Agritourism: A promising marketing strategy for Zimbabwean farmers

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Abstract: **With the turn of the millennium, Zimbabwean farmers have shown a significant interest in agritourism. The industry is still in its growth stage, as only 20% of the farmers have taken up as of 2023. There is limited knowledge and research on agritourism from the perspective of agribusiness in Zimbabwe. This study aims to address this gap. The objectives of this study were to analyze how agritourism is used as a marketing strategy by Zimbabwean farmers and to provide recommendations for further enhancement of the agritourism industry in Zimbabwe. This study used a comprehensive analysis approach from various databases, including Google Scholar, Science Direct, Elsevier, and Quesis. Platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, were also used. To analyze how agritourism is used as a marketing strategy, Ansoff matrix (product/market expansion grid) was used. The findings showed that agritourism helps farmers penetrate wider and international markets, as people are drawn by the heritage found in the farms and refreshing rural sites. In addition, farmers have increased the value addition of their farm produce through agritourism. This is seen in farm-to-table restaurants at farms and holiday houses. Of importance is the diversification created by agritourism. Farmers now have more income streams because more than one enterprise runs on the farm. The study recommends that the government of Zimbabwe support this sector by creating a framework that will act as a guide for farmers and policymakers. In addition, more publicity and farm education regarding agritourism is needed. More people need to be educated about it.**

Key words: **agritourism, diversification, marketing, Zimbabwe**

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, agritourism is gaining momentum and shows enormous promise in improving the socio economic status of farmers and surrounding communities. The efficiency and productivity of agricultural land have increased in importance owing to the aggravation of climatic, environmental, energy, and economic crises in our time [4], [6], [15], [9]. Zimbabwe has not yet been left behind in this development. This country is landlocked and situated in southern Africa. Zimbabwe has agriculture as the backbone of its economy, with almost 80% of the population directly or indirectly surviving in agriculture [16].

It is a country rich in agricultural heritage, and diverse landscapes are poised to capitalize on the growing global interest in agritourism. Some farmers in Zimbabwe have enthusiastically dived into this venture. The countryside, with refreshing greenery from crops and natural vegetation and a vast population of diverse livestock categories, has easily become an option for agritourism. This has given birth to a shift in inclinations with visitors slowly migrating from conventional tourism to farm-based retreats that allow them to engage in activities such as picking fresh fruits and vegetables, enjoying realistic farm life, and even tasting organic foods grown from farms [5]. According to [14], agritourism is the practise of inviting guests to an agricultural operation, with the goal of purchasing farm goods and having fun. It combines opportunities for outdoor recreation, agricultural education, and recreation [2]. Agritourism has been proposed as an alternative solution to the severe economic depression in rural areas, facilitating the recovery of local economies [8], [12]. Zimbabwean farmers who face the challenges of limited income can tap into this business.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. An analysis of how agritourism is used as a marketing strategy by Zimbabwean farmers
2. Recommendation on further enhancement of agritourism industry in Zimbabwe

Research questions

1. Are Zimbabwean farmers standing to benefit if they use agritourism as a marketing strategy?
2. How can the government intervene and help agritourism industry grow?

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Zimbabwean farmers face several marketing challenges. Some of them have low productivity levels owing to factors such as low soil fertility and reliance on rain-fed systems. Limited access to markets: Farmers often have difficulty accessing markets because of inconsistencies in supply and low quality. In addition, price volatility, as farmers may struggle with price instability, making it difficult to plan and invest in their operations. While there are all these challenges, most Zimbabwean farms are endowed with rich agricultural heritage and diverse landscapes, and farmers can capitalize on them. A country's favorable environment, climate, topography, and agricultural methods can contribute to marketing strategies. This can be done by using these heritages and landscapes as a marketing strategy to attract clients, in a bid for them to buy the produce and view the place as an agritourism destination. In return, the farmer boosts his or her income, expands its market, interacts with customers, and engages in economic diversification. When a farmer's income has been increased through the side business of agritourism, the farmer in turn will look at improving some other structures, such as infrastructure, that she or he has been relying on the government and agents for help. However, the gap in the agribusiness industry of Zimbabwe lacks documented knowledge as to how to use agritourism as a marketing strategy.

METHODOLOGY

This study used documentary survey reviews from journals, newspapers, and other online websites to analyze Zimbabwean agritourism as a marketing strategy. Moreover, this study used the Ansoff matrix model to analyze how agritourism is used as a marketing strategy by Zimbabwean farmers. This is also known as a product/market expansion grid. It was used because the agritourism farms that were analyzed were already in the business of farming, and agritourism to them is a growth strategy. The four generic strategies outlined in the Ansoff matrix model are Market Penetration, Product Development, Market Development and Diversification.

Source: Corporate Finance Institute by Kyle Peterdy (2024)

Market Penetration

This is the concept of increasing the sales of products in existing markets [10]. In the context of agritourism, this means that Zimbabwean farmers will develop their customer base in existing markets. An example is the Panganayi Boran stud farm in Wedza, Zimbabwe. The agribusiness farm specializes in breeding Boran cattle for sale. They offer services for selling boran semen, artificial insemination, consultancy, and training [3]. Farm owners highly believe in the Boran breed, which has excellent fertility and longevity traits. As a marketing strategy to increase sales of the existing boran breed, the farm has also ventured in agritourism. They hold special festival activities during special themes such as Valentine, Christmas, and the Easter season and engage in rural activities such as goat tagging and cattle exploration for urban people. During these activities, meat and cattle are sold. During these activities, potential clients get to have close interactions with the cattle, goats, and other products that are on sale. This increases farm sales. Customers who come to the farm share their stories with their friends on social media, such as X (Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. This in turn increases the visibility of the farm, which enhances clients and sales. Boran cows cost between $2000-5000 USD [3]. Panganayi agritourism farms have holiday homes, which cater to clients who want to stay for more days to learn more about the Boran breed before purchasing. Thus, the farm increases sales and makes clients comfortable at the same time.

Product development

This enhances existing offerings or creates new ones to meet changing customer needs [10]. Agritourism involves expanding activities beyond simple farm

visits to include workshops, cooking classes, and wine tasting to create unique experiences for customers. Farms make some modifications to existing products to give increased value to customers for their purchases [10]. A Zimbabwean example is KwaTerry, a roadrunner and goat farm. It specializes in roadrunner breeding and goat rearing. It is located in the deep rural areas of Zimbabwe, Mhondoro [6]. To enhance the existing offering of chicken sales, the farm is running a restaurant that takes urban clients and some rural customers to a modernized rural touch while eating traditional meals.

The themes of the restaurant are mostly traditional food and activities that involve learning about roadrunner breeds [6] . This farm enhances existing offerings or creates new ones, such as modernized restaurants in rural areas, to meet changing customer needs. This is through value addition, which is observed in cooked roadrunner meals. One of the funny activities that his clients like is to catch the roadrunner and have it cooked while waiting.

Market development

This is about selling more of the farm's existing products to new markets.this entails farmers can develop new markets by targeting international tourists with their existing agritourism products such as farm tours and agricultural festivals [10]. An example is when any agritourism farm in Panganayi or KwaTerry registers with the agritourism company. The company is Agritourism Zimbabwe. It offers tours to farms in Zimbabwe. They advertise widely on social media tools, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, X, and Instagram. This, in turn, widens the market base of farms, as they will be showcased on a global scale [11].

Again, agritourism farms can upgrade to meet the international standards of agritourism farms while at the same time keeping the rural touch of the farm. With the turn of the millennium, social media tools have been widely used to attract international market bases, especially when an agritourism farm utilizes festive themes. For example, KwaTerry hosted a couple's retreat on Valentine's attracting regional and international couples due to the captivating activities lined up [13].

Diversification

This involves entering new markets with new products that are either related or completely unrelated to the farm's existing offering. Diversification can be classified into three types: concentric or horizontal (related diversification), conglomerate (unrelated diversification), and vertical diversification [10]. An example of concentric diversification in Zimbabwean agritourism is Lake Harvest Kariba. It has entered new markets with new products related to the farm's existing product, which is fish sales. This new product allows people to tour Lake Harvest on educational trips or for fun as a way to see the place. Instead of selling fish only in the Sub Saharan region and in Zimbabwe, the farm also engages in agritourism in its diversification strategy.

Conglomerate diversification involves entering a new market with a new product that is completely unrelated to the farm's existing offering. An agritourism farm, the Maleme ranch, is situated in the Matabeleland of Zimbabwe [11]. The farm specializes in poultry and horticulture. The new products in its diversification are chalets, which are holiday homes, zip lines, and fuffy slies. These fun activities offer clients as part of agritourism packages. Some clients come to do both which is to buy produce and also do agritourism activities.

The other type of diversification is vertical diversification, which means moving backward and forward in the value chain by taking control of activities that used to be outsourced. An example of a vertically diversified farm is the Panganayi Boran stud farm's agritourism. The farm used to import boran semen from South Africa its neighboring country in Africa. As it grew its business, it diversified into selling the boran semen that they collected from their own bulls [3].

RECOMMENDATIONS

Agritourism farms exist in Zimbabwe, with some already possessing the necessary resources to engage in this practice; however, most farms still lag behind, and there is plenty of room for improvement. To further enhance agritourism among Zimbabwean farmers, the government needs to develop a framework for sustainable agritourism [1]. As of now, as much as agritourism is growing, the framework is not in place, and there is a need for sustainable growth. This will provide guidelines for farmers, policymakers, and other stakeholders to develop the

infrastructure, marketing strategies, and funding mechanisms necessary for tourism. There is also a need for farmer education in agritourism. Only 20% of the farms have realized the potential of agritourism and tapped into it. Education will help farmers understand the potential benefits of agritourism and how to develop and promote their farms.

The government plays a significant role in enhancing tourism in Zimbabwe. There is a need for a budget for the development of agritourism. This will help farmers invest in the necessary infrastructure and marketing strategies to attract tourism. In addition, encouraging collaboration between farmers and other stakeholders is required. This includes partnerships with local tourism boards, travel agencies, and other businesses to promote agritourism and to create a more comprehensive tourism experience for visitors.

Agritourism is still not very well known and popular in Zimbabwe, and it is still at an almost growth stage. Therefore, there is a need to develop marketing strategies to promote agritourism. This can include creating websites, brochures, and social media campaigns to showcase the unique experiences farmers can offer to tourists. Holistically, there is a need for both government and private sector intervention through investment to grow this most promising sector within agriculture to increase the incomes of farmers.

CONCLUSION

Agritourism holds significant promise as a marketing strategy for Zimbabwean farmers by offering a pathway to sustainable development and economic growth. The country already has beautiful landscape and heritage facets in farms that can be utilized in designing agritourism ventures. In return, agritourism is promising to pull clients and customers who, when well impressed with the farm, will share their experiences on social media tools with relatives and friends. This widens the clientele base for production on sale, and the farm as a resort area.

In addition, access to market challenges of farm produce is curbed through agritourism when a farmer opens a restaurant and meals that are prepared using his farm produce. Value addition will increase income. Through agritourism, farmers tend to market their produce in a friendly and playful environment during educational tours. Investing in and venturing into agritourism is proving to be a marketing strategy that kills two birds with one stone, leisure, and business. This brings more income to the farmers.

In conclusion, the Zimbabwean government has to show full support for this venture by establishing a framework that promotes it. Such support from the government embraces agritourism. This cannot only enhance farmers' economic prospects but also contribute to the sustainable development of rural communities.

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