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*Full Length Research Paper*

# The role of media in tourism promotion: A case study in Ethiopia

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**Media has a pervasive power for good or bad. Ethiopia suffers a lot from negative media presentations, even though the country hosts many glamorous features. And also its tangible and intangible tourist attractions can serve as a tool to change the images of the country in the international community. The country has more than Twelve UNISCO registered world heritages and more natural and cultural endowments, yet it benefits less from them. This work attempts to assess the tourism potential of the country and its actual gain from the sector. Moreover, it focuses on what role the media has to play in the process. To put this into effect, mixed methodology has been used and the result showed that, there exists a great gap between the potential that the country has and its benefit from it. The bridge is widened by lack of promotion through the different media outlets. The qualitative methodology was helpful to analyze contents related to the new media outlets while quantitative one addresses the views of one hundred tourists who have the experience of visiting the country. Hence the result revealed that the country has not been benefited from its potential.**

**Key words** Tourism, Promotion, Image, Destination, Media.

## INTRODUCTION

The country is gifted with exclusive amalgamation of natural and cultural heritages, impressive scenery, suitable climate, rich flora and fauna and acknowledged archeological sites. It has more than eight hundred species of birds, of which, twenty three are endemic to the country. The mountains, lakes and rivers of the country have many fascinating features. The fourth highest pick of Africa's mountain, Ras Dashen is located in Ethiopia. The Blue Nile (the world's longest river), Awash, Genale, the Wabishebele, Omo, Tekeze, and Baro rivers are among a few and most useful rivers for the country's socio-economic development. In addition to

this, Ethiopia has a rich history which astonishingly extends in the pre- historic period. With twelve UNISCO registered world heritages, the country is the home of more than eighteen nations and nationalities.

When we assess the press role in promoting the above potential of the country, it is said to be poor. The worst is that, both government and private newspapers, for example, do not have common columns on tourism and travel writing. Though ministry of culture and tourism claimed that enhancing internal tourism hardly reach domestic tourists by 67 programs through television, radio and newspapers, this is not fair enough to a country

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like ours whose international media fade out our glamorous image highly. Besides this, the quality of programs, area and time coverage, target audience and media selection, and appropriate use of the medium of communication (language) remains argumentative.

Tourism becomes a large global industry expanding rapidly not only in developed but also in developing countries. 11% of the world's GNP had been taken by the tourism sector as related activities (tourism and general travel) are included according to Roe et al (2004). Its split on a global economy has been increasing significantly, and it is faster than global output as per United Nation world tourism organization report (2005).

However, complaints have been coming from tourist destination countries on supportive measures to develop tourism potential areas. Activities in most of the tourist destinations are less than the expected ones (WTR, 2007). In line with using already existing sites, developing nations like ours by considering potential tourism attractions promotion and development activities should be done simultaneously to increase the benefits of the sector at large. According to Ashley et al. (2001), one of the main challenges for tourism to position itself as a key economic sector in developing countries is using only the existing tourism resource. There is a necessity for government policies and donor-financed tourism development programs that attempt to develop brand new potential sites in the tourism industry. Contrary to this idea, developing nations without expecting donation can achieve success if different actors of tourism jointly design least cost promotion and development strategies facilitated by the media.

For many years, Ethiopia has attracted the receptive travelers before the appearance of the known Ethiopian tourist sites, that is, Lalibela, Axum, and Lucy. Visitors also celebrated its attractions, yet the country has not benefited from its potential. Ethiopia's territory includes Twelve UNESCO registered World Heritage Sites, four important national parks, a source of the world's longest river, and sites admired among adherents of Christianity, Islam and Judaism and diverse African traditional societies. Ethiopia has very distinct cultural and historic products based on ancient Axumite civilizations and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; the walled Old City of Harar with its seven gates considered.

Ethiopia's predominant image in international media remains one of starvation, conflict and barren landscapes and many people in the West continue to see Ethiopia as a charity case. Therefore, to change distorted images in the international media, the country should use its enormous tourism potential by designing well promotion and marketing strategy. It is obvious that economic development has a pervasive role in image formation; and accelerating the perceptions of the international communities is equally important especially for countries like Ethiopia, whose low economic development shadows glamorous historical, cultural and natural attractions until

recently.

Ethiopia is a potential market source of revenue for local and foreign tourism industry products and services. A research conducted by Theodros (2012) showed that, when we talk about development what comes into our minds are agricultural, industries, mining, etc. But nowadays, tourism-heritage (natural or cultural) has made a huge contribution to development. It is obvious that Ethiopia handles numerous heritages, yet its commitment to use its tourism endowment is very limited. Its shortcomings to develop, maintain and promote our potential are obvious. Such obstacles hinder the country from not harvesting its fruits.

Developing the tourism sector means not getting foreign currency only, but it is also seen as building the image of our country. So protecting external media influence is vital and this can be done through the integration of media with the tourism sector. Even though the media content reflects reality or not is another critical problem. The content is presented from the perspectives of those groups who control the media. According to Howley (2005), the mainstream media distorts facts, portrays minority disobedience as violence, misrepresents marginalized minorities, keeps silent on important local issues, lacks plurality and diversity and serves the interests of the powerful. So apart from facilitating tourism products and services (hotels, restaurants, and destinations) the country tourism attraction needs to be promoted well (Figure 1).

Even though Ethiopia has a long tradition of cleric inscription and its first newspaper publication is a century old, it is far from having a well established vibrant free press (Shimelis, 2000). However, the circulation of newspapers and magazines went down from 638 and 241 respectively in 1992 to 85 and 39 in 2005 respectively. Seventy seven per cent of newspapers and sixty one percent of the magazines in the country are controlled by private organizations (Mekuria (2005).

## Research questions

This research addresses the following research questions:

1. Which type of media can promote Ethiopia?
2. How far does the country use its potential?
3. What are the factors that may affect the promotion of tourism in Ethiopia?
4. What are the main information sources for tourists to know about Ethiopia?

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND STRATEGY

Before rushing to design a strategy the researcher would rather focus on reading relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks; do reviews of national tourism statistics, relevant national media policy documents, media outputs which have tourism content,



Figure 1. Major tourist destinations of Ethiopia.

which were helpful to organize the research design and examine the core reasons of the research problem. Based on the objective of the study, qualitative analysis is made. Purposefully selected tourism blogs, websites, and Facebook pages were analyzed. The research design employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

To see the research problem from the other angle, two of the research questions- 'what are the factors that affect tourism promotion of Ethiopia? And what is the main information sources for tourists to know about Ethiopia?' Would be answered quantitatively. For this purpose, twenty seven five scale questions were prepared and given to one hundred tourists who volunteered. The researcher tried to entertain tourist respondents after they returned from all the tourism sites.

After gathering the relevant data from the respondents by using SPSS software, the results would be analyzed, and presented in mean ranking of factors that may affect tourism promotion of the country and major information sources tourists can be obtained about Ethiopia. And by inferring the figures interpretation would be given.

On one hand, seeing the problem from the consumers' (tourists) side is important; on the other hand, gathering and analyzing perceptions, feelings, descriptive contents by using quantitative methodology merely is difficult. To negotiate these contradictory facts the researcher chooses mixed methodology.

#### Sample selection methods

This research involves a total of one hundred respondent tourists. The respondents took the questionnaires at Addis after they return from their respective destination by cooperating with tour and travel agencies which settled in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia

to minimize costs and time limitations. The researcher proposes visitors of each region; each state is represented by at least ten respondents. The rest ten were taking part among the visitors of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. All of the respondents took part based on their consent and were chosen purposefully. Hopefully, it would help the researcher to incorporate different viewpoints across the regions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Qualitative analysis

#### The potential and state of web sites and social media for promoting Ethiopian tourism

As Mcphead (2011) said, the internet actually has unique benefits, but it is not the location where print documents are placed on to the web page for others to view. Rather, it is a conglomerate of traditional media and it takes different forms of those media. The function of the internet is beyond putting information on the web.

Promoting tourism through online media needs the strategy that integrates both online and offline activities. "Marketing is a full range of activities that you undertake - both on and off the web- in order to make certain that you are meeting customers' needs and that you are receiving enough in return for doing so" (Mcphead, 2011).

In an effort to identify the success factors of a website,

Park and Gretzel (2007) introduced a unified framework of commonly used website success factors emerging from the analysis and including a total of nine factors; (1) information quality, (2) ease of use, (3) responsiveness, (4) security/privacy, (5) visual appearance, (6) trust, (7) interactivity, (8) personalization, and (9) fulfillment. The following analysis is based on these success factors as an instrument.

**Ethiopian culture and tourism web:** The main problem of the ministry web is not only on inserting relevant information, but also blending of pictures with text, the quality of images, placement and formatting. Distinguishing which image should be put in what place, what tourists say about Ethiopia have to be incorporated with the latest information and current impressions. The website lists many options in its front page. Especially, some of the options in the left column are not fully functional. When you click it, there is no result at all sometimes. Ethiopia in brief, history, news and events, government, land and climate have some of the options on the left, whereas news and updates, travel advisory unique about Ethiopia and the likes are added to redundant presentation of search options, where poor and ambiguous expressions are found ([www.tourismethiopia.gov.com](http://www.tourismethiopia.gov.com)).

For the culture and tourism minister to develop its website he should work jointly with different stakeholders to present their web link and other related information about their service and operation. This could reduce extra costs of the country and make it manageable and efficient for users.

**The real Ethiopian web:** The developers of the web site say the web is designed to promote the country internationally as well as domestically as a tourist destination. The web provides an authoritative resource about Ethiopia and covers most needed information both who plan to travel to Ethiopia or already live in the country ([www.realethiopia.com](http://www.realethiopia.com)).

The web has engaging and useful contents, which are presented in the way that customers want. The initiator and developer of [realethiopia.com](http://realethiopia.com) are media A-2 in 2006, a company based in Sweden and with a branch in Addis. The web is distinguished from other websites which promotes Ethiopian tourism because it is more comprehensive and attractive.

Descriptions of easy presentation of facts and figures and inclusion of geographic sites are unique features of this website in the country. In addition to detailing explanation of history, culture, nature, religion, and tourist sites with different live and immersing pictures, it also describes the visa process, flight, taxi, tour packages, guest houses/ hotels, restaurants and line. After all it provides blank space for any recommendation and suggestion. This may increase the web sites' capacity and reliability.

**Fest Ethiopia tour web ([www.festethiopia.com](http://www.festethiopia.com)):** The [festethiopia.com](http://festethiopia.com) is a private website created in 2011 by Ethio-expedition tours. The website is seemingly designed to promote Fest Ethiopia tours and travel agency. It would have been better if the owner of the web knows that promoting the country means promoting its agency.

The biggest failure of this tour and travel agency's website is presentation of its services on the front page, instead of putting the pictures of the country's attraction endowment on its wall.

Expressions like "12 day historical tour to North Ethiopia, a 9 day northern historic rote by air, a 9 day tour of southwestern Ethiopia, a 7 day tour of southern Ethiopia and a 15 day trekking to Semen Mountain" fill the first page. Putting such cliché descriptions on the front upper part of the web highly decreases the power and quality of the web.

The website tries to read cultural, historical, archeological and natural attractions with low language skill and excretion power. All in all, the [festethiopia.com](http://festethiopia.com) is not well organized, concise, and does not have all rounded information about Ethiopia. The pictures of different endowments of the country posted are not eye-catching, well placed and structured with the text.

**Ker-Ezhi Ethiopia tour guide web ([www.kereziethiopia.com](http://www.kereziethiopia.com)):** Ker ezi was established in a year, but the web has got acceptance and recognition in such short period of time. Zelalem tour operation and car rent have been existing for eight years; they believed there is an information gap in the tourism sector so they established ker ezi Ethiopia a year ago.

Ker ezi Ethiopia distributed the first tourist guide magazine in October. They also distributed the second magazine in March. The first edition has 81 pages while the second, 122. The second is more attractive and has full information that the first, since it was printed abroad. More than twenty thousand copies were printed in English and Spanish languages and distributed in Ethiopia, America, Europe and Asian countries. Copies of the magazine were also downloaded from the company's web site.

Ker ezi Ethiopia has made a great move to promote Ethiopian tourism because it has a well-designed website and the information is provided with maps and pictures. Above all, the company invests huge sums of money for promotion and planning of strategies.

### Facebook pages for tourism promotion

Among the advantages of online promotion, measurability of strategies is the principal one. Its effectiveness can be evaluated by the numbers of blog hits, face book likes, tutor followers and the line. Based on this, an assessment has been made on how much Ethiopia uses Facebook for promoting its tourism potential compared to Kenya and

Tanzania.

When we type face book pages of Ethiopia, we find 2, 540,000 results, whereas Kenya scores 4, 380,000 results and Tanzania registered 4, 260,000 search engine results. The main reason for the difference is Kenya's and Tanzania's dominance in the establishment of a distinguished responsible Kenyan tourism board and Tanzanian tourism board respectively.

Tanzanian tourist board's (which is government organization) Facebook page registered 61, 111 likes and 1, 336 talking about the page while the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism's (which is also government organization) Facebook page scored only 370 likes and 17 talking about this.

Fortunately, community created Facebook pages, minimized the gap pages like "I am from Ethiopia" registered 31,079 Likes and 13,112 people talking about this.

## Quantitative analysis

### Factors that affect tourism promotion and major information sources for tourist about Ethiopia

The first purpose of the quantitative part of this study was to identify factors that may affect tourism promotion in Ethiopia. To do this, mean ranking was utilized and the results are presented in Table 1.

As indicated in Table 1, the result of the mean ranking of factors demonstrated that rich culture is the first factor that affects tourism promotion in Ethiopia. The second and the third factors were low price and many tourist attractions. The fourth was many heritage sites and the fifth was friendliness towards tourists while the sixth factor was many unique reminder products.

Political stability, beautiful natural landscape, interesting local way of life and good infrastructure were ranked seventh, eighth ninth and tenth correspondingly. On the other hand, the last factor was fast communication followed by good quality service good health care and nice climate respectively.

The other purpose of the quantitative analysis of this study was to identify the major information sources tourists obtain about the image of Ethiopia. To put it into effect, mean ranking of information sources was conducted and the results are presented in Table 2.

As indicated in the table, the result of the mean ranking of information sources showed that internet services, relatives and friends and education occupied from the first to the third rank serving as information sources tourists receive about the image of Ethiopia. The fourth, the fifth and the sixth information source were newspaper real experience of Ethiopia and travel guide books respectively.

Magazines, television and world travel fairs constituted seventh, eighth and ninth information source for tourists.

On the other hand, the least informative source ranked from the bottom three were tourism promotion of Ethiopia, travel agents and brochures respectively.

## Interpretation of results

As it is known, Ethiopia hosts more than eighty nations and nationalities. Thus they have their own folk belief, folk art and folk customs. In addition to this, the existence of Christianity and Muslim had been a long history and contribute a lot to the country's rich culture. That is why respondents rank it first to promote Ethiopian tourism to the rest of the world. It is obvious that tourists are attracted by the cost of living in the country to be visited. Ethiopia, according to the mean ranking of the results, attracted a number of tourists because of the low price of living. The endowment of the country with many natural and historical tourist attractions staged as a third factor to promote the country as a tourist destination. As per the respondents result shown, friendly Ethiopian people were preferable or comfortable for them. Next to the existence of many world heritage sites, cultural reminders have also significant role in promoting Ethiopia to the rest of the world. The relative prevalence of peace in the country is said to be satisfactory.

The mean ranking of tourist respondents further showed that beautiful natural landscapes and interesting local way of life have insignificant contribution to promote Ethiopia as a tourist destination. The latter may be impacted by negative globalization effect (the repression of local language, culture and unique way of life).

From the result, one can say the country needs to do more on building good infrastructure, good health care centers, and provide quality services and spread fast communication networks unless merely natural and historical endowment do not make a significant change in the sector.

Though using different media to reach potential tourists in one or another way is advisable, with the growing importance of internet design, a strategy which emphasizes on it is vital. In relation to this, the mean ranking of results demonstrates that the internet plays the leading role by serving as an information source for tourists to know about Ethiopia. Tourists who have visited Ethiopia and Ethiopians who live abroad serve as the second source of information. The third information source according to the respondents result is education. Both formal and informal education provides information about different countries of the world. Moreover, subjects like history and geography naturally provide information about countries.

Newspapers, real experience of Ethiopia and travel guide books have relatively serve as an information source for tourist to perceive about Ethiopia. Magazines, television and world travel fares insignificantly serve tourists who need to know about the country. This

**Table 1.** Mean ranking of factors that affect tourism promotion in Ethiopia.

Factors	Number of respondents	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean ranking
Rich culture	100	4.375	0.540	1
Low price	100	3.975	1.074	2
Many tourist attractions	100	3.925	1.118	3
Many world heritage sites	100	3.800	1.181	4
Friendliness towards tourists	100	3.525	1.109	5
Many unique reminder products	100	3.500	1.013	6
Political stability	100	3.325	1.118	7
Beautiful natural landscape	100	3.250	1.256	8
Interesting local way of life	100	2.775	1.544	9
Good infrastructure	100	2.575	1.196	10
Nice climate	100	2.450	1.377	11
Good health care	100	1.700	0.564	12
Good quality of service	100	1.700	0.689	13
Fast communication	100	1.550	0.504	14

**Table 2.** Major information sources tourists obtain about Ethiopia.

Information sources	Number of respondents	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean ranking
Internet	100	4.350	.834	1
Relatives and friends	100	4.025	.974	2
Education	100	3.050	1.280	3
Newspapers	100	3.050	1.280	4
Real experience of Ethiopia	100	3.000	0.226	5
Travel guide books	100	2.950	1.413	6
Magazines	100	2.700	1.203	7
Television	100	2.600	1.081	8
World tour fair	100	2.575	1.129	9
Books	100	2.000	1.240	10
Brochures	100	2.000	0.906	11
Travel agents	100	1.700	0.687	12
Direct Tourism ministry Promotion about Ethiopia	100	1.625	0.628	13

emanates from a lack of promotion through the international media and the locals not having a capacity of rich tourists elsewhere in the world, because of language barriers, small area covered and other reasons.

## Conclusion

In Ethiopia, the contribution of the private sector, especially promotion by internet contributes the highest. Web site like ker ezi Ethiopia, [www.realethiopia.com](http://www.realethiopia.com), and [www.festethiopia.com](http://www.festethiopia.com) play an important role in promoting Ethiopian tourism. Ethiopian culture and tourism web as government owned page are expected to incorporate adequate information with attractive images and videos, but it is not well designed and functional like the private

ones. The effectiveness of the media promotion strategy can be evaluated by the numbers of blog hits, face book likes, tutor followers, etc. To show the gap, Ethiopian ministry of culture and tourism's face book page scored only 370 likes and 17 talking about this whole community created Facebook pages, minimized the gap pages like I am from Ethiopia registered 31,079 Likes and 13,112 people talking about this.

As respondents from culture and tourism indicted they try to promote Ethiopia in the world tour and trade fair. This promotion strategy is very expensive and ineffective because language barriers existed in culture and tourism experts, less presence of target tourists and limited span promotion time and the like. But with the convergence of media the ministry could plan strategic use of the internet to reach mass at least cost.

## Recommendations

The contribution of tourism for one's country, multidimensional development and image building have been repeatedly discussed. Especially, countries like Ethiopia are culturally diverse, have ancient heritages, fascinating natural attractions, and are endowed with a rich history. Tourism has irreplaceable role not only for economic development, but also to build up distorted images for centuries. To bring this, it needs systematic, strategic and cooperative approach of all.

How can be achieved? There is no good name or development of thinking only. To accomplish the missions and wishes all citizens of the country have to work hard and fight obstacles proactively.

Above all, the government has a huge responsibility on creating workable atmosphere, promoting the country's tourism development by formulating policies, strategies and strategic plans, and enhancing the participation of stakeholders.

In accordance with this, as seen in the analysis, culture and tourism ministry has issued a policy in 2009 but there is no officially known marketing and promotion strategy; even the policy itself has limitations: in identifying main actors of tourism resulted in problem to give responsibilities precisely, limited vision in time and estimated work to be done and less focus for other sectors though it ties with many sectors in one or another way.

Media has the insidious power in promoting, informing, entertaining as well as educating the audience. Presenting documentaries about the national geography of Ethiopia may have two or more functions. It entertains at the same time promotes the country's tourism potential. Media (especially the new media) nowadays has become the main source of information worldwide. So based on audience research, providing adequate information through media (more emphasis to the internet) with different pictures, videos and texts is vital.

The ministry of culture and tourism has failed to use media as a tool for promoting tourism to the rest of the world. As respondents from culture and tourism indicated they tried to promote Ethiopia in world trade and fairness. This promotion strategy is much expensive and less effective. This is because of the low expressive ability of promotion and marketing experts, cultural, historical heritages and attractions in different languages throughout the exhibition, less presence of target tourists and limited span of promotion time and the like. Rather with the convergence of media the ministry ought to plan strategic use of the internet to reach people at least cost.

With the coming of Africa's balance of political and economic power to Ethiopia and its capital, Addis has served as being a seat of many international organizations, including the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). To use this opportunity heavy work remains to boost benefits from conference tourism besides image building.

## Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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A person with a backpack is standing on a mountain peak, celebrating with their arms raised in the air. The background shows a clear blue sky and a vast landscape. The person is wearing a yellow shirt, dark shorts, and a watch on their left wrist. The overall scene conveys a sense of achievement and accomplishment.

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