



# Practices and challenges of promoting major tourism destinations of Bale Zone for Sustainable Tourism Development in Ethiopia

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## Abstract

Ethiopia in general and Bale Zone in particular, is rich in both natural and cultural tourism resources. Conversely, its economic, socio-cultural and environmental role is insignificant due to problems mainly related to the lack of infrastructural development and marketing of the destination. In order to make tourism development more sustainable, it is important to look into the problems associated with promoting and marketing of the tourist destinations. Thus, as to achieve the objective of the study a mixed research methodology was implemented. Since the aim of this study was to assess the Practices and Challenges of promoting Bale Zone major Tourism Resources for Sustainable Tourism Development the research was typically descriptive in nature. In this study, both primary and secondary data was gathered. The data was collected through extensive, questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion, and field observation. To gather the needed primary data, 357 samples were selected from domestic and oversea tourists who have visited BZTD in 2014. The collected data were coded, processed and analyzed with the help of SPSS. The finding of the study demonstrated that the promotional and marketing activities of Bale Zone failed to meet their ultimate goal to become an important tourist destination because of the absence and limited nature of promotional practices, budget shortages, lack of attention from stakeholders and critically, a lack of skilled manpower. Above all, awareness problems, absence of good governance, and lack of cooperation between stakeholders aggravated problems which prevent sustainability.

**Keywords:** Development, promotion, sustainable tourism, Ethiopia

## Abbreviations/Acronyms

BMNP	Bale Mountains National Park
EBC	Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation
ETB	Ethiopian Birr
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FZS	Frankfurt Zoological Society
GTP	Growth and Transformation Plan
GWCTO	Gololcha Woreda Culture and Tourism Office
MoCT	Ministry of Culture and Tourism



MWU  
ORTO  
SOC  
TVO

Madda Walabu University  
Oromia Radio and Television Office  
Sof Omar Cave  
Television Oromia

## Introduction

### Background of the study

The travel and tourism industry is globally becoming an increasingly expanding area and is the most important economic catalyst in many countries. Over the past six decades, tourism has continued to expand and is, according to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2014), now one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world with an estimated number of 1,087 million international tourist arrivals in 2013, with a growth of 5% over the previous year. International tourist receipts grew to US\$ 1159 billion in 2013. It is also the largest employment generator worldwide with 1 in 11 jobs in the service industries.

Tourism has the potential to contribute significantly to economic growth and development in Africa (Roselyne, 2010). Despite its positive endowment and good growth in tourism over past decade, it remains a sad fact that Africa's tourism potential is underexploited and underdeveloped. Africa's share from total international tourist arrivals and receipts as of 2013 is only 5% and 3%, respectively (UNWTO, 2014). The situation in Ethiopia is even worse. Even though, its tourism potential is diversified and immense, which comprises well preserved natural attractions, magnificent historical traditions, an attractive cultural diversity of more than 80 nations and nationalities, the country is still one of the most poorly performing countries in terms of tourist arrivals and receipts (MoCT, 2010). For example, the total number of tourist arrivals in Ethiopia in 2012 was 596,000 which is more than four times smaller than the number in neighboring Kenya, 1,619,000 (UNWTO, 2014).

The travel and tourism industry is a very competitive market at the international level, where only the best-managed and marketed enterprises and destinations are likely to benefit. Since there is a huge and steadily rising number of international tourist destinations, which means destination choice available for tourists are continually expanding, there is fierce competition in which some 200 nations are "clamoring for a share of the tourist's heart, mind and wallet" (Sharpley and Telfer, 2002). The promotion of tourism resource is an important approach for many developing countries to influence tourists' destination preference (Ghosh, 2005). It also guarantees the destination image improvement in terms of economic viability, socio-cultural and environmental sustainability. Most tourism destinations of Ethiopia in general and Bale Zone in particular, are not properly marketed and promoted (Ayalew, 2009). Marketing and promoting tourism destinations of the country can help to increase international and domestic tourist inflows which invariably lead to higher tourist receipt. Consequently, this enables the government of Ethiopia to achieve the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) for addressing poverty and its goal to become one of the five best tourist destinations in Africa by 2020.

Although Bale Zone, and Oromia Region in Ethiopia, is rich in tourism potential including Bale Mountains National Park, Sof Omar Cave, Dirre Sheik Hussein and many more, its economic impact is insignificant. Moreover, due consideration has not been given to marketing and promoting tourism destinations of Bale Zone by National and regional tourism bureaus and destination administrators. Above all, there is lack of studies concerning challenges in promoting tourist destinations of Ethiopia. Thus, this study was proposed to find out what the actual



challenges are that affect tourism destination marketing and promotion activities of the zone administrative bodies and also to unpack the current trend.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is expected to have significance as it contributes by showing the current tourism destinations promotion and marketing trends and problems, and also by suggesting appropriate tourism promotion approaches in the study area which will be helpful for Culture and Tourism Bureaus at different levels to revise their policy so as to be more effective. Likewise, the findings of the research will have essential roles for policy formulation and decision making at all levels (such as, Regional, Zonal, Woreda, Kebele and grass root level of the community) to have appropriate marketing strategies. Since the research results will be forwarded to the Culture and Tourism Offices and other development agents, it will improve the knowledge and attitude of people about the tools that are suitable for marketing the suggest needed tourism resources. The research will hopefully initiate further research initiatives and projects that can help to build up a positive destination image and consequently improve the living standards of the local community in the process. Moreover, the study will be used as a preliminary information or reference point for those who have the intention to conduct further and comprehensive research on the same or related issues.

### **Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study was to assess the practices and challenges of promoting Bale Zone major tourism destinations for sustainable tourism development specifically in the cases of Dirre Sheik Hussein, BMNP and the Sof Omar Caves.

### **Specific Objectives**

- To assess the current practices of marketing and promotion activities in the study areas.
- To look into the problems associated with promoting and marketing major Bale Zone tourism destinations.
- To identify the appropriate tools for marketing and promotion of Bale Zone major tourism resources.

### **Concepts of Tourism Destination Promotion and Marketing**

Marketing has no universally accepted definition. This is perhaps due to the fact that marketing is a comprehensive management function. However, the one definition which is universally quoted is by Philip Kotler. Kotler defines the marketing concept as follows: "marketing concept holds that the key to achieving organizational goals consists in determining the needs and wants of target markets and deliver in the desired satisfactions more effectively efficiently than competitors" (Raju, 2009).

Makens et al., (1990) define marketing as "... to design a product/service combination that provides a real value to targeted customers, motivates purchase, and fulfills genuine customer needs." Tourism marketing is research-based, analytic, goal-oriented, strategic, and directed. In brief, marketing is all those activities in getting goods and services from the producer or supplier to the user (Edgell, David and Makens, 1990).

The key is to have a well-thought-out marketing plan. McIntosh et al., of *Tourism Principles, Practices, Philosophies*, stresses the need for a strong orientation toward the consumer as the



heart of successful tourism marketing management. In addition, it's important that management thinking be directed toward understanding the tourism product. The emphasis is on destination marketing as the basis for strategic marketing plans in the tourism market (Edgell, David and Makens, 1990). Marketing comprises all the activities and processes used to bring buyers and sellers together, including creating, distributing, promoting, pricing and innovating ideas to facilitate satisfying exchange relationships in a dynamic environment (Kotler and Armstrong, 2006). To compete in today's tourism marketplace with its increasing global competition, organizations of both, the public and private sectors must know who their customers are and what they want (Stankovic and Dukic, 2009).

Marketing is simply stated as creating and promoting a product (ideas, goods or services) that tend to satisfy a customer's need or desire and is available at a desirable price and place. Modern marketing is a way of doing business, and is based on the "marketing concept" which proffers that businesses and organizations should: (1) design their products/services to meet customer needs and wants; (2) focus on those people most likely to buy their product rather than the entire mass market; and(3) develop marketing efforts that fit into their overall business objectives. By adopting this concept you not only provide your customers with better products, but you will avoid wasting valuable time and money developing and promoting a product or service nobody really wants (Raju, 2009).

For communities that hope to compete for their share of visitors, the marketing of a distinctive culture, attractions or outstanding amenities might be the central theme. Promotion is essentially communication with the goal of changing the behavior of the consumer, specifically to purchase a tourism product such as air travel, hotel accommodations, restaurant meals, tours, or a complete destination package. Understanding where potential buyers are in terms of readiness to buy is important in setting appropriate objectives and developing effective promotional material (Martin, 2002).

### **Marketing Communications Mix**

Industrialization enabled societies living elsewhere, to produce a range of consumer products in mass quantities. The products were to be sold to the consumers for consumption. The selling (marketing) thus became an important business function (Raju, 2009). One of the basic concepts in marketing is the marketing communications mix. The marketing communications mix is also called the promotion mix. This consists of the blend of advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling and direct marketing tools that the company uses to pursue its advertising and marketing objectives (Kotler and Armstrong, 2006).

The major promotional tools of marketing include advertising, sales promotion, public relation direct marketing and personal selling. Advertising is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor. Sales promotion is short-term incentives to encourage the purchase or sale of a product or services. Public relations is building good relations with the company's various publics by obtaining favorable publicity, building up a good corporate image, and handling or heading off unfavorable rumors, stories and events. Personal selling is personal presentation by the firm's sales force for the purchase of making sales and building customers relationships. Direct marketing is direct connections with carefully targeted individual consumers to both obtain an immediate response and cultivate lasting customer relationships (Kotler and Armstrong, 2006).



## Sustainable Tourism Development

Sustainable tourism is defined as “*Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and Environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities*” (UNWTO and UNEP 2005). Wang and Pizam (2011) note that tourism, to be called sustainable, should address three most important issues. These are sustainability ecologically, socio-culturally and economically speaking and also educationally and how far does it lead to community participation. Tourism can be a more powerful agent of economic growth, social progress and environmental preservation if carefully handled (Mulugeta, 2012). This has given a sole concern to viewing of the impacts of tourism from a supply (hosts) side. Sharpley and Telfer (2002) state that economic benefits, the socio-cultural impact of tourism, community-based benefits, visitor satisfaction, environmental sustainability, and community participation are the six required criteria for sustainable tourism.

## Methodology

### Description of the Study Area

Bale is one of the largest zones in Oromia National Regional State with an area of 66,032.52km<sup>2</sup> which is located in the south and south eastern part of the state at the distance of 430km from the capital city of Addis Ababa (Bale Zone culture and tourism office, 2013). Geographically, Bale Zone is located between 5°22' N to 8°08' N and 38° 52' E to 42°04' E. Bale Zone is found with an altitude ranges of 300m (measured the lowest altitude at Rayitu) and 4377m (measured the highest altitude at Tulu-Dimtu which is the highest mountain peak in Oromia National state and it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest mountain peak in Ethiopia next to Ras-Dashen) (Stuart, 2002).

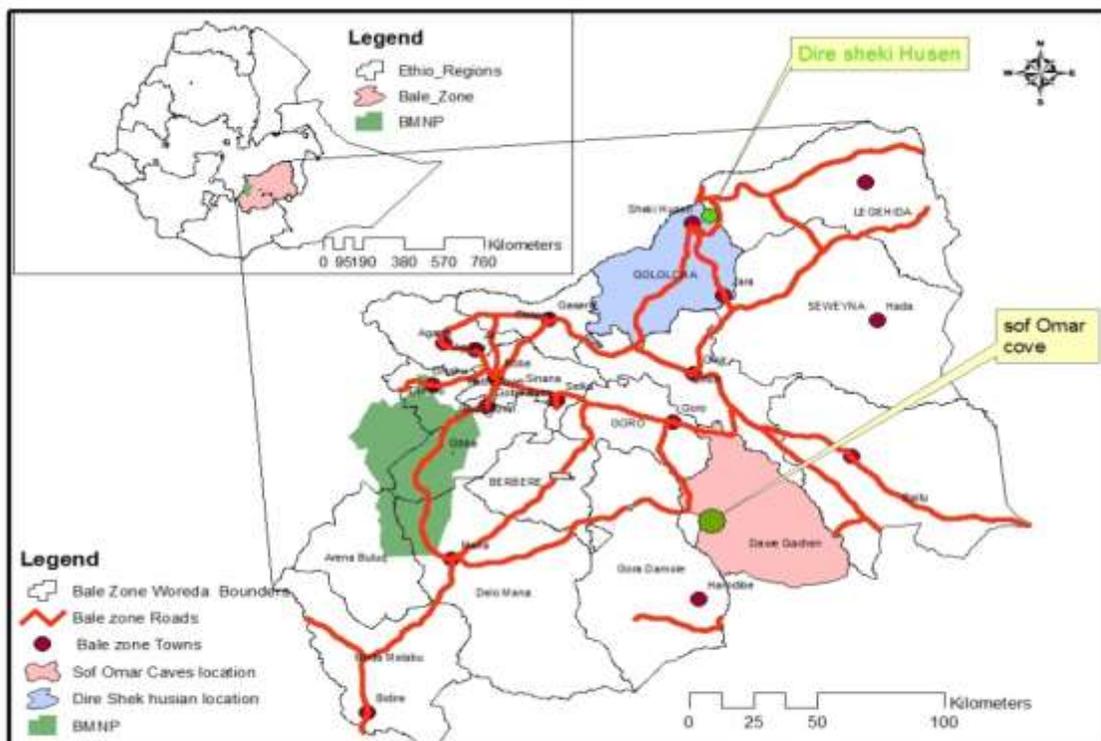
Bale Zone is one of the most important tourism destinations of Oromia region as well as Ethiopia because of its tourist sites such as Bale Mountains National Park, Sof Omar cave, and Dirre Sheikh Hussein Muslim shrine. Bale Mountains National Park (BMNP) is located at about 400km from Addis Ababa, it stretched over an area of 2000km<sup>2</sup> with in altitude ranges of 1500m-4377m above sea level. Being the largest Afro Alpine Habitat Park in Africa, Bale Mountains National Park offers the chances of viewing over 46mammal and more than 200 bird species and vegetation of unspoiled wonder land. These include various tree species and precious endemic mammals namely Ethiopian wolf, Bale Monkey, Africa Mole Rate, Mountain Nyala, and Menelik's Bushbuck (Wario, et al, 2006). The local boundary of BMNP lies within five Woredas: Adaba (West), Dinsho (North), Goba (Northeast), Mana-Angetu (South) and Berbere (east). The park area is encompassed within geographical coordinates of 6°29' – 7°10'N and 39°28' – 39°57'E and covers the largest area above 3000m *asl.* in Africa. Tullu Dimtuu, altitude 4377m *asl.*, is the highest peak in the park and the second highest peak in Ethiopia. The park includes an afroalpine plateau over 3500m *asl.*, and a major section of moist tropical forest, the second largest in Ethiopia (Stuart, 2002).

BMNP was first proposed in the late 1960s to protect afroalpine habitat and populations of the rare and endemic species of the mountain Nyala (*Tragelaphusbuxtoni*) and the Ethiopian wolf (*Canissimensis*). It was established by the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Organization (EWCO) in 1971 with the primary objective of conserving the wildlife and other valuable natural resources in the area (Richman and Biniyam, 2013). The cave is one of the World's biggest and Africa's largest cave. It is situated to the east of Robe, in the Bale Zone of the Oromia Region in southeastern Ethiopia (6°55'N 40°45'E), through which the Weyib River (Gestro River) flows. This marvelous underground world is located in Dawe Qachan district of Bale Zone at a distance of

110m from the Zone's capital Robe and 40 km from the nearest town Goro. The caves are known for their many pillars, particularly in the 'Chamber of Columns'. According to tradition Sof Omar was the name of a Muslim holy man who lived in the area (Robson, 1967). The caves major attraction features include: the cave's area which is typically characterized by flat topography and a deep gorge cut by river Web which forms the cave, and in particular the Ayyo Mako cliff gate of river entrance is the right spot where visitors start cave expedition while the Hulluqa is the resurgence of both visitors and the river from the cave (Catlin, 1973). The beauty of the cave comes from the untouched and savage aspects of the huge main passages, the very special shape of the sections of the galleries, the white color of the lime stones and basalt that form the walls. The cave has 42 internal entrances and total passages account for 15.6kms. Its 1.2km tourist route, which crosses the river seven times, takes visitors about two hours walking time (Wario, et al, 2006).

The name Dirre Sheik Hussein stands for both the Kebele (town) and the shrine. The town is situated in south eastern Ethiopia, Bale zone of the Oromia region, Gololcha District 178km far from Robe town. It has a longitude and latitude of 7°45'N40°42'E with an elevation of 1386 meters above sea level (UNESCO, 2011). The town is name after what, in some Ethiopian Muslim eyes, is the most sacred place in that country: the tomb of the thirteenth century Sheikh Hussein, who introduced Islam to the Sidamo people living in the area at the time, and is said to have performed many miracles. Dirre Sheikh Husein is one of the major tourist attractions of Oromia region and Ethiopia at large. The main attractions of the area include; The impressive white colored and conic shaped "Gamo"s or "Qubbaa"s (domes of tombs and mosques) are scattered all over in the site. There are two annual celebration occasions at the Dirre. Those celebrations occur twice a year during the Muslim months of Hajj and Rabi' al-Awwal. The first pilgrimage is to celebrate his birth, the second his death (Trimingham, 1952; Wario, et al, 2006).

Figure 1: Map of the study area



Source: GPS, 2015



## Research Design

This study aims to identify practices and problems related with marketing and promotion of Bale Zone tourism resources and seeks to look for better approaches and strategies. As a result, the mixed research approach (i.e. both quantitative and qualitative) was used. Mixed research approach is preferred because data was collected mainly through questionnaires and interview where both qualitative and quantitative data are involved. Since the researcher has tried to investigate the facts of the existing situation of the tourism promotion in the areas and seeks to describe it, a descriptive research design was employed.

## Sources of Data

The data used in this study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, field observation and focus group discussion. Whereas secondary data was obtained through document analysis from books, journals, other published and unpublished materials, and conference proceedings, tourism planning and policy, marketing and promotion policy and different official documents (administrative and archival documents), websites and broadcast media.

## Sampling Design and Procedures

A purposive sampling technique is useful to describe and explore a phenomenon in detail (Kumar, 2006). A purposive sampling technique was used to select samples from officials working in the Zone and Woredas Culture and Tourism offices, none governmental development bodies (FZS), local communities, and destination managers of the study areas for the interview and FGDs. Participants were selected based on the experiences, skills and knowledge of experts on the theme of the research.

In addition to this, a convenience sampling technique was used for selecting informants from the ranks of tourists (both domestic and foreign) to explore their sources of information, awareness and their exposure to major Bale Zone tourism resources. Availability sampling techniques were applied to those samples that were taken because they were most frequently available (Kumar, 2006). This refers to groups which are used as samples of a population because they are readily available.

## Sample Size Determination

Sample size determination is affected by different factors such as, purpose of the study, population size, the risk of selecting “bad” sample, and the allowable sampling error that the researchers will determine the sample size accordingly (Israel, 2012). According to the information from Culture and Tourism Office of Bale Zone the total number of tourists who visited Bale Zone tourism destinations is increasing gradually. The total number of tourists flow in the last five years 2002-11,637, 2003-14,642, 2004-35,700, 2005-88,629 and 2006-261,948. The average of these five consecutive years’ tourist flow is about 82,511 tourists. The researchers used this average figure to determine the sample size. In order to identify the sample size for the questionnaire, we used the  $n = \frac{N}{1+N * (a)^2}$  where ‘n’ is to refer sample size and ‘N’ is number of target population and ‘a’ is 0.05 (95%) confidence level (Gomm, 2008). Accordingly, the total number of sample size for the questionnaire was 397. Together with key informants, 20 focus group discussion members and 397 respondents, the total sample size was 425.



## Data Collection instrument

The study used both quantitative and qualitative data that were collected via questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, personal observation and review of documents. In order to obtain relevant data like about sources of tourists' information about Bale zone and its tourist destinations, challenges of marketing and promoting BZTDs and possible solutions and others from sampled respondents, both open and closed-ended questionnaires were administered to a total of 397 domestic and international tourists. To amplify the relevance of data, semi-structured face to face interview was conducted with 8 carefully selected key informants including tourism experts, communication experts, and elders. Key informants were selected purposively based on the assumption that persons with more experience, knowledge, and responsibilities. Moreover, the research is supported with three focus group discussions conducted at the three study areas, review of documents including promotional materials, and field observations.

## Method of Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected by using different data collection tools, both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were used. The quantitative data gathered from questionnaires were analyzed by using descriptive statistics to measure the frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviations of the variables using SPSS software (version 20). The qualitative data was gathered via FGDs, interviews and field observation were also analyzed by content analysis and by establishing different themes and relations in the variables. Data was documented; transcribed and similar responses were grouped together and interpreted based on the question and objectives of the study. Finally, the result was presented through charts, pictures, and tables.

## Results and Discussions

### Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents, which is displayed in Table 1 below, shows the gender, nationality, age group, educational level, occupation, and religion of respondent visitors. Other religions here include Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and non-religious visitors.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=357)

Variables	Options	No/357	Percentage
Gender	Male	212	59.4
	Female	145	40.6
	<b>Total</b>	357	100%
Nationality	Ethiopian	226	63.3
	Foreigner	131	36.7
	<b>Total</b>	357	100%
Age	18-28	195	54.6
	29-39	80	22.4
	40-50	49	13.7
	51-61	26	7.3
	above 61	7	2.0
	<b>Total</b>	357	100%
Education qualifications	Read and write	21	5.9
	High school	32	9.0
	College	60	16.8



	Bachelor degree	191	53.5
	Master's degree and above	53	14.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>100%</b>
Occupation	Student	144	40.3
	privet employee	85	23.8
	government employee	111	31.1
	Other	17	4.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>100%</b>
Religion	Muslim	104	29.1
	Christian	214	59.9
	Other religions	39	10.9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Researcher's own survey, 2015.

### Destinations visited by respondents

Table 2 below provides information about major tourism destinations of Bale Zone visited by respondent visitors. It is proved that BMNP (Bale Mountains National Park) was visited by most respondents visited by 78.4% respondents accounting about 43.1% share. DSH (Dirre Shake Hussein) is the other major destination which was visited by 58.5% respondents with a share of 32.2% respondents. Out of the total number of respondents comparatively a small number of respondents 44.8% which accounts only 24.7% respondent share visited SOC (Sof Omar Cave).

Table 2: Destinations visited by respondents

Variable	Destinations	Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Which tourist destinations of Bale zone you visit?	BMNP	280	43.1%	78.4%
	SOC	160	24.7%	44.8%
	DSH	209	32.2%	58.5%
	Total	649	100.0%	181.8%

Source: Researcher's own survey, 2015.

It was also proven that almost all visitors travel to southeast Ethiopia mainly Bale Zone do have visited BMNP and it is mainly linked with the accessibility of the park as well as its commendable promotional efforts.

### Visitors' source of information and motivation to visit Bale tourist destinations

Visitors may get first time information, which creates their first impression and motivation, about destinations from different sources. Some of these sources include tour operators, media, friends and relatives, website, tourist guide books, fairs and exhibitions, symposium, conferences, and others. The respondents (visitors) sources of information are shown on the Table 3 below.



Table 3: Visitors' source of information

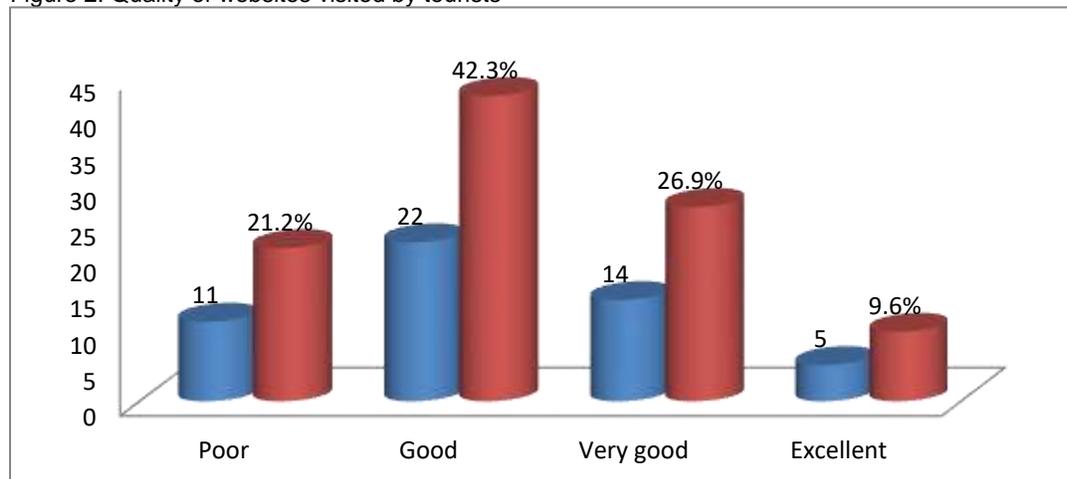
Variable	Options	Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
What is your <i>source of information</i> that motivates you to come to Bale Mountains National Park, Dirre Sheik Hussein, Sof Omar Cave (Bale Zone)?	Tour operators	78	15.9%	22.0%
	Fairs and/or exhibitions	13	2.6%	3.7%
	Media (Audio, Printed and Audiovisual)	91	18.5%	25.6%
	Word of Mouth	188	38.2%	53.0%
	Website of the zone, or Region, or Country	49	10.0%	13.8%
	Tourist guide books	40	8.1%	11.3%
	Other	33	6.7%	9.3%
	Total	492	100.0%	138.6%

Source: Researcher's own survey, 2015.

### Quality of websites visited by tourists

As it is clearly shown in the figure 2, below, that out of the total valid 357 respondents, websites were the source of information for only 52 (14.6%) of visitors. Those 52 visitors were then asked to evaluate the quality of the websites they have visited. Accordingly, while the majority of them were happy with the quality of the websites only a few of them were not. However, most of them left comments about the scarcity of websites - mainly those developed by destinations themselves.

Figure 2: Quality of websites visited by tourists



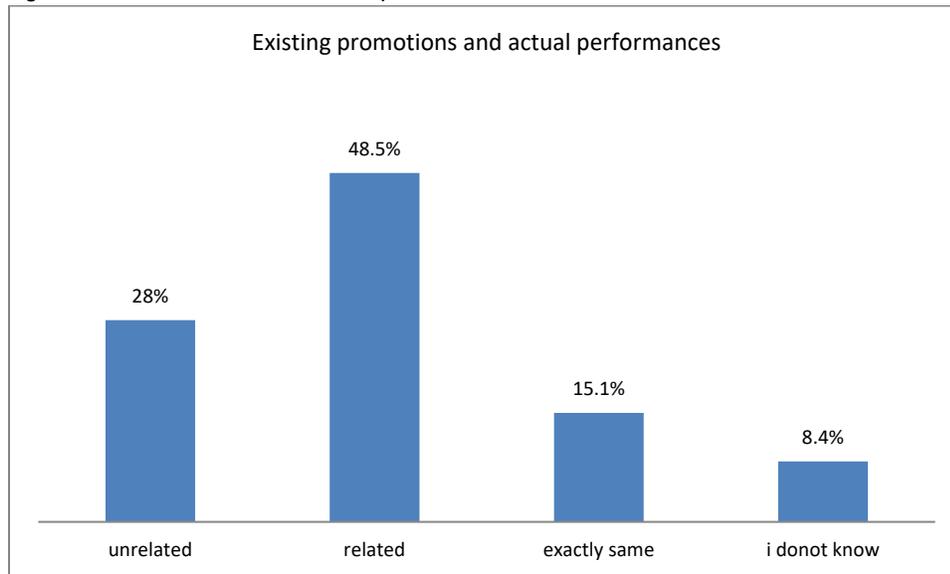
Source: Researcher's own survey, 2015.

### Comparison of promotions and actual performances of the destination

Promotions and actual performances of destinations and services are mostly unrelated. That unrelated and exaggerated promotions exist raises customers' expectation and finally leads to dissatisfaction of the customers. Dissatisfied customers are obviously dangerous since they tell their bad experiences to their friends and relatives (Middleton and Clarke, 2001) which impacts negatively on destination sustainability.

As shown in the figure 3 below, the majority of visitors rate the existing promotional practices as it they are related to the actual performances of the destinations. In contrast, about 28% of the total visitors evaluated current promotions as unrelated and somehow as exaggerated. On the other hand, 15.1% of the respondents answered that promotional statements and actual performances of the destination are 'exactly same'. About 8.4% of the respondents had no idea about promotion of the destination which means they were not exposed to any promotional material of BZTDs.

Figure 3: Promotions versus actual performances of destinations

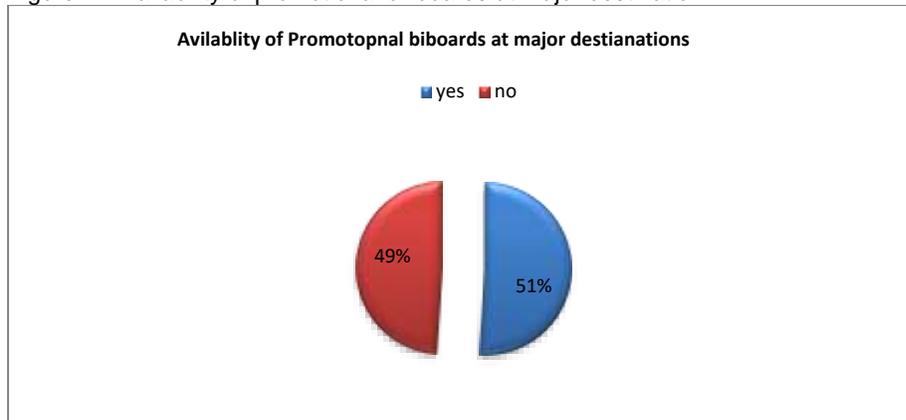


Source: Researcher's own survey, 2015.

### Availability of promotional billboards and signposts

Availability of promotional billboards and sign posts was also assessed. Accordingly, out of the total number of respondents, 49% of them had not viewed any promotional billboards while the remaining ensured that they had seen promotional billboards and signposts at visited destinations. This data implies that there are some sights which have promotional banners at the entrance points or different towns and road junctions but not all of them enjoy this luxury.

Figure 4: Availability of promotional billboards at major destination



Source: Researcher's own survey, 2015.

Concerning the quality and number of promotional billboards and signposts, respondents were asked: 'What do you say about the *quality* and *number* of promotional banners and land marks?' Accordingly, most of them responded: 'some are good some others are not' and they commented that 'they need improvement'. Moreover, most respondents agreed that:

- 
- Most sign posts are negligibly prepared, less informative, poor in quality and somehow vague,
- Not visible enough and difficult to understand,
- They are not equivalent to the zone resource endowment and do not adequately reflect the exact feature of the destinations,
- Poor in quality and little in number,
- Insufficient, and not properly designed, not attractive, very old, and worthless.



Figure 5: Sof Omar cave billboard



Figure 6: Billboards of BMNP

It was also found during personal observation that except for those at BMNP and its surroundings, others found in DSH and SOC to be very old and not visible. It is even difficult to find signposts especially at DSH and SOC major destinations of the zone. Billboards found at DSH and SOC also have a huge limitation in information provision and they do not show the entrance fees, fees of video camera use, rules and regulations, and so on.

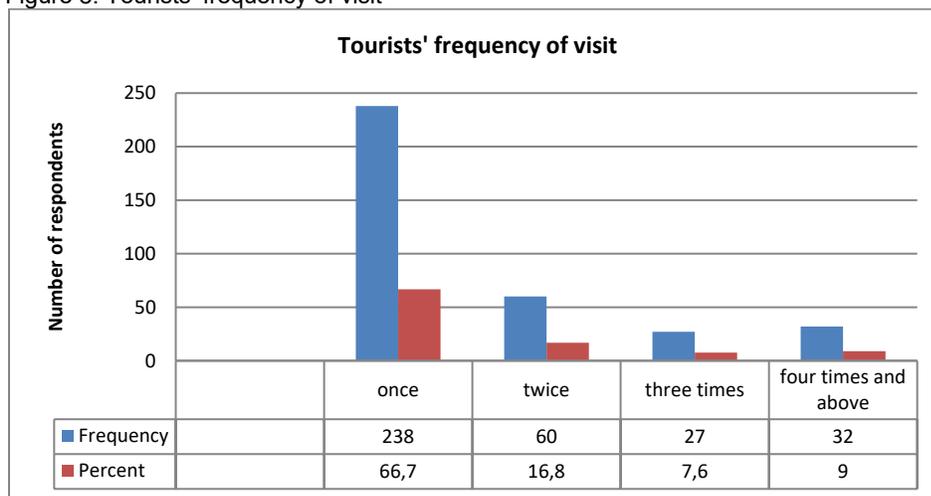


Figure 7: Billboard at the entrance of BMNP

### Tourists' visit frequency

Tourists' visit frequency was assessed by inquiring: 'How many times have you visited tourist destinations of Bale Zone (BMNP/SOC/DSH) in the past?' As shown in the figure 8 below, the majority were just first time visitors followed by two-time visitors and four and above and three times visitors. It was clearly observed that most of the visitors were only first time visitors which most probably happens due to lack of information, promotion and marketing about the tourist destinations. It was also identified that most of those frequent visitors (twice, three times and four times and above) were religious tourists mainly going to DSH.

Figure 8: Tourists' frequency of visit



Source: Researcher's own survey, 2015.

### Tourists' exposure to promotions about Bale Zone Tourist destinations (BZTDs)

As can be seen from the table 4 below, only 44.3% of the total respondents (tourists) were exposed to promotions of BZTDs in general, whereas, more than a half of the total respondents 55.7% had never heard of, or seen any promotions about BZTDs. This suggests that currently there is some promotion via television programs, documentaries, brochures, banners and so on. However, this is simply not enough.

Table 4 illustrates that the mean value of respondents who were exposed to promotions of Bale Zone major tourism destinations and those who were not totally exposed to promotions is (M=0.56) that there is no significant difference between those who have promotions exposure and who have not.

Table 4: Tourists' exposure to promotions about BZTDs

Variable	Option	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Have you ever heard or seen advertisements (promotion) about Bale Zone tourism destinations (BMNP, SOC, DSH)?	Yes	158	44.3	44.3
	No	199	55.7	55.7
	Total	357	100.0	100.0
	Mean			.56
	Std. Deviation			.497
	Variance			.247

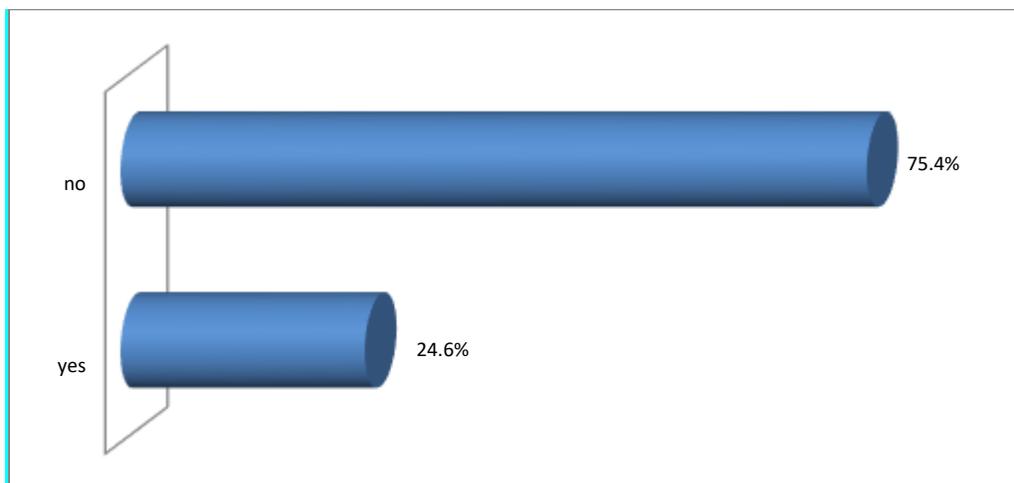
Source: Researcher's own survey, 2015.

Those respondents who have been exposed to promotions (44.3%) were also questioned about the quality and quantity (sufficiency) of the promotional tools they had seen or heard. Accordingly, the results were summarized as almost all available brochures including the one prepared by BMNP were considered to be poor in quality, not standardized, insufficient and limited in the actual destination sites. But at the same time, some tourists agreed that few promotional tools namely those prepared by BMNP are of a good quality. Regarding quantity and availability of promotional tools and marketing efforts, almost all replied it is totally insufficient and greater efforts were needed. According to some tourists, the only meaningful promotion is the one for BMNP but other destinations are not promoted well at all.

### Perception of tourists about promotion status of BZTDs

Figure 9 shows that, among the respondents most replied 'no' to the question 'Do you think that Bale Zone tourism destinations are properly promoted?' while the remaining visitors answered 'yes'. This implies that BZTDs are not properly promoted and the existing promotional activities do not feed the myriad of resource endowments in the zone.

Figure 9: Perception of tourists about promotion status of BZTDs



Source: Researcher's own survey, 2015.

Respondents were also asked their thoughts about the problems they think exist regarding the very limited promotion of BZTDs. Accordingly, respondents raised many possible reasons for the very limited promotion of BZTDs. Few tourists connect the problem with lack of attention from the federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MoCT) giving evidence to the sad fact that most



promotions and documentaries about Ethiopia focus on the North loop as well as non-registration of heritage sites in Bale Zone under the banner of the UNESCO World Heritage list. Whereas some of the respondents connect poor promotion of the destinations in Bale Zone with lack of attention from the administration in the top federal level, to the Kebele level to the tourism industry in general, and to BZTDs in particular. Other groups of respondents connected the problem to lesser or no ties with tour operators and travel agents who clearly refer their clients to intensive promotion efforts of the northern tourism destinations. Conversely some respondents think that a lack of connection and cooperation with big broadcasting media is responsible for the problem. Lack of awareness; lack of proper management and commitment from the concerned stakeholders; lack of attention to BZTDs from tour operators; limitation of facilities like network connection were also mentioned as important considerations.

### Most intensively used tools of promotion

Based on tourists' access to tourism promotions, respondents were asked to respond on the most frequently used tools of promotion they believe to be used by BZTDs and their responses are displayed in table 5 below.

Table 5: Most frequently used tools of promotion by BZTDs

Variable	Options	Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Which of the following tools do you think promote Bale Zone Major Tourist Destinations intensively?	Advertisement	276	48.3%	78.0%
	Public relation	62	10.9%	17.5%
	Sales promotion	96	16.8%	27.1%
	Personal selling	137	24.0%	38.7%
	Total	571	100.0%	161.3%

Source: Researcher's own survey, 2015.

As shown in Table 5 above, the highest majority of the respondents believe that BZCTO frequently used 'advertisements' to promote tourism destinations found in the zone. A large group of respondents answered 'personal selling', considering it to be the most frequently used tool for promotion. The remaining responses go to 'sales promotion' while 'public relations' accounted for about 27.1% and 17.5% of the total responses respectively. This data implies that most tourists were exposed to advertisement tools of promotion and other tools were virtually neglected or denied any attention at all.

It was also proved during interviews and FGDs conducted with different experts from the BZCTO and the three major tourism destinations, that advertisements are the main tool of promotion. It was also agreed that other tools of promotion were not applied properly mainly as a result of lack of budget, limited awareness and lack of willingness to motivate visitors.

### Challenges of promoting and marketing Bale Zone tourist destinations

Table 6 below, shows the responses of tourist respondents regarding the challenges of promoting and marketing BZTDs. The highest number of respondents selected 'poor management and administration' as a major challenge of promoting BZTDs accounting about 63.2% followed by 'lack of budget' and 'lack of skilled manpower'. The least selected reason was the 'bad image of the area in the eyes of the visitors' getting 21% responses.



Table 6: Challenges of promoting and marketing BZTDs

Variable	Options	Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
What do you think are the major challenges of promoting and marketing Bale zone major tourism destinations?	Poor management and administration	223	32.1%	63.2%
	Bad image of the area in the eyes of the visitors	74	10.6%	21.0%
	Lack of budget	206	29.6%	58.4%
	Lack of skilled human power	189	27.2%	53.5%
	Other	3	0.4%	0.8%
	Total	695	100.0%	196.9%

Source: Researcher's own survey, 2015.

Among other challenges mentioned, lack of local tour operators, lack of public awareness, lack of attention from the stakeholders including the government, limited distribution of promotional materials, and absence of tourist information center, tourist rout map, tourist guide book, websites and documentary film were some of the major concerns.

Some other major problems of promotion discussed include, poor quality of banners, magazines and fliers in content and structure, poor quality of leadership, lack of awareness and lack of infrastructures, materials and facilities (internet, audio visual materials, electric light, water supply, road), and surprisingly, the absence of even a basic tourist guide book.

## Conclusions

Comparatively larger numbers of respondents visited BMNP rather than SUC and DSH. Most tourists initially obtained information from different sources of which the highest got information from their friends and relatives. On the other hand, the majority of visitors rated the existing promotional practices as in alignment with the actual performance of the destinations visited. Many respondents disclosed the limitedness of the number and quality of promotional billboards and signposts, and most of them gave negative comments about their quality as well.

While some respondents were exposed to promotions of BZTDs in general, most of them had never ever heard of, or seen any promotion. The majority of respondents were first time visitors while a few were visiting the destination a second time. Most of the frequent visitors were religious tourists to DSH. The respondents who had been exposed to promotions proved that almost all available brochures were poor in quality, not standardized, insufficient and their distribution was limited to the destination sites. At the same time, most respondents believe that BZTDs are not properly promoted and the existing promotional activities do not feed the resource endowments of the zone. Most tourists were exposed to advertisement tools of promotion and other tools were rarely used mainly because of limitations in finance, lack of skilled manpower and/or a lack of interest. The current trend of promotional activities was described as 'very limited' by the majority of the respondents and experts in the field.

The major challenges of promotional and marketing activities include: destination management and general administration problems, lack of budget, lack of skilled man power, and bad image of the area in the eyes of the visitors. Besides these mentioned above, there are many other issues such as the high printing price of brochures and posters, limited distribution of promotional materials, lack of attention from all tourism industry stakeholders, absence of tourist information center and local travel agent, lack of tourist route map and tourist guide book, absence of quality website and documentary film; absence and poor quality of banners, magazines and fliers in both their content and structure.



Finally, experts and respondent agreed that effective promotion can bring huge changes to zonal tourism development, however, it needs a cooperative effort of all concerned stakeholders and a proper alleviation of problems that bottleneck promotional attempts.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are forwarded as possible solutions to overcome the problems related with promotional and marketing activities of Bale Zone major tourist destinations.

The concerned bodies should raise awareness about the benefits and concept of marketing and promotion through training all stakeholders. After establishing relevant tourism marketing and promotional strategy and identifying target markets, the government at all levels and NGOs like FZS, EWCP, Farm Africa and others should intensively promote the destination using all the appropriate marketing and promotional tools such as Magazines, TV, Radio, Newspapers, Brochures, Billboards, sales promotion, personal selling and direct marketing at the highest quality.

Chiefly, as tourism claims to be a labor intensive, the tourism sector of the area should be filled with well trained and qualified manpower to be in a position to excel in their contribution to the local tourism promotion efforts. Building relationship marketing: BMNP, SUC and DSH should build relationship marketing with visitors and encourage them to disseminate good word of mouth publicity. In addition to this MoCT and Oromia Culture and Tourism Office should support Ethiopians living abroad to promote Bale Zone tourist destinations or to serve as PR drivers.

Since promotion and marketing is a cumulative result, all concerned stakeholders working in the area of tourism namely MWU, BMNP, DKWCTO, GWCTO, BZCTO, tour operators, MWU, BZCO, ORTV, Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau, NGOs and MoCT should work cooperatively and cordially with each other. Beside this MWU, BMNP and BZCTO should create effective networks and have good connections with giant tour operators in Addis Ababa and also establish local agencies which must working in the areas concerned.

Creating good image: BZCTO, MWU, BMNP and NGOs like FZS should build a good image for the Bale Zone through the hosting of festivals, tourism fairs and exhibitions. At the same time participating in international and national exhibitions will play a greater role in informing and attracting tourists to the Bale Zone tourism destinations. Above all, good governance and proper administration is fundamental to any development including tourism. Thus, Bale Zone and respective Woreda administrations as well as culture and tourism offices should establish good governance through assuring local community benefits and participation in conservation, along with giving due attention to tourism development and promotion in decision making; Improving infrastructures in the destinations, and considering tourism in each and every policy making processes is essential for the development of the sector as well as the country.

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