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Full Length Research Paper

Tourism marketing challenges and new tourism product development potentials: Practices from the Amhara National Regional State World heritage sites

Yechale Mehret Geremew^{1*}, Haimanot Belay Alemayehu² and Ashenafi Tafesse Meskele¹

¹Department of Tourism Management, College of Business and Economics, University of Gondar, Ethiopia.

²Department of Marketing management, College of Business and Economics, University of Gondar, Ethiopia.

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The Amhara National Regional State undoubtedly has significant tourism potential. However, the industry remains in its infancy; unable to realize its potential due to a range of constraints including understanding difference on the concept of marketing. Therefore, the purpose of this study is designed to explore the successful and unsuccessful marketing efforts that have been utilized by the Amhara National Regional State Culture and Tourism Offices, and its potential for new tourism product development. To achieve these objectives, this study applied qualitative study design that helps to collect both descriptive and historical data. The data was collected from tourism experts who are working at Bahirdar, Lalibela, Gondar and Debarq cities, and analyzed through interpretative and descriptive account of the data. The findings of the study indicated word of mouth advertising as the most successful marketing operations, in addition the region didn't utilize internal marketing strategies to reach or influence their own customers. Similarly, even if the region has profuse tourism resources, there is no strategy to develop a new tourism product. The study also indicated potential new tourism products that can be developed, and offered to the tourism market. Finally, based on the results of the study, the Regional Culture and Tourism Bureau should understand tourism marketing as an effort that facilitate it's all round tourism operation.

Key words: Marketing, strategies, practices, new tourism product development, potentials, Amhara National Regional State Culture and Tourism Offices, Ethiopia.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, tourism is becoming one of the most important industries in terms of employment creation, and also to generate foreign exchange (UNDP, 2011). According to UNWTO (2015), international tourist arrivals hit a record of 1133 million worldwide in 2014, up from

1087 million in 2013. Similarly, many countries are beneficiary of the tourism business, and some countries economy completely depends on tourism.

The tourism industry is considered as one of the largest industries in the global economy from the aspect of

*Corresponding author. E-mail: getyechu@gmail.com +251913193114.

invested capital and the revenues of foreign currencies. This is due to the major role that tourism plays in the development of societies and countries, socially and economically. Thus, most countries focus on tourism, especially developing countries, due to its role in developing and supporting the national economy (UNWTO, 2013).

Therefore, today's tourism industry has become one of the most important factors in gross domestic product (GDP) contribution worldwide. It plays a significant role in socio-economic development of a country. It is recognized that most of the developing countries now generate economic benefits through tourism industry. In the past, the governments have been reluctant to invest in tourism development, but in this modern age the situation has changed (World Bank, 2006).

Ethiopia is considered as one of those countries whose economy can depend on the tourism sector, because it is characterized by its great diversity of tourism products. The temperate climate, natural resources, deep-rooted cultural heritages, archaeological sites and therapeutic sites give Ethiopia a competitive feature in the sector of tourism. It has beautiful sights and historical places which are able to draw the attention of international tourists. But this industry failed to grow properly because of lack of sustainable and effective tourism marketing strategies, and reluctant attitude of different stakeholders to develop the industry. Many foreigners have negative perception towards the country. They feel Ethiopia as a country of poverty, beggars and political unrest (Hossain, 1999).

In the aim of developing this sector, stakeholders must concentrate on the activation of the tourism marketing process through studying the tourism marketing mix elements because they have great importance in achieving success for the tourism sector. Even if, the regional governments have witnessed great development efforts in the tourism sector for the last decade they did not apply marketing strategy properly to reach their tourist product to the target tourists (MoCT, 2014).

Marketing has traditionally been viewed and treated more as an operational rather than strategic function in destinations. It focused on decisions related to analyzing and selecting target markets, product and brand development, promotion, and channels of distribution (Hunt and Morgan, 1995). This perhaps somewhat biased standpoint presents marketing as a task of creating, promoting and delivering goods and services to consumers and businesses (Kotler, 2003). It is generally accepted that acquiring a new customer may turn out to be considerably more expensive than building customer loyalty among firm's current customers (Kotler, 2003). This strongly speaks for the need for higher levels of customer orientation among destinations. Similarly to reward systems that base on short-term performance, short-term marketing focus may start working against longer-term market orientation and strategic intentions of a destination.

New tourism product development is the process by which the resources of a destination are shaped to meet the requirements of international and domestic customers. This covers everything from manmade facilities or attractions, to activities requiring varying levels of physical input, and organized events such as festivals and conferences (COMCEC, 2013). The creation of new products has to be oriented toward specific markets and specific targets, to be able to offer the adequate products to fulfill their needs and expectations and, therefore promote the creation of value within a tourism destination (Masip, 2006).

Tourism product development can be understood in many ways: at one extreme, it can be seen as embracing all elements with which the visitor to a destination comes into contact, including infrastructure, the service personnel, places of lodging, attractions and activities, facilities and amenities; while, at the other extreme, tourism product development can be defined as comprising only those attractions, activities and facilities that are specifically provided for the visitors. What is clear is that without the infrastructure to support the development of the attractions tourists wants to see and activities they want to do on their visit, tourism product development will not fully succeed (UNWTO, 2015).

In today's saturated markets, customers look for experience rather than destination driven products. Hence, in the future it will be important to create a rewarding tourism experience through innovation and product development instead of offering singular tourism elements (OECD, 2004). So in order to make sustain and keep the tourists number increase, countries should develop and offer a diverse tourism products and experiences along the existing products. New tourism product development improves the profitability of tourism businesses by increasing the number of products and services available for tourists – as well as the number of visits, length of stay and spending by individual visitors.

Statement of the problem

Tourism is a very competitive industry in nature, and the travelers have a wide range of options and gives attention for those which are good value for money. Inadequate quality infrastructure, uncompetitive rates, indifferent or product with poor quality, complexity in getting access to information on travel and tourist destinations and unskilled service providers have really negative effect on the competitiveness of the tourism destinations (Kotler et al., 2010).

However, tourism marketing literatures typically contain a small portion on destination marketing, most of these states that a destination is a product and thus should be marketed as any other product (Middleton, 2000; Jefferson and Lickorish, 1991; Teare et al., 1994). But is this really true? At a macro level, this view is applicable,

as any marketing approach will be helpful to the promotion of a specific region. However, it is not as simple as that. A destination is much more complicated to manage than any other operation, because destination marketers are not only confronted with tourism's well known particularities of intangibility and inseparability but they have also to deal with a number of different actors that are independent operators in their own right.

Currently, marketing efforts are extremely more important than production and sales, the function of marketing is vital in the tourism and hospitality industry. Accordingly, if a country has an adequate amount of facilities and possess potential of tourism but does not think about the marketing techniques and the introduction of this desirability in its programs, doubtlessly that country will not be doing well in growing and developing its tourism industry. Similarly, due to the lack of marketing strategy, the position of this industry in the developing countries is paler than before (Lamso et al., 2013). However, marketing's contribution to travel and tourism has been undervalued by both policy makers and practitioners, leading to a misunderstanding of the nature and value of the marketing discipline for the travel and tourism industry in general (Riege and Perry, 2004).

In addition to, having eleven world heritage sites, there are many positive opportunities that exist for tourism product development in Ethiopia. The majority of current tourism products of Ethiopia are, primarily, the cultural and historical, environmental and wildlife tourism resources that have enormous potential to contribute to ongoing tourism growth for Ethiopia (NBSAP, 2004). A major challenge is to recognize these potential tourism products whilst structuring and managing tourism development to the best benefit of Ethiopia, and its people for the long-term. Moreover, Biazen (2010) in his study of, Ethiopia as a tourist destination, state that many tourists who come to Ethiopia have very little information about the country's tourism resource which does not coincide with Ethiopian tourism potential on reality. The researchers also state that there is poor operation in marketing what Ethiopia really has because of this, and related problems Ethiopian tourism stakeholders fail to attract market to different tourism resources.

The Amhara National Regional State, home of age-old monuments and other heritages situated on the "Historic Route" has the Lion's Share of the country's tourist attractions. Three of the seven world heritage sites of Ethiopia (the medieval castles of Gondar, the Simien Mountains National Park and the Rock Hewn Churches of Lalibela, that is, one of the eight wonders of the world) are housed here. The thunderous Blue Nile Falls, Ethiopia's largest lake, Lake Tana dotted with island monasteries, the endemic wild lives like Walia Ibex, Gelada Baboon, Simien Fox, etc., still adorn this gracious region (ANRSCTB, 2011). Even though the region has eye catching nature and cultural endowments, these by themselves are not enough to bring change in the life of the people around. The resource potentials should be

identified and/or they have to be developed to actual products which can attract tourists and generate revenue. The effort to diversify products is an issue which urge due attention in many newly arising destinations in the region (ANRSCTB, 2015).

A painful example stated that Ethiopian tourism destinations are able to attract fewer tourists than similar neighboring destinations, particularly Kenya's destinations, which attracts many more times than tourist arrivals as Ethiopia does (Melaku, 2010). As recognized in national biodiversity strategy action plan (2004), although the country has many positive opportunities, lack of marketing strategy is among the factors which hold back the country from using its abundance of tourism products to compete as a tourism destination with other east African countries.

Therefore, the problem of the current study is; despite the fact that Ethiopia possesses varied touristic resources which form the necessary raw material for the Ethiopian touristic product and a huge cultural and natural heritages which make up a large part of tourism industry; Ethiopia hasn't got its share of the worldwide receipts for international tourism, which differ the number of tourists visiting Ethiopia and other neighboring countries. As one of the great service sectors of the 21st century economy, and after long decades of growth, nationally, tourism is still in its infancy. The researchers are particularly confident that Ethiopian tourism sector is firmly anchored to some of the world's most unique and iconic assets. In a world of considerable uncertainty, the researchers can be absolutely sure that tourism will continue to be a vitally important pillar of Ethiopia's economy, and it is more important because of its unique ability to distribute benefits to even the most remote communities (MoCT, 2014).

The importance of marketing is very crucial to a certain tourist destination. Without it, there is little chance for a country to attract enough visitors. Despite the very tight budget for marketing, Ethiopia has been engaged in various marketing efforts such as advertising, trade fairs, printed materials and internet based campaigns. It is true that the major goal of marketing in the tourism industry is to impact and attract as many tourists as possible. Therefore, assessing new tourism products and measuring the tourism marketing effectiveness is very important since it is significantly related to customer loyalty, repeat visitation, and positive social communication (World Bank, 2006).

Above all, the study attempts to analyze the effectiveness of tourism marketing strategy and assess new tourism product development in Ethiopia and the Amhara National Regional State particularly. Even the studies that have been made are sketchy and isolated; they shed very little light on the subject matter. In order to promote the development of an appropriate kind of tourism marketing strategy that prevents or minimizes socio-cultural and environmental degradation, and maximizes the economic benefits, more in-depth studies are needed for an understanding and smooth running of

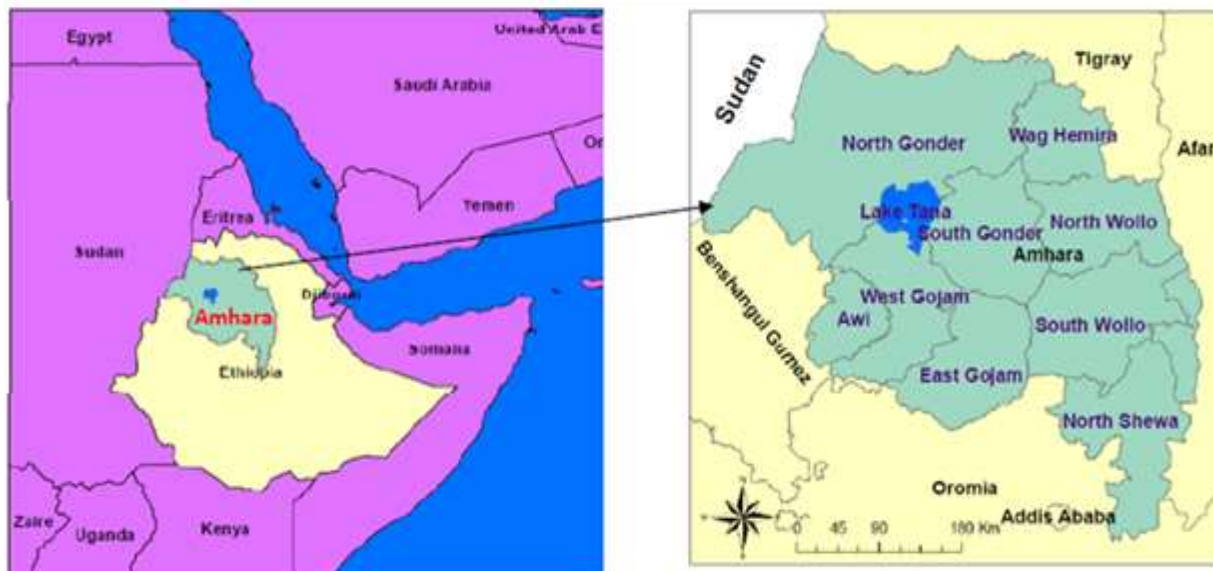


Figure 1. Map of Amhara national regional state and Ethiopia.

the tourism industry with other sectors. Therefore, the researchers strongly believe that there is a huge gap of data that can be used as a measure or indicator of the tourism marketing effectiveness, and new tourism product development from the perspective of the stakeholders.

Objective of the study

The main objective of the study is to analyze the Tourism Marketing and New Tourism Product Development Practices of the Amhara National Regional State Culture and Tourism Offices.

In order to handle the research questions and realize the general objective stated earlier, the study tried to deal with the following six specific objectives:

1. To evaluate the successful tourism marketing operations of the Amhara national regional state culture and tourism offices.
2. To review unsuccessful tourism marketing operations of the Amhara national regional state culture and Tourism offices.
3. To identify the new potential tourism products that can be developed in and around the Amhara National Regional State world heritage sites.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Description of the study area

Ethiopia, a mosaic of people and cultures, encyclopedia of geology, the cradle of mankind and civilization, is found in the Eastern part of Africa equidistant between the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer.

The country has nine regions, of these regions the Amhara National Regional State, hosting age-old monuments and other heritages situated on the "Historic Route" has the Lion's Share of the country's tourist attractions. Four of the eleven world heritage sites of Ethiopia (the medieval castles of Gondar, the Simien Mountains National Park, the Rock Hewn Churches of Lalibela that is, one of the eight wonders of the world and Meskel, 'the finding of the true cross) are housed here. The thunderous Blue Nile Falls, Ethiopia's largest lake, Lake Tana dotted with island monasteries, the endemic wild lives like Walia Ibex, Gelada Baboon, Simien Fox etc. still adorn this gracious region.

The climate of the region that is mainly controlled by altitudinal factors rather than latitude generally falls under two broad categories; that is, the sunny season which prevails October through May and the rainy (wet) season runs from June to September. The mean annual temperature and rainfall of the region vary between 7 to 30°C and 400 to 2000mm (Figure 1).

Research design

The methodological approach for this study was described as a case study of the Amhara National Regional State Culture and Tourism Offices within the qualitative domain. This research is viewed as being a qualitative research report because qualitative research is typically rich with detail and insights into participants' experiences of the world. Stake (1978) said that qualitative studies may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience, and thus more meaningful. Qualitative data can more fully describe a phenomenon.

In this study, data in the form of e participants' own words and direct quotations from documents were used to convey what the researchers had learned. According to Patton (2002), the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researchers than with sample size.

In an attempt to understand the marketing operations of the regional offices, descriptive and narrative marketing data was collected from the regional offices' personnel in order to answer the

Table 1. Number of region organized.

S/N	Destinations	No. of FGDs
1	Bahir Dar	3
2	Lalibela	1
3	Gondar	2
4	Dabark	1
Total		7

predetermined questions. Narrative and phenomenological strategies of inquiry through open-ended data collection were used in an attempt to identify any developing themes as described by Creswell (2003).

Population, sampling technique and size

The population of the study was the Amhara national regional state culture and tourism offices' experts in Bahir Dar, Lalibela, Gondar and Debarok which are considered as the most tourist hubs of the region. The experts were purposively selected based on their work experience, position and educational background on the issue, in order to get in depth information about the subject. To assure generalize-ability, data was collected from seven focus group discussion (FGD and fifteen interviews based on the principle of data saturation.

Data collection Instruments

To properly address each objective, a qualitative data collection instrument such as FGD, interview and document consultation were developed.

Key informant interview

Individual discussions with key senior experts, and policy and decision makers from the Amhara National Regional State Culture and Tourism offices at each destinations, particularly, at Bahir Dar, Lalibela, Gondar and Debarok was conducted in order to elaborate on the challenges being faced. Accordingly, three, four, six, and two experts were interviewed in the study at Lalibela, Gondar, Bahir Dar, and Debarok respectively. Based on data saturation principles, a total of fifteen (15) interviewees were conducted. All interviews were recorded by digital voice recorder after requesting their consent and notes were also taken throughout the course of the interview.

Focus group discussion (FGD)

A total of seven (7) joint discussions with six members of senior experts were conducted in order to identify the area of focus and elaborate on the challenges being faced. Therefore, at each top four destination of the region (Bahir Dar, Gondar, Lalibela and Debarok) the following numbers of FGD were organized (Table 1). Each group discussion pool of items (guides) was organized based on the major objectives of the study. All group discussions were recorded by digital voice recorder, and notes also taken throughout the course of the group discussion. To assure generalize-ability, data was collected from the maximum recommended number of samples based on the principle of data saturation and the heterogeneity/homogeneity of the participants was considered.

Document consultation

Official documents, studies and papers comprehensively describing the linkage between new tourism product development, tourism marketing and sustainable development were reviewed. These documents included archival researches from books, proclamations, regulations, journals, magazines, proceedings, pamphlets, manuals, bulletins, newspapers, reports, articles, internet materials and individual writing exercises related to the study.

Data analysis procedure

After the data have been collected, it is accompanied by proper way of analysis in order to interpret and draw conclusion from the mass of collected data. The interpretation of the qualitative data was a thematic analysis approach. In this case, the interview and focus group discussion results were repeatedly and thoroughly read so as to gain the major themes of each respondent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis and discussion of data as a part of scientific methodology of research process are fundamental to reach some conclusion. Therefore, this chapter deals with the interpretation and discussion of data collected from senior experts through interview and focus group discussion.

Characteristics of respondents

Furthermore, structured interview was held with fifteen senior experts who are working for more than five years in the tourism industry, and those who have a direct or indirect attachment on the marketing and product development departments of the offices. Similarly, seven focus group discussions with six senior experts averagely in each FGD that counts to forty two respondents have participated. All participants have a minimum of first degree and five years of relevant experience in the office. This is important to obtain data with regard to issues that required more clarification. In doing so, the characteristics of respondents, academic qualification and years of experience is based on the responses to the background data in the first part of the interview, and FGD obtained from fifty seven (57) experts (fifteen from interviewees and forty two from FGD participants).

Successful marketing operations of the region

Can successful marketing operations of the Amhara National Regional State be identified? This research question is supported by numerous interview questions that primarily deal within the promotional and process areas of the marketing plan component. It is desirable that any positive examples may be adapted, adopted, and utilized by other destinations in order to strengthen

their own unique marketing efforts. The Public Relation and Promotion Core Processing Owner of the regional bureau said,

"Good marketing is always about both identifying and providing what customers want and then communicating those benefits effectively. Competition is usually the key stimulus to better marketing"

According to, McDonald and Keegan (2002), the role of marketing is to ensure

1. That the company focuses on the total environments of the business, markets, competition, customers, government, and trends; and
2. That it uses all knowledge and experience to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with its customers.

Connor (2004) added that good marketing begins within an organization and relies on collaboration. Everyone in the destination should be held responsible for advancing the mission. Everyone markets, everyone recruits, everyone fundraises and everyone at the destination is an ambassador. Great marketing, like effective learning, occurs when there is a structure and expectation for collaboration and cross-fertilization.

Therefore, good marketing in the business world is usually measured in financial terms, and profit and loss statements. The regional culture and tourism offices are usually not measured in the same manner, but they must remain financially viable in order to maintain their operations and continue their mission. A question was posed to participants in order to determine if their destination is able to maintain profitable operations. Encouragingly, experts answered this question from two different perspectives. From the governments marketing view, destinations are operating within a budget deficit whereas the private stakeholders are collecting the highest profit from these destinations. One study participant shared this viewpoint,

"Marketing is an overall strategy to promote the mission of the destinations and its programs to the community. The heart of marketing our destinations is the integrity of aligning our mission, values, philosophy, policies, and program. Visitors who trust the destination to deliver what is promised will naturally spread the word." He also added, "Marketing is accomplished in a variety of ways. For example, at any time opinion leaders should go to different communities and market the destination. Their appearance, attentiveness, manners, and community service builds the destinations' reputation. Our promotional materials should market the destinations, its mission, values, philosophy, and programs. However, most of the promotional materials are not reviewed each year for accuracy and alignment, and even the website is not updated to reflect the actual practices of the regional bureau's effort."

According to the public relation and promotional officers of the regional offices, it is very difficult to identify the successful and failed promotional strategy of the bureau because of documentation problems. However, majority of these experts' identified that word of mouth advertising, billboards for the local visitors, trade fairs, festivals and culture based carnivals, signage and the web page promotions via the official web sites of the destinations and social media are the strongest and successful marketing tools for the regional destinations. Similarly, television is the most popular source of information for local visitors and internet is the main source of information for foreign visitors who come to visit the destinations.

Failed marketing strategies of the region

The research question explored within this study tries to identify if marketing strategies can be identified that have failed or not. The logic behind this area of study is to help other destinations avoid similar pitfalls in their marketing operations. Names of informants have been intentionally withheld to protect individuals who have confided potentially embarrassing office information. The opinions expressed throughout this report are solely those of the study participant, and are only meant to represent individual cases unless noted otherwise. One participant shared in regards to her office,

"Radio is too expensive nowadays and it yields very small results."

Another study respondent stated,

"I would say our newspaper advertisements do not reap the benefits we would like, compared to the cost of running the advertising." One respondent from Gondar city culture and tourism office admitted, "Much of our advertisement campaigns have failed and he added that we have tried many different marketing approaches, but we have never really monitored our efforts for success"

This is probably very poor marketing, isn't it? Some destinations provide only printed promotional materials like brochures, leaflets, newsletters and flyers to visitors in hopes that the visitors would pass them out and promote their destinations. However, most of the visitors do not read the materials even themselves. This marketing effort turned out to be quite costly, and it was an unsuccessful venture." In addition to these, experts do not have a clear understanding about the importance, difference and similarity of marketing mix strategies out of the classical components (People, Possibilities, Partnering and Process).

New tourism product development of the region

The range and scope of the tourism product offer is what

attracts tourists to a destination. However, the development of tourism products forms part of a large, inter related and continuing process and should not be considered in isolation. A destination's overall development policy will lead to strategic development priorities and principles for the various economic and social sectors, one of which will be tourism.

The identification of tourism product development opportunities in line with these strategies will be determined through the understanding of tourist market trends and tastes through market research; and the realization of the opportunities will require capital investment and marketing. Indeed, the link between the market and the product demand and supply is fundamental. There cannot be one without the other. Given that the great majority of prospective tourists have not previously visited the destination, targeted and effective marketing is vital for tourism destinations and the providers of their tourism products (UNWTO, 2015). According to the regional culture and tourism bureau public relation and promotion officer,

"Tourism product in a destination is an amalgam of many experiences as far as the tourist is concerned. It is not just the hotel stayed in, the places, museums, parks, restaurants, shops visited, or the journey to and from the destination. It is all of these things, and more. When planning new tourism product developments in the region, it is necessary to see how the ideas fit with the existing product."

When the researchers asked the question of potential tourism product development areas of the regional destinations, one expert at Gondar city culture and tourism office explained,

"The range of attractions and activities that fall under the umbrella term of tourism product development covers the experiential (festivals, activities, community, event, dining and entertainment, shopping, safety, service), emotional (human, cultural and historic resources, hospitality) and physical (infrastructure, natural resources, accommodation, restaurants) elements. Therefore, which potential elements you need to talk with? Whatever you name it, the regional destinations have it in all the three spheres of product development potentials."

Therefore, the researchers preferred to name the major tourism product development potentials of the regional destinations as per the experts here under.

Indigenous knowledge practices and language of the region

Ethiopia as a country and the Amhara National Regional State particularly are very rich in different indigenous

knowledge practices like architecture, medicine, agriculture and cottage industry. One respondent from the regional bureau stated,

"In Gondar and around, farmers shift their barn from one farmland to another to fertilize the land, the people in Wolqite area are very skilled in horn-works, in the rural community of the region is common for the residents to build their houses from stone, mud and ash, the rock-hewn churches of Lalibella, and the castles in Gondar are some of the standing monuments of civilization in ancient Ethiopia regarding architecture, and with regard to metal works, what is today known as annealing and hardening is very common with every parts of the regional traditional blacksmith; to soften a work piece they put it in a fire until it becomes red - hot and air cool it and to harden a work piece they put it in the fire until it gets red-hot and immediately immerses it in cold water and withdraws it."

Other expert added,

"In Gondar, woleka village, people are very famous in handcraft activities and in rural parts of the region, if someone is struck by lightning, the survivor will be immediately brought into contact with moist ground or dung. This practice is substantiated by static electricity theory though the rural people are unable to explain it and always make me surprise"

The other potential tourism product of the regional destinations can be the traditional medicinal and painting practices. A respondent at Gondar City culture and tourism office elucidated,

"Ethiopian medicinal and painting texts were first written in the classical language, Ge'ez, and later in the modern vernacular, Amharic. Such texts are kept not in churches or monasteries but with medical and painting practitioners, who are less able to preserve them for posterity. Traditional medicinal and painting texts and practices of the region tended to be secret, and therefore, unlike modern practices, are not subject to independent testing. They are more holistic than modern medical and painting works. For example, church painter artists were not allowed to paint pictures having a secular theme; and being tied to a particular church or monastery, neither could they simply paint pictures for private sale." He added, "Even we have tried many times, at office level, to deal with the traditional magicians, medicine and painting practitioners at Gondar and its environs to give a performance place and make them to contribute for the city's tourism but they are not volunteer to work with such environment." He added about the language of the country, "Since we are using a unique language of our own alphabetic system; there are many symbolic terms that are used in naming things around and using them in communication which is difficult and pleasant for the

tourists. This common pattern of communication has its own sound system. As we are dealing with a written text we might not observe these sound systems, but might be possible to identify the symbols. This and others can be considered as a potential tourism resource of the region”

Religious and cultural festivals of the region

It is very well known that Ethiopia is a country of God fearing people. Therefore, religion plays an important part of life in the Amhara National Regional State like other parts of the country. The Orthodox Tewahedo Church ceremonies are very unique and impressive; especially Timket and Meskel festivals which provide colorful ceremonies and celebrations. People dress in traditional costume and celebrate festivals across the region with colorful unique ceremonies such as Enkutatash (New Year), Meskel (Finding of the True Cross), Ledet (Christmas), Timket (Epiphany) and Fasika (Easter). Among these Christian festivities, Timket (Epiphany) and Ledet (Christmas) have many visitors in the regional destinations of Gondar and Lalibela respectively. Similarly, the Islamic tradition also celebrates religious festivals in the regional state. Keeping these in mind, the researchers raised questions for the respondents to identify the potential religious tourism products that can be developed.

Enkutatash (Ethiopian New Year)

A respondent at Gondar City culture and tourism office articulated,

“September 11 is both New Year’s Day and the Feast of St John the Baptist. The day is called Enkutatash meaning the ‘gift of Jewels’. When the famous Queen of Sheba returned from her expensive journey to visit King Solomon in Jerusalem, her chiefs welcomed her back by replenishing her treasury with enku, or jewels. The spring festival has been celebrated since these early times and as the rains come to their abrupt end, dancing and singing can be heard at every village in the green countryside. The sun comes out to shine all day long creating an atmosphere of dazzling clarity and fresh clean air. The highlands turn to gold as the Meskal daisies burst out in their entire splendor. The children, clad in brand-new clothes, dance through the villages giving bouquets of flowers and painted pictures to each household. Therefore, in my understanding, this can be counted as one of the biggest resources that the region has it.”

Meskel (Finding of the true cross)

Meskel is one of the eleven UNESCO World Heritages

that the country has. Even if it is registered as a world heritage, the Amhara National Regional State is not benefited from its contribution for the tourism industry like Timiket festivity. The feast is celebrated in Ethiopia on September 17 Ethiopian calendar (September 27 Gregorian calendar). A respondent at the regional bureau said,

“The celebration of Meskel signifies the presence of the True Cross at Mountain of Gishen Mariam monastery, which is one of the tourism resources of the region, and also symbolizes the events carried out by Empress Helena.” Experts at Gondar city stated, *“According to tradition, Empress Helena lit incense and prayed for assistance to guide her. The smoke drifted towards the direction of the buried cross. She dug and found three crosses; one of them was the True Cross used to crucify Jesus Christ. Empress Helena then gave a piece of the True Cross to all churches, including the Ethiopian Church. This piece was then brought to Ethiopia”*

According to the Ethiopian legend, when people get close to the piece of the True Cross it made them naked by its powerful light. Because of this, a decision was made to bury it at the mountain of Gishen Mariam Monastery at Wollo in the Amhara National Regional State and this festivity can be one of the real tourism products of the region.

Ledet (Christmas)

It falls on December 29 of Ethiopian calendar (January 7 Gregorian calendar). From the FGD conducted at Bahir Dar a respondent stated,

“This is one of the potential resources that the region has it but do not use it except at Lalibela. The festival is celebrated after forty three days fasting known as Tsome Gahad (Advent), with a spectacular procession, which begins at 6:00 am and lasts until 9:00 am. After the colorful mass service, people go home to break the fast with the meat of chicken or lamb or beef accompanied with injera and the traditional drinks (that is, tella or tej)”

In addition to this, there are different Christian festivities that are celebrated from January to March (like Asteryo Mariam, feast of St. Mary) which can be the real tourism resource of the regional destinations.

Fasika (Easter)

It is celebrated after fifty five days severe Lent fasting (Hudade or Abye Tsome). Orthodox Tewahedo Christians do not eat meat and dairy products for the whole fifty five days. Vegetarian meals such as lentils,

ground split peas, grains, fruit and varieties of vegetable stew accompanied by injera and/or bread are only eaten on these days. The first meal of the day is taken after 3:00 am (9:00 in the afternoon Ethiopian time) during the fasting days, except Saturdays and Sundays, where a meal is allowed after the morning service. A respondent from the FGD discussion at Gondar said,

“This is also one of the colorful Christian festivity in the region but is more colorful at Lalibela. Therefore, other destinations of the region should take the good lessons from it in order to attract more visitors.”

He explained about the festival,

“On Easter eve people go to church and celebrate with candles which are lit during a colorful Easter mass service which begins at about 6:00 pm (12 o'clock in the evening Ethiopian time) and ends at about 2:00 am (8:00 after mid-night Ethiopian time). Everyone goes home to break the fast with the meat of chicken or lamb, slaughtered the previous night after 6:00 pm, accompanied with injera and traditional drinks (that is, tella or tej). Like Christmas, Easter is also a day of family re-union, an expression of good wishes with exchange of gifts (lamb, goat or loaf of bread)”.

Coffee ceremony practices of the region

The coffee ceremony is an essential of daily life for most Ethiopians. As per the FGD discussions held with experts at Bahir Dar and Gondar city, coffee is more than just a coffee break, this ritual is an historic tradition with much symbolism. Once, twice and sometimes even three times a day, the senior woman in an Ethiopian household invites the family and neighbors for *buna* (coffee).

This is a quality time for Ethiopians when they relax together and catch up with what has been happening. A little stool is brought for the person performing the ceremony to sit on. A low table called a *rekebot* is produced to hold the small handle less cups, *sini*. A small ceremonial carpet is spread out on the floor, and fresh long green grass, *qetima* is sprinkled around to mark out the sacred space for the ritual. Fragrant flowers adorn the area on special occasions. The green beans must be roasted either over an open fire or on small charcoal burner. They are placed on a *baret metad* (roasting plate) and moved around meticulously to ensure an even roast.

The beans are then crushed with *mukecha* and *zenezena* (mortar and pestle) into fine grains ready to be infused in the boiling water of the *Jibuna*, the black clay coffee pot. At the right boiling point the pot is taken from the heat and placed in the *matot* (its holder), allowing the grounds to settle. *Itan* (incense – usually frankincense) is taken from the *moodai* (incense container) and is placed on the *girira* (a little clay incense burner) containing red-hot charcoal.

Whereas, in most places of the Amhara National Regional State, it is believed that the smoke of the incense will carry out any bad spirits that are in the home. The frankincense evokes memories of formal religious rites and elevates the ceremony to the sacred position it holds in the people's life. *Yebuna kourse* (a snack to accompany the coffee – usually popcorn, bread or a mixture of roasted barley, peanuts and seed known as *kolo*) has been made and is served on a *mesopwerk* (a small table made of straw). A young child is summoned to stand by, ready to bring a cup of coffee to the eldest in the room and then the guests, as well as to all the others. From a height of about one foot, the person performing the ceremony gracefully pours a thin stream of coffee into each little cup without stopping. Doing this without spilling requires years of practice. Sugar may be added, or in the countryside salt. Holding the hot little cup requires great dexterity.

The first round of the coffee ceremony, in which the strongest coffee is served, is called *Abol*. Once this round is finished, more water is added to the *Jibuna* and another brew is made of the same grounds. This round is called *Hueletagna* or *Berka*, in Amharic. Finally, in an unhurried manner; the whole process is repeated for *Sostagna* or *Tona* in Amharic, the final round. Participants at this leisurely social event have invariably become more relaxed and comfortable. There is a great deal of laughing, joking, storytelling and gossip. Friendships are made; people bond and the human warmth that Ethiopians value highly is freely expressed. Whether sitting silently or being vociferous the participants expect to undergo a transformation of the spirit that will send them away feeling happy. Understanding this socio cultural and economic value of coffee ceremony, many people are engaged in this activity at the regional destinations. Therefore, coffee ceremony can serve as one means of increase the length of the tourists stay at the destinations.

Cultural food and beverage practices of the region

In the Amhara National Regional State, the various cultural foods and beverages can be considered as additional means of entertainment for the specific destinations. According to FGD respondents, the cultural foods and beverages processing practices can generally be categorized into traditional fermentation and instant preparation. The cultural foods such as *Injera*, *Awaze*, *Siljo*, and *Qochqocha (Datta)*; and beverages like *Tella*, *Borde*, *Shamita*, *Tej* and *Katikala* are produced through traditional fermentation while local foods such as *Kollo*, *Nifro*, *Besso* and beverages like *Birz* are instantly produced.

Age-old Indigenous knowledge has been used for generations without sufficient scientific interventions of preparing these. This traditional process is to be blamed for time and energy consumption, impact on human

health and environment. Almost all traditional food and beverage processing practices are done by women. Most of the traditional practices are extremely tedious, unhygienic, one-at-a-time/piece-by-piece process and are still at their archaic stage. For instance, *Tella*, *Borde*, *Shamita*, *Tej* and *Katikala* making are tedious which most Ethiopian women practice to support their household life. Now it is very common to get commercial *Injera*, *Dabbo*, *Kollo*, *Yebekollo Tibs*, *Yebekollo Kikil*, *Yedinich Kikil* than ever before.

Injera

It is most of the time expressed as Ethiopian bread and can be made from *teff*, corn and barley as per the availability of the cereal products at each household level. The respondents addressed that the process of *injera* making can be an additional entertainment for the tourists. The flour is mixed with water to form dough and kneaded by hand. A leaven (*ersho*) is added.

The leaven can be obtained in different ways, for example, a small amount of the previous *enjera* dough may be saved for the next dough or the bowl may be left uncleaned after the dough is made and the small quantity left will be sufficient for leavening. If no *enjera* leaven is available, one can use the local beer (*tella*). It is allowed to ferment for 1 to 5 days. Most often 3 days of fermentation are allowed, but, if time is scarce, the dough is fermented for only 1 or 2 days.

The long-fermented *enjera* will give a better sourer taste and look nicer. During the fermentation period a top layer consisting of mould and a yellow liquid appears. The custom is to remove this in order to get an *enjera* with a nice texture. A small part of the dough is added to boiling water and this mixture is stirred until it starts to boil again, after which the whole mixture (called *absit*) is added to the *enjera* dough. This gives the dough the right fermentation before baking starts. The *mitad* is heated and cleaned with a piece of cloth. The pan is greased with kale and rape seeds. The dough is put on the pan in a circular shape, forming a thin cake, which is first baked without a cover. After that the cover is put on and the bread is baked on one side. The bread is removed from the fire with the help of a straw plate and allowed to cool down. After the baking is finished, some rape seeds are put on the *mitad* until the next time for baking. Therefore, this process can be taken as a source of entertainment for tourists at the destinations.

Tella (local beer)

The beverage for weekdays is the local beer (*tella*) and for feasts honey wine (*tejj*). It is polite to serve the glass so full that it overflows, and also to serve a second glass as soon as the first is finished. *Tella* is made of different cereals.

Finger millet and corn are the most popular, but in some areas barley or sorghum can be used. The way of preparing *tella* differs as between the ethnic groups and depends on tradition and the economic situation. The clay container (*insera*) is washed with *grawa* and water several times and after that smoked with wood from *weyra*, and/or *tinjute*, in order to get it as clean as possible.

Germinated grains of barley, corn or wheat (*bekef*), bought in the local market or prepared at home, are dried and milled. *Gesho* (local hops), is available dried in the local market. The *gesho* is dried again in the sun and after that pounded. The leaves are separated from the stems, which need a longer time to dry. The ground *gesho* leaves are placed in a clay container with water and left to ferment. Some of the grains intended for *tella* preparation are toasted and milled, and then mixed with water and baked on the *mitad*. This *kita*, broken into small pieces, part of the milled *bekef* and the pounded *gesho* stems are added to the water mixture and allowed to ferment.

The rest of the flour is toasted on the *mitad*, sprinkled with water and toasted until dark brown. This mixture *enkuro*, the rest of the germinated grains (*bekef*), some *gesho*, and water are added to the container. The mixture is kept covered overnight, after which more water is added and the container is kept sealed for days, when the beverage is ready. Therefore, high-quality *tella* is made with a relatively small quantity of water. Similarly, *Kerari*, *filtered tella Korefe Shamit* are prepared more or less with analogous approach.

Tejj (honey wine)

It is a beverage mainly used for great feasts, such as weddings and the breaking of fasts. It is a prestige beverage, and more expensive than the local beer. The most appreciated honey type is found in the Amhara national regional state tourist destination sites. The process of the wine is, at the first time the honey should be mixed with water and kept covered for days. Then, the wax and foreign particles are removed by sieving, and the mixture is put in a clean clay container (*insera*). *Gesho* stems are heated on the *mitad* and added to the mixture, which is left to ferment in a closed container for days.

Araqe

It is a distilled beverage. Ground *gesho* leaves and water are kept for days and after that a *kita* made of corn or other cereals and germinated barley or wheat is added. The mixture is allowed to ferment for days and then distilled. In the villages distillation is carried out with primitive equipments made of gourds and wood. The *araqe* can be redistilled and will then have higher alcohol

content. For this reason, the cultural foods and beverages can serve as source of entertainment for tourists and this make the tourists stay more enjoyable at the destination.

Cultural game practices of the region

As per the respondents of the regional culture and tourism bureau, the people of the Amhara national regional state has various ways by which they entertained themselves. These pastimes include but are not limited to *feres gugis* (horse racing), *dulamiktosh* (somewhat similar to fencing), *gibigb* (wrestling), *wana* (swimming), *gena* (hokey), *senterej* (Ethiopian chess), and *gebta* (Mancala). Except for *senterej* and *gebta* which are board games where one's ability as a tactician and strategist are tested, the rest of the games are physically demanding and require a fine skill and agility to partake in them. *Senterej* and *Gebta* have another unique aspect in that both are played only among peers that entail the same class, gender and age difference and affiliation specifically at the rural parts of the region.

Gena as its name implies, is a game played during Christmas. It is one of the oldest and most popular outdoor sports, predating the introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia. Some trace the name of the game, *gena*, to the Geez word, *ge'na*, which in turn was allegedly derived from the Greek word, *genos*, meaning birth. Legend has it that shepherds were playing *gena* when angles announced the birth of Christ. Thus, it is always played during Christmas season to commemorate the event. Another Ethiopian legend, however, associates *gena* with the beheading of John the Baptist.

The *qur*, sometimes also referred to as *rur*, which is made of ball shaped solid wood, symbolizing John's head, with which his executioners played. Because of its religious background and annual appearance, the game is played by anyone who is interested regardless of class—hence the adage, (*begana chewata ayqotum geta*). The respondents added that the master will not get angry in a game of *gena* (if he was mistakenly hit).

The rest of the games such as *feres gugis*, *dulamiktosh*, and *gibigb* are, more or less, related to and reflections of the warrior traditions of the regional people. All involve the skillful handling of weapons such as *dula* (stick), *gorade* (sword), *tor* (spear) that also includes hand-to-hand combat. The experts said except for *feres-gugis*, there are no written records of the aforementioned games. The latter, however, appears to be the most favorite sport among the regional people.

Azmaris performances of the region

According to the respondents of this study, besides the cultural performances of the destinations' community, *Azmari* performance has a great role in the tourists stay at the destination sites. Concerning *Azmaris* history, North Gondar and North Wollo (Lasta) are mentioned to

be the origins of *Azmaris* in Ethiopia.

Currently, *Azmari* families are found in many *woredas* and districts around the Amhara national regional state. These include *Gondar Zuria Woreda – Burbuax* and *sheha Gomenge* with a significant number and in *Wegera – Tiwa Giyorgis, Guntir Abo, Gedebge* and North Woll administrative zone. There are also few *Azmairi* families at *Dembia*, west *Belesa* and *Alefa Woredas*. Furthermore, few *Azmari* families have given up the art and engaged on other occupations found in the region. *Azmari* in the regional state usually perform in local bars such as *Bunna bet*, cultural Night clubs, *Tella bet*, and *Tejj bet* where people enjoy alcoholic drinks. These are the dominant settings for *Azmari* performances.

However, festivities and rituals are also important occasions for *Azmari* musicians in the region. In Gondar, *Azmari* performances are in strong demand for celebrations such as baptisms and weddings ceremonies. The annual celebrations of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, such as *Timket, Qedes Yohannes, Gena* and *Meskel*, are the primary religious occasions for this music. On *Qedes Yohannes*, the Ethiopian New Year's Day, groups of *Azmari* travel all over the region visiting from house to house and blessing people for the coming year. Sometimes, however, they are shooed away from houses as if they were annoying beggars. *Azmari* performances can also be seen once in a while during agricultural activities such as the harvest time for *teff*.

In general, the region has numerous new tourism product development potentials like cultural games, cultural food and beverage, coffee ceremony, religious and cultural festivals, the indigenous knowledge practices, language and wedding ceremonies are some to name. In the region, Lalibela and Gondar are known for being religious and cultural activities.

Therefore, in some cases, Lalibela and Gondar cities try to bid for international events in religious and cultural themes. Yet, the themes of Lalibela, cultural, festivals only partially reflect the city's perceived image since most relate to religious. While Gondar is known by visitors as safe and friendly, it wants to create a more cultural city identity centered on partying, celebration, pleasure, sightseeing, exploration, and discovery. The themes of Gondar festivals tend to relate to entertainment, culture, and religious. These themes are parallel to the city's desire image, partly due to the major role played by Gondar municipality and church administration in organizing the events. A comparison of festival themes between these two cities shows that Lalibela festivals have culture as main theme than Gondar's. Whereas, Debarq is purely a natural attraction and Bahir Dar, and its environs are a mixture of both resources.

CONCLUSION

Marketing should not be viewed as a proud, arrogant, and boastful tool. It should be viewed as an instrument

that is capable of spreading good, powerful, and positive news throughout the region. Visitors need to know that the regional destinations offer outstanding leisure activities, employ quality experts, and provide spectacular extra-curricular opportunities. This research assesses the marketing practices and new tourism product development to promote tourism in the Amhara National Regional State tourism destinations which is found in North Western part of Ethiopia.

To this end, the findings obtained from the analysis of purposely selected experts at Bahir Dar, Gondar, Lalibela and Debarq through interview, focus group discussion and document review were exploited in order to assess the predetermined objectives. Most of the questions were open-ended to allow for the greatest possible freedom of answers and thought. Many interviews and focus group discussions were extended well over one to three hours in length. Due to the size of the topic, marketing and new tourism product development, a wide variety of topics were covered.

With regard to tourism marketing activities, word of mouth is one of the most commonly used marketing tool because it is cheap and does not require expertise, and it is recommended by different visitors of the regional resources. However, these destinations are not utilizing properly this promotional tool to promote its tourism attraction. With regard to advertising; radio and printed media were identified as the failed marketing strategies of the region whereas billboards, signage, web site and social media are some of the successful marketing strategies of the offices. Accordingly, for these destinations television is the most popular source of information for local visitors and internet is the main source of information for foreign visitors who come to visit the destinations.

The strength of the regional tourism destinations are its new tourism product development potentials and safety and security of the sites. But its effective practice and implementation of marketing strategies to take the advantage of its strength and opportunity is not promising. Mainly, because of poor marketing back up activities of experts and government strategies are less effective to create and build good image of the region in general and the specific destinations at particular.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Tourism is one of the key industries driving change in the Amhara National Regional State, and it provides multiple opportunities for economic growth and improved livelihoods of the community. Among the reasons to develop tourism, you can find the creation of jobs, regional economic development, improvement of infrastructure, increasing domestic consumption and exports diversification, cultural heritage and environmental preservation, empowerment of women, the youth and

marginalized people, amongst others. To explore these opportunities, it is essential that the region should adopt clear marketing strategies based on suitable methodologies for tourism product development. However, the role of marketing activities and new tourism product development are recognized for these destinations, there are design and implementation problems. Therefore, the study recommends the following points:

1. There should be a platform of marketing collaboration among the key stakeholders of tourism agents at the regional, national and international markets through the use of audio-visual aids, publicity materials, workshops and participation at major international trade exhibitions. The respective tourism offices and other institutions working on tourism also execute these activities up to their terrestrial limit or administration level. Furthermore, they should work with relevant stockholders at regional and national level on activities designed to execute on the attraction in their mandated sites.
2. The bureau should be better organized and run the tourism industry by well qualified experts that can strengthen its capacity to regulate the smooth functioning of the whole system and provide reliable and up to date information to visitors through short and long term trainings.
3. The regional tourism and culture bureau should be committed in order to consider tourism as a displaced rather than a supplement to any rural or urban undertaking. Therefore, the bureau should strongly remind that there is a tourism product of some type and amount in whatever endeavor one is engaged in and should take necessary measures to implement marketing strategies to encourage the promotion of positive image of tourism in the region.
4. Since tourism and hospitality industry is a labor intensive and big business, the bureau should be committed and need to pursue a market oriented new tourism product development at the destinations. Therefore, like any other product produced for the market, tourism product needs to be profitable. To be profitable its production should be authentic to the specific destinations.
5. Trade fairs, festivals, culture based carnivals and other events should be prepared by concerned bodies in order to attract as many tourists as possible and create sales opportunity for individual enterprises.
6. The Amhara National Regional State Tourism Transformation Council should be strengthened and the regional bureau should give a chance to all stakeholders to contribute its part to the industry.
7. There should be tourism resource inventory by the local destination offices within the standards of the Amhara national regional state culture and tourism bureau and identifying associated tourism activities that can be developed from these potential resources.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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A person wearing a red jacket and a wide-brimmed hat is pointing towards a mountain range in the background. The scene is outdoors with a clear sky and green hills in the foreground.

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