An Analysis of the Effectiveness of Zimbabwe's Agritourism Companies' Websites

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Abstract

In the 21st century's highly competitive business environment, it is of vital importance that companies establish an online presence through a corporate website. Indeed, it has been argued and on a sustained basis by several scholars, that a corporate website provides a sustainable competitive edge to companies. Within this wider context, agritourism companies have found it necessary, if not mandatory, as is the case with other business sectors, to establish an online presence through a corporate website. This is not surprising as it is well documented that agritourism is now a billion-dollar industry in many parts of the world, particularly in the developed world. In developing countries, such as this present study's focus, namely Zimbabwe, the sector is still a small but increasingly growing one. However, despite the well-documented and touted benefits of adopting agritourism such as the generation of foreign currency and employment, there has not been much scholarly attention on the effectiveness of agritourism companies' websites globally. It is against this background that this chapter explores the effectiveness of Zimbabwe's agritourism companies' websites. In doing so, the chapter provides useful baseline information for future studies regarding an oft-neglected sector. The chapter draws its findings by evaluating websites from a sample of Zimbabwe's agritourism companies using fifteen functionality variables. The website variables that were used in this quantitative research include accessibility, functionality, usability, navigability, interactivity, quality of information, online payment capability, design and aesthetic attractiveness, value addition links and translation capabilities. The website attributes were assessed using the expert technique. The experts rated the website variables using functionality ratings on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being very poor and 5 being very good. The dominant theme arising from this study is that Zimbabwe's agritourism companies' websites still lag behind in many areas. It was therefore found that significant strides need to be made in order for the agritourism companies' websites to be user friendly, act as effective marketing platforms, be visually appealing and highly interactive sites, to mention a few shortcomings. In light of this, the chapter provides a set of feasible recommendations that may be used to improve the effectiveness of Zimbabwe's agritourism companies' websites. Therefore, the study has wider policy ramifications with regards to the way agritourism companies' websites are designed. Finally, the chapter ends by indicating future research priorities such as using

user ratings on the effectiveness of Zimbabwe's agritourism websites, as well as to extend the study beyond the current study site.