Research Article

The Online Marketing Strategies of the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) and South Africa Tourism (SAT): A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to compare the online marketing strategies of the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) and South Africa Tourism (SAT). The study sought to establish the online marketing strategies adopted by ZTA and SAT especially coming from the background that most National Tourism Organisations in Africa lack interactive web facilities and have limited knowledge on the significance of information communication technology in tourism marketing. The fact that tourism has been branded the fastest growing industry in the world but in Zimbabwe it's not like that while just across the Limpopo river in South Africa tourism is steadily developing prompted the researcher to compare the ZTA and SAT online marketing strategies. The objectives were to compare the online marketing strategies and to determine the effectiveness of ZTA and SAT's online marketing strategies. The researcher adopted comparative design as a way of drawing lessons useful to both ZTA and SAT. Information relevant to this study was drawn from a thorough analysis of the organisations websites, and social media networks. The researcher also reviewed literature in order to expose what other authors say about the online marketing strategies. Data in this study was gathered using netnography. A modified website evaluation model was used to evaluate website as proposed by (Li and Wang 2010). Information dimension, Communication dimension, Transaction dimension, Relationship dimension and Technical merit dimension (ICTRT) were investigated. Information was also obtained by visiting the organisation social networks. The researcher used a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of why ZTA and SAT chose the various online marketing strategies to market their destinations. Data for this research was then presented using tables from the ICTRT dimensions. From the results it was found that both ZTA and SAT use online marketing strategies but SAT had an improved edge in the social networks since it had more platforms.

Keywords: Tourism; Online marketing; Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA); South Africa Tourism (SAT)

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is regarded as one of the biggest industries in the world generating an estimated 11% of the global gross domestic product (GDP) and employing over 200 million people while serving 700 million tourists worldwide [1], a figure which researchers and analyst expect to double by the year 2020. In light of poor performance of the traditional economic sectors (manufacturing, mining and agriculture), the tourism industry has emerged as the biggest contributor of the GDP since the early 1990s in most African countries and is now viewed as the only hope for turning around African economies. Evidence from previous studies [2,3] all points to a positive growth of the tourism industry since the beginning of the new millennium. Governments the world over have since established standalone organisations responsible for promoting both domestic and international tourism. It is also significant to note that the organisations works hand in hand with other public, private and international bodies to boast tourism [4-6].

On the other hand various bodies responsible for tourism in various countries have been working frantically to market their tourism facilities to the world market. To this end, it is thus essential to highlight that tourism industry promotion like any other industry promotion has also evolved with time. Many tourism regulator bodies are now embarking on the dual marketing strategies which incorporate both the traditional marketing and the current technologically based marketing strategies which involves the use of the internet [7-12]. The importance of information and communication technology (ICT), especially the Internet, in the travel and tourism industry has increased tremendously over the past few years. The travel and tourism area is one of those industries that are able to gain enormous synergy effects from use of the Internet [13-15].

Internet has brought with it a cost saving, effective and efficient communication connectivity that is fast with stakeholders in business [16,17]. Rogerson, said that internet has led to the boom of e-commerce which is changing the nature of business. Internet has capacity to create and bring in more revenue which is what tourism industry in developing regions need [18-20]. Many developing countries like African countries can boost their struggling economies by investing in tourism that is being hampered by few development resources such as finance and skills [21,22]. Many organisations in the world over have adopted online tourism marketing strategies and from research done by Marcussen in 2005 shows that travel and tourism industry revenue have increased by adopting e-commerce. Below is a summary of studies conducted on online marketing strategies in various countries [23,24].

Guðmundsson [4] conducted a study on the online marketing of tourism companies in Iceland. It is important to note that the main objective of this thesis was to study how companies that cater to tourists in Iceland use the Internet as a marketing tool [25,26]. The study was also based on the philosophical assumption that the increasing usage of internet in Iceland and around the world makes a good marketing tool as a message can reach the whole world just after a click of a button [27-32]. The study was a survey of four companies in the tourism and hospitality sector. It is also clear that the study was a qualitative research that means the majority of the references were obtained after interviewing owners and managers of case sample companies [33-36]. The key findings of this study were that most respondents lacked of knowledge on online marketing while others had knowledge but time constraints were the major challenge hindering its use [37]. More importantly, the study concluded and recommended that everyone seemed to appreciate the value of using the internet [38]. The companies decided that internet based marketing is a tool can use to come up with a powerful promotional mix in the future. At this juncture, it is worth noting that although, the study wanted to establish the online marketing strategies in Iceland, the study concentrated more on the perceptions of the respondents instead of observing what was being done to promote online marketing. In light of this, this study seek to analyse the online marketing strategies which are being used by ZTA and SAT through a thorough assessment of the online marketing tools [39-46].

Another study was conducted by Nguyen and Wang [5] on the practice of online marketing with social media in tourism destination marketing in Sweden. They wanted to get insight in the use of internet with social media in tourism industry from the view of destination marketing organisation (DMOs), assessing their effectiveness for destination marketing management [47-50]. The other purpose of the study was to discover the role of online marketing using social media in building the destination brands and interacting with audience to reach potential visitors. Overall, the study recommended that DMOs need to give emphasis to the carrying out online marketing and participate in social media activities so that they get payback. However, this research falls short from the fact that it was carried in a specific DMO; it should have been carried out in two destinations so that it would have been evaluated in comparison to get meaningful conclusions. In line with this weakness, this study therefore will take a comparative path where online marketing strategies being used by ZTA and SAT will be compared [51-56].

Lai and Vinh [6] conducted research on the online promotion and its influence on destination awareness and loyalty in the tourism industry in Vietnam. The main aim of this study was to explore how online promotion and its influence on destination awareness and loyalty in the tourism industry [57-60]. The study provided a framework for understanding the interrelationships between online promotion, destination awareness and satisfaction and the other constructs in relation to behavioral intentions [61-66]. The study used a quantitative study which utilised information collected from randomly selected respondents who were given questionnaires. The study results were that tourism promotion through viral online marketing provides the needed information for tourism programs in Vietnam which is adequate for decision of purchase by clients [67-72]. As well as that online viral tourism promotional information is characterized by accuracy, clarifies the details of touristic products, clarifies things relevant with time intervals, indicates the ingredients of products clearly and indicates clearly the cost of these products accurately. In line with the findings and recommendations of the study, this study seek to compare the online tourism marketing strategies at ZTA and SAT as a way of highlighting areas which needs improvement as well as to draw lessons from one side to the other [73-75].

On the other hand, Potgieter et al. [7] conducted a study on innovative marketing information system: a management tool for South African tour operators in South Africa. The primary objective of the study was to establish how South African tour operators utilise information systems in marketing themselves. The study followed a quantitative descriptive design. The findings were that South African tour operators do not currently make use of information systems to provide them with market and marketing-related information for management and marketing decisions. In conclusion, the study recommended that tour operators and information system designers and developers consult on a regular basis and find solutions to the information needs of tour operators. Similarly a study conducted by Maswera et al. [8] about e-commerce adoption in South Africa, Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe all showed that few of the African destination marketing organisations are fully appreciating e-commerce. The study revealed that some African organisations websites are comparable to the developed countries to their counterparts Europe and USA; the majority of websites had room for considerable improvements. The African websites were found to be fully informative and lacked interactive options for performing online transactions. In light of these weaknesses, the survey recommended that these African organisations develop their websites to become marketing tools for them to benefit from the benefits of internet marketing.

This study therefore seeks to establish the online marketing strategies which have been adopted by ZTA and SAT especially coming from the background of those similar studies [2,7] that websites of most African organisations lacked interactive facilities and also from the conclusions that some tour operators have limited knowledge on the significance of information systems. In line with the above recommendations, and also coming from the background where tourism has been branded the fastest growing industry, this study will be a comparison of the ZTA and SAT online marketing strategies [75].

METHODOLOGY

The researchers used comparative research and descriptive research design. The exploratory and descriptive research design was used because it is characterised by a great amount of flexibility, versatility and offers a prolific description of relevant aspects of the research.

The study followed a case study strategy in which ZTA online marketing strategies was compared to SAT online marketing strategies. The study adopted the websites evaluation techniques as proposed by Li and Wang [9], Information dimension, Communication dimension, Transaction dimension, Relationship dimension and Technical dimension model (ICTRT). The ICTRT model was also used for data collection and analysis as guided by Li and Wang [9]. Primary data was collected through observations of the organizations' websites. The data was presented using tables guided by website performance models.

This study followed a qualitative philosophical thinking. Following this philosophical thinking, the researcher assumed that access to reality is socially constructed that is, it can only be obtained through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments. The researcher adopted this philosophical thinking mainly because; interpretivism allows the researcher to focus on meanings as well as to employ multiple methods in order to reflect different aspects of the issue.

The use of qualitative research approach enabled the researcher to conduct content analysis of the websites of ZTA and SAT. The study was a qualitative in nature to establish the online marketing strategies of ZTA and SAT. The researcher used qualitative research as a way of gaining an in-depth understanding of why ZTA and SAT chose the various online marketing strategies to market their destinations. On the other hand, it is important to highlight that the qualitative method enabled the researcher to investigates the why and how of certain online marketing strategies adopted by ZTA and SAT. More significantly, the qualitative method helped produce information not only on the two cases studied but allowed more general conclusions to be made with informed assertions.

The study setting

Zimbabwe is a developing African country which is situated on the Southern hemisphere of the equator. Regionally, the country is situated in Southern Africa and is a land locked country. Zimbabwe has a population of 13 million. Zimbabwe has a diversified economy which is primarily based on primary production that is mainly mining and agriculture. The main pillars which earn the country foreign currency are Tourism, mining and agriculture. However, tourism has been the fastest growing industry in Zimbabwe and efforts have been trebled to try and market the country as a safe tourist destination.

In Zimbabwe, tourism falls under the ministry of tourism which is responsible for promoting domestic, regional and international tourism activities. Under the ministry of tourism, there is a DMO which is primarily responsible for marketing tourism which is called the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority. The government entity was formed from the Tourism Act 1996 Chapter 14:20 with a mandate of marketing Zimbabwe as a Tourism Destination [10]. The mission of ZTA is to promote the sustainable growth and development of tourism in Zimbabwe for the social and economic benefit of the nation through setting and monitoring of standards, marketing activities [10]. Furthermore, the mandate of it is to develop, manage and market Zimbabwe as a tourist destination of first choice and to be to be an ICT-driven organisation. The Zimbabwe Tourism Authority has a website that saves a communication platform with a number of pages and links.

On the other hand, South Africa officially the Republic of South Africa (RSA), is a country located at the southern tip of Africa. It

has 2,798 kilometers (1,739 kilometers) of coastline that stretches along the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean. To the north lie the neighboring countries of Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe; to the east are Mozambique and Swaziland; and within it lies Lesotho, an enclave surrounded by South African territory. South Africa is the 25th largest country in the world by land area, and has close to 53 million people. The country has a diversified economy like Zimbabwe. On the other hand, tourism has grown to be one of the top foreign currency earners for South Africa.

South Africa is a popular tourist destination, with around 860 000 arrivals per month [11] of which around 210 000 are from outside the African continent. Revenue adding up to between 1% and 3% of GDP is generated by the tourism industry. Among the main attractions are the diverse and picturesque culture, the game reserves and the highly regarded wines. South Africa Tourism is a national tourism agency responsible for the international marketing of South Africa as a preferred tourist destination. Domestic Tourism marketing has also become an important component of SAT`s overall functions. Its aim is to make tourism the leading economic sector in South Africa, and to promote sustainable economic and social empowerment of all South Africans [12]. South Africa is marketed as an integral part of Africa and particularly the subcontinent of southern Africa. South Africa Tourism has a website with a number of pages with links to tourism attractions and social networks. It is being used to carry out online marketing of the destination.

Data collection procedure

The data for the study was collected from thorough analysis of the DMO's websites with primary focus on the online marketing techniques that are used by ZTA and SAT as a way of enhancing brand equity. The researcher used personal observation to compare the attributes of the Information, Communication, Transaction, Relationship and Technical (ICTRT) dimensions on the ZTA and SAT websites as postulated by Li and Wang in 2010 (Appendix 1). Firstly, the research looked at the information dimension where the ability of the website to provide a full package of information were analysed. Secondly, the researcher was also looking at the communication dimension of ZTA and SAT websites comparing them on their ability to offer communication platforms with the page visitors. This dimension was also analysed to see if the websites were designed in a way that allow interactive communication which is critical for competitiveness.

Thirdly, the websites were also analysed on the transaction dimension where the provisions for online bookings were analysed. Fourthly relations dimension was analysed to find if the websites can customize services and encourages relationship marketing to customers. Lastly, the websites were also analysed on the technical merit dimension where issues to do with load time and visual appearance were analysed. As a data collection and evaluation technique, the ICTRT model helped in a greater way to determine the effectiveness of ZTA and SAT online marketing strategies. In addition, it is important to highlight that the researcher adopted the ICTRT to evaluate the websites of ZTA and SAT because, it was the most appropriate model which allowed the researcher to effectively compare the websites of ZTA 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 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.

Data was also collected through analysis of SAT and ZTA social media platforms. Members, followers, likes, viewers, followers and comments were critically reviewed with the age of the social network platforms. From that the researcher managed to interpret the reach and interaction of the DMOs with visitors.

Netnography

Netnography is the branch of ethnography that analyses the free behaviour of individuals on the Internet that uses online marketing research techniques to provide useful insights. It is important to highlight that the term Netnography is a combination of internet and ethnography. On the other hand, the researcher used netnography because it was faster, simpler, and less expensive than ethnography. In addition, it provided information on the symbolism, meaning, and consumption patterns of online consumer group or online communities consumption unrelated but online sociability based on the exchange of information. More importantly, netnography is focused on cultural, symbolic information insights. The researcher used netnography because of its ability to analyse automatic transcription of downloaded documents. In addition, this data collection technique vastly lower search costs than face-to-face ethnography particularly in purely observational forms of netnography, data was often plentiful and easy to obtain.

It is important to highlight that the researcher used netnography because it's particularistic ties to specific online consumer groups and the revelatory depth of their online communications. Hence, the researcher managed to draw interesting and useful conclusions from a relatively small number of messages on the websites of SAT and ZTA especially where these messages contained sufficient descriptive richness and were interpreted with considerable analytic depth and insight perhaps based on Li and Wang's ICTR model. In essence, the netnography approach was primarily based on the evaluation of ZTA and SAT's online marketing techniques as a way of drawing conclusions on these two organisations on deficits, lessons and areas for improvement.

Data analysis

Content analysis was used to analyse research data. It is important to highlight that in the study Li and Wang's [9] information-communication- transaction- relationship (ICTR) model was used to analyse content on ZTA and SAT websites as a way of arriving at valid conclusions for the study. It is however pivotal to highlight that the research did not use the BSC and the EMICA models due to their shortcomings with regards to adequate website evaluation of DMOs websites. As such it is pertinent to note that, although both the BSC and EMICA models have certain advantages, neither of them are a cutting edge designed evaluation tools such as fragmenting website performance by layers can decrease the complicatedness of the website but they fail to maintain their consistency accuracy as each website may have a unique priority from their different dimensions.

At this stand point, it is crucial to highlight that the study adopted the Li and Wang approach because of its ability to ascertain the performance and complexity of the ICTRT dimensions. Information, Communication, Technical, Relationship and Transactional dimensions were briefly explained noting the best practices and design of DMOs websites. The indications of the presents and functionality of their sub elements was tabulated.

RESULTS

The online marketing strategies used by ZTA and SAT

The research data show that ZTA and SAT use a number of online marketing techniques as ways of promoting domestic and international tourism. Among the online strategies they use search engines, websites, email, blogs, social media and online forums, YouTube, Pay per click, Flicker, Pinterest, Instagram, and Google+. The research data show that both ZTA and SAT use a number of online marketing techniques which include: search engines such as Google, Yahoo; website marketing; email marketing; blogs; social media (Facebook, Twitter and MySpace) and online forums. More importantly, the strategies have enabled the organisations to contribute significantly in promoting tourism in the two countries there by bringing in substantive revenue in to the fiscus.

When using search engines; Yahoo, Google and Bing the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority is poorly ranked, it is ranked below fifth on the search results and South Africa Tourism is highly ranked on the second or third. SAT and ZTA website are highly ranked on the search engines. ZTA had no blogs and SAT's website had blogs as shown in Appendix 2 and 3. ZTA and SAT both use social media as part of their online marketing using Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. It is also important to highlight that the South Africa Tourism had gone a step further by using other strategies such Pay per Click, Instagram, Google+, Flicker and Pinterest which places the organisation on a more competitive edge than ZTA. The Twitter, Facebook and YouTube information about SAT and ZTA is presented in the Table 1.

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 has links with one another thus increasing the spectrum of the pages, On Meet South Africa Twitter page there are links to YouTube,

Table 1: Social media used by both ZTA and SAT.

Facebook	ZTA	SAT
Page name	Zimbabwe Tourism	Love South Africa
People talking	22	2165
Likes	2014	53254
New page likes	18	101
Twitter	**ZTA**	**SAT**
Page name	World of Wonders	Meet South Africa
Tweets	555	15200
Following	53	14300
Followers	2223	77800
favorites	25	4102
Lists	2	12
YouTube	**ZTA**	**SAT**
Page name	Zimbabwe Tourism	Meet South Africa
Subscribe	58	4366
Videos	13	623
Views	14578	2935578

Twitter, Flicker and Pinterest which makes the marketing effort better. 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 (Table 2).

Evaluation of the effectiveness of ZTA and SATs' websites functions

ZTA and SAT's websites were used for online marketing by the organisations and the Internet marketing is different from traditional marketing in that it relies on the support of information technology as postulated by Wang and Russo [13] which calls for need to evaluate the websites. An effective DMO's website needs to integrate technology and marketing principles Wang and Russo. Accordingly, a website should be evaluated on five dimensions, including information, communication, transaction, relationship and technical merit (ICTRT) model [9].

Information dimension: Communication is the methodology that DMO's use to portray value of a service for the purpose of selling that service. Information on a website must be accurate and up to date pertaining to the destination. A good website should have information about activities, accommodation, attractions, events and everything about the destination that customers need to know before convinced to make a purchase.

ZTA and SAT website have information on activities, accommodation, attractions, entertainment, events calendar, maps transportation, virtual tours and weather information. The information dimension of the websites is very clear as shown in Appendix 2 and 3. The ZTA website does not give information about entertainment, restaurant, travel packages, shopping and market segment. The websites purely give information regarding to their specific destinations only as there is no information on the websites giving links to regional or city pages. In South Africa the different cities have their websites not linked to the national tourism website, like Durban City Tourism marketing. Information dimension of ZTA and SAT websites are summarised in the Table 3.

Communication dimension: There is need for effective and constant communication with customers; online marketing enables two way communications which is difficult if not impossible with traditional marketing. DMOs should reflect on the communication function, covering all areas of promotion and marketing research. Direct exchange of information between the DMOs and consumers paves the way for future relationship building. The website can

Table 2: Online marketing strategies of ZTA and SAT.

Online marketing strategies	ZTA	SAT
Search engines (Google, Yahoo, MSN)	X	x
Website marketing	X	x
Email Marketing	X	x
Blogs	X	x
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, MySpace)	X	x
Online forums	X	x
YouTube	X	x
Pay Per Click		x
Flicker		x
Pinterest		x
Instagram		x
Google+		x

Table 3: Information, Communication, Transaction, Relationship and Technical merit (ICTRT model)
Modified ICTRT model (Li and Wang 2010).

Information Dimension	ZTA	SAT
Activities information	✔	✔
Accommodation information	✔	✔
Attraction information	✔	✔
Events calendar	✔	✔
Entertainment information		✔
Maps and directions	✔	✔
Restaurant information		✔
Travel packages		✔
Travel guides/brochures	✔	✔
Transportation information	✔	✔
Photo gallery	✔	✔
Links to regional/city/area pages		
Shopping information		✔
Information by market segment (business, family, etc.)		✔
Visitor center information	✔	✔
Travel tips	✔	✔
Local weather information	✔	✔
Virtual tours	✔	✔
Communication Dimension	**ZTA**	**SAT**
Search function		✔
Contact information (email, pone, mailing address)	✔	✔
Brochure request capabilities		✔
Destination image communication (logo, slogan)	✔	✔
Multiple language versions		
Email newsletter	✔	✔
Links to social media (YouTube, blog)	✔	✔
Feedback forms	✔	✔
Surveys		✔
Frequently asked questions		✔
Transcation dimension	**ZTA**	**SAT**
Online reservation	✔	✔
Events tickets	✔	✔
Attraction tickets	✔	✔
Shopping carts		✔
Web seal certification		✔
Relationshiop Dimension	**ZTA**	**SAT**
Privacy policy	✔	✔
Deals and discounts		✔
Personalisation		✔
Cross-selling opportunities		
Incentive programs/contests	✔	✔
Customer loyalty programs	✔	✔
Technical Dimension	**ZTA**	**SAT**
Link workability	✔	✔

Load time	Slow	Fast
Search engine recognition	✓	✓
Visual appearance	Excellent	Good
Navigation	✓	✓
Webpage design	Good	Excellent
Site map		✓

provide substantial opportunity for search functions, contact information, brand building and relationship marketing.

According ICTRT model a good website need to have the following attributes for best communication; search function, contact information, multiple language version, destination image, newsletter, links to social networks, feedback forms and frequently asked questions. The communication dimensions of ZTA and SAT website are shown in the Table 3.

Transaction dimension: Ticketing, reservations, web seal certification and shopping activities are part of the transaction activities on ZTA and SAT website.

Relationship dimension: The relationship dimension of the model is probably the most tricky to put into practice because of the necessary technological know-how and lack of knowledge-base in this area. As the DMOs' websites are rising fast and consumers' attention to websites is much scarcer than website content, websites are feeling the pressure of drawing and retaining consumer attention; ZTA and SAT are not spared from the fierce competition.

Technical merit dimension: Technical merit on websites leads not only to the establishment of web-based market places but to the one-stop shops for tourists. Technical merit holds the functions of the other four marketing dimensions (Information, Communication, Transaction, and Relationship). Links on website enables the tourist to reach other important organisations with short load time, easy navigation, and good web designs with site maps.

Effectiveness of ZTA and SAT websites

Comparison of the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority and South Africa Tourisms' websites showed some variations among the websites with differences in respect of effectiveness. The differences in the dimensions of information, communication, transaction, relationship, and technical merit of the two organisations gave rise to the difference in their effectiveness. A comparison of the ZTA and SATs' websites in this research showed that each organisation's website had its own strengths and weaknesses. Although SAT did not get the presence of all website attributes in every dimension, the presents of more attributes under transaction dimension helped it rank the first in overall effectiveness. This is in support with the argument of Li and Wang [9] where they argue that in ICTRT model, the effectiveness of DMOs' websites should depend not merely on the amount of the applications utilised but also on the level of sophistication of its applications. The results are in line with the argument and recommended that ZTA and SAT should pay more attention to the quality rather than quantity of their internet marketing features.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

SAT is far ahead of ZTA in terms of social media marketing as its social media pages have many followers and likes. This one can attribute to better technological advances in South Africa. However 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 do interlink with one another thus increasing the spectrum of the pages. On Meet South Africa Twitter page there are links to YouTube, Twitter, Flicker and Pinterest which makes the marketing effort better than ZTA social media pages which do not have links to other social media pages. The research reviewed that there are a number of similarities on the ZTA and SAT websites. However, there are some differences on the two websites with regards to specific content on the websites of the two organisations. The data showed that there is no entertainment information, restaurant information, travel package, shopping information as well as information categorised by segment on the ZTA website.

In this regard, it is thus clear that the information content of ZTA falls short compared to SAT website however the information contained in the website is highly functional and very important to travellers. Wang and Russo [13] 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. These findings appear to be consistent with previous literature on tourism information search whereby important information sought when planning a trip is functional rather than hedonic. 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 has latest information on its website.

The results from the study show that the ZTA is less interactive than the SAT website. The ZTA website (Appendix 2) has no search function which is very critical for visitors to easily access information from the website. On the other hand, the ZTA website do not have the brochure request capabilities which is essential for visitors to easily get information about ZTA. There is also the absence of surveys and FAQs on the ZTA website which prevents effective communication. In addition, the absence of multiple language versions from the SAT and ZTA website removes the user friendliness which is essential for effective communication especially when dealing with people from different language backgrounds. ZTA website have multiple language versions but the navigation button is not clearly labeled it takes an effort from the user to discover and understand it. It is clear that the SAT website is more interactive than the ZTA website especially considering that the SAT (Appendix 3) website is linked to a number of online forums which are not there on the ZTA website such as Flicker, Instagram, Google+ and Pinterest. Similarly the findings seem to concur with the conclusions by Guðmundsson [4] that the communication function is critical on a website as it involves all areas of promotion and marketing research.

The Web site might create a link between the consumer interaction and the brand, likely better than traditional advertising media can. Online communication is not bound by either space or time and has the capability to involve and engage the consumer but SAT and ZTA had limited use of the interactive potential of the internet especially with ZTA it does not have FAQs, surveys and brochure request capabilities. The research data showed that the ZTA and SAT 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 through online. Contrary, the ZTA 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 government organisations on the ZTA website and private businesses reservations are not active.

According to Li and Wang [9] the transaction function enables DMOs to generate revenue for both internal use and external stakeholders. A fully-fledged DMO website should have facilities to enable online transactions to take place thus to make online reservations and bookings. In terms of transaction dimension the results shows that the websites are lagging behind in performing transactions this concurs with research of Maswera et al. [2] on Ecommerce adoption of travel and tourism organisations in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Uganda.

The results from the study showed that the South African Tourism website is more advanced than the ZTA website in that it offers deals and discounts online as well as personalisation options which are not there on the Zimbabwe Tourism Website. Discounts and personalisation of services to customers is at the realm of marketing globally due to intense competition in the services sector and marketing organisations are moving away from the traditional way of shotgun marketing. ZTA might be failing to perform at par with SAT due to lack of discounts and personalisation on its website. On the other hand, both the ZTA and SAT websites all do not have the cross- selling opportunities which are important in DMOs. According to Canada Tourism Commission [14], Tourism in Canada contributed 7% to GDP which was highly attributed to discounts and personalisation of products offered through the website.

In terms of technical dimension the results showed that the ZTA website and the SAT 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 for tour operators of South Africa. However, the data also show that the ZTA website's load time is slow as compared to the SAT website which is fast. ZTA website had too many and too big pictures of attractions which makes it take a longer time to load. On the website design best practices Rita 2000 highlighted that too many big pictures reduces website load time and many internet users are impatient in using such a site. On the visual appearance, the ZTA website looks better than the SAT website which had too many blogs on its home page. There seems to be absence of a site map on the ZTA website compared to the SAT website which has a site map which is important for visitors.

There is need for ZTA and SAT to embrace advanced technical aspects on their websites so that they overcome the short comings of their website technical dimensions. Li and Wang [9] advocated that, it is important for DMOs to progress to additional classy level of technology use to give a further 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.

CONCLUSIONS

In line with objective of the study which sought to establish the various online marketing strategies by ZTA and SAT, the study concludes that Zimbabwe Tourism Authority and the South Africa Tourism use various online marketing strategies in the promotion of tourism. As such the study identified social media marketing (Facebook, Twitter and MySpace); blogs; online forums; email marketing and website marketing. It can be concluded that SAT use more social media networks than ZTA and they have more followers despite the age of the social media platforms of the two organisations being relatively the same.

The other objective of the study was to compare the online marketing strategies adopted by ZTA and SAT and it can be concluded that SAT is on advanced stage in terms of online marketing. The website had links to social media platforms and the page of the social media do interlink. On search engine both websites are highly ranked. Zimbabwe online infrastructure is a contributing factor to poor online marketing as network connection is very poor and very few people has access to internet connection. The website of ZTA is not always updated, its newsletters had stale news and some pages are not loaded with current information. There is also domain name conflict on ZTA and SAT websites as there are websites with the same name but it does not open and on SAT it does not represent the country's national tourism marketing body is just an association of tour operators. ZTA need to use its website as a point of sale like what SAT is doing as it is performing reservations and sale of tickets, the attribute is there on ZTA website but it needs to be activated.

On the other hand, the study sought to establish the effectiveness of ZTA and SAT websites, in line with the objective of the study it can be concluded that SAT website is more informative and user friendly than that of ZTA. The SAT website fulfilled all the best standard of a website as outlined by Li and Wang ICTRT model that was used to evaluate the websites. Although some few attributes of ICTRT were missing from the websites. The study sought strategies for improving online marketing of ZTA and SAT, the study concludes that both ZTA and SAT needs to improve on quality rather than concentrating on quantity.

Basing on the findings and conclusions of the study, the study therefore recommends that the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority and South Africa Tourism should focus on improving the quality of their websites than concentrating on the quantity of the ineffective services it offers. There is too much graphical content especially on the home page of the ZTA website, the researcher recommends that they should reduce the number of pictures so that the page can be loaded quickly. The website can reduce the number of pictures as well as written content and make use of correctly labeled links. The links should be functional as some of the links on the websites are not functional especially on ZTA website. Potgieter et al. conducted a study on innovative marketing information system: a management tool for South African tour operators in South Africa and recommends that coming from the background that websites of most African organisations lacked interactive facilities which can be enhanced by functional links on the website. This was also supported by Potgieter et al. when he concluded that tour operators have limited knowledge on the significance of information systems as a means to interact between tour operators and customers.

The study recommends that ZTA should join more social media networks so as to increase marketing effort online. They should

use offline campaigns like posters and pamphlets to redirect its potential customers to follow them on social networks. The social networks should be linked to one another on their pages like that of SAT.

The study recommends that both ZTA and SAT needs to invest more on online marketing due to the growing significance of information communication technology. ICT development in Zimbabwe is far much behind South Africa and there is need to inject capital in ICT especially in the line of tourism marketing as it is a major contributor to GDP. Rogerson, said that internet has led to the boom of e-commerce which is changing the nature of business. Many organisations in the world over have adopted online tourism marketing strategies and from research done by Marcussen in 2005 shows that travel and tourism industry revenue have increased by adopting e-commerce.

The study recommends that Zimbabwe Tourism Authority and South Africa Tourism need to continuously update their websites so that they provide current updated information that moved in line with the changes on the global market. South Africa tourism does update its website but they are relative slow but ZTA is very slow. ZTA needs to take an urgent attention to continuous updating of website pages as the majority of pages contain old and out dated information.

The researcher recommends that ZTA and SAT should workout domain conflict as for ZTA website there is a domain www.zta.co.zw which does not open. For SAT there is www.southafricatourism. net which shares the same domain name with SAT but is not the official DMO of South Africa Tourism. Domain conflict destructs focus of website users and they will end up not getting the information they are looking for.

The websites of DMOs should become point of sales of facilities in the respective countries. All tourism service providers should be linked to the websites and perform sales transactions online. Marketing online can reach far but it is ineffective without sealing a sale by making payment for services. Your Singapore marketing campaign, YourSingapore.com is intended to drive people to visit the campaign website, where they will be inspired to explore what Singapore has to offer and be motivated into creating their personal journey, from securing a room in the latest boutique hotel to booking seats for a musical matinee. The website is linked to private operators in tourism and purchase transactions can be performed online, this might had contributed to good performance of YourSingapore website.

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