

Domestic tourism promotion strategies during and after the Covid-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 induced lockdowns, including the closure of national borders, have created opportunities for innovative destination marketers to optimise the involvement of their nationals in domestic tourism. A qualitative approach in which 15 in-depth interviews with expert informants were carried out online using WhatsApp Video Calling, this study sought to identify domestic tourism promotion strategies in Zimbabwe. The expert informants were purposively sampled from tourism-related government departments, tourism parastatals, private sector tourism representative organisations, publicity associations, and tourism operators. Data was thematically analysed. The main identified strategies to promote domestic tourism in Zimbabwe during and post Covid-19 pandemic include making tourism products affordable and accessible, improving the income levels of Zimbabweans, developing appealing packages, and programs; tapping into the visiting friends and relatives market, embarking on aggressive marketing campaigns, introducing incentive travel particularly for civil servants, and a continued commitment to the observance of all Covid-19 prevention, and treatment guidelines. The study implications are that in Zimbabwe, it is imperative for the government, the private sector, and the community, to partner in various ways and at different levels in implementing these strategies to promote domestic tourism in the country.

KEYWORDS

Covid-19 pandemic, domestic tourism promotion, tourism promotional strategies, marketing, Zimbabwe tourism industry.

1. Introduction

Domestic tourism involves residents of a country traveling within their own country for leisure, business, and other purposes not related to payment of remuneration (United Nations World Tourism Organisations, UNWTO 2008; Singh, 2009). It forms the greater component of tourism trips in both developed and developing tourist destinations. Domestic tourism is a long-established practice dating back to ancient societies (Rogerson & Lisa, 2005). More than 60% of tourism trips in Europe are domestic tourism trips. Domestic tourism does not include the crossing of international borders but it is confined to trips within a country by residents of the country.

These local tourism trips can be for various reasons such as visiting friends, and relatives, business, leisure, weekend breaks, holiday vacations, for medical and religious purposes, all within the borders of a particular destination (Mapingure, du Plessis & Saayman, 2019). Globally, domestic tourism is the mainstay and a key driver of the tourism industry (World Travel & Tourism Council WTTC, 2018), accounting for more than 70% of total travel and tourism spending. It is a veritable tool to promote sustainable tourism development (Kabote et al., 2017).

Domestic tourism provides the rationale for upgrading and development of infrastructure, instils national pride and patriotism in people, creates employment, and generates income and wealth for the local economy (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority ZTA, 2018). It disperses visitors across regions thus redistributing the benefits countrywide; it helps countries to withstand damaging impacts of disasters and pandemics such as Covid-19, and lastly, improves the attractiveness and appeal of a destination (Woyo, 2021; National Tourism Recovery & Growth Strategy, Zimbabwe NTRGSZ, 2020; WTTC, 2018). Moreso, domestic tourism contributes to poverty alleviation and help limit overreliance on the agriculture, mining, and manufacturing sector (WTTC, 2018). It helps to address seasonality associated with tourism operations and helps to disperse tourists to less visited areas such as the rural areas that are sometimes shunned by foreign tourists. It helps locals to appreciate their local tourism resources (ISTO Bulletin, 2020).

Globally, successful tourism destinations are those with a vibrant domestic tourism sector (Zimbabwe National Tourism Recovery and Growth strategy ZNTRGS, 2020). In 2017, domestic tourism spending accounted for US\$3971 billion, that is, 73% of the total global tourism spending. China took the lead in terms of domestic tourism success, accounting for US\$841 billion followed by the USA with US\$801 billion (WTTC, 2018), with many countries in Europe and America also heavily relying on domestic tourism including France, the USA, Italy, and Germany among other leading tourism destinations in the world.

Domestic tourism is the mainstay of the tourism economy in Brazil with contributions amounting to 94% to the tourism industry. In India, Germany, and Argentina, domestic tourism contributions account for at least 87% of the total tourism market, thus highlighting the importance of domestic tourism (WTTC, 2018). In terms of its determinants, domestic tourism is influenced by the availability of disposable income, availability of time, incentive travel, labour rights, government policy, increased affluence in society, a culture of travel, and increased leisure time (Scheyvens, 2007). Moreso, transport infrastructure development, capital investment, level of economic development/affluence, governmental support, availability of affordable tourism products, and services (WTTC, 2018), influence domestic tourism. Furthermore, natural disasters and pandemics such as tropical cyclones, earthquakes, and diseases like Covid-19, and Ebola negatively affect domestic tourism through travel disruptions.

Even though the Covid-19 pandemic is not yet contained the world over, the positive news is that a vaccine has been developed to help fight the virus and the disease. With the advent of vaccines being rolled out across the world, governments have started easing out the lockdown restrictions to allow societies and economies to function normally.

In Zimbabwe, the government through the Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism, and Hospitality Industry launched a tourism recovery strategy with a biased focus on domestic tourism promotion during the second half of

the year 2020. The focus on domestic tourism is premised on the fact that international tourism is closed plus even if borders were to be opened, international tourism will take longer to recover (Woyo, 2021).

Despite its potential, the domestic tourism market is yet to be fully exploited in Zimbabwe (Kabote et al., 2017), yet, it is the low-hanging market that can cushion the tourism industry from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, in the Zimbabwe National Tourism Recovery and Growth strategy (ZNTRGS) document launched by the Zimbabwean government in 2020, domestic tourism promotion is considered to be one of the anchor pillars of tourism recovery during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the recovery and growth strategy are silent on how exactly is domestic tourism going to be promoted neither does it specify the promotional strategies. The ZNTRGS document states that “domestic tourism is expected to provide a cushioning effect to (tourism) sector” (ZNTRGS, 2020 p.2), without elaborating how it is going to be promoted.

It is against the aforesaid background that this paper proposes particular strategies that can be used to promote domestic tourism in Zimbabwe amid, and in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. The strategies are for all stakeholders inclusive of tourism-related government departments, the private sector, and the residents of Zimbabwe, and potential domestic tourists. The proposition of domestic tourism promotion strategies for all stakeholders is premised on the fact that in Zimbabwe, tourism is a government-led, private sector driven, and community-based. Thus, strategies targeting these three main stakeholders of the tourism industry are likely to guarantee uptake, and success for the growth and development of the domestic tourism sector in Zimbabwe during and post Covid-19 pandemic.

According to Woyo (2021), the Covid-19 pandemic created an opportunity for Zimbabwe to focus on domestic tourism promotion, given its reliance on international tourism during the pre-Covid-19 era. The tourism enterprises in Zimbabwe rely heavily on international tourism markets of Africa, Europe, America, and Asia at the expense of the domestic market. The reliance on international tourism by local operators is due to many factors which, among them, include that the international market has purchasing power and willingness towards local tourism products, and services. The other factors include low disposable incomes among the locals, lack of travelling culture (Zhou, 2016), and a difficult economic environment (Mapingure, du Plessis & Saayman, 2019). Thus, the only market to tap, and exploit fully, during the Covid-19 pandemic is the domestic market to breathe life into the tourism industry enterprises.

On 1 March 2021, the government of Zimbabwe eased the lockdown regulations by moving from level 4 to level 2, opening the society and economy to operate rather a bit normally. For the tourism industry, this presented an opportunity to hit the ground running to recover from the lost business, and revenue induced by Covid-19 restrictions. In the obtaining circumstances, the domestic tourism market is the only viable market to exploit as the international market will take relatively longer to recover as this is exacerbated by the slow rollout, and uptake of the Covid-19 vaccines.

The domestic market is available for takers by the local tourism enterprises as they launch their recovery and survival offensive in the year 2021 and beyond. Whilst tourism enterprises in Zimbabwe had their fair of challenges such as low occupancy, low revenue, and low profitability before the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, these challenges were exacerbated by the

pandemic making the situation untenable, thus requiring some intervention of some sort perhaps by way of turning to the domestic tourism market to salvage the dire situation. So, domestic tourism promotion strategies as an alternative to the dearth of international travel during the Covid-19 era are required. Yet, the adoption, and mainstreaming of domestic tourism is a panacea for tourism development (Kabote, Mashiri, & Vengesayi, 2014; Kabote et al., 2017), during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, Woyo (2021) posits that resilience, and recovery, from the unprecedented impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are dependent on well-planned strategies to promote domestic tourism. However, the study does not specify the actual marketing strategies that can be used or implemented in Zimbabwe to promote domestic tourism. Further, the ZNTRGS (2020) policy document lists domestic tourism promotion as a pillar strategy to tourism recovery and growth in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. The document points out that “the domestic tourism market is yet to be fully exploited” (ZNTRGS, 2020, p.14). According to ZNTRGS (2020, p.14), domestic tourism provides a “cushioning effect to the sector as international source markets are projected to take longer to recover” from the unprecedented impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study identifies domestic tourism promotion strategies which can be employed by the tourism sector in Zimbabwe during and post Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Covid-19 and domestic tourism

Covid-19 pandemic triggered an unprecedented crisis in the tourism industry never seen during the last 100 years (Chirisa, Mutambisi, Chivenge, & Mbasera, 2020; Rodr & Alonso-almeida, 2020). It is so far the biggest health disaster that has affected the world in the 21st century (Zenker & Kock, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic is a natural health disaster that has brought a crisis of unimaginable proportions to society, economies, and the global tourism industry (Zenker & Kock, 2020). Covid-19 is a unique health disaster with unprecedented impact on the global economy (Kabadayi, O'Connor, & Tuzovic, 2020; Woyo, 2021), and the tourism industry has been hard hit due to its dependency on travel and social mobility, activities that have been curtailed by the Covid-19 pandemic (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020).

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council WTTC, (2020), 121 million jobs in the tourism industry have been negatively impacted globally creating an economic and social crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 has brought devastating impacts on the tourism industry globally (Woyo, 2021), and economies that rely on tourism are on their knees.

Covid-19 impact on the global tourism industry has been devastating, though the full extent of the effect of the pandemic is still under assessment. Tourism is a victim, and the Covid-19 pandemic has long-term impact on both domestic and international tourism. With borders closed, international travel curtailed, and international airlines grounded, the tourism industry has lost millions in potential revenue; more than 75 million jobs have been lost, and certainly, some tourism enterprises closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Ranasinghe et al., 2020; Woyo, 2021).

Research has shown that domestic tourism tends to play a major role in the survival and recovery of tourism destinations during crises and pandemics such as the Covid-19 (Kabote et al., 2017; WTTC, 2018). Globally, tourism destinations increased their levels of focus on domestic tourism in response to

the global meltdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (Woyo, 2021). Domestic tourism provides immense opportunities for contribution to national development goals such as economic growth, job creation, and poverty alleviation. Domestic tourism should lead the recovery, and survival of the tourism industry during and post Covid-19 pandemic (ISTO Bulletin, 2020; Nofal, Al-Adwan, Yaseen, & Alsheikh, 2020) as destinations would open first for local travel before opening for international travel for fear of importing new and dangerous variants of the novel coronavirus. Health and safety, disposable income availability, travel restrictions, and economic performance are key success determinants of domestic tourism performance (Rodr & Alonso-Almeida, 2020; Woyo, 2021).

Domestic tourism promotion yielded success during a crisis as well as post-crisis in recent history. During the global financial crisis of 2008 to 2009, Mauritius survived by turning to the domestic market having deployed effective marketing mix strategies (Naidoo, 2011); Kenya turned to the domestic tourism market following the post-election violence of 2008 (de Sausmarez, 2013). Similarly, Malaysia tourism also survived the 1997/1998 Asian financial crisis by turning to the domestic tourism market. In terms of pandemics, the Covid-19 is not the first one to be experienced in the world.

The 21st century has already witnessed four global pandemics, namely SARS-CoV in Asia, MERS-CoV in the Middle East, Madcow disease in Europe, and Ebola in West Africa, negatively impacting economic sectors including the tourism industry (Hussain & Fuste-Forne, 2021). Under all these pandemics, affected tourism destinations turned to the domestic tourism market for recovery, and survival (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020). Thus, domestic tourism market promotion is a default response for tourism destinations when faced with crisis, disasters, and pandemics of whatever nature given that international tourism demand dried up due to Covid-19 lockdowns, and restrictions. Notably, several countries have turned to the domestic tourism market during the Covid-19 era with success. The countries include Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Japan, Croatia, France, Italy, Morocco, Mexico, Poland, Thailand, and Spain among others (Urrutia & Belanger, 2020). Therefore, domestic tourism promotion is suitably important for Zimbabwe as a tourist destination in the obtaining situation. Moreso, with the advent of the vaccine in 2021, and its rolling out within Zimbabwe, and other southern African countries, prospects are high that the tourism industry would fully open up and business claw back to pre-Covid-19 pandemic performance levels. Thus, the domestic tourism market should be the first market to focus and exploit (Basera, 2018; Makhaola & Proches, 2017), hence the need for domestic tourism promotion strategies in Zimbabwe.

3. Methodology

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country in southern Africa. Zimbabwe's tourism industry is anchored on its abundant natural resources, rich cultural heritage, and diverse scenery (ZNTRGS, 2020). Victoria Falls is Zimbabwe's signature tourist attraction among other attractions such as the Great Zimbabwe National Monuments, national parks, and the Eastern Highlands. While the tourism industry experienced some relative growth over the years, depending largely on the international tourist market, the Covid-19 pandemic completely shut down the international market. This presented an opportunity for the tourism industry in Zimbabwe to turn to the domestic market for recovery and survival. Thus, this study explores the promotional strategies that can be used to stimulate

domestic tourism in Zimbabwe amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

This study adopted a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews being the data collection method to explore the domestic tourism promotion strategies in Zimbabwe during and post the Covid-19 pandemic. The study participants were 15 expert informants (based on the saturation theory) drawn from a wide spectrum of organisations that are directly involved in the tourism industry at different levels in Zimbabwe; from government departments, tourism parastatals, publicity associations, and hotels to enhance the validity and diversity of information for the study. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their job positions (managers, officers, and directors) and years of experience (more than ten years) in the tourism sector. Participants were informed of the study objective, their rights to confidentiality, anonymity, and withdrawal from participation.

The interviews were carried online using WhatsApp Video Calling in June 2021 with each of the sessions being recorded. Each interview session took 10 to 15 minutes. Online interviews were the preferred method of data collection due to the government of Zimbabwe's sanctioned Covid-19 restrictions (Woyo, 2021). The interview questions focused on domestic tourism promotion strategies that can help tourism enterprises survive the unprecedented impacts of Covid-19 in Zimbabwe. The questions were based on the review of literature on domestic tourism. The 15 recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, manually coded, and analysed using thematic analysis. The key theme was strategies to promote domestic tourism in Zimbabwe during and post Covid-19 pandemic. Results generated are presented in the next section.

4. Results and discussion

This section presents domestic tourism promotion strategies that can help the tourism industry in Zimbabwe to recover and survive the Covid-19 pandemic. Firstly, **Table 1** below presents the demographic characteristics of the 15 study respondents for a better understanding of the context and content of the study findings for informed decision-making (Mhizha, 2014).

Respondent	Designation	Organizational type	Gender	Age	Experience	Location
R1	Director	Hotel	Female	45	16 years	Masvingo
R2	Marketing Manager	TBCZ	Male	40	15 years	Harare
R3	General Manager	Hotel	Female	41	16 years	Bulawayo
R4	General Manager	Hotel	Male	42	15 years	Mutare
R5	Marketing Manager	Hotel	Female	40	12 years	Victoria Falls
R6	General Manager	Hotel	Female	39	11 years	Gweru
R7	MICE Manager	ZTA	Female	42	12 years	Harare
R8	Tourism Officer	MECTHI	Female	37	10 years	Masvingo
R9	MICE Manager	ZTA	Male	39	14 years	Harare
R10	Tourism officer	MECTHI	Male	37	11 years	Harare
R11	Manager	TBCZ	Female	43	16 years	Harare
R12	General Manager	Hotel	Female	48	15 years	Kariba

R13	Tourism officer	MECTHI	Female	36	13 years	Harare
R14	Manager	Publicity Association	Male	44	14 years	Masvingo
R15	General Manager	Hotel	Female	38	14 years	Kariba

Table 1: Summary of demographic characteristics of study respondents

Source: Author's compilation, 2021

Domestic Tourism Promotion Strategies

The key domestic tourism promotion strategies for Zimbabwe that emerged from the thematic data analysis are discussed hereunder.

i) Building tourism and travel culture within the Zimbabwe society

Most study participants observed that the culture of travelling for tourism purposes was limited among Zimbabweans suggesting a need to build the culture of travelling in Zimbabwean people to create a viable and sustainable domestic tourism market that can support the tourism sector. This was noted to be a medium to a long-term strategy to promote domestic tourism during and post Covid-19 pandemic. The need for culture change with regards to tourism is illustrated below.

R3: Our Zimbabwean society lacks the culture of travel for tourism purposes. travelling for tourism is alien to our society.

R8: Travelling for leisure like visiting Victoria Falls does not find its way in the budgets of many of our people, even those with the means and income to partake in tourism activities do not do so, e-e-e I think it's a cultural issue.

R6: Honestly speaking, domestic tourism is the only option to make sure that the tourism sector can survive this pandemic, however, there is need to instil a culture of travelling in people through various efforts.

Some of the post-Covid-19 activities or efforts to create a culture of travel to promote domestic tourism outlined by informants included the promotion of school trips to different local tourism attractions for all levels from primary grades to secondary and high school including universities and colleges. By so doing, the culture of travel is inculcated into students at a young age such that even when they are adults they would keep on undertaking trips as individuals, with friends, and even with families. Also, the issue of introducing 'know your area' campaigns via radio, TV and online platforms such as websites, social media sites such as Facebook and WhatsApp emerged as an effort that can promote travelling culture among Zimbabweans during and post Covid-19 pandemic as noted below:

R1: One way to promote domestic tourism culture is through aggressive campaigns through radio, TV and by taking advantage of online communications to get the message out there.

R4: Information is power, it builds awareness and desire plus drives people into action, so there is need to run continuous campaigns, emphasising on the benefits of partaking in tourism activities.

R10: School trips are important in building the culture of travel in people, catch

them young, it's not easy to teach old dogs new tricks. If it was in my power, I would institute a policy for our education institutions to undertake trips with students to local tourism destinations at least once a year for every grade or level to instil the culture. By so doing, the industry starts ticking from those school trips through revenue generated.

Nurturing a culture of tourism, and travel, among the children and youth is arguably a great way to build an enduring domestic tourism market for Zimbabwe through taking deliberate steps that inculcate the tourism culture at a young age. This can also help in developing awareness about the country in young people through advancing a discover-your-Zimbabwe thematic campaign actualised through deliberate tourism trips by education institutions to different local attractions. This finding was also echoed by Woyo (2021) in which the willingness of the domestic market to travel, and pay for travel-related services needs to be inculcated for domestic tourism to bloom in Zimbabwe. This will go a long way in sustaining the tourism industry during the Covid-19 pandemic, and even other future pandemics.

ii) Affordability of tourism products to the local tourism market

Informants bemoaned the pricing of tourism products in Zimbabwe as a major obstacle to domestic tourism growth particularly in an economic environment constrained by Covid-19. Incomes for local people have been lost due to Covid-19 induced lockdowns. Therefore, making the tourism products affordable to domestic tourists is one strategy that can help stimulate the domestic tourism market. Price is a key driver of demand. According to the law of demand, more is demanded at a lower price. Thus, to stimulate demand for local tourism products, there is a need for tourism service providers to review their pricing models with a view of making them more affordable to locals so that they can participate in the consumption of local tourism products. This was noted below:

R6: Truly speaking our tourism industry pricing is skewed towards the international market, it is damn expensive.

R11: Hotel accommodation in Zimbabwe is expensive and beyond the reach of many locals, who are pressed with an economic crisis.

R4: The tourism enterprises need to charge affordable prices for locals, the hotels and other facilities in the sector must substantially reduce their prices for them to reap benefits from the local market.

Thus, results show that one of the effective and quick-win strategies to promote domestic tourism is making the tourism products affordable to the local tourists. This result is consistent with Woyo (2021) and Kabote, Mashiri & Vengesayi's (2011) studies in which it was established that affordability of tourism products, and services is one of the ways to promote domestic tourism in Zimbabwe as a resilient strategy in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.

iii) Improved income levels

Results showed that the Covid-19 pandemic worsened Zimbabwe's already underperforming economy. The Zimbabwean economy is not in good shape, even before the Covid-19 pandemic. The economy has been battling multiple challenges ranging from a severe liquidity crunch, unemployment, and low wages for those in

formal employment, and hyperinflation among other economic issues. This has resulted in workers grappling with low, and compressed wages and salaries or incomes. Respondents indicated that it is important for the Zimbabwean economy to stabilise first before one can talk of domestic tourism promotion. There is a need to improve the income levels so that people have adequate disposable income to spend on domestic tourism products and services during and post Covid-19 pandemic. Local people are struggling to meet the basic needs of their families, such that it will be difficult to persuade them to travel to local attractions for leisure when they are struggling with basic survival issues as illustrated below:

R2: Zimbabwe has been battling an economic crisis even before COVID- 19, so the economy has to get right first if the locals are to partake in tourism activities.

R7: The biggest obstacle to domestic tourism promotion is poverty and unemployment in the country.

R9: As we speak, the majority of Zimbabweans are struggling to put food on the table due to an ongoing economic crisis.

R10: Look at the rate of inflation, unemployment, and poverty; it's quite irrational to expect the local people to play a part in the recovery and survival of the tourism industry in Zimbabwe.

R11: Let's put the economy right first for the domestic tourism market to be able to play a meaningful part in the growth of the tourism industry in Zimbabwe.

This finding agrees with Woyo (2021) who asserted that poor economic performance characterised by high inflation, unemployment, a liquidity crunch, and droughts is a primary hindrance to domestic tourism growth in Zimbabwe. The COVID-19 induced lockdowns have exacerbated economic decline in Zimbabwe as normal business operations have been disrupted. Domestic tourism promotion is feasible on the back of a well-functioning local economy in which the locals have enough disposable income to spend on tourism-related activities.

iv) Development of domestic market customized products

Respondents emphasised the need to develop tourism products and facilities that are tailor-made for the domestic tourism market. Interview narratives suggest that the existing tourism product profile in Zimbabwe is skewed in favour of the international market, particularly when one considers the food menus offered in hotels and restaurants with foreign names. In addition, now that the international tourism market is subdued because of Covid-19 restrictions, the activities on offer for tourists also need to be locally oriented to accommodate the needs of the domestic tourism market as noted below:

R13: My feeling is that one of the fundamentals to promote domestic tourism lies in tailor-making the tourism products to what the locals prefer.

R12: Our tourism industry operators should offer a wide range of products for the locals.

R5: The tourism enterprises in the country should provide a cocktail of products that provide entertainment, educational and recreational benefits.

R15: You see, we now have the millennials as part of the tourism market, and this market like a lot of varied activities to occupy and satisfy them.

Thus, the views of the study respondents attest to the need to design tourism products and facilities to the travelling needs and wants of the domestic tourism

market in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Given that Covid-19 restrictions have completely shut down the international tourism market component for the Zimbabwean tourism sector, it is about time that the domestic market fills up the gap. To this end, the adoption of information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the internet and social media in product development to boost domestic tourism in Zimbabwe would go a long way towards this as recommended by Woyo (2021). Also, national parks, national monuments, and museums should seize the tourism demand vacuum created by the depressed international tourism market induced by Covid-19 as an opportunity to customise their products for the domestic market, in addition to making the most affordable to stimulate domestic travel to these national attractions thereby catalysing national travel. There is a need to increase the number and range of activities that are tailor made for the domestic market to increase visitorship (Woyo, 2021), now that the domestic tourism market is set to fill the demand gap created by the subdued international tourism market as a result of Covid-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, respondents pointed out the need to promote, strengthen and commercialise sport and religious tourism in Zimbabwe as these draw large numbers of people to a particular destination in the country as a post-Covid-19 domestic tourism promotion strategy. Zimbabweans are religious people who undertake several religious pilgrimages at different times of the year. Innovative tourism enterprises can exploit business opportunities that are brought by these religious gatherings by different churches such as Zion Christian Church (ZCC), Apostolic Faith Ministries (AFM), Family of God (FOG), United Family International Church (UFIC), Prophetic Healing and Deliverance Ministries (PHD) among other churches. Moreso, as a strategy to promote domestic tourism during the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism stakeholders in both the public and private sector can add their voice in encouraging religious tourists to get vaccinated as the government of Zimbabwe has given the green light to churches to allow vaccinated people to congregate. Thus, information dissemination encouraging congregants to be fully vaccinated so that they can attend religious gatherings during the Covid-19 pandemic era is one strategy for domestic tourism.

v) Segmentation of the domestic tourism market and running discount programs

The strategy of properly segmenting the local tourism market using targeted packages, and running discount programs, for the local tourism market dominated the responses as an effective promotional strategy for boosting domestic tourism in Zimbabwe in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. Market segmentation and discount programs take into consideration the constraining effect wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism market's ability to afford tourism products. Though this is related to product development, it is imperative to treat it as a separate thematic strategy given the fact that it dominated the strategy recommendations as shown below:

R1: The tourism industry operators must design appealing low-cost packages and programs for the domestic tourism market.

R2: Appealing packages for the domestic tourism market segments such as schools, colleges, universities, and corporates are the way to go and the packages should be affordable.

R3: It is important that programs that appeal to the local tourism market be developed as this will help create demand.

R14: The good thing with packaging is that they can be tailor-made to the specific tastes and preferences of the domestic tourism market in terms of everything including such things as accommodation, transport, food, activities, and prices.

R7: Packaging and programming are the two effective tools to manage demand for tourism products in the local tourism market.

R13: If done well packaging for the domestic tourism market has great potential to generate good results for the tourism industry in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic.

These views on packaging suggest that it is a low-hanging recovery and survival strategy for the tourism industry to gain from the domestic tourism market. Packages can be day packages, weekend packages, holiday packages, school packages, corporate packages to ensure that there is everything for everyone. If done well it can stimulate local demand for tourism products and facilities in Zimbabwe during and post-Covid 19 pandemic era. Woyo (2021) and Kabote et al. (2018) submitted that making tourism products and services affordable, including packages help in promoting domestic tourism in Zimbabwe.

vi) Tapping the visiting friends and relatives (VFR) domestic market segment

Findings showed that Zimbabweans have family structures steeped in the traditional extended family set-up and acquaintances, which from time-to-time require them to meet and socialise. Such a set-up of friends, and relatives, is an opportunity that could be exploited to promote domestic tourism. This market is in abundance in Zimbabwe. This view is premised on the fact that during the Covid-19 induced lockdowns, there were no travels. Friends and relatives were locked up in their homes, thus creating an enduring hunger to socialise with loved ones in other parts of the country. The envisaged opening up of intercity travel without restrictions in the post-Covid-19 pandemic would create a surge in the number of local people visiting their friends, and relatives, in different parts of the country.

Respondents implored tourism enterprises to be innovative and find ways of turning travel to see friends and relatives into a valuable market which translates into the generation of money for the tourism industry through utilisation of its facilities as illustrated below:

R12: Look, I feel there is an opportunity for the local tourism players to make some money from the local people who shall be taking advantage of the lifting of travel restrictions to travel around the country visiting some friends and relatives.

R15: There is some money that can be made by restaurants, lodges, and hotels from the locals that shall be visiting their relatives in different parts of the country given the opening up of intercity travel in the country.

R11: The locals who shall take advantage of the lifting of travel restrictions, like no exemption letters are now required, people can now use their cars for travel for different purposes including visiting friends and relatives represents a lucrative market for innovative tourism entrepreneurs.

R9: The visiting friends and relatives (VFR) market has for long been neglected in terms of making it a money generating market for local tourism players. To me, this is a lucrative market that requires innovative thinking to turn it into a valuable tourism market.

R8: My friend people have been locked in their homes for over a year now, the lifting of some travel restrictions will result in an upsurge in locals travelling around

the country for purposes of catching up with their friends, meeting and greeting their relatives. There shall be travel locally and that's a potentially good market to tap into and survive as an industry.

Results strongly suggest the VFR as a post-Covid-19 pandemic lucrative market which the tourism service providers can tap into for their quick recovery, survival, and growth in Zimbabwe during and post Covid-19 pandemic. This aligns with Dube-Xaba (2021) who found VFR to be a viable market to drive the recovery of the tourism sector during and post-Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, there is a need to promote diaspora packages that cater to people in the diaspora so that they can sponsor their families to have holidays in Zimbabwe during and post-Covid-19 era. Also, when they come back home for visits, they can have holidays for total relaxation with their families during and post-Covid-19 pandemic.

vii) Accessibility of tourist centres in Zimbabwe by the local market

Respondents pointed the fact that generally most tourist attractions/centres in Zimbabwe are not easily accessible by the local tourism market given the current state of the transportation system. For example, rail travel in Zimbabwe needs attention as it is currently down. Rail normally provides the cheapest form of transportation, and is a favourite for many local people as it gives an opportunity for great sightseeing as the train normally passes through a variety of scenery, and attractions, both natural and manmade. In addition, local air transport in Zimbabwe is also down such that even the local airline is not able to service the domestic routes to different tourist centres like Kariba, Masvingo, the Eastern Highlands to mention but a few. Air travel is fast, and convenient, and its availability usually promotes increased travel. Further still, the road network in Zimbabwe is generally not in the best state for ease of travel, and some highways are notorious for accidents that have needlessly claimed human life. These issues are illustrated below by study respondents:

R3: Tourism is dependent upon a good transport system and this does not exist in Zimbabwe.

R2: to promote domestic tourism there is need to improve the accessibility of our local attractions both in terms of physical access and in terms of cost.

R8: Roads in Zimbabwe are not safe for travel and in rural areas, it is a nightmare especially during the rainy season, you go to rural areas at a huge risk of getting stuck for days due to bad and impassable roads.

R4: Local travel needs an efficient and regular air transport system for it to happen.

R6: There are local people who have their monies but are hindered from travelling due to lack of air connectivity within the country. They do not have time to drive for hours and hours enduring all these potholes in our major highways, risking their lives.

R12: Look the other key issue that requires attention if domestic tourism is to be promoted is fuel availability and cost. In Zimbabwe fuel is rarely available and when you find it is damn expensive.

R14: Fuel is the lifeblood of local travel as the majority of people use buses and personal cars to travel around the country. Fuel must be made readily available and affordable for domestic tourism to happen.

These results show that improving the accessibility of tourist attractions/centres to

the local market will go a long way in promoting domestic tourism in Zimbabwe. Having better accessibility is also emphasised by Woyo and Slabbert (2020), as they cited poor accessibility as one of the major challenges hindering domestic tourism growth in Zimbabwe. There is a positive relationship between the accessibility of tourist destinations or facilities and the level of domestic tourism. Accessibility to different tourist centres in Zimbabwe, according to the respondents, can be improved by addressing the challenges bedevilling the three modes of transportation in Zimbabwe. For example, air transport can be improved by introducing flights to places of interest such that travellers can get to destinations within the shortest possible time so that people can have more time for leisure; upgrading of airports/airstrips to create more access points, and charging affordable cheaper airfares on domestic flights to induce demand. Road accessibility can be improved by sprucing up dust roads linking the local tourist destinations so that the roads are trafficable.

Good road infrastructure is critical together with feeder roads to places of interest, especially in remote areas. Travellers need to feel safe when driving on highways. Rail transport can be improved by revamping the existing idle rail transport network since rail transport resonates with large numbers of people as it is usually far cheaper than road and air transport.

viii) Aggressive marketing of local tourism attractions and destinations

Respondents expressed the need to intensify advertising and promotion campaigns of local tourist attractions by the national tourism body, that is, the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA). Tourism service providers can also complement the advertising campaigns. For a very long time, advertising and promotional campaigns at the national level have been targeting the international tourism market segment at the expense of the local market before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Views by respondents seem to point to a lack of information on local tourism attractions by residents. Hence, one of the effective ways to promote domestic tourism is by raising awareness through radio, TV, and online communications. Another way to disseminate information is through local community radio stations recently rolled out. Moreso, making sure that all tourist attraction information is translated and is readily made available and accessible through all the local official languages as spelt in the constitution of Zimbabwe will help in promoting domestic tourism in Zimbabwe. Thus, from a marketing model perspective, awareness raises interest, interest raises desire, and desire results in action through embarking on domestic tourism travel. This is noted in the following responses:

R2: Look, we have people here in Masvingo who have not visited the Great Zimbabwe Monuments and some they do not even know that it is here in Masvingo, its surprisingly true Sir.

R3: To boost domestic tourism there is a need to make a lot of meaningful noise about the local attractions, our people in most cases are not even aware of these attractions around them.

R14: Let's assume nothing, we need to amp our marketing efforts to every Zimbabwean about the local tourism attractions, packages, and facilities to enhance domestic tourism.

R10: There is lack of information among our people about the benefits of participating in tourism activities and this can be addressed through aggressive dissemination of complete, comprehensive and accurate information.

R15: Aggressive marketing campaigns are the way to promote domestic tourism in Zimbabwe.

Thus, the results suggest that aggressive marketing campaigns targeted at the domestic market with complete, and accurate, information can help promote domestic tourism in Zimbabwe during and post-Covid-19 pandemic era. Respondents indicated that aggressive marketing campaigns can happen at all critical levels for effective results, that is, at the government, city, tourism enterprise, and local community level to achieve the desired outcomes. This is premised on the fact that in Zimbabwe, tourism is government-led, private sector-driven, and community-based, so there is a need for greater partnerships for domestic tourism to succeed during and post Covid-19 pandemic. The aggressive marketing campaigns can use the marketing mix tools of product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence to achieve the intended objectives and aims. This finding is consistent with Woyo and Slabbert (2021) in which aggressive marketing was found to be one of the most effective destination management techniques to promote destination competitiveness and domestic tourism in Zimbabwe during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Moreover, to enhance extensive publicity, the study results suggest that the following action steps can go a long way in promoting domestic tourism during and post Covid-19 pandemic; updating listings of places of interest and supporting facilities and services; introducing and activating information centres at provincial and district levels so that critical information can be accessed closer to the places of interest; updating and circulating tourist maps so that potential local tourists can get information readily available on digital platforms and as hard copies; creating websites at national, regional and district levels so that information can be readily available; publicising various destinations e.g. through documentaries, short films, social media, radio, and TV programmes. Actively publicise yearly calendar events in various provinces that have a bearing on tourism.

The above agrees with Nofal et al. (2020) who asserted that the incorporation of digital marketing techniques plays a critical role in promoting domestic tourism during pandemics in support of the need to embark on aggressive marketing to boost domestic tourism.

ix) Promoting incentive travel

Respondents indicated the need for employers at different levels particularly at the government level and private sector to promote incentive travel during and post Covid-19 pandemic. Employee incentive travel schemes can be another low-hanging strategy that can be implemented to promote domestic tourism in Zimbabwe during the Covid-19 pandemic. Both the public, and private sectors, are implored to give some of their employees' holiday perks applicable within Zimbabwe. Direct incentives such as domestic tourism vouchers for civil servants can go a long way in stimulating domestic tourism in Zimbabwe during and post Covid-19 pandemic as noted below:

R3: To save the tourism industry from collapse due to the debilitating effects of Covid-19 pandemic, the government can provide domestic travel vouchers to its civil service.

R4: In Zimbabwe, tourism is a government-led, so it's incumbent upon the government to offer incentive travel options for its huge civil service, maybe through vouchers that are redeemable within Zimbabwe.

R6: The private sector can be encouraged to give domestic travel benefits to its employees, this will help cushion the tourism players in Zimbabwe such as hotels and restaurants in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Results suggest that incentive travel has immediate tangible benefits of promoting domestic tourism promotion in Zimbabwe during the Covid-19 pandemic era. It does not only provide the necessary push for the locals to travel, but also the time as well as the financial resources to meet travelling expenses, thus proving to be an effective tool. Incentive travel is important in driving the growth and development of domestic tourism (Celuch, 2012) during, and post pandemics such as Covid-19. Incentive travel is noted as one of the key motivations for travel (Mapingure, du Plessis, & Saayman, 2018; Mapingure, Engelina & Saayman, 2019) that can be exploited to promote domestic tourism in Zimbabwe during and post Covid-19 pandemic.

x) Adherence to Covid-19 protocols and treatment guidelines

Reports by health authorities worldwide suggest no immediate end to the Covid-19 pandemic despite the proliferation of vaccines. The efficacy of the vaccines is yet to be ascertained. This means that both tourism players, and the local tourists, need to remain vigilant in the ongoing fight against the novel coronavirus for the health and safety of all. Respondents pointed to the need for tourism players to embrace the vaccination programme by making sure that all their staff is vaccinated against Covid-19 pandemic. Also, tourism operators need to add their voice in encouraging the local people to get vaccinated in a bid to create a local tourism market that is vaccinated against Covi-d-19 for the safety and health of everyone.

Results point to the fact that creating a Covid-19 free destination is a sure way to help in the promotion of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe during the Covid-19 pandemic era. In addition to the vaccination issue, it is important for tourism players and local tourists to keep observing the Covid-19 prevention guidelines such as masking up, social distancing, hand washing, regular testing and screening, and regular fumigation of tourism facilities as noted by respondents below:

R1: We need not relax because the country has been opened up for intercity travel, Covid-19 is still among us.

R8: Continued vigilance by all is still necessary despite the discovery of the vaccine, the virus is ruthless.

R7: One of the ways to promote domestic tourism safely is by continuing to abide by the Covid-19 prevention guidelines for us to remain alive.

R9: In the face of some resistance to the virus reported through social media, it would be strategically wise if tourism operators can take the lead role in vaccinating their staff as well as adding their voice to encouraging the public to embrace vaccination.

R4: Let's abide by the Covid-19 prevention and treatment measures for us to enjoy the fruits of domestic tourism.

These views suggest that continued observance of Covid-19 prevention and treatment measures by both tourism players, and the local tourists remain a key strategy in promoting domestic tourism recalling as well that 'health is wealth'. Thus, only a healthy individual can partake in tourism activities. Complete adherence to Covid-19 prevention guidelines and vaccination remains the key to the health and safety of both staff and visitors (Bakar & Rosbi, 2020; Gössling,

Scott, & Hall, 2020; Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020) for the promotion of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe during the Covid-19 pandemic. **Figure 1** below shows a suggested framework of domestic tourism promotion strategies for Zimbabwe during and post-Covid-19 pandemic

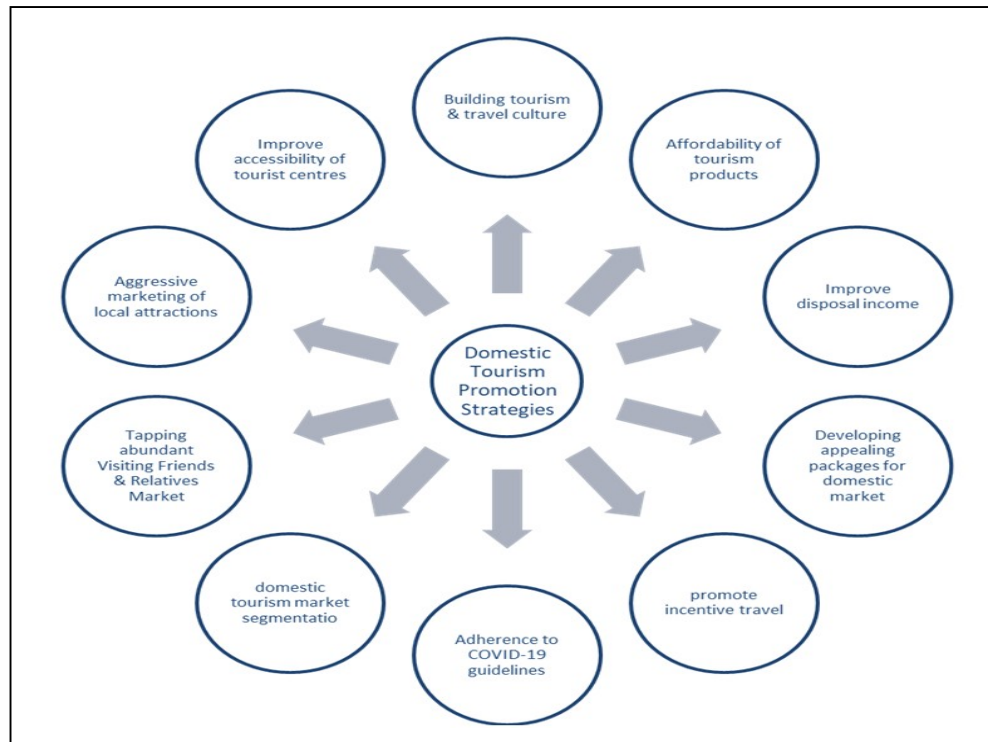


Figure 1: Domestic Tourism Promotion Strategies for Zimbabwe during and post Covid-19 pandemic
Source: Authors compilation, 2021

5. Conclusion

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic brought the global tourism industry to a standstill, it is not all gloom and doom as it presents an opportunity for tourist destinations like Zimbabwe to develop their domestic tourism market as a substitute to the traditional international tourism market. The study demonstrated that although the Covid-19 pandemic is a threat to the existence of the tourism industry, it presents a rare turning point in terms of marketing direction and strategy for the tourism industry in Zimbabwe in the context of its domestic tourism market segment.

The study identified, and explored, key strategies that can be implemented at various levels to promote domestic tourism in Zimbabwe during, and post the Covid-19 pandemic. The identified strategies include instilling a culture of travel in young people, making tourism products affordable and accessible, improving the incomes of local people, improving the economy of Zimbabwe, developing of domestic market customised products, segmentation of domestic tourism market, running discount programs, designing and developing appealing packages and programs, exploiting business opportunities presented by the visiting friends and relatives market, embarking on aggressive marketing campaigns using the marketing mix, introducing incentive travel particularly for civil servants, and a continued commitment to the observance of all Covid-19 prevention and treatment guidelines.

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