

Tourism Destination Marketing Challenges and Prospects: The Case of the Southern Route of Ethiopia

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How to cite this article: Muluneh, D.W., Chiriko, A.Y. & Taye, T.T. (2022). Tourism Destination Marketing Challenges and Prospects: The Case of the Southern Route of Ethiopia. African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, 11(1):294-309. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.226>

Abstract

Tourism destinations these days focus on tourism development with little marketing attention. This study's main aim is to assess destination marketing challenges and prospects in the Southern Ethiopian Route. The study employed a descriptive research design with a mixed research approach. Data were collected from tourists, culture/tourism experts, security personnel, road authorities and tourism businesses through questionnaires, interviews and FGD who were approached through convenience and purposive sampling techniques. The study revealed tourists are more impressed by cultural diversity which is a motivating factor, hospitality and natural attractions. Security, accessibility and quality of service are aspects tourists wouldn't like to recommend. Furthermore, seasonality, cost of media and security threats are the main challenges faced by tourism businesses. Previous image, accessibility and security are challenges faced by DMO. The destination is lagging in marketing activities compared with its immense tourism potential. The study approaches destination marketing in a tourist route context, which makes it unique from previous enquiry attempts. Theoretical and practical implications are also forwarded.

Keywords: Destination marketing, destination, marketing, tourism

Introduction

Tourism is the movement of people away from their normal place of residence (Holloway et al., 2009: 6). The industry is one of the largest incomes generating business sectors which contribute multidirectional benefits for a country's economic development (Olorunfemi & Raheem, 2008). Tourism happens in destinations and travellers are going to destinations to visit attractions, to partake in recreational activities which will result in experiences resulting from their interactions in the places visited (Uysal et al., 2011). For Pike (2004) a place that pulls visitors for impermanent stay and varies from very large like the continent to country and even a village is a destination. Tourists travel to destinations, places with some form of actual or perceived boundary, such as the physical boundary of an island, political boundaries, or even market-created boundaries (Kotler et al., 2014: 554). Tourists' choice of destination can be influenced by natural disaster, exchange rate, political reason and an individual's image for a destination. Notwithstanding these uncertainties people are still making journeys to different destinations (Roe & Urquhart, 2001; Ashley, 2005).

The study of destination marketing is essential for anyone who is currently working in or contemplating a managerial or entrepreneurial career in tourism, travel and hospitality (Pike, 2010). Destination Marketing Organizations are facing a number of challenges in marketing their potential for a prospected audience. Adapting to technology, managing expectations, confronting a new level for competition and finding new measures of success are main challenges faced (Gretzel et al., 2005). The national marketing strategy is complemented by marketing strategies for each of the five targeted regions under Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Plan, namely Amhara, Tigray, Addis Ababa, Oromia and Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples (MoCT, 2015), the region this study is conducted. The southern tourist route is a home for diverse culture and natural tourism resource endowment.

It is very well addressed that Ethiopia, with its distinct and tremendous wealth of cultural and historic tourism resources, has a huge potential of earning a great deal of benefits out of its tourism development activities (Assefa, 2011). However, the country has not been benefited from the sector due to a number of key challenges to strategically and sustainably develop the tourism sector. Tourist arrivals to Ethiopia have grown very well in recent years and the country has the advantage of being an all-year destination though tourism market shares in Africa remains limited with the country occupying 12th place in tourist arrivals and 10th place in tourist revenues (MoCT, 2015). Rather than marketing a destination, tourism planner is highly concerned on development (Kotler et al., 2017). Similar to destination development, attention have to be paid for destination marketing in order to retain the popularity of the destination and harvest the deserved benefit. Tourism destination contains multiple stakeholders. According to Buhalis (2000), destination marketing is a particularly challenging form of the marketing art. The challenges are mostly related to the general complexity of tourism product and different kind of stakeholders involved. Reaching an agreement on messages to be communicated and obtaining funds to develop and implement is the most challenging tasks for destination marketing (Kotler et al., 2014). Considering them in marketing activity of a destination is essential to reap the possible benefit from the sector and to remain competitive. The marketing and promotion activity of a destination is becoming omnipresent issues, supported by advanced technology such as social media that many destinations hitched in varying degrees (Hay et al., 2013)

Due to spike in the number of destinations, getting travelers' attention and competing in the market place gets challenging task for DMO. The more DMO are curious about marketing their potentials for domestic and international market, the more the destination gets high economic return from the sector (Pike, 2008). Tourists across the globe are facing with a wide range of travel destinations (Pike, 2005) and the service are provided to the customer and the choice is dependent on the destination's value for the independent travellers (Morgan et al., 2004). According to Uysal et al., (2011) destination marketing helps in discovering trends in and attractive aspects of travel to different market groups. Many studies were conducted in different level and parts of Ethiopia including analysis of tourism Marketing performance and strategy of Ethiopia (Getahun & Dhaliwal, 2017) and Assessment of tourism marketing strategy in tourism destination in Bale Mountains National Park (Mohammed, 2014). These researches have revealed reasons that resulted in low achievement in tourism sector. Basic marketing is one area that makes the country's tourism industry found to be low which calls other research like this to conduct study on assessing challenges and prospects of destination marketing. To the knowledge of the researchers no study has been conducted on destination marketing in the southern route of Ethiopia which makes this research worth studying. One of the most recent study on southern Ethiopian tourists' route is tourism potential and constraints; considering the natural and cultural attraction of South Omo by Gedebo (2017). His study reveals the route has enormous potential that appeals to both domestic and international tourists

and thus needs to be fittingly commercialized and changed into a special tourism product. The region is one of the target regions of Ethiopia's MoCT for which a five years comprehensive marketing strategy prepared for. The initiative taken by MoCT reveals tourism marketing is one of the pillar areas the government of Ethiopia would like to extend its effort (MoCT, 2015). Destination marketing being the main aim the study specifically identifies the main potential of tourism, assessing challenges and opportunities of marketing, identify tourism destination marketing practices and investigate factors influencing tourist's destination choice in southern route of Ethiopia.

Literature review

Destination and destination marketing

Many scholars observed destinations in a geographical ladder from a self-contained center to a country or a continent and its marketing encompasses the activities involved in sustainably developing a region with tourism appeal and in its promotion through marketing strategy (Pinto, 2011). Buhalis (2000) observed destination based on geographical concept and mentioned as a town, a region or country attracting tourists. History, culture, religion, traditions and leisure services provided is also part of destination. Destination must contain attractions (cultural and natural), transport, infrastructure, amenities and tourist organizations. The top destinations provide wonderful service and facilities, lodging and attractions with dissimilar culture and heritage. Therefore, the ten major destinations attract 70% of the worldwide tourism market (Piggott, 2001; Lozano et al., 2005). Being the leading in these destination elements helps to attract large number of tourists and prosper in tourism development. Accordingly, designing appropriate marketing strategy is essential to make the destination competitive.

Challenges of destination marketing

Destinations are facing a number of challenges in marketing their tourism potentials. Previous image is one of these challenges. Once spoiled, image is something difficult to regain (Wall & Nuryanti, 2008). Negative image by tourists is disastrous for a destination (Gursoy, 2011) and hence is a challenge to market a destination. Physical damage can be restored quickly while the damage done to the image of the destination might be more complicated to rebuild and strengthen (Minar, 2019) Technological progress, changes in the industry's markets and structures, economic slowdown, war and terrorist threats, climate changes and natural disasters (hurricanes, tsunamis), as well as problems related to diseases (i.e. SARS, hoof and mouth, bird flu) have resulted a lot of crisis that affect respective destination marketing organizations in essential ways. According to Gretzel et al., (2005) adapting to technology, managing expectation, confronting new level for competition and finding new measures of success are main challenges faced by those who are trying to market their destination for potential tourists. Negative tourist experience which can cause negative word of mouth is another challenge. Tourists may experience problems relating to various factors such as unexpected expenses, pollution, safety, security, cleanliness, poor facility and uncertainties (Chockalingam & Ganesh, 2010). Managing these problems can ease the challenges faced the DMO from negative word of mouth. Destination marketers need to work to face these challenges in the way they cannot influence the marketing activities in a negative way. The image issue, proper utilization of technology and confronting competitors, be refrain from setting unrealistic expectation are some of the efforts that can be done to minimize the challenges of marketing works.

Tourism destination attributes and potentials

The most important parts of a destination's appeal are those elements that create a deep emotional or psychological response in visitors (Uysal et al., 2011). The pull factors such as landscape, culture, price, service, and climate can draw one's attention to a particular destination. These are called exogenous factors which have been characterized in terms of the features, attractions or attributes of a destination (Klenosky, 2002). Moreover, cultural attractions have become the most important attributes, which motivates people to travel (van der Ark & Richards, 2006; Smith, 2003). Culture and heritage is also very important generating tourism flow (Vargas et al., 2009). Destination's entertainment can also be an attributes that can pull tourists to a given destination. Tourists also enjoy pursuing entertainment during their trip - even at museums and other cultural sites (Global Insight Inc., 2004). Destination's natural views and scenery are attributes on holiday tourists would like to enjoy (Formica & Littlefield, 2000). The pleasant weather and climate can significantly influence tourists' activities and behavior, just as they affect people's routine lives as well. Accessibility might be an attractive attribute for a certain destination (Zhou, 2005). One of the major concerns for tourists to make a decision on destination selection is the safety and security issue. Tan et al., (2017) stated security plays a significant role for tourism. The services of a destination are important in tourists' destination choice. In the eyes of many tourists, destinations function more effectively, when their services are in abundance (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). In addition to four world heritage sites of the country, the study area is known for being a home for an immense culture, jungle and pleasant weather and it is very vital to capitalize on these potentials. All of these factors are a potential for southern route of Ethiopia except security concern in some sites.

Tourist destination choices

Several previous literatures revealed the destination choice is influenced by many factors. The image, the impressions about the daily happenings in destination (Lin et al., 2007), travellers gender (Meng & Uysa, 2008), individual characteristics including finance and time, family lifecycle (Leisen, 2001), available time (Truong & Henscher, 1985), culture (Hofstede, 2011), access to information (Murphy et al., 2007) and service intangibility (Clow et al., 2006) are some to mention. Thus factors influence the decision of tourists to choose among tourism destination. Tourist destination need to work hard to build positive image by providing best experience and keeping the security of the destination. Provision of year round tourism experience with reasonable price that includes every family member is mandatory to encourage tourists to choose this destination is essential. Tourism facilities/service that fits both genders and culture is also important to be prioritized by tourists. Moreover, we need to tangibilize services in order to reduce possible effects of service intangibility that can reduce confidence of travellers to choose a destination.

Tourism destination promotions and the search for information

Tourists undertake search of travel information in order to plan their travel and make decisions about travel options such as choice of destination, transport, accommodation, and activities (Hyde, 2009). Infant destination like southern Ethiopian can utilize advertisement for initial publicity. This promotion tool is used to generate publicity and it gives basic idea of goods and services using printed (guidebook), broadcast and online media which are considered as effective in international marketing (Belch & Belch, 2004). These are borderless and the cheapest way of marketing goods and services. Some specific tools to promote a destination includes social media such as Facebook and YouTube (Scott, 2010; Lynn, 2013), websites (Kotler et al., 2010; Lynn, 2013) and FAM trip (Kaurav & Sharma, 2017). Identifying the main sources of information tourist consuming is vital as it helps to use proper promotional tools to

promote the destination. Choosing low cost media types that can reach large number of audience is essential since one of the headaches for destination marketers is lack of fund for promotion.

Methodology

Descriptive research design with mixed approach was employed to conduct this study. Descriptive research is very common in the leisure and tourism area, for three reasons: the relative newness of the field, the changing nature of the phenomena being studied and the frequent separation between research and action (Veal, 2018). Culture and tourism experts, tourism businesses, security peoples and zonal level road authority were the study subjects. By applying Gomm's (2008) formula tourist respondents were determined to be 396 out of 60343 with 0.5 level of confidence interval then convenience sampling was used to select the tourist respondents;

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$
$$n = \frac{60343}{1 + 60343(0.5^2)}$$

n=396

Where n= sample size, N= total population, e= level of confidence interval 0.5 (95%) .Purposive sampling technique were employed to determine the number of respondents from tourism business (60) and culture and tourism bureau experts (24), security personnel (3), road authority (3) and NP managers (3) making the total sample 489. Questionnaire distributed to international and domestic tourists, interview with head of culture and tourism bureau and national park managers and FGD conducted in two selected sites namely Jinka and Arbaminch containing participants from culture and tourism bureau experts, security personnel and Road authority were the data collection instruments used for the study. The information gathered from different sources, were compiled in the way that is easy to manage. Following the completion of the data collection, quantitative data were coded and entered into (SPSS) version 20 for analysis and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, ratio, mean, standard deviation). The data obtained through FGD and interview was analyzed through structured narration.

Results

Challenges and opportunities of tourism destination marketing

Table 1 shows the barriers faced by visitors during their stay in the destination.

Table 1: Barriers faced during visitor’s stay in the destination

Likely faced barriers	Mean	Std. Dev
Language barriers	4.48	.586
Too far from my home land	3.95	1.214
This tourist destination is not secured	3.79	1.295
Poor services/facilities in hotels and related establishments	3.58	1.349
Too expensive	3.36	1.451
No nightlife or entertainment	2.96	1.339
Poor/unreliable weather	2.46	1.418
Don’t know enough about it	2.45	1.371
Harassment related to sex and race	2.23	1.287
Nothing there that appeals to me	2.07	1.305
People are unfriendly/not welcoming	2.05	1.169
Poor attitude towards tourists like me	1.82	.978
Prefer to travel within well-developed tourist destination	1.67	.936
Personal reasons	1.66	.700

Sources: Survey data, 2020

Negative image established takes long way to curve it to positive image. Language difficulty is the most barrier faced in this destination (4.48) followed by being far from originating countries (3.95), Security (3.79), Poor service/facilities (3.58), and price (3.36) respectively. On the other hand, there are few barriers faced related to personal reason (1.66), being underdeveloped destination (1.67) and poor attitude towards tourists (1.82).

Table 2: Main challenges of tourism business promotion

Challenges tourism business promotion	Frequency	Percent
High cost of the Medias	35	58.3
Previous image	7	11.7
Unstable security	8	13.3
Seasonality	10	16.7
Total	60	100.0

Source: Survey data, 2020

In order of their influence, cost of media (58%), seasonality (16.7%), unstable security (13.3%) and previous image of the destination (11.7%) are challenges of promoting tourism business in this destination. Finding low cost media without compromising appropriateness to reach target audience hence can be a best technique that can be done. Curving the problem of seasonality needs combined effort with other industry practitioners. Pre-purchase impressions, and post purchase views formulate consumer’s attributes towards a product. Image is not constant.

Table 3: Challenges of tourism destination marketing/DMO perspectives

Challenges of tourism destination marketing	Mean	Std. Deviation
Country image/destination image	4.0833	.50361
Cost to promote the destination using printed media	1.7500	.79400
Website design cost	4.1667	.70196
Accessibility to main attraction	4.1250	.67967
Show the privileges of your country	4.0000	.72232
Security problem	4.1250	.53670
Lack of partnership with concerned tourism stakeholders	4.0417	.95458
Government structural intermingling	4.2083	.41485
Insufficient infrastructure	4.0833	.58359
Insufficient ancillary services	1.5833	.77553
Negative word of mouth spread by visitors	1.9167	1.01795
Poor usage and adaptability of technology	4.0833	.65386

Source: Survey data, 2020

Image created due to some bad previous happening in some sites of this route is one of the challenges to market this destination with a mean value of 4.08. Interview conducted with Omo

National Park manager reveals local residents who feel tourism is contesting their access for grazing land are killing travellers and even park officials which results negative image among potential travellers. In their level of influence, website design cost, accessibility, and showing the privilege of the country, security problem, and lack of partnership, government structural intermingling & infrastructure are the most influential challenges with a mean value greater than 4. According to the data obtained from interview from park managers many travellers and park officials were killed. Moreover, technological progress, changes in the industry’s market and security problem are the main challenges faced by DMO. Security has been a pressing issue especially in NP (namely Omo and Mago) and the way to off limit tourist destination of this tourist route. Establishing security personnel that includes the local can curve the problems.

Potentials and opportunities of tourism destination marketing

Table 4: Tourism Destination attributes

Destination attributes	Mean	Std. Deviation
The destination can be easily reached	3.18	1.363
Unspoiled nature	3.78	1.206
Climatic condition	3.19	1.318
Diversity of cultural/historical attractions	4.51	.564
Friendliness of the local people	4.10	.899
Offer of cultural and other events	4.04	.813
Opportunity for rest and relaxation	3.84	.937
Unique cultural and religious events	3.39	1.226
Archaeological and paleontological resources	2.98	1.256

Sources: Survey data, 2020

Diversity of cultural/historical attractions (4.51), Hospitality (4.1), Culture & event (4.04), are very important attributes of tourist destination followed by opportunity for rest and relaxation, unspoiled nature, unique cultural and religious events and archaeological and paleontological resources with a mean value of (3.84), (3.78), (3.39) and (2.98) respectively. The pleasant weather and climate can significantly influence tourists’ activities and behavior. Most of tourist destination elements regarded as very important for tourists are in immense potential in the study area. The hammer youth bull jumping and the body stick fight can be some of the cultural events to name. Community based security control can be a solution for this problem. This can be achieved by establishing small community-based tourism enterprises in all tourist routes in general and in specific security prone areas in particular.

Table 5: Main image built by visitors stay in this tourist destination

Image built from the stay	Frequency	Percent
Security	42	10.5
Beautiful landscape	98	25.3
Cultural diversity	137	35.4
Hospitality of the peoples	107	27.6
Others	3	0.77
Total	387	100.0

Source: Survey data, 2020

Cultural diversity occupied the most position in the mind of the travelers (35.4%) followed by hospitality of the peoples (27.6%), beautiful landscape (25.3) and security (10.5%). Some clear image has to appear whenever they hear of this tourist destination and that should be divided into different attributes of destination. Hence, along with the above rationale this tourist destination needs to have the customized destination positioning statement from the region. The data from interview reveals governments’ commitment, the destination image; the pleasant

weather, the welcoming people and relative price fairness are some of the opportunity this tourist route has to market its potential to target audience.

Table 6: Recommending this tourist destination

What to recommend?	Frequency	Percentage
The friendliness of the peoples	75	21.1
The security situation	41	11.5
Quality services of hotels	30	8.5
Accessibility of attraction	23	6.5
Tourism attraction	183	51.5
Others	3	.8
Total	355	100.0

Source: Survey data, 2020

They would like to recommend tourist attraction (natural, cultural and archaeological resources) (51.5%), Friendliness of the peoples (21.1%), Security (11.5) & Accessibility (6.5). Most roads towards the main tourist attraction of the destination are not convenience. The way to Mursi Village, one of the most noticeable attractions in Mago National park for example is one of source of complains as far as accessibility is concerned. Moreover, Omo National park and its outskirt attraction are some of the most inaccessible site of this tourist route. Being transportation is one major component of the industry; it is indispensable to improve access to these main sites of this tourist destination. For destinations, publicity represents public exposure, including “word of mouth,” which may be favorable or unfavorable.

Tourism destination choice

Table 7: Motivating factors to visit tourist destination

Motivating factors (Middleton and Clarke, 2003)	Frequency	Percent
Cultural/psychological/personal education motives	113	29.2
Physical/physiological motives	108	27.9
Business/work-related motives	64	16.5
Social/interpersonal and ethnic motives	71	18.3
Entertainment/amusement/pleasure/pastime motives	31	8.0
Romance	0	0
Religion	0	0
Total	387	100.0

Source: Survey data, 2020

In their level of importance, cultural/psychological/personal education motives (29.2%), physical/physiological motives (27.9%), social/interpersonal and ethnic motives (18.3%) and business/work-related motives (16.5%) and entertainment/amusement/pleasure/pastime motives (8.0%) are motivating factors to come to this destination whereas Romance/intimacy and religion are no more travel motives to this tourists destination. The second most leading motive is a physical/physiological motive which is associated with participation in indoor sport and active outdoor recreation such as golfing, walking, sailing, and skiing. Most of these specific motives hence are the potential for this tourism destination. It shows how this tourist destination attracts tourists when related to motives.

Table 8: Factors influencing tourist destination choice decisions

Factors influencing destination choice decision	Mean	Std. Deviation
Destination image	2.7132	.98059
Gender	2.2506	1.15472
Service intangibility	2.3669	1.25906
Individual characteristics	4.1680	.67156
Time	4.1705	.57752
Tourist culture and religion	2.4858	1.22016
Access for information/promotion	4.1525	.67908



Motivation for travel	4.0413	.78413
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Source: Survey data, 2020

Time (priority for activities), individual characteristics, access for information and motivation for travel are the most important factors to decide where to go with a mean value of 4.17, 4.16, 4.15 and 4.04 respectively. Gender of the tourist, service intangibility, and tourist culture/religion and destination image is least important factor. It is vital hence to meet these elements effectively in order to be prioritized by tourist starting from making the destination year round to meeting individual needs of tourist including lifecycle and promoting the destination to create huge access of information.

Tourism destination marketing practices

Promotional practices of this tourist destination and its effect on destination choice

Table 9: Sources of information to come to this tourist destination

Sources of information	Frequency	Percent
I already know of it	6	1.5
The internet	110	27.6
Friends and relatives	29	7.3
Media-social media	46	11.6
Guide books	62	15.6
TO and TA-outbound	80	20.1
TO and TA-inbound	18	4.5
Fair and exhibition	17	4.3
It was part of the travel package	12	3.0
Other	7	1.8
Total	387	100%

Source: Survey data, 2020

Internet (27.8%) is dominant source. Outbound TO and TA (20.1%) are the next sources used which are mostly used by travelers who want security and comfort (Gitelson & Crompton, 1983). Guidebooks, Social Media, friends and relatives, inbound TA and TO, fair and exhibition, travel package, other sources and already having knowledge are another source of information with a frequency of 15.6%, 11.6%, 7.3%, 4.5%, 4.3%, 3%, 1.8% and 1.5% respectively. If outbound TO and TA are serving as a source of information it means they organize trip to overseas destination. More efforts need to be done to work with overseas Ethiopian embassies to organize fair and exhibition to promote the country in general and this tourist route in particular.

Table 10: Promotional techniques used by tourism businesses

Promotional techniques	Frequency	Percent	Social media	Frequency	Percent
TV	6	10	Face book	19	67.8
Social Media	28	46.7	Twitter	5	17.8
Printed Media	15	25.0	Google plus	0	0
Radio	4	6.7	YouTube	0	0
Website/internet	3	5.0	Other	0	0
All	4	6.7	All	4	14.2
Total	60	100.0	Total	28	100.0

Source: Survey data, 2020

Social media (mainly face book and twitter) and printed media including brochures, folders and leaflets are the leading Medias used to promote tourism business. TV (10%), radios (6.7%) and website (5.0%) are the least media used. The usage of social media is about enhancing the site in which the shared or posted content harvests links which act as trust confirmation in the

purpose of listening to what the community often engaged in. It is hence very crucial to choose among media types to promote tourism business by comparing their purpose. \

Visitor's price perception

Table 11: Price perception of visitors in this tourist destination

Price of services/facilities	Mean	Std. Deviation
Room price	4.17	.770
Price of souvenirs and other cultural handicrafts	3.55	1.215
Price of transportation for arrival	3.25	1.341
Boating fee	2.92	1.250
Guiding service fee	2.82	1.174
Price of Guide book and other printed materials	2.65	1.108
Entrance fee of museums, cultural centers and protected area	2.57	.718
Food and drinking item price	2.46	.585
Escort and security fee in national park and related areas	2.44	1.303
Price of transportation to move around in this destination	2.25	.483
Entertainment and other miscellaneous expense	2.21	1.060

Source: Survey data, 2020

Room, souvenirs & transportation price for arrival are expensive while entertainment & price of transportation to move around is cheap. The price charged should not harm the demand for this tourist route. Some strict follow up is necessary in enabling tourism businesses in this tourist route to set reasonable price.

Table 12: Overall Marketing practices in this tourist destination

Marketing practices	Mean	Std. Dev
Availability of brochures and folders at TIC	4.04	.985
Tour guiding practices encourages repeat visit	3.99	.811
Coloring, grammar and information provided on leaflet is proper	3.84	.911
Most sign posts are not visible enough and difficult to understand	3.79	1.142
The peoples are friendly to guests which makes tourists feel home	3.65	1.085
Pictures in accommodation are revealing the local culture	3.64	1.278
Interior and exterior design of hotels shows local culture	3.49	1.316
Accommodation establishments included local dishes in their menu	3.49	1.212
Sufficiency of guide books and maps in this destination	3.36	1.340
Hotel ambiances and settings promotes local culture	3.31	1.275
Information on the websites is exactly what we can get in reality	2.81	1.394
Availability of attractive websites about this area	2.70	1.309
Sign posts are equivalent to the areas resource endowment	2.09	1.130
Sign post are good in quality and high in number,	2.04	1.103
There is sufficient signage showing different sites	1.92	1.149
Sign posts are sufficient, properly designed and attractive	1.89	.972
Most sign posts are professionally prepared	1.84	1.026

Source: Survey data, 2020

Sufficiency of brochures and folders, interpretation by guides, leaflet's information properness is some of marketing practices regarded as highly practiced in this tourist destination with a mean value of 4.04, 3.99 and 3.84 respectively. In this regard it is positive to see printed media is in high abundance in this new tourist route. On the other extreme most sign posts lack quality, not in the required number, insufficient, properly invisible, improperly designed, not to the level to show the resources endowment of the destination. These elements in the above table are mandatory if the destination wants to remain competitive tourist destination.

Discussion

The study founded that cultural diversity, hospitality, opportunity for rest and relaxation and unspoiled nature are the most important attributes of southern Ethiopian tourist route. Related

to cultural diversity, the result is also corresponding with the main image tourist built from tourist's stay in the destination followed by friendliness of the peoples which helps to promote places (Chigora & Hoque, 2018). Van der Ark & Richards (2006) as well as Smith (2003) proved that cultural attractions have becoming the most important attributes, which motivates people to travel. The route contains south Omo village, an example of cultural and ethnic diversity, a home for diverse cultural practices of 16 ethnic communities (Gedecho & Guangul 2017) which is motivating factor for tourists visiting this tourist route which is related with participation on festivals, theatre, music, museum, spectators or player (Middleton & Clarke, 2003), while romance and religion being not a motive at all. Being culturally rich plays a vital role since culture has considerable appeal to more tourists (Mapingure, 2018) which can be vital for this destination since it attracts tourist with diverse motivations. The route is also rich in natural attractions, protected areas and water resources noticeably the Omo River which is an excellent opportunity since tourists' would like to enjoy the destinations' natural views and beautiful scenery (Formica & Littlefield, 2000). This shows the route is ideal place for live culture and wildlife tourism which can attract large number of tourists to the area if properly marketed, turned into tourism product and promoted. In this regard the destination is lagging behind compared with its immense tourism potential. It is hence vital to capitalize the main potential, capacitate every component of the industry and collaborate with key actors to market the route to potential audience in order to reap the possible maximum benefit from the industry.

The study also revealed that language barriers, inaccessibility, security and service quality are the most challenge faced by tourist during their visitation. Study findings confirm previous contentions that language barriers (Kumar, 2018), safety and security and poor infrastructure are problems faced by tourists in tourist destinations (Chockalingam & Ganesh, 2010). Tourism business, guiding services and information Centres of this destination should give high attention to improve the language skills of their respective staff. These attributes are not to be recommended for others which affect the destination to not able to attract large number of tourist since tourists now a day depends mostly on information from others to reduce risk and uncertainty of purchasing travel related products (Matikiti-Manyeverve & Kruger, 2019) Recent research across industries show that most customers believe more in the f-factor (friends, families, Facebook fans, Twitter followers) than in marketing communications (Kotler et al., 2017). Specific to accessibility, which is an attractive attribute for certain destination (Zhou, 2005); the result is parallel with Ethiopia's rank with road quality; 97th out of 137 countries (WEF, 2017-2018). Moreover, Ariya, Sempele, and Wishitemi, (2020) relates accessibility to satisfaction and revisit intentions. Management must value positive future intentions (Ramukumba, 2018). Room price is rated as most expensive which is among attributes not to recommend. However, according to WEF (2013) Ethiopia is ranked 22nd in price competitiveness in the travel & tourism industry out of 140 countries. In this regard this study comes up with something novel. Price is a major attribute in tourists' decision to choose one destination over the other (Christie & Crompton, 2001). The price should fall somewhere between one that is too high to produce any demand and one that is too low to produce a profit (Kotler, 2008).

From tourism business context high cost of media and seasonality of the business are the main challenges faced. Social media is the most utilized means of promotion followed by printed media. According to Sass (2011) social media is widely used to access destination information. Moreover, Duffett & Nzeku (2021) stated social media has an enormous influence to select a tourist destination. Particular to small business, social media usage significantly boost marketing capability that might bridge the gap to make marketing strategies sustainable (Oji et al., 2017). Information posted and photos shared on social media sites are becoming a base for tourist's travel decisions (Matikiti-Manyeverve & Kruger, 2019). Audio-visual media

and websites are the least utilized means of promotion amongst tourism business. However, it should be noted these media types are ideal for tourist attraction for initial promotion (Belch & Belch, 2004). Particular to website, it should be noted it can be one of the best tools for promotion (Kotler et al., 2010).

DMO are facing challenges related to government structural intermingling, website design cost, previous country image, accessibility and security problem. Several previous scholarly works like Weru (2021) proves over all destination images had the greatest effect on post visit behavior. Unlike physical damages destination image might be more complicated to rebuild and plays crucial role in tourist behavior and intention to travel (Minar, 2019). Bayih & Tola (2017) stated bad image in the eyes of the visitor is one of promotion and marketing challenges in their study in Bale Mountains National Park which shares similar sort of tourists and nature of resources. It should be noted yet image can be frozen and doesn't show the real picture, depending on image can result success in drawing tourist (Christopher, 2009). Tourism is becoming more than an offline experience (Louw, 2017). Official websites provides pieces of information thereby assisting tourist before, during and after both an online as well as physical visitation. There is some security threat in the off-limit destination of this tourist route due to conflict of interest between local community and the industry. This is parallel with Ethiopian global competitiveness index result in safety and security that ranks 99th out of 136 countries (WEF, 2017). Tourists will not spend their hard-earned money to go to a destination where their safety and well-being may be in jeopardy (Tan et al., 2017). In the other extreme ancillary services and positive words of mouth are opportunities to exploit.

Availability of free time, individual characteristics and access for information are the most determinant factors to choose this tourist destination. Deciding where to go is an important part in the decision-making process which is a result of a collection of ideas, beliefs and perceptions people have about the daily happenings in a destination and the attributes they attach with the destination intended for visitation (Lin et al., 2007)

The internet and outbound travel agency and tour operation are the main sources of information to visit this tourist destination. The internet has become the most preferred information sources by large number of travellers (Tjostheim et al., 2007). Apart from this printed media is also used as sources of information by considerable number of tourists which believed to be an ideal sources of information for those motivated to explore new and unfamiliar destination (Gitelson & Crompton, 1983) Pertaining to the overall promotional practices printed media including brochures and folders are fairly available at TIC which is the best way for initial publicity of tourist attraction (Belch & Belch, 2004). Contrary to this website (ibid) which is one of the best ways for initial publicity is least available for most tourist sites and businesses in this tourist destination.

Conclusion

This study was aimed assessing tourism destination marketing at tourist route level in southern Ethiopian tourist route. The southern Ethiopian tourist route is a home for an immense tourism potential including cultural and natural tourism resources. Compared with the resources potential the marketing activity is at its infancy. Southern Ethiopian tourist route is a home for cultural diversity, friendliness of the local people and opportunity for rest mainly related to nature. Cultural diversity is the main motivating factors for tourists visiting this tourist route in addition to the natural attraction including protected areas and water resources which creates an opportunity to visit beautiful scenery. From demand perspective, language barrier, inaccessibility, security and service quality are the main challenges of marketing this tourist route. Accordingly, these are not attributes to recommend for other by visitors. From supply side cost of media and lack of year round business is the main challenges faced. Tourism

businesses are mainly utilizing social media for promotion while audio-visual media and websites are the least used tools. In line with this government structural intermingling, website design cost, destination image and accessibility are the main challenges faced by DMO. The internet and outbound travel agency and tour operation are the main sources of information for tourist visiting this tourist route. Internet and outbound travel agency and tour operation are the main sources of information visiting this tourist route while printed media is slightly used sources of information. If the tourism potential in this tourist is not well marketed, the industry cannot yield the desired benefit the local and national economy. To achieve this, main tourism potential the route contains need to be marketed while challenges should be mitigated. Accordingly, all concerned tourism practitioners should strongly collaborate to solve problem related security threat specifically at protected areas and accessibility in the off limit tourist destination.

There are other issues appear to be important and not well studied on the subject. Though the marketing challenges was addressed at route level, some site specific issues in relation to destination marketing should be studied. Topic under the general notion of marketing such as promotion, accessibility and tourism product development can be studied independently. Moreover, each tourist sites within the route can be studied based on the potential they could provide for different tourism market segment. Moreover, marketing elements and mixes can be independently researched to know how this tourist route can better provide tourism experience in one hand and to mitigate the problems the route is facing from differentiating itself from other competing destination on the other hand.

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