

Digitalisation from Print media branding of tourism destinations: Modernity in positive image building

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Abstract

This study explores the role of mainstream news media in enhancing the positive publicity of Zimbabwe as a tourism destination. Specifically, the research examines three key attributes, namely the types of mainstream news media used, their readership frequency and their underlying communication objectives. Employing a quantitative research design, the study gathered data through survey questionnaires distributed to a total of 561 respondents. These included 421 participants drawn from the tourism and media industries and 140 tourists visiting various sites across Zimbabwe. A comparative analysis was conducted to identify patterns and differences among these respondent groups.

The findings indicate that the most frequently utilised forms of mainstream news media for destination promotion include newspapers, brochures, travel magazines, travel journals and tourism directories. Among these, tourism directories, travel magazines and travel journals emerged as having the highest readership frequencies. These results underscore the enduring relevance of print media as a credible and effective tool for destination marketing in the Zimbabwean context.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that destination marketers need to prioritise the use of mainstream print media as a complementary promotional strategy. Given its broad reach and high readership engagement, print media offers considerable potential for shaping positive perceptions of Zimbabwe's tourism brand. Furthermore, the study acknowledges the influence of other media types, beyond print, on destination brand image and brand loyalty, suggesting that a multi-channel approach may be optimal for enhancing brand visibility and trust.

In conclusion, the study affirms that print media plays a significant role in building destination brand awareness, reinforcing perceived brand quality and strengthening brand associations. These dimensions are critical for repositioning Zimbabwe as a competitive and appealing tourism destination in the global market.

Keywords: Destination branding, print media, news, tourism, publicity, frequency

Introduction

Publicity refers to the dissemination of information to the public in a manner that transforms it into publicly accessible knowledge and encourages widespread consumption (Pember & Calvert, 2011; Tetteh, P. K., & Kankam, 2024). Although the phrase “any publicity is good publicity” is widely cited, empirical research demonstrates that negative publicity can have adverse effects on consumer perceptions and behaviour (Berger *et al.*, 2010:816). This is particularly evident in the case of Zimbabwe as a tourism destination, where negative publicity, especially from Western markets, has led to a decline in tourist interest and consumption. Negative publicity can severely damage a destination’s reputation, leading to long-term avoidance by tourists unless strategic interventions are implemented. Unlike positive publicity, which often requires time to generate tangible results, negative publicity spreads rapidly through mass media and word of mouth, making it particularly potent.

One of the core challenges in tourism branding is identifying the most effective media platforms for generating positive publicity. The literature remains limited on this subject, especially concerning the role of print media in tourism destination branding. This gap may partly explain why destinations such as Zimbabwe continue to struggle with establishing a consistently positive image that drives tourism consumption. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the role of mainstream news media, specifically print media, in enhancing the positive publicity of Zimbabwe as a tourism brand. Previous research by (Chigora *et al.*, 2024; Ndlovu & Heath, 2013) highlights the significant volume of negative publicity surrounding Zimbabwe in key source markets. Such negative narratives can adversely affect consumer evaluation and purchasing decisions, ultimately reducing sales and market performance (Huang & Chen, 2006, as cited in Berger *et al.*, 2010:816). A damaged brand image, stemming from persistent negative publicity, can derail ongoing efforts to promote a tourism destination (Ndlovu & Heath, 2013:947).

Zimbabwe's tourism brand has suffered considerably from international media coverage that often emphasises political instability and socio-economic challenges, resulting in a sharp decline in tourist arrivals and tourism-generated revenue (Chigora *et al.*, 2024:2). Consequently, examining the role of publicity is crucial to understanding and improving a destination’s competitiveness (Bakhshayesh *et al.*, 2022; Mohammad Shafiee *et al.*, 202; Nyagadza *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, rebranding and repositioning efforts must be informed by in-depth research into the destination’s attractiveness and market perception.

Over the past three decades, Zimbabwe’s tourism brand has undergone several rebranding efforts, including transitioning from Discover Zimbabwe in the 1980s, to Africa Paradise in 1996 and World of Wonders in 2011 (Ndlovu & Heath, 2013; Chibaya, 2013). These shifts reflect broader socio-political and economic upheavals

that have affected the country's image and tourism prospects (Chigora & Mutambara, 2019; Zibanai, 2014; Ndlovu, 2009). This further highlights that the media often acts as a catalyst in disseminating negative information about destinations, shaping public discourse and perception (Severi & Ling, 2014; Abu-Rumman & Alhadid, 2014; Habibi et al., 2014; Lange-Faria, 2012; Linh, 2012).

Given this background, it is plausible that negative media coverage, across various channels, has contributed to Zimbabwe's diminished tourism brand performance. However, there remains limited research on the role of print media in countering negative perceptions and promoting a positive destination image, particularly in the Zimbabwean context. As a longstanding form of traditional media, mainstream print outlets continue to play a critical role in shaping public opinion, making them worthy of scholarly attention in tourism marketing (Phionah et al., 2023; Davids et al., 2023). As such, this study investigates the potential of print media as an effective tool for enhancing destination brand publicity in Zimbabwe. Specifically, it aims to examine the types of print media that can support positive branding efforts, assess the readership frequencies of different forms of print media used in Zimbabwe's tourism sector and understand the primary communication objectives pursued through print media in destination marketing.

Literature Review: News Effects on Zimbabwe's Tourism Destination Branding

The role of media in shaping tourism destination perceptions is well-documented, with news coverage significantly influencing potential tourists' decisions and destination brand equity. In the context of Zimbabwe, international media, particularly from Western countries, have often portrayed the country negatively, affecting its tourism image and brand identity.

News content is impactful due to its scale, prominence, proximity, relevance and human interest elements. Such characteristics determine the salience of news stories and their potential to influence public perception (Metila, 2013). Journalistic practices, including the framing and presentation of news, can either enhance or distort the conveyed message (Pember & Calvert, 2011; Mohammad Shafiee *et al.*, 2021).

Negative media portrayals have led to perceptions of Zimbabwe as an unsafe destination. Headlines such as "Zimbabwe: Tourists Harassed" and "Zimbabwe dismally fails to attract EU tourists" have contributed to this image (Matiza & Oni, 2013; Zimbabwe Today, 2017; New Zimbabwe, 2017). These narratives, amplified by the global reach of Western media, have hindered Zimbabwe's efforts to establish a positive tourism brand. Alfonseca *et al.* (2013) argue that news agencies interpret events

differently, leading to varied perceptions among audiences based on the framing and depth of analysis provided.

Tourism destinations, including Zimbabwe, face challenges in selecting effective platforms to disseminate positive news and counteract negative portrayals. The widespread acceptance of negative narratives by global audiences reflects the influence of dominant media sources. Pember and Calvert (2011) and Nyagadza *et al.* (2022) highlight the power of news sources in shaping societal perceptions, which can be leveraged by destination managers for brand management. However, there is limited literature on the specific impact of print media on tourism destination brands, where research often lacks guidance on selecting appropriate media channels to achieve positive brand equity (Ali *et al.*, 2025; Chigora *et al.*, 2024; Rahman *et al.*, 2023). In essence, the media plays a crucial role in shaping the image and brand of tourism destinations (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020:2). In Zimbabwe's case, negative media coverage has adversely affected its tourism brand (Chigora *et al.*, 2021:135). As such, understanding the mechanisms of media influence and selecting appropriate communication strategies are essential for destination marketers (Martins *et al.*, 2025; Li *et al.*, 2022; Sharma, 2022) thus aiming to rebuild and enhance Zimbabwe's tourism image.

The impact of news headlines on Zimbabwe's Tourism Destination Publicity

Despite their spatial constraints and institutional conventions, news headlines play a pivotal role in shaping public discourse. They function not only as introductory cues to the content that follows but also as tools for capturing readers' attention and conveying the underlying attitude or perspective of the news agency (Mousoulidou, 2024:1648). Headlines offer a condensed insight into the broader narrative, acting as powerful framing devices that influence how audiences interpret subsequent information. Their effectiveness lies in the strategic use of language, idiomatic expressions and rhetorical techniques, which together stimulate interest and shape audience perception (Alisoy, 2023:88)

The influence of headline construction is particularly relevant in the context of tourism destination branding, where public perception is a critical determinant of market performance (Agung Sudarmanto, 2023; Morais *et al.*, 2022). In Zimbabwe's case, numerous print media headlines have had a profound impact on its tourism image, often reinforcing negative stereotypes and deterring potential visitors. Examples include, "Zim a Destination for the Brave" (Zimbabwe Independent, 2012, cited in Matiza & Oni, 2013, p. 4745), "Why Zimbabwe Remains an Expensive Tourism Destination" (The Herald, 2016), "Zimbabwe: Tourists Harassed" (Zimbabwe Today, 2017), "Zimbabwe Dismally Fails to Attract EU Tourists" (New Zimbabwe, 2017) and "Zim Amongst Worst Tourism Destinations" (Zimbabwe Independent, 2015). These headlines construct powerful discourses made up of particular meanings, metaphors and representations that shape

a specific version of reality, which is often negative or sensationalised (Alisoy, 2023:88). They contribute to a narrative that undermines Zimbabwe's tourism brand, regardless of the actual conditions on the ground. Moreover, headlines enjoy a privileged position in media communication. They are frequently perceived as encapsulating the 'truth' of a story, despite the potential for ambiguity, bias or factual inaccuracy (Lei et al., 2022: Aires et al., 2020)). This becomes problematic when international media, particularly Western outlets, disseminate headlines that portray Zimbabwe as unsafe, unwelcoming or economically unstable (Chigora et al., 2024:2). These representations can severely damage the country's image among potential tourists, particularly when such headlines are not balanced by positive or contextualised coverage (Chigora et al., 2021:135).

While destination marketers within Zimbabwe often seek to promote a more favourable image through positive messaging, the international media landscape often amplifies contradictory narratives (Chigora et al., 2024:2). This discrepancy between domestic branding efforts and international representations creates confusion among tourists and can hinder brand recovery and repositioning efforts (Seyfi et al., 2022:561). Consequently, the crafting and dissemination of news headlines wield significant influence over the public perception of Zimbabwe as a tourism destination (Chigora et al., 2024:2). Addressing these challenges requires coordinated public relations strategies and engagement with international media to counterbalance negative framing with more accurate and constructive narratives.

The role of news content crafting in tourism destination branding

The way news is crafted and presented in media plays a critical role in shaping the public perception of tourism destinations (Caamaño-Franco et al, 2025:2). The style of presentation and the variety of content across different media platforms not only contributes to meaning-making, but can also lead to distortion due to the inherent subjectivity and variability of news reporting (Muyidi, 2025:2). The effectiveness of print media in communicating tourism-related information is significantly enhanced when textual content is supplemented with high-quality visual imagery. For instance, vivid photographs can assist potential tourists in visualising accommodation facilities, attractions and local culture, thereby influencing their destination choices (Alshehri, 2023; Tuten, 2023)

Print media, including newspapers and magazines, are widely utilised across global tourism destinations, including Zimbabwe. These media platforms are instrumental in conveying a broad spectrum of tourism-related themes, ranging from general travel information to nuanced cultural narratives, often through visually enriched storytelling (Warta, 2011; Alipour *et al.*, 2012; Caamaño-Franco et al, 2025). As such, empirical research remains limited concerning the specific effects of print news content on tourism destination brand performance, particularly in the context of developing countries.

The construction of news content involves multiple interrelated components, including linguistic choices, structural framing and moral evaluations, which together influence how readers interpret and respond to the message (Metila, 2013:72; Nyagadza, 2021). These elements contribute to the framing of the content, enabling journalists to define issues, establish causality conduct moral assessments and craft narratives that capture audience attention. Nonetheless, due to the multifaceted nature of news construction, it becomes challenging to isolate which specific elements may contribute to negative branding outcomes. In the case of Zimbabwe, identifying such elements could aid in the development of more effective, reputation-enhancing news narratives to counter prevailing negative international perceptions (Chigora et al., 2024).

News content is typically framed in either episodic or thematic formats. Episodic framing emphasises isolated events, while thematic framing explores broader issues, underlying causes and long-term implications (Guo et al.2021; 660). In destination branding, this distinction is particularly important.) Various researches (Ruiz-Real et al. 2020; Anjomrouz et al. 2021;Chigora & Katsande 2021) underscored that destination branding is a long-term strategic commitment requiring sustained engagement and periodic recalibration. Yet, in many cases, media coverage of endemic challenges tends to be episodic, presenting deep-rooted issues as isolated incidents. This approach risks minimising the need for structural reform or sustained branding efforts, as it encourages audiences to view problems as exceptions rather than symptoms of systemic deficiencies (Bressers& Gordon, 2010:2; Mohammad Shafiee et al., 2016l; Nwachukwu et al, 2024). This short-sightedness in news framing may partially explain Zimbabwe's persistent challenges in establishing a strong and resilient tourism brand. The episodic treatment of tourism-related narratives in print media fails to reflect the complex and evolving nature of destination branding, which should be seen as an ongoing dialogue with international and domestic audiences. Consequently, leveraging print media to consistently deliver thematically framed, positive and informative content could be instrumental in rebuilding trust and enhancing the country's brand equity as a tourism destination.

In conclusion, the crafting of tourism news content must be viewed as a deliberate and strategic process (source). Print media, if utilised effectively, can serve as a platform for long-term narrative construction that supports destination branding efforts (source). Addressing the current gaps in content framing and adopting a thematic, sustained communication strategy may be essential for improving Zimbabwe's tourism brand performance in the global marketplace (source).

The influence of media coverage on tourists' buying behaviour

Tourists' buying behaviour encompasses a range of psychological and social processes, including decision-making, values, motivations, self-concept and personality, expectations, attitudes, perceptions, satisfaction, trust and loyalty (Li & Cai, 2021; Chen

& Gursoy, 2021; Kim & Jogaratnam, 2022). These dimensions have been widely examined in the literature, where they are often conceptualised as being shaped by a combination of personal, cultural and environmental values (Han, 2021:1028).

Media plays a critical role in influencing tourists' behavioural responses by shaping the perceptions they form about destinations (Dzreke&Dzreke, 2025:1161). In particular, media coverage, especially news headlines and narratives, can significantly impact the image of a destination, thus affecting the decisions tourists make when selecting travel locations (Chigora et al., 2024). Tourists often rely on the perceived image of a destination, derived from media representations, to assess whether it aligns with their personal values, lifestyle and expectations. As such, media serves as a key intermediary in constructing the symbolic appeal of a destination, often influencing emotional connections and brand associations (Guo et al.2021; 660).

In the case of Zimbabwe, media portrayal has had a measurable impact on its tourism brand. Although Zimbabwe offers a diverse range of experiences capable of appealing to different types of tourists, negative media representations have contributed to adverse perceptions that deter potential visitors. For example, a headline in the Zimbabwe Independent (2015), titled "Zim Among Worst Tourism Destinations", exemplifies how media narratives can damage a country's tourism image, potentially discouraging international arrivals and undermining destination trust and loyalty.

Despite these general trends, existing research also indicates that the effects of media on tourist behaviour may vary depending on tourists' national and cultural backgrounds (Garner & Kim, 2022; Pop et al., 2022; Lin & Rasoolimanesh, 2022) This suggests that tourists from different countries may interpret and respond to media messages differently, depending on their cultural schemas, prior knowledge and travel motivations. Thus, nationality serves as a moderating variable in the relationship between media influence and tourist decision-making (Ekici, 2023:458).

In conclusion, the media, through both positive and negative portrayals, exerts a profound influence on tourist behaviour by shaping destination image, altering perceptions and ultimately affecting consumer choices (Mheidat& Marzuki, 2024:2). For tourism destinations like Zimbabwe, managing media representation is therefore a strategic imperative in cultivating a favourable brand image and enhancing international competitiveness (Chigora et al., 2024:2).

The role of traditional and digital media in tourism destination promotion

A variety of media types are employed in tourism destinations to facilitate communication, enhance branding and influence visitor perceptions. These include broadcast media, social media, electronic media, outdoor media and direct media, each offering unique advantages in destination marketing and tourist engagement (Nzoku & Duffett, 2021:747). Broadcast media, particularly radio and television remain

foundational in tourism promotion, connecting destinations with broad audiences through engaging audio-visual content (Warta, 2011; Gutsche, 2019:1035). The primary strength of broadcast media, especially television, lies in its capacity to vividly represent movement, scenery and emotion, thereby bringing destinations to life for potential tourists (Gutsche, 2019:1036). Visual storytelling, supported by compelling graphics, music and narration, allows tourism marketers to present offerings such as landscapes, wildlife, cultural practices, transportation infrastructure and hospitality services in a dynamic and immersive manner. This multimedia format effectively simulates real experiences, creating emotional resonance and stimulating the desire to travel (Boboc et al. 2022; Zhong et al. 2021; Shih et al. 2020). As such, broadcast media can significantly influence destination image formation and international visibility.

Social media, representing the most recent and rapidly evolving form of media, has transformed the landscape of tourism communication (WorldHost, 2013). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, WhatsApp, blogs and online forums have enabled tourists and tourism stakeholders to engage in real-time dialogue regarding destinations (Tourism Queensland, 2012). Social media facilitates the exchange of information, personal experiences, recommendations and critiques, empowering users to co-create and influence destination narratives (Ekici, 2023:459). The accessibility of these platforms via mobile devices, including smartphones, tablets and laptops adds to their convenience and global reach. One of the most powerful aspects of social media lies in its ability to generate electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), which can significantly impact destination reputation. Positive experiences shared online can enhance attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, while negative reviews may deter potential visitors (Mikalefet *et al.*, 2012; Ahmad et al., 2022; Barari et al., 2020). As a result, tourism marketers must actively manage their digital presence and engage with user-generated content to maintain a favourable image.

Another widely used medium in tourism promotion is outdoor media, which includes billboards, banners, posters and other static or dynamic displays placed in high-traffic public areas, such as highways, airports, shopping centers and tourist hotspots (Freeman & Glazer, 2015; Cheong & Kim, 2012; Sissors & Baron, 2010; Belch & Belch, 2012; Moriarty et al., 2012; Ellison et al., 2020;). Outdoor media often employ striking visual designs featuring picturesque landscapes, iconic landmarks, cultural heritage elements and promotional messages to capture attention and create a lasting impression. In recent years, technological advancements have led to the emergence of digital billboards, capable of delivering animated or video content with audio, enhancing their capacity to communicate dynamic tourism messages (Gutsche, 2019:1036). These media types are particularly effective in creating constant visual reminders of a destination's offerings, contributing to brand recall and top-of-mind awareness among both domestic and international tourists.

Therefore this study also concludes that the strategic integration of broadcast, social and outdoor media into destination marketing efforts is essential for effectively promoting tourism brands in a competitive global environment. Nzeku & Duffett (2021:747) informed that each medium offers distinct advantages that, when leveraged appropriately, can contribute to enhanced destination visibility, engagement and tourist loyalty.

The Transformative Role of Digital Marketing and Social Media in Tourism Destination Branding

As global connectivity continues to improve, the tourism industry is undergoing a significant transformation by embracing digital marketing as a core strategy to enhance engagement between destinations and tourists, while shaping market perceptions to drive economic growth (Kamsaret *et al.*, 2023). This shift marks a fundamental departure from traditional marketing practices, representing a contemporary evolution in tourism promotion (Mariani *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, digital marketing is now at the forefront of strategic communication in tourism, offering tools that allow destinations to build brand visibility, influence consumer behaviour and reach wider global audiences in real time.

Given this context, it is imperative for tourism marketers to do a transition from conventional methods to digitally driven strategies that appeal to today's tech-savvy travelers (Gutsche, 2019:1036). The necessity of this shift is underscored by research indicating that the vast majority of tourists now plan and book their travel through digital platforms, including search engines, websites and mobile applications (Cooper *et al.*, 2021). This growing dependency on digital tools highlights the importance of aligning destination marketing efforts with the preferences and behaviours of modern tourists (Nzeku & Duffett (2021:742).

Digital platforms, particularly social media, offer distinct advantages such as broad audience reach, instantaneous interaction and enhanced destination visibility (Niziaieva *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, social media has become a dynamic space where tourism brands, organisations and consumers interact, exchange information and co-create value (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020). Consequently, tourists are increasingly reliant on these platforms not only to gather information prior to their visits, but also to document and share their experiences during and after travel (Primananda *et al.*, 2022).

This interactive digital environment necessitates that destination marketers adopt innovative and engaging approaches when using social media as a communication tool (Hafez, 2022). Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok provide visually rich content, such as photos, videos, reels and live stories that significantly enhance consumer engagement and satisfaction (Masa'dehet *et al.*, 2021). In addition, social media enables potential tourists to express their expectations and share personal experiences, fostering the development of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM). As noted by

Masa'dehet *al.* (2021), E-WOM is easily disseminated and remains permanently accessible online, making it a powerful influencer of destination image. In this regard, the reputation and appeal of tourism destinations are increasingly shaped by digital technologies, particularly through peer-generated content and social media interactions. In conclusion, the integration of digital marketing, especially through social media, has redefined the landscape of tourism promotion (Hassoon et al., 2022; Ebrahim, 2020; Haryono & Albetris, 2022). As such, if destination marketers want to remain competitive they must fully leverage these platforms to build compelling narratives, encourage traveler engagement and manage brand image in an increasingly digital global marketplace (Veerasingam & Goswami, 2022).

Research Methodology

This study was purely quantitative research with the aim to objectively construct data through surveys. The surveys were done through a comparative analysis of the demand and supply of tourism in the market using various types of print media. For demand, tourists were considered as respondents and for supply employees within the Zimbabwean tourism and media industries were considered as respondents.

A stratified random sampling method was used to group the respondents for the research into sectors within the tourism and media industry where the data collection was carried out. Creswell (2014:204) suggests that with stratification characteristics are identified and grouped into strata before making an actual sample. As such, three main sectors of the Zimbabwe tourism industry were investigated, namely accommodation, travel and resorts. In relation to the media industry, the focus was on print media. The total population for all four identified sectors is presented in Table 1, including the sampled population which was determined by Yamane (1967) sample size formula.

First approximation calculation

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Sample size calculation

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{(n_0 - 1)}{N}}$$

Where: N = population size
 n = sample size
 e = sampling error or precision level (e.g. 5% for 95% confidence level),
and

n_0 = the first approximation of n

Table 1: Population and sample size

	Accommodation	Travel	Resorts	Print	Totals
Population (N)	446	224	51	200	921
***Convenience Sampling (n)	194	99	48	80	421

***Due to the unavailability of some respondents the study then applied convenience sampling ignoring the sample size formula as given above.

Table 1 shows that the total population of respondents across all the sectors was 921. This was then reduced to a manageable sample size of $n = 421$ as an aggregate of respondents from all the sectors.

Table 2: Tourists sample size calculation

*Type Of Accommodation	Monthly Occupancy Rate	** Total Population of Tourists	Calculated Sample Size (N_0)	Sample Size (N)
Hotel 1	82	82	68	37
Hotel 2	133	133	100	56
Hotel 3	107	107	84	47
TOTAL	322	322	252	140

First approximation

$$n = \frac{3221 + 322(0.05)^2}{1} = 252$$

Second approximation

$$n =$$

$$252$$

$$1 + \frac{(252-1)}{322} = 140$$

$$322 = 140$$

In order to incorporate the perspectives of tourists, who often receive information through print and other media channels, a survey was conducted. The target population of tourists was drawn from three major hotels in Zimbabwe, which were randomly selected from the accommodation sector based on their size, which was determined by two factors, namely the number of rooms available for occupancy and monthly occupancy rates. These hotels were chosen because, unlike other sectors of the tourism industry where tourist interactions are often brief, such as resorts or transit locations where stays are typically only a few hours, the accommodation sector offers

greater accessibility to tourists who stay for extended periods, thereby facilitating meaningful engagement. Furthermore, an inquiry with the reservations departments of the three selected hotels indicated an average combined monthly occupancy of 322 tourists. This figure ($N = 322$) was used as the study's population size for tourists. Employing Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size determination, this was reduced to a sample of $n = 140$ respondents. As such, Table 2 outlines the tourist population and corresponding sample size.

The primary method of data collection employed in this study was a structured survey questionnaire. The instrument was designed to gather quantitative data and consisted predominantly of closed-ended questions formatted using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). This format was selected for its effectiveness in measuring attitudes, perceptions and levels of agreement across a range of variables relevant to the study objectives. The questionnaire was administered in person to selected respondents to ensure clarity and improve the response rate, with data collection taking place over a specified period to accommodate the availability of participants, particularly tourists residing in the three chosen hotel accommodations.

Quantitative data collected through the survey instrument was systematically analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 30. Descriptive statistics were employed initially to compute mean values and standard deviations, providing a general overview of trends in the dataset. To examine the relationships between key variables, both Pearson's correlation coefficient (for parametric data) and Spearman's rank-order correlation (for non-parametric data) were utilised, depending on the level of measurement and the distribution of variables. In addition, hypothesis testing was conducted to assess the statistical significance of observed relationships and patterns.

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the Likert-scale items. A threshold of 0.70 was considered acceptable for internal consistency reliability, in line with conventional social science standards. The use of SPSS facilitated a rigorous and replicable approach to the analysis, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the study's findings.

Understanding the specific types of print media accessed by tourists to learn about Zimbabwe as a tourism destination and its associated brand is critical for effective destination marketing (Chigora & Ndlovu, 2019:3;Caamaño-Franco et al., 2025:4). This insight enables destination marketers to strategically allocate limited resources toward the most impactful print media channels, thereby avoiding investment in formats that are not perceived as credible or informative by the target audience. Table 3 presents the responses from the employees within the tourism and media industries and the subsequent tourist respondents regarding the print media sources commonly used to obtain information about Zimbabwe and its tourism brand.

Table 3: Types of print media used by tourists regarding Zimbabwe as a tourism destination

TYPE OF PRINT MEDIA	Tourism and Media Organisations (n=421)	Tourists (n=140)
Newspapers	85.0%	92.0%
Travel magazines	60.2%	90.3%
Travel journals	25.1%	38.1%
Brochures	74.6%	71.7%
Academic publications	16.8%	14.2%
Regional tourism directories	60.2%	65.5%
Local tourism directories	27.4%	23.0%
Pearson Correlation	0.919(**) p-value=0.003	
Spearman's rho	0.901(**) p-value=0.006	

The statistics in Table 3 above shows the responses by both employees within the Tourism and Media industries and tourists in relation to the types of print media used as information sources by tourists. The findings indicate a strong alignment between the two respondent groups, with both expressing a high level of agreement on the types of print media tourists rely on for destination-related information. This consistency in responses is statistically supported by both Pearson's correlation coefficient ($r = 0.919$) and Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient ($\rho = 0.901$), both of which exceed the 0.5 threshold, indicating a strong positive correlation. Furthermore, the p-values associated with the Pearson and Spearman tests were 0.003 and 0.006 respectively, which were both below the conventional significance level of 0.05. These results lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_1), confirming that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between the responses of employees and tourists regarding print media usage.

When analysed within the framework of the Paid, Earned, Shared and Owned Media (PESO) Model it becomes evident that Paid Media, particularly newspapers and academic publications, are the most frequently utilised by both groups. The predominance of newspapers can be attributed to the persuasive content crafted by destinations to influence potential visitors. As noted by (Djafarova,2017; Chigora et al., 2024), the use of rhetorical devices, such as figures of speech in marketing content, can enhance message processing by increasing cognitive elaboration, thereby prompting deeper engagement with the promotional material. However, while content creation is initiated by the destination, its distribution, particularly in the case of paid media, is typically handled by third parties, reaching audiences beyond the destination's direct control. Earned Media, represented by travel magazines and journals, ranks second in usage. This form of media often manifests through word-of-mouth marketing, customer-generated reviews and unsolicited third-party coverage. Through engaging visuals and evocative language, such as that found in brochures and editorial content, tourism

discourse aims to captivate and influence the attitudes and behaviours of potential travelers (Irimiea, 2018; Dann, 1996; (Leung, 2021). Destinations may contribute to earned media by issuing press releases or offering representatives for interviews, thereby increasing their visibility through independent media coverage. Owned Media, including brochures, regional tourism directories and official websites, also plays a notable role. The strategic use of metaphors in brochures and blogs allows destinations to frame their tourism offerings in ways that resonate with visitors, helping them construct mental images of what to expect (Djafarova, 2017; Sánchez Castellanos, 2022). Blog posts, in particular, serve as a powerful form of owned media, as destinations maintain full control over the platform, content and audience engagement. Salim & Som, 2018; Abdelrehim, & Bshair 2025:14) emphasise the importance of tourism websites not only as information tools but also as mechanisms for shaping cultural norms, values and perceptions of place identity. Although, they also note that relatively limited research has explored the combined impact of linguistic and visual elements in shaping destination imagery. It is important to note that Shared Media, namely content shared through social media platforms, user interactions and peer-to-peer sharing, was not examined in this particular study. Future research may benefit from incorporating this dimension to provide a more comprehensive understanding of media influence on destination image and tourist behaviour.

While identifying the types of print media used by tourists to learn about Zimbabwe as a tourism destination and its brand provided valuable insights, this alone was not sufficient to definitively recommend the most effective media channels for enhancing the publicity of the Zimbabwean tourism brand. To strengthen the analysis and support evidence-based recommendations, the study further examined the readership frequency of various print media formats. Specifically, the investigation focused on travel directories, newspapers, magazines, travel journals, brochures and both local and regional tourism publications. The aim was to assess not only the types of media accessed, but also how frequently they were engaged with by tourists, thus offering a more comprehensive understanding of media influence and reach. The results derived from this extended analysis are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Types of print media and their readership frequency

		O=TOURISM AND MEDIA ORGANISATION (n=421)				T= TOURISTS (n=140)				
FREQUENC Y	Travel directory		Local newspapers		International newspapers		Travel magazines		Brochures	
	O	T	O	T	O	T	O	T	O	T
Daily	0.3	0	14.2	14.2	36.0	31.9	0.3	0	0	0
Weekly	1.2	0	76.1	90.3	34.8	64.6	1.2	0	5.9	0
Monthly	10.9	36.3	9.7	0	28.3	3.5	43.7	31.9	39.2	2.6
Only end of year	24.2	89.4	0	0	0.3	0	44.0	54.9	43.1	83.2
Never	63.4	0	0	0	0.6	0	10.9	13.3	11.8	14.2

Pearson Correlation	0.986 (p-value 0.011)	-	0.161 (p-value 0.731)	-	0.391 (p-value 0.609)
Spearman's rho	-	1.000(**) (p-value 0.005)	-	0.975(**)	-

** Spearman's rho Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Given the increasingly important role of online and print media in enhancing destination value, platforms such as websites and traditional print materials have become essential tools in the marketing and promotion of tourism destinations (Salim & Som, 2018; Alghanayem et al., 2023; Chigora et al., 2024; Muluneh, 2022). In this context, the study analysed the correlation between the responses of employees within the Tourism and Media industries and tourists regarding the frequency of readership across different types of print media. The results, as presented in Table 4, reveal varying degrees of alignment.

Pearson's correlation coefficient indicated a strong positive relationship ($r=0.986$) between employees and tourists concerning the readership of travel directories. With a p-value of 0.011, which is below the conventional significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, confirming a statistically significant relationship. Similarly, Spearman's rank-order correlation produced a perfect correlation ($\rho=1.000$) for the readership of local newspapers, with a p-value well below 0.05, reinforcing the existence of a strong, statistically significant association in the responses from both groups. In contrast, the Pearson correlation for international newspaper readership was weak ($r = 0.161$) with a non-significant p-value of 0.731, which exceeds the 0.05 threshold. This result led to the retention of the null hypothesis, indicating no statistically significant relationship between employees and tourists regarding the readership of international newspapers. The Spearman correlation for local newspaper readership remained strong at $\rho = 0.975$, with a p-value of 0.005, confirming once again a significant relationship between the two groups. Regarding travel magazine readership, Pearson's correlation showed a moderate relationship ($r=0.391$); however, the p-value of 0.609 was not statistically significant, leading to the conclusion that no reliable association exists between the perceptions of employees and tourists for this particular media type.

In summary, Table 4 suggests that employees and tourists shared a significant consensus only in their readership frequency of travel directories, local newspapers and, to some extent, travel magazines. These findings highlight the importance of these specific media channels as effective tools for tourism marketing communication. Such that other authors (Djafarova, 2017; Li, & Ma, 2024) postulated that the strategic use of metaphors and figurative language in tourism media enhances destination imagery and emotional appeal, making these media formats particularly influential. It is therefore recommended that Zimbabwean tourism marketers prioritise investment in travel directories, local newspapers and travel magazines, as these media align with the

consumption patterns and preferences of both supply-side stakeholders and potential tourists. This alignment strengthens the likelihood of effective message delivery and brand positioning within target markets. Print media plays a significant role in advancing various communication objectives associated with a tourism destination brand. One of the primary objectives of employing media in tourism marketing is to cultivate a positive destination image through strategic and favourable publicity. As highlighted by Dann (1996) and Lonardi (2021), language serves as a powerful tool in tourism promotion; where prospective tourists often form perceptions of destinations based on written descriptions prior to travel and their decisions are frequently influenced by the persuasive power of such language. In addition, media communication objectives can be further understood through key components such as headline framing, content construction and the scope of audience reach. Given that this study focused on print media, it was essential to evaluate its contribution in relation to these communication objectives. This comparative assessment aimed to determine the extent to which print media supports the branding and promotional goals of Zimbabwe as a tourism destination. The findings from this analysis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Responses on promoting the Zimbabwe tourism brand by print media publicity

TOURISM AND MEDIA ORGANISATION (n=421)						
Print Media Aspects	SD	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	SA	Mean
The print media can help to improve positive publicity of Zimbabwe tourism brand.	0%	0%	0%	13.6%	86.4%	1.14
News content in print media can influence tourists to associate with the Zimbabwe tourism brand.	0%	0%	0.3%	31.9%	67.8%	1.32
Headlines made in print media can improve the attractiveness of Zimbabwe tourism brand.	0%	0%	0%	42.2%	57.8%	1.42
Print media helps as a mass communication tool for the Zimbabwe tourism brand.	0%	0%	0%	43.7%	56.3%	1.44

Overall Mean	1.33
Cronbach's Alpha	0.745

*** Acceptable numeric Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.70 to 0.95

As presented in Table 5, all the communication objectives assessed in relation to the Zimbabwe tourism brand received mean scores below 3.0, indicating a general agreement among respondents regarding the effectiveness of print media in supporting these objectives. This is further substantiated by an overall mean score of 1.33, reflecting strong consensus that print media plays a positive role in advancing the communication goals associated with Zimbabwe's tourism brand.

In the context of promoting long-haul or less familiar destinations, it is common for promotional content to minimise perceptions of unfamiliarity by incorporating familiar or relatable elements that facilitate mental associations for potential tourists (Djafarova, 2017; Li, & Ma, 2024)). The item with the lowest mean score (1.14) suggests a particularly strong agreement that print media contributes to enhancing positive publicity for Zimbabwe as a tourism destination. This finding is particularly significant in light of the country's historical challenges with international media portrayals. As noted by Mirimi (2014), a decline in tourist arrivals was largely attributed to both projected and perceived negative media coverage, which framed Zimbabwe as an unsafe and undesirable travel destination. Additionally, a mean score of 1.32 for the item assessing the influence of news content indicates that respondents strongly agreed that the framing and tone of print media reports can shape tourist perceptions of Zimbabwe's tourism brand. This aligns with prior studies showing how international media, namely European outlets, have at times negatively impacted the country's image through adverse narratives. Taken together, these findings underscore the strategic potential of print media to rebuild and enhance Zimbabwe's tourism brand image. By leveraging well-crafted content and consistent positive messaging, tourism authorities and marketers can counteract past negative publicity and position Zimbabwe more favourably in the minds of prospective visitors.

Conclusions

Much of the existing tourism research tends to emphasise visual representations, given the crucial role that imagery plays in shaping perceptions and experiences in tourism marketing. However, comparatively less scholarly attention has been given to the textual elements of tourism promotion, despite the fact that text, particularly in print media, also carries a powerful visual and persuasive dimension through the strategic use of language.

The findings of this study highlight that Paid Media, particularly newspapers and academic publications, are the most frequently utilised print media, not only based on the feedback from tourists but from the perspectives of employees within the Tourism

and Media industries. In this media category, content creation is typically undertaken by the destination, while its distribution is managed by external entities, allowing the content to reach broader, often independent, audiences. Earned Media, which includes travel magazines and journals, also demonstrated a notable influence, particularly in fostering word-of-mouth marketing, user-generated reviews and unsolicited destination mentions. This type of media coverage often arises from press releases issued by the destination or participation in media interviews, where journalists or podcasters then produce independent content referencing the destination. Owned Media, including brochures, regional directories and blog posts, provides destinations with full control over content creation, distribution and audience engagement. Blog posts, in particular, were identified as a prevalent form of owned media due to their accessibility and customisable messaging.

Empirical results from the study revealed that travel directories, local newspapers and travel magazines had the highest readership frequency, indicating that these forms of print media are the most effective in reaching and influencing target audiences. This suggests that print media plays a critical role in shaping the public image of Zimbabwe as a tourism destination, particularly through the framing of news content, which can significantly influence tourist perceptions and brand associations.

The study concludes that headlines and content in print media can enhance destination appeal, reaffirming the role of print media as a valuable mass communication tool for promoting the Zimbabwean tourism brand. Consequently, it is recommended that destination marketers increase the strategic use of print media, particularly those formats with proven high readership, to strengthen brand visibility and appeal. Furthermore, marketing strategies should focus on selecting media formats that resonate most with the target audience if they want to enhance their impact. Additionally, there is a need to develop robust public relations strategies aimed at countering negative narratives and crafting content that positively frames Zimbabwe as an attractive and safe travel destination in both domestic and international contexts. Finally, the emergence of Shared Media introduces new opportunities for tourism branding, offering interactive and peer-driven channels for engagement. It is therefore recommended that tourism destinations begin to explore and integrate contemporary media platforms alongside traditional print media to enhance the effectiveness and reach of destination marketing efforts.

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