

Tourists' perception of Gaborone as a tourist destination

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ABSTRACT

Destinations all over the world have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and Gaborone as a tourist destination faces challenges of branding and marketing strategies. The main aim of this paper is to explore tourists' perception of Gaborone as a tourist destination from the tourists' point of view. Specifically, this paper has two specific objectives which are to explore the perceptions of tourists on the brand image of Gaborone city as a tourist destination, and to explore the perception of tourists on the brand identity of Gaborone city as a tourist destination. The study location is Gaborone city in Botswana. A total of 50 tourists as a sample size. The methodology used was quantitative. The usable questionnaire for analysis were 35 and subjected to descriptive analysis. The findings have shown that there were different perceptions by tourists regarding the image and identity of Gaborone city as a tourist destination. Most of the international tourists (over 50%) agreed that brand image included aspects such as unique climate, safety and security while brand identity revealed that the slogan "Diamond City of the World" was attractive and also, services offered at different sites are of high quality. Hence, this study's outcome is helpful to business communities, destination planners and Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) to consider brand image and identity as marketing strategy tools to attract visitors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Destinations with unique selling propositions are always a great choice for destination planners. Furthermore, United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) noted that it is important for cities to be branded and there has to be an image that markets and sells the destination either locally or internationally (UNWTO, 2022). Equally, Chiang & Chen (2023) emphasized on brand identity in relation to tourism experiences. In tourism, one important strategies that can be used to assist cities to be competitive is branding, which can be used to

market the culture, the history, attractions as well as the lifestyle of a destination (Zhang & Zhao, 2009). While Zhang & Zhao (2009) mentioned about branding, the study by Chiang & Chen (2023) added research on brand identity. However, the research gap in reference to literature on branding exists for Botswana as a country. For instance, Gaborone faces a challenge of lack of branding and marketing strategies as well as emphasis on its resources which have affected it negatively as an emerging tourist destination (Mbaiwa et al., 2007).

Additionally, tourist destinations all over the world have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Oktavio et al, 2021), including in Africa as indicated by various scholars like Ayu et al. (2022), Basera et al. (2022), Ncube et al. (2021), Mkwizu (2023), Mkwizu & Kimeto (2022), Mtapuri et al. (2021) and Vermeulen-Miltz et al. (2022) when investigating issues such as festivals, training, restaurants, community-based tourism, resilience, diversification, hotels and coastal tourism. In tourism, tourists like to create images for memory and sharing with friends and family as evident in a study by Mkwizu et al. (2023a, 2023b) which found that there was a significant relationship between selfie usage and marketing of domestic tourism in Botswana and Tanzania. However, the image literature contribution is based on selfie usage and not branding. As destinations recover from the pandemic, it is crucial to fill the research gap by re-examining branding and tourist destinations to enrich knowledge in the tourism sector.

In 2019, Sechele-Mosimanegape and Mkwizu also mentioned the need for marketing strategies to enable Gaborone city to be competitive (Sechele-Mosimanegape & Mkwizu, 2019, 2021). This clearly shows that Gaborone as a city of Botswana has a marketing strategy problem. Additionally, the implementation of useful strategies is vital in branding tourist destinations in order to be competitive and be different as compared to other destinations for loyal and potential tourists (Cronjé & du Plessis, 2020). It is in this light of marketing strategy challenges, the urgency to recover from the pandemic as well as the literature gap in terms of current empirical evidence which examine branding in the context of Botswana that motivated this paper's research. The main objective is to explore the tourists' perception of Gaborone as a tourist destination. Guided by a theoretical framework which is based on the sender-receiver

model, this paper specifically, explores what is considered as the brand image and brand identity of Gaborone city as a tourist destination.

The outcome of this paper is significant in assisting and benefiting the government and destination marketing managers to improve brand image and brand identity of Gaborone as a tourist destination in the post-pandemic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Image

The travel decisions of the customer are mostly influenced by the image of the destination. Crompton (1979) defines brand image as “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination”. Brand image is the real image that customers’ hold (Pike, 2007). The concept of brand image has also been defined by Keller (1993) as the perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory. Other scholars such as Wu & Chen (2019) mentioned that brand image can establish a unique image of objects and obtain customers’ identification and preference through visual transmission effects and product personality description, brand perception, belief, and ideas. According to this paper, the brand image is defined as the customer’s perception about the brand or how they interpret the brand.

Brand Identity

Brand identity is the self-images that marketers desire (Pike, 2007). Brand identity has also been defined from a corporate perspective as established good interpersonal relationships among community members which enable members to have a sense of belonging and social identity, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction within the community (Han et al., 2018). Brand identity is referred to as an intra-organizational structure which originates unilaterally from the organization (Souri, 2021). In this paper, brand identity refers to the visible elements like logo, colour or design that the company or organization creates,

that identifies and differentiates it from other companies that remains in the minds of consumers and potential.

Tourist Destination

Prior to defining the concept of tourist destination, scholars such as Oliver (1933) and Shaw & Williams (1994) defined a tourist as a person on a temporary trip away from home and also spends money derived from their home area and not from the place they have visited. Additionally, the UNWTO (2014) classifies a tourist as a visitor if his/her trip include an overnight stay. Further literature indicate that tourists can be categorized as international tourists and domestic tourists (Bowen & Clarke, 2009; Ghanem, 2017). For example, in the first quarter of 2022, Botswana had received a total of 158, 284 international tourists of which the majority were coming from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Sub-region while for countries outside Africa it is mostly from the USA followed by Germany (Statistics Botswana, 2022a). Interestingly, for quarter 2 of 2022, the international tourists to Botswana were 248,946 (Statistics Botswana, 2022b).

On the other hand, the example for domestic tourists from Botswana whereby the domestic tourists are considered to low compared to international tourists due to challenges such as income as indicated in the study by Mogomotsi et al. (2022). In fact, Morupisi & Mokgalo (2017) indicated that majority of domestic tourists in Botswana engage in Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) whereas the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (2014) and Stone et al. (2017) have mentioned that only 8.2% visited protected areas in 2010 to 2013. Furthermore, Mogomotsi et al. (2022) and Stone & Stone (2022) have opined that the Botswana approach of High Value - Low Volume (HVLV) is selectively excluding certain segments of the market such as the domestic market (e.g. local tourists and investors) in the tourism sector. The need to increase the number of domestic tourists to tourist attractions in tourist destinations has not only been advocated by scholars such as Mogomotsi et al. (2022) for Botswana but other scholars in other African countries like in Tanzania namely Anderson (2005), Macha (2021), Mkwizu (2018; 2021, 2022), and Sing'ambi & Lwoga (2018).

However, the statistics based on international tourists indicates that tourism is slowly recovering but the numbers are still low for Botswana as a tourist destination. A tourist destination can also be those destinations with cultural heritage (Jebbouri et al., 2022). For this paper, the term tourist destination simply means the place set for the journey by the tourist.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by a theoretical framework which is based on the sender-receiver model by Kapferer (2008) to explore brand identity and brand image in the context of Gaborone city. Kapferer's model assumes that there is a relationship between the concepts of brand identity and brand image and that, brand identity in terms of products or people is what a company sends out to the customers while brand image is the perception the customers create about the brand (Kapferer, 2008). Therefore, from the perspective of Kapferer's model, brand identity is the sender while brand image is the receiver. Considering that the customers are tourists, this paper assumes that brand identity is what the Gaborone city sends out to tourists. On the other hand, the brand image is the tourists' perception of branding Gaborone.

Similar studies investigating brand identity and image have applied this theoretical framework such as Lindeberg et al. (2012). The study by Lindeberg et al. (2012) applied both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate brand identity and brand image in the context of a food company in Sweden. The findings indicated that there were gaps in terms of communication between the food company's brand identity and brand image by their customers in reference to concepts like personality, and positioning which posed obstacles in managing close relationships with their customers.

While Lindeberg et al. (2012) used Kapferer's model to examine brand image and brand identity for a food company, this study extends the application of the concepts of brand image and brand identity in tourist destinations and particularly in Gaborone which is a city of Botswana. In this paper, the theoretical frame work of Kapferer's model is suitable to describe the tourists' perception of brand image and brand identity of Gaborone as a tourist destination.

Perception of a Tourist Destination

Perception of a tourist destination in terms of destination branding has been documented in the past studies. For instance, Blain et al. (2005) noted that destination branding consists of activities that market the place (1) differentiates a place from its competitors through designing a name, logo or a symbol that makes it unique (2) gives tourists a special memorable experience attached to the destination that will linger in their minds for a long time; that (3) allows visitors to connect emotionally with the destination and that (4) these activities influence tourists positively by leaving them with a good image and experience of a destination. Equally, destinations around the world are in the business of proposing high standard facilities of accommodation, infrastructure that is unique, excellent customer services and accommodative and friendly locals and that proves not to be enough characteristics to make an outstanding and unique destination (Morgan et al., 2002). Destination Branding is about differentiation of a product or service from competitors or substitutes who provide the same services and products to attract new tourists as well as keeping regulars. Hanna et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review analysis of existing literature on destination branding and concluded that more research is needed on destination branding.

From a destination branding perspective, Chiang & Chen (2023) did a study in Taiwan with the application of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and found that the constructs of brand perception and brand self-concept had effects on the tourists' experience of a destination. This implies that brand identity is crucial in relation to tourism experience. Other scholars like Cronje & du Plessis (2020) opined that there should be useful strategies in branding tourist destinations. Tran & Rudolf (2022) were interested on destination branding by examining the aspect of social media in relation to destination branding using a systematic literature review which revealed insights such as destination brand strategy. However, Mindrut et al. (2015) noted that a great product with no strong identification is inadequate and that it is important for potential customers to relate to the identity of a brand for product preferences.

In Africa, tourist destination studies have been done with concentration on image. The literature on image in tourism is also evident in studies by Wilbard (2023) and Salim (2023).

In examining destination image, Wilbard (2023) applied a quantitative approach using multiple linear regression and found that factors such as support facilities and technology influenced destination image. On the other hand, Salim (2023) applied quantitative method with structural equation modelling to investigate cultural capital as antecedent of destination image. The findings revealed that the dimensions such as historical objects, cultural behaviour and culinary experiences have a statistically significant relationship with a destination image and particularly, the image of Zanzibar (Salim, 2023). The valuable contribution by Wilbard (2023) and Salim (2023) on destination image is limited to Tanzania and therefore, more studies beyond Tanzania are necessary to understand image in terms of brand image.

On the other hand, Ngwira et al. (2022) examined destination branding but from a destination brand experiences with findings indicating that relational and spiritual as dimensions of brand experience for tourists visiting Lake Malawi in Africa. Whilst Ngwira et al. (2022) investigated by examining brand experience in Malawi within Africa, this paper on the other hand, specifically aimed at exploring tourists' perception of brand image and brand identity of Gaborone city as tourist destination.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study area is Gaborone City in Botswana. This paper employed a quantitative method and specifically a descriptive approach to address the two specific objectives guided by a theoretical framework based on Kapferer's model of brand identity and brand image as sender-receiver. The population of the study was determined based on probability sampling. The sample for this study was tourists who visited various attraction sites in Gaborone city including Three Chiefs Monument, National Museum, game reserve and Thapong Visual Arts Centre. For a valid estimate of sample size, Maas & Hox (2005) suggested for a minimum sample size of 30 to be recommended for multilevel analysis in quantitative studies. Hence, the sample size for this study was 50 which assisted in obtaining information to the two specific objectives which involved exploring the tourists' perceptions of brand image of Gaborone city

as a tourist destination, and the tourists' perception of brand identity of Gaborone city as a tourist destination.

This study developed a survey questionnaire to examine image perception and the participants were requested to rate their agreeability to the following statements that were adapted from Lindeberg et al. (2012): climate is unique, the destination is safe and secure for tourists, the destination can be easily reached, the destination offers quality entertainment, the destination offers unique healthy foods, organization of the local transportation services are reliable, accommodation at the destination is excellent, immigration officials at points of entry are friendly and helpful and health services are adequate. For brand identity, the participants were requested to rate their agreeability to the statements adapted from Lindeberg et al. (2012): the slogan "Diamond City of the World" is attractive, variety of the sites gives the destination a competitive advantage, there is enough information about what the destination can offer, there are quality infrastructures such as roads, airport, health centers, and the services offered at different sites are of high quality. The scale for both brand image and brand identity statements was of 1 to 5; whereby; 1 = strongly disagree (SD) 2 = Disagree (D) 3 = Not sure (NS) 4 = Agree (A) 5 = strongly agree (SA).

Prior to data collection, a pilot study was done and the questionnaire was pre-tested with a view to testing its validity and reliability. After pretesting, there were typos which were corrected. The questionnaires were distributed randomly to the tourists. Upon collection of quantitative data comprising 35 completed questionnaires, this study used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics was used to analyze quantitative data.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The characteristics for most of the respondents as tourists in Figure 1 were from America (20.0%) followed by Australia and United Kingdom at 11.4% each. However, there were no local tourists who responded to the questionnaire which implies that all the 35 tourists were international tourists. The findings of this study are in line with past studies such as Mogomotsi

et al. (2022) and Stone & Stone (2022) that overseas tourism in Botswana is largely contributed by international tourists from America.

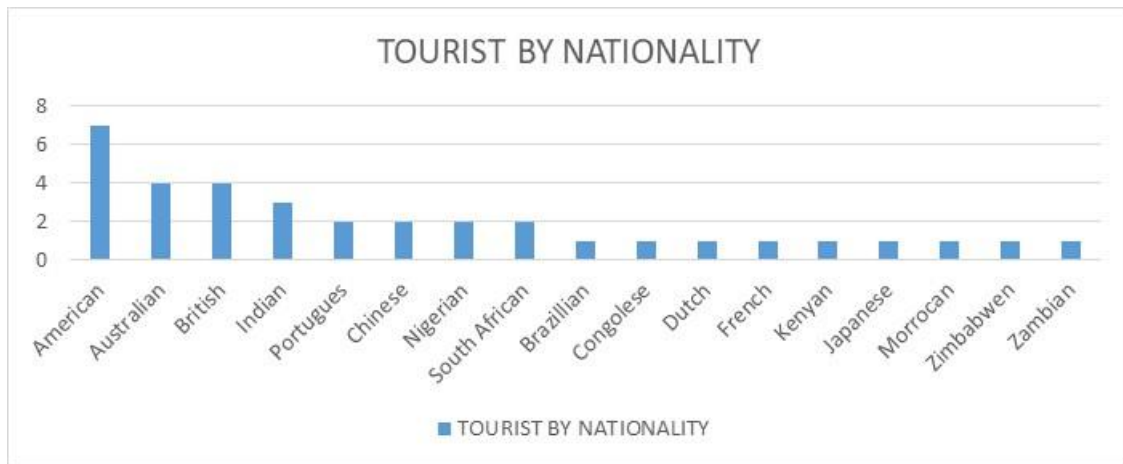


Figure 1. Distribution of Tourists by Nationality

Figure 2 shows that the majority of the respondents were females at 55.1% compared to males. This implies that most of the international tourists were females.

Respondents' Gender Distribution

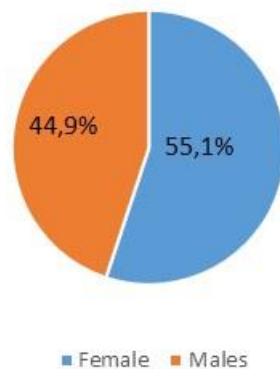


Figure 2. Gender Distribution of Respondents

Furthermore, from Table 1, the majority of participants visited Three Chiefs Monument (85.7%) followed by National Museum and Art Gallery (80%) and then Gaborone Game Reserve (71.4%). At the same time, there were few tourists that visited Mokolodi Nature Game Reserve (25.7%), Kgale Hill (17.1%) and ISKCON (11.8%). These findings imply that most international tourists that were sampled visited the attractions sites of Three Chiefs Monument, National Museum and Art Gallery and Gaborone Game Reserve.

Table 1. Common Tourists' Attraction Sites in Gaborone

Tourist Attraction Sites	Frequency (N=35)	Percentage (%)
Gaborone Game Reserve	25	71.4
Three Chiefs Monument	30	85.7
Thapong Visual Arts Centre	22	62.8
National Museum and Art Gallery	28	80.0
Mokolodi Nature Game Reserve	9	25.7
Maetisong Theatre	20	57.1
Lion Part Resort	10	28.6
National Assembly Building	15	45.7
Diamond Trading Company	25	71.4
ISKCON	4	11.8
Gaborone Dam	12	34.3
Crocodile Poles	7	20.0
Botswana Craft	13	37.1
Kgale Hill	6	17.1
Others	9	25.7

Table 2 displays tourists' perception on brand image of Gaborone. The participants had agreeability on statements; climate is unique, the destination is safe and secure for tourists, the destination can be easily reached, the destination offers quality entertainment, the destination offers unique healthy foods, organization of the local transportation services which are reliable, accommodation at the destination is excellent, immigration officials at points of entry are friendly and helpful. The only exception was on the adequacy of the health services as 68.6% of the participants responded to be unsure to the statement that health services are adequate. According to this study's findings, tourists mostly agreed that the climate in Gaborone is unique, the destination is safe and secure for tourists, the destination can easily be reached, the destination offers quality entertainment, the destination offers unique healthy foods, organization of the local transportation services is reliable, accommodation at the destination is excellent, immigration officials at points of entry are friendly and helpful.

In comparing the findings of this study with previous literature, the study by Anderson (2000) argues that what identifies and makes the city unique is what it carries. This study has shown that Gaborone have a lot of unique attributes, of which the city can capitalize on and build its brand image and identity that is comparable to other cities in the world. These findings are in line with similar studies on image where other attributes which destinations can capitalize is support facilities and technology as indicated in Wilbard (2023) as well as dimensions like historical objects shown in Salim (2023).

The only exception was on the adequacy of the health services as the majority of the participants responded to be unsure to the statement that health services are adequate. This may be because while visiting Gaborone, the tourist never had to utilize health services, hence they are unsure of the adequacy of the health services provide. This is contrary to similar studies that examined branding from services that are of relational and spiritual perspective like Ngwira et al. (2022) which found that tourists were sure and positive of branding that are offering relational and spiritual experiences.

Table 2. Perception on Gaborone (Brand Image)

Image about Gaborone	SD (%)	D (%)	NS (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
Climate is unique	5.7	8.6	8.6	45.7	31.4
The destination is safe and secure for tourists	2.9	5.7	14.3	34.3	42.9
The destination offers quality entertainment	5.7	14.3	17.2	51.4	11.4
The destination can be easily reached	2.9	5.7	5.7	45.7	40.0
The destination offers unique healthy foods	5.7	8.6	11.4	34.3	40.0
Organization of the local transportation services are reliable	5.7	11.4	5.7	40.0	37.1
Accommodation at the destination is excellent	2.9	2.9	2.9	57.1	34.3
Immigration officials at points of entry are friendly and helpful	0.00	5.7	0.00	25.7	68.6
Health services are adequate	0.00	0.00	68.6	20.0	11.4

Table 3 revealed results on tourists' perception on brand identity showing that agreeability was positive to a slogan "Diamond City of the World" being attractive (85.7%). Further findings revealed that there is a variety of sites which give the destination a competitive advantage (68.6%), there is enough information about what the destination can offer (54.3%), there are quality infrastructures such as roads, airport, health centers (62.9%), and the services offered at different sites are of high quality (85.7%). This suggests that the international tourists' perception of Gaborone city identity is rather highly on the services offered at different sites are of high quality and positive to a slogan "Diamond City of the World" being attractive. Furthermore, there were tourists who were excited to be in the city and appreciated Gaborone as a tourist destination. As indicated that most tourists agreed that there was variety of sites giving the destination a competitive advantage and there is also enough information about what the destination offers. Tourists appreciated infrastructure especially the roads, airports and health center.

In reference to past studies, the findings of this study in terms of infrastructure support previous studies such as Hospers (2010) which stated that the pride of the destination is found in the availability of infrastructure and amenities. The findings of this study as empirical evidence on brand identity based on tourists' perception of Gaborone as a tourist destination supports the study by Mindrut et al. (2015) that a product with no strong identification is not enough for potential customers. In the case of this study, the customers as tourists identify the brand of Gaborone as a tourist destination through infrastructure and amenities.

The results of this study on brand identity confirms past studies such as Hanna et al. (2020) that recommended for further research on branding. The research in this study has revealed current insights on brand identity for Gaborone as a tourist destination from the tourists' perception on issues not only for infrastructure but also adequate information about what the destination can offer as displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Perception on Gaborone (Brand Identity)

Identity of Gaborone	SD (%)	D (%)	NS (%)	A + SA (%)
Slogan "Diamond City of the World" is attractive	0.00	0.00	14.3	85.7
Variety of the sites gives the destination a competitive advantage	5.7	5.7	20.0	68.6
There is enough information about what the destination can offer	8.6	17.2	20.0	54.3
There are quality infrastructures such as roads, airport, health centers	8.6	11.4	17.1	62.9
The services offered at different sites are of high quality	0.00	5.7	8.6	85.7

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper can conclude that the tourists' perception of Gaborone as a tourist destination varies due to different perceptions by tourists who were mostly international tourists. For the first specific objective guided by Kapferer's model on the concept of brand image, the findings revealed that the majority of international tourists agreed on climate is unique, the destination is safe and secure for tourists, the destination can be easily reached, the destination offers quality entertainment, the destination offers unique healthy foods, organisation of the local transportation services are reliable, accommodation at the destination is excellent, and that immigration officials at points of entry are friendly and helpful. Guided by Kapferer's concept

of brand identity, the second specific objective of this paper involved exploring tourists' perception on brand identity of Gaborone city as a tourist destination. The findings have indicated that for brand identity, most of the international tourists rated highly on services offered at different sites are of high quality and positive to a slogan "Diamond City of the World" being attractive. The descriptive findings of this study have implications.

Practical Implications

The study's practical implication is for the government and the business communities, destination planners and Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) should consider the brand identity and brand image results of this study as marketing strategy tools to attract visitors to the various sites of Gaborone city. For brand image, the tourists' views were positive on issues of climate, safety, security, quality of entertainment, unique healthy food, reliable local transport, accommodation and immigration. Additionally, the considerations to be given for brand identity is to ensure high quality of service offered are maintained and that there is continuous use of the slogan "Diamond City of the World".

Research Contribution

This paper has practical and academic contributions by updating literature with empirical evidence on branding in the context of Botswana by revealing brand identity and brand image perceptions of most international tourists that visit Gaborone.

The outcome can be used as practical contribution to the tourism stakeholders like destination marketing managers for purposes of improving the tourism sector in the post-pandemic. The academics can use the findings as database for future research related to topics on branding.

Limitations of the Study and Direction for Further Research

This study's limitation is on the sample size and use of descriptive statistics only. Future studies can explore a larger sample size and extend analysis to include inference statistics to

better connect the concepts of brand image and brand identity in tourist destinations. It is suggested that for further studies more stakeholders should be involved to participate and explore other methods of data collection to understand brand image and brand identity for a tourist destination. In addition, special efforts to include local tourists can be explored by future studies so that the views of domestic tourists are inclusive in terms of brand image and identity of a tourist destination.

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