effectiveness of ZTA website from online marketing experts' perspective using the five dimensions of Information, Communication, Transaction, Relationship and Technical merit. Content analysis of ZTA website was done to achieve the objective of the research.

A list of items was identified for each of the five dimensions based on an extensive literature review mainly grounded in DMO website evaluation [8,11,14,20,21]. The performance and importance of the 47 items in the mentioned five dimensions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very poor - 5 very good). The degree of complexity of four marketing functions (information, communication, transaction and relationship) was measured on a 5-point Likert scale and 0 is recorded when the item is not there on the website [27-29].

Performance results cannot be used as a direct measure of effectiveness of website since functions of each item are different. Also, items have different importance for destination marketing efforts. The complexity of technology of applications affect

information, communication, transaction and relationship dimensions on the website. The importance, performance and complexity of each item were taken into consideration in measuring the effectiveness of the website in this study. The researchers rated the relative importance of all 47 items in the five dimensions and the effectiveness score in each item was calculated by using the following equation:

$$\text{Effectiveness} = \text{Performance} \times \text{Importance} \times \text{Complexity}$$

Effectiveness of items under technical merit dimension exclude complexity.

When evaluating the ZTA website the three aspects of importance, performance and complexity associated with each of the applications was taken into consideration from a marketing perspective. If the ZTA website is implementing more important and complex items, its overall effectiveness score should be very high from the perspectives of overall marketing and resource allocation effectiveness.

Sampling and data collection

To understand the effectiveness of ZTA website [22], the researchers conveniently and purposefully selected a sample of ten experts in the field of online tourism marketing and website developers to fill up online questionnaires. The respondents were informed about the objectives of the research so that they took due diligence in answering the online questionnaire while critically observing the functions on the website and give their expert judgment. Enough time was given to the respondents to familiarise themselves with the ZTA website and answering of questions was done at their own pace. Finally, two researchers worked together to check, confirm and analyse the results [30-32].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the ZTA website, the website was critically analysed for content by experts using ICTRT model and the results are presented in the subsequent tables. Of the respondents 50% have more than five years of work experience. They are highly educated with masters or highest possible degrees in their areas of specialisation. To confirm results the researchers interrogated the results by examining the website, some of the examined dimensions are shown in Figure 1.

The average value of 33.03 on effectiveness illustrated in Table 2 shows that the ZTA website is averagely effective on information aspects. Information is abundant on the website with events calendar being highly effective supported by an effectiveness value

of 47.41 and the information on travel packages is scarce with a value of 21.00. However, the information on the events seem to focus on state organised events like Sanganai Travel Expo and information on other key stakeholders' events in the tourism and hospitality industry is not there. Even though there is abundance of information on the website, a value of 3.54 on importance may have been attributed by lack of regular updates of the website. Information had an average effective score of 33.03 which shows average effectiveness as the information is more on quantity supported by an average value of 2.80 on complexity. The website information by market segments scored 30.22 which shows that the website marketing strategy is not segmented rather it's short gun marketing which yields low returns. The website gives state facts at national level and do not give state facts according to tourist attractions. State facts scored 24.86 which shows that it is less effective (Table 3).

Contact information is very effective on the website as it scored high on both its importance and performance. The DMO authorities can be contacted by phone, email, fax and on social media platforms, there is also physical address thus the website is highly effective. Links to social media scored 27.64. A value of on links to social media could have been attributed by the position of the links the far end of the home page which is very long which takes five pages scrolling down. The website is only in English it does not translate to other languages and its effectiveness obtained a value of 30.29. Tsokota et al., [20] compared ZTA website and South Africa Tourism website and found it superior in respect of contact information as it has physical addresses (Table 4).

The transaction dimension results are second from the least effective dimension as the website lacks shopping carts which are very important for selling the tourism products online. The website is rich with information but it cannot turn it into business

Table 2: Information Dimension of ZTA website.

Attributes	Importance	Complexity	Performance	Effectiveness
Activities Information	3.67	2.44	3.67	32.86
Accommodation	3.78	2.44	4.11	37.96
Attraction Information	4.11	2.33	3.89	37.30
Events Calendar	4.44	2.67	4.00	47.41
Entertainment Information	3.22	2.67	3.44	29.60
Maps and Directions	3.78	2.78	4.00	41.98
Restaurant Information	3.56	2.67	3.33	31.61
Travel Packages	3.22	2.44	2.67	21.00
Travel Guides/Brochures	3.56	2.33	2.89	23.97
Transportation Information	3.89	2.22	3.22	27.85
Photo Gallery	3.67	2.22	3.89	31.69
Links to Regional/City/Areas Pages	3.11	3.56	3.00	33.19
Shopping Information	3.22	3.44	3.00	33.30
Information by Market Segments	2.67	3.78	3.00	30.22
Visitors Centre Information	3.67	3.33	3.11	38.02
Travel tips	3.78	2.56	3.22	31.11
State Facts	3.22	2.78	2.78	24.86
Local Weather Information	3.56	3.22	3.11	35.64
Virtual Tours	3.22	3.33	2.89	31.03
Average	3.54	2.80	3.33	33.03

Table 3: Communication Dimension.

Attributes	Importance	Complexity	Performance	Effectiveness
Search Function	4.11	3.33	3.33	45.68
Contact Information	4.33	2.78	4.33	52.16
Brochure Request Capabilities	3.78	2.56	3.67	35.40
Destination Image Communication	3.78	3.33	3.67	46.17
Multiple Language Versions	3.56	2.56	3.33	30.29
Email Newsletter	3.67	2.89	3.44	36.49
Links to Social Media	3.44	2.89	2.78	27.64
Feedback Forms	3.56	3.22	3.44	39.46
Surveys	4.11	2.56	3.67	38.52
Frequently Asked Questions	4.00	3.00	3.56	42.67
Average	3.83	2.91	3.52	39.31

transactions as there are sales platforms for events and attractions tickets. The website is not effective as it is not performing any reservations role on behalf of stakeholders which might mean that after potential customers have browsed the website they still need to find other online websites where they can do their reservations for tourism products (Table 5).

The results show that the website does not have customer loyalty programmes. The cross selling opportunities are also ineffective. For a website to be effective it needs to have important attributes that encourages relationship with current and potential customers. The results showed that the website was not effective as it scored zero on customer loyalty programs and lowest on incentives programs (26.54) and cross selling opportunities (26.34) (Table 6).

The results shows that the ZTA website is very effective in terms of technical merit attributes as this dimension determines the effectiveness of information, communication, transaction and relationship effectiveness of any website. The website technical attributes are effective with link workability ranked high (16.42) although webpage design (12.25) and site map (12.63) scored low but above average. There website is well recognised with search engines as the website comes within the first three search results of any search engine.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The website is very effective in terms of communication followed by the information hinged on the effectiveness of the technical

merit. No dimension scored 100% not even on single attribute being evaluated and this is supported by Subandi & Putra [14] who said there is no perfect website. Website effectiveness is affected by a number of factors such as finance, technology and knowledge of developers. Furthermore, the development of a website is dynamic.

ZTA is using the website to market destination Zimbabwe to international potential visitors in today's technologically driven world. The website should educate tourist about the destination and become service provision portals. ZTA website plays a crucial role in attracting more tourists and improving their satisfaction. Thus ZTA website should be evaluated regularly using different methodologies to make sure if it's fulfilling its integrated marketing function and if not corrective measures need to be taken. The results of the evaluation of ZTA website using ICTRT model shows that ZTA is not using its website effectively. The ZTA website has information that is expected to be on the website but is not linked to all cities and places of interest in the country. The website information needs to regularly updated as some of the information appearing on the website has lapsed its importance. There are links on to major attractions but no alternative tourism links are there on the website. Transaction and relationship seem to be the weakest areas on the ZTA website, the website should not be a marketing tool only but it needs to adopt sophisticated technical attributes and become a sales tool. The website needs to act as a central reservation system and assist in the distribution of the country's tourism products. The website needs to incorporate private business agenda and link them to the website and not to

Table 4: Transaction Dimension.

Attributes	Importance	Complexity	Performance	Effectiveness
Online Reservation	3.78	2.33	3.67	32.32
Events Tickets	3.78	2.11	3.44	27.47
Attraction Tickets	3.78	2.22	3.11	26.12
Shopping Carts	2.89	2.44	3.00	21.18
Web Seal Certification	3.22	3.00	3.33	32.22
Average	3.49	2.42	3.31	27.98

Table 5: Relationship Dimension.

Attributes	Importance	Complexity	Performance	Effectiveness
Privacy Policy	4.00	3.00	4.11	49.33
Deals and Discount	3.22	2.44	3.89	30.63
Personalisation	3.78	2.22	3.67	30.78
Cross Selling Opportunities	2.78	2.67	3.56	26.34
Incentives programs/Contents	2.89	2.67	3.44	26.54
Customer Loyalty Programs	3.44			0.00
Average	3.35	2.60	3.73	32.54

Table 6: Technical Merit dimension.

Attributes	Importance	Performance	Effectiveness
Link Workability	4.22	3.89	16.42
Load Time	3.78	4.00	15.11
Search Engine Recognition	3.67	4.00	14.67
Visual Appearance	4.00	3.67	14.67
Navigation	3.67	3.78	13.85
Webpage Design	3.56	3.44	12.25
Site Map	3.67	3.44	12.63
Average	3.79	3.75	14.21

act as a government agent only as the tourism industry is also dominated by private businesses.

Their website is only at a national level there are no regional websites of tourism, there is need to come up with regional websites that feed or link to the national website so that there will be no information overload. It will be easy for a tourist with specific interests in the country certain tourism regions [11,23]. From the results it shows that the website concentrated on quantity rather than quality, the home page seems to be a blog site. There is a need to filter information and concentrate on quality which will increase the load time of the website by discarding too many graphics. There is a need for expert consultation in improving the ZTA website with a strong budget to develop or buy systems that enable the website to do sales transaction and offering personalised service. The website must have an option for different international languages so that tourists from all over the world can use it. The website has a site map which makes it more effective however it uses Google maps which take time to navigate and localise. There is a need to come up with an online Zimbabwe map which is quick to navigate and localise [20].

The study is of interest to professional by giving them a conceptual DMO website evaluation model integrating technology with marketing principles. Evaluation of the website using Information, Communication, Transaction, Relationship and Technical attributes enable the authorities to understand key areas that require improvement for effective function of a DMO website. The study worked with experts from outside ZTA which means that it lacked an insider perspective of analysis. In future, ZTA website designers and their online marketers can take part in evaluating the website for better results as their on the job experience matters.

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