



FACTORS INFLUENCING TOURISTS' DESTINATION TO AFRICA: THE CASE OF VICTORIA FALLS

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ABSTRACT

Tourism sector in Africa plays a pivotal role in the national economies and has been identified as one of the priority industries to drive the economy to attain economic growth. This study sought to investigate the factors influencing tourist destination to Africa focusing on Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe. The study employed email administered questionnaires to collect data from 50 international tourists at Victoria Falls hotel. The major findings of this study was that, among other factors, quality experiences expectations, uniqueness of Victoria Falls and costs of travel and stay in the destination are influential factors influencing the choice of a particular tourist destination among international tourists. The tourists' demographic characteristics which includes annual household income, age and occupational status were found to meaningfully influence international tourists' definition in Africa. The destination characteristics were also significant factors influencing tourist destination to Africa. The results of this study also indicated that tourism price and travelling costs are the main economic factors influencing international tourism destination to Africa. The study recommended the reduction of travel costs through improving the infrastructures at the destinations so as to easy accessibility and stay and also setting reasonable prices and providing high quality services will increase the influences of choice of Victoria Falls as an international tourist destination.

Key Words: *Tourist Destinations, Victoria Falls, Africa*

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INTRODUCTION

International tourism market demand for Africa lags behind other continents. This is despite the fact that Africa is bestowed with different tourist attractions and thus has great tourism potential. Brida, Disegna and Osti (2014) posit that, the number of international tourists' influxes to Africa from disparate world regions does not increase continuously but have experienced cyclical fluctuations over the years. Furthermore, African tourism product provided is becoming increasingly non-competitive. Africa is experiencing problems of competition due to degradation and reduction of the quality of Africa's tourism products as more international tourists are switching to other regions (World Bank 2010). There is need consequently, for Africa to provide market demand driven tourism products which safeguard visitors to come to Africa and stays longer. Marketers and tourism planners thus must clearly comprehend which significant factors affect international tourists' decision to visit Africa and Victoria falls in particular as their tourist destination. Song and Li (2018) observe that recognizing the factors that influence international tourists' destination and approximating proportions of their impact on tourism market demand are of great interest to decision makers in tourist industry. An understanding of tourism market is a starting point towards the analysis of why tourism develops, who patronizes specific destinations and what appeals to the client market (Hall and Page 2012). Empirical studies on international tourism market forces have focused on tourism market in advanced states whilst Africa has received very little attention (Xiao and Smith 2016). The researches have mostly deliberated on the economic factors influencing tourists' destination whilst ignoring non-economic factors due to inaccessibility of data. Chaiboonsri and Chaitip (2012) concur that when considering factors which influence international tourists' destination to Africa, both economic and non-economic factors such

as destination characteristics should be taken into cognizance since tourism market can also be considerably affected by non-economic factors. Experimental studies clarifying global tourism market for Africa are limited. Previous studies on tourism in Africa mostly focused on choice of attractions, expenditure and satisfaction of international tourists to Africa and economic contribution of tourism (Odunga 2015). Summary (2017) conducted a study on estimation of tourism market demand for Africa considering tourists from UK, USA, Italy, France and Germany. The study by Summary did not consider non-economic factors which can also influence international tourists' destination in Africa. This study, thus, endeavored to fill this gap by examining both economic and non-economic factors influencing international tourists' destination to Africa using the data that was collected through electronically administered questionnaires.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the factors influencing tourists' destination to Africa. Precisely the study sought:

- To establish the impact of economic factors that influence tourists' destination to Africa
- To determine the impact of tourists' demographic characteristics on tourist destination in Victoria Falls
- To establish the impact of destination characteristics on tourists' destination to Africa paying particular attention to Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe.

LITERATURE REVIEW

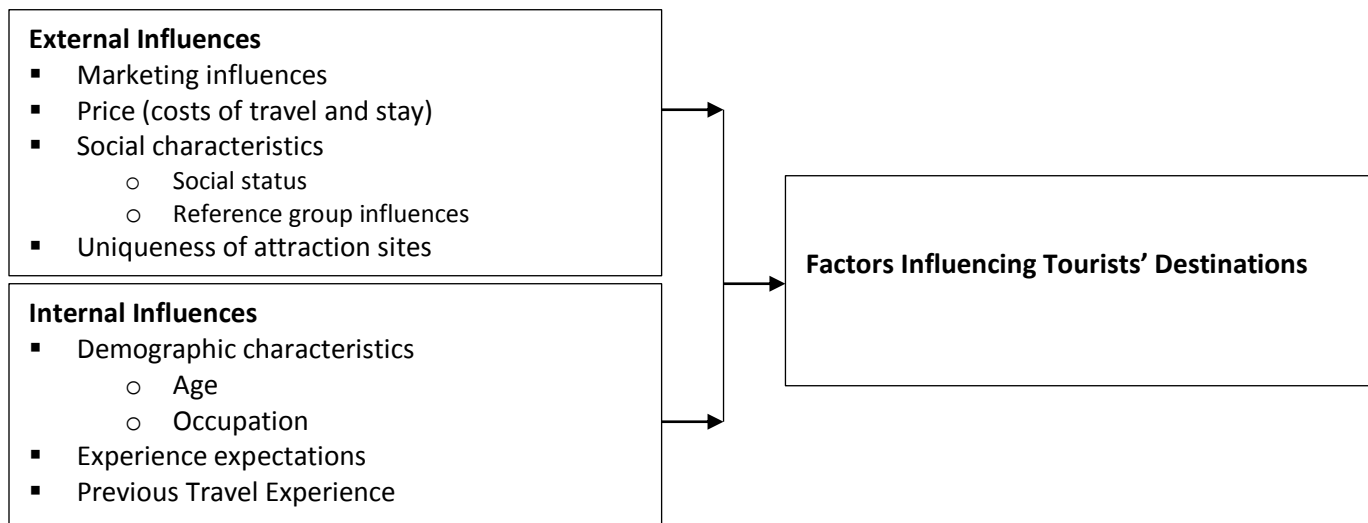
The literature on factors influencing international tourists' destination reviewed has provided insight into the various variables which influence international tourism. Most empirical research on factors that influence tourists' destination has focused on tourism in developed countries while Africa has received very little attention (Kabote 2015).

Empirical researches on factors influencing international tourists' destination have mostly concentrated on the impact of economic factors such as price, exchange rate and income on tourism market, but failed to explicate certain continental precise factors such as marketing expenditure, geographical features, attractions amongst others as observed by Lowry (2017) due to unobtainability of data on these variables.

In developing countries, especially in Africa, both non-economic and economic factors must be taken into cognizance when investigating factors which influence international tourists' destination since tourism market may be meaningfully affected by both non-economic and economic factors. From most of the reviewed research studies, several factors have been found to be significant in expounding international tourism. The extent of significance of each factor is influenced by the origin and destination

under consideration since international tourism market demand elasticities differ across destinations (Eilat and Einav 2014). Thus, there is no comprehensive international demand function as each demand function is distinctive depending on tourist origin and destination state. This infers that each destination state needs to determine its demand role.

Furthermore, the accuracy of different modeling techniques differ for data from state to state over various time periods and thus, neither a single model nor a single technique will necessarily be appropriate for all origin destination pairs (George 2015). This research endeavors to fill this gap through establishing factors which influence international tourists' in Africa and Victoria Falls in particular, taking into cognizance both economic and non-economic factors.



Independent Variables

Dependent Variable

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher 2020

Figure 1 above presented the conceptual relationship between variables. The dependent variable on this study were factors influencing tourists' destinations to Africa and the independent variables were

marketing influences, price (costs of travel and stay at the destinations and attraction sites), social characteristics (social status, reference groups influences) and uniqueness of destination,

demographic characteristics (age, occupation), experience expectations and previous travel experience of the international tourists. This conceptual framework showed that the independent variables have direct impact on dependent variable.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a quantitative approach was adopted. This is due to aim of gaining a better understanding of the factors influencing the choice of tourist destinations by international tourists at Victoria Falls. The participants for questionnaires were 50 international tourists residing at Victoria Falls hotel lodge. The electronically administered questionnaires were used to obtain data from all the participants (international tourists) based on the understanding and perception on Victoria Falls as their choice of tourist destination.

The electronically administered questionnaires which were distributed via email eliminated the researcher's direct involvement considering the national lockdown which restricted movements. Sekaran and Bougie (2011) posits that the use of email questionnaires also reduced the researcher's influence in the information which was given by the participants and this ensured the provision of unadulterated information by the participants. Documents from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), World Bank (WB) database, as well as reports from tourism related organizations were also engaged in an endeavor to gather data on the factors which influence international tourists' destination in Africa and Victoria Falls in particular.

The data which was captured from questionnaires were analyzed using tables, pie charts and graphs. All the data from the electronically administered

questionnaires were entered into Microsoft excel program spreadsheets. The program was used to generate graphs, tables, charts and descriptive statistics.

FINDINGS

Costs of Travel and Stay at the Destinations

The majority of the participants were price sensitive as demonstrated in this study from figure 1 below. 66 percent of the participants who indicated that they were highly influenced by the prices of the tour packages. It was imperative to note that the travel costs varies from the economy class and it was easy to opt and thus it was noted by the researcher that the costs of travel and stay influenced the choice of tourists' destination in Africa and Victoria Falls in particular. Also the proximity of different tourist attraction sites within the area has made it possible for international tourists to tour various attraction sites with relatively less time, less distance to travel and so less cost of travel.

The results of this study indicated that international tourists consider the element of price before deciding to travel and most would visit a destination offering affordable prices. International tourists exhibited a trait consistent with other tourists elsewhere where destination choice is based on best price–quality ratio (Kumar 2017).

More often international tourists went for the lowest possible prices in all segments of the tourism value chain from transport, accommodation through food, services, shopping and tourism activities. Some prospective international tourists may be interested in relatively low prices, whereas another segment may be concerned with other factors such as service, quality, value, and brand image.

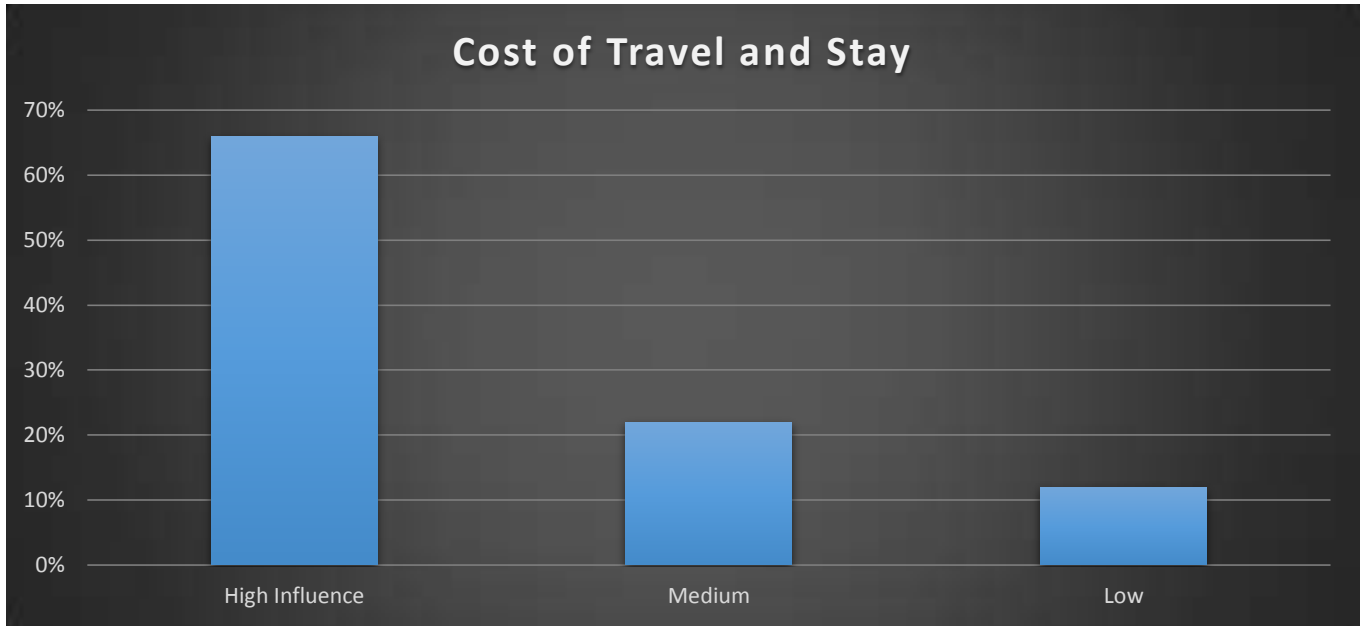


Figure 2: Reasonable price (Costs of travel and stay at destination)

Source: Field data (2020)

Uniqueness of Tourists' Destination

Figure 3 below showed that more than 72 percent of the participants highlighted that they have been highly influenced by either uniqueness of the features of the attractions at Victoria Falls and adventurous activities in the study area. This implies that the majority of the international tourists wanted to visit Victoria Falls as their tourism destinations as they want to witness the splendid scenery of the natural falls and the actual experiences of the nature.

This was followed by 24 percent of the participants who commented that the uniqueness of Victoria Falls had a medium influence and only 4 percent claimed that the influence was low. Attractions are viewed as the cornerstone of every tourist destination (Michler 2017). Attractions are the core of the tourism product that pulls the tourist to a destination. International tourists in this study considered attractions to play the significant role of attractions at a destination when selecting which one to visit. This entails that there are certain expectations from the

international tourists that need to be fulfilled while the tourist is at the destination. On the other hand, Victoria Falls offered nature based activities such as nature walks, game viewing, scenic walks and photographic safaris which mesmerize international tourists. Seemingly, international tourists felt these activities provided them with an opportunity to bond as they shared similar experiences at the same time.

This resonates with the findings by George (2015: 285) who argue that price could override all other elements as it will determine which destination to visit based on the available budget. The price of the tourism product needs to be considered as this element can be used simultaneously in the marketing mix and for revenue generation (Muchapondwa and Pimhidzai 2011). Thus, it is imperative for a destination to price their tourism product accordingly, since the majority of the participants of about 72% concurred that they considered price before selecting tourism destination.

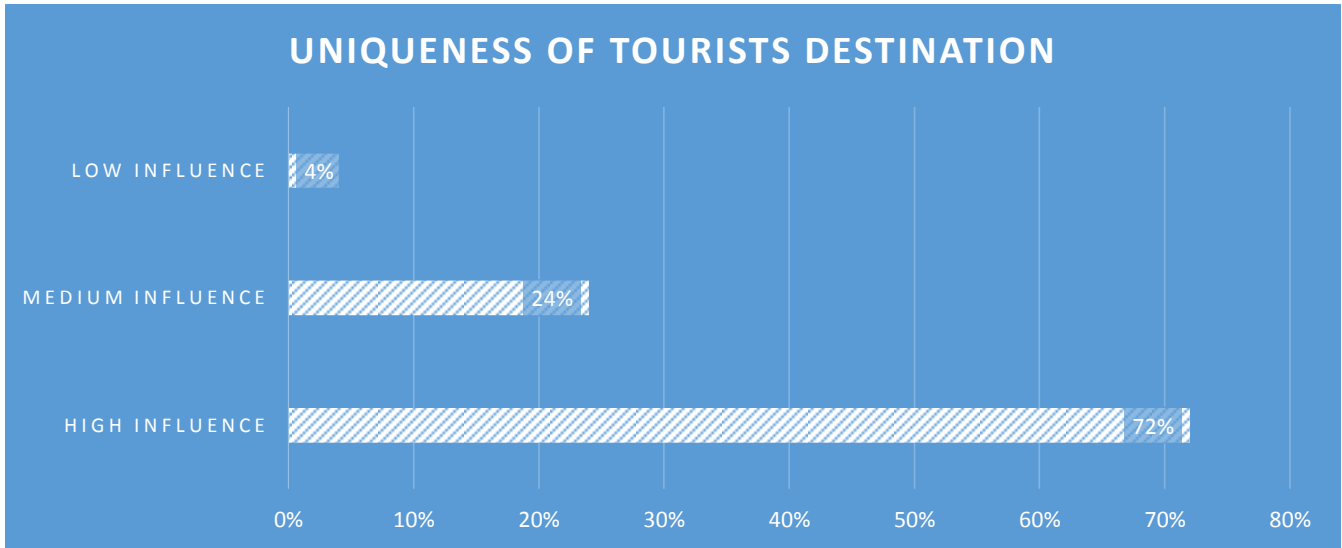


Figure 3: Uniqueness of Tourist Destinations

Source: *Field Data (2020)*

Previous Travel Experience Factor

Figure 4 below showed that 22 percent of the participants as asked in the questionnaires have previously visited Victoria Falls and some have visited

it more than twice to five times and this elegantly demonstrates that previous experience influence the choice of international tourists' destination.



Figure 4: Repeat International Tourist in Victoria Falls

Source: *Primary Data (2020)*

Information Search and Tourism Studies

The study found out that rapid growth of the internet has changed the way prospective international

tourists search information concerning hospitality and tourism industry across the world. A tourist gathers some information of different international

tourist destinations from different sources such as word of mouth from family members, friends, internet search, magazines and the tourist then analyses the information searched and acts upon the gathered information in making a choice or a decision with regards to which destinations to visit. Figure 5 below demonstrates that 40 percent of the participants' source of information which influenced them most in selecting Victoria Falls as their international tourist destination was through referrals

via word of mouth from family members, friends and fellow employees. This was followed by internet search as a source of information with 31 percent, magazines and newspapers with 20 percent of the participants and other sources of information being the least with only 9 percent of the participants. This justifies the fact that quality services to international tourist is very significant so as to get repeated customers or recommend to others (family, relatives and friends).

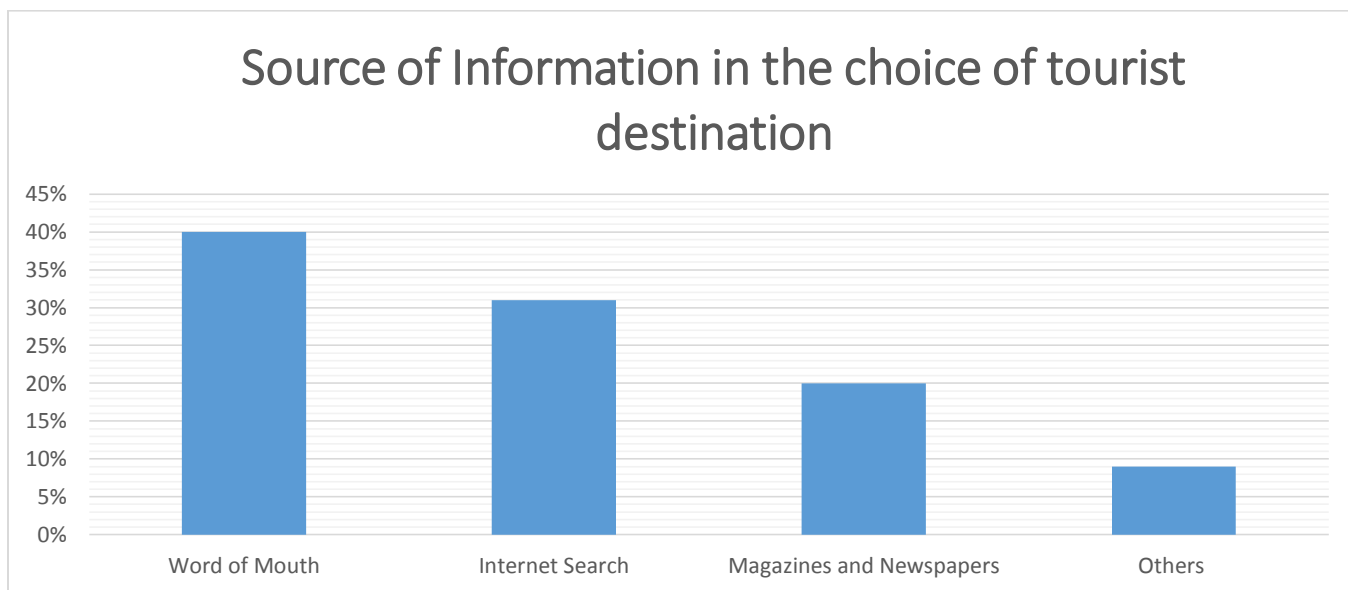


Figure 5: Source of information in the choice of tourist destination.

Source: Primary Data (2020)

Demographic Factors

In this study, the researcher analyzed some demographic characteristics of the participants which influenced the tourists' choice of destination in Africa.

Figure 6 below on the demographic characteristics of participants indicated how age as a personal attribute influence the purchase of a particular tourist destination of which the participants aged between 48-57 was highest with 26 percent of the participants, followed by 37-48 years with 22 percent, then 13-27

years with 18 percent, followed by 58-67 years with 16 percent, 28-37 years with 14 percent and the last category was the age of 67+ with only 4 percent of the participants. As displayed below, it is evidently that old aged individuals are less likely to travel across borders as seen by only a paltry of 4 percent of the participants of this study were 67 and above of age and it is even less likely for 67+ of age international tourist to choose Victoria Falls as their international tourist destination.

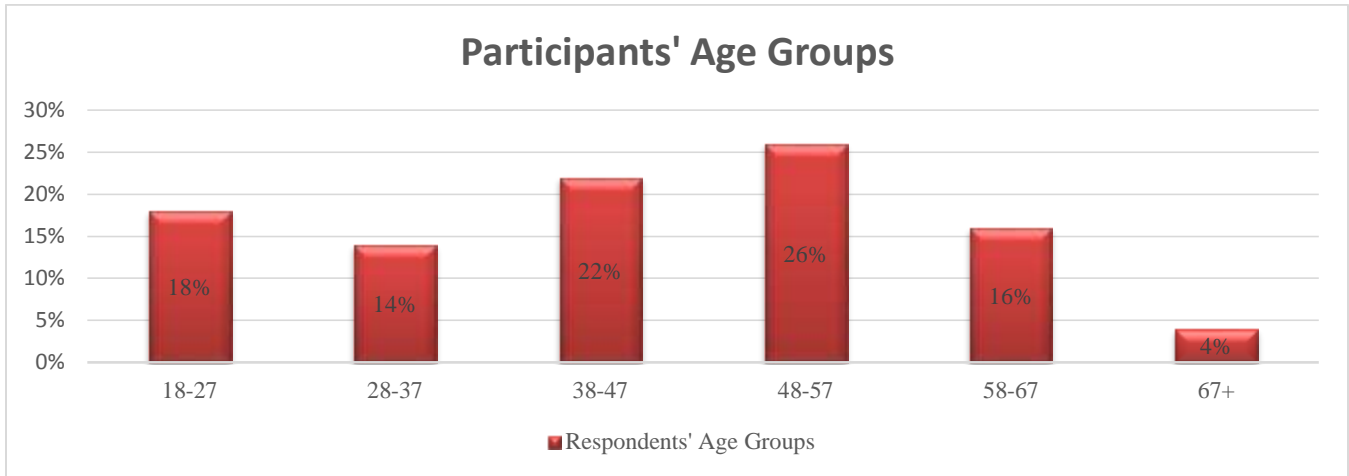


Figure 6: Participants' Age Groups

Source: *Field Data (2020)*

Occupation

It has also been expounded in this study that choice of a destination by international tourist is greatly affected by economic circumstances such as spending income, savings and assets. The occupation of the consumer determines the income as demonstrated in figure 7 below, the participants who were in the category of business persons were 41 percent and

this entails that such international tourists have more spending income due to business. Students followed in the category with 34 percent and this is because of the travel benefits as students and most of the times they pay less in the costs of travel and stay. The employed individuals were 16 percent of the participants and the others were only 9 percent of the participants.

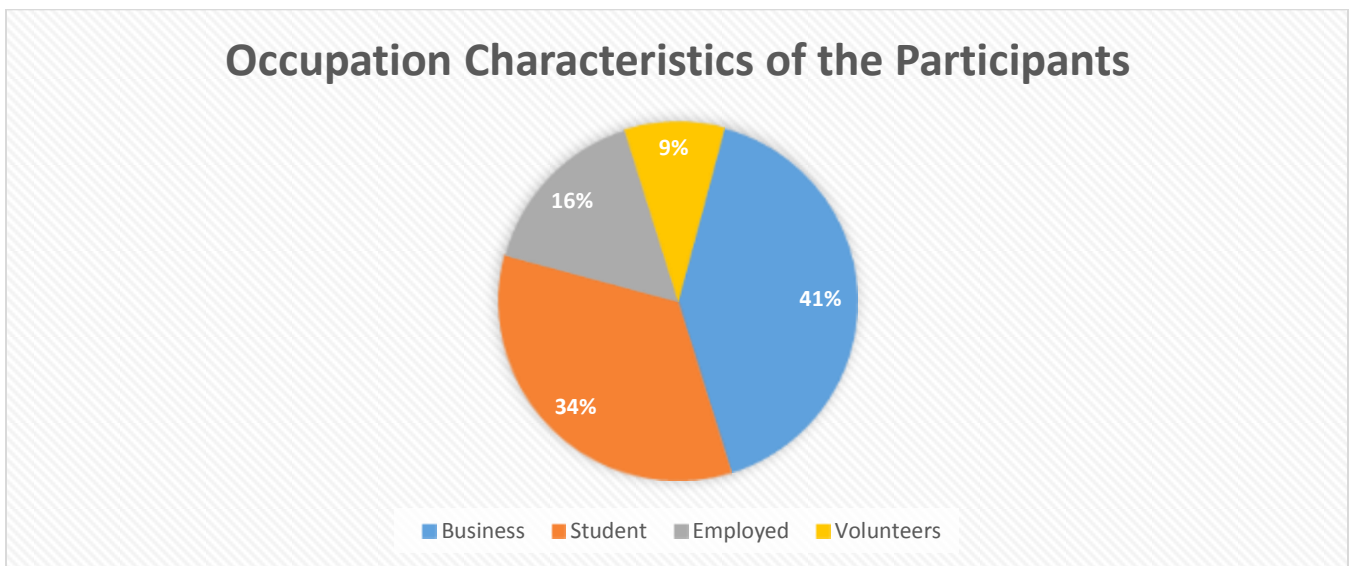


Figure 7: Occupation Characteristics of the Participants

Source: *Primary Data (2020)*

Social Factors

A purchase decision of a tourist destination by international tourists is influenced by such social factors attributes as social status and reference groups. Figure 8 below indicates the travel characteristics of the participants and demonstrates that the largest group in the category of membership in a group on travel was family with 32 percent of the participants, followed by couples with 24 percent of the participants and friends/relatives membership in

a group on travel with 22 percent of the participants. Family membership, couples and friends/relatives membership gives a total of 78 percent of the attributes and the participants traveling alone and in organized groups/students were 28 percent of the participants. This expounds that the closest persons (family, relatives and friends) have an influence on international tourists in making a choice of a tourist destination.

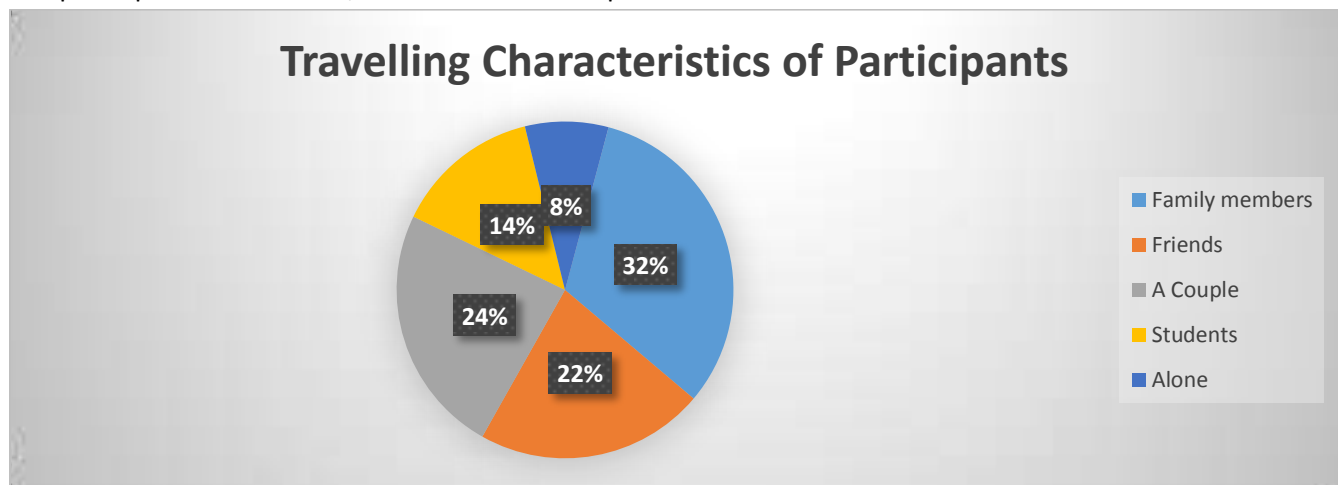


Figure 8: The Travelling Characteristics of Participants

Source: *Primary Data (2020)*

Tourist's Expectations on Experience

Participants were also questioned about their overall expectation concerning the experience of touring Victoria Falls and the results were succinctly captured in Table 1. From the study findings, 88 percent of the participants indicated that their expectations are

quality experience in natural world view and photographic safaris and adventures. This thus signifies that the overall perception on the experiences of the international tourist influence the choice of tourist destination in Africa.

Table 1: Experience of the Participants

Variable	Frequent	Percentage (%)
Experience expectations		
High Quality	44	88
Medium Quality	6	12
Low Quality	0	0
Uniqueness of the destinations and attraction sites		
High Influence	36	72
Medium Influence	12	24
Low Influence	2	4

Costs of travel and stay influences		
High Influence	33	66
Medium Influence	13	26
Low Influence	4	8

Source: *Field Data (2020)*

Marketing information and advertisements of the Tourists' destinations

The sources of data were from the internet search, magazines and newspapers, the word of mouth having 42 percent of the participants and other sources having only 8 percent of the participants. This justified that marketing and advertising of international tourist destinations such as Victoria Falls through different marketing strategies and media of advertisements respectively influences the choice of tourist destinations in Africa. Table 2 below demonstrated that the magnitude of the influences of the marketing information and advertisements of the

different international tourist destinations and this was through different media such as direct marketing of tourism products through international tourism conferences, advertisements of unique features or characteristics of destinations through televisions, magazines and newspapers. Thus in this study, 50 percent of the participants explained that marketing and advertisements highly influenced their choice of the destinations, 38 percent of the participants commented that the influence of marketing and advertisement was medium in their choice of tourism destination.

Table 2: Marketing Information and Advertisements Influences to Tourist' choice of destination

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High Influence	25	50
Medium Influence	19	38
Low Influence	6	12

Source: *Primary Data (2020)*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze the factors which influence international tourists' destinations in Africa focusing on Victoria Falls. More specifically, the factors which influence international tourists' destination have been analyzed and their levels of influence have been weighed. The major findings from this study is that, among other factors, quality experiences expectations, uniqueness of Victoria Falls and costs of travel and stay in the destination are influential factors in influencing the choice of Victoria Falls as a tourist destination among international tourists. The tourist's demographic characteristics which included annual household income, age and occupational status were found to meaningfully influence international tourists' destination in Africa. The destination characteristics

were also significant factors influencing tourist destination to Africa. The results of this study indicated that tourism price and travelling costs are the main economic factors influencing international tourists' destination to Africa. Tourism in Zimbabwe needs to be well understood for its development and understanding of the factors which influence the choice of tourist destinations. This will also assist tourism marketers, planners and developers to identify real concerns and issues which can optimize the influence of the attributes of the factors that influence the most and minimize the push factors at the destinations. The identification and development of other tourist attractions with unique feature can promote international and domestic tourism simply by influencing the buyer's choice to purchase the destinations developed.

Based on the study findings, the following were some of the suggestions and stratagems that can be suggested for the development of international tourism in Africa in terms of sustaining the growth of international tourists' market and attracting more international tourists into the continent. Since the research found out that the "verbal effect" was significant in explicating factors behind international tourists' destination, the tourism sector must embark on providing high quality services to augment the continent's image in order to attract new and repeat international tourists to Africa. The African governments together with the responsible ministries must engage in sustainable tourism to avoid tourism products degradation. Tourism price was also found as a significant factor influencing international tourists' destination, thus the African governments and other actors in the tourism industry for instance travel agents, the tour operators, car hire companies and hoteliers amongst others must aim at making the tourism price competitive compared to other states in other regions to avoid most of the competition from such states. The government must thus come up with favorable policies which will motivate investors to invest in the tourism sector. International tourists were also found to be affected by tourists' demographic characteristics. Thus, African governments, ministries of tourism and ministries of finance and planning must expedite formation of new products catering for diverse age groups, professionals and persons of diverse socio-economic status.

The Zimbabwean government must focus on the strategies to improve the pulling factors to their tourism destinations and this can be through improving the tourism sector in Zimbabwe and this can be done in several ways. The government must focus on different ways of ensuring quality tourism services and experiences and this can be achieved through building up tourism education institutions hence an increase of professional staffs in the tourism

sector. The government should also work on the infrastructures at the tourist destinations, infrastructure should be developed and renovated time and again to facilitate stay and travel, by so doing the reduced traveling time will reduce the cost of travel and so will highly influence a tourists destination.

Furthermore, the existing tourism products, amenities and services must be improved so as to boost repeat visits as well as attract new international tourists. The tourism industry and other stakeholders must come up with tourism activities, products and services which encourage much spending. Furthermore, since destination characteristics were also found to be significant factors that influence international tourists' destination in Africa, African governments must augment political stability in the state. All the tourism sectors stakeholders and other related sectors as well as every citizen, must work towards making a positive image through a favorable friendly and pacific environment, high quality tourism products and good tourism infrastructure which will make those international tourists visiting the continent to come back and also advise others concerning the goodness of Africa and Victoria Falls in particular as an international tourist destination. This would ensure Africa becomes the tourists' destination of choice.

Recommendations to future research

This study provided a general picture on the factors influencing tourist destination by international tourist to Africa and mainly Victoria Falls as tourist international destination. Future research can investigate on the factors which may influence the choice of tourist destinations not only for international tourists but also for the local tourists. Future studies should be applied to other tourist destinations using a similar research method so that a competitive analysis in different destinations can be explored.

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