

Decentralisation as a marketing strategy for archival services in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Purpose – Archival institutions must make their holdings and services known to the public to ensure increased usage. It is the obligation of archival institutions to adopt strategies to market their services to increase the usage of their holdings. Therefore, this study aims to assess the National Archives of Zimbabwe's (NAZ) decentralisation drive as a strategy to market its archival services.

Design/methodology/approach – The multiple case study research design, which is interpretive and qualitative, was used for the study. The study used interviews, questionnaires and document review as data collection tools. The collected data were presented, analysed and discussed using the thematic data analysis approach.

Findings – Findings revealed that the NAZ decentralised provincial records centres were actively involved in the marketing of archival services offered by the NAZ. The study also established that the decentralised provincial records centres perform activities such as records surveys, training, oral history, issuance of brochures, guided tours and career guidance, which increase their interactions with communities they serve. The decentralised offices took advantage of these interactions to market archival services offered by the NAZ.

Originality/value – The study illustrated that decentralisation of archival institutions and services to the lower tiers of government is a powerful strategy for the marketing of archival services. Therefore, there is need for archival institutions to adopt or enhance the use of this strategy to increase the usage of archives.

Keywords Archival services, Archives, Decentralisation, Marketing, National Archives of Zimbabwe, Provincial records centres

Paper type Research paper

Introduction and background of the study

Archival institutions play an invaluable role in the social, political and economic development of a country. They house treasures of special archival collections held on behalf of the society (Kamatula, 2011). These special archival collections have the potential to transform the lives of the members of the public through fostering accountability, promoting democracy and justice, protection of human rights and promotion of cultural heritage, among others (Ngulube *et al.*, 2017). The access and use of these archives by the public or by citizens in a country largely depend on the citizens' knowledge of the existence of an archival institution and its holdings. Scholars have, however, bemoaned the underutilisation of the archives by the members of the public, and highlighting that archival institutions are at risk of becoming irrelevant if their holdings are not used (Chaterera, 2017; Maphorisa and Jain, 2013; Saurombe and Ngulube, 2016). One of the key factors cited for this underutilisation of archives was lack of awareness of

archives by the public due to lack of proper marketing by archival institutions. Archival institutions, therefore, have a duty to make people aware of where to find the archives, and when and how to find the archives (Saurombe and Ngulube, 2016). Put differently, archival institutions have an obligation to market their archival services to the public to enhance their usage.

The marketing of archival services, although in its nascent stage, has emerged as one of the essential activities of archival institutions. According to Jestin and Parameswari (2005) marketing covers those activities that connect the organisation to its outside world that uses its products and services. Put in archival terms, marketing covers archival activities that connect the archival institutions to the users of their archival holdings. The marketing of archival services helps in raising the

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awareness of the public about the existence of the archives and their holdings thereby promoting the usage of the archival services by the current and potential users (Chaterera, 2017). This would assist in popularising the services offered by archival institutions thereby serving as justification to convince fiscal authorities to allocate more resources to the archives (Lekaukau, 1993). Ultimately, the marketing of archival services will allow archival institutions to gain political, social as well as economic support (Kotler, 1995), which is critical to their continued existence. One of the key strategies by which archival institutions can make themselves known, and that they can adopt to market their services is the decentralisation of archival services to the lower tiers of government.

The decentralisation of archival services in Zimbabwe started with the establishment of Bulawayo records centre in 1966. This was followed by a long period of inactivity with the decentralisation of archival services receiving new impetus after independence following the enactment of the NAZ Act of 1986, which extended the mandate of the NAZ. Few years after independence, the NAZ decentralised its services with the aim to meet the records management needs of the government's decentralised administrative network by ensuring that records-generating offices are served within their own locality (NAZ, 1987). This study sought to find out whether the decentralised offices, apart from offering records management services, were a vehicle for the marketing to the archival services offered by NAZ.

Prior to the establishment of provincial records centres, the marketing of archival services outside Harare was directly the role of head office of the NAZ, which occasionally came down to provinces to offer records management services and took that opportunity to market its archival services. Perhaps, this explains the invisibility of the NAZ and its services before the inception of provincial records centres in the administrative provinces of Zimbabwe. According to Chaterera (2017) the marketing and public programming of the NAZ is still largely the responsibility of Head Office through the Editorial Unit in conjunction with IT Unit. Consequently, most of the marketing and public programming activities of these units are confined to Harare, where these units are domiciled. Unsurprisingly, studies on marketing and public programming at the NAZ have also focused on head office of NAZ without a clear focus on the role of the decentralised provincial records centres. Therefore, there has not been serious scholarly intervention to explore the decentralisation of archival services, through establishment of provincial records centres, as a strategy for marketing archival services at lower tiers of government. As shall be seen in this paper, the decentralisation of archival services, through the establishment of provincial records centres, offered the NAZ an opportunity to market its services to the public at lower tiers of government.

Contextual setting of the study

The NAZ was established in 1935 through an Act of Parliament. Its current mission is, "To acquire, preserve, and provide access to documentation in whatever format, which comprises a legal and historical record of Zimbabwe's past and present" (NAZ, 1999). To achieve this mission, the NAZ is divided into four operational sections namely public archives

and research, records management, technical services and library section. These sections contain collections, which are of interest to both the public and government employees. As part of its collections, the NAZ public archives and research section contains public archives, which are government records of historical significance and are over 25 years old. The size of the collection, which dates back to 1890, is estimated to be around 22,000 cubic feet, and it includes administrative records, deceased estates records, family records, chief files, criminal records, census records, marriage certificates, among others (Chaterera, 2017). Moreover, the public archives section also houses historical manuscripts comprising letters, diaries and other personal documents created by people such as administrators, politicians, explorers, soldiers, hunters, missionaries and many others (NAZ, 2016). All these collections contain important information that is of interest to both government employees and citizens.

In addition, the library section, which is the country's principal legal deposit library, keeps large collections of published materials, which it receives through the Printed Publications Act of 1975 (NAZ, 2014). As a result of the deposit requirements of the Act, the NAZ National library contains a comprehensive collection of books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, government publications, pamphlets, maps and plans, pictorial collections, among other library materials. These library materials are complemented by other collections under the technical section, which include audio-visual materials that capture several important national events of historical nature. These are useful for research and historical purposes. Moreover, the technical section houses the oral history unit, which contains large collections of oral history interviews documenting several subjects of the history of Zimbabwe.

The other significant part of the NAZ's collections is found in the records management section and all of the five provincial records centres and the main centre in Harare fall under this section. Of the five provincial centres, four operate as records centres with the exception of one provincial centre, which has attained the status of a provincial archives. The public archives section, library section and technical section are still to be decentralised to the four provincial records centres. These provincial centres contain large volumes of government records, which have not attained the age of 25 years. The records that merit permanent preservation are transferred from provincial records centres to the public archives section after 25 years, as a result, the majority of records that become public archives are acquired through the provincial records centres (Matangira, 2016). While the records in provincial records centres are generally not open to the public until they become public archives, the public can access them through the government agencies that would have deposited the concerned records at the provinces centre.

The varied collections in both the main archives and provincial records centres, as described above, are of interest to several stakeholders in Zimbabwe. The government records in the provincial records centres are very helpful to government officials in the provinces seeking information of administrative nature, which would enable them to provide effective and efficient services to members of the public in the provinces. The collections in the public archives and research section are also vital to researchers pursuing different subjects about the history of Zimbabwe (Chaterera, 2017; Matangira, 2016). According

to the [International Records management Trust \(2004\)](#) archival records or collections such as those at NAZ can be useful in confirming citizens' rights such as pension entitlements, land rights, citizenship and voting rights, among others. Similarly, the collections in the NAZ's custody documents citizens' rights hence they confirm those rights and are critical in ensuring that citizens enjoy such rights. It is, therefore, imperative that these collections are marketed to ensure their use by citizens.

Problem statement

Records and archives are important documents that have the capability to transform citizens' lives as they foster personal and national development through provision of documentary heritage. As a result, many countries, including Zimbabwe, have established national archival institutions. Ordinarily, archival institutions must make their holdings and services known to the public to ensure increased usage. However, scholars such as [Chaterera \(2017\)](#) and [Saurombe and Ngulube \(2016\)](#) have noted that many national archival institutions have tended to become "white elephants" as they are largely remote and unknown by the general public and as they are largely not patronised by the same. Many national archival institutions are based in cities, thus cutting themselves away from the people who mostly reside in rural areas in the developing world. It is in the spirit of reaching out to the people that Zimbabwe has embarked on the decentralisation drive where it expanded operations from Harare to other provinces in the country. Taking archives to the people is one way that national archival institutions can use to market themselves. Nonetheless, it remains the task of this paper to assess the extent to which decentralisation of archival services in Zimbabwe has meaningfully popularised the existence of archival institutions, their importance as well as their products and services.

Purpose

The study sought to assess the NAZ's decentralisation drive as a strategy to market its archival institutions as well as its products and services throughout the country.

Objectives

- to trace the decentralisation of archival services in Zimbabwe;
- to interrogate the decentralisation of archival services as a means to market archival institutions, products and services; and
- to assess the extent to which decentralisation is a powerful marketing tool.

Methods and materials

The study was interpretive and qualitative in approach. The multiple case study research design was adopted for the study. The NAZ operates with five provincial records centres. Four of the five provincial centres operate with four staff members each. These include the Archivist, who is the head of the provincial office, Records Management Officer,

Executive Assistant and an Office Assistant while one provincial archives operates with 13 staff members, who include three archivists. The head archivists in the provincial centres are responsible for marketing the NAZ's products and services. All in all, there were seven archivists in all the provincial centres at the time the study was conducted. Therefore, the population of the study was comprised of all seven archivists from the provincial centres. However, five archivists were purposively sampled to participate in the study. Two archivists from one provincial centre were left out of the study because they were still new in the organisation so they were considered not yet experienced enough to inform the study. The study used open-ended questionnaires and interviews to collect data used to address the research problem. In addition to interviews and open-ended questionnaires, data were collected using researchers' personal observation and documentary reviews which comprised Directors' reports and annual reports. All the five archivists populated the questionnaires and were also interviewed as follow-ups to responses in the questionnaires. The collected data were presented, analysed and discussed using the thematic data analysis approach.

Results and discussion

This section of the paper presents and discusses the findings of the study. The presentation and discussion of the findings of the study was done following the themes derived from the study's objectives.

Tracing the decentralisation of archival services in Zimbabwe

The first objective of the study was to trace the decentralisation of archival institutions and services in Zimbabwe. The researchers established that the NAZ has decentralised to five provinces and the other provinces are catered for a provincial archival centre close to it. This has been aptly captured by one participant who indicated that, the department has decentralised to five provinces. Therefore, there are five provincial records centres namely Bulawayo Records Centre established in 1961 becoming Bulawayo National Archives and Records Centre in 2001, Mutare Records Centre in 1986, Masvingo Records Centre in 1987, Gweru Records Centre in 1988 and Chinhoyi Records Centre in 1999. It is clear from the above that the archival centres decentralised had the status of records Centres serve for Bulawayo, which has gained the status of an Archives.

According to the Ministry of Information, Posts and Telecommunications (1986) as cited by [Bhebhe et al. \(2013\)](#) the purpose for the establishment of these provincial archival centres was to decentralise archival services to reach the broader community in the provinces. In other words, the establishment of the provincial records centres was meant to make archival services known and accessible by the public in the provinces. Therefore, the paper argues that the purpose for the establishment of decentralised provincial records centre had the marketing element, which is illustrated by the Centres's activities as will be demonstrated later in this paper.

In tracing the decentralisation of archival services at the NAZ, the researchers were also interested in the legal and policy basis for the decentralisation of archival centres and services in Zimbabwe. The researchers established, through questionnaires and interviews, that the decentralised provincial records centres of NAZ are not a creature of archival legislation in Zimbabwe. Rather, the provincial records centres were established as a result of a general decentralisation policy adopted by the government of Zimbabwe soon after gaining independence in 1980. While this is a general trend in the ESARBICA region, where there is no legislation for establishment of decentralised archival institutions, it is different from the South African perspective. According to Ngulube *et al.* (2017) the decentralisation of archival institutions in South Africa is guided by archival legislation and the decentralised archival institutions are mandated to market archival services to the broader community in the nine provinces of South Africa. However, the study established that, although the marketing activities of the decentralised offices of NAZ are not legislated, the decentralised offices continued to engage in marketing activities as will be shown in this paper.

The researchers, as they were tracing decentralisation at NAZ, were also interested in the nature of archival services that were decentralised to provincial level. Therefore, the provincial archivists were asked to highlight the nature of archival services decentralised. The participants, as pertinently captured by one provincial archivist, revealed that, *only records management was decentralised while library, public archives services, audio-visual and illustrations have not been decentralised. However, the records centres do extra work to assist in ISBN issuance, access to delineation reports and oral history.* In other words, the NAZ has not fully decentralised since some of its archival services are still centralised at its Head Office in Harare. This confirms previous studies in ESABICA region (Malawi, Kenya and Zambia), which also revealed that the decentralised archival centres were established to offer a decentralised records management service (Gisesa, 2008; International Records Management Trust, 2007; Lihoma and Gondwe, 2006). In spite of the fact that they were established to offer records management services, the NAZ's decentralised provincial records centres are marketing all the archival services offered by the NAZ including those centralised at its head office in Harare.

The marketing of archival services at archival institutions must be the responsibility of a marketing office and the decentralised office must have a marketing structure to ensure effective marketing of the decentralised archival services. Therefore, the researchers were interested in finding out whether there is a marketing structure at the decentralised provincial records centres. All the five provincial archivists who participated in the study indicated that there is no marketing structure at the centres, but there is an arrangement whereby marketing is done by the provincial archivists, who have their core duties. This seems to be a mirror of what is obtaining at the Head Office of the National Archives of Zimbabwe, where there is no structure for the marketing of the department's archival services. The arrangement at the Head Office of NAZ is that marketing or public programming issues are handled by the Editor, who has other duties to his or her job description (Chaterera, 2017). This scenario has also been reported in other studies in the ESARBICA region, where the absence of a

marketing structure of archives is hampering the marketing of archival services at the Records and Archives Management Division in Tanzania (Mwango, 2015). Despite the absence of a marketing structure, the decentralised offices of NAZ are engaging in marketing activities. The following part of the paper presents and discusses these activities.

Decentralisation of archival services as a means to market archival institutions and services

The second objective of the study sought to interrogate decentralisation of archival services as a strategy of means to market archival institutions and their services. The research participants were asked to comment on whether the NAZ view the decentralisation of its services as a means to market its services. All the research participants concurred that the NAZ view decentralisation as a means to market its services. This was correctly captured by one participant, who indicated that, *the NAZ view decentralisation as a means to market its services and that is why the NAZ has instructed its decentralised offices to attend national events and commemorations in the provinces as a way to increase its visibility.* The Decentralised offices participate in national events such as Independence Day, Heroes and Defence Forces Days' commemorations. According to Kamatula (2011), participation at such events is a key strategy in marketing archival services to the wider community, which also generates the public's interest in the archives. Apart from the participation in national events, the decentralised offices' activities are also embedded with a marketing element. The decentralised provincial records centres also market archival services as they discharge their mandate. The following sections look at how the issuance of brochures, records surveys, oral history, training workshops and guided tours and career guidance are promoting the marketing of archival services by the decentralised records centres.

According to Kamatula (2011) the issuance of promotional brochures is the cheapest and simplest way of marketing archival services to the broader community. Therefore, the researchers sought to find out how the decentralised provincial records centres are using brochures to market the NAZ archival services. Five provincial archivists who participated in the study indicated that the decentralised offices issue promotional brochures to walk-in members of the public and some members of the public are visiting the provincial records centres for services after reading them in the brochures. This was confirmed by one provincial archivist, who indicated that, *we have received several members of the public who would have read about our services from the distributed brochures, coming to the provincial centres after reading our services in the distributed brochures.* This shows that the issuance of brochures by the decentralised offices is increasing the awareness and usage of archives by the public. This is in line with studies in Botswana, which also showed that brochures are an effective means to raise the public's awareness about the archival services offered by the Botswana National Archives and Records Services (Maphorisa and Jain, 2013, p. 39).

The decentralised provincial records centres of NAZ are also engaged in records surveys, which offer them an opportunity to market the department's archival services. According to Chaterera (2013) NAZ, including the decentralised provincial

records centres, is mandated by legislation to conduct records surveys at each government agency once in four years, with the aim to proffer recommendations that will improve records management in government agencies. This study was interested in finding out how these surveys are being used by the decentralised offices as a tool to market archival services. The study established that records surveys are playing a critical role in marketing the archival services to public workers in the provinces and districts. All the participants agreed that records surveys have raised the visibility of NAZ in government circles in the provinces and districts. During records surveys, archivists from NAZ explain the functions of NAZ to officers in the government agencies thereby making them aware of the archival services offered by NAZ. In view of this, a study has recommended the use of records surveys, by provincial records centres, as a tool to market archival services since they have the potential to raise awareness on archival services offered by NAZ (Dewah, 2010).

According to Bhebe (2016) the NAZ, soon after independence, extended its oral history programmes to cover diverse community in the country thereby bringing the NAZ into direct contact with members of the public, who are potential users of their archival services. This instigated the researchers to look into the oral history programmes of NAZ with a view to understanding how they are being used by decentralised provincial records centres in marketing the archival services offered by NAZ. The study revealed that, although the oral history programmes are infrequently done, they are a platform that is facilitating direct interaction between NAZ archivists and the general members of the community.

The study further established that the archivists take advantage of this interaction to market the archival services to the public in the communities. All participants concurred that they received visitors to their offices who would have known NAZ through oral history. Therefore, this paper views oral history programmes as a vehicle being used by the decentralised provincial records centres to market archival services of NAZ. It is in view of this that scholars such as Craft (2018) asserted that oral history programmes constitute an area that archives are using to connect with communities. Put differently, oral history programmes allow archival institutions to interact with the communities thereby raising the community's awareness on archival services offered.

The decentralised provincial records centres of NAZ have another function, which is to provide records management training to government agencies in the provinces. The provincial records centres organise training workshops, which brings several people from various departments in the provinces and districts. Kamatula (2011, p. 85) highlighted that training workshops are one of the cheapest ways of spreading the word about archives hence can play a critical role in the marketing of archives. Therefore, the researchers were interested in finding out if the training workshops organised by the provincial records centres were contributing to the marketing of the NAZ archival services. The study revealed that the training workshops were contributing to the marketing of the archival services offered by NAZ. One of the participants elaborated this by saying, *there is always a presentation dedicated to NAZ and its functions, which is meant to make participants appreciate the NAZ*

and archival services it offers. This is helping, whenever the workshops are held, in raising the participants' awareness of archival services. However, the participants revealed that the training workshops are held infrequently, which is making it difficult for the training workshops to reach full potential in the marketing of archival services by the decentralised provincial records centres.

According to Kamatula (2011) guided tours to the archives are a very useful tool that may be employed by archival institutions in promoting or marketing their archival services to the broader community. Consequently, the guided tours were also of interest to the researchers. The research participants were asked whether guided tours and exhibitions at career guidance shows were increasing the visibility of NAZ and its services. The research participants revealed that the guided tours and exhibitions at career guidance shows were assisting the provincial records centres in raising the awareness of public about archival services offered by NAZ. The study established that there were increases in the number of researchers and students who visited the provincial records centres for assistance soon after the provincial records centres' participation in guided tours and career guidance shows. Although these activities are not regularly done as indicated by the participants, they are a key tool in raising the awareness of the public on archival services offered by NAZ. Therefore, guided tours and career guidance shows can be used to enhance the visibility of the NAZ and its services (Chaterera, 2017).

Effectiveness of decentralisation as a marketing tool for archival services

In an effort to understand the effectiveness of the contribution of the activities of the decentralised provincial records centres on the marketing archival services of NAZ, the researchers asked the participants to comment on whether the visibility and use of archival services have improved. All the provincial archivists concurred that the marketing activities of the provincial records centres as discussed above, have enhanced the visibility of the NAZ and its archival services. This was evidenced by the increase in the number of researchers who visited the archival centres after being made aware of the services offered by the NAZ. However, it was felt that a lot still needs to be done since the visibility of the NAZ and its services is still strong in the cities and towns as compared to rural areas, where the majority of Zimbabweans live.

While there was unanimity among the research participants regarding decentralisation of archival services as a powerful tool in the marketing of archival services, there are factors that are adversely affecting the decentralised provincial records centres as they engage in marketing archival services offered by NAZ. The study established, as pointed by one participant, that *factors such as absence of a marketing structure, inadequate funding, lack of trained marketing personnel and modern marketing equipment are hampering the effectiveness of the decentralised provincial records centres in the marketing of archival services offered by the NAZ.* These challenges are fast becoming enduring challenges with regards to the marketing of archival services. Previous

studies in the ESARBICA region have also bemoaned these challenges (Chaterera, 2017; Mwango, 2015; Maphorisa and Jain, 2013). These challenges need to be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of decentralisation as a strategy in the marketing of archival services.

Conclusion

The decentralisation and physical presence of archival institutions at the lower tiers of government is in its own a powerful and effective way of marketing archival services to the general public. The decentralisation drive of NAZ increased the interactions between the NAZ and the general public as well as with its clients. Most of these interactions would not have happened had the NAZ not decentralised to the provincial level. As the decentralised centres interact with their clients and as the public interact with the decentralised centres, the archival services offered by the NAZ become known to the general public. It is through these interactions that the NAZ has managed to increase its visibility among the general public country wide. In view of the above, the study concludes that decentralisation of archival institutions is a powerful and effective strategy in the marketing of archival services offered by archival institutions.

Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations :

- There is need for the review of the archival legislation in Zimbabwe to ensure that decentralised offices of NAZ derive their mandate from the NAZ Act of 1986. The same archival legislation must give the decentralised archival centres the responsibility to market the NAZ's services.
- The NAZ must decentralise to the remaining provinces and all districts in Zimbabwe. This will ensure that the marketing efforts of the decentralised offices of NAZ reach the public in all provinces and districts.
- All archival services offered by the National Archives of Zimbabwe should decentralise to the provinces so that the public making contact with provincial offices will be able access all the archival services at provincial level.
- There is need for a budget dedicated to marketing activities the decentralised offices of the NAZ.
- The NAZ must establish a marketing office at the decentralised offices, whose core mandate is to market the services offered by the NAZ. This office must be manned by a qualified marketing personnel to ensure effective marketing of archival services by the decentralised offices of NAZ.
- The NAZ must procure ICT equipment for marketing purpose. This will enhance the exhibitions of the decentralised offices at marketing platforms.

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