Digital marketing adoption by National Tourism Organisations (NTOs): A Zimbabwean perspective.

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Abstract: **The importance of adopting digital marketing in this era of rapid globalisation can't be overlooked. According to several authors (e.g Bennett and Buhalis, 2003; Buhalis & Law, 2008) the internet is perceived as a powerful and effective marketing tool in tourism. It is consistently accepted as a valuable tool for distributing information and communication, and maintaining a corporate website is vital for the maintenance of relationships established between companies, by strengthening relationships with the public, and especially with customers, thus capturing a larger market segment. It goes without saying that digital marketing technologies have dramatically changed the way tourists and travellers communicate with each other, exchange views about their holidays, interact with the tourist industry in general as they organize their trips (pre-trip), or comment on services offered at hotels, restaurants (on-trip or post-trip) among others. The research sought to establish the digital marketing strategies adopted by Zimbabwe Tourism Authority; to establish the benefits of implementing digital marketing and the challenges faced thereof. In-depth, semi structured interviews were administered to 10 personnel from the NTOs marketing division. The data was thematically analysed. The results show that though ZTA has embraced the use of digital marketing through tools like websites, email marketing, social media marketing, it still faces an array of challenges that include limited financial resources to fully implement the concept.**

Keywords: **Digital marketing, National tourism organisations, Zimbabwe, Social media marketing, Websites**

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing is the most rapidly growing form of marketing in today's globalised world (Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021). National Tourism Organisations (NTOs) which are referred to as Destination Marketing Organisations / Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) by some authors (e.g Morrison 2013; Gretzel, 2015) have a crucial role to play when it comes to promoting destinations and their countries at large. According to Morrison (2013) most destinations rely on DMOs to design and implement marketing strategies to overcome inefficiencies and fragmentation in the tourism and hospitality industry. Gretzel (2015) asserts that adoption of ICTs in many ways makes the lives of these organisations better and easier as they open up marketing opportunities. However it is important to note that ,most DMOs are still in experimental stages of utilizing digital tools like social media for their marketing (Usalki et al, 2017). This proves correct in African

countries in general and Zimbabwe in particular. For example, according to Abdullah et al (2021) the top five countries in Africa in terms of Facebook subscription are Egypt, Angola, Algeria, Nigeria and South Africa.in addition, COMEC (2015) asserts that most African countries are affected by government policies when it comes to implementation of digital marketing. Digital marketing tools have changed the way in which potential guests disseminate and how tourism suppliers create information in the tourism industry (Hays et al, 2013). Digital marketing has become one of the key focus areas for tourism businesses and destinations all over the world (Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021). This means for marketers in NTOs, the traditional means of marketing are no longer sustainable in this globalised world.

Though the concept of digital marketing has been well embraced in the developed world, developing countries are still lagging behind. It is therefore against this background that the researchers sought to do this research so as to give the perspective of a developing country like Zimbabwe.

This research therefore has been done at Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) which is the government regulatory board for Zimbabwe's tourism and hospitality industry. The objectives of the research are as follows:

i. To establish the Digital Marketing strategies which are being employed by Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA).

ii. To identify the benefits of implementing digital marketing by ZTA

iii. To determine the challenges faced by the NTO in its endeavours to digitally market destination Zimbabwe.

II.. LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Digital Marketing in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Nowadays tourists mostly use online search for travelling purposes therefore travel sites position in search engines has become more important (Gretzel, 2015). Tourism is a kind of e-business in which it presents a transaction of products or services in the form of information. The evolution of internet technology has made the tourism industry information

concentric, in which visitors pay for the provided information and service.

Many authors have posed different opinions on the meaning of digital marketing. Accordingly, Chaffey and Smith (2008) refer to it as e- marketing which entails getting closer to customers and understanding them better, adding value to products, widening distribution channels and boosting sales through digital media channels such as search marketing, online advertising and affiliate marketing. The authors further stipulate that it includes the usage of websites to facilitate customer sales and after sales service. It is a way of thinking and putting the customer at the heart of all online services. On the same note, Buhalis and Law (2008) gave an understanding of e-marketing as moving elements of marketing strategies and activities to a computerised, networked environment such as the internet. It also involves the process of building and maintaining customer relationships through online activities to facilitate the exchange of ideas, products and services that satisfy the goals of the consumer and service provider. However, Kotler et al (2008) proposed that digital marketing is a social and management process where different groups and individuals get what they need and want, creating, offering and exchanging products with value for others.

Digital marketing has made remarkable changes in the tourism industry and has opened new channels for selling products. Tour operators and travel agencies have also engaged in digital marketing enhancing competition in the industry. Most studies carried out on digital marketing have mainly focussed on social media marketing which is the commonly used digital marketing tool which is defined by Kaplan (2015) as a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological foundation of Web 2.0. The author also adds that it allows the creation and exchange of "user generated content." Prior to that Chaffey and Smith (2008) asserted that majority of web users state that they use search engine to find information about a hotel. If the hotel is not registered with the search engine, it would find it difficult to find a prospective guest unless the guest knew the hotel's web address. However this idea was made before the popularisation of social media which saw most hotels joining social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to market their products.

Digital marketing strategies have also been employed by the airline industry as put forward by Nuran and Melten (2019). The authors articulate that digital marketing tools are being used by the customer at the stages of booking, boarding process, flight process, baggage delivery, and even transfer services upon of arrival. These digital marketing tools have also enabled the collection of vital customer information like preferences, travel habits and behaviours. This data is in turn enable the airline to create and manage relationships with their customers through customer relationship management. Furthermore according to Eurostat (2016) digital marketing through the internet is a very crucial communication canal for the tourism sector, since 4 out of 10 Europeans search for travel related information. The study also postulates that about 65% of Europeans, who used the internet in 2015, made purchases online, and 52% of these purchases were products and services related to tourism. Therefore digital marketing plays an important role in the tourism sector because consumers first research on the destination and visit company websites before they make a choice to visit the destination.

World Tourism Organization (2014) highlighted how new technologies and digital marketing have revolutionised the tourism and the hospitality industry. E-mail marketing, websites, blogs, social networks, together with mobile applications and online booking platforms are important digital marketing tools for the tourism and hospitality industry.

The Competitive Advantage Theory

The theory was proposed by Michael Porter in 1990.the theory suggests that countries and businesses should pursue policies that create high quality goods to sell at high prices in the market. As such by applying this theory, National Tourism Organisations can furnish themselves with the appropriate strategy to outperform competitors. Mandal et al (2016) asserts that digital marketing can generate a good strategic means of boosting trade and competitive advantage .Adeleye (2015) in a research where the Competitive Advantage theory was applied, it is projected that marketing intelligence can be utilized by marketers as a passive marketing advert to serve as a promotion means for brand awareness. On the other hand, Abdullah et al (2021) also applied the competitive advantage theory to assess the opportunities and challenges of digital marketing in Africa. The authors found out that Nigeria will have remarkable competitive advantage compared to other African countries as it has registered strong presence in online media. The country also has a leading capacity in promoting tourism growth by using digital media to market tourism and hospitality products.

Digital marketing strategies employed by National Tourism Organisations

There are numerous types of digital marketing strategies that NTOs can adopt and the major ones are highlighted as follows:

Social Media Marketing

The term "social" refers to relating or involving activities in which people spend time talking to each other or doing enjoyable things with each other. Being social requires interaction between parties within a community. Merriam Webster (2015) defines "media" as "a particular form or system or medium of cultivation, conveyance or expression". It can be articulated that social media is an electronic communication platform established to support interaction and information sharing between individuals of a community. Walker (2010) defines social media as that what we use in our daily life to communicate with others like Facebook, Instagram, Linkedin, YouTube amongst others. In these

networks businesses seek a customer type and pay attention on them to promote their product.

Search Engine Optimisation

Search Engine Optimisation SEO is defined by Cho (2010) as the use of methods to allow an increased website traffic by using the suitable keywords in the content of a company's website to appear on top of the search results page when a search of a certain topic is made. Chaffey *et al* (2006) stipulated that SEO is a structured approach to increase the position of a company or its products in search engine natural or organic results listings for selected keywords or phrases. On the other hand Bang and Roos (2014) pointed out that SEO is a set of techniques aimed at improving the ranking of a website in search engine listings thereby making it more likely that the end user will visit the site. It is also defined as the process of identifying factors in a webpage which would impact search engine accessibility to it and fine tuning many elements of a website so it can achieve the highest possible visibility when a search engine responds to a relevant query (Zyang & Dimitroff, 2005).

Content Marketing

Current Market Institute (2017) defines content marketing as a practice of producing personalised valuable content to an interactive, engaged and targeted audience. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) content marketing is a marketing and business process for creating and distributing valuable and compelling content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience with the objective of profitable customer action. The authors suggest that the content has to offer information in line with the organisation's goals in this case the DMOs goals. Rowley (2008) states that content marketing interacts more with audience than any other marketing strategies by mostly using a two way communication. Lies (2019) points out that when content marketing is being used, digital communities and media networks are well-organized and helps consumers to interrelate and engage with the delivered content. Content marketing is the management of text, rich media, audio and video content aimed at engaging customers and prospects to meet business goals. It is published through print and digital media including web and mobile platforms and is also repurposed and syndicated to different forms of web presence such as publisher sites, blogs, social media and comparison sites (Chaffey & Chadwick, 2016).

Email Marketing

Email marketing is when the company promotes products to a known database of existing and probable customers via email (Adeleye, 2015). According to Nguyen and Wang (2011) email marketing is developing into an important part of online marketing and it has turned into an acknowledged method of communication for both customers and companies. Nguyen and Wang (2011) further stipulate that email marketing offers more practical benefits as compared to direct mail and these

are the ability to send more emails to better targeted and more audience at lower costs hence the NTO reaching more traffic. It also can keep in touch with visitors by sending reminders and feeds for new promotions as well as giving a platform for a two way conversation between the customer and NTO thus allowing feedback from users. This allows customised or personalised service which is very crucial in tourism.

Benefits of digital marketing strategies

The internet and other new technologies have changed business industries in an unprecedented way and the tourism sector has not been an exception. Various digital marketing platforms are now one of the important influences to the customer decisions in many major markets. According to Veller and Kester (2008) the benefits of digital marketing are varying as a flourishing marketing strategy as it can benefit both consumer and company interests. This section looks at the benefits to both the customer and the organisation.

Benefits of digital marketing to the customer

Chaffey and Chadwick (2016) alluded that the digital marketing provides added channels by which consumers can access information and make purchase. The ubiquitous characteristic of the various digital marketing platforms allows tourists to gather information anytime and anywhere. In addition, the adoption of digital marketing promotes interaction between the organisation and the potential customers. According to Veller and Kester (2008) digital marketing is interactive hence a two way interaction between customers and companies or between customers and like-minded customers is developed. These interactions can help customers find the information, products or services they desire. According to Chaffey (2016) technology plays a more facilitative role in purchasing and communication due to the fact that customised relationships tend to be of greater importance when negotiating sales than remotely transacted arrangements. In addition social networks play an increasingly important role in linking together both consumers and potential business partners.

Benefits to the NTO

Through digital marketing, organisations can engage with customers and form customer databases as stipulated by Vella and Kester (2008). Customer database is important when an organisation is carrying out promotional activities and events to strengthen brand loyalty. Tourists need to be constantly reminded of the new products and changes in the industry and this can be achieved through sending alerts to consumers at regular intervals throughout the year. However the down side of this is that customers may change contacts, provide false information or avoid giving out information all together. Chaffey and Chadwick (2016) argue that the internet can be useful in penetrating the market by selling existing products in existing markets.

Digital marketing has also proven to be cost effective as stipulated by Veller and Kester (2008). The authors alluded

that flexibility, product availability, prices and promotions can also be adjusted daily or even hourly according to shifting market conditions. Chaffey and Chadwick (2016) on the other hand highlighted that new geographical markets can be penetrated, taking advantage of the low costs of advertising online, internationally without the need to invest in infrastructure in other countries. Traditional marketing strategies required DMOs to have regional and international offices in their major source markets and that requires a lot of resources to set and manage, but with the advent of digital marketing DMOs have been able to operate in their respective countries whilst penetrating new markets with just a click.

Digital marketing allows to virtualise all areas of marketing from studying the market through market segmentation, targeting and positioning to the effective use of the marketing mix. According to Nguyen and Wang (2011) internet and digital communication technologies have also been utilised by DMOs as an influence for innovation in marketing strategies. Innovativeness is the key to extend the brand online according to Chaffey and Smith (2012) and it is achieved through providing new propositions, new offers and experiences online including building communities. This assertion is equally true for DMOs who continuously have to come up with new ideas to attract existing and potential tourists.

In addition, digital marketing has a wide audience reach globally, with no geographic barriers and time zone constraints which is beneficial to an NTO because it allows organisations to easily reach out and target profitable niche segments (Ryan, 2019). Furthermore Zsarnoczky (2018) articulates that tourism used to be an industry based on relationships and connections, with travellers decisions set out by a limited number of large international tourism and travel enterprises. As a result of the revolution of digital marketing DMOs have been able to reach hidden markets which have been revealed. This holds true because tourism is a phenomena which has only been popular in developing countries in the recent years of technological development. The advent of digitalisation has seen under developing countries like Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Zambia and Kenya experiencing a rise in tourists' arrivals due to digital marketing initiatives.

Challenges faced by NTOs in the successful implementation of digital marketing

Past literature identified the importance of DMOs leadership understanding of new challenges and the meaningful use of new technologies to seek excellence in destination marketing (Gretzel et al, 2005, Inversini et al 2010). Typically the use and implementation of new technologies is not a straight forward road to success but rather a back and forward exercise as stipulated by Rogers (2003). For that fact there are a number of factors that can affect the successful implementation of digital marketing strategies by DMOs.

According to Gretzel (2015) the challenge lies in constantly learning the latest things and searching for newest technologies that supposedly make the job of destination marketing easier. The author further stipulates that there is need for money and the staff to keep up with technological changes while maintaining regular tasks. Limited technological capabilities and financial ability are also impediments as echoed by Kim (2009) and Yuan *et al* (2006).

Gretzel *et al* (2005) postulates that significant communication related challenges emerge from understanding who the audience of a DMO the key messages that the audiences should remember. According to Buhalis (2000), today DMOs typically face a growing number of constituencies all wanting to be heard and represented. Therefore as indicated by Hollebeck *et al* (2014) consumer engagement is the key metric on digital marketing tools like social media. However NTOs are struggling to grasp what that means and thereby stuck in the old push and broadcast frame of traditional mass marketing. For example, they use social media to spread advertising messages thus missing the essence of what matters on social media that is initiating two way conversations between them and customers or suppliers.

Furthermore there still exists a lack of research which allow for the proper conceptualization and measurement of tourism experiences (Gretzel & Fesenmaier 2009). Without a clear knowledge of the crucial components of meaningful experiences and related expectations, NTOs product development and digital marketing efforts continue to be based on gut feelings and trial and error approaches rather than being strategic and persuasive. This therefore affects effective implementation of digital marketing strategies because, marketers will not be having a clear picture of who, why, where and when they are marketing the destination. Leeflang *et al* (2014) argues that the problem of lacking a good marketing research can be attributed to organizations outsourcing statisticians, mathematicians and economists to assist in carrying out market research, but these experts lack a background in marketing and do not possess much ideas on the marketing fundamentals.

The literature review has clearly enabled an understanding of existing research and debates on digital marketing by national tourism organizations. Most of the researches as evidenced by the review have been done in the developed countries and there is a dearth of information from the developed world. This research will therefore help to build knowledge in the field of digital marketing from a developing country perspective. The review has been of very beneficial in coming up with research questions and analysis of data. The competitive advantage theory forms the basis of the research since it's the aim of every NTO to build competitive advantage, in this case through adoption and utilization of digital marketing.

III. METHODOLOGY

Study setting

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country in Southern Africa.it share its borders with South Africa to the south, Botswana to the

south west, Mozambique to the east and north and then Zambia to the North West. Though the country is endowed with abundant tourism resources, it is highly affected by the ongoing political, economic and social challenges. Tourism is the third foreign currency earner for the landlocked country after mining and agriculture.

To achieve objectives of the research, data was collected from Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) head office in Harare which is Zimbabwe's capital city. Zimbabwe Tourism Authority is a parastatal organisation that falls under the Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry. It was formed by an Act of Parliament: The Tourism Act Chapter 14:20 of 1996 with a mandate of developing, managing, promoting and marketing Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. It is therefore Zimbabwe's National Tourism Organisation and has got 4 divisions. The Destination Marketing and Promotion division is the one relevant to this research. The mandate of the division include developing marketing initiatives and promoting Zimbabwe as a destination for tourists (ZTA, 2021). The division is further subdivided into sections/source markets which are Africa and Middle East; China and Asia Pacific; Europe and America. Therefore each subdivision is responsible for coming up with marketing strategies peculiar to its market needs as articulated by COMEC (2015) who says that, for example, Mozambique has developed content that to address its various marketing needs. The Destination Marketing and Promotion division works closely with the department of ICT which develops and maintains the organisation's various digital marketing platforms.

Method

The researcher adopted an exploratory research design whose objectives include the exploration of new ideas or phenomena for the better understanding of research issues, testing their feasibility and determining the best methods to implement them. A mixed method approach comprising of quantitative and qualitative approaches was adopted so as to gain an in-depth understanding of how well ZTA was performing in terms of digital marketing. Data was collected through in-depth interviews administered to the personnel of the Destination Marketing and Promotion Division within ZTA who were purposively chosen. Purposive sampling (also known as judgment, selective or subjective sampling) is a sampling technique in which researcher relies on his or her own judgment when choosing members of population to participate in the study (Maholtra and Birks, 2003). The researchers therefore exercised their judgement to choose respondents to be included in the sample as they believed that they are appropriate for the aim of the research. The in-depth interviews were supplemented by a desk study of the authority's websites and official company documents. Due to the challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic telephone interviews were opted for so as to minimise face to face meetings. The interviews lasted at most 20 minutes per session. The interviews were done between July and September 2021 and they only commenced after clearance of the researchers to conduct research by the authority.

The Destination Marketing and Promotion Division has a staff compliment of plus 30 at the headoffice.10 interviewees were deemed enough so as to overcome the possibilities of data saturation. According to Rijnsoever (2017) cited in Makacha *et al* (2019), data saturation means that researchers reach a point in their analysis where continuation with research process does not lead to more information related to the research questions. The in-depth interviews were semi – structured so as to allow the respondents to go beyond specific issues and give room to further clarifications which contributes to data enrichment.

In terms of data analysis, the thematic method was used in this research. Thematic analysis involves interpretation in the processes of selecting codes and constructing themes. Information was grouped in terms of strategies employed by ZTA, their effectiveness and challenges faced during the implementation. According to Salman *et al* (2020), thematic analysis guides the researcher to identify and analyse themes occurring in the data. Thematic analysis is one of the most important and prominent qualitative data analysis strategies (Gibbs, 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

IV.. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital marketing strategies used by ZTA

The interviewees concurred that ZTA indeed is utilising digital marketing. Traditionally the NTO relied on tourism attaches in various countries to market destination Zimbabwe. The NTO also went on to hosting of international celebrities who would then become Zimbabwe's tourism ambassadors to their countries of origin (Karambakuwa et al, 2011). However due to the rapid growth in ICTs, Zimbabwe is also joining the bandwagon. The strategies implemented by ZTA according to the respondents who were interviewed are website marketing, social media marketing, Search Engine Optimisation, content marketing, television and in- store advertising. Of these marketing strategies social media marketing is the strategy ZTA uses to a greater extent as compared to the rest of the digital marketing strategies as these are updated almost on a daily basis. Evidence from the interviews and the desk research did by the researchers shows that ZTA uses also its website actively to communicate to potential tourists and also service providers. The website gives vital information to tourists which include travel requirements to Zimbabwe, Civid-19 regulations, places to visit and any upcoming tourism events. The organisation's website has got a blog where tourism news, promotions and vital announcements are posted. Potential customers can also post their comments on this blog. However the website does not have separate links targeting either the domestic or the international tourist. According to Gretzel (2015), the website might create a link of interaction between the consumer and the brand in a better way than the traditional means of marketing. The Zimbabwe Tourism Authority is very active on social media platforms

which include Twitter, Facebook, Trip advisor, LinkedIn and instagram.in terms of Facebook, the authority has two active official pages with over forty-thousand followers combined. Their Twitter page is '@ZTA updates' with over twenty-five thousand followers. These results corroborate with what Basera and Nyahunzvi (2019) found out in their research on online strategies utilised by ZTA and South Africa Tourism (SAT). They found out that the two organisation utilise search engines like Google, websites, e-mails, blogs and various social media platforms. The least utilised digital marketing tool is email marketing. 90% of the interviewees reiterated that emails are only sent to a few potential customers especially those who have done business before with the authority. The results of this study have demonstrated that ZTA has embraced well the use of digital marketing. Digital marketing adopting in this era of rapid globalisation can create competitive advantage for a national tourism organisation.

Benefits derived from utilising digital marketing

From the findings, it is evident that utilisation of digital marketing has contributed to a positive brand image of destination Zimbabwe. 80 % of the respondents reiterated that indeed adoption of digital marketing provides benefits to the country at large. The authority is now able to participate in virtual forums that are aimed at promoting the country. Digital marketing tools like the authority's website are enabling the organisation to minimise the risks brought about by intangibility of the tourism product. Vital information like places to visit in Zimbabwe, list of registered operators in the country, tourism trends and statistics are readily available by the click of a mouse. The interviewees were also asked if the strategies adopted are effective in marketing and promotion of Zimbabwe as a tourism destination. The responses show that the strategies adopted like social media marketing and website marketing have been very effective as evidenced by the traffic on the website. In terms of social media, subscriptions on Facebook and twitter have increased significantly from below ten- thousand to over sixty-thousand followers combined. Having a greater following has an advantage as it will also contribute significantly to positive word of mouth. The active participation on social media like Facebook, Twitter and Trip Advisor are also contributing to user- generated content as these platforms allow a two way communication between the organisation and the potential customers. Merabat (2020) articulates that destinations can highlight their characteristics and maintain competitive advantage through sophisticated communication strategy which is based on social media. However Hays et al (2012), says that it is critical to note that DMOs are using social media as they would any other marketing tool, neglecting the full potential of its ability to engage and invoke informal conversation. Yasmin et al (2015) highlighted that there are many advantages that digital marketing can bring to customers which are: stay updated with products or services, greater engagement, clear information about products and services, easy comparison with others, 24/7 shopping, share content of the products or

services, apparent pricing and enables instant purchase. Castro et al (2017) in their research found that these are very effective tools when it comes to attracting traffic to the destination websites, and that are likely to successfully explain the efficiency of the online promotion of a place. Another relevant result is the importance of the customization, which can be attained through the qualification of users and through the collected data on their preferences, through social networks and feedback.

Challenges faced by ZTA in successful implementation of digital marketing

The organisation though it is striving to fully embrace digital marketing technologies, faces a number of challenges. The researchers asked the interviewees to categorise the challenges into internal and those external to the organisation. The internal challenges noted in the interviews include limited resources that is hardware and software. In addition, there are budgetary constraints as this is a parastatal which is under a very broad ministry. As Zimbabwe is characterised by dire economic challenges since the turn of the millennium, the financial resources to fund some of the initiatives and ICT equipment becomes very limited. For example in the 2022 budget the Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry was allocated a paltry USD $ 20 million (ZIMSTATS, 2021). In addition, the NTO also faces the problem of brain drain. Marketing and IT experts are living the organisation for greener pastures like the private sector as a result of very low remuneration. The external challenges include slow adoption of technology especially by the domestic market. As a result, most domestic tourists rarely rely on digital platforms to choose their holiday destinations. For example, internet penetration in Zimbabwe stood at 33% in 2021 (Kemp 2021). In addition the negative image of destination Zimbabwe as a result of political crisis impedes the country to bear the fruits of its digital marketing initiatives. In addition just like other developing countries, there is too much interference from the government with the policies they put in place hence the NTO can not make some vital decisions on its own. All the ten interviews concurred that these challenges are negatively affecting them as the marketing personnel in meeting their objectives which includes to increase destination visibility, awareness, reach, engagement and following. In addition in terms of social media where the authority's presence is on almost all popular platforms, the limited number of shares on these pages indicate a weakness as they are very few. It is important to note that to a greater extent the number of viewers who share a post determine the ability of that post reaching a greater audience. They also provide ZTA's digital marketing team with feedback on the effectiveness of their digital marketing efforts. In their research, Bosio et al (2018) found out that DMOs lack enough resources for strategic issues, monitoring or reacting to interactions in time. In addition the authors also articulate a lack of good videos as a result of limited expertise and financial resources. High quality videos are crucial for the

successful implementation of social media marketing. Hvass and Munar (2012) also assert that DMOs lack resources to install a real monitoring system that includes defined performance indicators.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The role played and the changes that have been brought by information technology in the tourism industry cannot be ignored. The evolution of the digital marketing concept has changed greatly the 'usual' way of doing business and this is given g pressure to national tourism organisations to keep up with changes. Gretzel and Fesenmaier (2009) articulate that information technology has played a central role in the growth and development of the tourism industry. The strategies have enabled the NTO to contribute significantly in promoting tourism in Zimbabwe and thereby generating substantial revenue to the fiscus. The study gives valuable insights into digital marketing where NTOs can adopt similar digital marketing initiatives and produce innovative content to adequately address the changing needs of today's tourist. Fully embracing digital marketing can guarantee Zimbabwe a place in the top five countries in terms of digital marketing through creating competitive advantage. In addition the study helps policy makers in designing digital marketing strategies as a program for enhancing tourist influx and growth in Zimbabwe. However the study has shown that Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) still has a long way to go in terms of fully embracing digital marketing. The organisation is still lagging behind in technological advancement and this creates a challenge in carrying out digital marketing initiatives. The lack of effectiveness can be attributed to the challenges which were mentioned by ZTA. However it can be noted that ZTA has a vision of where they would want their efforts to reach evidenced by the current determination they are setting towards their digital marketing strategies.

The researchers recommend that the NTO needs to invest more on digital marketing due to the growing significance of information communication technology. A considerable amount of funds needs to be invested in the organisations ICTs. The government needs to create a standalone ministry responsible for tourism not the combined one as in this case. This will enable resources to be channelled and focused to the country's tourism and hospitality industry. In addition the NTO has to continuously update its webpage so as to do away with outdated information. The NTO should join more social media platforms as this digital marketing tool's use is outpacing all the other platforms and tools (Hays e al, 2012; Merabat, 2020). In general ZTA as Zimbabwe's NTO should strive to create competitive advantage through digital marketing and become one of the powerful and sought after destinations in Africa.

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