# BRANDING AS A STRATEGIC TOOL TO REPOSITION A DESTINATION: A SURVEY OF KEY TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS IN ZIMBABWE

By

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## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to develop a destination branding and positioning framework, with particular reference to the Zimbabwean experience. The theoretical underpinnings and concepts used in this study were destination marketing, destination branding and positioning, image and destination competitiveness.

To provide a strategic context to the study, branding as a key element of destination marketing was clarified; the strategic role of branding /re-branding in the positioning/repositioning of a destination was outlined; international trends and best practices in branding and positioning were evaluated; and the destination marketing situation in Zimbabwe, with particular emphasis on the status of branding and positioning, was determined.

To determine key stakeholder attitudes, experiences and expectations regarding the branding and positioning of Zimbabwe as a tourism destination, a stakeholder survey was carried out during 2006 and 2007. Stakeholder groups included in the survey were key industry representative bodies, national tourism authorities, publicity associations, tour operators and airlines flying into Zimbabwe.

The study concludes that the concept of branding has varied interpretations in destination marketing. While branding can be used as a strategic tool to reposition a destination, the study notes that there are a number of non-tourism factors which can erode brand equity rendering a destination brand obsolete. It observes that unless and until these non-tourism factors are addressed the destination brand may not perform optimally. Any destination that needs to re-brand has to deal with the image issues before any meaningful re-branding activities can take place. The consistent use of well focused promotional and public diplomacy strategies as well as proactive crisis management should be used to pull the destination from its negative equity.

A key outcome of the study is a strategic framework for branding and positioning a destination in crisis. It sets out guidelines for the stakeholders on how to implement the branding process. In addition, the framework adds value to destination marketing since it can be applied as a frame of reference in understanding the complexities of destination branding. While the framework has been developed in a Zimbabwean context, it can be applied to other destinations which have a need to brand or re-brand.

An integrated marketing and communication strategy is recommended since branding alone may not yield positive results under a crisis situation. At the same time the destination needs to address political and economic issues, design strategies that can bring together all the stakeholders, while encouraging alliances and joint ventures among tourism operators. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge regarding destination marketing, particularly destination branding.

**Key Words**

Destination branding, positioning, destination marketing, market segmentation, competitiveness, brand communication, brand identity, image, brand equity.

## DEDICATION

While PhD studies are an individual effort, this could not have been achieved was it not for the unconditional support and love of my wife Belinda and my two boys Mqalisi and Mbusi.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| **AZTA** | Association of Zimbabwe Travel Agents |
| **BOAZ** | Boat Owners Association of Zimbabwe |
| **CAMPFIRE** | Communal Areas Management Programme For Indigenous Resources |
| **CASS** | Centre for Applied Social Sciences |
| **CNN** | Cable News Network |
| **CRS** | Computer Reservation System |
| **CSO** | Central Statistics Office |
| **CTB** | Ceylon Tourism Board |
| **DMO** | Destination Marketing Organisation |
| **DTB** | Destination Tourism Board |
| **HAZ** | Hospitality Association of Zimbabwe |
| **HOA** | Heart Of Africa |
| **ICT** | Information Communication Technology |
| **IMF** | International Monetary Fund |
| **ITOZA** | Inbound Tour Operators of Zimbabwe Association |
| **MDGs** | Millennium Development Goals |
| **MICE** | Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events |
| **NCF** | National Consultative Forum |
| **NEDPP** | National Economic Development Priority Programme |
| **NGO** | Non Governmental Organisation |
| **NPWAZ** | National Parks and Wildlife Authority of Zimbabwe |
| **NTO** | National Tourist Office |
| **POSA** | Public Order and Security Act |

| | |
|---|---|
| **RETOSA** | Regional Tourism Organization of Southern Africa |
| **SADC** | Southern African Development Community |
| **SPSS** | Statistical Package for Social Sciences |
| **SWOT** | Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats |
| **TAG** | Tourism Action Group |
| **TALC** | Tourism Area Life Cycle |
| **UK** | United Kingdom |
| **UN** | United Nations |
| **WTO** | World Tourism Organization |
| **ZANU PF** | Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front |
| **ZAPU PF** | Zimbabwe African People's Union Patriotic Front |
| **ZATSO** | Zimbabwe Association of Tour and Safari Operators |
| **ZCT** | Zimbabwe Council for Tourism |
| **ZIPHGA** | Zimbabwe Professional Hunters and Guides Association |
| **ZNCC** | Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce |
| **ZTA** | Zimbabwe Tourism Authority |
| **ZTDC** | Zimbabwe Tourist Development Corporation |

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