



Marketing Strategies as a tool for Destination Competitiveness: A case of Gaborone City

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ABSTRACT: The main purpose of this paper was to explore marketing strategies as a tool for destination competitiveness. This study's specific objective is to explore social media marketing and attraction of visitors. Study area is Gaborone City in Botswana and a literature review approach method guided by the comparative advantage theory was applied in this paper. The outcome of this study can be useful to Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) in considering social media marketing as a tool to attract visitors.

Keywords: Destination competitiveness, Gaborone, marketing strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism continued to be a key driver of the global economic recovery, and a vital contributor to job creation, poverty alleviation, environmental protection and multicultural peace and understanding across the globe [1]. In 2018, there were 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals in the world [2]. In addition, the growing competition between cities has resulted in the increasing usage of marketing methods in their struggle to attract tourism [3, 4].

The current challenges facing Botswana Tourism venture is poor accessibility, limited income generation and heavy dependence on external donor funding, inadequate marketing and the stale 1996 Tourism Policy [5]. The current policy and legislative framework does not position Botswana competitively in the global market, and the major setback currently is that Botswana does not have a tourism marketing strategy [6].

Social media as a tool of tourism marketing can greatly enhance the destination's reputation and convince destination marketers that they are an integral part of the marketing strategies. On the other hand, tourism is an industry that is at the forefront of internet use and online transactions [7]. The development of a strategic tourism plan for a destination is an articulation of the strategic priorities and direction that have been identified by stakeholders for the planning, development, management and marketing of a destination and is essential for the long-term success and sustainability [7].

Botswana Tourism Organisation (Botswana Tourism (BTO) is a corporate body established through the Botswana Tourism Organisation Act 2009 with the mandate to: (1) plan, develop and implement tourism marketing and promotion strategies for Botswana, (2) determine and advice Government on policies as well as implement such policies, (3) establish and expand local and international travel trade networks, manage and coordinate Botswana tourism promotional and publicity programmes, provide market research information and marketing intelligence, (4) grading and classification of tourist accommodation facilities, (5) promote and improve industry standards, conduct tourism awareness campaigns in and outside the country, (6) develop and improve existing tourism opportunities and diversity and diversify the sector into other forms of tourism business ventures between citizens and foreign investors.

Botswana relies on web-based tourism because majority of the tourists are from the top ten European tourist countries and therefore, they need to appreciate the destination through social media before they could make a decision to visit [8]. It is therefore important to consider social media marketing as a strategic tool for destination competitiveness. Tourism marketing should therefore be strategically planned in order to be successful.

To contribute to literature on marketing strategies and destination competitiveness, the main objective of this paper is to explore marketing strategies as a tool for destination competitiveness in Gaborone City. Furthermore, past studies show that social media marketing is one of the trendy inbound marketing techniques while attraction of visitors to destination for tourism purposes is on-going worldwide. Therefore, this paper is motivated to conduct a literature review approach method guided by the comparative advantage theory with a specific objective of exploring social media marketing and attraction of visitors.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework for this study is guided by the comparative advantage theory to explore marketing strategies as a tool for destination competitiveness by specifically studying social media marketing and attraction of visitors. The comparative advantage theory was developed by Ricardo in 1817 and assumed that there are trade benefits even in the absence of absolute advantage [9]. For example, the availability of accessible natural resources such as beaches, sunny weather, or natural area become a comparative advantage in the tourism product function and explains why destinations with these elements have specialized in tourism [10]. Even lakes can be a comparative advantage in the tourism product function as per study of Mkwizu, (2019) [11] while previous studies in Botswana by Stone & Nyaupane (2018, 2019) [12], [13] emphasized on the need to promote other tourism products and consider the local tourist gaze in order for domestic tourism to grow and be competitive. On marketing strategies, previous scholars Choo (1999), Ibrahim (2018), Kotler & Gertner (2002) define marketing strategies as the tools and activities that are developed by the destination management in order to achieve the selected tourism market's objectives as well as involving the adoption of marketing concepts that fits the changing circumstances that characterize tourism with the aim to increase the competitiveness of a destination [14, 15, 16].

Marketing strategies is also defined as an organisation integrated pattern of decisions that specify its crucial choices concerning products, markets, marketing activities and marketing resources in the creation, communication and/or delivery of products that offer value to customers in exchange with the organization and thereby enables the organization to achieve specific objectives [17]. On the other hand, Kumar *et al.*, (2012) [18] refers to marketing strategy as a link to segmentation targeting, positioning, branding and marketing mix of the company. Similarly, Kotler & Armstrong (2012) [19] stated that marketing mix is made up of factors which are product, price, place and promotion (the four Ps). Further research by Jashi (2013) [20] noted that social media is a crucial tool for success in business. Choi *et al.* (2016) [21] defined social media marketing as engaging with customers through Social Network Sites (SNSs).

Social media marketing can also be referred to as internet-based online media in which individuals with common interests, goals and practices engage in social interactions and share information and experiences through social media such as SNSs like Facebook, photo sharing like Flickr and video sites like YouTube [22]. In this study, marketing strategies is the ability to achieve marketing objectives through the use of social media marketing.

Literature on destination competitiveness reveals various definitions of the concept of destination competitiveness. UNWTO (2017) [23] defines destination as "a physical space in which a visitor spends at least one night. It includes tourism products such as support services and attractions, and tourism resources within the consumer's travel time. It has physical and administrative boundaries defining its management, images, perceptions and the place's competitiveness in the market [23]. Previous authors have defined destination competitiveness as the ability of a destination to maintain its market position and share, create and integrate value-added products that sustain its resources while maintaining market position relative to competitors [24], [25], [26]. In this paper, destination competitiveness refers to the ability of a destination to attract visitors to the destination for tourism purposes.

Further literature notes that marketing strategy is a reflection of activities the destination management and will evolve on the selected tourism market and what tools to achieve these objectives will exploit [27]. Furthermore, the way the strategy process is structured is crucial for the result of the strategy context, and the content of the current strategy is crucial for the strategy in the future [27].

Vinerean (2017) [28] expanded literature on marketing strategies by examining the strategic importance of social media marketing with a theoretical and conceptual conclusion that social media marketing especially the online framework such as photo, video and podcast generated by a consumer gains more traction online than a similar type of content generated by a company or organization. In South Africa, a study by [29] used a linear model to research social media marketing communication and found that social media marketing had a positive influence on attitudes of young consumers who were Generation Z cohort. In China, Guillet *et al.*, (2015) [30] studied social media marketing in tourism and found that majority of hotels actively and consistently use Sina Weibo and Wechat platforms for their social media marketing.

Other scholars Khan & Raina (2014) [31] did a study in India by connecting the concepts of destination competitiveness and marketing with an argument that examining destination competitiveness and marketing helps in assessing the importance of competitive characteristics at tourism destinations. Khan & Raina (2014) [31] noted that marketing strategies drive destinations to compete and destination competitiveness can comprise of the size of National Parks and Nature Reserves and beauty. Khan & Raina (2014) [31] concluded that the sustainability of the destination's attractiveness and potentiality of the economic growth depends on the ability to maintain and integrate infrastructure and other components.

Perna *et al.*, (2018) [32] carried out a competitive destination study by comparing Spain and Portugal and found that destination competitiveness was identified in terms of seasonality, market demand, supply adjustment and accommodation prices. A similar study by [33] compared tourism between two countries (Botswana and Tanzania) but the focus was on selfie usage and domestic tourism. However, in this study the destination competitiveness focuses on attraction of visitors.

Further research by Jashi (2013) [20] explored social media marketing for promoting the tourism industry in Georgia and advocated that there is lack of investigation on the impact of social media marketing on tourist behaviour. In 2013, Paquette mentioned that despite initial progress by researchers, development in this area of social media marketing has been limited [34]. Therefore, this paper fills the knowledge gap by exploring marketing strategies as a tool for destination competitiveness with a focus on social media marketing and attraction of visitors in Gaborone City in Botswana.

Gaborone City has attractions namely the three Dikgosi (Chiefs) monument, Bonnington Farm Silos monument, Manyana rock paintings and Mmasechele cave, Livingstone tree, Lentswe la baratani/Baratani hill, Kobokwe cave and Ntsweng [35]. The three Dikgosi monument is the site that attracts higher numbers of visitors (200 tourists weekly) compared to the rest of the other sites such as Bonnington silos is 300 tourists monthly [35]. The high numbers of visitors to three Dikgosi monument is mainly because of the history of the three chiefs; the site is located in the heart of the Central Business District (CBD) surrounded by malls, offices, hotels; and accessibility to the site is easy [35]. However, Dewah (2014) [35] noted the competitiveness of the sites faces development barriers such as minimal marketing and absence of national strategy on cultural and heritage tourism as well as lack of ready product to meet demand of visitors like restaurants and lodging.

Dewah (2014) [35] suggested that nature based tourism as the major attractions in Botswana should be incorporated within cultural and heritage tourism. Bester (2016) [36] highlighted that there were 620,000 (28.4%) internet users in Botswana. Further research conducted in Botswana by [37] noted that Gaborone City does not have a clear image that comes to the residents and the visitors' minds because of lack of official documentation pertaining to the city and absence of integrated branding strategy.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper adopted a literature review approach of reports, conference papers, and journal articles to gain information on marketing strategies and destination competitiveness so as to achieve the main objective of this study which explored marketing strategies as a tool for destination competitiveness in Gaborone City located in Botswana, and specifically explored social media marketing and attraction of visitors. A similar study by [38] adopted the use of reports as a literature review approach to examine marketing strategies in Pakistan and found that social media is important for online tourism in the context of planning trips and that it has created pressure for people to visit places. Other scholars [39] in studying marketing for tourism have drawn study results by adopting available secondary data as a methodology approach.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Existing literature revealed that there are inadequate marketing strategies for Gaborone City thus limiting its competitiveness as a destination for tourism. Furthermore, social media marketing although regarded as a modern internet-based marketing tool there are challenges in using this modern alternative tool due to minimal marketing done for Gaborone City [5, 6, 35, 37, 38, 39].

In relation to attraction of visitors, the number of visitors to various tourist sites within Gaborone City varies. For instance, the historical site called three Dikgosi monument receives the highest number of visitors both locally and internationally compared to other sites within Gaborone City. Dewah (2014) [35] noted that the main reasons the three Dikgosi monument is seen as a favourite attraction among visitors is due to the history of the three chiefs, the site is located in the heart of the CBD surrounded by malls, offices, hotels, and is easily accessible.

V. CONCLUSION

Therefore, this study concludes that in exploring marketing strategies as a tool for destination competitiveness for Gaborone City, there is a need to specifically explore social media marketing and attraction of visitors. Attraction of visitors to destinations within the city is highly dependent on factors such as location, surrounding infrastructure and accessibility. Social media marketing with its advantage of internet-based communication faces challenges due to minimal marketing efforts.

The implications are that from a comparative advantage perspective, attraction of visitors to Gaborone City show that sites such as three Dikgosi monument received more visitors than sites like Bonnington silos due to advantages such as location within the City center, infrastructure and accessibility although all sites experience minimal marketing. Due to evidence of literature on minimal marketing, the practical and policy implications are for tourism stakeholders to engage modern marketing strategies such as social media marketing particularly social media platforms like Facebook since the population of Botswana as well as those visitors outside Botswana to Gaborone City sites use internet-based communication.

There are limitations in this study and these were exploring marketing strategies as a tool for destination competitiveness for Gaborone City only, and used purely literature review as a methodology approach.

Future studies can explore a similar research within and outside Gaborone City by applying quantitative and qualitative methods to further understand marketing strategies as a tool in destination competitiveness in terms of social media marketing and attraction of visitors.

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