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Tour guiding at the Great Zimbabwe National Monument

Abstract

The study aim was to establish the role of tour guides in tourist experiences at the Great Zimbabwe National Monument. A netnographic analysis was conducted of the written reviews of visitors to Great Zimbabwe National Monument posted on TripAdvisor.com website between January 2015 and December 2016. Of 140 reviews generated, 30 were deemed relevant for the study and analysed in detail using Cohen's and Hu and Wall's frameworks on the roles of tour guides. The results showed that tour guides performed the traditional guiding roles espoused by Cohen. The predominant roles of tour guides were leadership and mediation, where they directed tourists to different sections of the monument. On-site interpretation involved giving factual information on the history of the site and did not promote sustainability in the interpretation of the site. Guests did not interact with local communities nor were local communities' values and association with the site included in the interpretation of the site. Tour guides did not encourage tourists to behave sustainably by practising ecologically sustainable behaviour towards the site. Recruitment of tour guides from local communities is recommended. In addition, new guide training should be introduced in Zimbabwe that equips guides with skills as ecotour guides who could promote the sustainability of heritage sites.

Key words: netnography; interpretation; heritage tourism; tourist experiences; tour guides; Great Zimbabwe National Monument; Zimbabwe

Introduction

Tour guides are important players in the tourism industry (Hu, 2007, p. 18). They are frontline employees and make direct contact with tourists on behalf of all other tourism players at a destination (Ap & Wong, 2001; Black & Weiler, 2005; Salazar, 2012). Tour guides enhance tourist experiences and create a positive image of the destination (Kuo, Chang, Cheng & Lin, 2016). Tour guides have a sound knowledge of the destination, site and/or attraction, and most can provide volumes of facts and figures (Markwell & Weiler, 1998).

In addition, tour guides aid the sustainability of a heritage site by reducing the ecological impact of tourists on the site (Littlefair & Buckley, 2008; Ballantyne, Packer & Falk, 2011; Weiler & Walker 2014; Kim, Airey & Szivas, 2011), facilitating its sustainability (Walker & Moscardo, 2016; Hvenegaard, 2017). Despite widespread research on the contribution of tour guides to heritage tourism, little research has been undertaken on how tour guides enhance tourist experience at heritage sites (Scherle & Nonnenmann, 2008; Lo, 2013; Hu & Wall, 2012). This study addressed this gap by exploring the perceptions of visitors to the Great Zimbabwe National Monument (GZNM) of the role played by tour guides in visitors' experiences.

Zimbabwe is currently experiencing economic and political problems. Poverty levels are very high, estimated at 70% with an unemployment rate of around 90% (Macheka, 2016). Tourism is one of

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the few economic activities helping to sustain the country. In 2015, tourism contributed 7.5% of total employment and 11% of the gross domestic product (GDP) (WTTC, 2016). Table 1 shows the growth and importance of tourism in Zimbabwe, and this information emphasises the importance of a study on the role of tour guides in enhancing tourist experience in Zimbabwe. There have not been any previous Zimbabwe-based studies on the role of tour guides in enhancing tourist experiences and the aim of this study, therefore, was to bridge this identified gap by assessing the role of tour guides in visitors' experiences at the GZNM. Through this study, the researcher aimed to contribute to the tour-guiding literature from an African perspective, by reviewing and analysing written reviews of visitors to the GZNM on Tripadvisor.com website from January 2015 to December 2016.

Table 1
Zimbabwe tourist arrivals
and receipts, 2008–2016

Year	Arrivals	Receipts \$ million
2008	1,955,594	294
2009	2,017,262	523
2010	2,239,165	634
2011	2,423,280	662
2012	1,794,230	749
2013	1,832,570	836
2014	1,880,028	827
2015	2,056,588	886
2016	2,167,686	819

Source: Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (2016).

The next section briefly discusses the role of tour guides in tourist experiences. Following this, the choice and justification of GZNM as the study site is discussed. Netnography as the ethnographic study methodology (Mkono, 2011) is explained and justified as appropriate methodology for gathering data for the study. The results section presents verbatim actual reviews, downloaded from the Tripadvisor.com website, to highlight living stories as perceived by the visitors. The last section discusses the results, draws conclusions and makes recommendations for further studies.

Literature review

In this paper, a 'tour guide' refers to 'one who conducts a tour' or one with 'a broad-based knowledge of a particular area whose primary duty is to inform' (Pond, 1993, p. 17). A tour guide performs tour guiding for an individual tourist or a group of visitors by accompanying them on tours, and looking after them in places such as museums, factories, galleries and national parks (Moscardo, 1996).

Cohen (1985) is generally acknowledged as one of the earliest scholars to develop a typology of the role of tour guides in tourist experience. Cohen recognised and analysed the traditional roles of guides, classifying them into two spheres — the leadership and the mediatory (see Table 2). The two spheres were further classified into two sections — the inner-directed and the outer-directed. The inner-directed sphere employs resources within the tour party to fulfil the visitors' expectations, while the outer-directed refers to the use of resources outside the tour group to meet the needs of tourists (Hu & Hall, 2012). The leadership sphere has two sub-roles — the instrumental and the social. The instrumental role ensures that the trip is successfully accomplished. The tour guide achieves this by guiding the correct direction to the site, enabling the tourists to see both back and front stage of the

tour (McCannell, 1973). Another important role is control, which implies ensuring the safety and security of visitors. The social component in the leadership sphere entails ensuring that tension during the tour is well managed, there is integration in the group, and visitors are kept in high morale and are assisted to understand the activities (animation) (Cohen, 1985).

Within the mediatory sphere, a guide plays two roles — the interactionary and the communicative. The interactionary role, as Cohen explained, is where the tour guide facilitates interaction between tourism industry players and local communities. The guide discharges this responsibility through representation of the industry players to tourists and tourists to industry players, and also by ensuring that services and amenities are available and suitable for tourists. The communicative role has four elements — selection, information, interpretation and fabrication. Selection involves the choice of attractions that the tourist can see. The information element involves the guide giving relevant information on the site, its historical importance and other factors. The interpretation element refers to mediation of the cultural encounters between the foreign culture of the tourist and that of the local community/attraction or site. The last element, fabrication, describes how a tour guide may present untrue information about a site or a product, for example claiming that information is genuine while in fact it is vague.

Table 2
Cohen's typology of a tour guide's roles

Sphere	Outer-directed	Inner-directed
Leadership	Instrumental <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direction • Access • Control 	Social <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tension management • Integration • Morale • Animation
Mediatory	Interactionary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation • Organisation 	Communicative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection • Information • Interpretation • Fabrication

Source: Cohen (1985, p. 10).

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Since Cohen's seminal work on the role of tour guides, a considerable amount of research has been engendered on the tour guide's role in tourist experience (Ham & Weiler, 2007; Pond, 1993). Other roles, as shown in Table 3, have been added to Cohen's original model. These are interpreter, representative, salesperson (public relations representative) and entrepreneur. The model shown in Table 2 was used in this study to establish the role of tour guides in tourist experience at the GZNM. The additional roles of tour guides are discussed next.

Table 3
Roles of tour guides on guided tours

For whom/what tour guides are responsible	Roles of tour guides	Description of responsibility
Tourists	Pathfinder Group leader Mentor Animator	To satisfy tourists' needs and expectations through solving the problems of where to go, how long to stay, what to see, how to see, what to do and how to deal with locals
Resources of destination places	Interpreter	To reveal meanings, values and significance of local environments and cultures

Table 3 Continued

For whom/what tour guides are responsible	Roles of tour guides	Description of responsibility
Local communities	Representative	To show hospitality, to foster understanding
Employers/government authorities	Salesperson Public relations representative	To help to maximise economic benefits, to project a particular message or image, or help to realise some other political purpose
Guides themselves	Entrepreneur	To seek as much income as possible, to improve own social standing

Source: Hu & Wall (2012, p. 82).

Interpretive tour guiding

Moscardo (2007, p. 57), citing Knudson et al. (1995), defined interpretation as 'any planned or structured activity, including guided tours, self-guided walks, signage at heritage sites, and museum, zoo and visitor-centre displays, seeking to create for visitors an understanding of the history and significance of events, people and objects associated with the site'. Interpretation is a key role of a tour guide (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Tour guides use interpretation to facilitate visitors' connection with the place by challenging visitors' values, attitudes and behaviours (Moscardo, 1996). The end product is change in the behaviour of tourists, to that of responsible tourists who respect and appreciate both the natural and the cultural environments and are committed to acting responsibly towards those environments (Xu, Cui, Ballantyne & Packer, 2013; Markwell & Weiler, 1998; McIntyre & Haig, 2002). In other words, tour guides are responsible for the sustainability of both cultural and environmental resources (Hu & Wall, 2012; Walker & Moscardo, 2016).

Representative role

Under their representative role, tour guides represent local communities, whereby they mediate the cultural understanding between local communities and visitors. They ensure that the tourists have the opportunity to interact with local communities and buy local products so that there is cultural exchange and cultural understanding between the hosts and guests (Gelbman & Maoz, 2012; Scherle & Nonnenmann, 2008). Particularly important are indigenous tour guides, who can facilitate special access to indigenous cultural places and offer a unique total experience of these by giving tourists a strong sense of place (Walker & Moscardo, 2016) and care for the place visited. They also educate the community about tourism, and encourage tourists to visit and spend in the local economy for local community benefit (Ormsby & Mannie, 2006; Jensen, 2010).

Salesperson, public relations representative

The guides' training and close association with government re-enforce government position on how the site should be communicated to tourists. Wong (2013) observed that licensed tour guides in Macau communicate different messages to tourists depending on the origin of the tourists. If, for example, tourists were predominantly Chinese, they presented the skewed, one-sided official government view of Macau history, but presented a balanced historical account of Macau if presenting to non-Chinese tourists. Similarly, the tour guides in Yogyakarta, Indonesia only presented a government-rehearsed and -promoted narrative of the site (Dahles, 2002). They acted as buffers between tourists and the social environment by reducing the possibility of tourists interacting with the local community. Another example is that of the Island of Peace between Jordan and Israel, where, instead of cultural mediation by transmitting messages of hope and peace to tourists visiting the Island, tour guides were found to do the opposite, instilling fear among tourists (Gelbman & Maoz, 2012).

Entrepreneur

Salazar (2012) proposes that tour guides are 'small entrepreneurs who sell images, knowledge, contacts, souvenirs, access, authenticity, ideology and sometimes even themselves' (Salazar, 2012, p. 15). Case studies have indeed confirmed some of Salazar's proposals. Mak, Wong and Chang's (2011) studies in Hong Kong and Macau confirmed that the economic dilemmas of tour guides have forced them to compromise the traditional roles of guiding, to focus on entrepreneurship as a survival strategy (Wong, 2013). In Africa as well, tour guides are poorly paid and have to subsidise their pay through soliciting tips from tourists (Melube & Buzinde, 2016; Van der Merwe, 2016).

There is paucity of African-based studies on the role of tour guides in tourist experience (Botha, Saayman & Kruger, 2016; Salazar, 2008), hence the need for cross-cultural research (Moscardo, Konovalov, Murphy & McGehee, 2013; Huang, Weiler & Assaker, 2015). Most research has been undertaken in western contexts by western researchers. Weiler and Black (2015, p.169) noted fewer than ten studies located in Africa. The majority of studies on Africa have focused on the working conditions of tour guides (De Beer, Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014; Nyahunzvi & Njerekai, 2013; Melube & Buzinde, 2016; Van der Merwe, 2016). Few studies have focused on the role of tour guides in tourist experiences at cultural (Salazar, 2008) and wildlife encounters (Botha et al., 2016; Peake & Carter, 2014; Roberts, Mearns & Edwards, 2014). There is therefore a gap in extant literature on the role of tour guides in enhancing tourist experiences at heritage sites in an African context. This research took advantage of this gap to investigate the role of tour guides in tourist experiences at a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) world heritage site, the GZNM.

The study site- the great Zimbabwe national monument

Zimbabwe attained its independence from Britain in 1980. At independence, the country changed its name from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, which is derived from the GZNM. The GZNM was declared a UNESCO world heritage site in 1986. GZNM is approximately 30 km from Masvingo and is located in the lowveld at an altitude of some 1,100 m, in a sparsely populated region traditionally occupied by Bantu/Shona people. The property, built between 1,100 and 1,450 AD, extends over almost 800 ha (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/364>) (see Figure 1). The stone cities of the GZNM were previously linked as part of a large empire of the Karanga tribes, which stretched from the Indian Ocean to parts of northern Zimbabwe (Garlake, 1982). GZNM is the country's largest archaeological site and the largest archaeological monument in sub-Saharan Africa (Garlake, 1982) (see Figure 2).

GZNM is of spiritual value to clans in proximity to the site, including the Nemanwa and the Mugabe (not to be confused with the past president of Zimbabwe). Historically, the chiefs and kings of Zimbabwe had many religious functions and were often considered to be semi-divine. One of their important duties was to ensure good rainfall and plentiful harvest, by means of ceremonies held at the GZNM (Fontein, 2006; Huffman, 2010). Two types of ceremonies — the rainmaking ceremony and thanksgiving, and the appeasing of the spirits and request for prosperity — are held there annually by both clans (Matenga, 2011). It is said to be the third most visited place in Zimbabwe after Victoria Falls and the Hwange National Park (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, 2014).

Figure 1
Map showing location of Great Zimbabwe National Monument

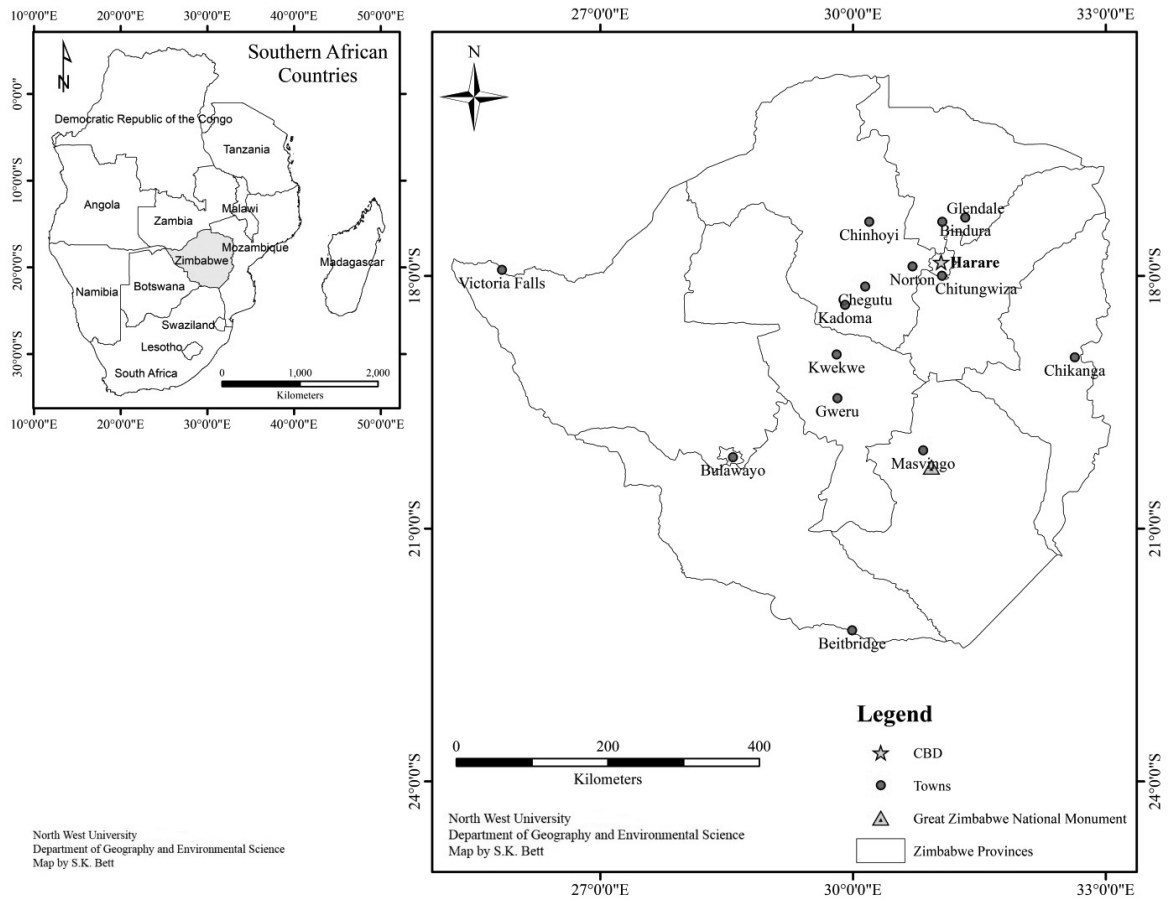


Figure 2
Picture of Great Zimbabwe National Monument



Source: the author's photo.

Methods

Netnography was first proposed by Kozinets (1998). Kozinets (1998, p. 366) defined netnography as 'a written account resulting from fieldwork studying the cultures and communities that emerge from on-line, computer mediated, or internet-based communications, where both the field work and the textual account are methodologically informed by the traditions and techniques of cultural anthropology'. Affleck and Kvan (2008, p. 269) propose that 'unlike traditional experience of interpretation social media afford reflexivity and insight, thus engendering a sense of place to our experience of cultural heritage rather than imposing only interpretation derived from professional interpreters, universal standards and normative practice'. The study uses reviews written on social media to establish the role of tour guides in tourist experience at GZNM.

According to Baka (2016), one of the advantages of netnography is the representativeness of diverse customers that use a tourism facility willing to share their experiences online (Mkono & Tribe, 2016). Another benefit of using netnography, as suggested by Wu and Pearce (2014), is that the researcher is able to explore new phenomena that might not be easy to explore or have not yet been explored through traditional methods of collecting data. Researchers are often denied access by tourist managers for fear that research might interfere with visitor experiences (Moscardo, 2014). Netnography helps circumvent this problem, as researchers do not need to travel to study sites but are able to access participants through the click of a button (Mkono, 2011).

The fieldwork site for this study was TripAdvisor.com website. TripAdvisor.com was chosen because it is the largest travel website, attracting more than 280 million visitors each month (Shoettle, 2014 cited in Book, Tanford & Chen, 2015, p. 995; Pearce & Parker, 2013). In addition, through the reviews on TripAdvisor.com, holistic tourist experience as the unit of analysis is available (Walker & Moscardo, 2016).

The netnography procedures outlined by Mkono (2011) were followed. The researcher used the search terms 'Reviews of the Great Zimbabwe National Monument'. One hundred and forty reviews posted on TripAdvisor.com between January 2015 and December 2016 were generated. The next step was to create a blank Microsoft Word document. All 140 reviews were copied and pasted onto the document. This generated document was read through and only those reviews that reported the use of a tour guide were selected. This resulted in 66 such reviews. These 66 reviews were then content-analysed into predetermined themes, based on the literature reviewed. Kozinets (2002), as noted by Mkono and Tribe (2016), does not prescribe specific rules about sample size or the quantity of data required. For this study, only reviews judged to be relevant based on the literature review were included in the study findings. Like Mkono and Tribe (2016), the analysis process involved coding the data manually, by reading it through three times over while making interpretive field notes about the role of tour guides in tourist experiences at GZNM. Thirty such reviews were then deemed to be relevant and sufficient for this qualitative study.

One limitation of this study is that very few of the respondents stated their country of origin. This is not uncommon, as Mkono (2011) noted in her research. Another limitation is the ethical consideration required in netnography, originally prescribed by Kozinets (1998), that researchers must be participant observers. The researcher, however, adapted what Mkono (2016, p. 1318) describes as the 'lurker approach', which precludes researcher participation in online interaction. The researcher felt that participation in online discussions for this study would compromise the anonymity of the reviewers (Mkono & Markwell, 2014). Hence the reviews are presented verbatim and have not been edited to

correct grammatical and/or spelling errors. In addition to TripAdvisor, reviews the author used reflexivity methodology to interpret the results of this study. The author's knowledge and experiences of tour guiding at GZNM influenced the interpretation of the results. The next section presents the results.

Results

Characteristics of tour guides

The TripAdvisor reviewers noted that the tour guides had in-depth knowledge about the site. They expressed this in the following words:

'...a very knowledgeable guide Joseph had just the 2 of us to take round these impressive ruins...' (TripAdvisor reviewer 1).

'The guides know a lot about the history and are good with their tales.' (TripAdvisor reviewer 2).

'The guide we had was well informed and spoke excellent english[sic], he made it all come alive.' (TripAdvisor reviewer 3).

Interesting was that the reviewers associated the expert knowledge with university qualifications, not to guide training. The reviewers wrote the following comments:

'Most guides are university educated.' (TripAdvisor reviewer 4).

'We paid for a guide (a university student) and it was very worthwhile for the detailed historical information and insight he gave us.' (TripAdvisor reviewer 5).

'Mine was a very knowledgeable young woman from Great Zimbabwe University!' (TripAdvisor reviewer 6).

The role of the tour guides

Leadership role

According to TripAdvisor's reviewers, tour guides at the GZNM performed elements of the instrumental as well as social roles of the leadership sphere. Under the instrumental role, guides facilitated directions to be followed to maximise the view of the site. The reviews were stated in the following words:

'...with the help of the local guides to take you around for your personal attention and full knowledge of the place, this is a great place to visit let your children learn even more of their country, it's a heritage sight found in Masvingo and also the small ones are in different areas, I love this place...' (TripAdvisor reviewer 7).

'We were taken to the ruins from our hotel and introduced to our guide "Gloria". She then spent the next 3 hours taking us to all parts of the site including a short visit to the local village to buy a few things to take home. She gave us very interesting descriptions on what we were seeing. The quality of the dry stone walls and the size of the ruins were very impressive and shouting out...' (TripAdvisor reviewer 8).

'We took an official guide. I think it was a good decision because it is very big and they show you the most important things.' (TripAdvisor reviewer 9).

Social roles involved making presentations interesting. These were stated as follows:

'Your guide will make the valley come to life.' (TripAdvisor reviewer 10).

'They are really very impressive and our guide, Philip, was very well informed and very funny.' (TripAdvisor reviewer 11).

'Guides added stories and experiences that gave colour and flavour to his account of historical facts and summary of archaeological and other studies of the site.' (TripAdvisor reviewer 12).

Mediatory sphere

An overwhelming majority of written reviews focused on the communication role of information giving. Tourist attested to guides' extensive knowledge of the history of the place and its importance, facts which they easily communicated to the tourist. Below is a selection of the reviews:

'I recommend doing a guided tour which will take you about 2.5 hrs to complete. With a guide you can really appreciate the history of the ruins and ancient kingdom.' (TripAdvisor reviewer 13).

'...should get a personal guide for best explanations of how the ruins were built.' (TripAdvisor reviewer 14).

Only one reviewer mentioned fabrication and this was stated as follows:

'We took a guide who took us through the place and we enjoyed knowing all the ancient way of life in the sacred place ... 'muchemedza mbuya' the traditional Viagra for the king with more than 300 wives...' (TripAdvisor reviewer 15).

Interpretation role

Tour guides at the GZNM did not perform the interpretive role. The reviewers stated this as follows:

'Although very interesting could have included more info on the culture and lives of the tribe living in Great Zimbabwe but apart from this an enjoyable day out.' (TripAdvisor reviewer 16).

'It is a shame that there is no explanation about the ruins; i.e. who built them and when and why and whether they linked with any others. It would have been helpful to find this sort of information on boards on site. The 'information desk' was completely bare and there was nobody there who looked as if they would be able to help.' (TripAdvisor reviewer 17).

Salesperson, public relations representative

According to one written review of GZNM, the tour guides were accused of misleading tourists by presenting only the politically correct/official view, by alleging that the site was built by the Mugabe clan even though historically, as was noted earlier in this paper, there are other claimants to the site. One reviewer expressed the following sentiments to show that she/he did not believe in the government's view of the history of the site:

'There is propaganda about it being part of the 'Mugabe' tribe and peopled by Shona tribe which one has to take with a bucket of salt.' (TripAdvisor reviewer 19).

Discussion

The role of tour guides at the GZNM

Communicative role

The study results show that the tour guides' roles were predominantly communicative, with tour guides passing historical facts about the site to tourists. This is explained by the tour guides' training in Zimbabwe, which equips guides with professional hunting skills but not the interpretive skills necessary at heritage sites (Nyahunzvi & Njerekai, 2013). Manwa (2007) made similar observations that heritage guides at Zimbabwe heritage sites were not trained to interpret heritage sites to tourists. However,

unlike in Manwa's study, which revealed that most of the tour guides lacked basic education, the tour guides in the present study had university education, hence were able to communicate effectively with visitors (Walker & Moscardo, 2014).

Interpretive role

The results did not show any inclination by tour guides to encourage sustainable behaviour by visitors to the heritage site. These results agree with Weiler and Black's (2015) observation that tour guides from developing countries are generally unwilling to encourage tourists to practise sustainable behaviour for fear that it could drive away tourists and lessen their chances of getting tips.

Representative role

Weiler and Black (2015) have contrasted the roles of tour guides in developed countries with those of developing countries. They have observed that tour guides in developing countries play a representative role, contributing to the destination economies and therefore helping reduce poverty, unlike in developed countries where the emphasis is on ecological sustainability of heritage sites. The results of this study contradict Weiler and Black's (2015) assertion about developing countries. At GZNM, visitors did not interact with local communities, even though they yearned for such interaction, as expressed by reviewers 16 and 17, for example. One explanation could be the background of tour guides employed in Zimbabwean heritage sites. The National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, the department responsible for museums and monuments, appoints tour guides to heritage sites based solely on academic qualifications. This tends to exclude local communities who have affinity to heritage sites.

Salesperson, public relations representative

In politically repressive regimes, tour guides tend to propagate the official line when communicating the history and importance of a heritage site (Dahles, 2002). In Zimbabwe, the past president, Robert Mugabe, was widely considered the 'strongman' of the country. It was therefore politically correct to associate everything with his dynasty. The GZNM has many claimants to its ownership, as is noted at the study site. However, as stated by reviewer 19, the tour guides were passing information that the Mugabe tribe built the site. This echoes Wong's (2013) findings in Macau, where interpretation to Chinese tourists masked the authentic history of Macau and instead only portrayed the history parroted by the Chinese government.

Entrepreneurship

From the written reviews of visitors to GZNM, the entrepreneurship role was not apparent. Tour guides in most African countries, including Zimbabwe, experience poor working conditions with poor pay. Soliciting for tips to complement their pay is a norm (Nyahunzvi & Njerekai, 2013; Melubo & Buzinde, 2016; Beer, Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014). It is therefore possible that tour guides solicited for tips.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to use netnography to assess perceptions of TripAdvisor.com reviewers on the role of tour guides in tourist experiences at the GZNM. The study contributes to tour guiding theory, adding perspectives from an African context yet suggesting that the traditional roles of tour guides espoused by Cohen (1985) are also applicable to Zimbabwe, where tour guides provide historical facts about a heritage site.

Tour guides can play a critical role in local development, especially in Zimbabwe where unemployment is very high. The government could capitalise further on the heritage tourism market to improve the livelihoods of communities living around the GZNM, by recruiting tour guides from local communities and offering them specialised ecotour guides training, which will guarantee sustainability of the site and also promote local development (Black, Ham & Weiler, 20001; Ababneh, 2016).

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