

Tourism marketing the social media way. Why it should cost Africa less to market African tourism.

(Conference ID: CFP/130/2017)

1st Author Maimbolwa Sepo Imasiku

Department of Marketing, School of Business, Mulungushi University, Kabwe, Zambia

Email: imasikuclan@gmail.com, skasofu@mu.ac.zm

2nd Author Mary Lubinda

Department of Marketing, School of Business, Mulungushi University, Kabwe, Zambia

Email: marylubinda@yahoo.com, mlubinda@mu.ac.zm

Abstract

Purpose –The purpose of this paper is to present a theoretical paper of the case of tourism marketing on the African continent through social media. It makes recommendations as to how countries on the African continent can use social media such as Facebook to market tourism and increase the number of tourists visiting their countries.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is a combination of the Authors own personal experiences and past associations using their skills and experiences as marketers to make workable recommendations. Other information sources included social media platforms, academic journals, the internet and other sources.

Findings – Social media marketing may not be a forever source of marketing, but for now its usage can be maximized to help various African countries increase and inform the masses about their country's tourism potential.

Research limitations/implications – The paper's core purpose is to show that social media, particularly Facebook can play a big role in helping the developing countries market to tourists from all over the world.

Originality/value – The paper holds valuable insights with regards to the use of social media at country level Nations, which are young, small and rapidly modernizing.

Keywords words-Tourism, Facebook, Marketing, Social media marketing

Paper type Case study

Introduction

“Africa is composed of 53 African Countries segmented into five geographical regions, including Western, Northern, Southern, Eastern and Central Africa”, [4] Tourism has been known to be one of the biggest contributors of GDP in developing as well as less developed countries. Globally, tourism is estimated to account for over 5% of gross domestic product (GDP) [12]. African countries are looking for ways to promote cultural heritage and sites. There are lots of reasons why governments are constantly marketing their countries to the outside world. One thing Africa is rich in is the abundance of tourism attractions, from the Egyptian pyramids, to the Serengeti, the Victoria Falls and Table Mountain of the Cape Town. Africa is not short of tourism attractions. It is in light of this that it would be necessary to carry out an empirical study of how it should cost close to nothing for Africa to market itself to the rest of the world. With the onset of social media, marketing has become fairly cheap and affordable hence the need to examine whether the use of social media to market tourism in Africa can be done massively through the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and many others. Destination marketing [6] plays a huge role in boosting the number of visitors to a country.

Countries around the world have benefited from tourism as international arrivals have grown. From 1980 to 2000 arrivals in Asia Pacific Region grew from 8% to 22% contributing to economic growth

and livelihoods. During the same period the Africa’s market share of global tourism grew from 3% (1980) to 5% (2010), [16]. According to the World Bank report, the number of tourists arriving in Sub-Saharan Africa has grown over 300% since 1990 with 2012 ranking a high of 33.8 million tourists. Income generated from tourism has also increased: Receipts from hotels, tours and other attractions in 2012 amounted to over US\$36 billion and directly contributed over 2.8% to the region’s GDP [16].

Traditionally, marketing campaigns required a significant amount of investment. In the recent past, the media landscape has changed dramatically [2]. While traditional methods still exist, the internet and social media tools such as Facebook have opened new avenues for countries to conduct marketing campaigns practically for free. The Interactiveness that comes with social media platforms is an added advantage [2].

A lot of African countries are using social media to market tourist destinations in the outside world. All countries in Africa have something to offer in terms of tourism [4]. What is the hindrance in getting these unique destinations known by the rest of the world? A quick check on trip advisor a site where visitors to various destinations all over the world air out their sentiments shows that most of these destinations offered the visitor or viewer an experience that cannot be felt or seen anywhere else in the world. Regardless of the political history or economic history of a country all countries in Africa have something unique to offer the world tourist [4]. However, African

destinations are not marketed the way they should be, even though the majority of the countries are on social media. How then can African countries use social media to market these destinations, what are the possibilities?

Background of the study

Tourism has the potential to help developing countries build their economies and become less dependent on donor aid. Tourism Marketing plays a huge role in ensuring potential tourists are aware of a particular tourist attraction so they can want to see it. Without proper marketing, tourists may not be aware of the potential a country has in providing or being a potential tourist destination. It is therefore imperative for countries in Africa that cannot afford to market themselves physically in other countries to use other mediums such as social media to market themselves.

Social Media Marketing

“Social media are internet-based applications that build on Web 2.0 and facilitate interaction, collaboration and sharing of content by providing the opportunity to create and exchange user generated content” [8]. “Social network sites (SNSs) are online social media platforms that serve as important channels of communication”, [10].

Social media is a wide term defining writings on blogs and forums, photographs, audio records, videos, links, profile pages on social networking sites and all different content forming many other social networks, [2].

Research on social media has not yet reached its peak because in many countries this is still a new concept. There are many uses for social media out there and so far, its use has not been maximized yet. Just like any technology its use may go on for years and may or may not be overtaken by something new.

Benefits of Social Media marketing

The role of social media in tourism is increasing, especially in information search and decision-making behaviors and tourism promotion focusing on best practices for interacting with consumers.

The benefits of social media marketing include:

1. Understanding your audience, for you to reach your audience through marketing efforts, you need to know who your customers are and what they want. Unlike traditional marketing, social media is a communication tool where you listen and take part in the conversations around your brand/product/services. By keeping an eye and ear to conversations, you can have an understanding of your audience’s needs, issues and trends, which can in turn influence your marketing efforts, [2].
2. Interacting with your audience – social media is a place to interact and engage with your audience asking questions, responding to comments and posting content that adds value to your followers

3. Checking Competition – tourism industry is very competitive. It is important to keep an eye on your competitors' activities. Social media is the best way of checking on your competitors, by visiting their pages seeing what they are doing or not doing.
4. Delivering quality customer service – quality customer service is at the heart of every successful tourism business. A good product or service backed by quality customer service helps in retaining existing customers and gaining new ones. Social media helps in delivering customer service by promptly responding to questions and searching for conversations around your brand on other pages and responding to questions.
5. Its Interactiveness speaks millions as that's what makes it unique to traditional marketing. The fact that a business can have one on one interaction with customers in real time gives it an advantage to all other forms of marketing.

Benefits of Tourism to the African Economy

When developed countries announce how much they have lost due to a terrorist attack on the news in terms of tourists we do not pay much attention. But the figures are usually high. The amount of money most developed countries make from tourism falls in the millions and sometimes billions of dollars. Tourism is responsible for “circa 10% of the world economy” [5]. This is why a lot of the less developed country of the

world is now looking to tourism to help their economies, [4]. Why then can't African countries gain a share of this big chunk? What are the benefits of Tourism to African countries?

1. It creates employment, whether direct employment or indirect employment the bottom line is that employment is created [13].
2. Tourism increases GDP, how, the more tourists come into the country the more dollars are brought in, the more taxes are payable, [4].
3. It helps alleviate standards of living, because more and more people are employed hence are able to live above the poverty line [13].
4. Helps with the general economic development as more money is generated in the country, [4].
5. More and more infrastructure can be developed as the need for such infrastructure is developed, [15].
6. Encourage locals to grow food to sell to hotels and lodges for the consumption of tourists this can help boost the agricultural sector in diverging the foods grown in various African countries, [1].

Marketing a destination as a brand on social media

Countries should not only market the country as it is but should also market the country's attraction as a “brand” [18]. Why is branding so important? Branding sticks in the consumer's mind, it helps create an attachment to a product or service. This is

important for WOM (Word of mouth) as well as for customer loyalty enhancement. By branding the various attractions, African countries will create a household name of those attractions found in their countries. In this case it does not mean that countries must change the names of the cities to suit the name of the attraction. It means countries must market the attraction like it was the name of the town. That way, when people think of the Country they also relate it to an attraction. Branding is important as it helps keep competitors at bay as there will always be the one place everyone will want to visit eventually, [14].

Branding plays a huge role that sticks in the consumer's mind [2]. When one mentions the words NY the first thing that comes to mind is that that's New York. Because NY has become a brand name for New York. African countries need to come up with a phrase or symbol that can sell an attractive. Marketing is about using the name of the attraction and making it big to help Tourists associate the name of the destination. [2] Also noted that social media, branding can have a huge impact on customer loyalty. Social media is considered one of the world's most influential relationship building mechanisms of our time, [11]. It is therefore important for marketers to use it wisely and to their advantage.

Tourism on the African continent

Africa has a lot of potential when it comes down to tourism [4]. The continent is vast in natural resources and tourist

attractions each and every country has something unique to offer, from the unique scenery to the vast beautiful scenery and entertaining wildlife. We hear of Zoos in western countries that resort to having mechanical animals which need constant recharging. In Africa tourists are able to experience the real deal, not a mechanical animal. And yet here we are missing out on the billions of dollars that could be benefiting to a continent such as ours [4].

Tourism has the possibility of growing the continents GDP by far if properly managed [4] and advertised. Slowly but surely countries are developing infrastructure that can provide for a host of tourists to go to. However, the sad part is that most locally owned facilities start off well, but along the way do not maintain their facilities (researchers' experience). This is very evident in most African countries. International facilities will from, time and time again get a facelift, but local businesses do not leave room for renovations.

From the Maletsunyane Falls (Semonkong) of Lesotho to the Centro Artistico Juvenil of Guinea, tourists have a variety of attractions to choose from. Africa has a vast array of natural and man-made creations so beautiful the experience of seeing them cannot be undone in the human brain for years to come. In east Africa the Serengeti offers the visitor a breathtaking experience. The Victoria Falls in Zambia offers the viewer an experience never ever seen before. The drop down to the boiling point is scenes only seen in a movie, but in reality, can be experienced live by the

viewer. Africa has so much to offer. From the sand-dunes of the Namib Desert to the rushing waters of Djibouti. Africa is not short of an adventure. Why then is a continent so rich in natural attractions and sceneries fascinating to the human eye still in a deluded state of tourism lack?

Africa is full of fun places and natural occurring entertainment which can mesmerize the naked eye. Exhibiting these attractions will help the continent reduce unemployment levels and stabilize currencies.

Research Methodology

The study observed a total of 30 social media sites of at least 15 countries in Africa and 15 from Western countries. The study was more of a qualitative study which used theory and observation to make a logical conclusion.

Findings

The majority of African countries have a social media presence. However, most of them are not using them to the maximum capacity. Most sites visited show the following information

1. General information about the country, its location and its neighbors
2. Some shows various attractions found in their countries
3. Most are not updated consistently
4. Some have been abandoned and have not had an update for years

5. Some have become news sites and all they post is news occurring in the country (aren't there enough news sites for that)
6. Some are searched and nothing comes up apart from the link between the country and Wikipedia
7. The information in some cases is hard to find no pinned posts to alert the visitor on where to go for more information
8. Some contacted but did not respond
9. Some contacted responded, but directed the researcher to an email address or a website that was unhelpful, so imagine if the researcher was a real tourist.
10. Some really good with all the information and various places to see
11. Some even going as far as providing accommodation, visa, sights to see information to allow the visitor a chance to see some of the sights whilst making up their mind on what to come and do
12. Some sites where every good in terms of photography, the way the photos were taken one can see seriousness in the advertising.
13. Perhaps marketing to the various segments should be done in age categories as in, [9].

This goes to show that social media are being under-utilized by most African countries as it is not used to maximize the use of the various attractions found in the various countries. The linking of Wikipedia to Facebook, sites helps a visitor read more

about countries' political, economic, cultural and other factors that may be of use to tourists.

How Western Countries are using social media to market their countries

Social media are an integral part of travel planning

1. Social media have become key sources for travel information purposes before, during and after a trip in most western countries. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, forums and review sites play a major role in travel planning for many western countries consumers.
2. Most companies generate more sales with the help of social media and are a very useful tool for managing customer relationships.
3. The development in the social media landscape is the rise of the photo-sharing platform Instagram, with a picture being worth a thousand words, Instagram is a powerful tool used by most western countries for promoting their destinations. It is also ideal for gathering and spreading user-generated content in the form of photos and videos.
4. Most western countries are digitally savvy travelers in the world, making use of social media obtain travel information, and booking.
5. Social media is an effective, cost-efficient tool used by most countries in

the west to create awareness and build an image and reaching new target groups

6. They use social media to engage with travelers in real time. For example, if someone is tweeting about arriving in your country, offer information on how to travel to your destination, or how to book a tour of the area through your company.

Discussion of findings

Most African countries do not interact much with the audience and they rarely seem to boost their pages to maximize coverage. This is regrettable because social media sites such as Facebook provide the user certain facilities that the user can access even without the page being monitored. One such facility is the provision of the pinned post.

What information should be available on pinned posts?

Most western countries have other immigration agencies or the department of immigration has a social media site which provides information with regards to travel to those various countries. Countries in Africa that really need this type of information to be readily available do not in actual fact have it. In this day of technology people should be able to apply for a visa online or at least get the necessary information with regards to the various methods, costs etc available for a tourist to apply for a visa.

The pinned posts can also provide information with regards to the various

activities available in a particular country. These can have links attached in order to provide the viewer with access to all the necessary information they would need if they were to travel to that country.

Experiences on Social Media and Internet Sites

The Zambia tourism [19] site is an excellent example of what it takes for a Country to market itself to the outside world. The site covers all the necessary information for a tourist wanting to come to Zambia including information on Visas and accommodation. The Zambia Tourism site also has a Facebook page which is updated reasonably often covering a lot of activities and events. However, the site seems to cover mostly events that have already occurred and not those about to occur and after their occurrence. Boosting such a page when there is an upcoming event will boost people's excitement and may trigger high responses. The page currently has well over 31, 000 likes.

Visit Zanzibar is a page on Facebook that shows the various activities in Zanzibar but the site has not had any update since 2014. This shows that either the person who was running the site abandoned it, but however the case there was no continuity. Sites need to have continuity in order to attract a perpetually growing following. By abandoning a page and it's the only page that appears when a tourist searches gives a wrong impression with regards to the destination. One this is certain, there is an

influx of international travelers visiting tourism destinations all over the world, [3].

Recommendations

The authors recommend the following to help African countries increase their tourist numbers:

- a. Have a social media page run by the tourist body managing all the tourism affairs of the country. These should be run and managed in such a manner as to provide all the necessary information required by a potential tourist.
- b. The pages should be boosted at least twice a month and also before a big event boosted every day until at least two weeks after the event has passed. The boosting should be international so that everyone who opens Facebook or searches the site sees the page.
- c. A one stop visa should also be made per region. E.g. one visa to cover all the countries in the Southern region, eastern region, Western Region etc. This can ease the process for tourists wishing to maximize their visits by visiting several countries at the same time.
- d. The use of International agencies should be limited to advertising; payment of fees should be made locally. In light of this, countries should set laws that subject foreign agencies to partner with local agencies so that the money paid for services does not remain in western

countries but brought to African countries.

- e. Countries should name towns, cities, airports after tourist attractions in order to create brand awareness and enhance the brand as an attraction, this will help tourists know exactly what they want and prefer. For example, most people assume Victoria Falls is in Victoria Falls town when in fact not.
- f. A summarized guide can be attached in pdf on Facebook for the viewer to be able to read through what the country has to offer and any other necessary information can be placed here.

Future Implications

The authors made the following conclusions in line with implications for African countries in line with what is prevailing in Western countries:

- (i) Countries need to have a social media page run by the tourist body managing all tourism affairs
- (ii) Could have a one stop visa should be made per region, to cover all countries in every region, to ease the process for tourists wishing to maximize their visits, by visiting several countries within the region at the same time
- (iii) Countries could create and enhance brand awareness of their tourist attractions by naming

cities or towns after the tourist attractions in those cities/towns. E.g. Victoria Falls could be renamed Livingstone Falls as it located in Livingstone.

- (iv) Have summarized guide attached in PDF on Facebook for the viewers to have access to the information about the countries.

Conclusion

The study concluded that Africa does and should use social media to market tourism and cost should no longer be a factor when it comes to marketing destinations on the African continent. Countries have to move with time and use the resources they have to market the various destinations in the various countries. Tourism has the potential to alleviate if not to eradicate poverty, therefore African countries should use it to the best of their abilities and maximize on the income generated through tourism. Technology has brought social media, which can make all this possible for African countries.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

[1] Amuquandoh, F.E and., Asafo-Adjei, R., (2013) "Traditional food preferences of tourists in Ghana", *British Food Journal*, Vol. 115 Issue: 7, pp.987-1002, retrieved 28th April 2017 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-11-2010-0197>

[2] Cawsey, T., and, Rowley, J., (2016) "Social media brand building strategies in B2B companies", *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 34 Issue: 6, pp. 754-776, retrieved 12th March 2017 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/MIP-04-2015-0079>

[3] Croce, V., (2016), " Can tourism confidence index improve tourism demand forecasts? ", *Journal of Tourism Futures*, Vol.2 Iss 1 pp. 6 – 21, retrieved 23rd January 2017, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JTF-12-2014-0026>

[4] Dieke, P.U.C, (2003) "Tourism in Africa's economic development: policy implications", *Management Decision*, Vol. 41 Issue: 3, pp.287-295, retrieved 29th April 2017, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00251740310469468>

[5] Fraga, V., (2016) "Azores tourism: a development and marketing strategy", *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, Vol. 8 Issue: 6, pp.705-710, retrieved 17th April 2017 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-09-2016-0045>

[6] Henderson, J.C., (2015), " Destination development and transformation: 50 years of

tourism after independence in Singapore ", *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, Vol. 1 Iss 4 pp. 269 – 281, retrieved 23rd January 2017 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/IJTC-05-2015-0011>

[7] Kim, A.J. and Ko, E. (2012), "Do social media marketing activities enhance customer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brands", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 65, pp. 1480-1486.

[8] Kaplan, A. and Haenlein, M. (2010), "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media", *Business Horizons*, Vol. 53 No. 1, pp. 59-68.

[9] Santos, M.C., Veiga, C., and Águas, P, (2016) "Tourism services: facing the challenge of new tourist profiles", *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, Vol. 8 Issue: 6, pp.654-669, retrieved 17th April 2017 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-09-2016-0048>

[10] Shen, H., Song, C., Li, M., and Jiang, Q., (2015) . "Shaping Destination Images through Social Networking Sites: A Case Study of Singapore" *In Advances in Hospitality and Leisure*, 89-107, retrieved 23rd January 2017 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/S1745-354220150000011006>

[11] Tsimonis, G., and , Dimitriadis, S., (2014) "Brand strategies in social media", *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 32 Issue: 3, pp.328-344, retrieved 12 March 2017 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/MIP-04-2013-0056>

- [12] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2010). The combination of tourism to trade and development, retrieved 29th April 2017 from https://unstats.un.org/unsd/wsd/docs/Geneva_wsd_report.pdf
- [13] Uzama, A., (2009) "Marketing Japan's travel and tourism industry to international tourists", International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, Vol. 21 Issue: 3, pp.356-365, retrieved 17th April 2017 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09596110910948341>
- [14] Viardot, E., (2017) "Branding in B2B: the value of consumer goods brands in industrial markets", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 32 Issue: 3, pp.337-346, retrieved 12th March 2017 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-11-2014-0225>
- [15] Ward, T., (2016) "Hotel chain development pipelines in Africa: implications for human capital Development", *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, Vol. 8 Issue: 2, pp.134-148, retrieved 29th April 2017 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-11-2015-0046>
- [16] World Bank, (2013). Tourism in Africa, Harnessing tourism for growth and improved livelihoods, retrieved 9th March 2017 from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/publication/africa-tourism-report-2013>
- [17] Xiang, Z. and Gretzel, V. (2010). Role of Social media in online travel information search. *Tourism Management* 31, 179-188
- [18] Yazdanparast, A, Joseph, M., and Muniz, F , (2016),"Consumer based brand equity in the 21st century: an examination of the role of social media marketing ", *Young Consumers*, Vol. 17 Iss 3 pp. 243 – 255, retrieved 3rd March 2017, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/YC-03-2016-00590>
- [19] Zambia Tourism (2017) <http://www.zambiatourism.com/>