



Status of Tourism Marketing and Promotion: Gambella People's National Regional State, Gambella, South West Ethiopia

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Abstract

Nowadays tourism is one of the largest and increasingly recognized fastest growing industries globally. Tourism marketing and promotion is a core processes in the tourism industry and is one of the most important procedures of identifying the need of customers through an integrated marketing approach and by designing genuine products or services to target prospective consumers. Even though Gambella Region has an abundance of attractions and tourism products, less attention is given to tourism marketing and promotion. The study aimed at assessing the status of marketing and promotion strategies for sustainable tourism development at Gambella Peoples Nationals Regional State of Ethiopia. The study involved both desk and field research and a convenience sampling was used of tourists (n= 23). A purposive sampling method was adopted for personnel of Gambella Cultural Tourism Bureau and Gambella National Park office (n=15), Majang Zone Administration (n=19), hotels and resorts (n= 27) and NGOs (n= 5). Accordingly, this study involved (n=89) respondents from four sample categories. Collected raw data were chosen, refined, categorized, edited, evaluated, coded and entered to SPSS software version 20. Different methods of data analysis were used to investigate different marketing and promotion strategies. Descriptive statistics were computed for relevant variables and information obtained from the key informants was described in what is hopefully meaningful content. Even though, the Region has tremendous tourism potential, the findings of this study illustrates that there is weak marketing and promotion of the tourism industry in the region. Less attention is given to inter-alia, the roles of website development, information updating, linkages with tour operators, developing information centers, competition, guidebook development and product knowledge. Providing trained experts and filling a knowledge gap regarding tourism marketing and promotion, could be resolved through capacity building and tourism marketing and promotion would thus be enhanced via connecting with large tour and accommodation operators. Such measures would help in driving tourism sustainability in the region.

Keywords: Tourism, Marketing, Promotion, Gambella, Ethiopia

Introduction

Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment, for personal or business/professional



purposes (UNWTO, 2006). According to Raju (2009) tourism has emerged as the largest global industry of the 20th century. Moreover, it is considered one of the fastest growing and most competitive businesses in the world. Tourism is also one of the largest and most important industries in the world in terms of employment creation and generation of foreign revenue (UNDP, 2011). It is one of the main sources for foreign exchange income and the number one export group, creating considerably wanted employment opportunities for many developing countries (UNWTO, 2011). Marketing in the tourism industry is associated to making potential customers sensitive to the products and service available in the tourism area and persuade them to visit and propose that they will be satisfied and benefit if they become customers. Marketing is thus the systemic, coordinated and integrated effort to optimize the satisfaction of tourists by making and providing the best possible services available. Promotion is the process of initiating, nurturing and maintaining interactive communications with the market and managing the customer relationship over time, during the pre-selling, selling, consuming and post consumption stages (Lamsou, Niroomand & Rafsanjani, 2013). The development of tourism marketing and promotion of a destination is very important in the tourism industry. The tourism marketing and promotion plan of one region, state, and country can affect those of another region, state and country, one destination of another destination and one business of another business. Hence, one must understand that marketing strategies and promotion to compete in the market with others is challenging and requires thought. It is said that even 'good marketing is done mostly for bad products' but think what if the 'product is good'. Most potential tourism products fail because of bad marketing and promotion strategies. However, the contribution of marketing and promotion to the travel and tourism industry has been undervalued by both policy makers and practitioners, leading to a misunderstanding of the nature and value of the tourism destinations (Riege & Perry, 2004).

Ethiopia has an abundance of attractions of numerous types ranging from wildlife, landscape culture, scenery, history and archeology sites that set it apart from its neighbours. UNESCO has registered eleven Ethiopian historical and natural sites as world heritage sites. These are Fasil castle (1979), Axum (1980), rock hewn churches of Lalibela (1978), Simien mountains national park (1978), Tiya (1980), Harar (2006), lower Omo valley (1980), lower Awash valley(1980), Konso (2011), Meskel celebration (2013), and Chenbelala celebration (2015) (Ashenafi, 2016). Ethiopia is thus a suitable place with a wide range of tourism attractions and it needs to be competitive in attracting tourists and needs to have an appropriate marketing strategy in how to market its various tourism potentials (Asmamaw & Verma, 2013). Generally, tourism is becoming one of the important sectors in Ethiopia contributing a great deal towards all the social, cultural, and economic development aspects of the country although its marketing and promotion development is still unsatisfactory when considering the diverse tourism resources of the country (MoCT, 2009) that are undervalued. Although Ethiopia is known to possess an ever-increasing international tourist inflow, the country is one of the lowest tourist inflow benefit recipient countries in Africa, with a share of only 0.58% arrivals in 2003 (89.95US\$) and this can be compared with about US\$ 650 million for Tanzania in the same year (UNWTO, 2006). Regardless of the presence of the tourism resources both in the national and regional levels, the development of the tourism industry in Ethiopia is still in an infant stage. In the past less attention was given to this industry and it therefore lacks apposite marketing and promotion strategies.

Gambella is one of the most beautiful ethnic cultural destinations located in the south west of Ethiopia. It has retained its cultural values intact in such a way that it seems one is entering it in ancient times where everything was indigenous, that is, from life to livelihood methods. It has tremendous potential to attract tourists from various part of Ethiopia and the world. However, its tourism marketing and promotion is very weak. Lacking in marketing skills and promotion and

weak coordination between Gambella Cultural Tourism Bureau and Gambella National Park office as well as all concerned stakeholders, and this has created a big gap in enthusiasm to implement the required programmes of marketing, promotion and operations. Some villages have been listed as ‘Cultural Villages’ to promote tourism, but less attention is given and on the ground the reality is poor aesthetics and alack of upkeep, ambience and needed promotional initiatives. A village adoption model can be developed to promote the village, which is rich in culture, traditions, fairs, festivals, art and crafts, folk dancing, folklore and folk music (Kumar, 2016). These problems can be mitigated by designing the appropriate marketing and promotion strategies such as product strategy, price strategy, promotion strategy, place (distribution) strategy, the people component strategy, the service delivery process strategy and managing physical evidence and design strategy in the pursuit of providing better services to tourists and meeting or sometimes exceeding their expectations. Hence, this study focuses on assessing the status of tourism marketing and promotion strategies for the sustainable development of the ecotourism/tourism industry in Gambella Region.

Methodology

Study Area

The study was conducted from September 2017- June 2018, in Gambella People’s National Regional State which is located in the South Western part of the Country. It is about 777 km away from Addis Ababa, the Capital City of Ethiopia. It lies between 7°49’59”N latitude and 34°30’00”E longitudes, which covers an area of about 29,782.82 km². The Region is bounded to the North, North East and East by Oromiya National Regional State, to the South and South East by the Southern People’s National Regional State and to the South West, West and North West by the Republic of South Sudan. Its altitude ranges from 300 to 2300 m.a.s.l. with average annual temperature is 27.6^oc but the mean monthly temperature varies significantly and the average annual rainfall is 1400 mm (Yeshibar, 2003). Based on the 2007 Census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), the Gambella Region has total population of 307,096, consisting of 159,787 men and 147,309 women.

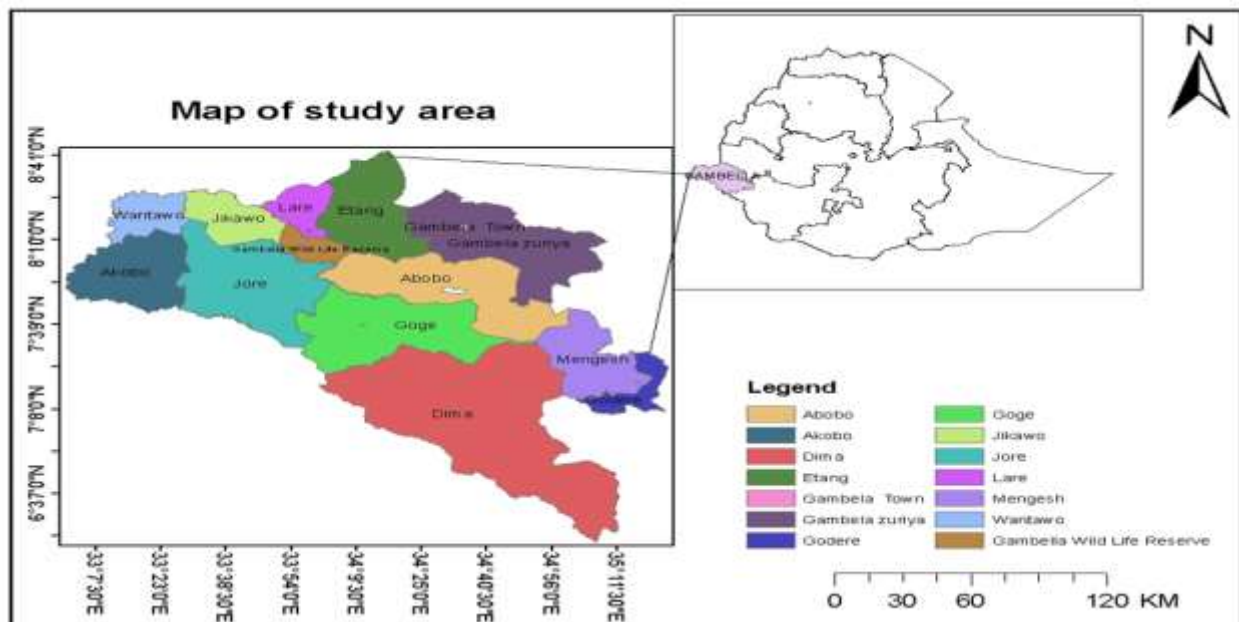


Figure1: Map of the study area Source: Ethio_GIS Data Base, ESRI ARC_GIS 10.1, 2010



Sampling Design

In this study mostly non-probability, purposive and convenience sampling techniques were adopted. In line with this, key informants were purposively involved based on the fact that the sample was most likely to provide the desired information. This was a reasonable way in order to represent the true situation and to achieve the research objectives. Besides this, if interviews are conducted with household and other respondents, they may not give truly valuable responses since the concept of tourism marketing and promotion is for some a new idea. Moreover, most senior experts whose profession is more related to tourism were selected. Accordingly, key informants from the Gambella Culture and Tourism Office and the Gambella National Park Office (n= 15), Majang Zone administration (n= 19) and NGOs experts (n= 5) respondents were involved in the study. Likewise, a convenience sampling technique was used to select the required hotels and resorts (n= 27) and tourists (n= 23) visiting cultural villages and Gambella National Park. Hence, a total of (n= 89) people were consulted for this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews with international tourists, domestic tourists, Gambella Culture and Tourism Office and Gambella National Park Office, Majang Zone administration, NGOs as well as the hotels and tour operators. Secondary data were obtained from published materials such as academic journals, articles, as well as websites to access the information concerning marketing and promotional strategies in general. Deep interviews were carried out by firstly explaining the concept and objectives of the study. Discussions were then held with key informants, with unstructured, open-ended questions. Collected raw data were refined, categorized, edited, evaluated, coded and entered in to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were computed for relevant variables and presented using tables, graphs and charts, and described in meaningful content. Information obtained from in-depth interviews and discussions was cross-checked and described in text in an expressive way.

Results and Discussions

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

As table 1 shows, about 84.27% of the respondents were males. Similarly, about 61.80% of the respondents were educated first degree holders and 8.99% of the respondents were attending higher education institutions. Among the respondents, 55.06% were between the age category of 26-35 and 3.37% were in the age category of >55.

No.	Variables		Sample Categories				Frequency	Percentage (%)
			Officials	NGOs	Visitors	Resort Operators		
1	Sex	Male	29	5	17	24	75	84.27
		Female	5	-	6	3	14	15.73
2	Education Level	Masters	3	-	2	3	8	8.99
		Bachelor	19	5	18	13	55	61.80
		School	12	-	3	11	26	29.21
3	Age Categories	18-25	6	-	2	3	11	12.40
		26-35	19	4	13	13	49	55.06
		36-45	7	1	5	8	21	23.60
		46-55	2	-	1	2	5	5.62
		> 55	0	-	2	1	3	3.37
4	Marital Status	Married	25	2	19	27	73	82.02



5	Income Level (in ETB)	Single	9	3	4	-	16	17.98
		<1500	-	-	-	-	0	0
		1500-3000	6	-	-	-	-	6.74
		3000-4500	11	-	-	-	11	12.36
		>4500	17	5	23	27	72	80.90

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n=89)

Status of Tourism Marketing

According to interviewed officials of Majang Zone administration (n=19), about 42.1% have tourism product knowledge and can identify their customers. About 73.68% informed that competition is also a crucial element in marketing strategies. They indicated that tourism industry development should play significant role in socioeconomic development of the local community (63.16%). However, most of the results show that there are weak marketing strategies and officials/experts were lacking in product designing, development and marketing skills. There were also indications of lack of interests, ideas and opinions regarding various strategies of tourism marketing. For instance, according to Figure 1, the percentage of people said “Yes” regarding various tools of marketing such as website development (21.06%), promotion (15.79%), guidebooks or directories (10.53%), linkage with tour operators (10.53%), and others, whereas in same office the percentage of officials saying “No” and “Not Sure” were higher, which shows a complete mismatch and lack of interest/improper functioning. See also figure 2 below.

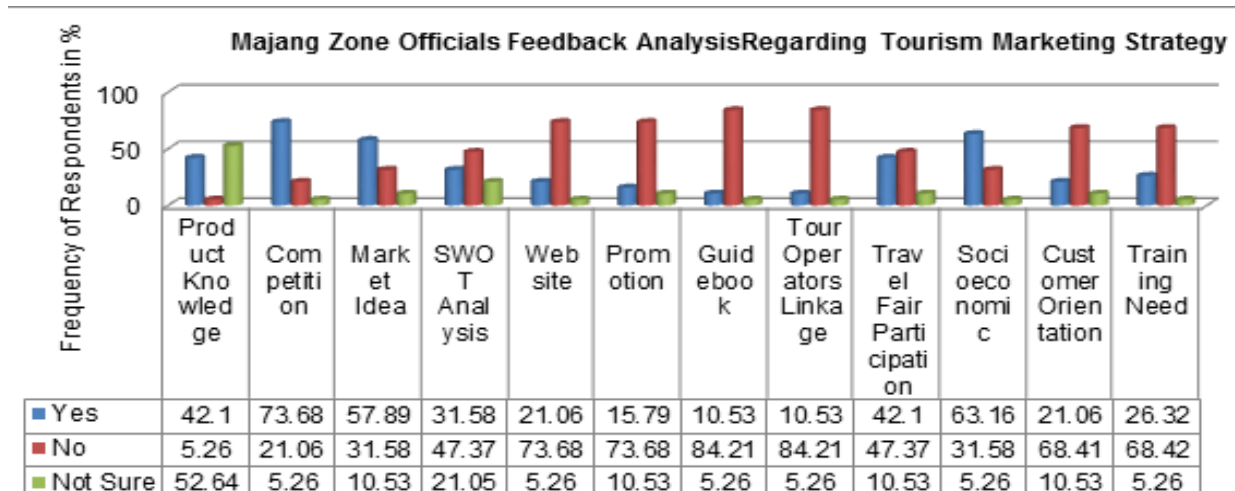


Figure 2: Majang Zone officials’ feedback analysis regarding tourism marketing strategies

Field survey feedback from Gambella Culture and Tourism Bureau and Gambella National Park officials (n=15) shows that there is weak website development to promote and announce existing tourism products (26.47%), product knowledge (45.65%), and a lack of tourist guidebooks (44.17%). There is also an insignificant linkage with national tour operators to let them know about the products and destinations of the region (17.86%). Participation in travel fairs and tourism conferences is not sound (17.86%). On the other hand, some respondents were not sure about the role of website development in tourism industry (11.71%). They were not confident enough to explain available product knowledge (6.52%), no linkages with tour operators (2.33%) and participation in travel fairs (7.43%). There is a knowledge gap about the importance of and role of tourist guidebooks (55.83 % “No idea”) and linkage with tour operators

(79.81%). They believe that further training (77.24%) is a core activity to effectively market and promote tourism destinations of the Region. See figure 3 below.

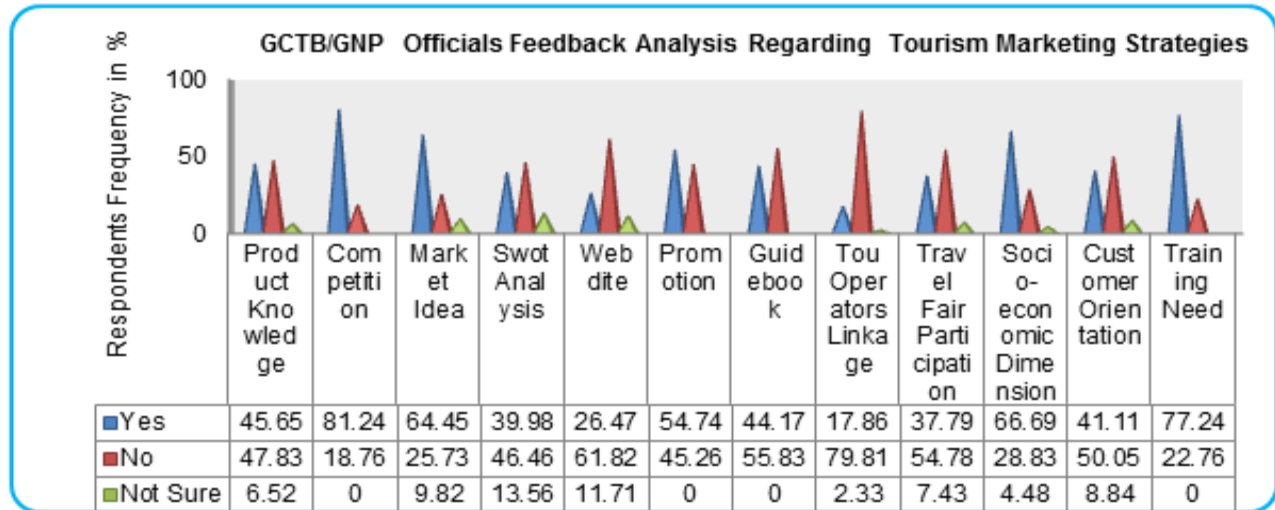


Figure 3: Gambella Culture and Tourism Bureau/Gambella National Park officials' feedback analysis regarding marketing strategies

Respondents of lodges/resorts/hotels operators (n=27) also indicated “Yes” that they had little tourism product knowledge of Gambella Region (27.15%), informed of weak website development to promote products (18.89%), weak promotion of existing tourism products (22.34%), a lack of guidebook tourism products and destination services (11.72%), unsatisfactory linkage with tour operators (29.97%). Lodges/resorts/hotels operators, particularly located in Addis Ababa were operating their businesses in other regions rather than Gambella Region since they were lacking in information about ecotourism products and destinations of the region. This was due to unsound promotion (22.34%), lack of guidebooks (11.72%), and weak linkage with lodges/resorts/hotels operators resulting in inadequate accommodation provision in the region.

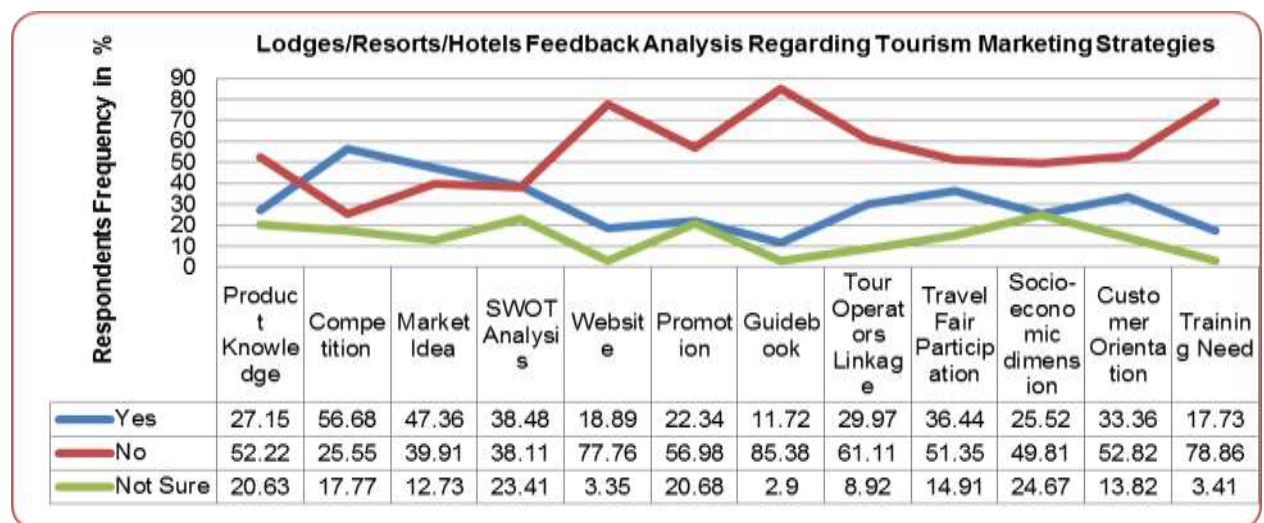


Figure 4: Lodges/Resorts/Hotels Feedback Analysis Regarding Marketing Strategies

Key informant respondents from NGOs experts indicated (Yes) that they have a good tourism product knowledge (75%), information updates (83%), a good market orientation (74%), and know of website development (87%). They placed more emphasis on promotion (92%) of available tourism products and the socioeconomic dimension and community culture conservation (90%). Likewise, they explained the role of Tour Operator's linkage (89%) to advertise existing tourism potential as well as to catch more international and domestic visitors.

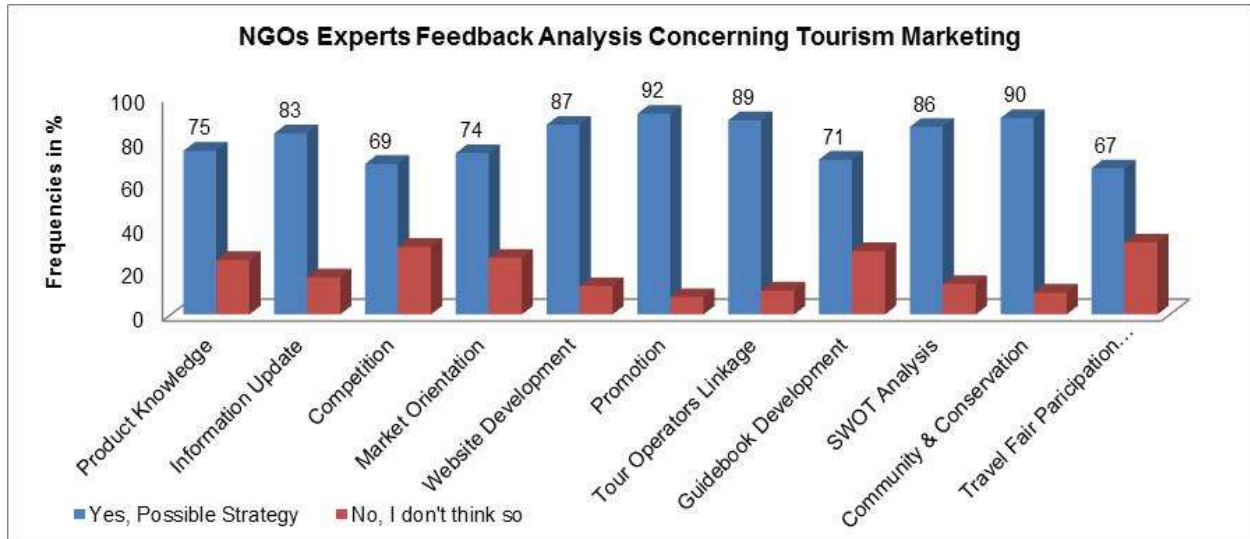


Figure 5: NGOs experts' feedback analysis concerning tourism marketing strategies

Status of Tourism Promotion

Promotional tools are crucial for the tourism/ecotourism development in a certain area. In this regard, tourists/visitors (n=23) who observed the destinations in the region indicated that the status of tourism promotion is very weak. They informed that there is no organized information center and local tour guide associations in the region about tourism products and destinations. There are inadequate promotional materials or direction boards (20%) to tourism destinations and Gambella National Park. Furthermore, resorts/hotels did not play a significant role as expected in tourism promotion. They lack tourism/travel desks, flyers, brochures, guidebooks in hotels (20%). There is also weak advertisement about tourism destinations and area potential in public places, special events, social medias, the radio (10%) See figure 6 for details.

Figure 6: Visitors feedback analysis regarding tourism promotion

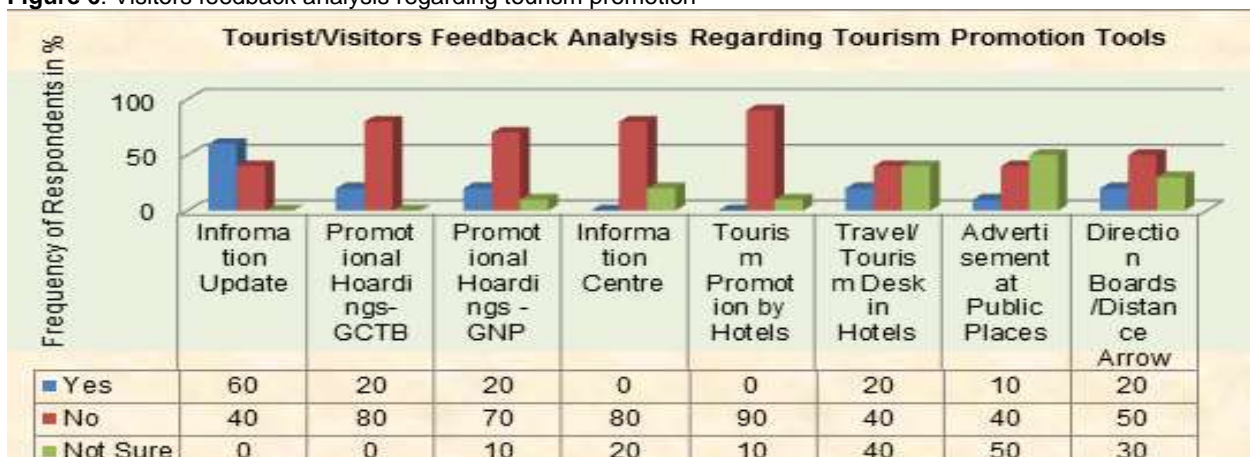


Figure 7 below, shows respondents from Gambella Culture and Tourism Bureau and Gambella National Park officials indicated that tourism promotional strategies were weak. This can be seen through the percentage of officials saying “Yes” in regards to the information center about tourism products (33.14%), travel/tourism desk in the hotels/resorts (37.12%), direction boards (43.42%), linkage with tour operators (17.86%), communication (guidebooks) for marketing and destinations (44.17%) and website presence about tourism destinations of the region(26.47%). Similarly, respondents were also not sure whether it exists or not regarding information center (14.19%), travel/tourism desk in the hotels/resorts (17.48%), direction boards (10.97%), linkage with tour operators (2.33%) and presence of website (11.71%). There were also problems in coordination, commitment and communication among concerned stakeholders. Besides this, there is gap in marketing skills and interest with regard to tourism products and destinations in the region. In concerned offices, personnel were lacking in various skills, interest, adequate tools for marketing, product design skills as well as operational activities. Relationship Management was also missing which is an important strategy of strategic marketing and promotion in tourism industry.

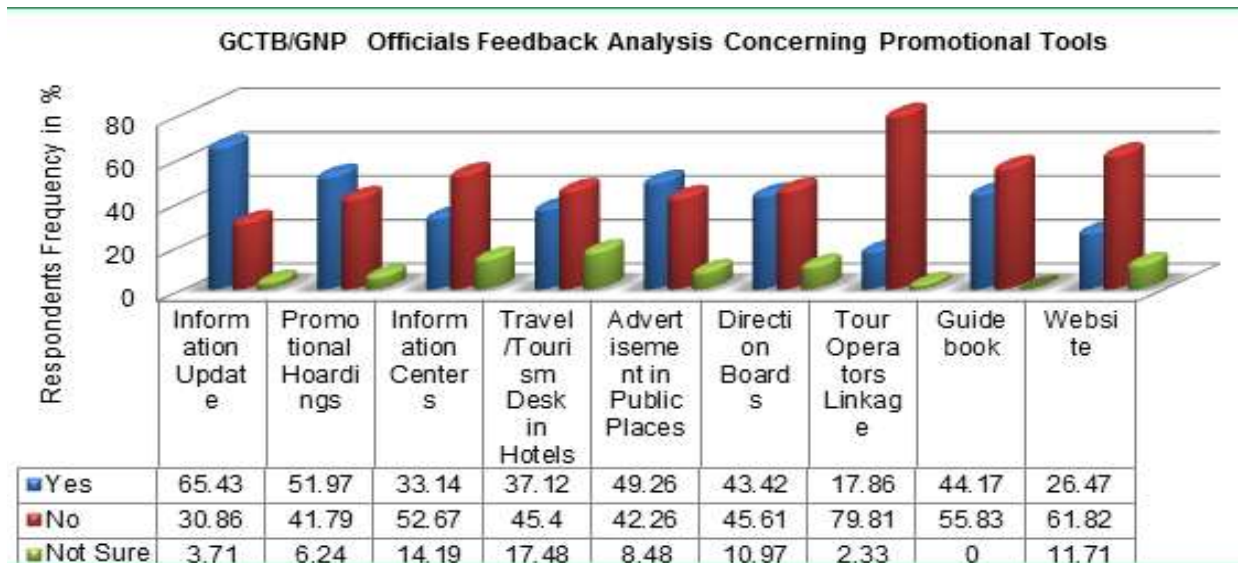


Figure 7: GCTB/GNP Officials Feedback Analysis Concerning Promotional Tools

Lodes/resorts/hotels which indicated “Yes” as figure 8 shows below, there were insignificant information updates concerning tourism products, destinations and marketing strategies (17.18%), poor promotional methods (24.36%), insufficient information centers (29.93%), lack of practicing travel/tourism desks in hotels (14.82%), and a lack of websites (6.31%). These were the major hindering factors of tourism/ecotourism development in the region. Respondents were not sure whether there are any promotional tools are ongoing activities or not in the region.

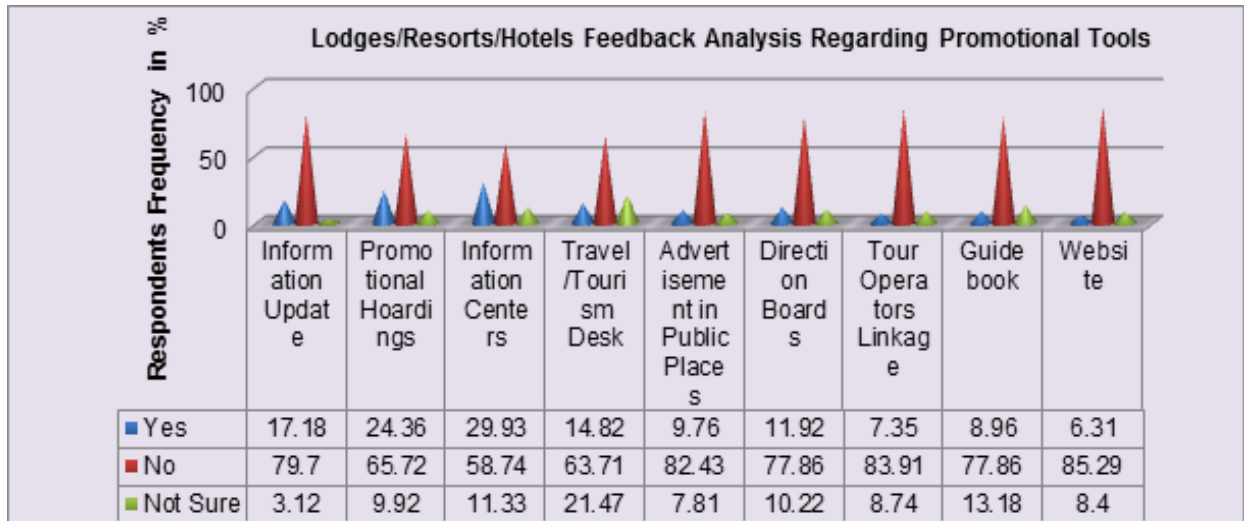


Figure 8: Lodges/Resorts/Hotels Feedback Analysis Regarding Promotional Tools

Conclusion

Tourism marketing and promotion is the most vital activity in the tourism industry in order to ensure sustainable tourism development in any area. It is one of the most important procedures for identifying the needs of customers through an integrated marketing approach and designing of the genuine products or services to target the prospective consumers. Gambella is one of the most beautiful ethnic cultural destinations which has marvelous potential (natural, manmade, cultural, historic and special events) to attract tourist from various parts of world. Nevertheless, tourism marketing and promotion thereof is still at an infant stage. Relationship Marketing (RM) has good strategies and tactics to touch the sentiments, emotions and ego of different classes of people and then provide remedies to find out the best solution. It has strategic power to connect host and guest as it emphasizes on a “give back and take away tourism” through anticipating guest-host relationships both in the process of conservation and utilization of various resources and skills available to them. The government of Gambella Region through its Culture and Tourism offices, Tourism Organization office, Gambella National Park office and all other concerned stakeholders has made some effort to make sure that tourism in Gambella becomes one of the key sectors in which the country can focus so as to generate much needed foreign exchange that can be used for the country’s foreign transactions such as imports for both consumer and capital goods as well as for the livelihood of local communities.

To achieve tourism development that is sustainable, all stakeholders have been practicing different marketing and promotional strategies such as product designing, development and marketing strategy with the main focus on product diversification. However, tourism marketing and promotion in the region is still in an infant stage. The major marketing and promotional gaps are lack of product knowledge, competition, lack of timely information updates, lack of websites and their development, lack of tourist guidebooks, poor linkages with tour operators, insignificant communication with resort/lodge/hotel operators, lack of tourism/travel desks in the hotels, lack of information centers, weak promotion through social medias, and also the radio. Hence, it was found that enhancing marketing and introducing promotional tools such as trade shows and exhibitions, internet/website development, using TV channels and social media, collaboration with airlines, tour operators and hotels, creating information centers are the core and essential aspects requiring work in order to ensure the sustainable development of the



tourism industry in the region. The distribution of needed tourist products must be undertaken by tour operators, airlines, hotels/resorts, tour guides, travel guides, travel agents and various other national and international tourism organizations for marketing to be able reach the maximum targeted prospective buyers and consumers. Furthermore, capacity-building and training employees and local people is undeniably also a major assignment if the region is to provide better hospitality to tourists, and enhance tourism marketing and promotion.

Recommendations

- Experts, staff and the youth of concerned sectors need to be provided with capacity building and sufficient training in tourism product designing, development and marketing.
- A conducive environment and support should be made available from concerned government bodies to hotel/lodge/resort operators with support to install their businesses in the region.
- Developing of exchange programs among other tourism/ecotourism destinations and their experts to share marketing, designing and promotional strategies as well as to develop information centers and local tour guide associations should be prioritized.
- Collaboration with large size tour operators and specialized eco-cultural and wildlife safari tour operators would be the best way to attract tourists from throughout the world.
- Using the internet to increase the ability of tourism and ecotourism professionals to exchange information and expertise by developing web pages, social networking sites like, Facebook, WhatsApp, Google+, LinkedIn, yahoo groups, and maintaining of e-mail lists current, is a critical need.

Acknowledgements

Our heartfelt thankfulness goes to all the people involved in the interview and discussions. We are grateful to Research Directorate, Gambella University for logistics arrangements. Financial support was provided by MELCA-ETHIOPIA (Movement for Ecological Learning and Action).

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