

Chapter 13

Digitalization of the Tanzania's Tourism Industry: A Marketing Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In Tanzania the tourism industry is one of the main contributors to the economy. Despite the steady increase in tourists after the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry's performance is low compared to the unique and abundant tourism resources with which the country is endowed. Tanzania is ranked 1st in Africa and 12th worldwide on the quality of its nature-based resources and 32nd in Africa on its cultural resources. Yet the country holds 5th place in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is due to several factors, and the low integration of digital solutions is one of them. In order to improve the performance, the chapter identifies areas in the customer journey that can benefit from digitalization and proposes relevant interventions. The challenges include underutilization of user-generated content, limited internet access, the dominance of traditional marketing practices, inadequate planning services, and limited access to local businesses. The proposed interventions include the development of an interactive web portal and e-tourism stickers and the inclusion of planning features in a tourism portal.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry plays a key role in Tanzania's economy and the wellbeing of its people. In 2019, the industry contribution to GDP was 10.6%, i.e., USD 2.6 billion. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, however, the contribution fell to 5.3% in 2020. Since 2021 the industry has started to recover, recording an increase of contribution from 5.3% to 5.7%. This is attributed by the increase of tourists in the destination, raising the number of tourists from 922,692 in 2021 to 1,454,920 in 2022 post COVID-19 pandemic. This is due to a tremendous efforts the government has put forward to ensure the country's natural resources and cultural heritages contribute significantly to the economy of the country. Among the efforts, is the establishment of Safari Channel, an exclusive TV channel for showcasing the destination, improved col-

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laborations with foreign journalists and bloggers and establishment of destination rebranding committee that came up with renewed brand and tagline “*Tanzania Unforgettable*”. Nonetheless, many credits are to The Royal Tour documentary by Her Excellency, Hon. Dr. Samia Suluhu Hassan, the first female President of the United Republic of Tanzania. The documentary has to a great deal created awareness on the tourism industry in Tanzania.

With a population of more than 60 million, Tanzania has low crime rate and a relatively stable political environment. Tanzania is blessed with abundant natural and cultural resources. Tanzania harbors the highest permanently snow-capped freestanding mountain in Africa (i.e. Mountain Kilimanjaro), the largest intact volcanic caldera on Earth (i.e. Ngorongoro Crater) and the massive annual migration of wildebeest and zebra in Serengeti National Park in the mainland. In Zanzibar, Tanzania is blessed with historic buildings, exotic beaches and parks and games, and unique and organic spices. World Economic Forum (2022) ranked Tanzania 1st in Africa and 12th globally on the quality of its nature-based tourism resources as well as 32nd in Africa on its cultural resources. Yet, Tanzania holds 5th place in Sub-Saharan Africa, behind Mauritius, South Africa, Botswana and Kenya. This clearly shows that something has to be done for the country to claim its position and achieve its target of reaching 5 million tourists by 2025.

Saner and colleagues (2019) propose four intervention pillars (political, economical, social and environmental) that any national tourism development plant should address. Specifically, this chapter contributes to social and economical intervention pillars. Within the framework of the social intervention pillar, the chapter proposes to build capacity of marketing personnel in the tourism industry to align with digital marketing strategies. As for the economic intervention pillar, the chapter proposes interventions to increase collaborations and partnerships among and beyond tourism stakeholders, and availability and access to “engaging tourism content”, and improve business environment. Nevertheless, interventions proposed in this chapter are purely geared to increase ICT readiness in the industry. In particular, the interventions are geared to increase usage of digital platforms in the tourism industry, which according to the World Economic Forum (WEF) are crucial for determining destination’s competitiveness globally.

DIGITALIZATION OF THE INDUSTRY

In the wake of information and digital era, countries have been striving to evolve their convectional economies to digital economies. Like many other countries, Tanzania has also started the journey to digital economy (World Bank 2021). Bukht and Heeks (2017) define digital economy as an economy driven by digital technologies and their innovative business models. In one aspect of the digital economy, governments strive to improve service delivery through digital solutions. In another aspect, governments strive to take advantage of digital solutions to build favorable business environment and encourage business diversifications. Either way, however, it is evident that digital technologies play an important role in realizing the digital economy thus enabling businesses in different sectors to become competitive and economic viable.

Globally, contribution of the tourism industry is huge in countries’ economies. Consequently, integration of digital technologies in the tourism industry has attracted increasing academic interest. Bănescu and colleagues (2021), for instance, provide a systematic review of the impact of digitalization in European countries. They observed a shift on trading tourism products from physical to virtual. On Internet usage,

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