

CHAPTER 8

TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR DESTINATION BRANDING AND REPOSITIONING

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CHAPTER 8

TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR DESTINATION BRANDING AND REPOSITIONING

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter builds on the extensive literature review that is presented in chapter 2; the best practices in international destination-branding and positioning that are described in chapter 4; the situational analysis of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination that appears in chapter 5; and the results of the empirical survey that are set out in chapter 7.

The objectives of this chapter are to:

- discuss an overview of the cardinal factors in destination branding and repositioning;
- develop a framework for branding and repositioning of a tourism destination;
- discuss a framework for the strategic branding and repositioning of a destination in order to maximise its competitiveness;
- make a comparison of the framework that was developed for this study and other branding and positioning models that are discussed in this study; and
- discuss the uniqueness of the branding and positioning framework as compared to other similar frameworks on branding and positioning a destination.

8.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE CARDINAL FACTORS IN DESTINATION BRANDING AND REPOSITIONING

Most tourism activities take place at a particular destination and therefore the destination itself forms a pillar of any modelling that is done for the tourism system (Pike, 2004:1). The desire to become a recognisable destination presents a marketing challenge (Kotler *et al.*, 1996:156). While destination marketing has often presented complex challenges, the understanding and application of strategic thinking and marketing is the basis for differentiating a country's offering from that of its competitors. Heath (2004:6) emphasises that:

"it is being increasingly accepted that the marketing success of a destination is not dependent on only the so-called push factors (i.e. market-demand forces), but it also depends on the pull factors (i.e. supply-side factors) that have a major impact on the branding success of a particular destination".

The literature reviewed in chapters, 2, 3, 4 and 5 and the data analysis undertaken in chapter 7 form the basis of the exposition presented in this chapter. The chapters referred to above provide the foundation for the development of a framework for branding and positioning that is described in chapter 7. According to Heath (2004):

"a competitive analysis includes three constructs, namely competitor, resources and market analyses (i.e. the strengths, gaps and challenges faced by the destination concerned)".

Other scholars have also emphasised the importance of image analysis in the branding process (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997:12; Gartner, 1993) and cautioned that the image projected by the destination could on occasion differ from the image that is perceived by tourists. In such an event, the destination brand could lose its identity, because image formation is dependent upon a continuum of the acts of separate agents who act independently or in some combination to form a destination image that is unique to the individual destination (Keller, 2003). The development of the branding and positioning framework took into cognisance of the brand image and brand identity.

A key factor that emerged from the empirical survey regarding the branding process was the stakeholders' perceptions of the brand. The process of determining what these perceptions are, involves the analysis of the perceptions of various categories of stakeholders, namely visitors, local residents, the government and the business community. The results of such an analysis could assist the destination to formulate a positioning strategy (Framke, 2002:95; Axelrod, 1997; Chacko, 1997:2). The perceptions of the various stakeholders could become the source of differentiation, as discussed in chapter 2.

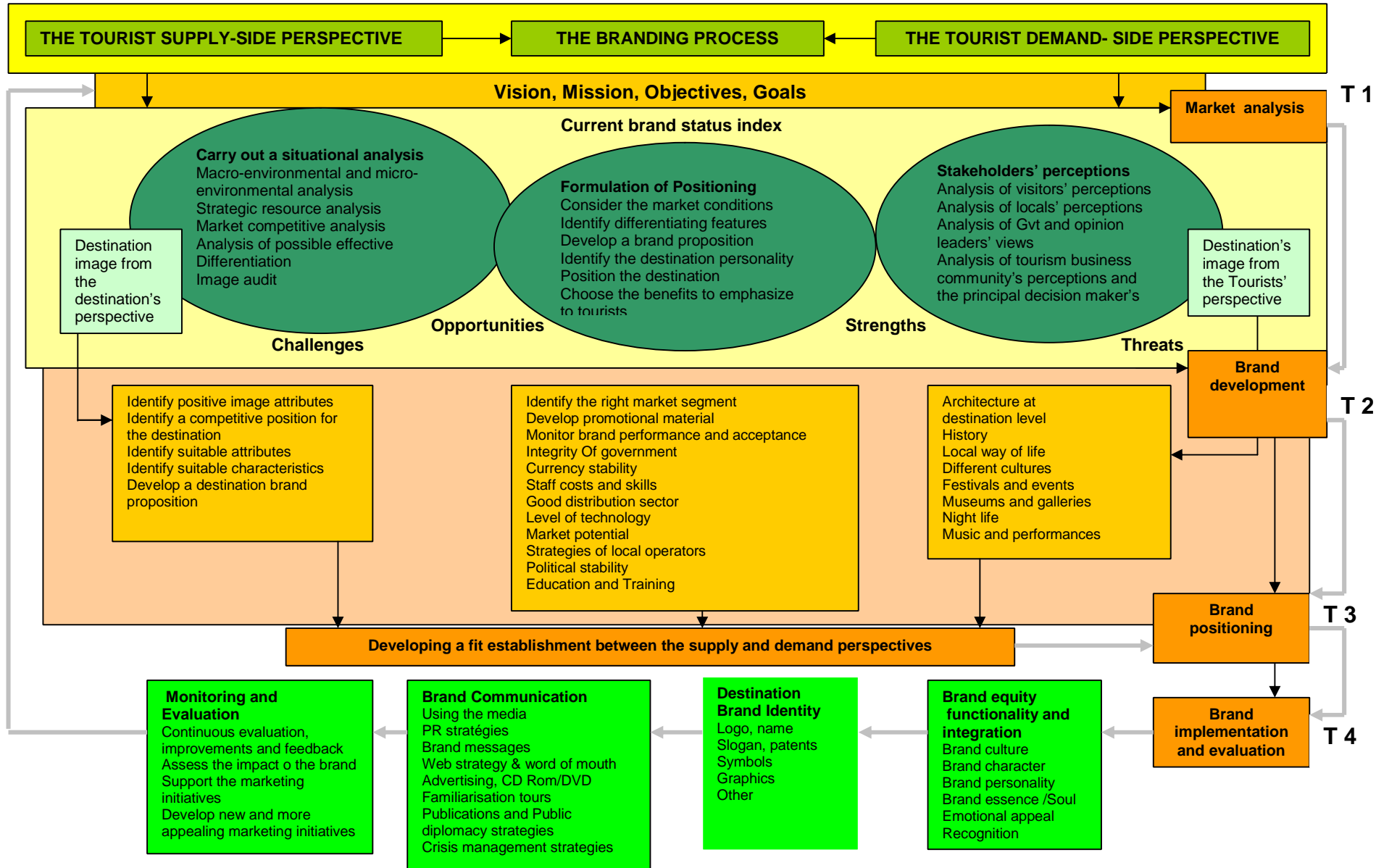
Other Scholars (Marzano & Scott, 2005; Trist, 1983; Keogh, 1990 and Landkin & Bertramini, 2000) have stressed the factors of brand equity and added value, which fulfil a significant role in the branding process (Aaker, 1996:7-8; Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998:95, Brymer, 2003; Keller, 2003:76). Brand equity includes matters such as personality, quality of experiences, lifestyles, familiarity, identity, preferences, functionality, loyalty and brand awareness. These factors were incorporated into the proposed destination branding and positioning framework.

Some scholars have even argued that brand identity is the core of the branding process (Morgan, *et al*, 2002; Ooi, 2003; Olins, 2002) whereas others emphasise a very important factor such as promotion and communication of the destination to the target market, which can be achieved through the use of various strategies for reaching out to the customer (Fabricius, 2006a:9; Buhalis, 2000:102). The last important factor of the branding process is implementation, monitoring and evaluation, which provide feedback through a continuous developmental process that is aimed at the improvement and continual repositioning of the destination in the marketplace. Brand implementation and evaluation constitute the most important aspect in the proposed branding and positioning framework.

8.3 DEVELOPING A DESTINATION-BRANDING AND POSITIONING FRAMEWORK

The proposed destination branding and positioning framework aims to explain the strategic role of destination-branding in the repositioning of a destination. The experience of Zimbabwe is used as an example. Destination branding is a strategic tool for destination marketers. Several constructs play an important role in the use of this strategic tool. These constructs include destination performance; key features of destination branding; destination branding; communication methods in destination branding; re-branding of a destination; branding and positioning; destination image; micro-environmental and macro-environmental analyses; monitoring, evaluation and control; and brand identity. In the following sections attention is given to the details on the relationships between these variables. The relationships are presented schematically in figure 8.1.

Figure: 8.1 Relationships between the constructs in the destination branding and positioning framework



Source: Researcher's own construction

The proposed framework provides a new way of looking at destination branding and positioning by explicitly demonstrating that destination branding does not consist of a single component. There are several factors involved in destination branding. These factors include market analysis; brand development; brand positioning; brand implementation; and evaluation. The constructs that are described and tested in chapter 7 are interwoven in this model to demonstrate how these components interact with other variables. The components are not independent or separate, as some scholars (Fabricius, 2006a; Keller, 2003; Morgan *et al*, 2002) have demonstrated. The components concerned are market analysis (Tier 1); brand development (Tier 2); brand positioning (Tier 3); and brand implementation and evaluation (Tier 4). The components are discussed individually in the following sections.

8.3.1. Market analysis

The first step in destination branding is to undertake an environmental analysis, such as an analysis of the broader context (Heath, 2004:20). The marketing environment comprises outside actors and forces that affect the destination's ability to develop and maintain successful relations with its tourists. The marketing environment should be viewed from both the tourist-supply and the tourist-demand demand perspectives. The macro environment consists of those forces that create opportunities and pose threats to the destination at large or to the stakeholders which is referred to as the current brand status index in the model. These factors, which are largely uncontrollable, include political, social, technological, economic and demographic

issues. The analysis of these factors can lead to the development of a vision, mission and goals for the destination.

According to Heath (2004:20), the competitive environment consists of all those suppliers of tourism offerings that compete for the same target market. The empirical survey revealed that the micro environment is the immediate environment that primarily comprises the current and potential tourism markets for the destination and the businesses linked to the destination. As shown in the empirical survey it is vital for the destination concerned to conduct an internal analysis, such as undertaking an audit of the available resource components. The aim of the audit is to identify the major sources of strengths and weaknesses as far as the destination's resources are concerned.

The development of any marketing strategy is premised on what is available, i.e. the core competences that can provide a competitive advantage (Heath, 2004:21). It is indicated in chapter 7 that the Zimbabwean tourism brand has been affected by several factors. The inception of the agrarian reform in 1999 contributed to the decline of the tourism industry (Chadenga, 2000:8). The resettlement programme resulted in some people being resettled in wildlife areas, an action that had a negative impact on tourism development. The insecurity that is perceived by tourists abroad, which is based on negative publicity, also contributed immensely to the decline in tourist arrivals. As indicated in the empirical survey, the situation has been exacerbated by the shortage of foreign currency, food and the general malice on the part of government. The respondents showed that the situation in that country is dire since some pointed out the political and safety issue as unpleasant surprises in the destination.

The absence of a strategic tourism plan has also resulted in the failure of the destination to decentralise information adequately to both the national and international markets as evidenced in the empirical survey. A market analysis should involve a SWOT analysis in order to identify the gaps, threats, opportunities, strengths and challenges that the destination should address as shown on the framework. A clear understanding of the macro and micro environments should guide the development of a vision and mission for and the determination of goals for the destination and thereby commence the course towards brand development.

8.3.2 Brand development

The aim of brand development is to reach congruency between the desired brand image and the perceived image of the destination. However, it is difficult to coordinate and control the development of a brand image. A strategic approach to destination branding could be undermined by the fact that campaigns that are launched by various organisations at the destination level could project different messages to the target market. In most cases such campaigns are undertaken without any consultation on or co-ordination regarding the values of the destination that are to be promoted.

The failure of Zimbabwe to strike a balance between the perceived image and the projected image effectively jeopardises the relationship between stakeholders and threatens the achievement of the destination-branding objectives and long-term competitiveness of the destination. When a destination is faced with an image crisis, as is the case with Zimbabwe, it is important not to attempt to address the signs and symptoms, but rather to determine the root causes of the negative publicity that it

receives. Based on the empirical evidence, negative publicity is severe about Zimbabwe, therefore the DMO must consider changing the destination's logo, strap line or positioning in the future branding of the destination. The study revealed that the DMO should simultaneously take steps to counter negative images and cultivate pride in the citizens of the destination.

Whereas Zimbabwe has an excellent tourism infrastructure, including sports; wildlife; and natural and cultural tourism, these assets have not been converted from distinctive competencies to a competitive premium. The shortage of goods on the market has affected the merchandising and retailing of products. The accommodation and ancillary services have proved to be comparable to international standards. Transport is one of the most important vehicles for tourism development, but it has been seriously affected by the shortage of foreign currency and the resultant dearth of fuel. This situation implies that even if tourists do visit the country, they could be stranded and may not reach their destinations. Moreover, the study reveals that the destination lacks a regional strategy on tourism. The destination has done extremely well in respect of human resources development, but its attempts have been hampered by a large-scale brain drain as people move out of the destination in search of greener pastures.

At present the tourism industry in Zimbabwe is very diverse and fragmented. Many agents are acting in their own interests and are not projecting the same image of the destination to the international market. The result of this situation is that there is minimal involvement of the industry in the development of tourism plans. The failure by the destination to convert hostility into empathy, prejudice into acceptance, apathy into interest and ignorance into knowledge has only exacerbated the situation. The

study reveals that the government should manage the brand meanings and assets on the demand and the supply side while simultaneously integrating its branding and promotional initiatives. By the same token, experts have continued to complain about the non-availability of an attractive brand that postures Zimbabwe's geographical location; physical properties; and the quality of its intangible assets, such as history, nature, culture, people and traditions. Very often tourists do not buy products per se, but rather pay for an experience and a dream. While Zimbabwe has a world-class attraction portfolio, the area of facilitation requires urgent attention. The lack of information on entry formalities, particularly on visa requirements, calls for a complete paradigm shift in the way things are done.

In order to in create a positive destination image, it is essential for Zimbabwe to review all the essential matters that affect the average tourist. Examples of such matters are the fees charged by the national parks, which are said to be too high; cost of hotel accommodation; and even the services offered by Air Zimbabwe, which sometimes randomly cancels its flights. Tourism marketing in Zimbabwe is centralised and such marketing and promotion is very costly for the government. Currently, the destination is associated with images of diseases, crime, lawlessness and general chaos.

Tour operators and travel agents appear to be projecting contrasting images of the destination, while political problems remain the main reason why policies that favour the promotion of multinational tourism can not be employed successfully. A clear conceptualisation of these factors would provide leads for the reconciliation of the supply and demand perspectives and form the basis for brand positioning.

8.3.3 Brand positioning

At this stage of brand development, the positioning process seeks to enhance the attractiveness of the destination in the minds of the target audience. Positioning is a communication strategy that involves the development of marketing-mix strategies that are aimed at occupying a specific place in the market. It flows naturally through market segmentation and target marketing.

The target market comprises people who have the potential and motivation to visit the destination. In order to position Zimbabwe as a tourist destination effectively, it is essential to divide the market into segments that comprise distinct groups of homogeneous subjects or tourists/consumers. The perceived uniqueness of the brand association often determines whether the brand marketer will arrive at the most appropriate consumers' choices. However, a multi-stakeholder "buy in" could guarantee the subsequent use of the destination brand by all the stakeholders concerned, which is an important element in the positioning of the destination.

Effective positioning is premised on the basic principle of marketing that states that products and services are created to solve consumer problems; satisfy their needs and wants; and deliver on the promises made to them. It is urgently necessary to position Zimbabwe to become different from or better than its competitors who already offer a similar product. Positioning cascades downwards from the brand status analysis to brand development. Each step is invariably interlinked with the other.

In positioning itself as a destination, Zimbabwe should consider the following: Firstly, the unfulfilled need, for example, to look for opportunities to service those segments of the tourist markets that are currently not being serviced. Secondly, it is cardinaly important not to position the destination between market segments as such positioning may result in failure to serve and satisfy any of the segments. Thirdly, it should not attempt to serve two segments with the same strategy, because a strategy that serves one segment successfully can not be transferred to another segment. Finally, it is important that Zimbabwe should not position itself in the middle of the map, for example, it should not position itself in such a manner that its strategy can not be perceived clearly. These guidelines have implications for the key characteristics of a strap line, which should be developed in accordance with the group being targeted. Heath (2004) warns that DMOs should avoid the following errors:

- Under-positioning or failing to position the destination at all. Such an error could cause tourists to have a fuzzy or vague idea of the destination;
- Over-positioning or giving the market a very narrow picture of the destination;
and
- confused positioning, which may result in the market having a confused image of the destination.

The above mentioned errors are an evidence of improper brand positioning for Zimbabwe. Therefore positioning should consider a fit establishment the destination's image and markets, situational factors and resources. Whilst Davidson & Rogers (2006) distinguish between a slogan and a positioning statement, the evidence presented in the empirical survey has shown that destinations must not just

develop slogans but should come up with positioning statements that would benchmark the destination for competitiveness. The empirical evidence considers a positioning statement to be a concise theme that is interwoven with all marketing communications (i.e. unified) while a slogan is an external marketing tool, which is often a phrase that is generated from the positioning statement. A slogan is intended to capture the attention of the target market and to reinforce the product's image. The aim of the slogan is to make a differentiating proposition that can contribute to positioning a destination in the minds of the prospective users. In order for a slogan to be successful, it should fulfil the following conditions:

- It should be based on genuine product attributes and not on fake attributes, which means that it should use various brand values and personalities. However, the emphasis should be on the benefits that the audience seeks;
- it should be readily understood by customers. Such understanding could be promoted by matching the brand elements and developing brand extension strategies;
- it should be inclusive of the leading players in the industry;
- it should be sustained over a long period of time through the use of a brand value chain; and
- it should be systematically exploited in a range of activities through the use of core brands and brand mantras in order to position the brand.

Therefore Zimbabwe needs to develop a position that is genuine without under or over promising. This positioning should easily connect with the target audience and easily understood by customers. From the evidence presented in the empirical

survey, the development of slogan or jingles should involve the tourism operators as well.

8.3.4 Brand implementation and evaluation

Once the desired market position has been devised and articulated, this position should be presented to the marketplace in a way that stands out from the other attention-seeking messages of rival destinations and substitute products. If this presentation is done successfully, the position could establish the destination as a top of the mind brand in the target audience. Such positioning could in itself lead to the achievement of a competitive advantage.

In order to gain a competitive advantage, the destination's attributes should create a gap, which represents an important buying criterion. The existence of this criterion should be carefully integrated into the implementation and evaluation process. The flow of information does not always proceed as intended and it should never be assumed that potential visitors have an accurate image or perception of the destination (Heath, 2004).

The brand implementation and evaluation stage is concerned with brand culture, character, personality and essence. The brand should have an emotional appeal and be easy to recognise and recall. The implementation process should be supported by an appropriate brand identity. For example, a logo, slogan, symbols or graphic that is appealing and alluring. The empirical evidence has shown that the brand implementation process should recognise the present situation in that country.

8.3.4.1 *Developing a destination-brand equity*

The empirical evidence has shown that the functional characteristics of a brand include its culture, personality, soul recognition and emotional appeal. These factors should be aligned with the destination-brand identity and with what it represents. The functionality and integration of the brand amount to the value of the brand. This value is based on the extent to which it has a high brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, strong brand association and other assets, such as patents, trade marks and channel relationships (Vincent, 2004a). The brand equity concept involves the development of programmes and activities that are intended to build and manage the destination brand. It involves the interpretation and sustaining of the brand's performance.

In Zimbabwe, the importance of brand equity is often underestimated. The main consideration in respect of brand equity is that it emanates from the destination as well as from the tourists. The evidence shown in the empirical survey has shown that brand equity should therefore provide marketers with the strategic bridge that is required to leverage the destination from its past into the future.

It is essential that Zimbabwe should understand that the future prospects of the brand rest with the customers and their knowledge of the destination. It is knowledge that creates differential effects and drives brand equity. The marketing and distribution of such knowledge should be sustained over time, because its desired effect on the markets requires considerable time and effort.

8.3.4.2 Destination-brand identity

A destination such as Zimbabwe, whose brand offers little emotional appeal, has a challenging task if it is ever to become a destination winner. The results of the empirical survey have shown that destination-brand identity conveys a sense of experiencing the brand rather than of merely delivering a sight encounter. Brand identity constitutes an amalgam of characteristics and these characteristics come in the form of logos, names, slogans, patents, symbols, graphics and other forms that are intended to lure the target audience.

The study revealed that Zimbabwe does not have a carefully crafted brand-identity strategy to sell the destination's positioning, namely "Africa's Paradise", both locally and internationally. The destination should use a diffusion strategy in terms of which innovation is communicated through a selection of communication channels over a period of time. As a result of Zimbabwe's failure to use a strategy for the diffusion of innovation, the Africa's Paradise brand could be at risk. In order to reinforce the destination's identity, the promotion of the brand could take the following forms: advertisements; road shows; events and symposia; press releases; media relations; documentaries; web strategies; and even public diplomacy.

Pike (2004) observes that we live in an over communicated society in which we are bombarded daily with information at levels that are unprecedented in our history. Therefore the mind has developed a defence mechanism against clutter. The only way to cut through the clutter to get to the mind is to use simplified and focused messages.

8.3.4.3 Brand communication

The development of a destination brand should lead to the launching of the brand, direct marketing and communication. Direct marketing refers to any form of marketing and communication that is an interactive system of marketing and uses one or more advertising media to effect a measurable response and/or transaction. The marketing could be in the form of direct-response media advertising, direct mailing, e-mailing and telemarketing. Tools such as the following could be used to launch and communicate the brand to the target audience: publications, websites, newsletters, advertising, public relations, the printed and electronic media and familiarisation trips. These methods are discussed individually in the following sections.

a) Publications and public diplomacy

This marketing tool could be used in the design and transmission of the destination's messages to potential visitors. The process could involve the use of brochures, planning manuals, newsletters and visitor guides. Publications could be aimed at communication with stakeholders. Such publications take the form of annual reports and newsletters. Publications could also be used to obtain business leads. The Internet and its multiplicity of uses has become one of the most efficient methods of reaching a wide audience in the shortest possible time.

Destination guides provide an overview of a destination, its attractions, amenities and accessibility. These guides contain excellent photographs, concentrate on

facilitating understanding and have a comprehensive index. Paper-based guides are still used. The main advantages of publications are their flexibility and portability. They are also readily accessible. They facilitate comparisons between destinations in the same or different regions. However, the emergence of the Internet has witnessed the wide use of the electronic guides. These guides are important in complementing printed guides rather than making them obsolete.

b) *Websites and word of mouth*

The biggest challenge to printed guides has come from the Internet. Most destinations have websites that can be updated regularly. Their weakness is that they can not be altered very often as a result of the cost involved and therefore become outdated and inaccurate. Websites can be accessed at any time from anywhere in the world and their distribution costs are low in comparison with printed guides. To capitalise on this major advantage, websites should be visually attractive and make use of the full screen. Tourists should be quick to load and navigate and they should contain factual information about the destination's features. The implication for Zimbabwe is that the DMO should design websites that contain excellent maps, travel directions and even virtual tours.

c) *Crisis Management strategies*

Every destination especially Zimbabwe which is reeling and struggling with bad publicity needs to develop crisis management strategies in order to mitigate any potentially volatile situation. Developing crisis management strategies can take many forms. Newsletters have proved to be a valuable marketing medium for many

destinations. Their design, illustrations and snappy news items of newsletters have proved to be effective in strengthening the relationship between the destination and its clients through the regular flow of information. However, newsletters may prove to be very expensive to produce. To counter the distribution cost of newsletters, Zimbabwe could distribute e-newsletters to prospective tourists and tour operators in the form of PDF attachments. This strategy can be useful especially under political crisis like what is happening in Zimbabwe.

d) Advertising

Good advertising is likely to require the input of a specialist advertising agency, particularly an agency that has a clear understanding of and experience in destination marketing. In Zimbabwe, this option has been considered to be more expensive than public relations (PR), because the media costs are always high while the message, positioning and timing of public relations exercises are totally within the control of the destination. Advertising should be planned strategically and executed over a period of time as part of a campaign that is integrated with the overall sales and marketing plans for the destination.

e) Public Relations

Public relations (PR) can be described as a series of communications techniques that are designed to create and maintain favourable relations between the destination and its publics. PR is concerned with the reputation of the destination as a result of what it does and says and what the tourists say about it. It is about looking

after the reputation of the destination with the aim of earning the understanding and support of the stakeholders and influencing opinion leaders. Its primary goals are to manipulate demand and influence buyer behaviour by reaching out to the people and communicating to them the messages that are intended to influence their purchase cues. However, PR differs from direct advertising in that its target audience is wider. It targets local residents; local and central government; politicians; existing and potential buyers; domestic tourists; the media; shareholders; suppliers; investors; professional trade associations; and pressure groups.

According to Davidson & Rogers (2006), PR has five major roles, which the destination should use effectively, namely: **press releases** - newsworthy items of information that are placed in the news media to generate favourable publicity or reduce the impact of unfavourable publicity; **product publicity** - implementing tactics to draw attention to particular products, new or renovated hotels/attractions and special events; **destination publicity** – generating a favourable image for the destination, both internally and externally; **lobbying** - dealing with legislators and government officials to promote a cause or defeat a particular piece of legislation; and **counselling** - advising management on the public issues, especially the sensitive issues with which the destination may be associated.

In addition, the PR function also includes a research and monitoring role within the destination. Public relations strategies are useful to a destination such as Zimbabwe as they can help the destination to keep its target audience updated. Currently the destination is not effectively using the PR tools to positively position the destination.

f) *Using the media*

It is clear that, despite the best marketing efforts, much positive and negative publicity for a destination appears in the media without the influence or control of the destination. It is vital for Zimbabwe to establish and nurture a good relationship with the local and international media. Such a relationship could produce positive editorial coverage, which is more essential for the image of the destination than extensive advertising. A destination such as Zimbabwe should channel good news or stories through the same media that publish negative reports in order to have an effective campaign to overcome bad publicity. The destination should maintain a PR library that enables it to respond quickly and effectively to media requests.

g) *Familiarisation tours*

Trade shows are not only the place where exhibitors can meet buyers in person, but are also events at which buyers can actually experience the product at first hand. Such familiarisation trips are the only means through which potential buyers can be given an opportunity to have a preview of the local facilities, attractions and amenities.

The tours are meant to provide buyers with an experience of the destination and also with an opportunity to share certain facts on and features of the destination. While Zimbabwe has been involved in the presentation of familiarisation tours, trade shows and exhibitions, the results thereof have not been encouraging, mainly due to other non-tourism factors within the destination.

8.3.4.4 Brand monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is an important factor in destination branding and positioning. A destination such as Zimbabwe could use this component of the branding process to ensure that budgets are not exceeded and that plans achieve the results specified in their objectives. The destination could use the criterion of the number of room nights that are booked over a period of time to determine the levels of occupancy and to project the total number of tourist that come to the destination. It is important for Zimbabwe to gather statistics regarding the number of inbound and outbound tourists in order to have an overview of the distribution of tourists within the destination (local, regional, national and International).

When evaluating their destination brand, DMOs, hotels and other stakeholders should know what type of tourists come to their destination. Monitoring and evaluation is a very important component in the branding and positioning of a destination, because the information gained could provide feedback on whether the positioning is in accordance with the branding. It could also assist the marketers to develop appropriate communication strategies. Evaluation could also take the form of an investigation of the types of bookings (conventions, exhibitions, trade shows, special events, meetings) that are made over a period of time and the volume of business (Hankinson, 2004) that is booked through various marketing techniques, such as trade shows, direct mail, direct sales and advertising. It could even produce information on the local taxes that are generated from tourism.

8.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DESTINATION BRANDING AND POSITIONING FRAMEWORK

The branding and positioning model seeks to close the gap in existing knowledge regarding destination marketing. This study revealed that consumers and investors rely on the brand and the destination image when making economic decisions. Brands have in fact become shortcuts to purchasing decisions. The destination branding and positioning model developed in this study could be implemented over a long term. It would require a great deal of effort and the development of marketing strategies in order to achieve the desired position. Branding is a source of competitive advantage. The proposed branding and positioning model requires the involvement of all stakeholders in the branding process and not merely the government. The involvement of the government and the private sector partners could contribute significantly to triggering the process of change that would increase the competitiveness of a destination.

A compelling facet of the proposed model is the consistency of all the messages, graphics and values that are used in the destination's umbrella concept. The model indicates that by formulating the branding and positioning strategies in partnership with stakeholders, perceptions could be changed and a new identity crafted without contradicting the widespread image that people have of the destination.

Communication of messages through the brand could contribute to leveraging the destination by creating opportunities to increase people's familiarity with and appreciation of a country. Communication could take the form of developing

attractive, informative and user-friendly websites. It could also be done by means of advertising, public diplomacy, public relations and personal selling. The feedback system that is embedded in the model provides the process with the opportunity for improvement and development.

8.5 COMPARISON BETWEEN THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK AND EXISTING BRANDING AND POSITIONING MODELS

It is important to compare the proposed destination branding and positioning model with other models and processes that have been developed to date. The most recent frameworks include a market-positioning strategy (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2004), destination-positioning strategy (Terzibsoglu, 2004; Kaczynski, 2003); brand-building matrix (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997); destination-brand pyramid (Morgan *et al.*, 2002); destination-audit process (Richie & Crouch, 2003:254); and the steps and tools for creating strategic destination brands (Tasci & Gartner, 2006). Other branding processes have recently been proposed by Kotler & Gartner (2002); Olins (2000) and Brymer, (2003). It is important to outline and compare these models in order to identify similarities and differences that could exist in the frameworks. These models are discussed in detail in chapters 2 and 3 of this report. The destination-branding and positioning model is found to be similar to the other destination-branding and positioning frameworks in the ways that are detailed in the following sections.

8.5.1 Market analysis

While the market-positioning strategy (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2004) propounds a

thorough market analysis, the proposed destination-branding and positioning framework propounds a market competitive analysis on the second level. The proposed destination-branding and positioning model also calls for an analysis of the micro environment and the availability of resources. This analysis corresponds to the internal analysis in the market-position strategy that is proposed by Lovelock & Wirtz (2004).

8.5.2. The competitor analysis

Both the proposed destination-branding and positioning model and the market-positioning strategy of Lovelock & Wirtz (2004) acknowledge the importance of the evaluation of the destination's competitors. However, the market-positioning strategy goes on to detail the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. The destination-branding and positioning model takes a slightly different view, especially in respect of the micro environment. It seeks to establish the current status of the destination and the perceptions of the stakeholders, which is a very important aspect of the positioning of a destination particularly the current one. This approach is similar to the proposals made by Heath (2004) and Brymer (2003).

8.5.3 The importance of image

The market-positioning strategy of Lovelock & Wirtz (2004) does not take cognisance of the importance of the destination image in positioning a destination effectively. The destination image is a very important element in the positioning process. Furthermore, the proposed destination-branding and positioning model outlines all

the basic steps that should be followed in the positioning process. These steps are merely assumed in the market-positioning strategy. The proposed destination-branding and positioning model proposes the formation of national and/or international marketing teams that should be complemented by the formation of a global marketing strategy. What is of significance in the proposed destination-branding and positioning model is the development of a marketing campaign and a brand proposition that can assist in articulating the desired position of the destination.

8.5.4 Brand equity

Brand equity is one of the most important elements of the branding process. A true brand fulfils the perceived needs of the customers and simultaneously triggers a positive response in the customers' mindset. The major aim of the proposed branding and positioning model is to achieve sustainable tourist perceptions, which may lead to a competitive advantage for the destination. The personality of a destination brand begins with the tourist (Palmer & Bejou, 1995). Any DMO that wants to achieve marketing success should listen to its customers' wants, needs and expectations.

While there are many constructs associated with a destination, any nation's branding efforts should identify and define the brand personality. Failure to do so may result in confusion. One result of such confusion may be that the brand is forgotten. The definition of a brand personality is in line with the brand equity model that was developed by Brandt & Johnson (1997) and that incorporates the following components as part of brand equity: destination images and personality,

associations, preference, loyalty, awareness, familiarity, and availability. These concepts as evidenced in the empirical evidence have been incorporated into the proposed destination branding and positioning framework.

8.5.5 Functionality and integration

In order to achieve a strong brand, the branding process should be functionally distinctive and unique. A strong brand could be achieved by offering superior products. Functionality is measured by means of the benefits that are enjoyed by the customers as result of the use of the product. In the proposed destination-branding and positioning framework, functionality is integrated with brand equity. However, the proposed destination-branding and positioning framework is similar to the model developed by Tasci & Gartner (2006) in respect of the steps and tools that are to be used to create strategic brands. The latter authors do not include the word functionality, but use the word benefits instead.

Functionality is what makes a consumer select a destination as his first choice amongst competing destinations. It represents those unique benefits that are sought and enjoyed by tourists and which give novelty to the destination. The uniqueness is not only achieved by means of discriminating benefits, but also by focusing on the motivating benefits that are the pull and push factors in respect of visiting a destination. Destinations, just like any product or brand, should be functional. Functionality is interpreted as the observable benefits of a destination. A country should function as a destination by offering transportation; state of the art infrastructure and facilities; trade and commerce; tourism and recreation attractions;

and other ancillary services that form the basis for emotional appeal, brand personality and character. A destination should suit each and every individual's circumstance and needs. This factor is considered to be an important branding element and therefore it is incorporated in the proposed model.

8.6 DISCUSSION

When the residents believe in a brand that brand becomes reinforced and considered to be truthful (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998:17). For example, the use of word of mouth, political climate, public relations and even the graphic design of the logo can contribute to reinforcing a destination brand. Destinations should be open to change and should adjust to the political climate. By embracing and adapting to diverse cultures and peoples' ideas and lifestyles, destinations could evolve into strong brands. It is only in this way that destinations can consistently project a definite identity.

The destination-positioning framework that is proposed by Fabricius (2006:6a) has some shortcomings in that it is difficult to deduce from it the sequence in which the steps are to be followed. However, his framework does have clearly outlined stages that are presented in a diagrammatic format. While the destination-branding matrix proposed by Olins (2000) is a very important tool in brand building, it does not provide guidelines for the brand-building process, but merely provides a list of factors. There are nevertheless several similarities between the proposed destination-branding and positioning model developed for this study and the destination brand-building matrix. All the components that are present in the brand-building matrix (Olins, 2000) are present in the proposed destination-branding and

positioning model. These two models differ on the fundamental issue of the steps that are to be followed in the branding process. Upon a closer look at the brand-building matrix, it is tempting to conclude that its structure is a mere list of the attributes of successful branding. The brand-building matrix is merely a small component of the proposed branding and positioning model and it is therefore inappropriate to compare the two models.

The proposed destination-branding and positioning framework could also be compared to the destination-brand pyramid that is proposed by Morgan *et al.*, (2002:33). While the destination-brand pyramid represents the foundation of the branding processes, it is noteworthy that branding is concerned with perceptions and that therefore image fulfils a very important role in the development of a brand. The destination-branding pyramid has gaps in its formation. The pyramid does not take cognisance of the fundamental fact that branding should be done from a supply as well as a demand perspective, whereas the proposed destination-branding and positioning model specifically articulates this fact. Whereas the destination-branding pyramid proposes logical steps that are to be followed in the branding process, it appears to lose sight of the fact that branding is more than the development of a name, sign or logo. The questions that are outlined in the destination-branding pyramid may not eventually lead to the development of a brand, although it is important to ask these questions before deciding on the brand. Morgan *et al.*, (2002) do not consider the branding process from a pluralistic point of view, but merely consider it from the perspective of a tourist's motivation to visit a destination.

While Kotler & Gartner (2002) present a detailed list of the steps to be followed in the branding process, they consider only a part of the branding process. Branding is a

continuous process that can not be accomplished by following the simple steps that they propose. The process proposed by Kotler & Gartner (2002) tends to lack detail and oversimplifies the complexity of the branding phenomenon.

Fabricius, (2006b), also developed a guide to branding in his key links to destination-branding. He overlooks the fundamental issue of image analysis. The assumption made by Fabricius is that a destination brand has already been developed and he therefore starts with the question: Where are we now and how well do we compare to the competition? It is assumed that by answering these questions, the destination will identify its position within the market by means of a destination competitive analysis. The second stage of Fabricius' model is concerned with positioning, for which purpose the marketers should ask the following questions: Where would we like to be? What are our dreams and goals? The third stage is concerned with the clients, namely who our clients are and what their preferences are? The fourth stage is concerned with key success factors. The question to be asked is: What do we need to do well in order to comply with their needs? The final stage is concerned with institutional management and monitoring in respect of which he recommends that destination marketers should ask the following question: What should we do to maintain market leadership? Fabricius' framework was developed solely from the point of view of destination marketing management, but it does add a dimension to the branding process.

Brymer (2003) also discussed the branding process. His branding model considers only one aspect of the branding process and is therefore not particularly useful for the development of an effective destination brand. The model presents a novel approach to destination branding, considers both the supply and the demand sides,

but has the shortcoming of not addressing the complexity of the destination-branding and positioning phenomenon. The proposed destination-branding and positioning framework is unique in several ways, namely:

- It projects brand meanings step by step from both the demand and the supply perspective;
- it comprises a step by step holistic approach to the branding process, analysis of the brand image, brand position, promotion and/or communication;
- it provides for a current situational and competitive analysis; visitors' and stakeholders' perceptions; analysis of the current brand status index; formulation of positioning; and the development of branding and communication strategies;
- it contains a separate stage for the strategic fit between the supply side and the demand side;
- it provides a separate stage for the establishment of brand equity; functionality and integration; brand identity; and communication; and, finally,
- it provides room for evaluation and feedback.

8.7 SUMMARY

Chapter 8 developed and contextualised a branding and positioning framework that can be used for repositioning a destination for greater competitiveness. The proposed destination branding and positioning framework is both theoretically and empirically balanced. The framework is differentiated into four tiers that influence the

performance of a destination brand namely: market analysis, brand development, brand positioning and brand implementation and evaluation. These tiers are then discussed and an explanation is provided of how they are interlinked in the brand-building process. The discussion is followed by a discussion and comparison of the destination-branding and positioning model with other models that are discussed in this study. The framework that was developed for this study could be used to brand and reposition a destination in a crisis and enhance its competitiveness. Chapter 8 revealed that a destination that fails to brand itself, can not expect to be positioned strategically in respect of its target market.

The next chapter focuses on the conclusions drawn from and the recommendations that emanate from this study.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the conclusions reached in this study in relation to the objectives that were formulated for it. The chapter also provides recommendations that are aimed at the development of a strategic destination-branding and positioning model that could be used for repositioning a destination for increased competitiveness. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the areas recommended for further research that were identified in the course of the study as well as with some concluding remarks.

9.2 REVISITING THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of destination branding in order to develop a model that could be used to strategically reposition a destination for increased competitiveness and to apply the model to the Zimbabwean situation. The objectives that were formulated for the study were articulated as follows:

- **To clarify the context of branding within destination marketing and to outline the strategic role of branding/re-branding in the positioning/repositioning of a destination (chapter 2).** For the purposes of

developing a framework for destination-branding and positioning, a study was undertaken of the literature on branding and positioning in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the subject. It was furthermore deemed necessary to:

- *Discuss the significance and role of destination marketing.*
- *Identify the role of branding in destination marketing, clarify the major aims of destination branding and demonstrate the importance of destination branding as a strategic tool in destination marketing.*
- *To determine what the relationship is between destination branding and positioning in destination marketing.*
- *To discuss the importance of the concept of image in destination marketing and to establish the link between a destination's image and its branding.*
- *To establish what major challenges are faced by a destination-marketing organisation in branding and positioning a destination.*

The literature review led to the development of a destination branding and positioning flow chart that is presented as table 18 in chapter 2. The flow chart is based on an analysis of the strategic role of destination branding; micro-environmental and macro-environmental planning; positioning; image; brand development; brand implementation; management and evaluation.

- **To analyse the destination-branding process and competitive positioning.** The analysis was undertaken in chapter 3. In order to achieve the above-stated objective of the chapter, an explication of the following matters is presented in chapter 3: A discussion of the destination-branding

process and its strategic role in the positioning of a destination; the important role of destination-brand equity and how it relates to brand identity; the strategic brand management process and its impact on the health of the brand; how a destination can effectively and sustainably brand on the web; the role of positioning as an element of destination branding; and the role of image as an element of destination branding and positioning

- **To evaluate international trends and best practices in the branding and positioning of destinations.** The main objective of the study was to develop a model that could be used in the repositioning of a destination. In order to achieve this objective, the approaches to destination branding and positioning of destinations in several countries were analysed critically and justified in chapter 4. It was found that the international approaches to destination branding include the use of public diplomacy strategies and these strategies were analysed within the context of destination branding and positioning. This analysis contributed to the development of a strategic branding and positioning framework.
- **To determine the current situation in Zimbabwe regarding destination marketing with particular emphasis on branding and positioning strategies.** In chapter 5, an attempt is made to establish the current situation in Zimbabwe regarding the branding and marketing of the destination. Strategies that are used by the DMO to market the destination are analysed. The analysis is followed by a detailed discussion on the factors that affect the destination brand and how these factors contribute to negative equity. Thereafter the findings of a detailed SWOT (strengths, weaknesses,

opportunities and threats) analysis of the destination are presented. The SWOT analysis contributes towards the identification of factors that could erode the health of the brand.

- **To discuss the methodology that was applied in the study.** The discussion of the methodology appears in chapter 6. It includes details of the research approach and the instruments that were used to determine stakeholders' attitudes, expectations and perceptions regarding the branding and repositioning of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. The design of the instruments was based on the information garnered from the literature survey that is reported in chapter 2; analysis of branding and positioning strategies contained in chapter 3; and the situational analysis of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination that appears in chapter 4. A survey instrument was developed and tested with the co-operation of industry practitioners and lecturers in the tourism management departments in various state universities in Zimbabwe.
- **To determine stakeholders' attitudes, expectations and experiences regarding the branding and positioning of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination (chapter 7).** This objective was achieved by means of the conducting of an empirical research. The results of the empirical survey are discussed in chapter 6.
- **To refine the proposed framework on the strategic branding and repositioning of a destination for sustainable destination competitiveness.** The basic framework that is articulated in chapter 2 is refined in chapter 8. The intensive literature review that is reported in

chapters 2 to 4 and the results of the empirical survey that appears in chapter 6 contributed to the development of a strategic destination-branding and positioning framework. The framework was compared to other branding, positioning, brand-identity and image frame works.

- **To contribute to the body of knowledge on destination marketing and to provide guidelines for stakeholders' implementation of the branding and positioning of a destination as well as to propose areas for further research.** The contribution to the relevant body of knowledge as well as the guidelines for implementation are outlined and discussed in chapter 9. The significance of the study for the relevant body of knowledge is based on the results of the survey that are discussed in chapter 7 and the proposed strategic guidelines for branding and positioning a destination are outlined in chapter 8.

9.3 AN EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

The findings and conclusions of the research project are outlined and discussed in this section. The information obtained from the literature review and the empirical research survey is used as the background to the discussion.

The discussion focuses on the importance of branding in destination marketing; implications of branding in destination marketing; factors that affect the branding and positioning of a destination; and the challenges that prevail in respect of destination branding and positioning.

9.3.1 The importance of branding and positioning in destination marketing

Branding has often mistakenly been considered to amount to having a logo, symbol or tagline. Branding comprises much more these symbols as they are merely the visual expressions of the brand. The value of a brand goes beyond a name, a jingle or a positioning statement. In fact, successful brands add value to products and services (Keller, 2003) and they are associated with the destination. Branding can be viewed as a tool that could be used for building relationships between a destination and its audiences. It can also contribute to personalising the relationship between the audience and the branded destination. This personal relationship involves the building of emotional bonds that are based on experiences at the destination.

Branding is founded on expectations. The expectations are, in turn, based on what people know about the destination, what they think about it and what they expect from those friends, family members and acquaintances who have visited the destination. People who have incomplete knowledge of a destination, nevertheless make up their minds and build a portfolio of (Blain *et al.*, 2005) relationships that are based on trust and loyalty.

Branding has an umbrella effect on the destination's performance. A brand could be the main cause of the degree of differentiation between the destination and its competition. Each and every destination is different and has a unique identity. The value of the brand depends strongly on perceived differences that are valuable to the customer. A decision to choose a particular brand is sometimes based on the

intangibles that are borne by emotions than on cold facts. While the creation of a brand is never a simple task, there are a number of important factors that should be considered when (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003) developing a brand. A destination such as Zimbabwe should give serious consideration to these factors.

It is vitally important for the parties responsible for destination marketing in Zimbabwe to ensure that they have a clear idea of the visitor's holiday experience in the destination before they commence the development of a brand for the destination. To obtain this idea would include the conducting of extensive research on the perceptions held by the stakeholders. The research findings could contribute to the gaining of an understanding of what the target audience and the local residents think of the destination (Buhalis, 2000). When the South African brand was developed, the key stakeholders in the South African tourism industry at that time were consulted. The consultations included the government, opinion leaders, local residents, artists, NGOs, civic groups and the international community. The aim was not to establish how the destination should be, but to evaluate how it is perceived. The positioning that is chosen for a destination should be acceptable and credible within the destination itself. When branding a destination, it is important not only to look at the targeted audience, but also to reach out to all the interested parties in order to achieve consensus regarding the perception that the target audience and the local population have of the destination. The failure of any destination to brand and position itself on the international map could result in it being relegated to a minor position in the minds of potential tourists. The re-branding of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination could contribute to the repositioning of the destination in the international market. The process could lead to the creation of a favourable image that is alluring to the target audience.

9.3.2 Implications of branding and positioning in destination marketing

When branding a destination, the picture that is projected to the world about the destination should portray the reality of the destination (Baker, 2007). Failure to do so could result in gaps being created in the perceptions held about the destination and the experiences offered by it. The inhabitants of a destination should know what the visitors expect from them and should be comfortable with these expectations. The destination should align the brand with other aspects of the destination. Such alignment involves the development of positioning strategies, because the failure to align may lead to a conflict between the perceptions held by potential or actual visitors, positioning and the brand. In addition, the national promotional strategy should dovetail with the branding strategy.

After developing a new brand, Zimbabwe should market its new position, both nationally and abroad. It is important to communicate the new position to current and prospective target audiences. While this matter appears to be obvious, it may be fraught with difficulties. The marketing of destinations requires strategic advertising rather than mere tactical advertising, which means that it should be low on product and high on values. It means furthermore that what is sold is the attributes of the destination rather than the product (the destination) itself. The destination should embark on an aggressive marketing campaign, to enable the brand to change the perceptions held by the target audiences. The brand should be dynamic and continue to serve the destination for many years, because it is impractical and exorbitantly expensive to make regular and radical changes to a brand. To avoid this pitfall, the brand should be flexible and adapt to circumstances as they unfold. As the

audience changes, the competitive environment changes, too, therefore the brand-building process should take these matters into consideration in the long term.

Branding should make allowances for catastrophes. Such incidents are the circumstances that could change the market conditions and reposition the destination, possibly for the better. In order for the branding process to be effective, everyone within the destination should “sing from the same hymn book.” The branding process can not be achieved successfully through advertising or through the use of a website alone. It should among other things involve the local residents so that they are enabled to spread the message by word of mouth and become ambassadors of the destination wherever they go. The experiences at the destination should match the expectations of the visitors and, ideally, even exceed them. If this occurs, there is a likelihood of converting tourists into repeat visitors. A good destination brand should be evident in the entire destination, including the physical environment; attitudes of residents; experiences at the destination; events; points of entry and exit; and, finally, in the transport facilities. In destination branding, everyone at the destination has a role to play.

9.3.3 Factors to be considered in destination branding and positioning

The cardinal element of destination branding is the positioning of the destination in the mind of the target population. Zimbabwe has had a long trend of tourist inflows, but in the relatively recent past its image has varied from mixed to a negative as a result of the bad publicity that the country has had. Its negative image is to a large extent not a result of tourist factors, but is primarily due to non-tourism factors. The destination has been projecting a rather confusing positioning statement without

having clearly defined target markets. It is therefore important for Zimbabwe to develop a brand identity for the destination that is based on the benefits that targeted tourists seek from a destination. The brand architecture should correspond to the destination's characteristics. Zimbabwe should develop a symbol or logo that is relevant to the destination and that will promote preference and recall. The symbol/logo or sign could be used to differentiate the destination from its competitors and form the basis for brand identity. Once that has been done, tourists will begin to associate the country with its new identity, personality and character. Above all, the brand should deliver a long-term competitive advantage.

At present, Zimbabwe is faced with a difficult situation concerning tourism arrivals. To reposition itself as a tourist destination on the international scene, demands strong management of its image, both internally and externally. Since the introduction of the economic embargo, several factors have continued to have a strongly negative impact on Zimbabwe. The economic embargo has crippled the local currency to the extent that the inflation rate has risen to over 231 million % (CSO, 2008), the highest in the world. Due to negative publicity in the international media and cautionary advisories from tourist-generating countries, prospective tourists are shunning the destination. They prefer to go to neighbouring countries despite the fact that Zimbabwe has unique attractions to offer. The result has been that the number of tourists visiting Zimbabwe has decreased, primarily as a result of non-tourism factors. Officials have consistently failed to devise realistic marketing strategies to stimulate tourism in the country. A lack of investor confidence in the tourism sector and in other sectors has led to disinvestment in the country.

Respondents report poor integration of tourism marketing strategies and ascribe it to a lack of financial resources. There is also a lack of appreciation of the importance of the industry by government and consequently a lack of contribution by the government. Above all, there has been lack of co-operation by government with foreign tour operators, and a resultant decline in tourist arrivals.

The need for an appropriate national, regional, and international promotional structure to deal with the management and promotion of tourism cannot be over-emphasised. The survey indicates that there are a number of factors that encourage tourism marketing. For example, the existence of state of the art tourism facilities and products that are of international standard is very encouraging. Whilst the destination experienced peace and stability from 1987 to 1999, which created favourable conditions for the tourism industry, there have been incidents of human rights abuses and politically motivated violence from 2000 to 2008. The ability to reposition Zimbabwe as a leading tourist destination lies in the destination's ability to control the effect of the non-tourism factors.

The existence of a pristine natural environment and abundant wildlife, complemented by the existence of UNESCO world cultural heritage sites, demonstrates the plurality and richness of the destination. In addition, the existence of a well-developed infrastructure and excellent service provision could set the tone for signalling a revival of tourism once the non-tourism factors are addressed.

Zimbabwe's current destination brand is tired and has outlived its timeframe. The first priority should therefore be to develop a new destination brand. In conjunction with the development of a brand, the destination's image should be confronted

aggressively by producing consistent, well-focussed promotional material, coupled with a thoroughly considered brand strategy. The destination should allocate financial resources for appropriate marketing campaigns... Due to the complexity of branding and the difficulties associated with the development of a brand that is consistent with the destination's resources and that matches the target market with the services provided in the destination, a programme of action should be developed to enable the destination to respond to the changing market needs. Destination branding could be used to disassociate Zimbabwe from its recent past and act as a base for differentiation. Differentiation should convey the new national image and, by emphasising the new position, emphasise that the destination has changed,. Globalisation has caused the world to "shrink" and has brought with it increasing competition and the need for innovation, Zimbabwe should accept the challenge to play a prominent role in world tourism.

9.3.4 Challenges of destination branding and positioning in Zimbabwe

Extending a brand into the global sphere is a very complex process that requires specialised knowledge of tourists' perceptions and expectations. It requires an understanding of scale, distance, materials and techniques that, in turn, make high demands on the brand. A great destination brand should have meaning. It should connect with the target audience emotionally by providing a complete sensory experience of the environment. It was observed in the empirical study that, although a negative image of a destination could be overcome, a concerted effort is required of all the agents who manage the brand. Zimbabwe has been branded as a banana republic and/ or a coconut republic by foreign media. The negative tone of such branding is intended to discredit the destination and to create a crisis situation.

Although Zimbabwe once had a positive image, this image has been eroded in source markets, largely as a result of negative publicity. The study reveals that one of the most appropriate strategies that could be used by destination marketers to reposition Zimbabwe as a tourist destination is that of image rebuilding. However, image rebuilding should be preceded by the creation of conducive macro and micro environments that could enable tourists to have confidence in the destination. If such environments are not created, a great deal of resources could be wasted on branding and imaging.

The media play a significant role in shaping tourists' attitudes and perceptions. Negative media coverage can jeopardise any branding initiative. This has been proven to be the case in Zimbabwe. As the destination has a negative image in source markets, a major task is to conduct an international benchmark study of the destination. Such a study could reveal the causes of the negative image and enable the destination to build a new image constructively. In a destination that experiences negative publicity, such as that experienced by Zimbabwe, there will continue to be tension between the stakeholders until they unite in respect of a common purpose of rebuilding and re-branding.

Respondents in the survey consider the application of destination branding in Zimbabwe to be reasonable. However merely having a destination brand is not enough. Branding should be complimented by a well-developed infrastructure, skilled workforce, favourable policies that encourage return on investment and by travel trade. Reference has been made to the fact that the application of destination branding in Zimbabwe lacks the level of sophistication that is proposed in the relevant literature. A high level of brand sophistication is a prerequisite for successful

destination branding. Whilst the respondents agree that the destination brand has a strong character and identity, it appears that there is no strategic co-ordination among the stakeholders and the institutions involved in the promotion of the destination. As a result of this lack of co-operation, various organisations that are involved in destination marketing have created individual images for their products.

The message and strap line that is currently being used for Zimbabwe is outdated and too general. Respondents strongly agree that the destination has failed to deliver on the brand as a result of its poor service delivery. Attractions, scenery, adventure and emotional appeal are the key elements that are emphasised in the current brand, but the destination has no defined destination-marketing strategies to market these elements and it has become over dependent on international tourists. The situation has been exacerbated by a lack of support from the local population who are ignorant about the brand. The Zimbabwean brand is perceived to be static and lacking in tangible and intangible elements. The destination has relied on word of mouth as a brand communication tool. Over reliance on this method has devastating consequences in a crisis situation, because it can not be controlled.

The study also reveals that the destination has relied on government-controlled printed media for the communication of its messages. The government-controlled media offer one-way communication, are expensive and not credible in the long run. To create a strong destination brand, requires a long-term rather than a short-term approach. Destination branding is a slow process that requires patience, perseverance and introspection.

9.4 A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGIC DESTINATION BRANDING AND POSITIONING

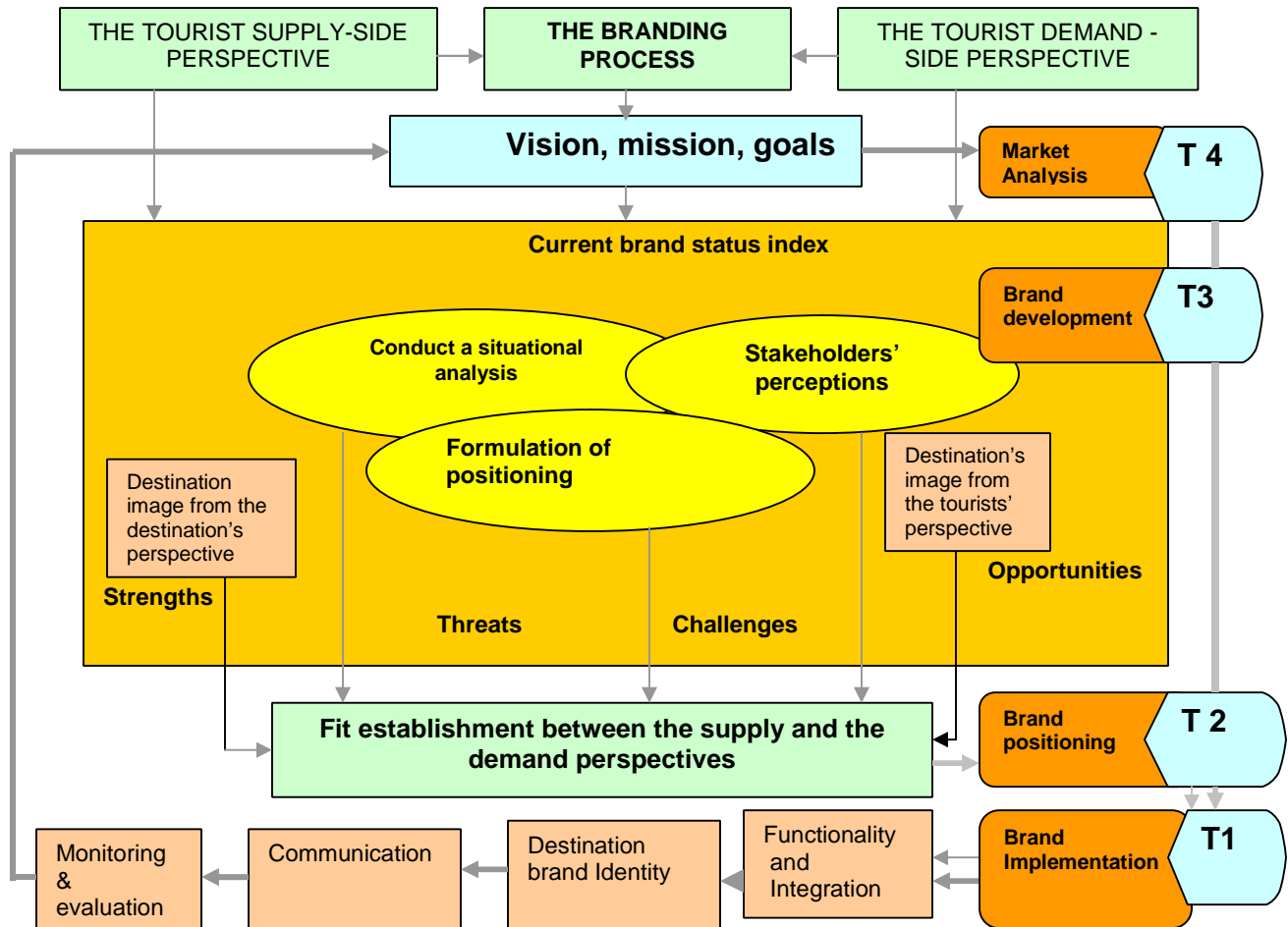
One of the major objectives of the study was to develop a strategic destination-branding and positioning model. A basic model is proposed in chapter 3, which is based on the intensive literature review. The initial model consists of the following components: branding committee; planning and analysis; image; brand development; brand positioning; brand implementation; brand management; and brand evaluation.

The Destination branding and positioning flow chart and the destination branding and public diplomacy campaigns model developed in chapters 3 and 4 were used as baseline for the development of the final framework, which is presented in chapter eight. The final model was refined and tested through empirical survey.

Therefore, the construction of the final framework took into account of the analysis of international best practices in branding and positioning of a destination (chapter 4); a situational analysis in Zimbabwe (chapter 5); and the empirical survey (chapters 6 and 7). In chapter 8, the proposed strategic destination-branding and positioning framework was compared to other branding, positioning, brand identity and image models

The aim of the present section is to present a summary of the final framework that is derived from this study.

Figure 9.1 Summary of the strategic destination-branding and positioning framework



Source: Researcher's construction, 2009

The final framework, which is presented by means of the above diagram, has a wider applicability and could be used by other tourism destinations, because it can be adapted to the regional, national, and local levels of tourism destination. The strategic destination-branding and positioning framework possesses a number of special features. It provides an explicit explanation of the components and steps that should be followed in destination branding and positioning. These components fulfil an important role in this model as they provide guidelines on the destination-branding

process. The following are the critical steps: market analysis; brand development; brand positioning and brand implementation; monitoring; and evaluation. A brief exposition of each of these steps is provided below.

9.4.1 Market analysis

A market analysis comprises an assessment of both the supply and the demand perspectives on the destination's image. The process involves the conducting of an audit of the image that is held by domestic and international tourists and the stakeholders (chapter 2). This analysis determines the brand architecture (chapter 2); positioning; identity; marketing and promotion (chapter 2 and 3); and also considers the factors that could erode brand equity (chapters 3 and 4). The purpose of the market analysis stage is to assist the marketers to gain a sound knowledge of the specific areas upon which they can base their decisions regarding the development of a brand. This stage is deemed to be the planning stage at which the key macro-environmental and micro-environmental analyses are undertaken. It is at this stage that the vision, mission and goals are formulated.

9.4.2 Destination brand development

The brand development phase consists mainly of an assessment of the outcomes of the market analysis as well as the information that is derived from the situational analysis (i.e. the analysis of possible areas of differentiation), stakeholders' perception (opinion leaders' views). Furthermore, it comprises the formulation of a positioning strategy (i.e. identification of the brand personality and choosing the

benefits to emphasize). It is a very important stage, because it contributes a great deal to brand positioning.

9.4.3 Destination brand positioning

Brand positioning is a very important stage in this model. It involves the establishment of a fit between the supply and the demand perspectives on the destination's attributes as well as an analysis of the current brand status index. Positioning is determined by the image or perception of the tourists and results in the formulation of a competitive position for the destination (chapter 2) and a subsequent detailed marketing mix (chapter 2).

Unlike the other models that consider positioning solely from a product perspective, this model proposes that destination positioning should also consider other key factors. These factors include the architecture of the destination, history, way of life, festivals, events, culture, identify, and appropriate market segment as well as the development of the relevant promotional material. It takes into account the integrity of the government, stability of the currency, staff costs, available skills, technology and political stability (chapter 4). The process also includes the identification of the brand images, attributes and characteristics that contribute to the development of a brand proposition.

9.4.4 Brand implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Brand implementation is split into four unique stages, namely functionality and

integration; destination-brand identity; communication; and monitoring and evaluation. Destination branding and positioning is a continuous process and not a once-off event. The brand character, personality, essence, recognition and emotional appeal should resonate with the expectations of the target audience. One way to achieve such resonance is through the establishment of identity. Tourists should identify themselves with the brand's personality by means of its symbols, slogans and/or logos. The symbols/logos should be supported by promotional activities and communicated by means of various strategies, such as public relations, websites, advertising, marketing mix and public diplomacy. These activities should be monitored continuously and complemented by the use of more appealing marketing initiatives, assessment of the impact of the brand, continuous evaluation of and feedback regarding the brand's performance.

9.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made on the basis of the information obtained from the literature study and the empirical findings of the study. These recommendations are made under the following headings: Resource allocation, destination image, destination branding, brand identity, destination promotion and the development of crisis-management strategies.

a) *Resources allocation*

It is increasingly being accepted that destination branding requires a significant investment in terms of finance, infrastructure and human resources. Destination branding can not be achieved in isolation. It should be a co-operative national effort

that involves all the stakeholders. The study emphasises that destination branding can not be limited to an advertising campaign, slogan/sign or logo, although these symbols can contribute to the consolidation and reinforcement of pleasurable memories of the experience provided by the destination. These factors all contribute to the creation of an image that is perceived by visitors.

Resources are identified as key attributes that could contribute towards the success of a branding enterprise. If a brand is starved of marketing, human resources and funds, the popularity of the brand may decline. Respondents in the survey indicate the need to allocate adequate resources for the marketing of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination and the establishment of a sound base for both the national and the international marketing teams.

The study reveals that there is considerable under-utilisation of capacity in the Zimbabwean tourist facilities as a result of reduced visits and narrow range of activities resulting from short length of stay. The destination should upgrade its infrastructure and develop unique and innovative products to augment the existing products. While the destination boasts relevant and appropriate training programmes, friendly people and a service culture, these attributes are being compromised by the poor salaries paid to employees as a result of the decreasing profitability of the tourism industry as tourist arrivals continue to decline.

b) *Destination image*

Studies should be undertaken to establish what tourists' perceptions are of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. The image that caused Zimbabwe to stand out from its competitors in the previous decade has changed dramatically. In contrast,

South Africa's image has increased in stature. The situation in the country has therefore also been affected by changes in the competing landscape.

The study reveals that destination branding is intended to develop the economy and to benefit the country by selling its products and services. Since branding changes the mindset and is used to influence tourists in their purchase cue, the country should develop means and capabilities of managing its national image and the destination brand in order to make it as effective as possible in selling all its products, technology and services.

The study furthermore reveals that a destination-branding project comprises amongst other things the devising and entrenchment of an image that is shared by all the stakeholders. It should also be possible for the various industries and service providers to adapt the brand as it should not necessarily serve tourism only. If an image is shared by the entire nation, the target market adaptation is easier, and the potential to yield favourable results is maximized. The respondents indicate that the biggest task in Zimbabwe is to build differentiating messages and create visual ideas that could be put into words to encapsulate what the destination brand represents. The task can only be successful if there is increased market differentiation, taking into consideration the urgent need to dissociate the destination from its recent past by recreating a new image for the destination that paradoxically, emphasises, the scenic perspective; adventure; services and facilities; key attractions; emotional appeal; and infrastructure. To achieve this new position, the destination should ensure safety and security for tourists by, for example, declaring some tourist areas to be hooligan-free zones.

c) *Re-branding the Destination*

Destination branding entails among other things the creation of a logo/slogan and/or graphics in order to identify the destination and to differentiate it from its competitors. Moreover, the branding process should from the outset involve the “buy in” of all the stakeholders, thereby ensuring that all the stakeholders participate in the branding process. This study concludes that destination branding is indeed a strategic tool for long-range tourism planning and that it could be used effectively in the formulation of a market segmentation strategy. Such a strategy could provide focus and integrate stakeholders’ efforts. Whereas the destination-branding process is concerned with alignment, it should be noted that consistently doing what is correct creates a symphony that harnesses the power of the greatest possible number of message partners and stakeholders within the destination.

This study also demonstrates that branding can contribute to influencing the influencers and to maintaining sound communication with those who control the messages, while minimising negative impacts for the destination. In the light of the current problems that are being experienced in Zimbabwe, the destination could benefit from a re-branding process. However, the study simultaneously indicates that non-tourism factors should also be taken into consideration in the re-branding process. The importance of these factors implies that an appropriate structure should be established to manage the brand and to ensure that the quality and performance standards of the brand do not deteriorate below the criteria that are set.

The study reveals that there is a lack of leadership regarding the management of brand equity and the review of the design, production and distribution of brochures. The destination should develop a clear strategic direction that fosters the attainment

of cohesion between the private and the public sectors. A shared vision could lead to the formation of strategic alliances, joint ventures with other international bodies and the luring of international airlines to again fly to the destination.

d) *Destination positioning*

While Zimbabwe is not a novice in the selling of tourism experiences. Given the negative events that have been occurring in the country, the position projected by the “Africa’s Paradise” slogan is no longer appropriate, The study reveals that in the course of the 1990s, the Zimbabwean brand contributed to positioning the destination on the world map. However, some respondents in the survey are of the opinion that the brand positioning has outlived its usefulness, because it lacks an aggressive and forceful identity. It has lost its lustre and no longer lures tourists. For brand positioning to succeed, it is fundamental to ensure that the positioning exercise remains realistic and opportunistic at all times in order to avoid the risk of failure. Zimbabwe is renowned for its uniqueness, diversity, nature, hospitality, service and value for money. On the other hand its weaknesses as a destination are its political turmoil, instability of its currency and, above all, an economic recession.

It is apparent from the study that the destination should conduct market research and do intelligence gathering in order to identify the extent of visitor satisfaction and exploit new market segments. The information-gathering process should include a search for opportunities to build on the destination’s position, both locally and internationally. These objectives could be achieved by identifying markets that have large growth potential; undertaking public relations exercises through the media; and using the Internet to relay information on the destination. A destination should remain visible at all times, always counter negative publicity and promise to improve the

situation. The study recommends that the destination should not become involved in a tug of war with the international media, but should invite representatives of the media to experience the destination at first hand.

e) *Destination identity*

A prominent issue that emerges from this study is the importance of brand identity, which provides the impetus for the achievement of a competitive advantage. It should remain a priority for a destination such as Zimbabwe, if it is to adopt the best practice in destination branding. Zimbabwe had identified itself as “Africa’s Paradise”, but this positioning statement is described by some of the respondents as “a shoddy job” that was done haphazardly without satisfactory consultations. The industry and other stakeholders appear to be confused about the use of the strap line, “Africa’s Paradise”. This confusion indicates that there is no strategic fit between the destination and its positioning strategy.

The study concludes that the continued use of the present brand will not yield positive results. The brand is said to have a poor brand identity selling point. The findings of the study suggest that it is necessary to apply a holistic approach to Zimbabwe’s brand identity by rebuilding the brand’s character, personality, essence, culture and blueprint. A brand identity should be in accordance with the tourists’ experiences and should be distinctive

The findings of the study lead to the recommendation that the destination should devise trailblazing strategies that involve all the stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the strategies and encourage their collaborative investment in them. The establishment of a brand identity could also involve the issuing of

invitations to ambassadors of source market governments to sample Zimbabwe's tourism products while simultaneously creating multiple linkages within the Southern African Development Community (SADC). To achieve success with the establishment of these multiple linkages there is need to promote the creation of peace parks in order to broaden the product base.

Zimbabwe's brand identity has been blurred by a high level of corruption and it has been plagued by internal operating problems, political turmoil, inflation, HIV/AIDS and the failure of the leaders to admit the existence of a crisis. The government should address these issues aggressively.

f) *Promoting the destination*

It should be acknowledged that destination branding is a long-term investment, but that the brand is nevertheless destined to become obsolete in the long term. A brand should be established and promoted for at least a generation.

It is furthermore recommended that the promotion of the destination should not be considered to be the responsibility of the government only. It is essential that provision should be made for continuity. Therefore the destination brand should be designed professionally (i.e. political connotations should be avoided) to ensure that it survives a change of the government. Moreover, a brand should be owned and promoted by the inhabitants as a national asset and be considered to be a strategic marketing tool for all export business.

It is also recommended that promotion of tourism should be directed at the establishment of credibility. An essential part of such credibility is the establishment

of management standards for self-control and self-maintenance in the tourism industry. These standards are dependent on the development of quality standards and on the functioning of control and monitoring mechanisms in respect of the use of the brand by the various sectors of the tourism industry. Since the “seven Ps” of tourism marketing are applicable all over the world, these principles are also available to Zimbabwe and it a matter of urgency for this country to begin to customise its marketing strategies. It is recommended that the destination should develop clear marketing objectives, promotional plans and mitigating strategies that could contribute to enhancing the image of the destination while also keeping it affordable for tourists. The destination should send out positive signals to the international world in order to garner consumer goodwill.

g) *Destination’s competitive advantage*

A new approach to the repositioning of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination is recommended. The approach should be based on the competitive advantage that the destination has over its competitors and on the changing market demands, as outlined in the model. While the destination has a competitive advantage over its competitors and excellent tourism potential, it is considered to have poor market penetration as a result of its negative image in source markets. Although the most commonly used communication tools in branding and positioning are websites, electronic media, public relations and travel expos, respondents indicate that Zimbabwe tends to rely primarily on travel expos and a website that is not current. The destination should develop and update its website regularly and use it as a marketing tool.

h) Development of crisis management strategies

It is recommended that Zimbabwe should develop crisis management strategies to protect its destination brand and enable itself to transform a crisis situation into an opportunity. A strategy of this nature could be achieved through the use of a number of approaches that could include focusing on the positive aspects of the destination; highlighting special circumstances; focusing attention on other non tourism elements of the destination which have a direct impact on the destination in order to change the way that people think about the destination; shifting paradigms; and creating a new destination image.

Destination-marketing strategies that could be employed during a crisis situation include the use of promotion, market-segment mix, channel mix, geographical mix and/or even product mix. All of these factors should be considered and steps should be taken to address the prevailing needs and to generate the outcome that the destination desires in a crisis situation. Destinations should develop a blueprint that details a crisis communication plan and a spokesperson for the destination should be nominated to take charge of the plan. The plan should specify what is required of the spokesperson, the training that is to be given, development of messages, recruitment of third party media spokespersons and identification of key media contacts. The successful execution of the plan is of critical importance and the destination should rehearse the blueprint in preparation for a crisis.

9.6 ISSUES THAT REQUIRE FURTHER RESEARCH

The following four broad areas are identified for further research on the branding and repositioning of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination:

competitiveness in tourism, but it can not guarantee success. The model developed in this study could be applied to any international destination that is embarking on a branding and positioning exercise.

- The application of the strategic branding and positioning model that was developed in this study in other destinations that are experiencing circumstances that are similar to that in Zimbabwe and to compare the results with the findings of this study.
- Assessing the effect of politics on branding and its impact on the marketing of a tourism destination, with particular reference to Zimbabwe.
- Evaluate the level of collaboration amongst stakeholders in the destination-branding process and its impact on the position that Zimbabwe holds as a tourist destination.

9.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study contributes to the prevailing literature on destination marketing, particularly in the field of destination branding and positioning. It has led to the development of a strategic destination-branding and positioning model. The study also contributes to the clarification of the complexity of destination branding by streamlining the closely related and interlinked terms that are usually used interchangeably, for example branding, destination brand and nation branding. It also illustrates the close relationship that exists between destination branding, destination image and destination positioning. These factors are clarified by means of both the literature review that was undertaken and the empirical survey that was conducted.

While destination branding is a strategic tool in the repositioning of a destination, the empirical evidence indicates that there are also non-tourism factors that could affect the health of the brand. Therefore branding is indeed a tool for achieving greater