



# The Covid-19 pandemic on cultural heritage tourism in Zimbabwe: Post-Covid-19 recovery strategies

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## ABSTRACT

This article interrogates how the world's cultural and heritage tourism destinations' performance was affected following the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019. Various studies have been undertaken on the impacts of Covid-19 and post recovering strategies for cultural heritage tourism, especially in developed destinations with little attention given to developing destinations like Zimbabwe. This research assesses the impact of Covid-19 on tangible cultural and heritage tourism in Zimbabwe. It also proffers post-Covid-19 pandemic strategies for the segment under National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ). A qualitative approach was adopted and online interviews were conducted with frontline staff. Thematic analysis was employed to report the results. The results revealed that the employment of core employees was stable with salary delays, forced paid leave, and/or no transport allowances. On the other hand, most casual employees' contracts were terminated. Loss of tourism revenue, deferment of projects, and cancellation of marketing activities, vandalism, and increased poaching were reported among five regions of the NMMZ. After the relaxation of lockdown measures, NMMZ started operating while adhering to WHO Covid-19 health and safety regulations. This brought a slight positive change in domestic tourists with a huge negative change in international tourists. The study, therefore, recommends social media usage, diversification, and branding (SDB) destination recovery strategy as well as promotion of local travel to sustain cultural heritage tourism in Zimbabwe.

**KEYWORDS:** Covid-19 pandemic, Cultural heritage tourism, post-Covid-19 recovery strategy, National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, and World heritage site



## **Introduction**

This study investigates the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on tangible cultural heritage tourism in Zimbabwe between 2020 and 2021. It also troubles the resilience and post-Covid-19 recovery strategies for the segment. By definition, cultural heritage tourism is the “travel to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present, including cultural historic and natural resources” (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2008 n.d). Cultural and heritage tourism contributes to nearly 40% of the global tourism revenues with the world heritage museums and sites often serving as the focus for visitors (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2020). Cultural and heritage tourism is a source of revenue, offers employment, supports small businesses, connects different groups of people, and provides an opportunity to inform the populace on the importance of protecting and preserving the country’s treasures. However, the global lockdown forced almost all countries to close their world heritage properties to contain the virus thus disrupting cultural and heritage practices (UNESCO, 2020). The forced closure of attractions and World Heritage Sites cost millions in revenue (UNESCO, 2020), considering that most cultural world heritage and natural sites rely on revenue from tourism to carry out archeological and conservation work. In response to this, there is a growing interest in devising recovery and post-Covid-19 strategies for the cultural and heritage tourism sector in various destinations as the sector was hardest hit by Corona Virus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic across the globe (Abbas, et al., 2021; Kheira & Anissa, 2021).

In December 2019, the Covid-19 pandemic originated in China, and later on spread to other countries from February 2020 (Sorokowski, Groyecka, Kowal, Sorokowska, Bialek & Lebuda, 2020; WHO, 2020a). As the Covid-19 virus kept on spreading across the globe, the cultural and heritage tourism segment was not spared since international and local cultural and heritage tourists’ travel patterns were also disrupted. This was because travellers were the main agents of the transmission of the coronavirus in different communities (Abbott, 2021; Gössling et al., 2020). As a strategy to contain the virus, various state governments in line with WHO regulations, implemented Covid-19 travel restrictions, called for the maintenance of social distance, as well as discouraging gatherings of large groups of people (Flew & Kirkwood, 2020; WHO, 2020c).

**T**he United Nations World Tourism Organisation [UNWTO] (2020a) advised tourists to stay at home and travel later after the situation had improved. The health travel warnings impacted the tourists' travelling behaviours and mental well-being (Bauer et al., 2021). This implies that tourists are sensitive and worried about their security and safety when visiting popular destinations (Rahman, Gazi, Bhuiyan & Rahaman, 2021). Resultantly, many travellers ended up postponing and cancelling their tourism trips due to fear of being infected by the virus (Mamirkulova et al., 2020; UNWTO, 2020). This reduced local and international travelling, thus a reduction in tourism as well as reduced incomes for the destinations that depended on tourism for their survival. More so, a number of aeroplanes were grounded (Black, 2020), restaurants closed (Dube, Nhamo & Chikodzi, 2020), zero hotel occupancy was recorded (Feuer, 2020), recreational parks and facilities were deserted (Dolesh & Colman, 2020) and almost 90% of the museums were closed with a postulation that more than 10% of museums may never reopen (UNESCO, 2020). This meant that access to culture and heritage sites were reduced, and communities were deprived of expressing their culture and revenues. Similarly, most tourism and hospitality businesses responded to these adverse effects by laying off their employees whilst others reduced staff wages (World Bank, 2020b).

**I**n connection with the above, Zimbabwe as a country endowed with ubiquitous cultural and heritage tourism attractions was not spared from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Cultural and heritage tourism is one of the segments with the most popular activities such as visiting historic and cultural sites (Hargrove, 2002), preferred by families, groups, and senior people. Cultural heritage tourists were found to stay longer, spend more, and do more activities than other types of tourists (Travel Industry Association of America, 1999). As a result of the lucrative benefits derived, this type of tourism is one of the niche segments of the tourism industry most economies depend on as it has social and economic benefits, assists to preserve cultural heritage, establishes and reinforces identity, supports culture, and renews tourism and facilitates harmony and understanding among different groups of people (Richards, 2006).

**H**owever, the significance of cultural and heritage tourism was suppressed due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in various destinations across the globe. In connection to this, this study focuses on five regions of the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe namely the Southern, Northern, Central, Eastern, and Western regions. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic were revealed through the lens of 15 in-depth expert online interviews with the

museum and monuments employees ranging from heritage education officers, regional directors, and tour guides that took place between September 2021 and April 2022. This was supported by literature from other cultural and heritage destinations that were also affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Cultural heritage tourism in Zimbabwe and Covid-19 pandemic**

Cultural heritage tourism is a special type of tourism that comprises “the travelling of people to places that are important to the past or present cultural identity of a particular group of people” (McNulty & Koffi, 2014 p. 6). Kelly (2009) adds that cultural heritage tourism also encompasses the travel of people from their places of residence to monuments, archaeological sites, architecture, historic townscapes, and historic buildings for leisure and education. The traveller’s motivation is to discover, experience, learn, and consume the intangible and tangible cultural and heritage attractions, services, or products in the chosen tourism destination (UNWTO, 2017). Local and international people travel to experience the places, artifacts, and engage in activities that authentically represent the people of the past and present, stories, cultural history, and natural resources (Hargrove, 2002).

The link between tourism and cultural heritage is based on material aspects such as landscapes, monuments, natural resources and later on, broadened to include events, performing arts, gastronomy, creative activities, tastes, and the intangible heritage of the destination (Hughes, 2000; Richards, 2011). Richards (2001 p. 7) asserts that cultural tourism “includes not just the consumption of the cultural products of the past, but also of contemporary culture or the way of life of a people or region. Therefore, cultural tourism covers both heritage tourism (related to artifacts of the past) and art tourism (related to contemporary cultural production).” Smith (2009 p. 17) adds by noting that cultural tourism is “passive, lives, and [is an] interactive engagement with culture(s) and communities, whereby the visitor gains new experiences of an educational, creative, or entertaining nature.” The everyday life of local communities is also included in cultural heritage tourism (Howie, 2000) and the inclusion of visits to popular cultural attractions, sporting events, and living heritage (McKercher, Ho & du Cros, 2004). Therefore, it means the cultural heritage intangible and tangible assets should be of value to the communities (UNESCO, 2003). UNESCO (2020) adds that 40% of all European Union tourists choose their travel destinations based on their cultural offerings.

**A**lthough cultural heritage is comprised of (a) tangible assets (such as monuments, historic buildings, architectural remnants, archaeological sites, and cultural artifacts), (b) intangible resources (such as cultural traditions, philosophies, ceremonies, values, music, oral histories, local dance, cultural celebrations, and social customs) (Nuryanti, 1996; Chhabra, Healy & Sills, 2003; Ashworth, 2009), (c) living cultures (Timothy & Boyd, 2006) and (d) natural heritage (like wildlife, natural landscapes, wildlife (UNESCO), this study is discussed within the context of tangible heritage assets endowed in Zimbabwe that falls under the National Museums and Monuments (NMMZ) category. The museums and monuments work as sources of scientific communication and cultural and heritage knowledge repositories with the power to attract travellers from all works of life (Khan, 2020).

**I**n connection to the above, culture and heritage are vital assets that act as Zimbabwe's tourism drawcard as both local and international tourists visit different heritage sites which fall under the five regions of National Museums and Monuments namely the southern region with Great Zimbabwe Monument, northern region houses Museum of human sciences (sites include Domboshava, Chiremba, and Ngomakurira) and National Heroes Acre, the western region houses the natural history museum (sites include Rhodes grave, Khami, and Pomongwe), the central region houses the Military Museum (sites include Dhlodhlo, National mining museum, and Naletale), and the eastern region houses Mutare Museum (sites include Ziwa and Diana's Vow) (National Museum and Monuments, 2020; British Council, 2016 ). The National Museums and Monuments is a niche segment that attracts both local and foreign tourist arrivals to the country for leisure and education.

**T**he segment was among the segments of tourism that were hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. Among others, this saw a sharp decline in tourist visits to the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwean sites. The total number of tourists who visited the museums in 2019 and 2020 was 200 349 locals and 13 119 foreign and 48 610 locals and 2 240 foreign tourists respectively (ZTA report, 2020). Statistically, this has resulted in a 76% and 83% fall in domestic and international entries, respectively, which graphically reflected the depressed tourist travel following the outbreak of Covid-19 and associated travel restrictions and lockdown in the country. The ZTA (2021) report also revealed that museums and monuments received 50791 local and 565 foreign visitors in 2021. This shows that domestic travel rose by 4% while international entries declined by 75%. This major decline in tourist arrivals into

the country calls for post-Covid-19 recovery strategies as the heritage tourism segment is one of the key pillars of tourism that has great potential to assist the country to achieve its 2030 vision of being an upper-middle-income economy.

Even though Covid-19 was seen as an opportunity by Elgammal and Refaat (2021), most of the developing countries in Africa are struggling to get adequate vaccinations to protect their citizens against the disease. This was supported by WHO (2021) statistics which revealed that as of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 2021, only 7.5% of the population was fully vaccinated, with more than 80% of the population still needing to receive the first dose. Even with the Covid-19 vaccination exercise across several destinations, the cultural and heritage tourism segment is still struggling to recover the losses faced due to the closures and revive their resources and functions to normalcy. This drawback calls for a relook at the future of cultural heritage tourism in Zimbabwe during the Covid-19 pandemic and after and proffer strategies, considering that the government has relaxed lockdown measures in phases.

## **Materials and Methodology**

This study was guided by purposeful sampling to select relevant stakeholders under the 5 regions of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ). According to Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011), purposive sampling is one of the qualitative sampling techniques employed to identify and select respondents who are knowledgeable about the case under investigation. Within the context of museums and monuments, purposeful sampling was used to identify and select NMMZ personnel that were knowledgeable and experienced in the running of day-to-day museum operations. The selection was based on the respondents' experience, knowledge, role as well as influence in policy formulation and implementation in heritage tourism development. The participants were composed of three regional directors, five heritage education officers, and seven tour guides amounting to 15 online interviewees.

The online interviews were considered a safe method of gathering primary data during the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. The online interviews were conducted using the Google Meet platform. These online interviews were held separately guided by the convenient time of the respondents. Online interviews were conducted from 06 September 2021 to 30 April 2022. Online interviews were appropriate during Covid-19 pandemic. This made it easy to collect data

because the accessibility of the respondents was no longer constrained by geographical location. The online interviews lasted for an average of 15 minutes.

The interviews were recorded and saved to the organiser’s (researcher) meet recording folder in the researcher’s drive. The recorded files were downloaded in a media player *viz* VideoLan Client (VLC). The interview data were transcribed and thematically analysed. The generation of results was done after an engagement in various activities that included the transcription of data, familiarization of data, identification of codes, searching, and defining themes. The themes were formulated and supported by NMMZ documents.

## Results

The respondents were asked to highlight the effects of Covid-19 on NMMZ operations. The following themes show the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees, finance, educational, and leisure visits.

### *Covid-19 on tourist arrivals and receipts*

The respondents were asked to highlight the impacts of Covid-19 on the regions of NMMZ. 100% of the respondents highlighted that the spread of COVID-19 across countries including Zimbabwe was the major challenge to NMMZ as compared to other pandemics, political and economic challenges the nation has experienced before. Table 1 shows the statistics for tourist arrivals from 2019 to 2021.

*Table 1: National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe’s tourist arrivals 2019-2021*

Region	2021		2020		2019		Change 2019-2020		Change 2020-21		Overall total
	Local	Foreign	Local	Foreign	Local	Foreign	Local	Foreign	Local	Foreign	
Mutare Museum (Sites include Diana’s Vow, Ziwa)	1430	1	3844	07	8090	85	-52%	-92%	-63%	-86%	-63%
Great Zimbabwe Monument	12229	258	10633	1319	42528	2400	-73%	-82%	16%	-81%	5%
Natural History Museum (Sites include Khami, Rhodes grave, Pomongwe)	15626	203	15996	876	85687	10163	-81%	-91%	-2%	-77%	-6%
Museum of human sciences (Sites include Chiremba, Nyomatopeya, Domboshava)	14701	50	12357	5	28480	428	-33%	-99%	13%	1567%	14%
Military Museum (Sites include Naletale, Dhlodhlo, National Mining Museum)	5098	28	4196	16	19507	40	-78%	-60%	21%	75%	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50791</b>	<b>565</b>	<b>48610</b>	<b>2240</b>	<b>184726</b>	<b>13116</b>	<b>-76%</b>	<b>-83%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>-75%</b>	<b>1%</b>

Source: National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (2020 & 2021)

From Table 1, all the regions of NMMZ recorded an insignificant number of international tourist arrivals in the country. Indeed, the three NMMZ regions recorded a more than 90% decline in international arrivals and a more than 75% decline in domestic travel between 2019 and 2020. The findings are in line with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2021) which revealed that international arrivals in most developing countries were down by 80-90%. The statistics of the period under review were a testimony that cultural and heritage tourism was the most hit by Covid-19.

To make matters worse, the NMMZ regions were temporarily closed from 13 January 2021 to 23 March 2021 amid a rise of Covid-19 cases in Zimbabwe. This temporary closure led the NMMZ to record zero domestic tourist arrival and zero revenue across its regions during the first quarter of 2021. However, after the relaxation of lockdown measures by the government of Zimbabwe, the NMMZ started operating while allowing limited numbers of structured and unstructured trips. This saw the NMMZ recording low volumes of numbers as compared to the pre-Covid-19 period. This had a direct effect on the revenues of NMMZ.

The year 2020 to 2021 brought a slight improvement in tourist arrival at museums and monuments. This saw the Military Museum, Museum of Human Sciences, and Great Zimbabwe Monuments recorded a positive change in local arrivals, with 21%, 13%, and 16% respectively. Positive changes of more than 75% foreign arrivals were recorded by the Military Museum and Museum of Human sciences. However, negative foreign arrivals were recorded by Mutare museum, Natural history museum, and the Great Zimbabwe Monuments with 86%, 77%, and 81% decline respectively. Mutare museum and Natural history museum also suffered a decline in local arrivals with negative changes of 63% and 2% respectively. The overall change of local arrivals stood at 4% against minus 75% foreign arrivals to NMMZ in 2021. The results are not favourable and imply that the museums and monuments segment was heavily affected by the pandemic. This shows that domestic tourism has become a pillar in NMMZ tourist analysis to the detriment of international travel.

More so, the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted the financial resources of NMMZ as a result of reduced tourism business. Although funding was principally in the form of recurrent and capital budgets from Zimbabwe's Ministry of Finance via the Ministry of Home Affairs, NMMZ's supplementary financial activities were disrupted as most educational and leisure trips were cancelled and postponed



due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This was supported by one of the respondents who said:

*the coming of Covid-19 to Zimbabwe was a major drawback, especially to us the NMMZ considering that we get some funds from entrance fees from local as well as international visitors, consultancy fees, sale of publications, filming, auditorium hire, and accommodation (Interviews Respondent, 10).*

In support of the above sentiment, another key source of revenue for NMMZ was coming from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe as was echoed by all of the respondents. This was in support of the new education curriculum that has introduced culture and heritage components. For the Zimbabwean schools, a special visit to various departments of NMMZ to see various exhibitions and unique collections was considered very important in their school calendar. However, schools in the country were also closed in compliance with the government's lockdown measures meant to forestall the spreading of Covid-19, thus affecting the supplementary revenue of NMMZ.

#### *Covid-19 and the workforce in the tourism sector*

The NMMZ employees were not excluded from the effects of the Covid-19 crisis. Of the respondents, 100 % pointed out that the recording of zero revenue in our operations has greatly impacted all the operations of the museums, for instance, the monthly salaries were delayed and no transport allowances were offered to employees during the COVID-19 crisis. One of the respondents adds that:

*As employees, we were also affected as the museums were not able to procure some of the cleaning detergents in time as well as providing teas for the staff (Interviews, Respondent, 3).*

This means that services were disrupted and employees were to adjust the way they were working.

After the opening of NMMZ branches on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2021, the Government of Zimbabwe went on to relax Covid-19 restrictions in phases. The government had reduced the size of the workforce to report physically for duty while others were at home as follows; initially, the workforce was reduced by 70%, followed by 30%, and lastly by 10% in line with lockdown measures. This saw employees reporting for duty three times per week as was cited by 73% of the respondents. Although employees were not reporting for duty at the same time, 53% of the respondents pointed out that the employment situation was stable especially for

permanent employees as compared to temporary workers. This was supported by one of the respondents who said:

*As of today, I would like to thank God! No core employees were laid off from NMMZ. However, if the business remains low, we are likely to face downsizing in other departments. In addition, some of the employees were to go for a compulsory one month paid leave. Termination or non-renewal of contracts was experienced by casual or part-time employees rendering services to NMMZ (Respondent, 14).*

### ***Cancellation of marketing activities***

The Covid-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe disrupted the NMMZ calendar of events as of March 2020 for an indefinite period as was echoed by 100% of the respondents. One of the respondents pointed out that:

*The NMMZ joins the world in celebrating International Museums Day on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May every year. The day was set aside to celebrate the role museums and monuments play in national development, creating intercultural understanding and, world peace. In line with the event, the NMMZ through its heritage education department spearheads heritage educational programmes across the country as a strategy to market museums and promote the consumption of Zimbabwe's cultural heritage among all age groups. However, the celebrations were cancelled for 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This was a major loss to NMMZ (Interviews, Respondent, 15).*

More so, NMMZ's outreach programmes and school quiz competitions were postponed during the Covid-19 pandemic. The identified events were used as marketing strategies to market both intangible and tangible cultural assets of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination.

### ***Disruption of community life surrounding the World heritage sites***

The respondents were asked about the effect of Covid-19 on the life of communities that usually depend on designated World Heritage Sites in Zimbabwe. Of the respondents, 67% argued that there was a loss of employment, loss of income from the sale of curios to incoming tourists since there was no travel. One of the respondents said:

*Ooh yes, the spread of COVID-19 was a major effect on sculptors who depend on tourists for the sale of their artifacts as well as the sale of artifacts to galleries or museums. Sculptors were left with huge amounts of stocks and some recorded zero revenue as art fairs and galleries were shut down. Sculptors were left with no income to pay for their day-to-day expenses (Respondent, 2)*

This means that the disruption of tourism activities at World Heritage Sites has a direct impact on nearby sculptors who were found struggling to make ends meet. As a result, some of the world heritage sites suffered from vandalism

and poaching activities from locals due to the reduction of monitoring, and a decrease in managed visitation by the NMMZ personnel.

### *Suspension of projects*

Another challenge faced by NMMZ during the COVID-19 pandemic was the suspension of rehabilitation and upgrading of the surveillance system at one of its sites namely the Great Zimbabwe Monuments World Heritage Site as was cited by 20% of the respondents. Among the programmes that were suspended included the clearing of Lantana Camara by NMMZ with the support of the US-funded Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) and the erection of state of art surveillance system at Great Zimbabwe monuments. This was supported by one of the respondents who said:

*Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the rehabilitation programme to spruce up Great Zimbabwe monuments. The international experts to spearhead the installation of the latest surveillance cameras were not able to travel to Zimbabwe and the clearance of the Camara plant was temporarily suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Respondent, 1).*

### *National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe post-Covid-19 recovering strategies*

This section deals with the measures proffered by the different branches of the NMMZ to mitigate the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. These responses followed the relaxation of the restrictive Covid-19 lockdown measures. Broadly, what emerges is that there was a plethora of strategies that were implemented by the NMMZ's regions as the museums and monuments were reopened to the public as highlighted below. These strategies in a large way also served to demonstrate resilience amidst adversity in the sector.

One of the most adopted methods was to limit entrants into the NMMZ cultural and heritage sites. In this regard, the NMMZ branches allowed small numbers of people to enter the sites per available slots. To this end, entry was permitted to less than 20 visitors for every one-two-hour slots. The NMMZ branches also strictly adhered to world health Covid-19 regulations in an effort to minimize the transmission of the disease. These included insisting on temperature checks at the main entrances, observing social distance within the sites, hand sanitization, and fumigation of the premises after every group visit as well as at the end of every week. In addition, the visitors were not allowed to touch the artifacts in the museums. Furthermore, visitors were not allowed to enter the museums and monuments without face masks to avoid the spread of the coronavirus. Later on, as the Covid-19 vaccination gathered momentum

in Zimbabwe, the NMMZ sites only admitted fully vaccinated visitors. As well, school children were not allowed to exchange their paint brushes and other equipment during their educational visits. To strengthen the mitigatory measures, the NMMZ officials and workers were subjected to regular Covid-19 tests to reduce the spread of the virus. Moreover, the front-line employees were also reminding the visitors of the best safety practices before tours started. This practice assisted each other to stay safe.

### *NMMZ recovery and post-Covid-19 strategies*

**A**s the government of Zimbabwe has relaxed lockdown measures in phases, in September 2021, the NMMZ through its Military Museum has hosted a temporary exhibition for artists in the Midlands to showcase their artifacts to the public. This in a way served as a clear testimony that one of the regions of NMMZ was safe to perform business during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**F**urthermore, all of the regions of NMMZ increased the marketing of their products. As a way of advertising, there was the use of social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube to create awareness of the country's heritage sites. NMMZ made presentations on Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) aiming to raise awareness on the safety of visiting museums and monuments that were previously considered as Covid-19 hot spots.

**T**o enhance recovery after Covid-19, Cultural heritage sites needs to focus on social media usage, diversification and branding, (SDB approach) to promote other tourism products in addition to the cultural heritage site features. Thus, tourism product improvement and diversification may consider various recovery strategies like, conferences and exhibitions, sports tourism products and many others, in relation to the market demand and the resource base of Zimbabwe.

### *Social media usage*

**S**ocial media usage gives people the ability to communicate and share their interests and personal information with others from all around the world (Shava & Chinyamurindi, 2018). People also use social media postings as a way to boost others' perception of their status. These desires can shape their daily behaviour (Laesser et al., 2020), as social media allow individuals to gain status by sharing their experiences. When a consumer shares this content on their own or friends' social media accounts (for example, microblogs and social networks), they are

doing so because of their own motives (for example, a desire to be liked and approved of by society, socialisation, self-expression) related to their or others' personal social media channels (Buhalis, 2019).

### *Diversification of tourism products*

Kim (2017) examined the influence of product diversification in sustainable tourist attraction; the study indicated that the nature of product diversification had a strong relationship between regional dimensions and tourism attractions. Adi (2018) investigated the effect of tourism diversification and how it affects smart specialization of tourist marketing. From regression analysis by Adi (2018), it was clear that product diversification had a positive association with tourism promotion and performance. Research done by (Reicheld & Sasser, 2019; Hernandez-Calzada, 2019) noted that product diversification has a great impact on business practices with focus on customer satisfaction. Market and product diversification strategies encourage growth through the development of new and authentic products (Lusariah et al., 2021).

### *Branding*

Destination branding plays a significant role in positioning and marketing a destination (Chigora et al., 2020). Destination branding involves a combination of services created and provided in cooperation with local stakeholders (Lisebo et al., 2021) which contribute significantly to the quality of the experience (Hugues, 2019). If effective brands are created, destinations benefit through increased potential to differentiate against destinations with similar offerings, enhanced emotional relationships with visitors and increased yield for tourism enterprises. Travellers' benefits come in form of easy decision-making through reduced information search, reduced risk and likely enhanced brag value (Milicevic, et al., 2017). Destination brands also give the potential tourist a picture of what to expect in the destination since destination brands reflect local habits and communal practices of the local people that colour the tourism experience (Kankhuni, 2020).

## **Discussion**

This research assesses the impact of Covid on tangible cultural and heritage tourism in Zimbabwe and proffer post-Covid-19 recovery strategies for NMMZ. Broadly, the restrictions on travelling greatly affected cultural heritage tourism in Zimbabwe and other parts of the globe considering that the sector thrives on the ability of people to travel freely for leisure, education, and business

(UNWTO, 2020). As Musavengane et al (2020) posit, without the ability to travel, the future of tourism is uncertain. As such, with the stringent travel embargoes, the future of cultural heritage tourism is at crossroads. In this regard, respondents raised several negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on cultural and heritage tourism in Zimbabwe. Results of the research revealed that the global outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic reduced the consumption of culture and heritage products in Zimbabwe by both local and foreign tourists. NMMZ thus suffered the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic as temporary closures were witnessed in Zimbabwe.

**T**he temporary closures of the NMMZ operations acted as a testimony to what was pointed out by Musavengane et al. (2020) as some of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. This has brought a major economic loss considering that most of the NMMZ's revenue came from the entrance fees to museums and sites charged to tourists, sale of literature/publications, filming, curios, consultancy fees, accommodation, auditorium hire, and investments. The loss of revenue also fuelled the financial challenges that were experienced by NMMZ following the withdrawal of donor funding. The findings concur with the British Council (2016) report which revealed that large donors like the European Union have withdrawn their funding from the NMMZ and redirected their focus to other developmental issues in the region. The withdrawal of funding, among others, left the NMMZ with limited funding to carry out archaeological work and conservation.

**M**ore so, the employment patterns of NMMZ were disturbed amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. As already alluded to, employees were to report for duty in batches three times per week in compliance with Covid-19 health and safety regulations that were pronounced by the government. This meant that part of the staff had to work from home. The findings tally with those made by the International Council of Museums (2020) that most museum professionals worked from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The strategy of limiting the workforce to report physically at work had an impact on employee networking and the exchange of ideas as others did not have the wherewithal for online working and communication. Some of the workers who were at home suffered from psychological stress on the security of their jobs because there was no hope of returning to work during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**W**ithin NMMZ, there was no record of termination of core employees' contracts but salaries delay was reported. NMMZ employees had better job security when compared to the U.S museums such as the Whitney Museum of American

Art, The New Museum, and the Guggenheim Museum which laid off some permanent employees as well as reduced employees' salaries (Artsy, 2020). NMMZ's casual employees suffered the most considering that their contracts were summarily terminated. As elsewhere, the downsizing and termination of contracts of contract workers were strategies employed by employers to adjust their payroll budget (Khan et al., 2021; International Council of Museums [ICOM], 2020). For the NMMZ, this was amidst dwindling revenues and loss of sponsorship to oil its operations. Generally, the Pacific and North America recorded the highest percentage of staff that was downsized when compared to Africa (ICOM, 2020). In addition, every NMMZ employee was forced to go for one month of paid leave. Whilst the ICOM (2020) posits that forced leave was a way of reducing the workforce at the premises, it brought fear, anxiety, and uncertainty on whether employees were to return to work or stay at home forever as they were breadwinners.

**M**ore still as a result of the loss of revenue, the NMMZ failed to offer core employees incentives such as morning teas and transport allowances during the Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, the NMMZ had to cancel some of its marketing activities such as outreach programmes, quiz competitions, and the International Museum Day celebration for the years 2020 and 2021.

**F**ollowing the flattening and even the reversal of the Covid-19 curve, the NMMZ opened its doors to the public while limiting the number of visitors to cultural tours. NMMZ also continued to comply with WHO Covid-19 health and safety regulations of allowing vaccinated tourists, hand sanitization, wearing face masks, and maintaining social distance.

## **Conclusion**

**T**he study highlighted the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on cultural and heritage tourism in Zimbabwe and proffered post-Covid-19 strategies for the sector that were adopted by the sector. This study concludes that the Covid-19 pandemic had a long-lasting impact and has put both developed and developing World Heritage Sites in a critical position considering that most of their revenue comes from the visitation of tourists to their culture and heritage sites. Covid-19 pandemic has brought both developing and developed World Heritage Sites to the same level, and it is an opportunity for NMMZ to reposition itself within the cultural and heritage tourism market within southern Africa to gain a competitive advantage. Covid-19 pandemic brought economic, social, and psychological disturbances to the NMMZ. The study revealed that

the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the decline of tourist arrivals or recording of zero tourists, loss of revenue at cultural and heritage sites, cancellation of marketing activities, termination of contacts, forced paid leave, postponement of rehabilitation projects, and promotion of vandalism of the heritage sites. On a positive note, the employment of core workers was found to be stable in NMMZ thus making it distinctive when compared to private world heritage sites which had trimmed off their workforce to survive the pandemic.

## Recommendations

As world heritage destinations in most developed economies are moving towards online museums, it seems as if Zimbabwe a developing destination is falling behind in terms of technology, therefore, there is a need to invest huge sums of money in digital platforms to support the following projects:

- a)
- b) *Considering that most of the NMMZ literature is in form of hard copies, there is a need to have online collections, online publications, online museums, and digital exhibitions to increase the consumption of cultural and heritage products to the general public. There is a need to organize online quizzes and other educational activities online to reduce Covid-19 challenges. Digital media has offered a bridge for physically isolated tourists to enjoy the heritage and cultural experiences offered by Zimbabwe.*
- c) *There is a need to increase social media platforms like Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat on how they are showcasing culture and heritage during the Covid-19 era as well as after the pandemic as part of marketing their museums and monuments online.*
- d) *Even though NMMZ is faced with limited financial resources as a result of donor funding withdrawal and reduction in tourist revenues, the government of Zimbabwe needs to avail Covid-19 funding for online training of the employees on how to package online collections, online publications as well as online exhibitions. This is because the employees lacked digital skills. Therefore, training and skills development might reduce resistance to change regarding new ways of doing work in museums and monuments. There is a need to embrace technology in museums and monuments.*
- e) *As a way of raising funds for improving the security system, preservation, and archaeological work, there is a need for private companies and elite people to offer financial support to NMMZ-a parastatal funded body through a grant by the central government to revive their operations after suffering from Covid-19 crisis. This might also reduce the financial burden experienced by the government.*



- f) *As a way of utilizing marketing strategies for recovering from Covid-19-induced challenges, cultural heritage sites should develop and implement recovery strategies such as social media usage, diversification and branding (SDB recovery approach).*
- g) *From the tourist statistics NMMZ has recorded under the review period, it was clear that foreign clientele was no longer sustainable for NMMZ, therefore, the best way to go is to focus on promoting domestic travel at museums and monuments. Museums are important in supporting education about culture.*

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