

A Critical Analysis of the Impact of Zimbabwe's Domestic Tourism Promotion and Growth Strategy on Domestic Tourism Performance: The Case of the ZIMBHO Campaign

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Abstract

The tourism sector in Zimbabwe contributes significantly to the country's Gross Domestic Product. It comes third after mining and agriculture. However, tourism performance in Zimbabwe is largely anchored on international tourist arrivals and expenditure. Whilst Zimbabwe possesses abundant natural attractions, its domestic tourism is performing below its potential. In order to improve the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority embarked on a domestic tourism promotion and growth campaign called 'ZIMBHO'. The ZIMBHO campaign was launched in 2020 as a way to improve domestic tourism performance of the nation and drive economic growth. However, stakeholders' perceptions on the impact of the ZIMBHO campaign on the performance of the domestic tourism in Zimbabwe have not been fully explored. This study therefore explored stakeholders' perceptions of the impact of the ZIMBHO campaign on the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe. The study was carried out in Kariba resort town. Specifically, the study sought to establish the stakeholders' perceptions of the performance of domestic tourism in Kariba before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign; establish the stakeholders' perceptions of the performance of domestic tourism in Kariba after the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign; assess the challenges faced by the stakeholders in implementing the objectives of the ZIMBHO campaign in Kariba and suggest strategies for optimizing the contribution of the ZIMBHO campaign to the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe. This study employed qualitative research methodology, through the use of structured interviews and observations to collect data from a sample size of twenty purposefully chosen respondents. The population of the study comprised of domestic tourists, tourism and hospitality operators and Ministry of

Tourism and Hospitality Industry and Zimbabwe Tourism Authority officials. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Findings from the study indicated that the ZIMBHO marketing campaign contributed positively towards the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe, which was evidenced by an increase in domestic tourists' occupancy and travellers to Kariba after the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign. The study recommended that more support systems for domestic tourists be initiated, that domestic tourists pay less for services, and that the road infrastructure to tourist resorts be improved to enhance easy accessibility.

Key Words: ZIMBHO, domestic tourism, domestic tourism performance, tourist arrivals, tourist expenditure

Introduction

Statistics from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) show that tourist arrivals to Zimbabwe rose by 174 percent in 2022 (from 380,820 tourists in 2021 to 1,043,781 in 2022), due to the recovery in overseas markets following the end of COVID-19 lockdowns (ZTA, 2022). Despite the notable increase in tourist traffic, Zimbabwe is not ready to rely on domestic tourists because they are low income earners that cannot economically support tourism in Zimbabwe (ZTA, 2024). In order to boost the performance of the domestic tourism market, the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) implemented various interventions to stimulate domestic tourism in Zimbabwe. Some of the key strategies include the 3-tier pricing system which aimed at making tourism more affordable for Zimbabweans, encouraging them to explore their own country. As argued by Gössling and Hall (2006) affordability is important in promoting domestic tourism, particularly in developing countries. The ZTA also organized roadshows in major Zimbabwean cities to raise awareness about domestic tourism destinations and packages (ZTA, 2022). These events often involve travel agencies, hotels and other tourism stakeholders showcasing their offerings. Another strategy adopted by the ZTA is the use of celebrity endorsements, which, according to van der Veen (2008), can enhance the credibility and effectiveness of tourism promotional campaigns. The ZTA has therefore appointed prominent Zimbabwean figures as domestic tourism ambassadors to leverage their influence and promote domestic travel. These ambassadors participate in promotional campaigns and raise awareness about Zimbabwe's tourism potential.

The Zimbabwe Tourism Authority established a dedicated domestic tourism unit to focus specifically on developing and promoting domestic tourism initiatives in Zimbabwe. This unit works with stakeholders to create attractive packages, address challenges faced by domestic

tourists and conduct research on domestic tourism trends. The ZIMBHO campaign is a strategy of reviving domestic tourism performance in Zimbabwe (Guvamombe, 2020). However, stakeholders' perceptions of the impact of the ZIMBHO campaign have not been fully explored, hence the need for this study.

Background of the Study

Domestic tourism can be described as tourism involving residents of one country travelling within their own country. It does not involve the crossing of international borders at entry points (Choo, 2016). According to the Polaris Market Research (2023), the global domestic tourism market was valued at USD 1,670.34 billion in 2022 and was expected to grow at a rate of 16.9% by 2023. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) (2021) argues that domestic tourism is the key driver of the tourism sector globally. Domestic travel is essential to the domestic economy since it retains financial resources in the country. The financial resources may be employed to modernize the community's services and infrastructure and enhance the quality of life of its residents (Kachniewska, 2015). According to the Polaris Market Research (2023), China has been extraordinarily successful in promoting domestic tourism, beating other countries in domestic expenditure growth. China launched a three-year programme to boost domestic tourism in 2023 which included initiatives to enhance domestic tourism, offer high-quality travel options, enhance the overall travel experience and elevate the quality of public service in the tourism sector (Xijia, 2023). According to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, China, the total number of domestic tourist trips in China reached 3.674 billion, which shows a 75% increase from 1.58 billion in 2022. WTTC (2021) recorded that China and USA account for over 40% of the world's total domestic spending. Europe, being the home for most of the well-known countries and cities in the world, many with fascinating history and magnificent natural settings, has the highest levels of domestic arrivals. The COVID-19 pandemic led to the temporary suspension of international travelling, hence increased need for domestic tourism worldwide.

Understanding stakeholders' perceptions of promotional campaigns to enhance domestic tourism performance is crucial for Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. Stakeholders' perceptions can reveal unexpected consequences of the campaign, both positive and negative. Higgins-Desbiollens (2020) posit that governments view domestic tourism as a way to diversify tourism portfolios, reduce reliance on international travel, especially during pandemics like COVID-

19, and foster national pride. Kabote, Mashiri and Vengesayi (2014) argue that domestic businesses perceive domestic tourism as a more stable and predictable source of revenue compared to international travel. However, this can be affected by seasonal fluctuations in demand. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) advocate for responsible domestic tourism practices that minimize negative environmental and social impacts while promoting cultural preservation and community involvement (Scheyvens, 1999). Governments perceive domestic tourism as a source of economic growth, job creation and national identity. According to Tsviliy and Matviienko (2024), tourism businesses perceive domestic tourism as a way to reduce reliance on international markets and diversification of customer base; whilst Hall (2014) argues that NGOs perceive domestic tourism as a means to community empowerment, cultural preservation and responsible tourism practices. Therefore, by acknowledging diverse perspectives and working collaboratively, stakeholders can maximize the benefits of domestic tourism for local economies, communities and environments.

Jorden (2023) argues that visa travel delays have resulted in Africans visiting local destinations and promoting domestic tourism. For example, lengthy visa waits to travel to Europe have driven Indian travellers to visit destinations closer to home. According to Brophy (2023), African travel executives believe the continent's growing middle class can boost tourism, in particular, domestic tourism. South Africa has seen a 41% surge in domestic tourism in the first four months of 2023 (Brophy, 2023), even exceeding pre-pandemic levels (Chilamphuma, 2025). Christie, Fernandes, Messerli, and Twining-Ward (2014). argue that domestic tourism is on the rise in Africa, driven by a growing middle class, increasing disposable income and urbanization. Kenya is also a popular destination for domestic tourism due to its famous safaris, beaches and stunning scenery (Muchapondwa & Stage, 2013). Among other countries is Morocco, a home for rich culture, beautiful cities and stunning scenery. Nigeria is famous for beautiful beaches, rainforests and vibrant cities whilst Ethiopia has ancient ruins and beautiful scenery (Brown & Hall, 2008). Domestic tourism has become a growing trend in Africa and has a positive impact on the continent's economy, communities and environment.

According to the Nicula (2024), tourism across Africa is on the rebound, following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, with an increase to 96% in international arrivals compared to the pre-pandemic levels. Nicula (2024) revealed that North Africa is performing stronger with an 8% increase between January and July 2023 as compared to 2019. Countries like Ethiopia

increased their arrivals by 28%, Tanzania 19%, and Morocco 15%, during the same period (Nicula, 2024). In 2021, domestic visitors spent 67 billion U.S. dollars in Africa. This was an increase of 39.4% percent from the year before. In 2020, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic highly affected the tourism industry. Despite the most recent improvement, domestic visitor spending remained below the level recorded in 2019 (Statista, 2025). This shows that domestic tourism in Africa is a growing phenomenon, with lower arrivals as compared to the international arrivals. Therefore, understanding the various stakeholder perspectives is crucial for maximizing benefits and mitigating potential drawbacks. Muchapondwa and Stage (2013) argue that many communities in Africa see domestic tourism as an engine for economic growth. It creates jobs and increases demand for local goods and services, benefiting businesses and artisans. South Africa has implemented strategies and frameworks to grow domestic tourism, such as the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS) which focuses on the development of a competitive domestic tourism market that contributes to the growing economy as well as the tourism Capacity Development and Promotion Support policy (Nyikana & Bama, 2023). These strategies focus on marketing and branding domestic tourism destinations in South Africa. Domestic tourism is rising in South Africa due to strategies like the “Black Friday of Tourism” where stakeholders offer discounts of up to 50% (Chilamphuma, 2025).

Issues of affordability and access to destinations remain a challenge for domestic tourists in Africa. Governments in Africa perceive domestic tourism as a contributing factor to increased tax revenue, supporting infrastructure development and social programs (Brown & Hall, 2008). Moreover, responsible domestic tourism can foster appreciation for natural and cultural heritage encouraging conservation efforts and promoting sustainable practices. Therefore, the impact of domestic tourism is not uniform across all stakeholders. This highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement since dialogue and collaboration among all stakeholders is crucial for addressing concerns and ensuring sustainable development of domestic tourism in Africa.

Mutana and Zinyemba (2013) argued that Zimbabwe is not ready to rely on domestic tourism since most Zimbabweans are low-income earners that cannot economically support tourism in Zimbabwe. Kabote, Mamimine and Muranda (2019) supported this sentiment by highlighting that Zimbabwe struggles to increase domestic tourism due to reasons like poor marketing of tourism to local people. The subdued economic performance in Zimbabwe also negatively

affects domestic tourism as local people have lower disposable incomes for them to visit local leisure facilities. These studies revealed the major driving factors in the development of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe. However, these factors cannot be fully unearthed without looking into the stakeholder perceptions regarding domestic tourism in Zimbabwe.

Domestic tourism performance refers to the health and growth of tourism activities within a country, where tourists travel within their own national borders (Choo, 2016). Tourism performance is measured using household surveys which gather data on residents' travel habits within the country, including frequency, duration and expenditure (UNWTO, 2024). Tracking hotel occupancy rates, particularly during off-peak seasons, can indicate domestic tourist activity while analysing domestic flight bookings, car rentals and public transportation usage provides insights into domestic travel patterns. The key performance indicators used to assess domestic tourism performance include domestic tourist arrivals and the total number of domestic trips taken within the country during a specific period (ZTA, 2018).

Kabote *et al.* (2019) argue that the total amount of money spent by domestic tourists on travel-related expenses like accommodation, transportation, food and activities is another key performance indicator used to assess domestic tourism performance. The average percentage of hotel rooms occupied by domestic tourists throughout a period, the average duration of domestic tourist trips, indicating the depth of engagement with destinations, and the percentage of total tourism accounted for by domestic tourist activity are some of the KPIs of domestic tourism (UNWTO, 2024). This provides a sense of the relative importance of domestic tourism within the country's tourism sector.

According to the Statistics Research Department (2023), the total number of domestic tourists staying in hotels in Zimbabwe amounted to 343 000 in 2015, 510 000 in 2018 and decreased to 216 000 in 2020. Chibaya and Mushoorwa (2025) argue that the Zimbabwe tourism industry experienced a harsh two years of pounding by the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving the sector virtually on the jaws of death, but was saved by domestic tourists who drove business. Hotel occupation in 2020 averaged around 23% outside cities, and 32% in cities which was largely driven by government and private sector workshops (Chibaya & Mushoorwa, 2025). Despite the growing domestic tourism business, pricing remained unaffordable to average families in Zimbabwe. Businesses in the tourism sector raised prices in order to meet their expenses since the tourist arrivals had declined by 40% due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Kabote *et al.*, 2019).

The continued efforts by the ZTA through campaigns like “URIPI?” suggest a continued push to revitalize this sector. Moreover, as a way to revive the sector, the government implemented a recovery and growth strategy named the “ZIMBHO Campaign” launched in 2020 seeking to grow the industry to US\$5 billion by 2025 (Chibaya & Mushoorwa, 2025) due to the recognition that domestic tourism is of crucial importance in the Zimbabwean economy.

According to Guvamombe (2020), the ZIMBHO campaign was part of the Zimbabwe government and the ZTA’s broader strategy to stimulate domestic tourism amid the COVID-19 pandemic challenges. This campaign was set to change the lifestyle of many people as it opened floodgates for all Zimbabweans to tour and enjoy their country (Guvamombe, 2022). Under the ZIMBHO campaign, the government removed Value Added Tax on all local tourists to enable the industry to reduce prices. It is argued that the ZIMBHO campaign was meant to bring Gross National Happiness through visiting tourist attractions at lower prices (Musasa & Mago, 2014). During the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign in Kariba, the Minister of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry urged all suppliers of tourism and hospitality services to lower their prices to increase affordability by the majority of citizens to ensure the success of the ZIMBHO Campaign (Guvamombe, 2020). The ZIMBHO campaign is a marketing strategy that touches upon various aspects of the marketing mix. The ZIMBHO Campaign promotes the idea of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination highlighting its diverse offerings including adventure, wildlife, cultural experiences, historical sites and stunning natural beauty (Guvamombe, 2022). Moreover, the campaign leverages tax breaks to encourage affordable prices. As highlighted by Guvamombe (2022), the Zimbabwean government removed Value Added Tax (VAT) on local tourism packages thus making them more affordable for domestic tourists.

According to Ruzvidzo (2023), ZIMBHO does not focus on a specific location but rather aims to spread awareness across the entire country, thus encouraging exploration of various destinations within Zimbabwe. The campaign uses a catchy name and slogan “**ZIMBHO – Zimbabwe, a world of wonders**” to create a memorable brand (Tshuma, 2020). The government has also collaborated with the local private sector for special packages. According to Ruzvidzo (2023), ZIMBHO targets Zimbabwean citizens and the diaspora, aiming to cultivate a sense of national pride and encourage them to explore their country. ZIMBHO does not directly handle the booking process, but, by promoting domestic tourism, it aims to

streamline the overall process which can lead to improved infrastructure and services within the tourism sector (Chibaya & Mushoorwa, 2025). ZIMBHO relies on the beauty and experiences Zimbabwe offers as its physical evidence. Moreover, successful campaigns may lead to positive reviews and testimonials from domestic tourists, further strengthening the campaign. Therefore, focus on these elements creates a comprehensive marketing strategy for the ZIMBHO Campaign to promote domestic tourism in Zimbabwe.

The ZIMBHO campaign was launched with the objective to create awareness among locals of all attractions within Zimbabwe, develop a culture of travel among Zimbabweans, increase domestic travel and increase the contribution of domestic tourism to the community (Musasa & Mago, 2014). However, its impact as perceived by stakeholders like tourists, travel agencies, tourism operators, ZTA, hotels, local government officials and local communities in the tourism sector has not been fully explored, hence the need for this study.

Problem Statement

Stakeholder perceptions of the contribution of the ZIMBHO Campaign in Zimbabwe have not been fully explored. While Zimbabwe possesses abundant natural attractions, its domestic tourism sector underperforms compared to its potential (ZTA, 2022). Domestic tourist arrivals, as measured by their entry into national parks and museums, were 626 118, or 28% of the total arrivals in 2022 (ZTA, 2022), significantly lower than the regional average of 50% (UNWTO, 2023). Whilst the ZIMBHO campaign aims to increase domestic tourism performance, stakeholders' perceptions of its impact have not been fully explored. Ignorance of stakeholder perceptions on the campaign's impact hinders strategic resource allocation and improvement opportunities for the campaign. This may lead to misalignment with stakeholders' needs which can limit the campaign's potential to revitalize domestic tourism performance in Zimbabwe. This study employed a qualitative methodology to assess stakeholders' perceptions of the contributions of the ZIMBHO marketing campaign to the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe, specifically Kariba. Findings of the study may inform evidence based policy interventions as well as effective resource allocation for better performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe.

Research Objectives

Main Research Objective

This study sought to assess the stakeholders' perceptions of the contributions of the ZIMBHO marketing campaign to the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe.

Specific Research Objectives

Specifically, the study sought to:

- Establish stakeholders' perceptions of the performance of domestic tourism in Kariba before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign,
- Establish stakeholders' perceptions of the performance of domestic tourism in Kariba after the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign,
- Assess the challenges faced by stakeholders in implementing the objectives of the ZIMBHO campaign in Kariba, and
- Suggest strategies for optimizing the contribution of the ZIMBHO campaign to the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe.

Literature Review

ZIMBHO Campaign

According to Guvamombe (2020), the ZIMBHO campaign was part of the Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority's broader strategy to stimulate domestic tourism performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. This campaign was set to change the travelling culture of many Zimbabweans to tour and enjoy their country (Guvamombe, 2022). Under the ZIMBHO campaign, the government removed Value Added Tax on all local tourists to enable the industry to reduce prices. The ZIMBHO campaign was launched with the objectives to create awareness among locals of all attractions within Zimbabwe, develop a travelling culture among Zimbabweans, increase domestic travel and increase the contribution of domestic tourism to the community (Musasa & Mago, 2014). The campaign was meant to bring Gross National Happiness as it manifests itself through visiting tourist attractions at lower prices (Musasa & Mago, 2014). Tourism Operators were urged to lower their prices to increase affordability by the majority of citizens to ensure the success of the ZIMBHO campaign (Guvamombe, 2020).

Domestic Tourism Performance in Zimbabwe

Whilst domestic tourism has become increasingly important in Europe, understanding stakeholder perceptions of its performance is not widely studied. The Nyaupane and Paris (2020) define domestic tourism as tourism involving residents of one country traveling only within that country. This excludes inbound tourism involving non-residents traveling within the reporting country. The reasons for travel can include many tourism-related aspects such as visiting friends and relatives, leisure and holidays, business, and internal conferences and events. While studies exist on the specific aspects of domestic tourism, a comprehensive analysis of stakeholder viewpoints across various stakeholder groups seems missing. Studies like the one carried by Murray, Elliot, Simmonds, Madeley and Taller (2017) in Canada demonstrates stakeholder considerations for human resource impacts but does not directly address domestic tourism.

Rasoolimanesh and Jaafar (2017) discovered differences in tourists' perceptions of sustainable tourism development between the three stakeholder groups which includes the government, local residents and private entrepreneurs. However, stakeholders like tourism businesses, local communities and tourists themselves, are likely to hold distinct perceptions on performance. Murray, Elliot, Simmonds, Madeley and Taller (2017) argued that the definition of performance in domestic tourism can vary; hence economic indicators, socio-cultural impacts and environmental sustainability are all relevant. Therefore, stakeholder perceptions on the performance of domestic tourism can be a complex area of study globally.

Domestic tourism holds immense potential for economic growth and regional development in Africa. Therefore, understanding stakeholder perceptions of domestic tourism performance in Africa helps to develop effective strategies for its growth. However, as compared to developed regions, research on domestic tourism in Africa is scarce. Sánchez-Cañizares *et al.* (2016) studied the perceptions of tourism stakeholders regarding the effects of tourism development in Cape Verde focusing on tourists, residents and business owners. Some studies like Morupisi and Mokgalo (2017) focused on the challenges faced in the development of domestic tourism in Botswana. However, these studies failed to delve deeper into the diverse perspectives of stakeholders including governments, local communities and domestic tourists themselves.

A study conducted by Pretorius (2020) measured the stakeholder perceptions of responsible tourism development in Sanparks, South Africa. This study aimed at determining stakeholder

perceptions of responsible tourism development. Patricia *et al.* (2019) studied the role of stakeholder's participation on tourism performance in West Pokot and not necessarily their perceptions on the performance of domestic tourism in the country. These studies have addressed variables such as stakeholder perceptions of responsible tourism, the role of stakeholder participation in tourism performance and not the perceptions of stakeholders on the performance of domestic tourism. Rumukumba (2019), analysed tourism stakeholder's perceptions of the attractiveness and competitiveness of the garden route as a tourist destination. This study focused on the perceptions of the key stakeholders in a tourism destination whilst relating to the destination attractiveness and competitiveness. However, very few studies, if any at all, have been done focusing on assessing stakeholder perceptions of the performance of domestic tourism in Africa.

Studies like Ahokas (2017) focused on the safety concerns, particularly for female travellers, which can be a deterrent to domestic tourism. However, in depth analysis is required to understand the stakeholder perceptions on the performance of domestic tourism in Africa in order to understand the social and cultural impacts of domestic tourism on local communities, encompassing both positive aspects and potential negatives.

There is scarce dedicated research on stakeholder perceptions of domestic tourism performance in Zimbabwe. Existing literature focuses on broader tourism topics or specific stakeholder groups. For instance, studies like Moyo (2016) acknowledge domestic tourism's potential for job creation and economic growth but highlight lack of data on its actual contribution. Before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign, most studies focused on broader tourism topics and in as much as the stakeholder perceptions were studied, focus was on sustainability of tourism attractions. For example, Kabote *et al.* (2019) emphasized the stakeholder views on the sustainability of tourism taking place in Zimbabwe with emphasis on the nature of attractions. Studies like Zengeni and Zengeni (2014) focused on the perceptions of stakeholders on tourism turn-around strategies in Zimbabwe. In as much as stakeholder perceptions have been studied, a gap still exists in that there is lack of research on stakeholder's perceptions on the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe.

Makoni and Tichaawa (2018) studied the stakeholder views on tourism whilst focusing on the stakeholders' assessments of tourism policy and product development in Zimbabwe. Studies like Bonga and Sithole (2020) emphasized the need for improved infrastructure to facilitate

domestic tourism growth. Chigora and Hoque (2018) identified a gap in marketing domestic tourism destinations in Zimbabwe. However, a gap still exists in exploring diverse perspectives of stakeholders in Zimbabwe including government, tourism businesses and domestic travellers, to assess domestic tourism performance in Zimbabwe.

Domestic Tourism Performance in Kariba after the Launch of the ZIMBHO campaign.

There seems to be a scarcity of published research specifically focusing on stakeholder perceptions of domestic tourism performance in Kariba following the ZIMBHO campaign launch. Some studies offer insights into broader trends on tourism in Kariba, and can be used to infer stakeholder perceptions. Before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign, Basera (2018) studied tourism marketing strategies and domestic tourism demand in Kariba. This study sought to explore tourism marketing strategies that can be used to optimise domestic tourism in Kariba. According to Mutingwende (2024), there are positive results recorded from the ZIMBHO campaign in boosting the country's tourism sectors as a number of visitors to local resorts grew significantly, especially during festive seasons. It is argued that the launch of the domestic tourism festive season campaign drew a crowd of about 28000 local people from across Zimbabwe (Mutingwende, 2024). Ruzvidzo (2023) argued that these high numbers were an indication that local people were eager to explore the rich cultural and natural heritage of their homeland.

There has been an increase in hotel occupancy in Zimbabwe with locals being the biggest block of occupants. This was fuelled by the meet and greet campaign under the ZIMBHO campaign during the 2023 festive season in which the Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality collaborated with the ZTA and other stakeholders to increase domestic tourism (Mutingwende, 2024). Beitbridge and Victoria Falls had an increase in occupancies. According to Mutingwende (2024), the high occupancy in resort areas like Victoria Falls reflect a growing interest in local travel destinations.

Challenges Faced by Stakeholders in Implementing the Objectives of the ZIMBHO Campaign in Kariba

While the ZIMBHO campaign has been successful in driving domestic tourism in Zimbabwe, there are still challenges stakeholders face in fully achieving its objectives. Here are some potential roadblocks. Despite VAT removal, travel costs like accommodation, activities, and even gas prices, might still be a hurdle for some locals. According to Musasa and Mago (2014),

tourism operations were no longer making profit from the reduced prices of their packages in as much as they wanted to attract more domestic tourists.

Looking at Kariba resort, travelling to Kariba especially from remote areas, can be time-consuming and expensive due to limited public transport options. The campaign needs to engage stakeholders and collaborate with transport companies to offer affordable travel packages or explore public-private partnerships to improve bus routes as a way to improve the campaign's impact and effectiveness.

Whilst the ZIMBHO campaign has gained traction (Guvamombe, 2022), there is still a challenge in ensuring everyone in Zimbabwe is aware of the benefits of domestic tourism, particularly in Kariba. Seemingly, the ZIMBHO campaign has not been effectively publicized especially among local tourists. Stakeholders could benefit from continued publicity efforts, and leveraging local influencers as well as community leaders to spread the word. While Kariba offers stunning scenery, tourists still seek more diverse activities. Therefore, the ZIMBHO campaign can put more effort in promoting cultural experiences, adventure tourism options, or even creating themed events to keep visitors engaged for longer stays in Kariba (Musasa and Mago, 2014).

Methods and Materials

This study adopted an interpretive research philosophy and qualitative research methodology in order to assess stakeholders' perceptions of the impact of the ZIMBHO campaign on domestic tourism performance in Kariba. Interpretivism and qualitative methodology also enabled the study to deeply comprehend respondents' social cultural context and to probe the interviewee's thoughts and perceptions by utilizing the key approach of interactive interviews (Buissink-Smith & McIntosh, 1999). As argued by Bhattacharjee (2012), interpretivism is nomothetic, anti-positive, voluntarist and ideographic. It uses subjective first-hand knowledge. A case study research design was adopted for this study. The population for the study comprised of tourists, local residents, government agents, transport providers and accommodation providers in Kariba. A purposive sample of eighteen stakeholders was selected, comprising of three hotel managers, two government officials, two members from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority and six community members. Five domestic tourists were conveniently selected for triangulation purposes. Data was collected through interviews and observations. Thematic data analysis was utilised to analyse the data.

Findings and Discussion

The following were the findings from the study; as guided by the specific objectives:

Stakeholder Perceptions of the Performance of Domestic Tourism in Kariba Before the Launch of ZIMBHO Campaign

The first specific objective of the study was to establish the stakeholders' perceptions of the performance of domestic tourism in Kariba before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign.

Volume of the domestic tourists before the ZIMBHO campaign

The study sought to establish the volume of the domestic tourists visiting Kariba in the years prior to the ZIMBHO campaign. Respondents expressed mixed perceptions with some evaluating domestic tourism performance as low whilst others argued that it was average before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign.

Respondent 1,

The market was mainly from South Africa prior the ZIMBHO campaign launch.

This is in support of Makoni, Chikobvu and Sigauke (2021) who claimed that 80% of tourism activity in Zimbabwe before the COVID-19 pandemic was attributed to international tourist arrivals. This means that domestic tourism in Kariba was relatively lower than desired as it was mainly dominated by the international tourism market.

Respondent 7 said:

The industry declined so much during the COVID-19 pandemic since most international tourists were restricted from travelling, the seasonal trend was noticeable from a few domestic tourists during public and school holidays.

This concurs with Shava and Shava (2023)'s findings who opined that the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the travel and tourism industry in Zimbabwe. Therefore, tourism was generally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and only a few domestic tourists were received in Kariba during holidays. However, one of the tourists indicated that they know nothing about the ZIMBHO campaign. This shows that the campaign is still new to some of the tourists and requires a lot of publicity. This strategy is informed by Chaudhuri, Chatterjee and Vrontis (2024) who emphasized how branding can create a distinct identity for a destination which makes it more appealing to domestic tourists seeking unique experiences within their own country. Moreover, Mapingure *et al.* (2019) also argued that deliberate efforts to design products which match the motivations of tourists can increase satisfaction among

domestic tourists in Zimbabwe. Therefore, the ZIMBHO campaign should be highly publicized to all Zimbabweans, coupled with the design of more activities that attract more volumes of domestic tourists to local destinations such as Kariba.

Factors which influenced domestic tourists' visits to resorts before the launch of the ZIMBHO Campaign

Findings indicate that factors like the people's overall interest in domestic travel and holidays, the love for travel and the availability of middle-class families, amongst others, influenced domestic tourists' travel patterns before the ZIMBHO campaign was launched. Respondents argued that most domestic tourists who visited Kariba before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign did so during holidays and these were from middle class families with discretionary income available for leisure travel.

According to Respondent 3:

We usually travel with my family during holidays as a way to get from our daily routine of work and school. Kariba has been one of our best destinations and we don't regret coming back again and again. Travelling gives us the opportunity to rest and relax whilst we explore new places and new experiences.

The findings are consistent with Mapingure *et al.* (2019)'s findings who opine that one of the motivating factors of domestic tourists in Zimbabwe is escape and relaxation whereby tourists get an opportunity to travel with friends and relatives, enjoy local cuisine and meet new people with similar interests. However, Kabote *et al.* (2019) posit that destination preference is the main factor that influences the number of domestic tourists visiting Kariba. This is as a result of most domestic tourists wanting to experience life at the most popular destinations of the country, which helps in boosting their self-esteem.

Respondent 8 said,

One of the factors that influenced domestic tourists to visit Kariba before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign was their love for travel. Tourists had an inherent desire to explore new places which can be exciting and rejuvenating.

These sentiments concur with ZTA's (2022) Zimbabwe Tourism Market Analysis Report which reported that the love to travel hugely influences domestic tourist travel in Zimbabwe.

The effectiveness of the marketing and promotional efforts directed towards attracting domestic tourists to Kariba prior to the ZIMBHO campaign launch.

The study also assessed the effectiveness of the marketing and promotional efforts directed towards attracting domestic tourists to Kariba before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign. The respondents argued that these efforts were not effective since there were a few domestic tourist arrivals as compared to international arrivals.

According to Respondent 13,

The efforts were not so effective because of less activities and the destination was on the decline.

These findings concur with Basera and Nyahunzwi (2019) who opined that the ZTA website fell short in giving information about entertainment, restaurant, travel packages and activities about Kariba, hence limiting domestic travellers' interest in the destination. Generally, the marketing and promotional efforts used before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign were not effective enough to bring more domestic tourists to Kariba.

Respondent 15 observed that,

Some of the efforts by the ZTA which include the Kariba Regional Tourism Development and Marketing strategy were not effective enough to bring more domestic tourists to Kariba resort.

These findings disagree with Basera and Kuranga (2019) who claimed that the ZTA uses effective online marketing strategies like its website which is effective in terms of communication. However, the ZTA website looks inferior if compared with the South Africa Tourism (SAT) website which has more advanced features used to influence more domestic travel (Basera & Nyahunzwi, 2019). Marketing and promotional efforts directed towards attracting domestic tourists need to be advanced in a way that brings more domestic tourism to different destinations in the country.

The level of engagement and support from local stakeholders for domestic tourism initiatives in Kariba prior to 2021

The study also assessed the level of engagement and support from local stakeholders for domestic initiatives in Kariba before the Launch of the ZIMBHO campaign. Findings indicate

that there was lack of engagement from stakeholders for domestic tourism initiatives in Kariba before the ZIMBHO campaign. According to Respondent 17, *Domestic tourism in Kariba has been largely influenced by political and economic challenges and this did not give stakeholders the room to support and engage in domestic tourism initiatives.*

This points to the observation that Kariba, as a resort destination, is adversely affected by lack of stakeholder engagement in the marketing of the destination to the Zimbabwean tourist market (Basera, 2018). The results also concur with Muzapu and Sibanda (2017) who observed that the tourism sector in Zimbabwe face political related challenges which limit the potential of the sector to significantly contribute to the wealth creation in the nation.

The importance of domestic tourism to the overall economic and social well-being of the Kariba resort area before 2021 and how it compares to international tourism

Findings indicate that in as much as domestic tourism was underdeveloped before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign, it played a significant role in the economic and social well-being of the Kariba resort. Benefits included job creation, revenue generation, reduced seasonality, community and infrastructural development and entrepreneurship.

According to Respondent 1,

Domestic tourism in Kariba, which is characterized by hotels, lodges, restaurants and crafts markets helps to create job opportunities for the local residents in the hospitality sectors.

The same respondent also argued that an increase in domestic tourism in Kariba would improve revenue generation whereby local businesses benefiting from local tourists can contribute to government revenue through taxes as well as creating opportunities for incentivized investment in local infrastructure like roads and public transportation. This is in line with the notion brought forward by Moyo (2016) who argue that domestic tourism has so much potential for job creation and economic growth but highlight lack of data on its actual contribution.

Domestic tourism in Kariba has always been important as it created employment and boosted revenue generation. This was supported by Respondent 13 (resident) who said,

Domestic tourism in Kariba is important the same way as international tourism since it helps to create employment opportunities for us.

Respondent 18 said,

Domestic tourism before 2021 in Kariba helped to mitigate the impact of seasonal fluctuations in international tourism, although it was very low before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign, it helped to fill in the gap when international tourism was low.

These findings concur with Muzapu and Sibanda (2017) who also acknowledged that the tourism sector in Zimbabwe has been contributing to the various macro-economic aggregates in the country and has a greatest potential to create wealth for the players and the country as a whole. This shows that although domestic tourism was slow before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign, it was important to the overall economic and social well-being of the Kariba destination.

Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Performance of Domestic Tourism in Kariba after the Launch of the ZIMBHO Campaign

The second objective of the study was to establish the stakeholders' perceptions of the performance of domestic tourism in Kariba after the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign.

The Volume of Domestic Tourists after the Launch of the ZIMBHO Campaign

Findings indicate that there was a significant increase in domestic tourists visiting the Kariba resort, especially during festive seasons and public holidays. As highlighted by Respondent 18:

Domestic tourists are now visiting especially during holidays. For example, during 2023's festive season, domestic tourists' arrivals doubled as compared to 2022.

According to Respondent 5 (a transport provider):

There was a significant increase in people travelling to Kariba during the festive season and the New Year's Eve.

Respondent 2 concurred and observed that:

Local tourism has increased due to the impact of the ZIMBHO campaign and we have noticed an increase in domestic travel expenditures like accommodation bookings and occupancy rates.

These findings are in agreement with Woyo (2021) who found that there was an increase in domestic tourism after the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign as evidenced by high occupancy rates during festive seasons in the resort towns of Kariba, Masvingo and Victoria Falls. Mutingwende (2024) also claimed that there were positive results recorded from the ZIMBHO campaign in boosting the country's tourism sectors as the number of visitors to local resorts grew significantly. Ruzvidzo (2023) added that these high volumes were an indication that domestic tourists were now eager to explore the rich cultural and natural heritage of their homeland. These findings seem to indicate that the ZIMBHO campaign has had a positive impact on domestic tourism in Zimbabwe through ensuring a significant increase in domestic tourist arrivals in Kariba.

Awareness by the Domestic Tourists of the ZIMBHO Campaign and how it has Influenced Their Decisions to Visit Kariba Resort

Findings indicate that the ZIMBHO campaign has influenced a number of travellers to visit Kariba.

Respondent 1 (a ZTA Provincial Official) said,

Tourists who visit Kariba resort are fully aware of the ZIMBHO campaign as indicated by their numerous enquiries about the ZIMBHO campaign.

This therefore indicates a direct link with the goals of the ZIMBHO campaign as stipulated by Ruzvidzo (2023) that the campaign aims to promote local tourism and instil a culture of travelling among Zimbabweans to explore wonders of their own nation. If tourists are aware (Heintz, 2021) of the ZIMBHO campaign, more domestic travellers can explore Kariba and other local resorts, which drives economic growth of the nation.

However, some tourists highlighted that they were not aware of the ZIMBHO campaign at all whilst others mentioned that the campaign does not offer any special discounts since most of the prices remained the same. Therefore, low-income could not afford to visit Kariba or any other tourist resort. Respondent 11 (Tourist) said,

Yes, we are aware of the ZIMBHO campaign but the campaign has no special offers, the prices remained the same and some people couldn't afford.

This contradicts Tshuma (2020) who claims that the ZIMBHO campaign was highly publicised to Zimbabweans, both in the country and to those in the diaspora.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of the ZIMBHO Campaign in Attracting Domestic Tourists to Kariba Resort

The stakeholders indicated that the ZIMBHO campaign's strengths included increased awareness of the need to travel by domestic tourists and targeting a specific audience.

Respondent 2 said,

People are now aware that visiting Kariba is not for international tourists only.

Respondent 15 mentioned that,

The ZIMBHO campaign instils the culture of travel among Zimbabweans.

These sentiments concur with Ndeleva, Kiriimi and Nyaga (2025) who claimed that domestic tourism campaign is a means of spreading awareness about domestic tourism. The ZIMBHO campaign seeks to dispel the long-held perception that tourism is for the elites and foreigners only. The ZIMBHO campaign has thus been effective in motivating domestic tourists to visit Kariba resort. The ZIMBHO campaign managed to portray Kariba as a domestic tourism destination to the wider Zimbabwean audience.

The major weakness of the ZIMBHO campaign was its inability to address the affordability barrier. According to Respondent 11,

The campaign has no special offers for local people yet domestic tourists need discounts.

This means that the ZIMBHO campaign should consider offering more discounts as a way to attract more domestic tourists to visit Kariba resort. Kabote *et al.* (2014) posits that domestic tourists are in favour of least pricing, discount pricing, differentiated pricing and price bundling.

One accommodation provider indicated that the weakness that is limiting the ZIMBHO campaign from bringing more tourists to Kariba is that most people believe tourism is for the rich and those with low income never prioritize tourism. However, this is against the ZIMBHO

campaign objectives which emphasize that tourism is not for the perceived rich only, but for every Zimbabwean, and people need to take local holidays.

Challenges Faced by Stakeholders in Implementing the Objectives of the ZIMBHO Campaign in Kariba

The third objective assessed the challenges faced by stakeholders in implementing the objectives of the ZIMBHO campaign in Kariba.

Challenges in communicating the objectives and benefits of the ZIMBHO campaign to local communities and businesses in Kariba

The study identified challenges in communicating the objectives and benefits of the ZIMBHO campaign to local communities and businesses in Kariba. The respondents mainly argued that there was no engagement since the campaign was mistakenly taken for a political campaign.

Respondent 4 said,

“The major challenge was that the campaigns were wrongly perceived as political rallies and most of the local people did not show up.”

Respondent 1 (a government official) supported this sentiment when he said,

There was no stakeholder involvement since the campaign was mistakenly taken for a political campaign.

The effectiveness of the collaboration and the coordination of the stakeholders’ efforts in implementing the ZIMBHO campaign

Some of the respondents argued that the collaboration between the government and the ZTA was successful in implementing the ZIMBHO campaign in Kariba as well as attracting domestic tourists. Respondent 15 claimed that,

The government successfully collaborated with the ZTA and the tourism industry to implement the campaign in a way to attract more domestic tourists to Kariba.

Tshuma (2020) observed that the Zimbabwean government (through the Ministry of Hospitality and Tourism Industry) collaborated with the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority in

coming up with the ZIMBHO campaign, and encouraged locals to travel. The government and the ZTA removed Value Added Tax on tourism related transactions for domestic travellers to enable affordability. The move to remove VAT by the Ministry of Hospitality and Tourism Industry and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority made a positive impact on the success of the ZIMBHO campaign as domestic travel became more affordable.

However, some respondents called for government-private sector collaboration so as to maximize the effectiveness of the ZIMBHO campaign.

Respondent 9 said,

Collaboration between transport providers in providing travel packages, restaurant owners in providing meal packages and accommodation providers is essential in a way to attract more domestic tourists to Kariba through offering package combos.

The same respondent mentioned that stakeholders should collaborate in marketing their products to customers at any point when services are needed.

Private sector participation and collaboration is another way that helps to achieve the goals of the ZIMBHO campaign. ZTA Tourism Market Analysis (2022) posits that the ZTA, along with the private sector and the government, should collaborate whilst investing more in domestic tourism promotions. Lack of stakeholder collaboration in Kariba adversely affected the performance of domestic tourism (Basera, 2018).

Limitations that hindered the stakeholder's ability to implement aspects of the ZIMBHO campaign

Respondents mentioned lack of resources as the major challenge that hindered their ability to implement aspects of the ZIMBHO campaign. One accommodation provider opined that they had no fuel to travel and to facilitate the campaign. Respondent 5 highlighted that:

Poor road networks to Kariba have always been a challenge since most tourists are not willing to use public transport.

Muzapu and Sibanda (2017) posit that most tourism centres in Zimbabwe are scattered all over the country which compromises the ability by tourists to access these resorts due to poor road networks, lack of domestic air connectivity and unreliable railway network.

According to Respondent 19,

The reduced prices on holiday packages has directly impacted our sales and business.

Findings concur with Musasa and Mago (2014) who observed that tourism operators were reluctant to participate in the ZIMBHO Campaign due to reduced profit margins as the government and the ZTA encouraged operators to reduce prices so as to motivate more domestic tourists to travel. However, Guvamombe (2022) observed that, although the ZIMBHO campaign has gained traction, there was still a challenge in ensuring everyone in Zimbabwe is aware of the benefits of domestic tourism, particularly the benefits of travelling to Kariba.

Challenges of reaching the intended target audience of domestic tourists with the ZIMBHO campaign in Kariba

Stakeholders pointed out the lack of access to the internet by the domestic travellers as a hindrance to the effective communication of the ZIMBHO campaign. Respondent 19 said,

The lack of understanding of domestic tourists' media consumption habits hindered the campaign from reaching the target audience since the campaign could miss some potential tourists on their preferred platforms.

Moreover, some audience had a misconception of the ZIMBHO campaign which they believed to be a political movement. Respondent 9 said,

Yes, challenges of avoidance were faced as local people perceived the campaign as associated with politics.

The ZIMBHO Campaign needs to re-strategize the awareness and audience targeting approach so that the proper communication channels can be utilised. However, Basera (2018) claims that lack of activities that appeal to the domestic market as well as poor customer service are the major challenges hampering domestic tourism performance in Zimbabwe.

Key Success Factors for the ZIMBHO Campaign

Different suggestions were proposed by the stakeholders including discounted holiday packages for domestic tourists, introduction of more exciting activities in Kariba, refurbishment of road networks and social media marketing. According Respondent 14:

The ZIMBHO campaign should also target refurbishment/rehabilitation of road networks to ensure that tourists can enjoy their rides to Kariba.

Respondent 3 suggested that the campaign should consider offering special promotions during the off-peak seasons to attract more domestic visitors when the destination is less crowded. Such promotions would include discounts on accommodation as well as bundled packages. Respondent 4 said,

The campaign should give away incentives and prizes on social media in a way to generate tourist's excitement for the campaign.

Respondent 17 highlighted that the campaign should promote Kariba as a destination and advertise heavily on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) since most people are more active on these platforms. Respondent 20 said,

The campaign must use high-quality visuals on social media platforms to showcase Kariba's beauty, attractions and activities.

Respondent 15 emphasized the need to collaborate with local operators, hotels and restaurants to offer ZIMBHO campaign packages like special experiences and bundled discounts.

The study also suggested that appropriate channels of communication be utilised so as to effectively reach out to domestic tourists. Some of the channels mentioned by stakeholders are social media, radio, television (digital satellite television and terrestrial television), and newspapers (online and print media). According to Respondent 16,

The campaign should make use of digital channels like social media in a way to target the younger generation and instil the culture of travelling in them.

Respondent 13 (Resident) also supported this view when she mentioned that the campaign should make use of modern marketing strategies like targeted advertisements on Facebook, as a way to attract more domestic tourists. According to Respondent 19,

"The campaign should use Search Engine Optimisation tools on X (formerly Twitter), for example hashtags such as #ZIMBHO, #Visit Kariba, etc."

Some residents suggested that the campaign should also consider traditional channels like radio, newspapers and billboards. Some stakeholders also suggested that the ZIMBHO campaign managers should consider integrating mobile money platforms for easy booking and payment options within the ZIMBHO campaign for Kariba. The stakeholders also mentioned that the campaign should partner with local community groups in Kariba to promote their offerings through their existing communication channels.

Conclusion

The study sought to assess stakeholders' perceptions of the contributions of the ZIMBHO marketing campaign to the performance of domestic tourism in Kariba since 2019. From the foregoing, it is safe to conclude that the ZIMBHO campaign managed to raise awareness, interest and desire among Zimbabweans to travel to Kariba. Stakeholder perceptions indicate that the ZIMBHO campaign sparked interest in Zimbabweans to explore domestic tourism options. The ZIMBHO campaign encouraged locals to spend more money on domestic travel and experiences. However, due to economic challenges and poor road networks, the ZIMBHO campaign has failed to position Kariba at the pinnacle of tourist attractions in Zimbabwe as compared to other destinations such as Victoria Falls, Harare and the Eastern Highlands.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

- The campaign should implement strategies to ensure it reaches a wider domestic audience, particularly in under-represented areas.
- The campaign should develop marketing initiatives which offer discounts and special packages for domestic tourists to reach a bigger audience as well as increase the numbers of domestic tourists in Zimbabwe.
- The transport providers should also promote travel packages and options that are accessible to domestic tourists to instil in them a culture of travel.
- Collaborate with local communities and stakeholders, giving them specific roles in the campaign's planning and programs to instil in them a sense of being in charge.
- The campaign should also establish a system to track the campaign's impact on domestic tourism arrivals across different destinations in Zimbabwe.

Limitations of the Study

The researchers acknowledge certain limitations of the study and suggest improvements that were made in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the ZIMBHO campaign's effectiveness and contribution to domestic tourism growth in Zimbabwe. Firstly, the researchers did not have any control over the degree of honesty of the respondents and data restrictions. However, the use of purposive sampling assisted in choosing the right respondents for the study. Further, the study relied on stakeholder perceptions which can be subjective and influenced by individual experiences and biases. Therefore, the study included data on actual tourists' arrival statistics to strengthen the analysis.

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