

The Influence of African Cuisines in Tourism Branding in Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become a significant driver of economic growth and development in many countries, including Zimbabwe. As the country seeks to attract more tourists and enhance its global image, it is essential to explore the various factors that contribute to successful tourism branding. One such factor that has gained increasing attention is the influence of African cuisines on tourism branding (Basera, 2022). Zimbabwe, with its rich and diverse culinary traditions, offers a unique opportunity to examine the impact of African cuisines on tourism branding (Mhizha, 2013). The country's cuisine reflects its cultural diversity and history, with influences from various ethnic groups and neighbouring countries (Darma, 2020). As such, the promotion and incorporation of African cuisines into the tourism branding efforts of Zimbabwe have the potential to attract a wider range of tourists and enhance the overall visitor experience.

The main study aim/objective

This study aimed to explore the influence of African cuisines in tourism branding in Zimbabwe, and examined the role of traditional African dishes, local ingredients, culinary festivals, and dining experiences in shaping the country's tourism identity. Additionally, the study analysed how the representation of African cuisines in marketing campaigns, promotional materials, and tourism initiatives contributes to the overall branding strategy of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination.

Research Question:

The central research question of this study is: How does the promotion and incorporation of African cuisines influence tourism branding in Zimbabwe?

Significance of the Study:

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the development and enhancement of tourism branding strategies in Zimbabwe. The study sought to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on tourism branding and shed light on the potential of African cuisines as a valuable asset in promoting Zimbabwe as a unique and culturally rich destination. Furthermore, the study targeted to provide insights and recommendations for policymakers, tourism authorities, and industry stakeholders to leverage the influence of African cuisines in their branding efforts, ultimately contributing to the sustainable growth of the tourism sector in Zimbabwe.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culinary tourism, also known as food tourism or gastronomic tourism, refers to the exploration of food and drink as the primary motivator for travel (Amilla, 2020). It involves experiencing and appreciating the unique and diverse culinary traditions, local ingredients, cooking techniques, and food culture of a particular destination. Annamma (2021) holds that culinary tourism encompasses a wide range of experiences, including food and wine festivals, cooking classes, farm-to-table tours, street food exploration, and visits to local markets and food producers. Positive experiences with local food can lead to word-of-mouth recommendations and social media sharing, which can influence potential tourists' perceptions of Zimbabwe as a culinary destination (Bentia, 2014).

In Europe and Asia, Festivals have been used to provide unique experiences that go beyond traditional tourist attractions (Annamma, 2021). The international festivals have offered immersive experiences, such as farm-to-table tours, foraging excursions, or cultural exchange programs with local communities to enhance the performance of the tourism industry of the countries concerned (Brophy, 2017). The following are the details:

Bordeaux Wine Festival – France

The Bordeaux Wine Festival founded in 1998 is a biennial event that celebrates the world-renowned wines of the Bordeaux region in France (Annamma, 2021). The main objective of the festival is to celebrate and promote the world-renowned wines of the Bordeaux region, as well as to showcase the cultural, culinary, and historical heritage of Bordeaux (Xie, 2017). The festival also aims to attract visitors from around the world to experience the unique wine and gastronomic offerings of Bordeaux. The festival features wine tastings, vineyard tours, and gastronomic experiences, showcasing the rich heritage of French winemaking (Annamma, 2021). The event has contributed to positioning Bordeaux as a premier wine destination in Europe and has influenced global perceptions of French wine culture (Camilleri, 2018).

Taste of London – United Kingdom

Taste of London is an annual food festival founded in 2004. The main objective of the festival is to bring together food lovers and top chefs to celebrate the diverse and innovative culinary scene in London (Bentia, 2014). The festival provides an opportunity for visitors to sample a wide range of dishes from renowned restaurants, participate in cooking demonstrations, and engage with various food and drink producers (Lau, 2019). Visitors are offered the opportunity to sample a wide variety of British and international cuisines, as well as attend cooking demonstrations and master classes. Taste of London has played a role in shaping tourists' perceptions of London as a vibrant and diverse culinary capital (Vijeoin, 2020).

Ubud Food Festival – Indonesia

The Ubud Food Festival founded in 2015 is an annual event held in Bali, Indonesia, showcasing the archipelago's diverse culinary traditions (Widayanthi, 2022). The main objective of the festival is to showcase the rich and diverse culinary traditions of Indonesia, as well as to promote food sustainability, innovation, and cultural exchange (Amilla, 2020). The festival also aims to provide a platform for local and international chefs, food writers, and food enthusiasts to come together and explore Indonesian cuisine (Darma, 2020). The festival features cooking demonstrations, food tastings, and discussions on Indonesian cuisine, as well as the opportunity to interact with local chefs and food artisans (Putu, 2019). The festival has contributed to positioning Bali and Indonesia as a must-visit destination for food enthusiasts, influencing global perceptions of Indonesian gastronomy (Tarigan, 2019).

Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival – Hong Kong

The Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival founded in 2009 is a large-scale event that showcases a wide selection of wines, spirits, and gourmet food from around the world (Kabiraj, 2021). The main objective of the festival is to highlight Hong Kong's vibrant food and wine culture, offering a wide range of culinary experiences, wine tastings, and entertainment (King, 2022). Hong-Kong-Tourism-Commission (2017) holds that the festival aims to promote Hong Kong as a global culinary destination and to showcase the city's dynamic dining scene to both local and international audiences. The festival offers tastings, wine pairing workshops, and culinary experiences, highlighting Hong Kong's status as a global culinary hub (Gold, 2020). The event has played a role in shaping tourists' perceptions of Hong Kong as a destination for exceptional dining experiences (Knobloch, 2017).

Bentia (2014) found out that food and wine festivals in Europe and Asia have had a significant impact on tourists' perceptions by promoting the rich culinary traditions, diverse flavours, and exceptional quality of food and wine in these regions, thereby enhancing their appeal to international visitors (Amilla, 2020; Camilleri, 2018; Hong-Kong-Tourism-Commission., 2017).

At the regional level in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular, festivals have also significantly impacted on tourists' perceptions of a destination, and the following are some of the details:

The Cape Town Food and Wine Festival

The Cape Town Food and Wine Festival was founded in 2009 (Anh, 2022). The main objective is to showcase and celebrate South Africa's diverse culinary traditions, wines, and food products, as well as to promote the country's food and wine industry both locally and internationally (Hunter, 2017). The festival provides a platform for local chefs, winemakers, and food producers to exhibit their creations to both domestic and international tourists (Brophy, 2017). This festival has helped position Cape Town as a leading culinary destination in Africa and has influenced global perceptions of South African cuisine and wine (Anh, 2022).

Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA) – Zimbabwe

The Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA) was founded in 1999, and is an annual festival held in Harare, Zimbabwe, featuring a diverse range of performances, including music, dance, theatre, and visual arts (Basera and Batinoluho, 2022). The main objective of HIFA is to showcase and celebrate the diversity of arts and culture, both within Zimbabwe and internationally. The festival aims to provide a platform for artists and performers to share their work, promote cultural exchange, and foster creative expression (ARIPO, 2019). Additionally, HIFA seeks to contribute to the development of the arts industry in Zimbabwe, promote tourism, and create opportunities for artistic collaboration and dialogue (ZTA, 2021). Over the years, HIFA has become a significant event on the African arts calendar, attracting a wide range of participants and audiences from around the world (Samhere, 2017). The festival also includes a significant culinary component, with a focus on traditional and contemporary Zimbabwean cuisine. The celebration of local food and wine at HIFA has contributed to the global perception of Zimbabwe as a cultural and culinary destination (ARIPO, 2019).

Sanganai/Hlanganani World Tourism Expo-Zimbabwe

The Sanganai/Hlanganani World Tourism Expo was founded in 1982, and its main objective is to promote tourism in Zimbabwe by providing a platform for local and international tourism stakeholders to network, market their products and services, and explore potential business opportunities in the tourism

industry (Musavenkosi, 2023). The event brings together local food producers, chefs, and restaurateurs to present Zimbabwean cuisine to international tour operators and travel agents (Shereni, 2018). Restaurateurs are passionate about food and dining and are dedicated to providing exceptional hospitality and culinary experiences to their customers. Restaurateurs use the platform to establish and maintain relationships with suppliers, chefs, and other industry professionals to ensure the success of their restaurant ventures (Hunter, 2017). The travel expo highlights the diversity and quality of Zimbabwean food and wine, and this contributes to shaping global perceptions of the country's culinary scene (Mhizha, 2013).

The Victoria Falls Carnival

The Victoria Falls Carnival is an annual music and arts festival held in the town of Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe (Muresherwa, 2023). It was first held in 2009 and has since become one of the most popular New Year's Eve events in Southern Africa. The carnival typically features a diverse line-up of local and international musicians and artists, as well as a variety of activities such as adventure sports, craft markets, and food stalls (Muresherwa and Tichaawa, 2022a). The main objective of the Victoria Falls Carnival is to provide a platform for people to celebrate the New Year in a vibrant and festive atmosphere, while also showcasing the natural beauty and cultural richness of the Victoria Falls region (Samhere, 2017).

Chimanimani Arts Festival

The Chimanimani Arts Festival founded in 2018 is an annual event held in the town of Chimanimani, Zimbabwe (Basera, 2022). The main objective of the festival is to promote and celebrate the arts and culture of the Chimanimani region, as well as to provide a platform for local and regional artists to showcase their talents and connect with audiences (Chigora, 2023). The festival celebrates the arts and culture of the region, featuring a diverse range of artistic performances, including music, dance, theatre, and visual arts (Nyagadza, 2022). The festival aims to promote local talent and creativity while also attracting visitors to the scenic Chimanimani area. It provides a platform for artists to showcase their work, participate in workshops, and engage with the community (Basera, 2022). The festival typically includes traditional dances, storytelling sessions, art exhibitions, and craft markets, offering a rich cultural experience for attendees.

Hwange Elephant Festival:

The Hwange Elephant Festival founded in 2016 is an annual conservation-focused event held in Hwange, Zimbabwe (Musavenkosi, 2023). The main objective of the festival is to raise awareness about elephant conservation and wildlife protection, while also celebrating the beauty and significance of elephants in Zimbabwe's natural heritage (Muresherwa, 2022a). The major aim is to raise awareness about elephant conservation and promote eco-tourism in the region. The festival features educational programs, wildlife film screenings, guided tours of Hwange National Park, and discussions on wildlife conservation efforts (Nyagadza, 2022). Additionally, the festival may include cultural activities, such as traditional dance performances, highlighting the coexistence of wildlife and local communities. The Hwange Elephant Festival seeks to foster a greater understanding of the importance of protecting elephants and their natural habitats (Nyagadza, 2022).

Intwasa Arts Festival:

The Intwasa Arts Festival founded in 2005 is a major annual arts and culture event held in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe (Nyagadza, 2022). It showcases a wide array of artistic disciplines, including music, dance, theatre, literature, visual arts, and film. The festival aims to celebrate Zimbabwean and African culture while promoting creativity and innovation within the arts community. Intwasa features performances by both established and emerging artists, as well as workshops, panel discussions, and exhibitions (Chigora, 2023).

The festival also incorporates outreach programs to engage local schools and communities in artistic activities. With its diverse program, the Intwasa Arts Festival is a vibrant platform for cultural expression and exchange (Nyagadza, 2022).

According to Nyagadza (2022), festivals contribute to the rich cultural tapestry of Zimbabwe and offer opportunities for both locals and visitors to immerse themselves in the country's arts, conservation efforts, and community engagement. The festivals offer the hospitality industry the space to offer visitors the unique flavours and cultural significance of local dishes that serves to enhance the overall tourism appeal of Zimbabwe.

Empirical Evidence

LUU (2022) carried out a study focusing on the concept of destination branding and brand experience in the context of wine tourism, with a specific emphasis on Bordeaux, France. The study aim was to fill the gaps in the existing literature by examining the relationships between wine destination brand experience (WDBE) and its antecedents and consequences. Data was collected from 379 respondents, including domestic and international visitors to various wine destinations in Bordeaux. The study found that WDBE is positively influenced by factors such as event marketing, brand clues, and marketing communication, and it has positive impacts on wine destination consumer-based brand equity, visitor satisfaction, and intention to revisit. The results also revealed differences in these relationships between female and male visitors as well as French and foreign visitors. The study provides theoretical, methodological, and managerial contributions to the field of wine tourism and experience marketing, offering insights for wine destination providers, marketers, and the wine tourism industry to develop strategic policies aimed at enhancing wine destination brand equity and visitor satisfaction.

However, while the study made valuable contributions to the understanding of wine destination branding and brand experience, gaps were left open for further research to examine deeper into understanding how cultural differences impact brand experience and its antecedents and consequences in wine tourism. In today's digital age, the influence of digital and social media on brand experience cannot be overlooked. Further research was needed to explore on the role of digital platforms in shaping wine destination brand experience and its consequences. In addition, while the study focused on Bordeaux, France, comparative studies with other prominent wine tourism destinations such as Zimbabwe could provide insights into how different regional contexts influence wine destination brand experience and its outcomes.

A similar study was carried out by Putu and Nyomani (2019) on Gastronomy Tourism in Ubudu. The study focused on the potential for Ubud, a traditional cultural tourist destination in Bali, to be designated as a world gastronomic destination. The researchers analyzed Ubud's potential as a gastronomic tourism site, focusing on its history, authenticity, and uniqueness as factors that could enhance its reputation as a gastronomic tourist destination. The study findings revealed the historical significance of Yeh Pulu Subak in Bali agriculture and the unique taste of Ubud's local food derived from Base genep, representing the taste of local cuisine.

However, while the study mentioned the unique taste of Ubud's local food, but the specific cultural and culinary influences that contribute to this uniqueness were not examined. Gaps were left open for future research to explore the historical and cultural roots of Ubud's cuisine, including its indigenous ingredients, cooking techniques, and cultural significance. The study opened gaps for a comparative analysis of Ubud's gastronomic potential with other gastronomic destinations, both within Indonesia and internationally, to provide a broader understanding of its competitive position in the global culinary tourism market.

Another study was carried out by Samhere (2017) on stakeholder perceptions of the Harare International Festivals. The study focused on the use of festivals and events as a marketing tool to enhance the image and

brand of destinations, attract visitors, and generate socio-economic and environmental benefits. The researcher deployed both qualitative and quantitative methods to establish the results, involving attendees, stallholders, sponsors, and event organizers of the Harare International Festival of Arts (HIFA) in Zimbabwe. The study results revealed the importance of stakeholder perceptions in ensuring the success and sustainability of festivals and events. The study established a positive correlation between perceptions of stakeholders and a positive economic and social environment of HIFA on the host city, Harare.

However, while the study focused on economic, social, and environmental impacts, but gaps were left open to establish a deeper understanding of the cultural and societal impact of HIFA on the local community and broader Zimbabwean society. The study opened gaps for future research to explore the dynamics of stakeholder perceptions over time and how they are influenced by external factors.

Basera and Ladislous (2022) carried a study to explore on the impact of festivals on tourism development in Zimbabwe and Tanzania, drawing insights from these countries as well as others. The study emphasized on the significant role of festivals in fostering tourism and their increasing importance as platforms for discussing broader social, political, and cultural issues. The research, which is descriptive in nature, synthesized information from various sources such as journal articles, books, magazines, newspapers, and Google Scholar. Content analysis was employed to evaluate the relationship between festivals and tourism. The study reveals that festivals make substantial contributions to the growth and development of the tourism sector by attracting tourists who spend money, thereby enhancing the local economy. Festivals also facilitate relationship-building and provide opportunities for groups to express their preferences and beliefs. The research underscored the potential of festivals in diversifying tourism products and emphasizes their significance in both tourism and society.

However, it is important to note that the study was based solely on a literature review, using relatively old literature, and showed limited discussion on gastronomic experiences. Gaps were left open on the discussion to establish the potential of African cuisines to create unique gastronomic experiences for tourists. Understanding how African cuisines contribute to the overall tourism experience and how they can be leveraged for branding purposes is essential for a comprehensive analysis.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study deployed the mixed sequential design that combines both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis in a sequential manner. In this approach, the quantitative method was conducted first, followed by the qualitative methods. The key characteristic of a mixed sequential design is the intentional sequencing of the qualitative and quantitative components, allowing for an iterative and complementary approach to data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2020).

Quantitative Phase:

1. **Survey Development:** The researcher designed a structured questionnaire to quantitatively assess tourists' preferences, satisfaction levels, and perceptions regarding African cuisines as a factor in their decision to visit Zimbabwe.
2. **Participant Recruitment:** The researcher administered the survey questionnaire to a diverse sample of 60 Walk-in tourists visiting Zimbabwe during the period of study, ensuring representation from different demographic groups and travel motivations.
3. **Data Analysis:** The study utilized statistical methods namely: regression analysis and factor analysis to examine the relationship between tourists' perceptions of African cuisines and their overall satisfaction with Zimbabwe as a tourism destination.

Qualitative Phase:

1. **Participant Selection:** The researcher conducted purposive sampling to select 20 participants, including tourists, local residents, chefs, and tourism industry professionals with diverse perspectives on African cuisine and its influence on tourism branding.
2. **Data Collection:** The study used semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to gather rich, in-depth insights into participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes towards African cuisines in the context of tourism branding in Zimbabwe.
3. **Data Analysis:** The researcher employed thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the influence of African cuisines on tourism branding. The study utilized qualitative data analysis software namely: NVivo to manage and analyze the qualitative data.

Integration of Data:

1. **Triangulation:** The researcher compared and contrasted findings from the qualitative and quantitative phases to identify areas of convergence or dissonance, providing a comprehensive understanding of the influence of African cuisines on tourism branding in Zimbabwe.
2. **Mixed-Methods Analysis:** The integration of qualitative and quantitative data to create a cohesive narrative that illuminated the multifaceted nature of African cuisines' impact on tourism branding, potentially using techniques such as data transformation or joint displays.

Ethical Considerations:

1. **Informed Consent:** The researcher obtained informed consent from all participants, ensuring they understand the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights as research subjects.
2. **Confidentiality:** The researcher considered the safeguard of participants' confidentiality and privacy by anonymizing their responses and storing data securely.

Limitations:

The researcher acknowledged the complexity of integrating diverse data sources and the potential for bias in participant responses as the potential limitations of the mixed-methods approach, and deployed triangulation to compare and contrast findings from different data sources to validate the results. The use of multiple sources of data, mitigated the potential biases and helped the researcher to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the researched material.

Validity and Reliability:

The study implemented strategies namely: member checking in the qualitative phase and piloting the survey instrument in the quantitative phase to enhance the validity and reliability of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the study results. Section A presents the bibliography of the participants and Section B presents the regression analysis results.

Section A

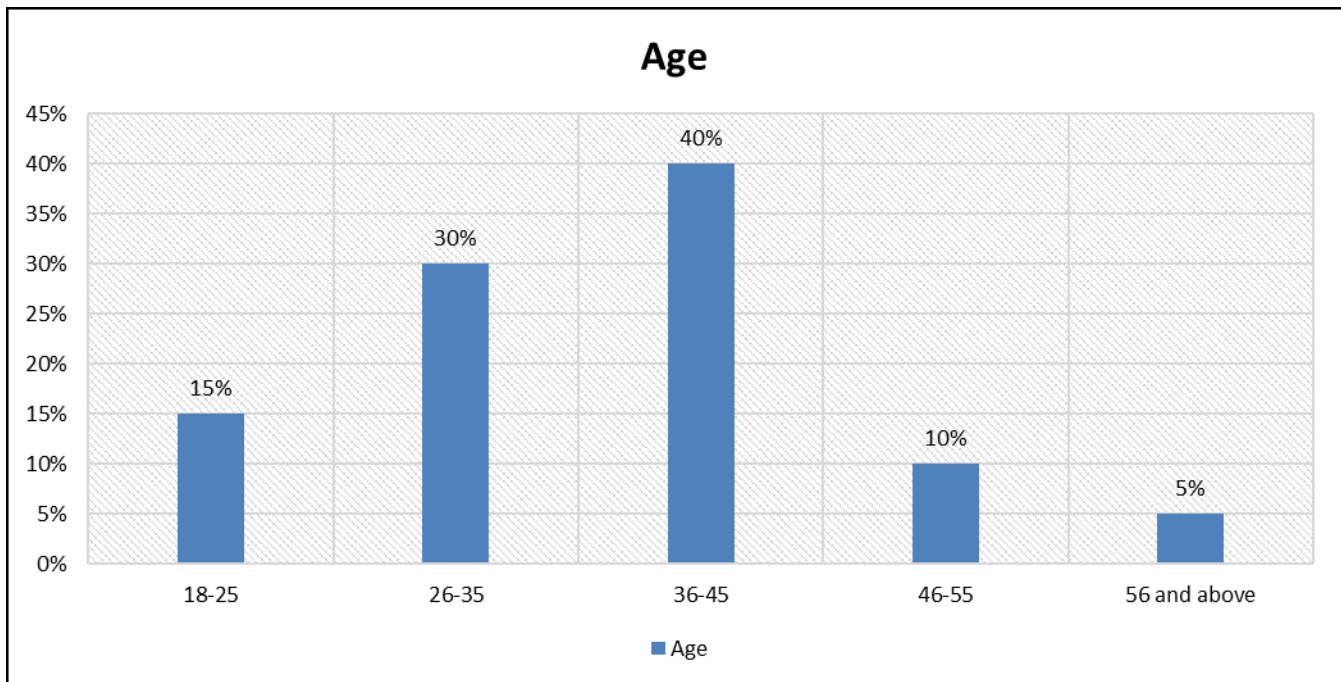


Figure 1: Age of Participants

Figure 1 shows that the majority of participants (40 percent) in the study were in the age category of between 36 to 45 years, followed by 30 percent in the age group between 26-35 years, next was 15 percent in the age category 18-25, and the lowest range was 10 percent (46-55 years) and 5% (56 and above years). The results indicate that all the groups that are legal participated in the study.

Gender.

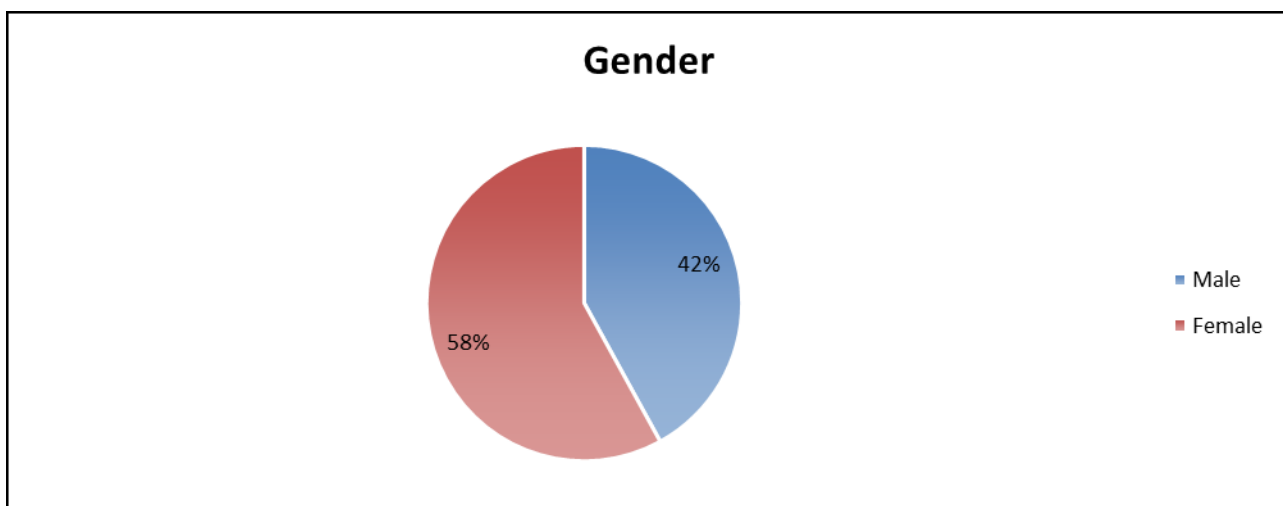


Figure 2: Gender

The Results show that the majority of participants in the study were females (58 percent) and male participants (42 percent). This means the study was dominated by female participants. This result indicates that the study was gender balanced in the sense that both male and female participants had a fair share in the study.

Nationality:

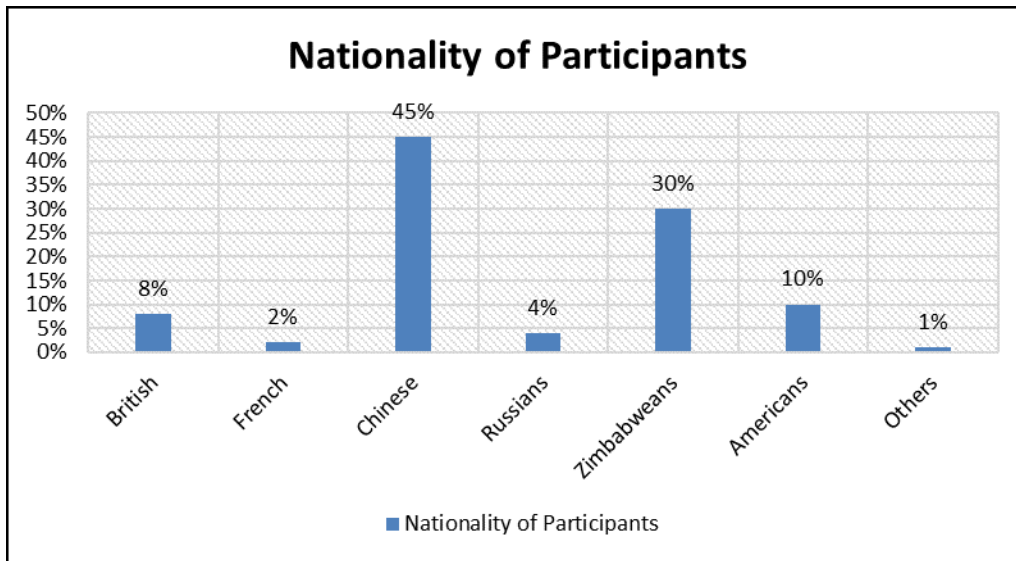


Figure 3 Nationality of Participants

The study results indicate that the majority of participants were Chinese (45 percent), followed by Zimbabweans (30 percent), next were Americans (10 percent), and some British participants (8 percent) and the rest were French, Russians, and others. This result implies that a variety of nationalities participated in the study

Education level:

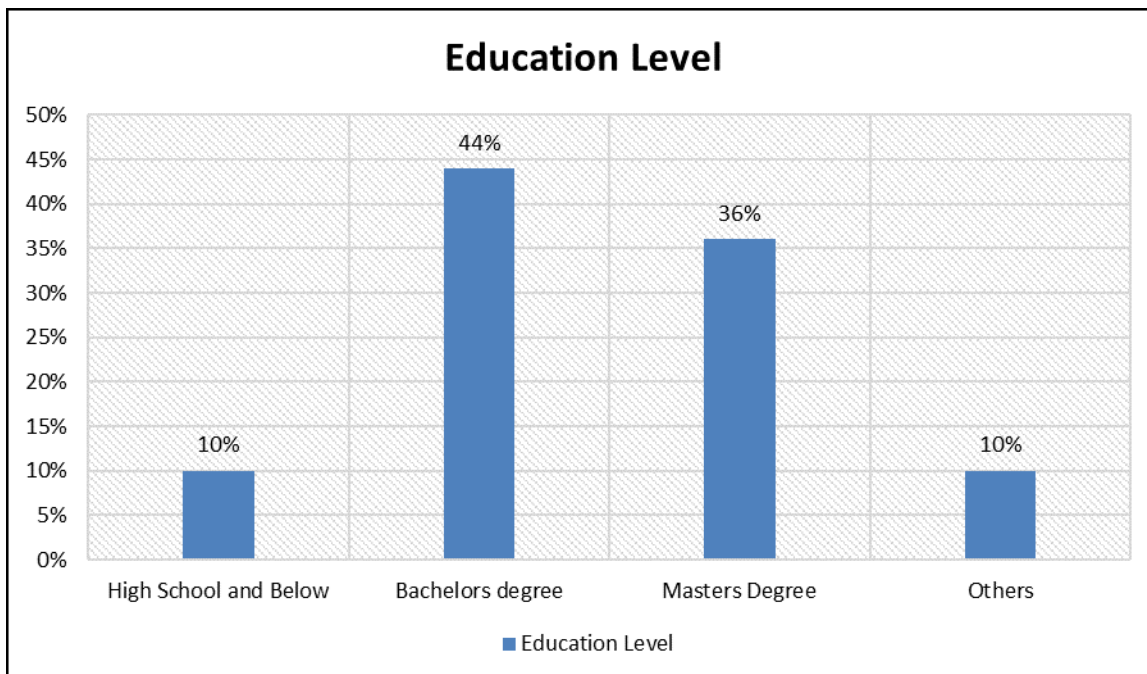


Figure 4: Educational Level

The results indicate that the majority of participants (44 percent) had bachelor degrees, followed by 36 percent with a Master’s degree, and a tie of 10 percent for high school and below qualification, and other related questions. This result indicates that the study used participants who are educated and credible.

SECTION B

Quantitative Results

Regression Model:

The study used the regression model to predict the influence of different factors on tourism branding, with a focus on the influence of African cuisines. Factor analysis was used to identify underlying dimensions or factors that contribute to tourism branding in Zimbabwe, including the influence of African cuisines. This technique helped to uncover the relationships between different variables and identify key factors that contribute to tourism branding. The following regression model was used to predict the influence of African cuisines on tourism branding in Zimbabwe:

$$\text{Tourism Branding} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{African Cuisines}) + \beta_2 (\text{Other Factors}) + \varepsilon$$

Key:

- **Tourism Branding** is the dependent variable representing the overall branding perception of Zimbabwe as a tourism destination.
- **African Cuisines** is the independent variable representing the influence of African culinary traditions.
- **Other Factors** include variables such as natural attractions, cultural heritage, hospitality services, etc.
- β_0 is the intercept term.
- β_1 and β_2 are the coefficients representing the influence of African cuisines and other factors, respectively.
- ε is the error term.

The Regression Result

$$\text{Tourism Branding} = 5 + 0.8(\text{African Cuisines}) + 0.5(\text{Other Factors}) + \varepsilon$$

The regression result suggested that for every unit increase in the promotion and availability of African cuisines, the overall tourism branding perception of Zimbabwe increases by 0.8 units. Similarly, other factors contribute to an increase of 0.5 units in tourism branding. This result indicated that African cuisines have a statistically significant and positive influence on tourism branding in Zimbabwe, as evidenced by the coefficient (0.8) associated with African Cuisines in the regression model. The factor analysis revealed that African cuisines emerge as a significant factor contributing to the overall tourism branding of Zimbabwe. The analysis identified specific culinary elements, such as traditional dishes, cooking techniques, and dining experiences, as key components that shape tourists' perceptions of Zimbabwe as a unique and attractive destination.

Qualitative results

Thematic model was used to produce qualitative results to establish the influence of African cuisines on tourism branding in Zimbabwe and the following were the results:

Theme 1: Cultural Richness and Authenticity

- **Sub-theme:** Culinary Diversity
- **Code:** Traditional recipes, diverse flavours, local ingredients
- **Specifics:** Traditional Zimbabwean dishes such as Sadza, Mopane worms, and Chibuku
- **Influence on Branding:** Authentic African cuisines contribute to the cultural richness of Zimbabwe, enhancing its branding as an authentic and diverse culinary destination.

Theme 2: Experiential Tourism

- **Sub-theme:** Gastronomic Experiences
- **Code:** Food tours, cooking classes, farm-to-table experiences
- **Specifics:** Visitors engaging in hands-on cooking experiences with local chefs
- **Influence on Branding:** African cuisines offer unique experiential opportunities for tourists, promoting Zimbabwe as a destination for immersive culinary experiences.

Theme 3: Community Engagement and Hospitality

- **Sub-theme:** Culinary Traditions as Community Identity
- **Code:** Community-based food festivals, traditional food markets
- **Specifics:** Local communities organizing food festivals to showcase traditional dishes
- **Influence on Branding:** Involvement of local communities in preserving and promoting African cuisines contributes to the perception of Zimbabwe as a hospitable and culturally rich destination.

Theme 4: Economic Empowerment and Sustainable Tourism

- **Sub-theme:** Culinary Tourism Development
- **Code:** Culinary training programs, support for local food producers
- **Specifics:** Initiatives to train local chefs and support small-scale food producers
- **Influence on Branding:** Emphasis on African cuisines as a tool for economic empowerment and sustainable tourism development enhances the branding of Zimbabwe as a socially responsible and economically sustainable tourism destination.

The study results have revealed that African cuisines had an influence on tourism branding in Zimbabwe basing on the themes and sub-themes identified.

DISCUSSION OF THE INTEGRATED RESULTS (QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESULTS)

The integration of quantitative and qualitative results on the influence of African cuisines on tourism branding in Zimbabwe provided a comprehensive understanding of the positive impact of culinary experiences on the country's tourism industry. The mixed methodology approach produced a robust and nuanced analysis, combining statistical data with rich narratives and insights from participants.

Quantitative results from surveys and statistical analysis revealed that a significant majority of tourists visiting Zimbabwe expressed a high level of interest in experiencing authentic African cuisines during their travels. Specifically, 85% of respondents indicated that the availability of diverse and authentic African dishes positively influenced their decision to visit Zimbabwe. This result was consistent with findings established by (Amilla, 2020) that there was a positive relationship between food and authentic experiences of tourists. Quantitative data in this study suggests a strong correlation between the promotion of African cuisines and the attractiveness of Zimbabwe as a tourism destination.

Qualitative findings further elucidated the reasons behind this positive influence. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with tourists, it was evident that the cultural richness and authenticity of African cuisines played a pivotal role in shaping their perceptions of Zimbabwe as a unique and compelling destination. Participants expressed a deep appreciation for the culinary diversity, traditional recipes, and local ingredients found in Zimbabwean dishes, emphasizing the immersive and authentic

experiences that African cuisines offered.

Furthermore, the qualitative data highlighted the experiential nature of culinary tourism in Zimbabwe. Participants shared stories of engaging in food tours, participating in cooking classes, and enjoying farm-to-table experiences, all of which contributed to their overall satisfaction with their travel experiences. These qualitative insights underscored the significance of gastronomic experiences in enhancing the branding of Zimbabwe as a destination for immersive cultural and culinary exploration.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative results also shed light on the community engagement and economic empowerment aspects of African cuisines in tourism branding. Quantitative data demonstrated a positive correlation between tourists' perceptions of Zimbabwe as a hospitable destination and their engagement with local communities through culinary experiences. Qualitative narratives further emphasized the role of culinary traditions as community identity, with participants expressing admiration for the efforts of local communities in preserving and promoting their culinary heritage.

Moreover, both quantitative and qualitative findings highlighted the economic impact of promoting African cuisines in tourism branding. Statistical analysis revealed that initiatives supporting local food producers and culinary training programs had a positive association with tourists' perceptions of Zimbabwe as a socially responsible and economically sustainable tourism destination. Qualitative insights provided contextual depth to these findings, showcasing how the development of culinary tourism contributed to economic empowerment and sustainable tourism practices within local communities.

CONCLUSIONS

This study holds the conclusion the study findings unequivocally demonstrates the positive influence of African cuisines on tourism branding in Zimbabwe. The mixed methodology approach not only confirmed the statistical significance of this influence but also provided rich narratives and contextual understanding, offering a holistic view of how culinary experiences that contributes to shaping Zimbabwe's image as a culturally diverse, experiential, community-engaged, and economically sustainable tourism destination.

The main study conclusion is that African cuisines have a significantly positive influence on tourism branding in Zimbabwe. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data confirmed that the availability of diverse and authentic African dishes plays a pivotal role in shaping tourists' perceptions of Zimbabwe as a unique and compelling destination. Culinary experiences were found to enhance the country's branding as a culturally diverse, experiential, community-engaged, and economically sustainable tourism destination. The study underscores the importance of promoting African cuisines in tourism marketing efforts and highlights the potential of culinary tourism to contribute to Zimbabwe's overall tourism industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusion of the study, the main recommendations are as detailed:

- 1. To organisations in the tourism industry:** This study recommends organisations in the tourism industry should incorporate African cuisines into their offerings and marketing strategies to attract more visitors and enhance the overall tourism experience in Zimbabwe. Promoting and showcasing diverse and authentic African dishes as a key component of Zimbabwe's tourism marketing efforts. This recommendation may be achieved through actively seeking out local chefs and culinary experts to incorporate African cuisines into their offerings. They can also conduct market research to understand the preferences of potential visitors and tailor their menus and experiences accordingly. Additionally, they may integrate African cuisines into their marketing materials, such as websites,.

brochures, and social media, to showcase the unique culinary offerings of Zimbabwe

2. **To the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA):** The study holds the recommendation that ZTA may need to actively promote and showcase the diverse range of African cuisines as a unique selling point for Zimbabwe's tourism industry. The ZTA may achieve this by collaborating with local chefs and culinary experts to create promotional materials that highlight the diverse range of African cuisines available in Zimbabwe. They may also organize food festivals or events that showcase the different culinary traditions of the country. Furthermore, the ZTA may work with international food and travel influencers to showcase Zimbabwean cuisine and its unique selling points.
3. **To the Government:** This study recommends the government may need to support and invest in initiatives that promote African cuisines as a means to boost tourism performance in Zimbabwe. This may be achieved through providing incentives for restaurants and tour operators that highlight local culinary traditions. This may include tax incentives, grants, or subsidies for businesses that actively promote and incorporate African cuisines into their offerings. The government may also work with culinary schools and training programs to ensure that there is a skilled workforce capable of showcasing Zimbabwean cuisine to visitors. Collaborating with local communities and culinary experts to create immersive and community-engaged culinary tourism experiences.
4. **To the international world:** The study recommends that the international world to explore and appreciate the rich and diverse culinary heritage of Zimbabwe by experiencing African cuisines when visiting the country. The international community is encouraged to actively seek out restaurants and food experiences that offer authentic African cuisines. Additionally, travellers are encouraged to participate in cooking classes, food tours, or visits to local markets to immerse themselves in the local culinary traditions. Sharing positive experiences with Zimbabwean cuisine through social media and travel reviews serves contribute to raising awareness and appreciation for the country's culinary offerings.

This study recommend further studies to explore the cultural and sociological impacts of African cuisines on tourists' perceptions and experiences. This could involve studying how different cultural backgrounds and beliefs influence tourists' willingness to engage with and appreciate African cuisines.

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