



# The reticent effect of ICT on tourism: A case study of Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

The rapid developments in ICT have revolutionised tourism operations and the way companies and countries lure tourists, resulting in stiff competition in the global tourism industry. ICT has become the 'umbilical cord' of tourism as it has assumed a crucial role in the survival and performance of tourism destinations. However, ICT is a double-edged sword as it can be used with considerable effect either in promoting or downgrading tourism destinations. For example, in situations where a tourism destination is receiving negative publicity, ICT has the disadvantage of spreading that adverse information quickly to a global audience. This study is an important contribution to the body of knowledge on the demise of tourism in Zimbabwe in general but specifically focusing on the role of ICTs between 2000 and 2016. This research was conducted through a comprehensive literature review, mainly focusing on multiple peer-reviewed journal articles, books and conference papers from 2000 to 2016, before the Emmerson Mnangagwa-led government came to power. The selection of articles was purposive. Only those that provided deep insights and in-depth understanding as well as a proper representation of Zimbabwe's tourism sector in line with the purpose of the research were selected. The available literature strongly points out that a combination of ICT, especially the internet, government policies deemed retrogressive and economic refugees emigrating from tourist-seeking countries have contributed to the soiling of the image, reputation and identity of Zimbabwe as an attractive tourism destination on a global scale. This has had an adverse effect on the growth of the tourism sector in the country. Thus, ICT can negatively impact tourism, and thus, countries intending to lure visitors to their tourism destinations should avoid policies, events and activities that can result in bad publicity in the international media. On the other hand, there is no denying that if used properly ICT can also help to successfully rebrand a tourism destination. For this reason, it is important for national tourism strategies to encompass and interconnect both physical and virtual tourism promotion methods.

**Keywords:** Information and communication technology, Zimbabwe, bad publicity, destination

## Introduction

The rapid developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has revolutionised tourism operations and the way companies and countries lure tourists, resulting in stiff competition in the global tourism industry (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012). ICT has become integral to the development of modern tourism (Molz, 2012). Thus, ICT can be seen as the umbilical code of tourism as its use has become crucial for the survival of tourism organisations (Evans & Wurster, 1997). This is because information is the life-blood of tourism (Buhalis, 1998; Grotte, 2013; Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2013). As Stiakakis & Georgiadis (2011), observe, the tourism sector is an information-intensive competitive business. As a result, ICT



has also been used to enhance operational, structural, strategic and internal processing efficiency and the distribution of information in the tourism sector. It thus can be viewed as an essential “raw material” for tourism; a raw material that has led to irreversible developments in the tourism sector’s structure and strategy (Anandkumar, 2015; Bagherinia & Zali, 2013). On the basis of the above observations there is no doubt that ICT and the tourism sector are intricately intertwined. Destinations that do not sufficiently adopt ICT risk being driven out from global markets (Hoarau & Kline, 2014).

However, ICT services can have a negative effect on the image of tourism destinations. In situations where a destination is getting negative coverage, ICT has the disadvantage of spreading the adverse information and even fake news quickly. Pictures and videos can be posted easily in real-time. This has also been exacerbated by the convergence of media. Any person with a smart mobile phone can post information, images and videos online (Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013; Mortensen & Keshelashvili, 2013; Örnebring, 2013). International media can share such stories and provide both pictures and videos (Castillo, El-Haddad, Pfeffer & Stempeck, 2014; H. Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013; C. S. Lee & Ma, 2012) on platforms that have a huge international following. Consequently, this information whether real or perceived can result in some tourists being hesitant to visit those destinations. Thus, ICT can and has been used to negatively impact particular destinations although it is generally known that ICT can and does play a pivotal role in promoting and boosting tourism. Cognisant of this, the primary objective of this paper is to demonstrate how ICT can contribute to the demise of a country’s tourism.

This paper starts by providing an extensive literature review so as to highlight the nexus between ICT and tourism. Thereafter, the research methodology used in conducting this study will be provided, followed by a case study of how ICT negatively affected Zimbabwe’s tourism sector. The discussion on the findings of the study will be followed by the conclusion.

## **Literature Review**

Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal leisure, business or professional purposes (UNWTO, 2008). These people are generally referred to as visitors (who may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which imply tourism expenditure (Hristov, 2015; Odunayo, 2014; Tobora et al., 2014). ICT has enabled the provision of modern tools that facilitate tourism in terms of new distribution channels, consequently creating a new competitive business environment (Énalán & Soteriades, 2012; Molz, 2012; Sigala & Chalkiti, 2014). ICT tools have transformed dynamically interconnected trading partners and altered the distribution of services and the provision of information for tourists across the globe (Sigala, 2014). Thus, advances in ICT have radically revolutionised and varied the day-to-day operations of tourist organisations (Hjalager, 2015). New technologies have drastically altered the operations, structures and strategies in organisations, bringing in new innovations (Baum, 2015). They have also enabled cooperation between different role-players in the sector, both locally and globally (Berné, García-González, García-Uceda & Múgica, 2015; Magadan & Rivas, 2015). ICT has helped both in the generation and processing of information. ICT in this sector consists of many components that include computerised reservation systems, teleconferencing, videos, video brochures, management information systems, airline electronic information systems, electronic funds transfer, digital telephone networks, smart cards, mobile communication, e-mail, and internet (Eraqi, 2014; Poon, 2003; Teruel & Viñals, 2012). These various communication technologies are being used in the travel and tourism industry and its related sectors. Therefore, ICT has a direct impact on the tourism sector which can be improved using electronic business systems (Hojeghan & Esfangarch, 2011).



There is abundant literature available across the globe (Ali & Frew, 2014; Alitany, Redondo, Fonseca & Sanchez Riera, 2013; Baggio & Del Chiappa, 2014; Balandin & Laizane, 2013; Beirman, Ritchie & Campiranon, 2014; Sigala, 2014) confirming the intimate relationship between the two. There is a significant body of literature that systematically explores the ways in which ICT and the tourism sector relate (Balandin & Laizane, 2013; Bethapudi, 2013; Law, Buhalis, & Cobanoglu, 2014; Martínez-Martínez, Cegarra-Navarro & García-Pérez, 2015; Mihajlović, 2012; Sigala & Chalkiti, 2014). Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) refers to various sets of technological tools and resources for the production, analysis, storage, search, dissemination and management of information (Belagra, Benachaiba & Guemid, 2012; George, 2015). ICT encompasses a combination of hardware, software, telecommunications, Netware, groupware and human ware (Waghmode & Jamsandekar, 2013). Several scholars (Bethapudi, 2013; Law et al., 2014; Mihajlović, 2012) agree that ICT is central to the tourism, travel and hospitality sectors of an economy in the following ways: (i) it has become critical for the survival of tourism organisations, (ii) it facilitates individual access to tourism products, and (iii) it enhances operational, structural, strategic and internal processing efficiency.

For example, Mihajlović (2012) argues that the use of ICT in the tourism sector is indispensable. Such a view is also shared by Bethapudi (2013), who contends that ICT allows customer relations and supply chain management to be combined into a single source that facilitates a variety of operations. In essence, ICT has also led to changes in demand and supply in the tourism sector (Ali & Frew, 2014; Baggio & Del Chiappa, 2014; Berne, Garcia-Gonzalez, & Mugica, 2012; Buhalis & Inversini, 2014; Chakravarthi & Gopal, 2012; Guo, Ling, Dong & Liang, 2013). These disparities in access to technology are referred to as the digital divide. Thus, places and destinations not connected through ICT can be left behind in technological developments and information arrives late in these remote areas as compared to the globalised and advanced world (Burt, Kleiner, Nicholas & Sullivan, 2014; Janta, Cohen & Williams, 2015; H. Lee, Harindranath, Oh & Kim, 2015; Nugroho, Putri & Laksmi, 2012). Destinations that have not benefitted from developments in ICT are in danger of remaining in the digital shadows and not being visible on a global scale, thereby failing to attract significant numbers of tourists. Thus, the digital divide can hinder the development of tourism.

Over and above the digital shadow, some destinations can be said to be in digital silence (Miller, 2013). Invisibility manifests itself in many ways which include a lack of online content for a destination. This results in that destination's voice not being audible on the global tourism market. This may explain why many destinations and service providers have adopted various online media like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, video promotions, testimonials and online photo albums. However, many destinations in Africa still do not have access and connectivity (Chetty, Sundaresan, Muckaden, Feamster & Calandro, 2013; Ferreira, Kostakos, Beresford, Lindqvist & Dey, 2015; Gupta et al., 2014). Pucciarelli, Vannini, and Cantoni (2014) lament the situation in some destinations, especially in Africa, where tourism destination promotion is largely oral or via printed material, as many such destinations, due to challenges in connectivity among others, do not have content online. In this age of advances in ICT old style destination promotion strategies need to ride on a strong backbone of virtual representations. Both traditional methods and the virtual space must be used to promote tourism destinations. Hence, it is important for tourism to encompass and interconnect both the physical and virtual methods in promoting destinations. It cannot be overemphasised that the convergence of ICT with media technologies makes the audio-visual presentation of information to out-perform even the "glossiest and most colourful print" media (Dasgupta, 2011:209). It is thus arguable that apart from the low costs associated with production and distribution of marketing material through ICT, the audio-visual capabilities of ICT are also crucial in making the message more appealing and effective. ICTs combine all the previous disparate media platforms such as print, radio and television into a single platform; the computer. However, it is important to note that audio-visual capabilities of ICT will count for nothing if the presentation of the marketing message and content is poor.



## Methodology

This case study was conducted through a comprehensive literature review mainly focusing on multiple peer-reviewed journal articles, books and conference papers from 2000 to 2016 before Zimbabwe's Emmerson Mnangagwa-led government came to power. The selection of articles was done in a way that provided deep insights and in-depth understanding as well as a proper representation of the tourism sector in Zimbabwe in accordance to the purpose of the research. Selected literature, mainly from electronic databases specifically focusing on research studies that have documented and described how ICT has adversely affected the tourism sector in Zimbabwe, were analysed. According to Yin (2014:14), a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context "when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used". In this case, the real-life phenomenon is the negative impact of ICT on the tourism sector in Zimbabwe. The advantage of using the case study as a research strategy is that it allows for the study of "how" and "why" questions "being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has no control" (Yin, 2014:13). This is particularly useful in studying the negative impact on the tourism sector in Zimbabwe where little is known. The case study provided a comprehensive and detailed understanding of how ICT has negatively impacted Zimbabwe's tourism sector.

The next section presents an in-depth study of literature on how ICT negatively affected Zimbabwe's tourism sector between 2000 and 2016.

## The Case Study

This case study examines how ICT has negatively affected the tourism sector in Zimbabwe, a landlocked country in Southern Africa. The Zimbabwean tourist product is made up of natural resources, people, history, culture, amenities and super structures with an array of activities and sightseeing (Makuvaza & Makuvaza, 2014). The country has five World Heritage Sites, namely, Great Zimbabwe Ruins, Khami Ruins, Matobo Hills, Victoria Falls, and Mana Pools (Rusike & Chitambara, 2012). A total 11% of Zimbabwe's land area is designated as national parks, with a variety of flora and fauna that include 550 bird and 100 mammal species (Gandiwa, Heitkönig, Lokhorst, Prins & Leeuwis, 2013). Despite being endowed with such a rich array of natural resources, the country's tourism is not competing effectively on the global stage. Zimbabwe was ranked 115 out of 140 countries according to the 2015 World Economic Forum Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (Blanke & Chiesa, 2015). Despite the country's strengths in terms of endowments, this low Tourism and Travel Competitiveness Index suggests weaknesses in other areas. Consequently, it can be argued that Zimbabwe is performing below par from a travel and tourism competitiveness point of view.

There is a significant body of literature supporting the premise that the ICT sector has contributed immensely to the demise of the tourism sector in post-2000 Zimbabwe through a negative portrayal of the country (Buiters, 2007; Glaeser & Shleifer, 2005; Mkono, 2010; Ndlovu & Heath, 2011; Zibanai, 2014). With the advent of social media that has been necessitated by the accessibility of broadband and high mobile phone penetration, advertising tourist destinations and packages had become easy and efficient, but this same technology is now haunting the tourism industry in Zimbabwe. This has not been helped much by the country's turbulent political and economic landscape especially over the period under study. The unstable socio-political economic environment has spawned a swirl of negative publicity in both local and international media. For example, whenever there are violent protests in Zimbabwe and people start sharing that on social media, it means a potential traveller may shy away or become scarred to visit the country. Thus, ICT becomes a growth and development "contraceptive" to tourism. Reports of socio-political and economic upheavals occurring in Zimbabwe between 2000 and 2016 were widely reported in the international media. The convergence of media and ICT has resulted in media houses having ICT platforms



such as websites, social media sites and twitter handles. These have the effect of broadening and amplifying coverage of such occurrences and these sources of information are widely trusted and viewed as authentic as well as reliable.

Some of widely reported events in the various ICT platforms included: the rapid depreciation of the Zimbabwean dollar and unprecedented inflation sparked by the huge and un-budgeted pensions offered to liberation war veterans in 1998, which led to the rejection a government-led draft constitution in a February 2000 referendum (Thram, 2006; Zamchiya, 2011). The rejected draft constitution contained a clause which allowed the government to expropriate land without compensating white commercial farmers. Veterans of Zimbabwe's liberation war consequently began violent invasions of the white commercial farms and the government did not stop them, leading scholars such as Chavunduka and Bromley (2013), Kriger (2003) and Raftopolos (2013) to argue that the government sanctioned the violent land invasions. During the same period an opposition party, the Movement of Democratic Change (MDC), was gaining popularity and there were violent clashes between the ruling party (ZANU PF) and opposition supporters in the period leading to elections in June 2000 (Fielding, 2015; LeBas, 2006; Makumbe, 2006; Raftopoulos, 2000). The violent land reform programme, the invasion of tourist attractions and wildlife conservancies, operation Murambatsvina, hyper-inflation, corruption, State-sponsored violence, inconsistent policies by the government, among other activities, were the major source of bad publicity (Antonio, 2015; Chigora & Vutete, 2015; de Jager & Musuva, 2015; Ndlovu & Heath, 2011; Peters-Berries, 2002). Although the government of Zimbabwe remained adamant that it was addressing historical imbalances in land ownership patterns arising from colonialism, the chaotic and often violent manner in which the land acquisition and redistribution was executed attracted a slew of negative publicity for the country.

An international outcry ensued over allegations of gross human and property rights abuses. These developments gained the country wide negative coverage on the ICT platforms like the internet and in local private media and foreign media; a development that led to tourists shunning the country. The negative coverage eroded tourists' confidence and marred public perception of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. In addition, this negative publicity attracted global attention including international bodies such as the United Nations which ended up dispatching a special envoy to Harare, Dr. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka in 2005 Rupiya (2005). The envoy went on to produce a negative report which was widely circulated through ICT platforms such the internet and international media. The situation was further exacerbated by western governments, for example the USA, Britain and Australia, issuing travel warnings to their citizens with regards to Zimbabwe. To make matters worse, these countries had been Zimbabwe's major tourism source markets prior to that period.

During the same period there was very few, if any, ICT platforms managed by Zimbabweans in Zimbabwe to present their side of the story. Most Zimbabweans during this period were recipients of information on ICT platforms. However, the prominent views about the country by Zimbabweans came from Zimbabweans who had emigrated to other countries largely as political and economic refugees. These emigrants played a significant role in fuelling bad publicity about Zimbabwe. Although, there might have been genuine cases of political persecution, the majority of the people who fled the country during this period made false representations to gain asylum in other countries (Lipton, 2009; Maharaj, 2002; Maunganidze, 2016; Parsons, 2007; Pasura, 2009; Shizha & Kariwo, 2012; Sibanda, 2010). These economic refugees went to the source markets of Zimbabwe's tourism sector and gave negative information about the prevailing situation. Their claims gained wide coverage on the internet and in foreign newspapers. Thus, the tourism sector in Zimbabwe was affected by both the physical and digital realities.

In 2007, the country suffered a cholera epidemic that further attracted bad publicity (Chibaya, 2013; Chigora & Zvavahera, 2015), rendering the country even more unattractive to regional



and international travellers. Zimbabwe, as a tourist destination, was subsequently perceived as more dangerous than war-torn countries (Chibaya, 2013). The year 2008 ushered in a very unstable environment which was characterised by the global economic crisis, and for Zimbabwe, hyper-inflation, price controls, severe shortages of electricity, fuel and foreign currency and political violence (Chibaya, 2013; Chikanda & Crush, 2014; Mawowa, 2013; Mufudza, Jengeta, & Hove, 2013). This caused a decline in demand for travel for both regional and international tourists, forcing foreign airlines to withdraw their services/flights into Zimbabwe.

The increase in ICT gadgets and internet access over his period gave Zimbabweans a platform to publicise negative material about their country (Mpofu, 2013, 2015; Mutsvairo & Sirks, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015). From 2004, the concept of “online newspapers” began to inspire a number of vibrant projects. NewZimbabwe.com was Zimbabwe’s first news website and discussion forum. Zimbabweans began to use new media as an alternative to the government-controlled public media. These new media offered audiences the possibility of being both consumers and producers of content. Whereas the public media offered biased coverage of events (Mhiripiri, 2013; Mpofu, 2013; Otteng, 2014) and systematically barred voices critical of ZANU PF from being heard, new media offered those counter-hegemonic and excluded voices access to ICT platforms to debate issues of common public interest.

Since then, many of the media houses in Zimbabwe and outside the country are now available online which has given people the opportunity to play the role of citizen journalists. This enables almost anyone with a smart mobile phone and internet access to publish content and images online using information technologies such as SMS, email, social media, micro blogs and video sharing platforms (Mutsvairo & Sirks, 2015). Apart from posting news that might be false or fake, readers can also comment on such news, further damaging the image of the country since they can be accessed by source markets (Moyo, 2009). Many Zimbabweans use hate speech, insult each other and make derogatory statements about their country, its leaders and citizens especially on ICT-powered platforms as a strategy to be accepted and survive in foreign countries hosting them (Deane, 2013; Mutsvairo & Columbus, 2012; Pretorius & Blaauw, 2015).

Bad publicity negatively influences the country’s perception and image as a destination in the tourism source market. Players in the tourism sector acknowledge that negative publicity in the international media has played a major role in hampering growth in the sector. It has resulted in travel insurance charges, especially for American visitors, making Zimbabwe an expensive destination in the region. Other source markets, especially the USA and the UK issued travel warnings to their citizens (Chipanga & Mude, 2015; C. L. Jenkins, 2015; Lepp & Gibson, 2003; Mamdani, 2009; Mkono, 2010; Muzvidziwa, 2013; Van Amerom, 2006) whilst some international tourism websites excluded Zimbabwe from their holiday packages in Southern Africa, marketing Victoria Falls as a South African destination. Bad publicity also made it difficult to access funding from multilateral and bilateral institutions, leading to a shortage of funds for the refurbishment, revival and development of tourism facilities (Chipanga & Mude, 2015; Karambakuwa et al., 2011).

While Zimbabwe was getting adverse publicity in the early 2000s, largely based on allegations of gross human rights abuses emanating from the land reform programme and disputed elections, its image temporarily changed around 2009 following the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in February 2009. This political pact between the country’s political forces that had been on each other’s throats for a decade saw the Southern African country attaining some measure of socio-political and economic stability. The political settlement also saw the country slowly winning back international goodwill and investor confidence. However, the end of the GNU in 2013, which saw ZANU PF regaining virtually total control of the government, brought mixed perceptions locally and internationally. It is this



context of the shifting socio-economic environment in Zimbabwe, which makes this research necessary, since the socio-economic environment has a bearing on the ICT and tourism sector in any country.

## Discussion

This section will discuss key findings from the case study and their implications. The political situation in Zimbabwe whether real or perceived, negatively impacted on the country's image, reputation and identity, which consequently through bad publicity churned by ICT-powered media negatively affected the tourism sector in Zimbabwe. This, is despite the fact that Zimbabwe as a tourist destination is endowed with a variety of spectacular scenic landscapes, exceptional biodiversity and abundant wildlife as well as a broad range of tourist products and services suitable for a variety of travellers.

Mkono (2012) argues that politics has significant implications for the tourism sector, especially where source markets are of the perception that visiting Zimbabwe would be an implicit way of legitimising the government. Then led by President Robert Mugabe, the government was seen as autocratic, violent and disregarding human rights and the rule of law. This gave rise to negative publicity in both print and online news sources and ultimately tarnishing Zimbabwe as destination, resulting decline of the tourism sector. The violent land reform programme, invasion of tourist attractions wildlife conservancies, operation Murambatsvina, hyper-inflation, corruption, state-sponsored violence, inconsistent policies by the government among other activities were the major source of bad publicity (LeBas, 2014; Matiza & Oni, 2013) largely circulated via ICT and this led to a negative perception in source markets. The result was that tourists inevitably shunned the country (Mugobo & Wakeham, 2014). This view also resonates with Eugenio-Martin and Campos-Soria (2014), who argue that bad publicity can result in a tourist destination being regarded as unsafe for tourists, leading to a decline in the number of tourist arrivals. Thus, ICT played a significant role in creating a bad or negative image of Zimbabwe that obviously affected the tourism industry.

In this research, the main focus was to understand how ICT negatively affected Zimbabwe's tourism sector between 2000 and 2016. The study highlighted that although ICT can be used to improve tourism it has also power to negatively impact the image of a destination through the spread of negative publicity. This case study has shown that the image of a destination is determined by its representation on online media platforms and this can have either positive or negative consequences for the physical image. Hence, advances in ICT have resulted in tourist destinations being a hybrid of virtual and physical representation (Baggio & Del Chiappa, 2014; Govers & Go, 2009; Ružić & Dukić, 2013). A tourist destination thrives on its image (Navickas & Malakauskaite, 2015; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). The virtual image comprises the representation and the visibility created and shaped by its online presence (Baggio & Del Chiappa, 2014; Govers & Go, 2009). In this case, the virtual representation of Zimbabwe between 2000 and 2016 had mainly negative consequences. This is reflected by the large quantities of bad publicity that the country endured during this period which inevitably soiled the country's image. Thus, governments in tourism destinations should avoid policies, events and activities that can result in bad publicity. With the advent of technology, information can easily be disseminated all over world at the click of a button further denting the image of a destination through negative perceptions. ICT alters or augments the way tourism destinations are perceived in the virtual realm. Bad publicity often results where what is perceived online differs from what is actually happening. Destinations need to use ICT to correct the bad publicity created by images and misconceptions. Hence, ICT can be successfully used to rebrand a destination. Therefore, it is important for tourism strategies to encompass and interconnect both the physical and the virtual promotion methods.

Another finding from the case study was that Zimbabwe is a highly polarised society online, with predominantly two groups of people who hold very divergent views - those who are pro-



government and those who are opposed to the government. These present an image of a house divided within itself, a divided society with violent traits epitomised by an intolerant and blundering government. This is in agreement with the findings of the government-instituted commission of inquiry into the August 2018 post-election violence report. In its findings the commission led by former South African President Kgalema Motlanthe, concluded that there was a “very worrisome degree of polarisation and bitterness within the body politic of Zimbabwe” (Motlanthe, 2018:55). Those who are against the government were in the forefront in demonising their country, tarnishing the image of the country and government officials through the use ICT, especially social media and online newspapers. Furthermore, they perceived that the government had barred their critical voices and were using ICT to express their grievances and protest against government policies and push for economic, social, political reforms. This was exacerbated by the fact that there was no much digital material to promote the country as a tourist destination online (Nyaruwata, 2018; Tsokota, Von Solms, & van Greunen, 2017). Hence, it was left to outsiders to define and interpret the digital images of a place. Consequently, online presence plays a prominent role in promoting a tourism destination.

Virtual representations must complement and be congruent with physical representations. Both traditional methods and virtual space must be used to promote a destination. This however, is very difficult where there are divergent and polarised views online about a destination, as is the case with Zimbabwe. Furthermore, there has been very little effort to promote Zimbabwe digitally as a destination (Njovo & Makacha, 2018). ICT can thus be seen as a threat to destinations for organisations that remain traditional and fail to take advantage of new tools.

ICT can be used to create images that reflect the intrinsic qualities of the tourism product, its design, quality and style of attractions, and its physical features and social environment (Mishra, 2015). These images are then used to market the destination and to adapt and influence potential tourists’ expectations (Middleton & Clarke, 2012). The use of ICT thus becomes pertinent in the tourism sector, where the products are intangible and difficult to evaluate before consumption.

However, it has been argued that Zimbabwe’s national tourism promotion body, the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority’s efforts at the time mainly centred on using tourism attaches, brand ambassadors, tourism exhibitions and carnivals as well as inviting celebrities to visit Zimbabwe (Zengeni & Zengeni, 2014). It can therefore be argued that there was need for sustainable use of ICT in the tourism sector in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe’s neighbouring countries like South Africa, Namibia and Botswana took advantage of Zimbabwe’s post-2000 political-economic crisis and its attendant negative coverage which portrayed Zimbabwe as an unsafe destination. This resulted in lower tourism arrivals and income for Zimbabwe.

This section has discussed how politics, government policies as well as bad publicity generated and widely circulated by political and economic emigrants through ICT platforms such the internet and international media contributed to the soiling of the image, reputation and identity of Zimbabwe on the global tourism market. This has had an adverse effect on the growth of the tourism sector in Zimbabwe.

## **Conclusion**

The research has pointed out that the government of Zimbabwe as well as other non-state actors’ actions, especially retrogressive policies or preventable actions, reinforced the negative perceptions and image of the country. Thus, the country spoilt its image through actions which are adversely reported on various platforms which are powered by ICT. This resulted in the denting of the country’s image, reputation and identity in a global tourism arena. This had an adverse effect on the growth of the tourism sector in the country.





With the rapid developments in technology, information can easily be spread all over the world further damaging the image of a destination through negative reportage. Thus, ICT has a lethal effect on how a destination is perceived and can thus become an impediment to the development of tourism.

Consequently, this research is important as it provides new insights into the centrality of ICT in tourism especially in Zimbabwe. This study contributes to the body of knowledge in this field by demonstrating how ICT can contribute to the demise of destinations, especially in developing countries like Zimbabwe. Previous researches have argued that declining figures in leisure tourist arrivals were caused by factors like the nature of politics, social and economic factors (Chigora & Ndlovu, 2018; Mirimi, Shumba, Chiutsi, Hurombo, & Mangwiro, 2013; Mkono, 2012). However, this paper argues that over and above these issues, ICT was the chief vehicle in spreading bad publicity about Zimbabwe as a tourism destination. Thus, ICT can be seen as both a development enabler if positively and expertly deployed and an impediment if ineptly handled or ignored to the development of tourism as was the case with Zimbabwe between 2000 and 2016.

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