

MICE Tourism Development Strategies: A Case of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

MICE Tourism is a form of tourism that focuses on meetings (M), incentive travel (I), conventions (C), and Exhibitions (E). The study sought to identify strategies to promote MICE tourism development in Zimbabwe. The study adopted a qualitative research design approach with key informants from the tourism industry in Zimbabwe being interview respondents. Data were thematically analyzed. The major finding indicates that Zimbabwe, as a country, is still yet to develop its MICE tourism sector, hence there are entrepreneurship opportunities for all. The key strategy is developing MICE Tourism infrastructure and superstructure by the government in partnership with the private sector in all the regional tourism destinations in the country. The paper recommends the adoption of public-private partnerships (PPPs) as a sustainable way towards MICE tourism business development in Zimbabwe. The government needs to create a conducive investment and business environment to attract foreign direct investment towards MICE tourism.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, MICE Tourism, Public-Private Partnerships, strategies, and tourism development.*

1. Introduction

The MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, conventions, and exhibitions) sector is one of the major tourism sectors that has continued to grow exponentially since the 1960s (Gichuki, Yobesia & Kihima, 2020) within the global tourism industry, particularly in Europe and America. MICE tourism is a type of tourism involving large groups of people that are brought together for a particular purpose (Khan, 2015; Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili, 2017), involving small meetings to major global conferences and exhibitions that draw thousands of people. MICE tourism is a multi-billion dollar form of tourism with more than 400 000 conferences and exhibitions being held worldwide (United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), 2017). MICE tourism has many benefits to nations and communities (Rwigema, 2020), including bringing direct and indirect revenue to host destinations among other social, economic and political benefits (Alananzeh, Al-Badarneh, Al-Mkhadmeh, and Jawabreh, 2018). MICE tourism draws profitable business to towns, cities, nations, and regions, together with a host of returns to economies as MICE tourists are usually high spenders (Page, 2003). For that reason, Zimbabwe needs to develop itself into a competitive MICE tourism destination given its endowment with unique natural and manmade attractions. Given the limited empirical studies on MICE tourism in Zimbabwe, this study proposes MICE tourism development strategies for Zimbabwe.

2. Background of the study

The tourism industry is a powerful vehicle for economic development globally. UNWTO (2019) reported that international tourist arrivals reached 1.5 billion in 2019 and is forecasted to hit nearly 2 billion by the year 2030. The tourism industry generated revenue amounting to 1.7 trillion dollars

in 2019. In terms of employment, it employs over 200 million people and one in ten jobs is in the tourism industry. Tourism contributes 30% of service exports and 10% of the global gross domestic product (GDP). In Africa, tourist arrivals grew by 7% in 2017 from 57.8 million in 2016 to 62.1 million in 2019. In Zimbabwe, tourist arrivals grew by 12% from 2.17 million in 2018 to 2.42 million in 2019 (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), 2017). Arrivals into Africa account for 2% of global arrivals. Tourism generates foreign currency thus helps in maintaining a good balance of payments position. It helps to alleviate poverty and is an engine for community development (CBTEs) (Nyaruwata, 2011; Runyowa, 2017; Stojanovska-Stefanova and Atanasoski, 2018).

Through the evolutionary developments of tourism, various forms of tourism have emerged as a response to the different tourism market needs and wants. Consequently, the following forms of tourism presently dominate the tourism landscape and nomenclature and among them include; mass tourism, religious tourism, medical tourism, village tourism, heritage tourism, cultural tourism, spa tourism, sports tourism, ecotourism, community tourism, and recently MICE Tourism (Timothy, 2018; UNWTO, 2017; Zimbabwe National Tourism Master Plan (ZNTMP), 2017). These forms are named after the purpose of travel. MICE tourism is the focus of this study as it is one of the 'newest' forms of tourism in Zimbabwe. MICE is an acronym for meetings (M), incentive travel (I), Conventions (C), and exhibitions (E) (Alananzeh, Al-Badarneh, Al-Mkhadmeh and Jawabreh, 2018).

MICE tourism is a specialized economic activity that involves facilitating the gathering of large groups of people in a place for a particular purpose (Katsitadze and Natsvlshvili, MICE tourism is a multi-billion dollar form of tourism with more than 400 000 conferences and exhibitions being held worldwide (UNWTO, 2017). Countries with MICE tourism facilities tend to rake huge economic benefits from this sector (Alananzeh, Al-Badarneh, Al-Mkhadmeh, and Jawabreh, 2018). For that reason, Zimbabwe needs to develop itself into a competitive MICE tourism destination given its unique attractions. Few studies have investigated MICE tourism development strategies in Zimbabwe and this study attempts to address that gap for the benefit of MICE tourism stakeholders in Zimbabwe.

3. Literature review

3.1 Theoretical Framework

3.1.1 Ansoff Matrix

The study is based on the Ansoff Matrix theory (1957). This matrix was created by Igor Ansoff, an American planning expert, in 1957. It is a strategic planning tool that links the organization's marketing strategy and its general strategic direction. It provides growth options in terms of both the product (new and existing) and the market (new and existing) that are available to every organization. Given that MICE tourism is arguably a new form of tourism that is set to shape the tourism industry in Zimbabwe; it can best be described as a new tourism sub-product that can help boost Zimbabwe's tourism fortunes, hence the use of the matrix in this study. The Ansoff matrix helps an organization and even a country to develop a MICE tourism strategy for improving market appeal and position through four growth options namely; market penetration, product development, market development, and diversification (Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2014).

Market penetration is one growth option in which the focus is on selling more of the existing product or services to the currently existing market to achieve growth in market share (Dawes, 2018). It is considered a low-risk strategy that can be pursued through dominating growth markets, driving out the competition, increasing existing customer usage, and retaining or increasing your product's market share. This strategy requires detailed market and competitor intelligence (Gurcaylilar-Yenidogan and Aksoy, 2018; Kotler, Bowen, and Makens, 2014).

Product development is where the organization's focus is on developing new products or services for the existing markets (Iyer and Church, 2018). This is a medium-risk strategy that requires a transformation in business operations. Product development requires research and development, assessment of customer needs and wants, and requires a clear path for brand extension. Normally organizations introduce new products through leveraging on the existing market's trust and goodwill with regards to existing products (Gurcaylilar-Yenidogan and Aksoy, 2018). In developing new products three routes are usually preferred namely; the new product that matches current purchasing habits, the new product which is associated with the current product, and the new product that revamps and refreshes the current product (Kotler, Bowen and Makens, 2014).

Market development strategy involves selling an existing product into new markets (Chen, 2019). This is a moderate risk strategy that can be achieved through having new distribution channels, going for new geographic markets, new product dimensions or packaging, and a new market segment created by different pricing. Market development requires a well-researched market, financial and operational data; it requires detailed market and competitor intelligence (Kotler, Bowen and Makens, 2014). Diversification strategy is a high-risk strategy that achieves growth by developing new products for completely new markets (Chen, 2019). It requires an assessment of risks, access to capital and willingness to invest, clear expectations of potential gains, and the right balance of risk versus reward (Iyer and Church, 2018). The Ansoff matrix theory underpins this study given that MICE tourism is a growth option for the tourism industry in Zimbabwe.

3.2 MICE tourism

The MICE tourism sector has been exponentially growing worldwide, broadening and diversifying the tourism industry (Kerdpitak, 2019; Rwigema, 2020). MICE relates to the hosting of events and activities, be they for business, sports, leisure, recreational purposes, etc. (Lau, 2016; Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili, 2017). Lau (2016) argue that MICE tourism involves events and activities in which the participants share a common interest and gather in a place and venue which must be arranged in advance, providing facilities necessary to satisfy the needs and wants of attendees to the gathering. MICE tourists require such facilities as shopping, entertainment, transport, food and drinks, and accommodation to mention a few. MICE tourists do engage in a variety of activities depending on availability within the place visited. These tourist activities are grouped into the land (sightseeing, game drives), water (boat cruising, fishing), and air (bunji jumping, balloon flight, the flight of angels) based activities (Cooper et al, 2005). Tourists normally engage in travel for multi reasons to such an extent that a single trip may be used to fulfill quite several needs and wants (Holloway and Humphrey, 2012). MICE tourism involves several components and players for its success and these include; corporate meeting planners, meetings and convention departments of hotels, conference cruise ships, food, and beverage managers, logistics firms, private tour operators, hotels and lodges, restaurants, travel agencies, incentive houses, tourism

boards, tourism trade associations, professional trade organizations among others (Lau, 2016; Khan, 2015; Rwigema, 2020). Below is a presentation of the MICE elements in more detail.

3.2.1 Meetings

Meetings are normally to share information, discussing and solving problems (Sylla, Chruscinski, Druzynska, Plociennik and Osak, 2015). Meetings do vary regarding type and purpose and they normally include board meetings, management meetings, shareholder meetings, training seminars, product launch meetings, strategic planning meetings, retreats. Meetings are normally among and between persons who know each other and are relatively small in size. Food and beverages are normally served during the meetings (Sylla et al., 2015).

3.2.2 Incentive travel

Lau (2016) defines incentive travel as a management tool for motivating and rewarding top performers in an organization, inclusive of sales representatives, managers, dealers etc. Incentive travel can even be extended to loyal customers. It is a way of recognizing peak performance to encourage and promote more of it (Robinson, 2012). Under incentive travel the top performers are sent on holiday trips; the trips can be national, regional, and international depending on organization policy (Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili, 2017). Incentive travel normally comes with hotel accommodation, tour packages, and planned activities and is not business-related but the emphasis is on leisure and recreational activities (Lau, 2016). In Africa and Zimbabwe, in particular, incentive travel is still at the development stage while in Europe and America it has reached the maturity stage (Lau, 2016). Several factors influence incentive travel and these include the economic performance of the sponsoring company, the pricing in the destination country, the political climate of the destination country, safety and security issues in the destination country among others (Robinson, 2012; Lau, 2016).

3.2.3 Conventions

Conventions are much bigger than meetings and they take place for several days (Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili, 2017). These are gatherings of people with common objectives that are organized and held to share ideas, opinions, and information of common interest to the gathered people (Lau, 2016). Normally to attend a convention one has to pay registration or convention fees which cover all the sessions, discussions, food, drinks, and associated activities. Normally, conventions are organized on an annual basis with a theme related to the convention's topic (Shereni, Mpofu, and Ngwenya, 2018). Conventions are held by professional associations, trade associations, regional or international bodies as well as academic institutions. Conventions can also be hosted by charities and political parties. Conventions normally generate income for the association and require quite a considerable amount of time in planning (Robinson, 2012).

3.2.4 Exhibitions

Exhibitions are marketing-oriented (Shereni, Mpofu, and Ngwenya, 2018). They are held to showcase existing and new products, including building awareness through the provision of information to potential buyers and stakeholders who have an interest in the organization (Sylla, 2015; Shereni, Mpofu and Ngwenya, 2018). Exhibitions are categorized into three, namely; business to consumer (B2C) that are open to the public such as shows, fairs, and expositions; business to business (B2B) which is restricted to organizational or business buyers such as trade shows, trade fairs, and trade expos and lastly a mixed exhibition which is both open to the public

and also for trade. The combined exhibition normally begins with trade days restricted to business buyers and ends with public days where those interested pay an entrance fee to attend the show. Most exhibitions are combined to produce a hybrid outcome. Exhibitions can take several days depending on the size and industry type. During exhibitions, the exhibitor, that is, the company showcasing its product rents or buys exhibition space for purposes of meeting with potential buyers and other stakeholders. Exhibitions are important in that they provide unique opportunities to get sales leads, disseminate new product information, network with the right people, gather the latest information about competitors as well as help the company build a strong image (Shereni, Mpfu and Ngwenya, 2018).

Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili (2017) argue that MICE tourism is the larger and significant part of business tourism. The International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) reports that at least 400 000 conferences and exhibitions are held every year with the largest exhibitions such as the Worldwide Exhibition for Incentive, Travel, Meetings and Events (IMEX) in Germany and European Incentive and Business Travel and Meetings Exhibitions in Spain draw more than 3000 delegates from over a hundred countries. The MICE tourism market is very attractive and is growing at a growth rate of 5% every year (UNWTO report, 2017). Furthermore, the UNWTO report (2017) states that 60% of the tourism industry is made up of business tourism; business tourists are high spenders as compared to leisure tourists.

The UNWTO report (2014) praised MICE Tourism as a clean industry that promotes environmental quality and sustainability. MICE tourism promotes and supports other business sectors, meetings create and spread knowledge worldwide, meetings build the community profile, and meetings promote global understanding and cooperation (UNWTO, 2016). The foregoing makes the promotion and development of MICE tourism not only desirable but is needful for the achievement of the rapid development of tourism. Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili (2017) stated that though the main purpose of MICE tourism is a large business, MICE tourists also engage in sightseeing, recreational activities among other tourism activities. The availability of MICE tourism facilities in a country can act as a major tourist draw card apart from the natural tourist attractions. In terms of ranking, top MICE tourism major markets are China, USA, Germany, Japan, United Kingdom, France, South Korea, Italy, Brazil, and India, with Western Europe having the largest share at 40% of the total tourism world market (Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili, 2017).

However, the MICE tourism sector faces both opportunities and threats from technological developments and advancements. This is exemplified by the introduction of internet-based or driven meetings applications such as the ZOOM, Microsoft teams, Blue Button, Google meet among others. These meeting applications were recently adopted in response to travel and interactions restrictions that were imposed to curtail the spread of the COVID 19 virus. Thus, a greater part of the business meetings is now being held online, taking away a significant part of the potential MICE tourism business as there is no longer a need for delegates to congregate into some physical space such as conventions centres. On the other hand, the technological developments present innovation opportunities on the part of MICE stakeholders as necessity is the mother of invention. As much as business meetings have been taken over by online conferencing platforms, they are other forms such as festivals, sporting events such as soccer, Olympics, trade fairs, travel shows, agricultural shows, entertainment shows among many that

remain needing people to congregate into some physical space thus bringing many benefits to the MICE sector and the tourism economies.

3.3 MICE Tourism in Zimbabwe

MICE tourism in Zimbabwe is underdeveloped. It holds much potential if the requirements are put in place. Harare, the country's capital city's biggest indoor convention centre holds a maximum of 2500 guests, which is not adequate if one takes into account that MICE draws crowds. This means that Zimbabwe needs to develop its capacity to host MICE events. Even in terms of outdoor events, the country last built the National Sports Stadium with a capacity of 60000 guests soon after independence. The state of the outdoor MICE venues is below international standards to the extent that in the year 2000, the country lost out the bid to host the biannual soccer event, the Africa Cup of Nations because the facilities were adjudged to be below-set standards. Thankfully, the nation has been able to host regional events such as the COSAFA Cup, All Africa games in 1995 among other regional and national sporting events. In a show of capacity, Zimbabwe co-hosted the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) general assembly together with Zambia in the year 2013.

However, conference venues in hotels and lodges dotted around the country are relatively small with the majority of them with an average seating capacity of 100 delegates. This limits the capacity to host bigger events, thus affecting business returns in comparison to venues in South Africa for example. Thus, there are MICE tourism development opportunities in Zimbabwe that can be exploited for the growth of the tourism industry.

3.4 Factors influencing the choice of a MICE tourism destination

MICE tourism buyers or consumers consider several factors before settling for a specific destination. The factors that are considered include; the cost of space, cost of labor, cost of living, manpower quality, conventions space size, conventions space availability, exhibitions space, exhibitions space availability, location is also a huge determinant, trade visitor size, the reputation of the destination, the reputation of the conference center, infrastructure, superstructure, cost of airfare, climate and weather, safety and security issues, political situation and the availability of attractions (Khan 2015). A look at these determinant factors shows that the most influential factors are related to infrastructure and superstructure. All the major MICE tourism destinations of the world such as China, the USA, Spain, France, Germany, the United Kingdom among others are characterized by; they boast of the best infrastructure in terms of the transportation network, big and well-equipped convention centers, they do have qualified and experienced personnel, they do have National Conventions Bureaus to drive MICE tourism through bidding for international conventions and events such as the soccer world cup, the other striking, and the enduring feature is that they have good and high performing economies, they put much emphasis on total quality management in everything they do, they do have cutting edge information communication technology infrastructure, they are innovative and they do have excellent tourism facilities in terms of hotels, lodges, conference facilities, and conventions and sports facilities. Politically these countries are generally peaceful and stable (Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili, 2017; Sylla et al, 2015). A destination that has positives in all these factors tends to have a successful MICE tourism industry.

However, several factors hinder the development of the MICE tourism industry which among them include; lack of awareness, lack of direct flights, uncomfortable flight time, pricing of tourist facilities, poor transport network, non-existence of flights, a bad economy, and political instability plus lack of requisite infrastructure and superstructure. MICE tourism development in Zimbabwe cannot happen by chance but there is a need to identify and implement effective strategies.

3.5 Benefits of MICE tourism

Several countries are developing their MICE tourism for it brings a lot of benefits (Lau, 2016; Sylla et al., 2015). When one considers the competitive bidding associated with hosting major sporting events like the soccer world cup, Africa Cup of Nations, etc., it is clear proof that MICE tourism is highly beneficial. MICE tourism benefits are both direct and indirect and some of the identified benefits are; it brings in a huge amount of income including foreign exchange, MICE evens out tourism demand by eliminating the aspect of seasonality, creates jobs for the host community as it is largely labor-intensive, boosts economic activity within the host community as the gathered people need to be catered for, MICE builds and improve the host nation's image, it enhances secondary businesses and the independent tourist attractions also benefit as MICE tourists take time to visit the attractions independently or as part of the program. MICE tourism is also beneficial in that it is flexible as any country can bid for any MICE event; as long as the facilities are adequate the event can be held anywhere (Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili, 2017; Lau, 2016; Sylla et al, 2015, Robinson, 2012).

Furthermore, MICE tourists spend much higher than leisure tourists such that the growth of MICE tourism is directly related to the growth of income earned by a particular country (Lau, 2016). MICE tourism eliminates seasonality as it can be effectively organized around off-season periods to counter the effects of seasonality (Robinson, 2012). It strengthens and expands partnership opportunities for the delegates who attend these MICE events. MICE tourism allows information and knowledge to spread wider and faster especially in this era of globalization (Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili, 2017). It attracts the much-needed foreign direct investment to a country and helps local businesses to improve their business standards to a global level hence improve the overall competitiveness for the good of the economy. The infrastructure and superstructure developments for MICE tourism can also help the host community as this infrastructure is also used to foster other economic activities. Additionally, given the fact that MICE tourism brings in people from different countries in large numbers, there is tremendous support to other economic sectors such as agriculture and the generality of the economy. MICE tourism provides a conducive platform for sharing cutting-edge ideas, knowledge, and technologies as well as promoting cultural exchange, tolerance, cohesion, peace, and mutual understanding among countries (Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili, 2017; Lau, 2016; Sylla et al, 2015).

3.6 Empirical literature

3.6.1 MICE tourism development strategies

There are strategies proposed in literature which other countries have implemented as part of their MICE development strategy. These strategies include; appropriate infrastructure and superstructure development including construction of convention centers, high-level hotel facilities, transport network transformation, intensive marketing, national MICE industry leadership organization, market and empower the regional tourist regions to host MICE events, market place investment and resources, transport infrastructure, strategic marketing

communications, MICE tourism skills training and education and continuous engagement (Katsitadze and Natsvlshvili, 2017; Lau, 2016).

In addition MICE tourism development can be enhanced by; creating a conducive environment, building roads, education, and training of MICE personnel, reduce congestion, and building standard facilities. Furthermore, MICE tourism development can better be achieved through improving accessibility, both virtual and physical, stakeholder support, the existence of interesting places and attractions, improvement of the destinations image, availability of well-trained people able to undertake MICE tourism activities, and availability of large scale meeting facilities (Nasrullah, Rendra, Hatta, Cahyani & Palippui, 2018). The next section presents the methodology adopted in this study.

4. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design as it provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study (Creswell, 2014). This was a national study focusing on Zimbabwe as an emerging MICE tourism destination. Key informant interviews with respondents from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), Ministry of Environment, Tourism and Hospitality Industry (MOETHI), The Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe (TBCZ), and Hospitality Association of Zimbabwe (HAZ) and document analysis were the data collection methods. Hotel managers were also respondents in the study given that hotels are the most dominant venues for MICE tourism activities. The respondents were drawn using quota, purposive, and convenience sampling techniques from across Zimbabwe. In total, a sample of 20 respondents was used for the study comprising of a diversity of key informants from the tourism industry, guided by the saturation theory. Interview questions were drawn from the literature. The study participants were informed of the study objectives first; their rights with regards to anonymity consent, confidentiality, and withdrawal from the study were explained and observed throughout the research. The interviews were carried out via email, WhatsApp, and telephone from November 2019 to January 2020 for convenience purposes (Woyo, 2021). Complementary data on MICE tourism in Zimbabwe was obtained from documents such as the National Tourism Policy of Zimbabwe (2014), Zimbabwe National Tourism Master plan (ZNTMP, 2014), Zimbabwe Tourism Authority reports among other scientific journal articles and institutional papers. Data were thematically analyzed through which the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, followed by rereading the transcribed data, data familiarization, reviewing, and defining themes. Results and discussion were presented below in detailed narrations following the dominant themes.

5. Results and discussion

Table 1 below presents the profile of study participants for a comprehensive understanding of the context of the study findings for informed decision making (Woyo, 2021).

Table 1: Summary of demographic characteristics of study participants

Respondent	Designation	Organizational type	Gender	Age	Experience	Location
R1	General Manager	Hotel	Male	48	18 years	Harare
R2	Marketing Manager	TBCZ	Male	44	15 years	Harare
R3	General Manager	Hotel	Female	45	17 years	Victoria Falls
R4	General Manager	Hotel	Male	41	14 years	Mutare
R5	Marketing Manager	ZTA	Female	40	13 years	Bulawayo
R6	Tourism officer	MECTHI	Female	36	10 years	Harare
R7	MICE Manager	ZTA	Female	40	14 years	Harare
R8	Tourism Officer	MECTHI	Female	43	15 years	Harare
R9	MICE Manager	ZTA	Male	38	12 years	Harare
R10	Tourism officer	MECTHI	Male	39	10 years	Harare
R11	Manager	TBCZ	Female	40	14 years	Harare
R12	General Manager	Hotel	Female	47	17years	Gweru
R13	Tourism officer	MECTHI	Female	38	10 years	Harare
R14	General Manager	Hotel	Male	48	18 years	Kwekwe
R15	General Manager	Hotel	Female	38	14 years	Kariba
R16	General Manager	Hotel	Male	46	16 years	Beitbridge
R17	General Manager	Hotel	Female	40	15 years	Nyanga
R18	Area Manager	ZTA	Female	43	16 years	Victoria Falls
R19	General Manager	Hotel	Female	40	12 years	Victoria Falls
R20	General Manager	Hotel	Male	45	17 years	Masvingo

The next section presents MICE tourism development strategies for Zimbabwe

5.1 MICE tourism development strategies for Zimbabwe

5.1.1 Infrastructure and superstructure development

The study found out that one of the key strategies to promote MICE tourism is the development of infrastructure and superstructure. Respondents noted that in terms of MICE infrastructure and superstructure facilities such as roads, rail, air, conventions centers, hotels, lodges, Zimbabwe is still underdeveloped to attract the right clientele both in volume and in value. Respondents noted that,

Respondent 5, *“MICE thrives in an environment with supportive facilities in terms of conference centres and accommodation to service delegates eh eh , that is primarily fundamental.”*

Respondent 8, *“Appropriate infrastructure remains a key driver of MICE tourism development and Zimbabwe is not an exception.”*

All the top MICE tourism destinations in Europe (France, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom), America (USA, Brazil) as well as Asia (China, Japan, India) do have superb MICE tourism facilities (Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili, 2017). Accordingly, if Zimbabwe is to develop its MICE Tourism, it has to aggressively invest in the relevant infrastructure and superstructure.

5.1.2 Information and Communication Technology

Respondents do concur that for MICE tourism in Zimbabwe to develop there is a need for the government and the private sector to partner in information and communication technology investment. The Internet is now a basic requirement in the tourism sector in general and as for the MICE tourism sector, it is a necessity as noted below;

Respondent 1, *“We are now in the 4th industrial revolution in which the internet of things is becoming the in thing such that for Zimbabwe to become competitive MICE destination there is need for continuous serious investment in the modern and appropriate information and communication technologies.”*

Respondent 4, *“We are now in the 4th industrial revolution, and investments in ICT are a prerequisite for the development of MICE tourism in Zimbabwe.”*

Given that MICE tourists travel for business, the need to remain connected online is very key. The very fact that they gather for information sharing, means ICT is a requirement for any MICE Tourism growth and development (Buhalis, 2008).

5.1.3 Accessibility

MICE tourism development in Zimbabwe is also dependent on accessibility. Respondents pointed out poor accessibility as one of the impediments in Zimbabwe. Air Zimbabwe, the national carrier is almost grounded, the road network is also poor with potholes found even in major highways and the occurrence of accidents is higher. And the rail network is also poor. This is captured in the following comments;

Respondent 18, *“One of the key drivers of MICE tourism development, without any shred of doubt is the issue of accessibility, Zimbabwe as a destination needs to put right its*

transport system both in urban and rural areas, the roads, railways, the airline, all need attention.”

Respondent 6, *“Zimbabwe has to address the issue of accessibility among other priorities if the country is to become a competitive MICE destination”*

Respondent 12, *“MICE tourism by its nature involves movement of people, meaning the issue of accessibility is a major one if Zimbabwe is to develop its MICE tourism”*

MICE tourists prefer accessible destinations and the top destinations are those that are highly accessible (Lau, 2016, Sylla et al, 2015).

5.1.4 Amenities and ancillary services

The study found out that for MICE tourism to develop, there is a need to invest in good accommodation and catering facilities including retailing and other tourist services. There is need for a well-functioning banking system that allows international transactions. The development of telecommunications, post, and other services used by tourists, investment in four and five-star hotels in Zimbabwe with world-class facilities are also key in promoting MICE tourism. Respondents commented that,

Respondent 15, *“Our hotel capacity as a country is generally low and this limits the size of MICE events that the country can host as delegates will not have places to sleep”*

Respondent 4. *“In terms of the standard of the hotel facilities that the country has, they are below 3 stars and they do not compete with those in neighbouring countries such as South Africa”*

Respondent 10, *“Our banking system has bottlenecks concerning international payments plus the local tourism enterprises, a good number of them lacks international payments systems in place.”*

Respondent 20, *“Look, only Harare, Bulawayo, and Victoria falls have acceptable facilities for MICE events. At a national level, there is a need for investments not only in venues but also in hotels and lodges if the country is to become a strong MICE destination.”*

Thus, MICE tourists are largely business tourists who require somewhat high-level facilities that offer the greatest convenience (Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili, 2017).

5.1.5 Public-private partnerships (PPPs)

The study found out that public-private partnerships (PPPs) are key to MICE tourism development in Zimbabwe. MICE tourism is government-led and private sector driven (ZNTMP, 2017, Zimbabwe National Tourism Policy (ZNTMP), 2014). Respondents pointed out that the government should take a lead role in the development of MICE Tourism. It has to create a conducive environment for both local and foreign direct investment given the fact that MICE tourism is capital intensive and the government cannot do it alone. Respondents, in support of stakeholder partnerships, remarked that,

Respondent 2, *“Partnership among all the tourism stakeholders in the public and private sector is a necessary ingredient in the development of MICE tourism in Zimbabwe”.*

Respondent 5, *“MICE tourism promotion and development requires the active and collaborative participation of every stakeholder for it to be successful.”*

Respondent 13. *“Truly speaking MICE tourism development can never be the responsibility of the government or the private sector in their capacities but it requires working synergies to be put in place to achieve success.”*

5.1.6 Political stability

The study suggests that a stable and peaceful political environment attracts MICE Tourism. This was evidenced by the following comments by respondents,

Respondent 3, *“MICE thrives in a politically peaceful environment as it draws different people from different regions.”*

Respondent 15, *“MICE tourists place their safety ahead of anything and they prefer politically stable and safe destination.”*

Respondent 16, *“Peace is a key driver of tourism development of any nature. Check the World Cup (soccer) is never hosted in a politically unstable environment.”*

Top MICE tourism destinations are politically stable and largely peaceful (Khan, 2015; Rwigema, 2020) hence Zimbabwe needs to keep promoting a stable, democratic, and peaceful political environment and atmosphere. MICE tourism is very sensitive to political strife and disharmony as MICE tourists regard their security and safety highly (Holloway and Humphrey, 2012).

5.1.7 Economic stability

The study indicates that a stable and growing economy is a driver of MICE tourism. All the respondents concurred that one of the key factors that have been hindering the development of MICE tourism in Zimbabwe has been the poor state of the economy characterized by a liquidity crisis, company closures, unemployment, and disinvestment plus a currency crisis. Respondents commented that,

Respondent 17, *“The bad economy characterized by hyperinflation, unemployment plus little disposable income is a huge deterrent to MICE tourism development in Zimbabwe.”*

Respondent 19, *“MICE tourism thrives in a vibrant economy for there is a positive correlation between economic status and MICE tourism development.”*

Respondent 1, *“Just sort out the economy and everything will fall into place, period. It’s the economy that needs to be righted.”*

Thus, a growing economy attracts business tourists (Khan, 2015) and MICE events are usually more in stable and growing economies than in those suffering from recession, unemployment, and inflation (Katsitadze and Natsvlshvili, 2017).

5.1.8 Intensive marketing

The study found out that MICE tourism development is also dependent on marketing. Respondents revealed that the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) needs to craft and implement a Zimbabwe MICE tourism plan supported by the Tourism Business Council of Zimbabwe (TBCZ). Respondents remarked that,

Respondent 4, *“ZTA as the DMO must take serious leadership in crafting a MICE tourism marketing plan for Zimbabwe, this is so critical.”*

Respondent 8, *“There is need for a MICE tourism Marketing plan that must be developed through a consultative process that includes, ZTA, TBCZ and all tourism stakeholders for MICE tourism to develop in Zimbabwe.”*

There is a need to invest in intensive MICE tourism destination marketing if Zimbabwe is to develop and compete with other destinations. This finding is supported by Shereni, Mpofu, and Ngwenya (2018), Lau (2016) Khan (2015) who concluded that destination marketing is the key driver of tourism growth and development.

5.1.9 Devolvement of National MICE tourism leadership organization

The study found out that there is a need to have a national MICE tourism leadership structure to drive the development of this important form of tourism. Respondents emphasized that in the following comments,

Respondent 14, *“MICE tourism development can be achieved if ZTA as DMO forms a national directorate on MICE that is devolved to the provinces since tourism is community-based.”*

Respondent 16, *“The National Conventions Bureau at ZTA needs to be capacitated, expanded and devolved to all provinces of the country to drive MICE tourism development.”*

Katsitadze and Natsvlishvili (2017), Sylla et al (2015), Khan (2015), do emphasize the critical role played by a national MICE leadership organization in driving the promotion and development of MICE tourism in any destination. Indeed, Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, which is a destination management organization for Zimbabwe, has the national convention bureau as a department. However, the department is still new and small and it needs to be expanded and to be well supported and funded in its programs for it to have a meaningful impact.

5.1.10 MICE tourism skills training and education

The study shows that human capital development is one of the key strategies to develop MICE Tourism in Zimbabwe. Respondents remarked that,

Respondent 7, *“There is need for education and training targeted at equipping people with MICE tourism management skills.”*

Respondent 20, *“Capacitating people with MICE tourism specific knowledge, skills and values is one of the key factors in promoting MICE tourism development; knowledge is power baba.”*

MICE tourism is a people-centered industry that is largely a service hence skills are a prerequisite (Khan, 2015). There is a need for those who work in the MICE tourism sector to develop the necessary skills in customer care, social and people skills including the technical skills necessary to provide total quality MICE tourism service. Tertiary education institutions such as Universities and colleges should see to it that they introduce MICE tourism training in their existing tourism programs. More so, they can introduce standalone MICE tourism degree and diploma programs in their curricula. This will go a long way in enhancing the development of MICE tourism in Zimbabwe.

6. MICE tourism Development Strategies Framework for Zimbabwe

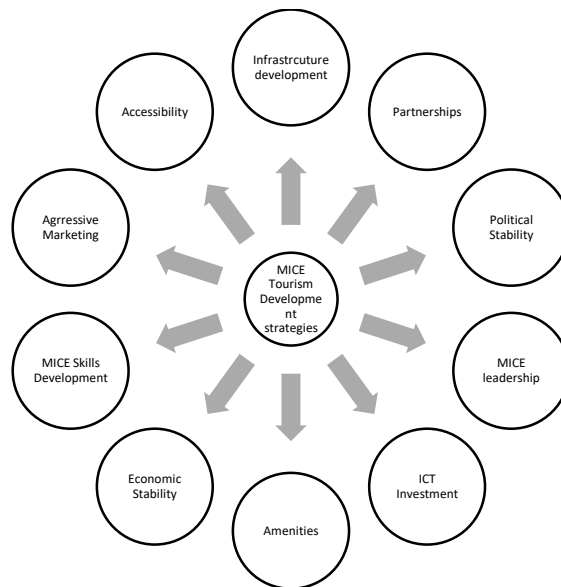


Figure 1: MICE tourism development strategies for Zimbabwe

Source: Author's compilation

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, Zimbabwe is still underdeveloped in terms of MICE tourism. The MICE tourism development strategies which Zimbabwe can adopt and implement include; infrastructure and superstructure development, a stable and growing economy, a stable and peaceful political climate, improved accessibility, the development of appropriate amenities and ancillary services, MICE tourism skills training and education as well as the use public-private partnerships in MICE tourism development.

8. Recommendations

The paper recommends the adoption of public-private partnerships (PPPs) as a sustainable way towards MICE tourism development in Zimbabwe. Moreso, the government should create a conducive investment, business, and political environment to attract local and foreign direct investment towards MICE tourism.

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