

Reputation Risk of Tanzanian Tourism: The Role of Tanzanian Students in China

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ABSTRACT

Although Sub-Saharan Africa is developing rapidly with vibrant business environment and modern skylines, it is also known as the “dark continent”, the home of many awful stories of violence, famine and genocide. It is a fact that perception about a tourist destination is a reality to the prospective customer. It is therefore imperative to have in place sustainable strategies to maintain a good reputation. China is now the world's largest travel outbound market with about 150 million trips and Tanzania is strategically positioning herself to have more Chinese tourists through initiatives as ‘Tour Africa New Horizon’ and more. The study suggested that Chinese millennials in college should be recognized as a powerful audience for building brand loyalty and lifelong customers after they start earning income. The survey was conducted in Wuhan city through an online questionnaire interview of 988 Chinese undergraduate students who share classes with Tanzanian students. The survey intended to explore how much the Chinese undergraduate scholars who share classes with Tanzanian students know about Tanzania and whether interest could be aroused when more information is given. The answers were coded and entered into spreadsheet electronic data files and analyzed. The study was able to give recommendations on how Tanzanian students in China could be mobilized in order to improve and promote Tanzania’s reputation as one of the best tourist destinations in Africa.

Keywords: *reputation risk, Tanzanian students in China, Chinese tourists*

1. INTRODUCTION

Destinations don’t always get the reputations they deserve, and it is arduous to change the perception of people about a destination [1]. Tourists usually avoid destinations with a negative reputation or perception of being risky or unsafe [2]. Health threats, crime, natural disasters, political instability, terrorism, and violence are some of the factors associated with travel - risk. [3-4]. Therefore it is imperative to have in place strategies to maintain a good perception.

The purpose of this study is to explore Tanzania’s reputation as a tourist destination among the Chinese college students in Wuhan, but also to examine how much the Tanzanian students in China are or could be doing to promote their motherland.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Reputational Risk and Tanzanian Tourism

Perceived risk is commonly considered to be part of a destination’s image [5]. In her book Rayner [6], noted that, “Reputation is fundamentally about perception and beliefs; it is not necessarily an accurate reflection of reality. But in

the eyes of the beholder perception is reality – perception is what counts.”

Coaffee & Rogers [7] argued that reputational risk is associated with security and emergency preparedness, and they are becoming one of many key selling points of branding a city.

A business with a negative reputation is expensive and consequently lowers profit margin [8]. In this internet age, customers are able to publicly shame or praise any brand through their reviews. With a click of a button, one can now acquire information from other countless consumers. These reviews provide prospective customers with information about the quality of services or products from experience after consumption.

According to research by Mcdermott [9], about 80% of the people will not buy from a business with negative reviews. This means 8 out of 10 prospective customers will not visit a destination if it has a negative reputation. This is a significant amount of revenue when this number is quantified.

In 2018 Tanzania received 32,773 Chinese tourists [10] while Kenya her neighbor received 81,709 [11]. This is despite the fact that Tanzania has a better safari experience and game-viewing, in terms of quality and quantity of animals. This reality accentuates the importance of marketing, image and reputation management, although does not substitute the real work that has to be done to improve infrastructure, customer service, etc. If the problems and challenges in the tourism sector are not fixed that will worsen the country’s reputation as a tourist

destination especially when tourists share their experience [1].

China is now the world's largest travel outbound market with about 150 million trips; in addition, the market has a huge potential since about 90% of Chinese citizens have not yet traveled overseas [12].

Tanzania Tourist Board and Touchroad International Holdings Group has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to bring Chinese visitors in Tanzania in a campaign known as 'Tour Africa New Horizon' [13]. In May, 2019, more than 350 tourists from China arrived in Tanzania as the first batch of the expected 10,000 according to the MoU which was signed during the 2018 China-Tourism Roadshow [14].

The branding and reputation of Tanzania as a leading East African tourist destination is promising under the new branding initiative campaign called *Unforgettable Tanzania*. The Tanzanian embassy in China led by ambassador Mbelwa Kairuki successfully strides forward in promoting Tanzania in China. The ambassador urges all the tourism players to take advantage of technology in reaching the Chinese market. The embassy is creating a website and online booking app which all the stakeholders could place their advertisements and also encouraged them to open accounts on Wechat and Weibo which are popular social media platforms in China [15].

There is a tendency of focusing on negative news and crisis events by the international media [16], hence online platforms will give Tanzanian tourism agents and other players an opportunity to market and communicate with the Chinese directly and therefore show the reality of events (how the tourists are enjoying themselves, the quality of safaris and other facilities, the reviews of tourists who already visited Tanzania, etc).

2.2. The Role of Tanzanian Students in China in Promoting Their Homecountry's Tourism

Quoted from Makundi [17], "One African country with a long history of education cooperation with China is Tanzania. This dates back to 1962. A major component of this relation is scholarships." By February 2020, there were more than 4,000 Tanzanian students in China as stated by Ms. Wang Ke, Chinese Ambassador to Tanzania [18]. This is a substantial number of Tanzanian nationals who if effectively partnered with the authorities in tourism management could be ambassadors to their country while in China.

However, many international students have a habit of sticking to their own country mates hence are unsuccessful to create satisfactory cooperation [19]. Through an interview held in May, 2020 with the presiding leader of Tanzanian students in Wuhan (WUTASA), mentioned that Tanzanian students get a chance to promote their country's culture through an annual event called "Cultural Festival" separately organized by Wuhan University (WUDA) and Wuhan University of Science and Technology (WHUT). Twice a year Tanzanian students would get a chance to

present their culture i.e. food, clothing and tourist destination images at an allocated booth in these events.

In this 21st century, the importance of direct and face-to-face communication is undisputed. In the midst of all promotional noise, face-to-face communication across cultures functions as a possible causal agent for breaking down negative perceptions among the target audience [20]. Government institutions are doing their part but the diaspora - in this case international students in China, is a powerful element that shouldn't be ignored for managing the brand and reputation of Tanzania as one of the leading tourist destinations in Africa.

The one who is able to publish information will take the attention of the audience in this case the prospective customers. In order to win in the management of reputation we must not only publish the right information but also make sure the information reaches the audience on time [6].

One might ask why market to university students? After all they don't have a job and hence don't generate income to spend on a safari in Africa. The idea this study is proposing is that these millennials in college might be broke now but will not be that way for long, especially after they graduate and get a job. College students should be recognized as a powerful audience for building brand loyalty. They are a good investment because even though they don't have an income but there is a high possibility they could be lifelong customers [21-22].

Moreover college students could be good marketers to their parents and relatives once they get enough information about Tanzania. According to a report by UNWTO [12], about 48% of the Chinese outbound tourists get their information and recommendation about a destination from relatives and friends.

3. METHODOLOGY

The primary method of gathering data for this study has been questionnaire survey of the Chinese undergraduate students who share classes with foreign students and in this case Tanzanian students. Five (5) universities in Wuhan were selected, namely, Wuhan University of Science and Technology, Wuhan University, Huazhong University, Huashi University, Hubei University of Technology. The interviews were conducted through online questionnaires, 1000 questionnaires were sent out and later received 988 responses.

The survey intended to explore how much the Chinese undergraduate scholars who share classes with Tanzanian students know about Tanzania and whether interest could be aroused when more information is given. The answers were coded and entered into spreadsheet electronic data files and analyzed.

Finally based on the findings, the study will draw some conclusions and suggestions concerning how the Tanzanian students in China could be mobilized in order to improve and promote Tanzania's reputation and tourism. Table 1 below summarizes the profiles of the Chinese undergraduate students who were surveyed. The mean age

of the students was 20 years and half of the respondents came from 2nd tier cities. Cities are classified according to the GDP and population size among others. According to South China Morning Post [23], 2nd tier includes cities with GDP between US\$68 billion and US\$299 billion and a population from 3-15 million.

Table 1. Profile of Chinese Students Surveyed

Characteristics		No of students	% of students
Age	18 years	99	10
	19 years	346	35
	20 years	267	27
	21 years	99	10
	22 years	138	14
	23 years	40	4
	<i>Total</i>	988	100
Gender	Female	642	65
	Male	346	35
	<i>Total</i>	988	100
Hometown	Tier 1	148	15
	Tier 2	494	50
	Tier 3	178	18
	Tier 4	168	17
	<i>Total</i>	988	100

4. RESULTS

Although only 6% of the respondents had adequate knowledge about Tanzania nevertheless 25% had a negative perception about the country. 15% of the respondents had a positive reaction to Tanzania while more than 90% had inadequate to no knowledge of the country. It is promising that 19% of the respondents had frequent contact with the Tanzanian students meaning they socialize and hence proving an opportunity to promote Tanzania if proper mobilization is done. 29% had no contact with Tanzanian students and rarely interacted with them on campus. However, an encouraging 52% recognize and occasionally talk to Tanzanian students when they meet in class or dorm but are not apart of the same social circle.

The questionnaire design had a secondary pedagogical purpose and contained interesting tidbits. After the knowledge of seven UNESCO heritage sites present in Tanzania, the award-winning white powdery sandy Zanzibar and the Kilimanjaro, 76% and 48% of the respondents for question 7 and 4 respectively answered 'definitely interested' to travel to Tanzania. Although 3% and 17% for question 7 and 4 respectively were not interested in traveling to Tanzania even after the knowledge of it. More than 70% of the respondents were surprised to learn that more than 143,000 Chinese are traveling to Tanzania for tourism. Over 90% of the respondents had no idea that this big number of tourists

would trek mount Kilimanjaro annually. About 810 Chinese students representing 82% of our sample said 'yes' to having the Zanzibar island experience in their lifetime. Although Sub-Saharan Africa is developing rapidly with vibrant business environment and modern skylines, it is also known as the "dark continent", the home of many awful stories of violence, famine and genocide [24]. The only image most of the world has of Africa is of starving children and war [25]. Question 9 addressed this issue and more than half (52%) of the respondents were aware that brands could be misrepresented by the media and hence misunderstood by the world.

Our final question measured the respondents' interest if they would like to know more about Tanzania and about 860 students (87%) showed interest. This is good as it represent an opportunity to have these students as the future tourists to Tanzania.

5. RISK REDUCTION STRATEGIES

The reduction of reputational risk necessitates all-encompassing promotional management of public relations, targeted marketing, or branding [7].

Rayner [6] highlights that: *reputation management will inevitably involve risk identification, prioritization and developing appropriate responses, in order to build a robust and integrated risk management system that can forge a sustainable reputation.* Appropriate and timely responses in improving challenging areas are key to a sustainable reputation and the best way to avoid negative reviews from tourists who have visited our country [1]. This study presents two suggestions elaborated below that could catapult Tanzanian tourism sector.

Creating an emotional link between the destination and tourists through patriotism (common beliefs and social values) and national heritage (history and legacy) may boost visits [26]. The Chinese are loyal to their allies and friends and they are keen to remember their history. The author has met much older Chinese who remember how China despite financial difficulties at the time, helped to build TAZARA railway; and usually would say with warmth and a smile that Tanzania and China are good friends. This strategy could remind the Chinese of the good relationship that started with both of our founding fathers, the late President Julius Nyerere and Chairman Mao Zedong. President Nyerere visited China more than 10 times during his presidency, this showed a deep friendship with China. And in 1971 when China resumed their lawful seat at the United Nations, Chairman Mao commented that "it was our African brothers who have carried us into the U.N". The cooperation between China and Tanzania continues stronger, even in the outbreak of Covid-19, Tanzanian's leaders immediately sent a message of solidarity to their Chinese friends. And when there were cases of Covid-19 found in Tanzania, China shared its epidemic-control experience without holding back [27].

There are more than 4,000 Tanzanian students in China [18], we suggest that these students to partner with different stakeholders in Tanzania and create a "Tanzanian

safari to Chinese colleges” where they could market their country as one of the best tourist destinations in Africa to their Chinese classmates, teachers and friends. In this case the selected Tanzanian students in each Chinese city could do a free monthly presentation to available students and faculty on different aspects about Tanzania and tourism and have an open discussion at the end of the monthly program. A professional from the tourism sector in Tanzania could also do a presentation via conference call and help to clarify on some issues. The program, “Tanzanian safari to Chinese colleges” could also offer to the Chinese students' internship opportunities in Tanzania; additionally, the program could sponsor skill and career development competitions. This would create a long-lasting attachment not only with the students but also with the faculty [22].

6. CONCLUSION

The suggested “Tanzanian safari to Chinese colleges” program has not been implemented before but one that could offer substantial outcome in terms of building life long loyal customers out of the Chinese. The Chinese outbound travel market is expected to continue to grow and more opportunities present as they become wealthier and more sophisticated in their travel options. The future of Tanzania as the number one choice for Chinese tourists in Africa is promising as more promotional and reputational strategies are being implemented by the different players in the sector.

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APPENDIX

Table 2. Questionnaire

		Response	% of students	No of students
1	What is your reaction to Tanzania?	Positive	15	148
		Neutral	60	593
		Negative	25	247
2	How is your interaction with Tanzanian students on campus?	Frequent	19	188
		Infrequent	52	514
		Never	29	287
3	How is your knowledge about Tanzania?	Adequate	6	59
		None	58	573
		Inadequate	36	356
4	Tanzania is home to seven UNESCO World Heritage sites, including Kilimanjaro the highest mountain in Africa, the best African Safaris and white powdery sand beaches. Does knowing this make you more interested in visiting Tanzania than you otherwise might be?	Definitely interested	48	474
		Neutral	35	346
		Not interested	17	168
5	Did you know that roughly 20,000 visitors trek the mountain Kilimanjaro every year?	Yes	5	49
		Had an idea	12	119
		No	83	820
6	Tanzania has received more than 143,000 Chinese tourists between the year 2014-2018. Are you surprised to learn more Chinese are interested to	Surprised	73	721
		Neutral	23	227

	explore Tanzanian natural beauty?	Not surprised	4	40
7	Zanzibar island in Tanzania is an award winner of Africa's Leading Beach Destinations and had about half a million tourists visit in 2018. Does information like these make you more interested in visiting Tanzania than you otherwise might be?	Definitely interested	76	751
		Neutral	21	207
		Not interested	3	30
8	Zanzibar is considered as one of the most dreamy tourist destinations and often listed among the 10 destinations to top your Africa Bucket list. Having knowledge of this, does it make you want to have this experience in your lifetime?	Yes	82	810
		No	8	79
9	With your experience, what is the possibility that brands (products, services & destinations) could be misrepresented by the media and hence misunderstood by the world?	Possible	52	514
		Not sure	26	257
		Impossible	22	217
10	Will you be interested to learn more about Tanzania?	Definitely interested	87	860
		Neutral	7	69
		Not interested	6	59