



# Places to cities: Comprehending brands as personalities for Zimbabwean urban tourism vibrancy

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## Abstract

This study upon which this article is based was grounded on understanding the personalities existing within the urban residential areas in Zimbabwe. The aim was to establish personalities that would be used to brand places and cities as residential areas in Zimbabwe. This was a qualitative study conducted among eight participants who were selected purposefully. These participants included: a council employee, secondary school teacher, district officer, senior police officer, resident, medical practitioner, Church leader and shop owner. In-depth interviews were conducted and recorded and thematic analysis was done. The themes that were obtained from the in-depth interviews were: Ruggedness, Sincerity, Hospitable Nature, Friendly, Stubborn, Gentle, Aggressive and Welcoming. The study recommended that there should be effective consultation of local communities in crafting and formulating vibrant personalities to sell place, city and destination brands. The study also recommends a further more in depth study to find the most dominating personalities in the branding of cities in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** Place branding, city branding, destination branding, brand personality, Zimbabwe

## Introduction

Traditionally, accessibility and convenience were the most important factors to be considered by a prospective tourist before an actual visit is made. In the current situation, tourists view destinations as humans who have a personality that will either encourage or discourage their visit. As propounded by Metaxas (2007) the competitiveness of a place is multi-dimensional such that there is need to find the right parameters to have lasting competitiveness. The right parameters as discovered by this study emanate from understanding the existing brand personalities for places and cities within Zimbabwe. This has resulted in various social enterprises getting more pressure to do place branding as a tool for improved marketing (Mitchell et al., 2016). There is now an increasing importance and need to practice place branding as a government agenda item to sell places (Cleave, 2014). This shows that places should be known as brands rather than just physical or geographically bound areas. The people in these places have become brand ambassadors, through their living set-up, their way of interaction and the overall personality they reflect to the world. Campelo et al. (2009) concurred with this notion by announcing that the local communities are vital in developing a sustainable place brand identity, when they support and



legitimize the promise of the brand to the world. In his model Kavaratzis (2008) informed that when referring to local communities the focus is not only on the residences but, also involvement of businesses and investors in developing and delivering the brand. They form a collective personality that forms a brand for the city or place. This is also supported by Hanna and Rowley (2011) who expressed that there should be continuous community stakeholders' involvement in order to achieve a prolonged brand identity.

This study was based on the understanding that places have grown to be known through their cities. Assuming that the brand of a place is a composite formation coming from cities with the place, there was a need to investigate city brands as humans with different personalities. There are several communities within Zimbabwe and they are organized according to social classes with different levels of interaction. When tourists visit the country, they live in these places or cities such that the behaviour and personality of the residences helps in building a certain brand in the mind of the tourists. Tourists are therefore attracted by a personality that reflects their own, and if not they will not visit the destination. Since there has been a reported decline in touristic visits within Zimbabwe, knowing and building personalities that are expected by the target markets might result in the formation of an overall attractive Zimbabwe tourism brand. This is because as alluded by Bell (2016), there are gaps surrounding place brand identity and place brand image due to complex governmental arrangements, and it is through this study that brand personality could be regarded as a concept that would close the gap from a Zimbabwe tourism destination perspective.

### **Statement of the problem**

In Zimbabwe, just like any other countries around the world, there are different types of residential areas in existence. These are usually classified according to their social class namely low, medium or high class. This has also resulted in the classification extended to their density, that is, low density, medium and high density. However, there is a growing concept of city branding which has helped in selling cities, places and nations as touristic destinations. According to Heeley (2011) the application of city branding using various techniques is still at a low level of practice. Classifications are no longer enough but having a positive personality for identity. Little research has been done in relation to residential "brand personality" from a tourism perspective, particularly in Zimbabwe. If considered, this might help in selling and improving performance of the Zimbabwe tourism destination brand.

Even with Hosany et al. (2007) having tried to close the gap between brand personality and brand image for tourism destinations, little has been done in relation to personalities of cities. Also Tran et al. (2013) have sought to discover how brand personality and brand quality relates, but without a focus on place and city brand personalities. This study, therefore investigated the personality of cities and places by looking at the increasingly growing urban residential areas in Zimbabwe. There is a need to craft integrated models for place branding (Acharya & Rahman, 2016; Hanna & Rowley, 2011; Zenker & Braun, 2010) and this study considers the concept of brand personality.

### **Research Objectives**

- To understand the personalities that are reflected by places, cities and communities in a tourism destination
- To inform on the specific personalities of urban residential areas in Zimbabwe



## Literature review

### Brand personality

According to Plummer (1985) brand personality is when human characteristics are connected with the brand so that both attributes and physical elements of a brand are communicated to the consumer, the brand being viewed as a human being. Selection of one brand over another is based on the personality of a brand (Siguaw et al., 1999). This shows that brand personality has increasingly become a tool to connect the suppliers and their customers. Morgan et al., (2003) further postulated that brands have their own personality which affects the perception that the customers have on the product or service together with quality judgement, utility and desirability.

However, in relation to this study destination brand image and the concept of personality is more recent, such that little research has been carried out on this issue (Hosany et al. 2006). This might be the reason why the Zimbabwe tourism brand has failed to regain ground from its negative image over the years. According to Diamantopoulos et al., (2005) the personality of a brand goes beyond the functional utility that is expected by the customer since the customers now use brands as symbolic instruments that can be applied not only to explain, but also to express their own personality.

This is the reason why marketers are now using descriptors of human personalities since brands are being personified (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003:149). There is a need to extract specific personalities that might be used to identify particular brands. For this study, it was important to produce specific personalities to be applied in order to improve attractiveness and market visibility of the Zimbabwe tourism destination brand, spearheaded by an effective city or place branding exercise. Aaker et al., (2001) produced some key personalities specified into five as: Sincerity; Excitement; Competence; Sophistication; and Ruggedness.

Even with a wide application and discussion of these personalities in various researches and literature that were previously done, these might not be applicable from a destination branding perspective, particularly for Zimbabwe. As argued by Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) the brand personality concept by Aaker was not properly defined. It was therefore important for this study to produce specified brand personalities for cities in Zimbabwe. This is also supported by Klipfel et al., (2014) who announced that the traits forming a brand personality stem from communications made between the brand and its customers, and for this study the traits originated from the residences within the cities in Zimbabwe tourism destinations. To a greater extent, brand personalities are increasingly beginning to be applied in the branding of places (Hosany et al., 2006). This was therefore the drive for this study to improve on branding of places in Zimbabwe through the use of effective brand personalities.

### Place branding

There are traditional practices that have resulted in the rising of the value of places such as the people, knowledge and capital but these could not attract key groups as can be achieved through place branding (Konecnik Ruzzier & de Chernatony, 2013). However, in the existing literature and research there is little agreement on the real purpose and nature of place branding (Lucarelli & Berg, 2011), which was the intention of this study coming from a tourism destination perspective. A place has been defined from a general perspective as a concept of living (Cresswell & Hoskins, 2008:394). To specify the concept of place branding Kemp et al., (2012:508) informed that it is based on enhancing the branding of cities and regions. This study focused on branding of cities



as an influence to place branding. Another perspective by Dinnie (2008) was place identity and place image, for which the former was explained as the manner in which people view themselves and the latter referring to how a place is perceived to be. Hanna and Rowley (2011) then informed that even with various perspectives and understanding of place branding, there are few models on the subject matter and these have neither being adapted nor adopted, or even cited. Thus the drive of this study is to fuse place and city branding to come up with effective place and city brand personalities.

Various authors (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Lucarelli & Berg, 2011) also concurred by postulating that the area of place branding lacks in theory which calls for developing the theories and processes for place branding. In order to come up with an effective place branding procedure, there is need for stakeholder consideration (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). This study therefore considered various members of selected communities in order to come up with effective place branding in Zimbabwe. Also Braun (2011) informed that there is still confusion on the origination of place branding so as to produce an effective conceptualization in the study of marketing.

### City branding

The concept of city branding is still in its infancy, having fewer studies carried out in that area (Lichrou, O'Malley & Patterson, 2010). Even with some existing practices of city branding, the available strategies have been criticized as ineffective as they communicate about the image of city brand through general slogans, logos and adverts (Govers, 2013). This calls for other new ways of improving city brands, and for this study, it was through viewing the brands as humans with personalities that influence a consumption decision. On the other hand Sally et al., (2014) looked at the competitiveness of city brands by raising factors to be considered for their market success as a combination of factors including strategies, policies, processes and institutions influencing sustainable levels of productivity for a city connected to the socio-economic and environmental issues. Chernatony and McDonald (1992:3) went on to highlight the main features of a city as its heritage, natural resources and culture. However, even with an array of these feature in Zimbabwe, branding of the tourism destination has been difficult over the years. Ginting and Wahid (2015) suggested that heritage and other activities within a city can last in the memories of the tourists. To a greater extent, just like any other destination branding activities Gaggiotti et al. (2008) in their model explained the need to have commitment of stakeholders' participation and commitment for an effective city branding and management. This study therefore selected to work with communities as custodians and stakeholders for developing effective city branding personalities. It thus opted to work with specific persons who were likely to offer views that could be generalized.

### Research Methodology

This was a cross-sectional qualitative study conducted among eight participants who were selected purposefully. The profiles of each of the participants are shown below. This was achieved through visiting and interviewing people who are close and involved in the day to day activities of communities. These included a church leader, police officer, council officer and district officer. Also the participants included a medical practitioner for local hospitals and a teacher from a community school.

**Table 1.1 Profile of participants for in-depth interviews**

ORGANISATION	n	POSITION IN SOCIETY	INDUSTRY TYPE	DURATION OF MEETING
Mbare City Council	1	Council Employee	Town Council	1 hour 11 minutes
Mufakose Community	1	Secondary School Teacher	Secondary School	52 minutes

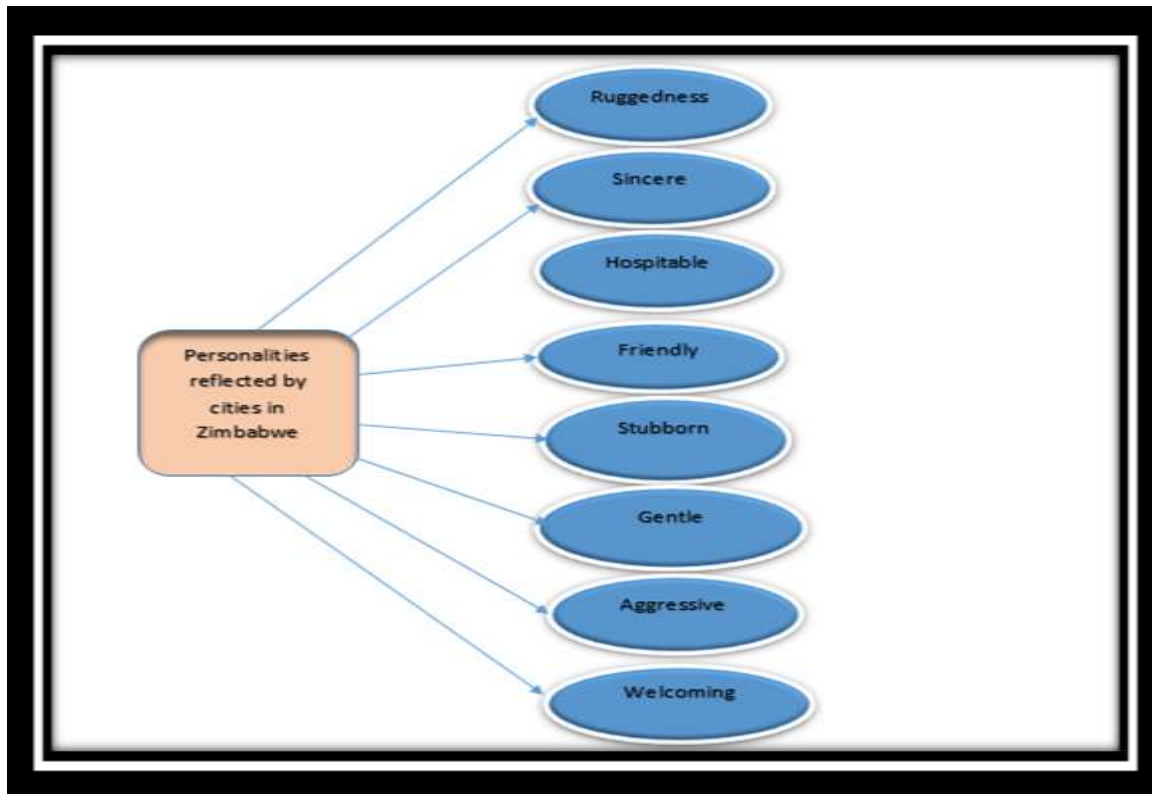
Mabvuku District Council	1	District Officer	Urban District	1 hour 32 minutes
Harare Central Police Station	1	Senior Police Officer	Ministry of Home Affairs	1 hour 57 minutes
Avondale Residential Area	1	Resident	Residential Area	47 minutes
Norton Medical Hospital	1	Medical Practitioner	Residential Hospital	1 hour 3 minutes
Westgate Shopping Mall	1	Shop Owner	Retailing	49 minutes
Harare Roman Catholic Church	1	Church Leader	Religious	1 hour 53 minutes

A content analysis was done on the data received from the above in-depth interviews which then established themes for the study.

### Findings and discussions

The findings from the in-depth interviews helped in producing the themes for this study in relation to the overall personalities that are reflected by most cities in Zimbabwe. These personalities are as presented in Figure 1.1 below as Ruggedness; Sincere; Hospitable; Friendly; Stubborn; Gentle; Aggressive; and Welcoming.

**Figure 1.1** Types of personalities reflected by cities in Zimbabwe Source: The Present study



The established themes are very similar with the ones available in existing literatures as discussed earlier. For instance, Kaplan et al., (2010) produced some brand personality dimensions as: excitement, competence, peacefulness, ruggedness, conservatism and malignancy.





## Personalities of cities in Zimbabwe

**Rugged and Aggressive:** This attribute may be due to the fact that the social environment in the country has been disturbed by political and economic upheavals which is now even reflected in the characters of the populace. This might be the reason for a sharp decline in the performance of the overall destination brand. The communities, cities or places within Zimbabwe are not supporting a personality that is welcoming. There is need for community involvement as major stakeholders in developing an effective brand. This is supported by Eshuis et al., (2014) who announced that there is need for local residents' participation in order to have a vibrant and attractive place brand. This is because the locals will have a sense of ownership and behave in a manner that supports tourism growth through a positive personality. An employee for the City Council commented:

*"It depends with the social class of the residents, for example those in low density suburbs are gentler and welcoming compared to those in high density who are aggressive and ruggedness."*

**Friendly, Gentle and Sincere:** These are highly related personalities. Historically, Zimbabwe tourism destination has been known as a friendly destination with gentle and sincere residents. The operating environment especially the political past might be the reason for the stubbornness of personality. This is due to the culture of love and welcoming within the people and communities. A friendly community is highly competitive as propounded by Hankinson (2007) through notifying that establishing a strong relationship between local residents and customers can lead to long term socio-economic benefits. Tourists want to enjoy and relax in a friendly environment. The cities in Zimbabwe have a change of attracting more tourists through a friendly brand personality. A Secondary Teacher commented:

*"I have seen that most urban cities in Zimbabwe have mixed personalities but mainly being friendly and with some reflecting stubbornness."*

**Hospitable and Welcoming:** The research positively informed that members of communities surrounding Zimbabwe are highly hospitable and welcoming. This might be due to the existence of a diverse multi-cultural environment that accepts anyone from all corners of the world. This is a positive state towards producing a vibrant and attractive city, place and destination brand in Zimbabwe. As alluded by Ekinici (2003), the success of a brand is based on a positive relationship between the destination and the tourist.

*A Church Leader commented: "Zimbabweans are hospitable in general and they welcome anyone from all over the world which forms their personality." Whilst a Shop Owner also concurred by commenting that, "There is a positive hospitable personality for most cities in Zimbabwe which increases the welcoming of the tourists."*

**Stubbornness:** This is a negative personality attribute in achieving an attractive city, place and destination brand. Tourists do not visit a destination reflecting that personality. The reason for this outcome might be due to the fact that Zimbabwe as a country, has experienced political violence which even made the general populace angry, bitter and stubborn. It then brewed a character that reflects a similar personality for brands of cities, places and communities around the country. The responsible destination marketers should then conduct various promotions to make the community members aware of a personality that is labelled on them. A Senior Police Officer commented:

*"I have seen that most urban cities in Zimbabwe have mixed personalities but mainly being friendly and with some reflecting stubbornness."*



## Conclusion

The study was based on understanding the personalities existing with the urban residential areas in Zimbabwe. This was with an aim to use these personalities in marketing the tourism destination as a brand. The basis of this study was to revisit the concept of destination brand personality but with a specific focus on the Zimbabwean cities and places. The study helped in establishing the personalities qualities that define most of the cities in the country as: Ruggedness, Sincere, Hospitable, Friendly, Stubborn, Gentle, Aggressive and Welcoming. The study also concluded that, if a further study could be done, there could be a new framework for destination brand personalities especially with regards to Zimbabwe and other similar destinations in the SADC region. This is because in this study, it only managed to come up with the general personalities but did not produce the most dominant ones to be used for Zimbabwe's destination brand ascendancy.

## Recommendations

There is a dire need to consult local residents in building brands for cities, places and the destination as a whole. This is because they will provide useful suggestions from their day to day experiences and their personality can even be understood so as to mold it to fit with the requirement of the brand. This is supported by Hankinson (2007) who states that engaging local residents and communities is crucial for improved marketing and ultimately the competitiveness of a place.

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