



**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, LANGUAGE AND JOURNALISM**

**SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION**

**Integrated Marketing Communication Dimensions of Ethiopia's Nation branding system**

A RESEARCH PAPER SUBMITTED TO ADDIS ABABA

UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION IN  
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR MA THESIS

**By**

**SELAMAWIT KASSA**

**STUDENT ID – GSE/7429/14**

**PUBLIC RELATIONS AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION, EXTENSION CLASS**

**MAY 2024GC**

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## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that **Integrated Marketing Communication Dimensions of Nation branding system: A quality Practical Insights for Ethiopia** is my original work and has neither been presented in any other universities nor was published before and that all sources of materials used for the thesis have aptly been acknowledged by means of complete referencing.

SELAMAWIT KASSA WODAJENEH

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Signature

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

10<sup>TH</sup> May, 2024

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**

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**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATIONS**

This is to certify that the thesis is prepared by Selamawit Kassa Wodajeneh entitled Integrated Marketing Communication Dimensions of Nation branding system: A quality Practical Insights for Ethiopia which is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of master Journalism and communication. It complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

**Approved by: Members of the Examining Committee**

**Samson Mekonen (PhD)**

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## **Acronyms**

DMO	Destination Marketing Organization
ETO	Ethiopian Tourism Organization
ETTC	Ethiopian Tourism Transformation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMC	Integrated Marketing Communication
LDC	Least Developed Countries
MoT	Ministry of Tourism (FDRE)
NB	Nation Branding
NBI	Nation Brands Index
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OTA	Online Travel Agencies
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TE	Tourism Ethiopia
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WTM	World Travel Market

## **Abstract**

Nation branding is a growing trend for nations to differentiate and improve economic performance, especially in tourism, investments, and exports. Ethiopia, with its rich cultural heritage and rapidly growing economy, can leverage its unique cultural heritage to develop an integrated marketing communication framework for nation branding. This study uses qualitative research methodology to explore subjective experiences, meanings, and social phenomena. Primary sources include Ministry of Tourism leaders, public relations executives, and documents like the Tourism Marketing Strategy for Ethiopia, Ethiopian Tourism Brand Manual, and MoT's 10-year strategic plan. The conceptual framework suggests that the revitalization process begins with a clear strategic vision and mission from the top leadership, followed by re-evaluating the vision, core values, and message through input from key stakeholders.

Ethiopia's national brand revitalization process begins with senior leadership establishing a strategic vision and mission, which is then re-evaluated with stakeholder involvement. The Ministry of Tourism (MoT) must evaluate experiences and determine effective ways for communicating key values. Active stakeholder involvement is critical, and ongoing input is required to track progress. The comprehensive framework that is designed in this study adds to current literature by proposing an integrated method to revitalizing Ethiopia's national brand. Ministry of tourism should communicate its core message through multiple channels and continuously provide feedback for effective monitoring and assessment of progress.

***Key Words: Branding, Country Branding, Ethiopia land of origins, stakeholders***

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

## 1.1 Introduction

In the face of unprecedented challenges such as recession, political instability, internal conflict, corruption, war, refugee crises and religious war (Vecchi, et al., 2021; Shahrabani et al., 2020; Saifer, 2020; Wu et al., 2021; Garbarova and Vartiak, 2022), nations around the world were forced to adopt different strategies in an attempt to deal with these and several other challenges (Vrontis et al., 2020). A growing and inevitable trend for nations has been to adopt nation branding strategies to achieve differentiation (Saifer, 2020) and enhance their economic performance especially in terms of tourism, investments and exports (Avraham, 2020).

The concepts of planned brand identity, awareness, image, reputation and identification are well established in the IMC literature. Nevertheless, comparable approaches are often applied to corporations rather than Nations which remains to be an under-researched topic.

Ethiopia, a country with a rich cultural past, diversified landscapes, and a quickly rising economy, is well-positioned to use nation branding to accelerate its development goals. As Ethiopia strives to promote itself as a top destination for tourism, commerce, and investment, implementing an integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategy to its national branding initiatives offers various benefits.

The goal of this study is to contribute to the existing literature while also providing practical insight into Ethiopia's nation branding system and its aspects of IMC.

## 1.2 Background of the study

Primarily ingrained in the pioneering writings of two British proponents, Simon Anholt and Wally Olins, and the theoretical narratives of marketing Nation Branding might be regarded as “the application of corporate marketing concepts and techniques to countries, in the interests of enhancing their reputation in international relations” (Kerr & Wiseman, 2013). As Simon Anholt puts it,

*“Nations may have brands – in the sense that they have reputations, and those reputations are every bit as important to their progress and prosperity in the modern world as brand images are*

*to corporations and their products – but the idea that it is possible to ‘do branding’ to a country (or to a city or region) in the same way that companies ‘do branding’ to their products, is both vain and foolish.”(2010, p. 2)*

At its infant stage the idea of nation branding was predicated on the simplistic claim “that the reputations of countries function like the brand images of companies and that they are equally critical to the progress and prosperity of those countries” (Anholt, 2008).

Nation branding is becoming ever more crucial as nations advocate for attention, tourists, investors, supporters and governments (Anholt, 2007). More than ever, it has become evident that unless a country stands for something unique and distinctive, it will struggle to compete for attention. A nation's image is its greatest asset: it is its national identity rendered powerful, genuine, engaging, and, at the highest level, advantageous (Anholt, 2006).

According to Business Dictionary, “brand is the unique design, sign, symbol, words, or a combination of these, employed in creating an image that identifies a product and differentiates it from its competitors” (Goda, 2021, p. 51) and when the branding concept is about the country, state or nation, Dinnie (2008, p. 15) defined it as “the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all its target audiences”. Thus, a nation brand is derived from its culture (Dinnie, 2015), and it uses brand elements such as logo, name and symbols for this differentiation (Goda, 2021).

Nation branding's fundamental objective is to globally present the country in the best way possible, considering its assets and shortcomings (Cromwell, 2016). According to Dinnie (2015), a positive and powerful branding of a country can provide a crucial competitive advantage in this globalized economy, and this process is known as “nation branding”.

### **1.2.1 Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)**

Since its introduction to the marketing literature in the early 1990s, integrated marketing communications (IMC) has become well accepted as an important marketing communication perspective (Schultz and Patti 2009).

In a strategic sense, IMC is viewed in terms of broader imperatives such as integration of all brand-related communications (Duncan and Moriarty 1998; Hartley and Pickton 1999), database marketing (Kitchen and Schultz 1999; Zahay et al. 2004) and customer orientation (Schultz 1996;

Stewart 1996). In a tactical sense, IMC is primarily considered a tool for coordinating multiple media tools to accomplish specific marketing campaign goals (Nowak and Phelps 1994; Keller 2009; McGrath 2005; Reid, Luxton, and Mavondo 2005)

Different disciplines have different viewpoints or approaches towards IMC that evolved through time which then reflected on how IMC has been defined.

Researchers have put more emphasis on certain areas depending in part on their disciplinary background. Communication academics have tended to place more emphasis on internal factors, such as organizational processes that promote or inhibit optimal coordination and sequencing of message content while marketing academics have tended to place more emphasis on external factors, such as the optimal design of marketing communication programs based on their effects on consumers (Schultz and Kitchen 1997).

IMC's effect can be seen all over modern culture, including internet exhibit adverts, business blogs, optimized search engines, newspaper reviews, outdoor advertisements on billboards, magazine advertisements, and more.

Regardless of its historical origins, by 2000, IMC was seen by many as a way of better managing the growing range of marketing communications choices which were becoming available to marketers, including the internet and sophisticated consumer databases (Duncan, 2002). IMC has been described as “one of the most influential marketing management frameworks of our time” (Schultz and Patti, 2009, p. 75).

It has evolved from its early incarnation as a tactical tool for harmonizing the various elements of the marketing communications mix such as advertising, sales promotions and public relations to its current status as a strategic approach to building customer relationships and brand equity. Its no longer merely an “inside – out” device for ensuring the consistency of marketing communications, IMC now plays a long-term strategic brand management role (Kitchen et al., 2004; Porcu et al., 2012).

This evolution in IMC has been driven by major changes in the global market culture, the media, communication process and the consumers (Gould, 2004).

IMC's evolution represents marketing's transformation from a mass-oriented one-sided process to the more intricate, dynamic, and multifaceted phenomena that it has become in our digital, collaborative innovation era.

### **1.2.2 Nation Branding and Tourism**

Nation branding as a theoretical concept and practical solution, has captured the attention of policymakers, and they advocate that a strong nation brand is important from the perspective of tourism and in the creation process of the country's destination branding identity (Garbarova and Vartiak, 2022)

Tourism has evolved into a worldwide industry, recognized as one of the world's fastest growing and most significant sectors. This fact has a direct impact on countries turning towards developing a Strong nation brand that can enhance the country's appeal as a tourist destination and overall reputation influencing the perception and decision of travelers, investors, policy makers and international partners.

Effective nation brands can highlight a country's uniqueness and the natural, social or cultural heritages that can ultimately boost the tourism industry and directly enhance economic growth.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

According to Imran (2017), nation branding should not only be implemented by the largest economies in the world but even by the less economically developed countries to enhance their image and reputation. Obviously, for states in the midst of unsettled lingering multi-layered controversy and because of internal unrests, whose reputation is characterized by uncertainty and conflict, such as Ethiopia, it is even harder and challenging to promote and maintain a national identity. Exponential growth was seen in the last few decades on the use of branding techniques by nations envisaging "the synthesis of brand management with public diplomacy, trade and investment, tourism and export promotion" (Anholt, 2007, p. 3).

Even though there is a growing interest in both Nation Branding and Integrated marketing communication (IMC) topics, studies that combine the two subjects in order to design a framework or evaluate an existing system are very scarce.

Acknowledging the visible research gap in the topics, there are very few researches conducted on NB and IMC worth mentioning and have direct relation to this study. One is a study that delves deep in to the concepts and practices of IMC by Samson (2020) ***‘EVIDENCE OF BRAND CONTACT IN THE ETHIOPIAN BEER MARKET: A NORDIC SCHOOL PERSPECTIVE OF STRATEGIC INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION’***.

Even though the study has substantial content regarding brand management and Integrated Marketing Communication, the focus area of the study being the Ethiopian beer market takes it far from the concept of branding a nation.

There have been several attempts to Nation Branding at the national level in Ethiopia. The first one that can be cited is “13 Months of Sunshine” introduced in 1965 to promote Ethiopian tourism. This effort initiated only for tourism purposes arguably ran a successful campaign creating a particular image of authentic beauty and promotion of historical heritages of the country. Through this campaign popular posters and post cards distributed across the globe and can be cited as a one of the reasons for the rise of tourism in the late 60’s and early 70’s.

In July 2016, Ethiopia launched a new national brand: “Land of origins”. As the brand was mainly focused on reimagining Ethiopia’s tourism sector, it was run by Ethiopian Tourism Transformation Council (ETTC), Ethiopian Tourism Organization (ETO) and the then ministry of culture and tourism. In July 2016, Ethiopia launched a new national brand: “Land of Origins.” As the brand was mainly focused on reimagining Ethiopia’s tourism sector, it was run by the Ethiopian Tourism Transformation Council (ETTC), the Ethiopian Tourism Organization (ETO), and the then ministry of culture and tourism. With the launch of the national brand, two major documents in relation to the national branding were also publicized. The first was the "tourism marketing strategy for Ethiopia (2016–2020)," and the second was the "Ethiopian tourism brand manual."

As the nation branding strategy laid out a direct plan in relation to the tourism sector in maximizing tourism revenues, to make Ethiopia one of the top five tourist destinations in Africa by 2025. It was evident that achieving this goal requires reaching the ambitious market growth targets, which include an increase in tourism arrivals at an average annual rate of 20% a year, a rise to 5 million tourists, [while] increasing receipts per visitor at an average annual rate of 1.6%, to \$1,100 and increasing total tourism receipts at an average annual rate of 20% a year to \$12.5 billion.

According to (World Data.Info) Ethiopia recorded a total of 518,000.00 tourists in 2021, ranking 67th in the world in absolute terms. The fact that larger countries regularly perform better in a comparison of the absolute number of guests is obvious. By putting the tourist numbers in relation to the population of Ethiopia, the result is much more comparable In Eastern Africa, it ranked 12th. In 2021, Ethiopia generated around 2.60 billion US dollars in the tourism sector alone. This corresponds to 2.1 percent of its gross domestic product and approximately 31 percent of all international tourism receipts in Eastern Africa.

Recognizing the potential of the country, the Ethiopian Government has made tourism one of the five main economic growth pillars and leading this task is FDRE Ministry of Tourism with other stakeholders like Ethiopian Tourism Transformation Council (ETTC) and the Ethiopian Tourism Organization (ETO) to promote and market Ethiopia's Brand. "Land Of Origins" is being used as the leading brand of the marketing campaigns used by these entities to communicate about Ethiopia's vast natural, cultural and social attractions.

IMC has proven to be a critical approach in the field of national branding, providing a consistent framework for integrating multiple channels of communication. In the context of Ethiopia's nation branding initiatives, IMC encompasses multiple aspects, each of which serves a vital part in shaping views, fostering interaction, and optimizing the country's overall image on the world arena.

The lack of a critical study that looks into the practices and experiences of integrated marketing communication process to promote Ethiopia's national represents a missed opportunity for understanding and improving the country's branding efforts.

## **1.4 Objectives of the study**

### **1.4.1 General objective of this study**

The general objective of this study is to explore the application of integrated marketing communication (IMC) practices in the Nation branding process of Ethiopia.

### **1.4.2 Specific objectives**

1. To assess the unique advantages of Ethiopia that makes integrated marketing communication effective in the nation branding process.

2. To identify ideal channels of communication to promote Ethiopia's national brand in an integrated manner
3. To find out how the messaging of Ethiopia's national brand is communicated constantly across all channels
4. To examine the synergy of stakeholders in amplifying the impact of Ethiopia's national brand

### **1.5 Research questions**

In order to achieve the broad objectives of the study, the following research questions were explored;

1. How can Ethiopia leverage its unique cultural heritage and historical significance in developing an integrated marketing communication framework for nation branding?
2. What communication channels and platforms are most effective for promoting Ethiopia's national brand on a global scale?
3. How can Ethiopia ensure consistency in messaging and branding across various communication touch points to enhance its overall nation branding efforts?
4. What role can partnerships with international organizations, influencers, and businesses play in amplifying Ethiopia's nation branding message?

### **1.6 Significance of the study**

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policymakers and other stakeholders about the importance of adopting a holistic and coordinated marketing communication approach to nation branding. By understanding the various dimensions of IMC and their implications for nation branding, Ethiopia can develop more effective strategies to attract tourists, attract foreign investment, and promote its cultural and economic assets to the world. This study can also provide insights to shape future decisions and optimizations in branding initiatives by FDRE ministry of tourism and other stake holders.

This study also brings an opportunity for other researchers who are looking into assessing and measuring the effectiveness of current strategies and identify areas for improvement.

Understanding what is working and what is not, leads to a more efficient resource allocation towards nation branding.

By identifying best practices and success stories from other countries the study has a significance of pointing out ways of adapting them to Ethiopia's nation branding efforts. In addition to that, based on the findings, the study can provide recommendations on resource allocation, collaboration between different stakeholders and leveraging emerging communication technologies.

By addressing the gap of in-depth insights towards IMC in Ethiopia's nation branding process the study can contribute to the academic literature on branding, communication, and tourism sectors.

### **1.7 Scope of the study**

The study was focused on the practical applications of integrated marketing communication frameworks in Ethiopia's Nation branding efforts. As a leading organization of Ethiopia's national brand, the study was deriving its constructs from key Tourism and communication sector decision makers.

### **1.8 Limitation of the study**

The first limitation deals with the representativeness of the sample. In this study, samples were drawn only from FDRE Ministry of tourism in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. If a more diversified input was gathered from other stakeholders, the researcher believes that it would have given a better rounded and reflective conclusion to the study.

In addition, lack of studies in Ethiopian national branding system and its communication process was another hindrance to this research which forced the researcher to focus on specifically the tourism aspect of the topic. Due to this, the study is conducted with the limited data.

### **1.9 Methodological approach**

A qualitative exploratory approach is taken, comprising face to face in-depth interviews with organization leaders (ministers) of Ministry of tourism, selected experts involved in the day-to-day practices of integrated marketing communications, particularly brand sources of contacts in

terms of nation branding, imaging, public relations, communications and digital media management.

### **1.10 Organization of the research**

This research was organized into five main chapters, which are structured as follows: The first chapter deals with introduction, background of the study, statement of the problem, objective of the study, significance and of the study, scope of the study, and limitation of the study. The second chapter provides the review of related literature and conceptual frame work of the study. The third chapter focuses on the research methodology: data collection instruments (in-depth interviews and focus group discussions), and method of data analysis. The Fourth chapter covers finding and discussion of the research. Finally, conclusion and recommendation of the study is discussed in the fifth Chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the theoretical aspects related the study as well as other countries tourism brand experience was reviewed.

### **2.2 Theoretical review**

#### **2.2.1 Integrated marketing communication (IMC)**

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) was first introduced in the 1980s (Schultz and Schultz, p. 19). The American Marketing Association defines IMC as a planning process that ensures all brand contacts received by a client or prospect remain relevant and consistent throughout time.

*A strategic business process known as integrated marketing communication is used to plan, create, implement, and assess coordinated, quantifiable, and convincing brand communication programs with consumers, customers, prospects, and other relevant and targeted external and internal audiences over an extended period of time (Schultz & Schultz, 2003; p20-21)*

IMC is a process that unifies marketing communication elements like public relations, social media, audience analytics, and advertising to create a consistent brand identity across different media channels. It helps organizations deliver an engaging consumer experience and optimize their image and stakeholder relationships. Professionals with IMC backgrounds can work in various industries, including social media marketing, digital media, journalism, market research, public relations, non-profit, government, entertainment, television, and radio.

According to He and Mukherjee (2009), communication serves as a link between a company's identity and its image.

Integrated marketing communications (IMC) is the practice of integrating a brand's messaging to ensure consistency across all media channels used to reach its target demographic. It is a strategic strategy that governs communication and strategies utilized in all marketing media.

In today's digital world, organizations use multiple channels to communicate with their audiences. By using the right mix of marketing channels, companies can achieve their marketing objectives and ensure that all channels work together to achieve their goals. The management of a company's identity and communication should be based on its consumers' responses, requiring an examination

of communication from a receiver's perspective to understand how organizational cues are collected and interpreted. Stakeholders can both passively and positively influence organizations (Vân Riel and Balmer, 1997).

### 2.2.2 Marketing communication

Marketing managers of an organization must recognize which channels, tools, and messages are more effective in the eyes of the company's stakeholders (Kitchen, 2005). Furthermore, how the company's customers react to its communications should determine how it manages its identity and communication; for this reason, it's critical to look at communication from the perspective of the recipient in order to understand how organizational cues are gathered and understood. Stakeholders have the power to positively impact companies as well as act as passive recipients of communications from them. According to Van Riel and Balmer (1997), a company's communications can be crucial when it comes to aspects like corporate personality and visual identity, which are acknowledged in the literature on corporate identity. Customers' impressions of the intended company brand may be shaped by communicators like advertisements, corporate logos, buildings, etc.

When compared to competitors, a company's corporate logo, which is always present and serves as a product and corporate differentiator, helps to communicate a positive corporate image (Foroudi et al., 2014; Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Henderson and Cote, 1998). This is the external embodiment of a brand (Kotler, 2000).

According to He and Mukherjee (2009), p. 3, the idea of communication may be seen as a bridge that connects the company's identity and image. It may also affect the business's strategy and give stakeholders access to a corporate communication system (Hatch and Schultz, 1997; He and Mukherjee, 2009). According to Stuart (1999), "the central forms of communication between identity and image are both organizational and marketing communications."

Moreover, communication has the power to influence how an organization's personality and identity are connected (p. 204). Van Rekom (1997, p. 411) emphasizes how enhancing a certain intended business image for target audiences is the goal of corporate communications. Simoes et al. (2005, p. 156) state that integrating communications between internal and external stakeholders is necessary to get a competitive advantage through messaging.

### **2.2.3 The advancement of IMC**

Dr. Donald Schultz, a professor at Northwestern University, developed the first concept and theoretical underpinnings of integrated marketing communications (IMC) by introducing customer "touch points" and the intricate web of interrelated possibilities that shape consumers' perceptions of businesses. Nearly everything possible was on the lengthy list. Essentially, according to Kitchen and Burgmann (2010), every location, individual, and media outlet has the power to influence and raise consumer expectations.

The term "IMC" became popular in the 1990s due to changes in marketing and mass communication (Schultz et al., 1993a, 1993b). However, some scholars (Hutton, 1996; Spotts et al., 1998) argue that the concept originated earlier in the marketing discipline. The integrated approach to marketing communications recognizes the need of using several communication channels to successfully manage stakeholder interactions. Due in large part to globalization, technological advancement, and the emergence of new communication modalities, the IMC paradigm emerged in the latter decades of the 20th century, further diminishing the relative independence of its composite disciplines (Finne & Gronroos, 2017; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015; Kliatchko, 2008). The phrase "integrated" was used to imply a more comprehensive model that produced more than the product of its components (Keller, 2016). IMC has been effective since it was first conceptualized, increasing market shares, sales, customer happiness, and brand equity for businesses (Delgado-Ballester, Navarro & Sicilia, 2012; Duncan & Moriarty, 1997; Zabkar, Mumel & Vanita, 2015).

According to Kliatchko (2005), IMC is a natural progression of marketing communications rather than a significant shift in marketing philosophy. By 2000, many marketers saw IMC as a superior approach to manage the expanding range of marketing communication options, including the internet and sophisticated consumer databases (Duncan, 2002). As Schultz and Patti (2009, p. 75) explain, IMC is one of the most prominent marketing management frameworks today. Marketing communications has developed from a tactical instrument for coordinating advertising, sales promotions, and public relations to a strategic method for creating customer connections and brand equity. IMC is no longer just a tool for ensuring consistency in marketing communications. It now plays a strategic role in brand management, enhancing brand equity and providing memory and attitudinal benefits (Kitchen et al., 2004; Porcu et al., 2012;

Madhavaram et al., 2005; Garrettson and Burton,2005).

According to Cornelissen et al. (2006), the term "IMC" can apply to several elements of communication integration.

- Integration as "content" refers to the connection and uniformity of media and marketing messaging. Consistent marketing communication improves efficiency and increases brand equity (Schultz et al., 1993a, 1993b; Keller, 1996; Madhavaram et al., 2005).
- Integration is a "process" that aligns the operations of communications professionals across organizations and functions. It involves management between the communication processes and activities established by the various marketing communications professionals inside and outside the organization (Gronstedt and Thorson, 1996; Eagle and Kitchen, 2000).
- Integration is a "process" that aligns the operations of communications professionals across organizations and functions. It involves management between the communication processes and activities established by the various marketing communications professionals inside and outside the organization (Gronstedt and Thorson, 1996; Eagle and Kitchen, 2000).

It could make channel integration and message consistency easier. Due to their simpler organizational structures and lower degrees of formalization, smaller businesses may be more successful in implementing IMC (Einwiller and Boenigk, 2012; Christensen et al., 2008; Low, 2000).

#### **2.2.4 Implementation of integrated marketing communication (IMC)**

In an increasingly competitive world, businesses use IMC to set their products and brands apart. In fact, the concepts of IMC have permeated marketing practice so much that in some markets, the "integrated" differentiator may become unnecessary (Burgmann, 2007; Schultz, 2010).

Though there were some variations in their conclusions, particularly regarding the feasibility and actual implementation of IMC, IMC is still developing (Schultz et al, 2004). For example, seven stages of IMC implementation (awareness, image, functional, coordinated consumer-based, stakeholder-based, and relationship management) were defined by Duncan and Caywood (1996).

However, Schultz and Kitchen (2000) created the IT basis, management level, outside-in, tactical coordination, and implementation stage of IMC. Kliatchko (2008) has made a significant addition to the definition and application of integrated marketing communications (IMC). He defines IMC as a business process that targets audiences at the corporate and operational levels and outlines the four stages of IMC implementation (stakeholders, content, channels, and results). While these implementation stages are undoubtedly distinct, they are also somewhat related, particularly in the way that they come together to represent IMC as a "stakeholder-based business approach," "coordination of communication," and "integration through content and messages" (Kitchen et al., 2004; Eagle et al., 2007; and Kliatchko 2008).

An integrated marketing communication strategy combines the key elements of the marketing mix to successfully promote companies to consumers. An integrated marketing communication strategy combines many marketing strategies, such public relations, advertising, and social media promotion, among others, to raise target audience awareness of goods and services.

### **2.2.5 Brand**

According to Doyle (1992), a successful brand may be defined as "a name, symbol, design, or some combination, which identifies the "product" of a particular organization as having a sustainable differential advantage." This description is brief and frequently cited. A similar definition of a brand is provided by the American Marketing Association, which states that it is a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and from those of competitors." Macrae, Parkinson, and Sheerman provide a somewhat more nuanced definition of a brand that takes into account the consumer's perspective in addition to the producer's perspective.

A brand is viewed as a business asset and a competitive strategy tool that adds value for the firm and its target market's consumers (Urde, 2003). A brand should be distinctive and challenging for rivals to copy in order to maintain a sustained competitive advantage. Previous studies (Gürhan-Canli and Batra, 2004; Keller and Aaker, 1998) demonstrate the impact of corporate brand associations on consumers' reactions to products. In particular, the psychological mechanisms underlying these types of corporate brand associations are examined.

Of course, brands don't just exist; in order to succeed, they need to successfully coexist with the dominant zeitgeist. Strong brands are fueled and influenced by popular culture and societal trends. Urde (2003) presents three distinct perspectives about fundamental values that are crucial for the process of developing a brand.

Three values exist: One that relates to the organization and expresses the special and fundamental tenets that bind it; Two that encapsulate and characterize the essence of the brand, Three that represent the brand as it is experienced by customers, or the value that the brand adds to their lives.

Many scholars in the branding literature disagree with Aaker's (1996) static definition of brand identity, arguing instead that it is a dynamic process of discourse within a social environment (Scott and Lane, 2002; Gioia et al., 2010). Therefore, it would seem that stakeholders play a critical role in brand formation. Furthermore, according to some studies, brand meaning and values may be established through communication utilizing visuals and languages, which can then influence brand identity and reputation (Black and Veloutsou, 2017).

A brand is a distinctive feature that identifies goods or services, and its marketing strategy aims to create a unique identity, values, and perceptions that differentiate it from competitors. Brand equity represents the intangible value a brand holds in consumers' minds, resulting in higher customer loyalty and increased market share. Brand identity includes visual and symbolic elements like name, logo, color scheme, typography, and design.

#### 2.2.6 Practice of branding

The method by which businesses set their product offerings apart from those of their competitors is known as branding. The task of differentiating their product offers from those of competitors has become crucial for countries vying for both local and foreign consumers in an increasingly globalized economy. According to Keller (2003), the process of strategic brand management include creating, implementing, and evaluating marketing campaigns and initiatives in order to establish, assess, and maintain brand equity.

#### The Seven Best Practices to Better Branding

##### Determining Your Brand's Target Audience

- Identify the ideal buyer persona to build a brand for.

- Utilize technology and advanced market research to identify the perfect audience.
- Understand the target audience's mindset, form customer relationships, and create effective ads.

#### Researching Brands within Your Industry Niche

- Analyze and learn from similar brands to your own.
- Avoid making the same mistakes that unsuccessful businesses have made.
- Brand research is not limited to the beginning stages of development; it should adapt as the business grows and the market changes.

#### Outlining the Key Qualities and Benefits Your Brand Offers

- Clarify your ideologies and identify your strengths and weaknesses.
- Serves as a tool for team building.

#### Building a Brand Message and Elevator Pitch

- A positive first impression is crucial for a brand.
- A defined brand message and well-constructed elevator pitch ensure potential customers get the right impression.

#### Spreading the Word about Your Brand

- Prioritize spreading the word about your brand.
- Word-of-mouth is an effective way to get the word out about your brand.

#### Integrating Your Brand into Every Aspect of Your Business

- Your brand should encapsulate everything that your business is about.
- Integrating your brand into customer-relationship management (CRM) can have a long-lasting impact on customer retention and brand loyalty.

#### Staying True to Your Brand Building

- Consistency is the key in branding.

- It ensures customers feel confident in your business, employees know expectations, and provides a foundation for growth.

### **2.2.7 Political marketing**

According to Ormrod and Henneberg (2011), political marketing and branding have a significant influence in modern democratic processes. Political marketing is a widely used term in the political domain, with efforts to operationalize it in political communication exercises aimed at influencing voters. A sophisticated theoretical corpus is emerging to address specific demands of political marketing, with a focus on qualitative aspects and the symbolic and interactional domain (Harris and Lock, 2010).

Moreover, because political marketing involves both functional and emotional processes, it can provide "a basis for long term loyalty in an environment where products are fluid" (Needham, 2006: 180).

Due to research that examined Scotland's national referendum campaign, the significance of this improvement is enhanced (Black and Veloutsou, 2017). Regarding the brand personality and interaction potential of the political leader in the context of young voters, our study has a comparable applicability. Ultimately, the majority of study on political marketing has been conducted in western cultures. Research in the eastern settings is few and rigorous. In order to tackle this matter, there exist some recurring trends that impact political advertising. Voters are viewed as customers in the first pattern.

The next trend is the widespread use of social media for political marketing, which is driven by three factors: curiosity, attention, and political knowledge. Significant related research has focused extensively on how customers create brand value. It also discusses how, in the context of art, this concept might be expanded to encompass both current and potential clients. The study also takes into account how consumers frequently choose brands depending on how much they believe such companies to represent their own personality (Kim et al., 2018).

De Chernatony and McDonald offer an explanation of the function of branding and caution that, although marketers initiate the process (branding as an input), the consumer or user creates a mental image of the brand (branding as an output) that may differ from the intended marketing

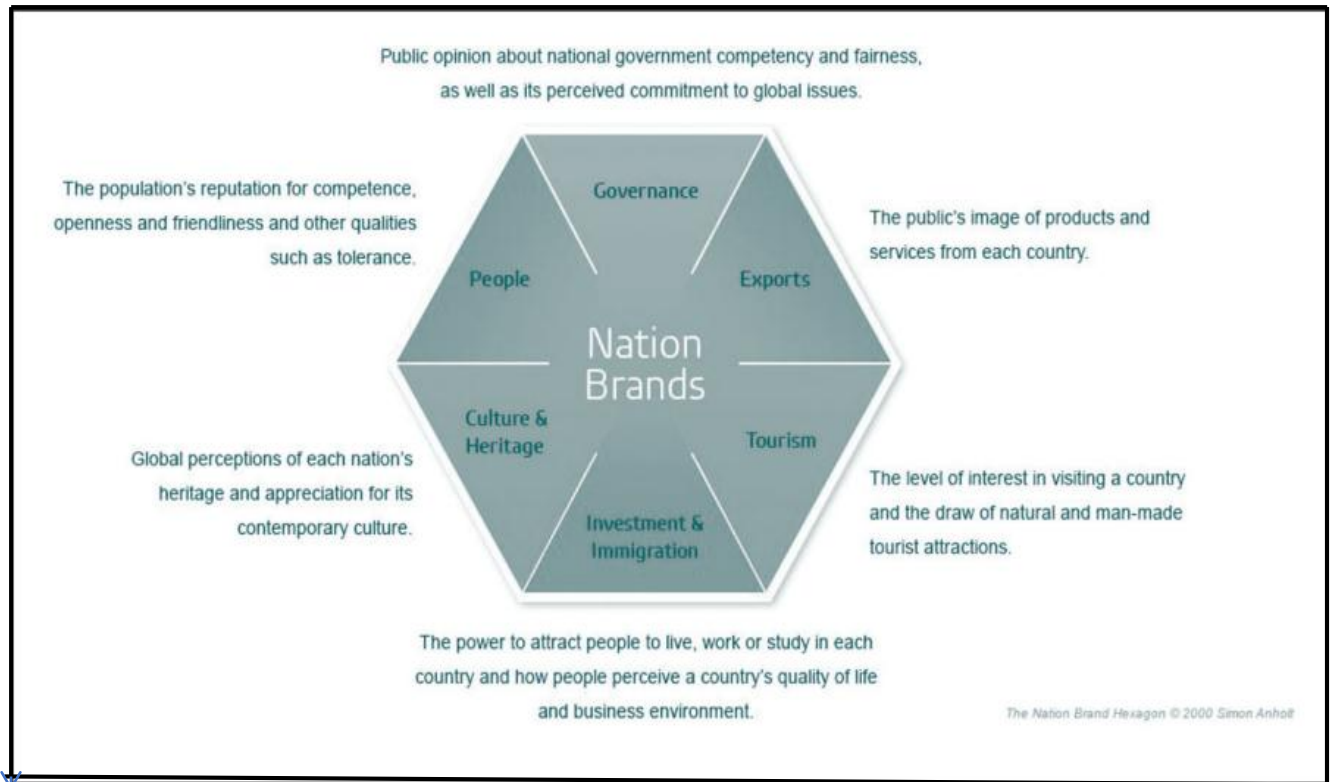
message. This is especially important for nation branding, as it can be challenging to alter ingrained national preconceptions in the minds of customers.

### **2.2.8 Nation Branding**

In the words of Dinnie, K. (2008) “A brand available nationally as distinct from a regional or test-market brand and a nation-brand, where the brand is the country, state, or nation in question” is the definition of a national brand. The distinctive, multifaceted combination of components that gives the country culturally based uniqueness and significance for all of its target consumers is known as the nation-brand. The Nation's name evokes perceptions, feelings, and emotions in target audiences such as investors, tourists, workforce, general public, and companies. The representation of the Nation in the digital sphere is crucial for unspoken validation derived from the Nation's essence and purpose.

Researchers on the idea of nation “branding” have led to the development of several new methodologies. Simon Anholt, the independent policy advisor, is regarded as a trailblazer in this area. He first used the phrase "nation brand" in 1996 to describe how a nation's reputation functions similarly to the brand representations of businesses and goods and because of this, a country's reputation may have a big impact on its welfare, wealth, and efficient government (Dinnie, 2015).

Years later, Anholt discovered that the idea of a nation's brand had been misconstrued and misrepresented, coming to mean that managing a nation's image could be boiled down to a set of promotional strategies and he responded by introducing the idea of Competitive Identity, a paradigm that integrates the assessment of a nation's identity (acknowledging its advantages and disadvantages) with the potential to modify specific acts and behaviors to enhance it.



1 Figure 2.1 Anholt's (2003) Nation Brand Hexagon model

The emerging trend of nation branding is fascinating, intricate, and contentious. It is complex because it encompasses multiple disciplines beyond the narrow scope of conventional brand strategy; it is controversial because it is a highly politicized activity that generates strongly held and frequently conflicting viewpoints and opinions; and it is exciting because it represents an area in which there is a great deal of real-world activity but little existing theory (Anholt, 2007).

The significance of the brand and the value that customers place on it are highlighted by brand equity imply that consumers assess a brand's level of interest. Brand equity may be measured in a number of ways. The first involves gathering primary survey data, while the second involves determining the brand's worth.

Some of the leading authorities on branding have observed that people believe a brand to be something that exists in their imaginations. Over a number of years, the brand-building process necessitates a long-term commitment, with very modest short-term rewards possible (Dinnie, 2008). When developing their nation-brand, nations must accept this fact and take a long-term strategic approach rather than focusing on a short-term, temporary advertising campaign that may

have fleeting impacts (Anholt, 2007). As branding is essentially a commercial field, its cultural roots and sociological background are only somewhat explored in the literature. Strong messages may be communicated through representations and images. These are the outcomes of centuries' worth of historical occurrences, governmental choices, existing legislation, economic conditions, cultural experiences, and much more (Pasquinelli, 2010).

Applying branding methods and other marketing tactics to cities, regions, and nations with the intention of promoting their social, political, cultural, and economic growth is known as branding. Place branding has become more prominent in public agendas and intervention methods in the context of globalization, despite the fact that attaching marketing to locations is not a new phenomenon (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005).

Nation branding is becoming more and more popular as a result of nations investing increasing amount of resources in building their nation-brands. There is an ethical duty to regard nations as brands only to the extent that it is permissible and to do so in an honest, courteous manner when applying the notion of a brand to them as opposed to only to individual items (Anholt, 2008).

### **2.2.9 Nation Branding objectives**

A nation's brand is just as vibrant and intricate as the country. Nation Branding and City Branding are a combination of governmental and commercial entities' attempts to control the way that a country or city is viewed by audiences throughout the world, and how this perception is shaped by both external and internal actors, actual experiences, and virtual imagery and these initiatives are, or at the very least ought to be, coordinated with the political, social, and economic goals of the country (Cheregi, Bianca, Bargaoanu, Alina, 2020).

Country Depending on a nation's unique issues and management style, branding goals differ from nation to nation. Public-private partnerships aim to promote entrepreneurial growth or the revalorization of a territory's cultural capital, whereas government-led programs often concentrate more on economic development, foreign policy, or public diplomacy.

It is crucial for countries during global crises when marketing instruments fail (Zeineddine, Cornelia, 2018)

Nation Branding is often pioneered by the misperception that a brand is a logo or statement, leading to wasted budgets and the blurring of unique logos on the global map. The goal is to create a unique and memorable brand image for a country (Anholt, 2008).

### **2.2.10 The Perspectives of Nation Branding**

Author of "Nation branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice," Keith Dinnie (2008), states that while creating a plan for a nation's brand, eight key components must be taken into account. A country should investigate many approaches to accomplish its nation brand objectives and keep the following factors in mind.

Ying Fan (2010) defines country branding as the entire representation of a continent on the global scene, including its political, economic, and cultural facets. The entirety of a country's perceptions in the eyes of international customers is known as its nation brand, and it can consist of any combination of the following: population, location, cultural identity/language, history, cuisine, fashion, well-known individuals (celebrities), international companies, and so on.

Nation branding is conceptualized from three main angles: political, cultural-critical, and economic. It has been noted from Kaneva's (2011) study that country branding is not a singular viewpoint. His thorough analysis of academic works credited to nation branding reveals that the literature on the topic is far from uniform and differs greatly, not the least of which how nation branding is portrayed is.

A country's identity endures whether or not it is intentionally branded, as every nation has a distinct brand that can be powerful or weak, new or ancient, precise or ambiguous, and is recognized by the whole community. Nation branding extends much beyond the nation of origin's more limited goal of placing brands to further particular economic goals. Fan (2010) adds, "Nation branding is a developing field of study that is mostly directed by practitioners, and there is a pressing need for the theoretical and analytical advancement of the discipline.

Anholt IPSOS Nation Brands Index and FutureBrand Country Index

- Anholt IPSOS Nation Brands Index: Created in 2005 and updated since 2008, provides a global appraisal of a country's performance based on six criteria:

- Exports: Reputation of products and services.

- Tourism: Interest in visiting the country and its natural and artificial attractions.
  - Culture and Heritage: Value of a nation's heritage and interest in its contemporary culture.
  - Governance: Public opinion about national government competency and fairness.
  - People: World reputation in terms of openness, friendliness, or tolerance.
  - Investments and Immigration: Attracting people or companies, quality of life, and business environment.
- Future Brand Country Index: Assesses top 75 countries in terms of GDP, analyzing them against multiple variables under two rubrics: Purpose and Experience.

### **2.2.11 Political perspective**

From a political perspective, nation branding is viewed by academics as a concerted government attempt to manage a nation's image in order to draw foreign relations, investment, and tourists. According to Volcic & Andrejevic (2011), country branding is viewed as a potent political tool in this context, especially for tiny, periphery states eager to strengthen their strategic position and challenge the superpowers' hegemony in the areas of diplomacy, commerce, and military might.

MacDonald (2011) discusses the political outlook on nation branding and criticizes the focus on competitiveness and market positioning. He emphasizes that attempts to brand a nation can be dangerous and even counterproductive because they can erode efforts to win over people's hearts and foster mistrust. Volcic and Andrejevic (2011) express a similar concern, noting that "branding and economic rivalry will quickly represent the continuation of warfare among many forms in an age of capitalist globalization."

### **2.2.12 Cultural perspective**

According to Kaneva (2011), country branding attempts to consider its effects on national cultures, societal power structures, and the agenda-setting process. Given that marketing is not a value-free, objective means of providing a service that satisfies consumer needs, the entire process of branding and marketing must be approached cautiously throughout (Moufahim, Humphreys, Mitussis, & Fitchett, 2007).

From a culturally critical vantage point, nation branding demonstrates a certain way of thinking about the role of a nation and its people, which it attempts to influence in the framework of

economic progress. By combining the obligations of the state with the risks and responsibilities of entrepreneurship, it thereby embodies the idea of capitalism (Volcic and Andrejevic 2011).

### **2.2.13 Application of nation branding**

Nation-wide branding is becoming more common due to global competitiveness in both local and external markets. Nations are focusing on country branding to attract visitors, spur inbound investment, and increase exports.

Many nations compete to recruit talented workers and higher education students. Temporal suggests that nation branding can benefit more than just attracting tourists, inward investment, and exports. It can also improve currency stability, restore international credibility and investor confidence, reverse ratings downgrades, increase political influence, and foster stronger global partnerships.

Various nations have used distinct approaches to address the unique obstacles they encounter. Nations with widely differing cultures and geographical locations, such as South Korea, New Zealand, Scotland, Egypt, Britain, and Spain, have determined that nation-branding techniques are beneficial to create.

### **Britain**

#### Late 1990s Britain Rebranding Campaign

- The rebranding of Britain was initiated by the incoming Labor government under Prime Minister Tony Blair.
- The campaign was based on a report by the Demos public policy think tank, Britain: Renewing Our Identity.
- The rebranding was seen as necessary due to Britain's perceived backward-looking image globally.
- Businesses were wary of overtly marketing their national identity due to fear of negative

connotations.

- The solution was to modernize Britain's image, replacing 'Rule Britannia' with 'Cool Britannia'.
- The campaign faced a hostile reaction, with concerns about the viability and desirability of rebranding national identity

## **Germany**

"Branding Germany: A Strategy for Changing Perceptions"

- In 1999, ZDF, a German television network, commissioned identity consultant Wolff Olins to create a national brand for Germany.
- The campaign aimed to shift consumer perceptions from Germany as a mechanical perfection nation to a country of excitement and surprise.
- The campaign was influenced by German manufacturers like Audi, who criticized Germany for lacking warmth and emotional depth.
- Olins' website details the approach, based on the belief that Germany is the economic dynamo of Europe but is often negatively perceived.
- Six steps were suggested:
  - Establish a national brand steering committee.
  - Create a research and development team.
  - Conduct national consultations.

- Conduct research into perceptions of Germany abroad.
- Review how and where the national brand could be utilized.
- Develop a program of implementation for the brand options adopted by the national steering committee.

## **Scotland**

### Scotland Brand's 2002-2004 Events/Promotions Plans

- Internal focus: Capitalizing on major events like Saint Andrew's Day, Burns Celebrations, regional events, and sporting events.
- External focus: High-profile events like Tartan Week celebrations in Chicago, USA.
- Visual aspect: The 'Scotland mark' logo, a definitive mark for Scotland, uniquely identifies and authenticates Scottish products.
- The 'Scotland mark' is found on a wide range of Scottish products, from traditional to modern.
- The research process and design solution helped articulate corporate branding and communication strategy.

## **South Korea**

### South Korea's Branding Strategy

- South Korea's co-hosting of the 2002 FIFA World Cup led to a plan to boost international recognition of Korean brand-name products.
- Five strategies were developed: internationalizing Korean brand names, strengthening corporate brand management, reinforcing electronic brand marketing, expanding brand marketing infrastructure, and boosting the nation's image abroad.
- A 100 billion won venture fund was created to assist exporters in improving product designs.

- Industrial design renovation centers were opened nationwide to assist small- and medium-sized companies in product design improvement.
- A 'Brand Academy' was established to train specialists in brand management, character design, and industrial packaging.

## Egypt

### Egypt's Branding Strategy

- Egypt's branding strategy is based on its high-quality product, Egyptian cotton.
- The government is developing a campaign involving global advertising, public relations, government relations, market research, and event planning.
- The strategy is risky as it may be too narrowly focused and not fully representative of the nation.
- If cotton market conditions worsen, the nation-brand may also suffer.
- The government is promoting its nation-brand by positioning Egypt as a business destination.





2 Figure 2.2 sample brand logos of countries Source (world press, 2012) sample country brand logos of nations

# CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 3.0. Introduction

Prior to problematizing the current topic, an interdisciplinary literature review was conducted. This process revealed several gaps identified in previous sections. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a suitable research design as the foundation of the entire research process. This chapter outlines various research methods and techniques employed in this study, including the principal research methodology, related research design, sampling framework used, methods of data collection, and ethical considerations observed during data collection.

The chapter on research methodology offers a comprehensive overview of the methods and techniques utilized in the study. This chapter also highlights the ethical considerations that were taken into account during the data collection process.

## 3.1 definitions of terms

### 3.1.1 Research

In the context of qualitative research methodology, "research" refers to the systematic process of investigating and understanding a specific topic or problem (Cypress, 2015). Research is a systematic investigation aimed at generating new knowledge or enhancing existing knowledge (Cypress, 2015). When defining academic research, it is important to note the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research (Stejskalová & Štrach, 2015). Qualitative research focuses on exploring and understanding subjective experiences, meanings, and social phenomena, while quantitative research involves measuring and analyzing objective data.

Mertens discusses the subjective and contextual nature of qualitative research, highlighting its focus on exploring and understanding subjective experiences, meanings, and social phenomena (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). She also emphasizes that qualitative research allows for a deeper exploration of the complexities and nuances of a subject, providing valuable insights that quantitative methods may not capture (Cypress, 2015). In general, qualitative research

methodology seeks to gain understanding and insight into the meaning individuals give to their experiences (Beding, 2017).

### **3.1.2 Research design**

It is imperative to highlight the importance of a well-thought-out research design and methodology for the success of a qualitative research study. The research design not only provides a roadmap for conducting the study but also ensures that the data collected is relevant and reliable. In qualitative research, the choice of methodology is crucial in shaping the research process and influencing the outcomes. In academic writing, the importance of a well-planned research design cannot be overstated. A strong research design not only guides the overall structure and organization of the paper but also ensures the credibility and validity of the research findings. By carefully selecting the appropriate research methods and techniques, researchers can effectively address their research questions and contribute valuable insights to their field of study. Furthermore, a sound research design enhances the overall quality and rigor of academic writing, setting the foundation for impactful and meaningful research contributions.

In qualitative research, a well-thought-out research design and methodology are imperative for the success of the study (Babchuk, 2019). Caduff, Bhangu, and Provost highlight that qualitative research methods are valuable for their rigorous techniques in analysing subjective and intricate phenomena, especially those influenced by social factors that are difficult to measure quantitatively (Caduff et al., 2023). Steckler, McLeroy, Goodman, et al. mention that qualitative methods excel by generating rich, valid process data that maintains the perspectives of study participants (Steckler et al., 1992). Stejskalová and Štrach discuss the in-depth and contextual information that qualitative research methods provide and suggest that qualitative methodologies are less utilized than quantitative ones in several social science disciplines (Stejskalová & Štrach, 2015). Qualitative research methods offer a holistic understanding of complex social phenomena, emphasizing the subjective experiences and perspectives of the participants. These methods enable researchers to delve deep into the context and intricacies of a subject, providing valuable insights that quantitative methods may not capture. Despite their immense potential, qualitative methodologies have been underutilized in certain social science disciplines.

However, their significance in offering nuanced and in-depth insights cannot be overlooked (Mohajan, 2018). Creswell and Poth offer an overview of qualitative research methodology, emphasizing its distinct characteristics and its potential to provide a deeper understanding and insight into the experiences and meanings individuals give to their experience (Caduff et al., 2023). Qualitative research methods play a crucial role in understanding subjective and complex phenomena, particularly those influenced by social factors (Kaminski & Pitney, 2004).

### **3.1.3 Research methodology**

Qualitative research methodology is a systematic approach that aims to explore and understand subjective experiences, meanings, and social phenomena (Cypress, 2015). It involves collecting and analyzing data through methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis. Qualitative research methodology focuses on the exploration and understanding of subjective experiences, meanings, and social phenomena.

Caduff, Bhangu, and Provost highlight the effectiveness of qualitative methods in analyzing complex, subjective phenomena that are influenced by social factors and can be difficult to measure quantitatively (Caduff et al., 2023). Shareia discusses how qualitative research is particularly appropriate for investigating the social world, which often requires an interpretive approach to understand the subjective experiences of involved individuals (Shareia, 2016).

### **3.2.1. Research Paradigm and Approach**

The research method adopted for this study is qualitative, specifically employing an anti-positivist or naturalistic inquiry approach (Malagon- Maldonado, 2014). The choice of qualitative research methodology in this study is justified based on the need to understand social phenomena influenced by subjective experiences and opinions (Shareia, 2016).

When discussing topics such as social networks and brands, this perspective is useful for its careful examination of daily human interaction with various occurrences. The main research methodology used in this study is a qualitative one. Due to the novelty of this concept, a qualitative approach is suitable, as it aims to explore new phenomena and challenge existing beliefs that have received little or no attention in research. It is also beneficial when studying subjective topics like this one,

which constantly involves personal perspectives and experiences and undergoes complex interdisciplinary discussions.

### **3.2.2. Data Gathering Instruments**

Even though there are several means of data gathering, the data gathering instruments for this study that applied qualitative research design were mainly one-on-one in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and qualitative content analysis. For the purpose of this research and in order to achieve the objectives, data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was based on an in-depth interview using the purposive selective method. For this research, two higher officials from the MoT were selected purposefully, and an in-depth interview was conducted. In addition to that, 8 experts in relevant fields of work were intentionally selected for focus group discussions. The purposeful selection of higher officials from the Ministry of Transport and experts in relevant fields maximises the chances of obtaining specific, relevant, and expert insights. The data gathering instruments used for this study are discussed as follows:

#### **3.2.2.1. One-on-One In-depth Interview**

The use of qualitative research methodology allows for in-depth exploration and understanding of subjective experiences and opinions within their natural contexts (Malagon- Maldonado, 2014). One-on-one, in-depth interviews are a key data gathering instrument in qualitative research, valued for their ability to elicit rich, detailed information from participants. These interviews involve open-ended questions and allow participants to freely express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Ulfah et al., 2020).

One-to-one interviews offer insight into personal experiences, promoting introspection on topics that might be impacted by societal influences within a collective environment (A Practical Guide to Focus-Group Research, 2006). The use of qualitative research methodology and one-on-one, in-depth interviews provides a valuable opportunity to capture rich and detailed information about subjective experiences and opinions within their natural contexts (Hofisi et al., 2014). Semi-structured interviews are a common form, using a guide with flexible ordering of questions to follow the natural flow of conversation, providing structured yet adaptable interactions (Ågren et al., 2022). In-depth, semi-structured interviews are particularly beneficial for exploring complex

behaviors, opinions, and emotions and for capturing a diverse range of experiences (Longhurst, 2009).

The conversational nature of research interviews allows participants to convey their situation from their own perspective and in their own words, offering researchers a structured way to understand experiences from the subject's point of view (Sayrs, 1998).

### **3.2.2.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

FDGs offer a group setting for qualitative data collection (Al-Busaidi, 2008). Focus Group Discussions offer a valuable method for qualitative data collection in research. This approach involves bringing together a small group of participants to engage in facilitated discussions about a specific topic or issue (Odimegwu et al., 2017). The importance of FGDs in qualitative research lies in its ability to generate rich and diverse perspectives through interactions among participants. Unlike one-on-one interviews, FGDs create a dynamic environment where participants can express their views, challenge or support each other's opinions, and build on shared experiences (Caretta & Vacchelli, 2015) (Almutrafi, 2019). This group dynamic often leads to the emergence of in-depth insights, different viewpoints, and collective interpretations that might not be unearthed through individual interviews (Caretta & Vacchelli, 2015).

Furthermore, FGDs provide a platform for researchers to observe social interactions, group dynamics, and the influence of social norms and cultural factors on participants' perspectives. This can be particularly valuable when studying phenomena that are shaped by communal experiences, shared beliefs, or societal influences (Koelle et al., 2020). By capturing the interplay of ideas within a group context, researchers gain a deeper understanding of how social dynamics and collective experiences shape individuals' viewpoints and actions (Parker et al., 2018).

The interactive format of FGDs also enables researchers to probe and clarify participants' responses. Additionally, FGDs allow for the exploration of group norms, consensus-building processes, and the negotiation of meaning within a social context (Caretta & Vacchelli, 2015).

### 3.2.2.3 Qualitative content analysis

It is indeed an important research technique for evaluating qualitative data, especially textual information. Qualitative content analysis helps researchers systematically categorize and interpret text data, allowing for a thorough analysis that can reveal patterns, themes, and meanings within the data (Perez et al., 2023). This method provides a means to convert qualitative data into a form that can enable researchers to draw replicable and valid inferences from texts in the context of their use (Onwuegbuzie & Denham, 2014). It is a flexible method that can be adapted to align with the research questions and theoretical framework of the study. By employing qualitative content analysis, researchers can discern the subtle nuances of language and the underlying messages communicated in texts, which might include written documents, interviews, or focus group discussions (Perez et al., 2023).

Qualitative content analysis can take on both inductive and deductive approaches, each useful for different research goals. Below is a quick summary of the tasks required in each stage: preparation, organization, and reporting phases.

#### **Preparation Phase:**

- Selection of the material: deciding on the body of texts or content that will be analyzed, which could include documents, transcripts of interviews, or any other textual data.
- Defining the unit of analysis: specifying the smallest unit of the text to be analyzed (e.g., a word, sentence, or paragraph) and the context unit, which is the amount of text considered relevant for one instance of analysis.

#### **2. Organization Phase:**

- Open coding is an initial stage of coding text without predefined categorization, particularly relevant in inductive content analysis.
- Creating categories: Developing a set of categories that summarize the underlying themes or issues identified in the data. In deductive content analysis, categories may be predetermined by a theoretical framework, whereas in inductive content analysis, they emerge from the data.

- Sub-categorization: further minimizing and refining categories to make them more specific, if necessary.
- Abstraction: generalizing from the categories and subcategories to construct higher-order classifications, if applicable.

### **3 Reporting Phase:**

- Describing and presenting the findings: explaining the analytical process and the findings in a way that connects the data to the categories and themes. This includes quoting from the text to provide evidence for the conclusions drawn.
- Discussing the validity and reliability: Reflect on the trustworthiness of the analysis by discussing aspects such as how well the categories cover the data and whether the analysis was conducted consistently. It should be noted that these steps are not necessarily linear; the researcher may revisit earlier stages as needed throughout the process.

Researchers can ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of their findings when employing qualitative content analysis by following several established criteria and strategies. Lincoln and Guba's model outlines four criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability (Renjith et al., 2021) (Vaezi et al., 2021)

The credibility aspect is akin to internal validity in quantitative research. It demands that the findings reflect the data accurately. Transferability as a criterion refers to the applicability of findings to other contexts. This includes providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participants allows others to judge the extent to which results can be transferred to different settings (Renjith et al., 2021). Dependability also reflects the stability of data over time and conditions. Another key element is conformability which indicates that the findings are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias or motivation (Vaezi et al., 2021).

By incorporating these strategies, researchers can enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative content analysis, ensuring that their findings are robust, well-supported, and meaningful.

### **3.2.3 Sources of Data**

The primary sources included leaders of the Ministry of Tourism as well as public relations and marketing management executives with substantial experience in their respective fields. In-depth interviews using semi-structured questions were conducted to gather valuable insights for the study, employing a funnel technique that began with open-ended questions before transitioning to more targeted ones. Two one-and-a-half-hour long interviews each were held with the minister and state minister of MoT while focus group discussions lasting two hours took place with members of the public relations and marketing management teams.

For secondary sources analysis included documents such as "Tourism Marketing Strategy for Ethiopia (2016-2020)", "Ethiopian Tourism Brand Manual, and "MoT's 10-year strategic plan" approached primarily focusing on the language embodied within these framework documents as a medium of thought or expression without neglecting their content.

### **3.2.4. Data Analysis Procedure**

Different frameworks may aid in analyzing qualitative data transcripts. For this study, the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews are being analyzed using an inductive content analysis approach due to the exploratory nature of the research.

The data gathered by the above-discussed qualitative data collection techniques were analyzed based on appropriate qualitative research methodologies and by linking them to the objectives of the study. Hence, in this study, thematic analysis is used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data sets, (Lochmiller, 2021) and the data that will be thematically analyzed can include interview text, field notes, photographs, and video footage. Thematic analysis is a widely used approach in qualitative research, as it allows for the identification and exploration of patterns and themes within the data.(Labra et al., 2020) This approach involves systematically identifying themes and patterns within the data, coding and categorizing the data, and interpreting the meaning behind these themes(Aronson, 1995). In summary, the qualitative research methodology employed in this study utilizes thematic analysis as a way to analyze and interpret the participants' expressions and experiences (Heriyanto, 2018).

The information obtained from both the focus group discussions and individual interviews underwent thematic analysis based on transcripts of recorded interviews and the researcher's notes. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure no essential details were missed, and then translated from Amharic to English. While the analysis was not constrained by specific theories or models outlined in the literature review, theoretical frameworks, models, and empirical concepts served as guides for understanding the data. Inductive data analysis was employed to derive themes from the participants' responses. As a researcher, efforts were made to identify noteworthy findings and recurring themes in both types of interactions. The collected and analyzed data is presented descriptively, with relevant quotations used to reinforce key study findings.

### **3.2.5. The Researcher's Role**

During the data gathering, the searcher took on a moderator's role. To facilitate discussion and ensure equal participation, an assistant moderator who was familiar with the discussion content worked alongside the researcher during sessions.

The researcher prepared and used an interview guide containing relevant issues to ensure that discussants focused on research-related subjects. Interviews were recorded with participants' consent using a tape recorder, and the researcher also took notes as a backup. The audio recordings in Amharic were transcribed and translated for analysis.

### **3.2.6. Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations are paramount in qualitative research, as they protect the rights and well-being of participants and ensure the integrity of the study. Researchers should obtain informed consent from participants, respecting their autonomy and ensuring they understand the purpose and procedures of the study (Lietz et al., 2006). They should also maintain confidentiality by keeping anonymity of participants and protecting their identities (Vaezi et al., 2021). Furthermore, researchers should consider potential power imbalances and maintain a respectful and equitable relationship with participants. In addition, researchers must navigate ethical considerations related to the dissemination of their findings (Lietz et al., 2006). These considerations may include obtaining permission to use participants' quotes or acknowledging their contributions appropriately.

Regarding the ethical considerations mentioned above, participants in this study were provided with prior information about the research's objectives. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw their consent at any time. All participants agreed to these terms. The researcher also ensured that the rights of the informants were respected and protected during questioning.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents an analysis of the research findings and evaluates the use of Integrated Marketing Communications by the Ministry of Tourism in managing Ethiopia's national branding. To protect their privacy, respondents' names were replaced with codes consisting of letters and numbers, such as I1, I2, and I3 for Interviewees 1, 2, and 3 respectively. The data gathered through in-depth interviews will be analyzed in relation to the research objective.

The research was conducted using the qualitative methodology outlined in Chapter 3 and applies mainly to the following research questions:

1. How can Ethiopia leverage its unique cultural heritage and historical significance in developing an integrated marketing communication framework for nation branding?
2. What communication channels and platforms are most effective for promoting Ethiopia's national brand on a global scale?
3. How can Ethiopia ensure consistency in messaging and branding across various communication touch points to enhance its overall nation branding efforts?
4. What role can partnerships with international organizations, influencers, and businesses play in amplifying Ethiopia's nation branding message?

In-depth interviews were conducted at the Ministry of Tourism, focusing on actions closely linked to nation branding and image building. The research included leaders from the Ministry, as well as professionals in public relations, marketing management, and digital media. A total of 10 professionals from MoT were invited for interviews and focus group discussions; 8 participated, resulting in an 80% response rate for data collection.

The fast-tracked data collection process accommodated the schedules of the interviewees while providing insights from both decision makers and implementers within the institution. All interviews and focus group discussions were held face-to-face to ensure dynamic and authentic responses.

The primary sources' work experience ranged from 4 years to over 20 years in leadership, tour guiding, public relations, digital marketing, and social media expertise. The respondents' ages spanned between 25-45 years old with a male-female ratio of approximately 90:10%.

The interview questions were structured to allow for a natural flow of conversation, rather than strictly following the sequence of the research propositions. The reported results focus on what is most important and relevant to the study; as a result, irrelevant answers have been omitted.

## **4.2 Background of the organization**

Ministry of Tourism-Ethiopia was reestablished on 2013 EC from Ministry of Culture and Tourism with the powers and duties to promote the country's tourism resources and attractions domestically and abroad by organizing and coordinating tourism marketing initiatives of the various stakeholders; establish and administer tourism fund to carry out its mandates. It also has the responsibility to design and implement a strategy to ensure that the country's tourist attractions are identified, properly developed, and organised. It also has the mandate to set up, coordinate and direct gateways in-country tourism attractions and facilities information centers. The ministry has the duty to improve conditions and work towards the fulfillment of preconditions of the nation's tourist attractions for recognition as international heritages. Originate and put into effect tourism attraction, product and service brands and update them timely and Identifying, collecting, analysing, organising, and communicating data and study types suitable for conducting marketing operations is another mandate MoT has. The ministry also has the following mandates bestowed upon it;

- Set tourist service provider institution standards and supervise same; Ensure that tourist services are expanded and that local communities share the benefits derived from tourism
- Facilitate the addressing of training needs by assessing tourism development and marketing service gaps
- Establish collaboration and partnerships with various actors in the tourism sector
- Conduct studies and research to ensure the growth of the tourism sector; implement the same when it is approved by the relevant organ
- Identify existing and new tourist destinations development gaps and facilitate their development

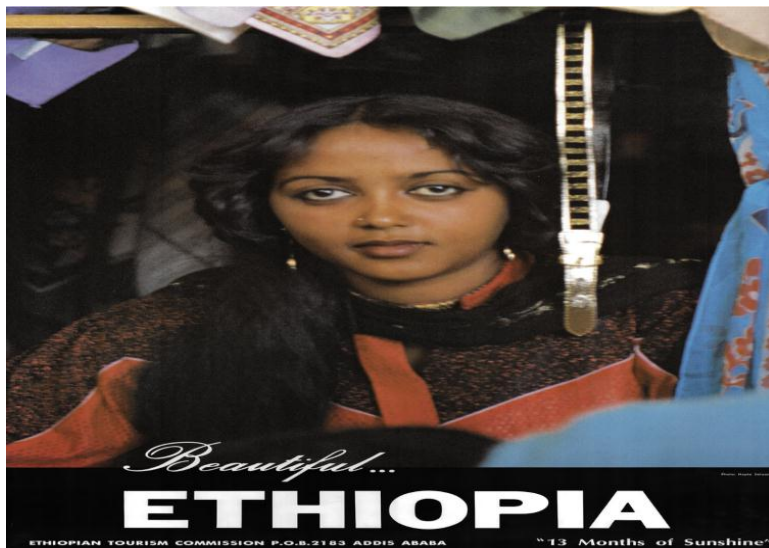
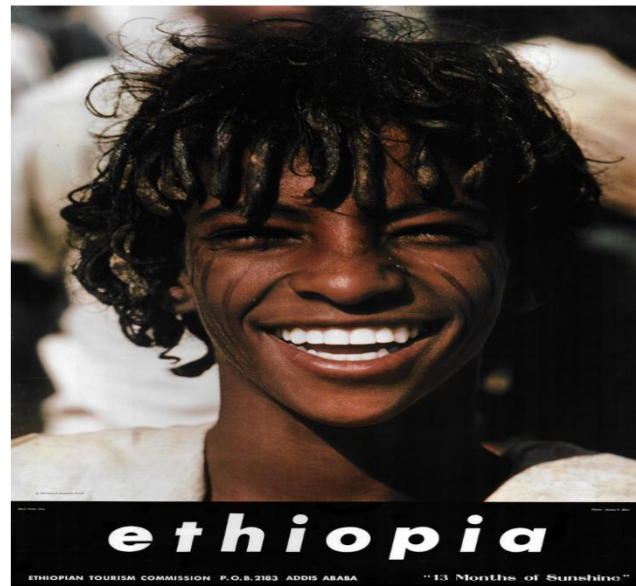
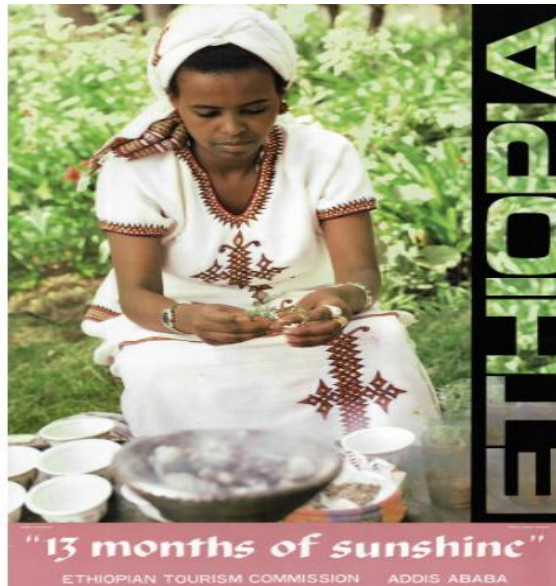
- Promote the participation of the private sector in the development of the same

The relationship between strong nation branding and the tourism sector is crucial for the overall development and promotion of a country's attractions (Gupta et al., 2020). A well-defined and effectively communicated national brand can significantly impact the tourism industry by attracting more visitors, increasing tourist spending, and ultimately contributing to the economic growth of the country. Hence the main task of branding and promoting the national brand of Ethiopia is given to the MoT. A strong nation branding strategy, coupled with effective integrated marketing communication, is essential for driving the growth of the tourism sector and establishing the country as a compelling and competitive destination for international travelers (Hassan & Mahrous, 2019). Taking that into account MoT in extension ETO took the task of conceptualizing, designing and promoting Ethiopia's national brand internationally.

### **4.3 Introduction to Ethiopia's branding history**

There have been several attempts to branding at the national level in Ethiopia. The first one that can be cited with evidence is "13 Months of Sunshine" introduced in 1965 to promote Ethiopian tourism. This arguably successful campaign had beautiful and popular posters and post cards distributed across the globe and can be cited as a one of the reasons for the rise of tourism in the late 60's and early 70's. As popular and catchy as it was, this branding did not survive the revolution of 1974 and the advent of the military takeover of government.

Indeed, Ethiopia has unique cultural heritage with historical significance. The "13 Months of Sunshine" tag line, while catchy and arguably successful, only focused on one aspect of Ethiopia, i.e., attractive weather even as the beautiful posters depicted incredibly high-quality photos of Ethiopians and Ethiopia's cultural and historical heritage. (See examples below)



3 Figure 4.1 sample brand identifications (Source, Ministry of Tourism official website)

National branding will have to be able to describe the nation in a few words to: enhance reputation, increase tourism, attract investment, show cultural and geographical beauty, increase trade, display the best attributes of the country and many more reasons.

Here lies the difficulty and complexity of coming up with one or a few taglines and symbols. Additionally, the difficulty and care required to come up with one is simply daunting as it may please some while disappointing others.

In nations that implemented country branding successfully, some mentioned in chapter two, and more examples such as "Incredible India" for India, "Cool Japan" for Japan, "100% Pure" for New

Zealand, “There’s Nothing Like Australia” for Australia they all focused on aspects of their nations to highlight the most attractive attributes in a unified and descriptive manner.

#### 4.3.1 From “13 months of sunshine” to “Land of origins”

In line with the growing recognition of tourism as a lever for economic growth and job creation, in 2013 the Government of Ethiopia proclaimed Federal Regulation 294/2013, which established the Tourism Transformation Council chaired by the then Prime Minister Haylemariam Dessalegn, the Ethiopian Tourism Organization (ETO) and the Tourism Board which oversees the ETO and whose members are high level representatives of the public and private sector.

The role at the ETO was to bring significant change and introducing a new paradigm in the implementation of the two main mandates which are fostering the development of the tourism destinations and products in a sustainable and competitive manner, and ensuring consistent and efficient promotion of Ethiopia as a tourism destination in the international as well as in the local market.

In 2015 ETO have been working on two projects with the support of the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project (ESTDP) funded by the World Bank. The first and main task was the preparation of a marketing strategy and an official National brand and logo.

Following this mandate, the organization officially launched the national brand that succeeded “13 months of sunshine” with “Ethiopia- land of origins” with the aim of capturing the attention of the international audience on the world stage. “Land of origins” as a national brand pointing a break from Ethiopia's previous tourism imagery "Ethiopia--Land of 13 Months of Sunshine" represents the fact that public diplomacy in its broadest sense is emerging to occupy a greater niche in the country's diplomatic sphere with a view to harness the broader spectrum of Ethiopia's aesthetic, civilizational, historic, spiritual, representational, reputational, cultural, institutional, and artistic capital in the context of globalization.

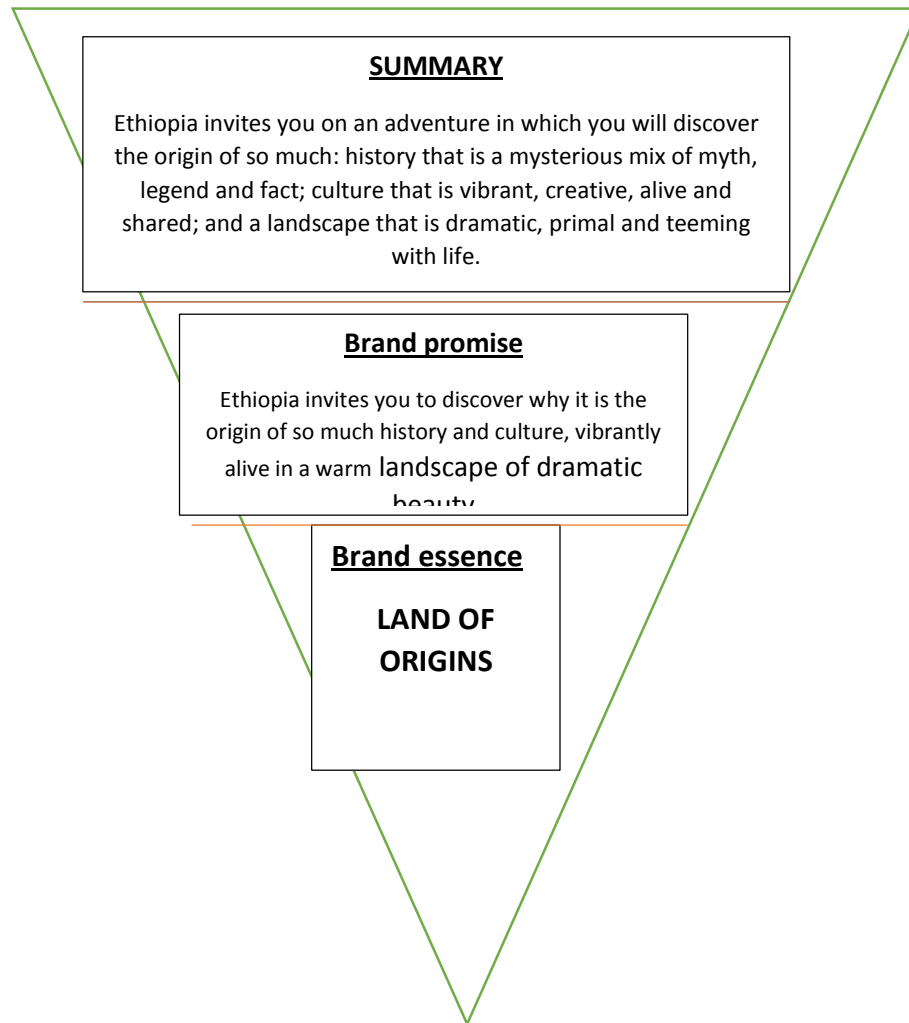
According to Tourism Marketing Strategy for Ethiopia 2016-2020, ‘Ethiopia: Land of Origins’ is based on Ethiopia's ‘Spirit of Originality’ and the new brand was believed to position Ethiopia by positively differentiating it from competitors in a way that authentically resonates across stakeholders.

It also states that conceptualizing and designing “land of origins” as a national brand was a product of extensive research in consultation with Ethiopian stakeholders, tour operators and potential tourists in source markets. The national tourism brand contains, according to the strategy, the summary promise of "Ethiopia invites you on an adventure in which you will discover the origin of so much: history that is a mysterious mix of myth, legend and fact; culture that is vibrant, creative, alive and shared; and a landscape that is warm, dramatic, primal and teeming with life".

#### 4.3.2 “Land of origins”- Brand definition

According to the Ethiopian tourism brand manual, 2015, the national brand definition that positions Ethiopia as a tourism destination has three main sections

- 1) **Self-analysis-** The origin of so much, from humankind, to civilization, from tolerance of diversity to the strength of unity, in a place of dramatic beauty all supported by the regions that substantiate this claim.
- 2) **Stakeholder analysis-** Ethiopia is the origin of so much: a history that is a mysterious mixture of fact, myth and legend; a culture that is vibrantly alive that finds its proud roots in the history; and a dramatic landscape that is primal in its extremes.
- 3) **Competitive analysis-** Ethiopia is an adventure in which Ethiopians will welcome your participation, involving you in their rich past and inspiring you with a future full of potential



4 Figure 4.2 brand definition formula source (Ethiopian tourism brand manual, 2015)

### 4.3.3 “Ethiopia; Land of origins”- Brand story

Ethiopia’s National Brand “Land of Origins” story is presented in the Brand manual as follows:

“If you desire the freedom to find out who you are through exploring the world with the goal of experiencing a better, more authentic, more fulfilling life, then Ethiopia is a part of your journey. For Ethiopia will give you such a wealth of discovery that your curiosity will be stimulated and satisfied in a continual cycle of anticipation and reward. Ethiopia invites you to discover why it is the origin of so much history and culture, vibrantly alive in a warm landscape of dramatic beauty. As you travel across her great heights and deep places you experience the origins of humankind and of species, of personal harmony and of civilization. You will meet her people and they will welcome you and you will experience the origins of unity that finds expression in a value system

that helps you rediscover humanity. You will discover the creativity that finds its origin in diversity. Make the time to share a pot of coffee and you will find out about the origins of trade, of power and of African diplomacy. Make the time to explore Ethiopia and you will be put in touch with your own origins”.

#### 4.3.4 “Land of origins”- Brand architecture

The tree is rich in imagery. Universally it stands for growth.

### Brand architecture

The logo



5 Figure 4.3 Source Ethiopian Tourism brand manual (2015)

## 4.4 Discussion of Findings

In this category, the study is divided into two stages. The first stage involves proposing a conceptual IMC framework for revitalizing the Ethiopian national brand based on a literature review that integrates three models developed by Dinnie (2008), Hankinson (2007), and Anholt

(2000). In the second stage, empirical evidence is used to finalize the proposed framework, resulting in a holistic and practical model.

#### **4.4.1 Implications and Practical Applications of the Study Findings**

The interview transcripts yield four main themes and sub-themes organized from qualitative data analysis, reflecting core factors essential for revitalizing Ethiopia's national brand, "Land of Origins" using IMC. Some factors emerged from an extensive literature review, while others surfaced during qualitative data analysis. The first theme (RQ1), "Importance," relates to overall wealth supporting the national brand and emphasizes leadership's role in reigniting it. The second theme (RQ2), "Types of Channels," identifies effective communication channels for using IMC more effectively. The third theme (RQ3), "Core Message," focuses on communicating messages to target audiences upon which the nation's brand is built. Lastly, (RQ4) "stakeholder participation" centers on the roles played by the main stakeholders in the NB process.

The following sections will discuss each emerging theme with verbatim quotes indicating how interviewees' opinions support new insights.

##### **Theme 1 (RQ1): Importance (the vision)**

Qualitative data analysis revealed a key finding: the government and its vision have played a critical role in developing the nation's brand. The Government of Ethiopia has prioritized tourism as a main growth sector, with efforts to re-establish the ministry exclusively focusing on tourism and investing in new attractions, indicating high expectations for future tourism growth. The "Land of Origins" marketing strategy was initiated by the government to strategically utilize the country's unique wealth in competing globally. However, challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Tigray war disrupted this strategic plan, emphasizing the importance of nation branding initiatives amidst internal and external challenges. Therefore, all respondents agree that it is crucial for the government to take responsibility for developing and executing a national branding plan with visionary leadership at its core to ensure success in both overcoming obstacles and seizing opportunities ahead.

The public sector will not be able to cope with this project [developing the nation brand] without visionary leadership; without a clear vision, nation branding will lose its path and its direction. (Respondent #2, a high-ranking official and expert in tourism and branding)

Several scholars in the field of nation branding emphasize the crucial role of a brand leader in establishing a clear vision for building the nation's brand. Sari and Uygur argue that strong visionary leadership is a key pillar of nation branding. Similarly, it is suggested that the government plays a crucial role in developing and communicating strategic visions and core values to nurture the national brand. According to Varga, integrating leaders' national vision with core brand values will advance the nation branding strategy and extend it to other stakeholders. Additionally, all stakeholders should agree on a final vision statement that provides both meaningful and operational guidance for their destination's future.

The study also emphasizes each stakeholder group's examination of its own role in its contribution to building the nation's brand, followed by active participation. Reflecting on this, respondent #2 (a high-ranking official) pointed out that Ethiopia's national brand was designed through extensive consultations with public and private stakeholders, laying the foundation for collaborative promotion of "Ethiopia: Land of Origins" to various target markets.

It is important for stakeholders to agree on a message reflecting not only their general vision but also one specific to their expertise areas. However, while respondents 1 and 2 emphasize stakeholder involvement during the conceptualization and design process of "Land of Origins," they also note shortcomings in implementing integrated marketing communication towards promoting the national brand as planned, resulting in underwhelming stakeholder participation.

## **Theme 2 (RQ2), "Types of Channels"**

According to the literature reviewed, countries tend to use the six-dimensional framework proposed by Anholt (2007), encompassing people, tourism, exports, governance, investment, immigration, and culture and heritage, to build their nation brand. As this particular study delves into the tourism aspect of the subject, it assessed the different channels used by the Ministry of tourism to communicate and promote the country's brand. The study's findings revealed that so far, the most effectively used communication channel in promoting the national brand is business-

to-business trade fairs. As the 2nd and 5th respondents explain, this platform presents an opportunity for stakeholder groups and businesses that work in the sector related to tourism, to connect with other international networks. This also leads to high tourist turnout, which directly reflects on the nation's branding, marketing, and promotional processes.

Another channel used to promote the NB is “Familiarization Trips” which indicates intentionally selecting key international participants and stakeholders to be part of a visiting trip to the natural, cultural, and other heritages of the country.

As respondents #6, #7 and #8 agree, media engagement in regards to “Land Of Origins” and Integrated Marketing Communication is mainly focused on local broadcast and print media. This highly limited the practice of integrated marketing communication in effectively using the media to promote Ethiopia’s National Brand. Using the traditional media to introduce and promote “Land of Origins” to the local community in the country is inadequate. This resonates with the issue of inconsistent media engagement that only relied on events rather than pre-planned; agenda based and measured media engagements. Another lacking that was shared by all the respondents was lack of international media presence that focuses on promoting Ethiopia’s national brand.

Respondent #1 discussed the importance of engaging with new media with the aim of addressing the growing impact of social media on the younger generation. But this, as the respondent explained, was not given proper focus in previous years. Even though the national strategy clearly states that in an online world where traditional and digital media converge and customers are constantly bombarded with an extensive array of marketing information, Ethiopia has to stand out from the crowd and grab attention by building relationships and engaging with the public in the new spaces they are playing in, including mobile, social, and online.

By using the integrated marketing and communications opportunities, Ethiopia’s national brand can reach a wider audience than if it were to wait for the audience to come to Ethiopia. The national tourism strategy clearly states the practical steps needed to create digital marketing action, which include formulating the right message aligned with the national brand story the next step is to choose the right platform for the message. Identifying the intended audiences and their preferred digital media platforms is paramount. This helps start and develop conversations and public

engagement. This task also aligns with identifying mechanisms to engage with the audience by creating a content calendar that shows your marketing efforts across the channels. The content calendar could include photos, videos, blog posts, social media posts, user-generated content, and articles. Last but not least, setting clear vision on what is expected and assessing the digital media goals can provide a means to measure the digital activities regularly, tweaking activities to achieve best outcomes.

The strategic document states all this but the findings from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions reveal that there is still a lack of implementation of integrated marketing communication strategies. The lack of proper funding was cited as a common reason for the underwhelming activities in digital media by all of the respondents. This lack of funding hinders the ability of Ethiopia's national brand to effectively engage with the younger generation through social media and other digital platforms (Hays et al., 2013). This led to a shortage of dedicated experts and professionals that could take exclusive responsibility of promoting the national brand using IMC.

Another finding is the use of local main stream media, including TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines, to promote the national brand of Ethiopia. On this issue, respondent #1 mentioned a challenge that was particularly observed in this sector, which is the monopoly of a few media professionals that work on the tourism agenda, which hindered the ministry from branching out on different media channels. Lack of focus and well-planned contents are also reflections of the challenges the sector is facing while using the mainstream local media.





6 Figure 4.4 Business-to-business trade fairs in different countries

Source (official website of Mot)

### **Theme 3 (RQ3), “Core Message,”**

The core message in nation branding is vital because it serves as the foundation upon which the nation's identity is built and communicated to domestic and international audiences. It encapsulates the nation's essential values and distinctive characteristics, shaping its image and reputation. A compelling core message has to resonate with stakeholders and align with their perceptions and experiences of the nation. The core message encapsulates the essential values and distinctive characteristics of the national brand.

Some key reasons why the core message is important, according to North (2003), in the national branding process are to successfully convey the unique identity of a nation and to convey a clear and consistent core message that enables a nation to maintain a coherent image across various platforms and mediums. Another reason for the importance of a unique and well-crafted core message is to enable the nation to stand out in a competitive global market, where countries are vying for attention and investment (North et al., 2003). It also helps to connect emotionally and intellectually with target audiences, which can lead to deeper and more effective engagement. A successful nation branding strategy with a strong core message enhances the nation's soft power by creating a favorable and lasting image (Li et al., 2020).

In all, the core message is a strategic tool in nation branding that not only informs how a nation is seen but also impacts the effectiveness of its engagement on the international stage. Therefore, crafting a compelling and authentic core message is crucial in order to effectively shape the perception of a nation and establish a strong national brand identity (North et al., 2003).

There are two separate but interconnected aspects of this core message, as perceived by stakeholders: the visual aspect represented by the logo, and the verbal component. Integrating these dimensions is crucial for creating a powerful message that conveys meaning to its target audiences. The message holds significance in efforts to build the nation's brand as it embodies and communicates the nation's identity.

Some of the symbolic and verbal dimensions of the core message are strongly embedded in the local Ethiopian culture and heritages, but the interpretation and meaning of these symbols may differ outside of Ethiopia. Thus, it is essential to make sure there is a “unified message” that can be decoded effectively by all target audiences, internal and external.

Perceived symbolic and verbal dimensions of the core message:

- **Symbolic dimension:** when translating the umbrella and the three themes of the “Land of Origins” logo colors:

1) Light blue: the origin of so much history, the Great River Valley, and humanity.

2) Green: The dramatic landscape and the life that flourishes there

3) Yellow: A mosaic of cultures living in harmony

4) Red: History that goes back as far as myth and legend

Apart from the color familiarization on the logo, the writing also adds the Ethiopian alphabet, which also aligns with the theme of the core message.

- **Verbal dimension:** Ethiopia: Land of Origins, the dramatic landscape, and the life that flourishes there; a mosaic of cultures living in harmony; a history that goes back as far as myth and legend.

Overall, the core message is a crucial element in nation branding, as it serves to create a favorable and lasting image of a nation.

The findings drawn from the interviews indicate that the core message behind the national brand of Ethiopia aligns with the symbolic and verbal dimensions of the core message. The core message effectively captures the essence of Ethiopia's rich cultural heritage, diverse landscape, and deep historical roots. These aspects contribute to establishing a strong national brand identity that resonates with both domestic and international audiences.

Even though Ethiopia's national brand impact assessment and brand recognition have not been formally measured, the informal situational assessments by the MoT show there is acceptance of the core message of the brand as it encompasses a lot of aspects that are meaningful and relevant to Ethiopian culture and heritage (Zong et al., 2023).

#### **Theme 4 (RQ4) “stakeholder participation”**

- **Public sector**

The study's findings revealed that all the interviewees agreed that the public sector plays a crucial role in the nation branding process. It requires a comprehensive effort and a coordinated governmental plan to promote Ethiopia's nation brand, involving all sectors.. (Respondent #4, marketing and communication expert) The public sector is essential for the success of nation branding efforts as it requires a comprehensive and coordinated governmental plan involving all sectors (Marat, 2009).

*The primary sector responsible for setting policies and taking a leading role in advancing our national identity is the government. It is tasked with creating regulations and policies to facilitate this process, as well as coordinating the messaging of public institutions to reflect the core message of the national brand.*

(Respondent #2, a high government official) The study's findings suggest that the government's involvement should be most active in countries like Ethiopia since the building of strong institutions is still a long process.

The government's involvement and commitment to achieving the branding campaign objectives are perceived to be essential in sustaining the participation of all the necessary stakeholders.

As respondent #1 explains, the most effective public institution participation in promoting Ethiopia's national brand so far has been with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ethiopian Airlines, and Ethiopian embassies across the world.

- **Private sector**

The interviewees concur that the private sector should play an active role in promoting the "Land of Origins." They believe that the private sector, with its expertise in various business fields, can effectively reach a broader audience through integrated marketing communications. According to Respondent #3, a marketing and public relations expert, this involvement is crucial. Additionally, it was noted by the interviewees that travel agents are among the most engaged private stakeholders supporting government efforts to assess Ethiopia's national brand. The private sector's expertise in various business fields makes it a valuable partner in promoting the nation's brand (Lekakis, 2014). Tourism involves several sub-stakeholders, including hoteliers, tour operators, and restaurants. Their role is crucial in promoting Ethiopia's brand. The representatives of the tourism sector have the power to embody the nation's brand through their interactions with external audiences like holidaymakers and visiting business people. Private sector participants such as travel agencies, tour operators, and hotels have actively taken on the task of promoting "Land of Origins" at trade fairs and international events. However, this study reveals that most private sector engagements in national brand promotion lack planned preparation and integration into core brand messaging.

- **The media**

The role of media in promoting the national brand of a country is pivotal, as it is the primary channel through which images, stories, and perceptions are disseminated both locally and globally (Marat, 2012). The media's impact on nation branding involves image projection, which includes

the dissemination of images and narratives that significantly contribute to a country's reputation. The media also provides information dissemination platforms for communicating core brand messages and information regarding the national brand (Jian, 2008).

This study finds that the practical use of the media in promoting “land of origins” is limited to local mainstream media. From the interview with participant #1, MoT has been working with state and privately owned media institutions such as Ethiopian broadcasting corporation, Ethiopian news agency, Fana broadcasting corporation, Ethiopian press agency, Ethiopian broadcasting service, etc. These engagements mainly focus on events and incidents rather than planned and integrated approach to the media based on the core national brand message. The study also finds that the language barrier presents a challenge in disseminating brand messages across Ethiopia. Lack of sufficient budget is the main constraint for the MoT to not engage foreign and international media that can play a significant role in echoing the core message of Ethiopia’s national brand to a global audience. All the respondents of the interviews agreed that, in a globalized world, strategic engagement with the media is essential for countries to effectively promote their national brands and compete for attention, respect, and influence. In order to fully utilize the potential of media in nation branding, it is necessary for countries to adopt a strategic and integrated approach (Fan, 2006).

- **Embassies**

Embassies play a significant role in promoting a nation's brand (Parlov et al., 2016)(Wang, 2011). They serve as official representatives of a country in the host nation and are pivotal in the practice of public diplomacy. Here's how embassies impact the promotion of a nation's brand. Embassies are the physical manifestation of a nation's presence abroad and thus reflect the nation's image, values, and culture(Malone et al., 2019). They also often organize cultural events, exhibits, and exchanges that showcase the nation's heritage and contemporary culture, enhancing its image and attractiveness. They provide accurate and official information about their home country, countering misinformation and fostering a positive image (Maags, 2014). Embassies help promote their country as a destination for tourism and a hub for business and investment, often working closely with trade and tourism departments. Through diplomatic activities, embassies aim to

influence the foreign policy of the host nation in a direction favorable to their country's brand values and interests (Malone, 2013).

Overall, embassies are essential in creating and maintaining the desired international image of the nation, and their diplomatic efforts are central to the success of a country's nation branding strategy.

- **General public and the intellectual community**

For nation branding to be successful, it should be inclusive; engaging with diverse sectors of society to ensure the brand represents the nation's multifaceted identity (Marat, 2009). The general public and the intellectual community play important roles in the promotion of a nation's brand, (Groen & Lee, 2013) as their involvement can be crucial for creating an authentic and credible image of the country. The general public contributes through social media, word-of-mouth, and cultural exchanges, and they serve as informal ambassadors and can influence perceptions of a country by sharing their experiences, traditions, and lifestyles both in person and online (Putri & Yasri, 2020). Tourism, international events, and direct interaction with foreigners are some of the ways through which the public's participation manifests.

The intellectual community of academics, thought leaders, and cultural figures can shape national branding through their work, which often reaches an international audience (Steenkamp, 2019). By providing informed narratives, participating in global debates, and showcasing a nation's intellectual and cultural assets, they help build the nation's brand by adding depth and credibility. Their endorsements or critiques can greatly influence international perception. Agreeing on the great importance of the participation of the general public and intellectual community in promoting Ethiopia's national brand, all the participants in the interviews noted the lack of consistent engagements with these stakeholders. Participant #6 highlighted the lack of integration in bringing all the regions to the core message of the national brand of Ethiopia. Unplanned and sometimes contradictory messaging from different regions can dilute the nation's brand and create confusion among international audiences (Marat, 2009).

The involvement of the general public and intellectual community is crucial in promoting a nation's brand, as their participation ensures a diverse and authentic representation of the country

Participant #2 explained that the MoT is preparing to evaluate the effectiveness of current nation branding efforts by assessing the level of engagement and involvement from the general public and intellectual community.

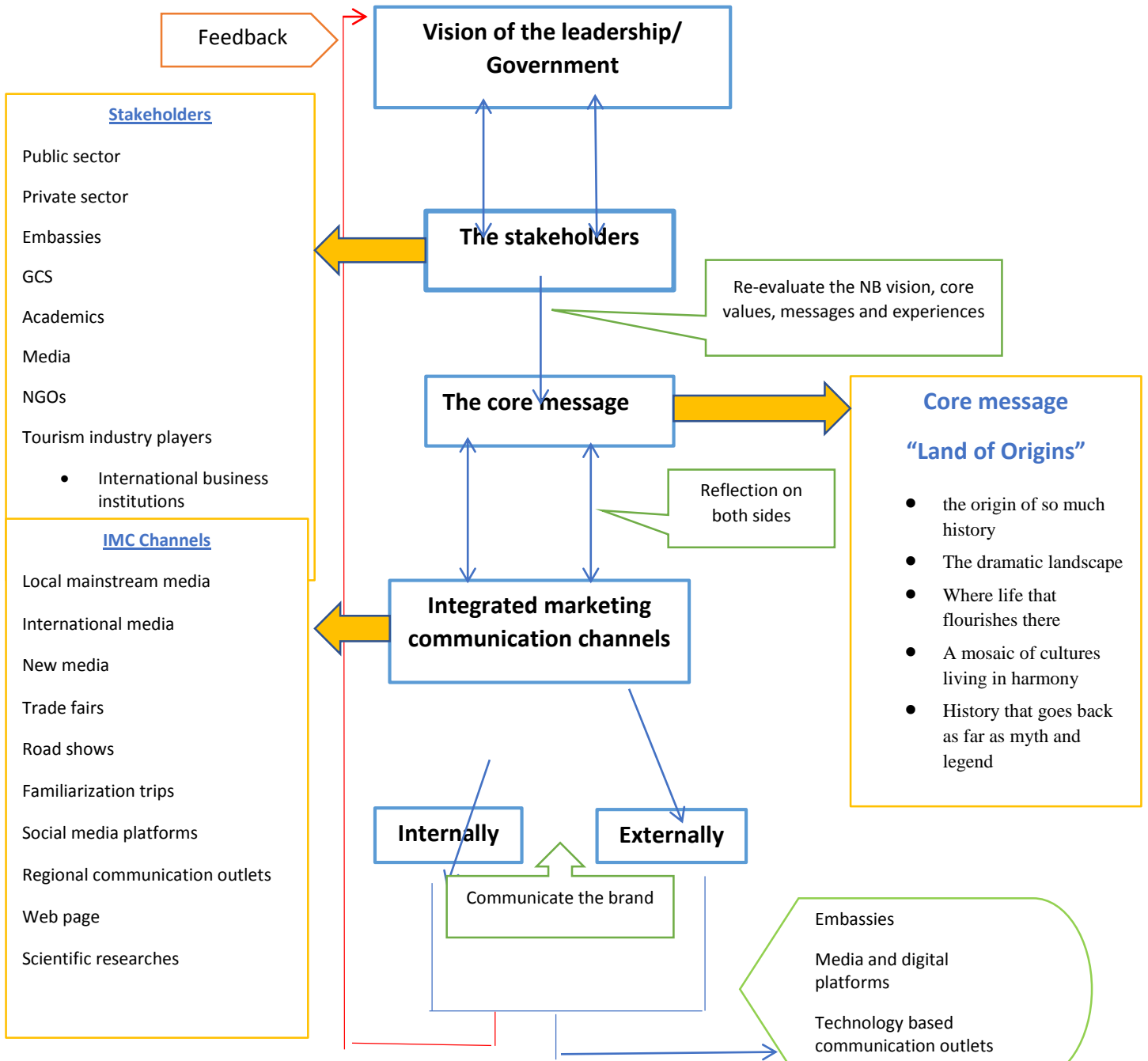
#### **4.5 Final framework development and design**

The final conceptual framework from the qualitative data analysis indicates that the nation brand revitalization process begins with a clear strategic vision and mission from the nation's top leadership or government. This forms the foundation for a culture focused on building and promoting the national brand.

The next step involves re-evaluating the nation brand's vision, core values, and message through careful input and integration from key stakeholders. The nation brand message should then be intentionally assessed to encompass the essence of Ethiopia's national identity. Therefore, MoT must assess experiences and identify effective channels to communicate core values of the nation's brand. Success depends on all stakeholders contributing to this effort by sharing their perceptions, experiences, and expertise in order to revitalize Ethiopia's national brand as "the land of origins". The framework emphasizes active stakeholder participation throughout this process.

Working alongside stakeholders involved in national branding efforts, MoT should communicate its core message through multiple external and internal channels. A crucial aspect for success is continuous feedback allowing effective monitoring and assessment of progress in revitalizing Ethiopia's nation branding efforts. The researcher believes that this holistic framework enriches existing literature by providing an integrated approach to Ethiopia's nation-brand revitalization process.

**Final framework**



7 Figure 4.5 proposed practical IMC model for Nation Branding

# CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter expresses the conclusions and recommendations of the study. Data is

Summarized in line with the objectives of the study described in chapter one of this thesis.

## 5.2 Conclusion

**Objective one:** to assess the unique advantages of Ethiopia that makes integrated marketing communication effective in the nation branding process.

According to the national tourism marketing strategic document "Ethiopia: Land of Origins," it is based on Ethiopia's 'Spirit of Originality'. Ethiopia's national brand is believed to position the country by positively differentiating it from competitors in a way that authentically resonates across stakeholders. This study observed that the versatility of the brand concept makes it relatable to the cultural, historical, and social riches of the country. Having the summary promise of "Ethiopia invites you on an adventure in which you will discover the origin of so much: history that is a mysterious mix of myth, legend, and fact; culture that is vibrant, creative, alive, and shared; and a landscape that is warm, dramatic, primal, and teeming with life," Ethiopia's national brand is suitable for the use of integrated marketing communication strategies.

The very rich heritage of Ethiopia is stipulated in the national brand, which fully captures the essence of Ethiopia as a land of origins. These include: the hominoid skeleton of 'Lucy'; the mystical churches of Lalibela, hand-hewn from rock to create the Jerusalem of Africa; the biblical Ark of the Covenant kept in Aksum; the castles of Gondar; the astonishing mix of ethnic groups in Southern Ethiopia; the colorful Harar, the old walled city of a hundred mosques, and the fourth most holy site in Islam; the Simien Mountains, the Roof of Africa; and endless vistas in Gheralta to experience the spirituality of centuries old churches dotted among steep pink cliffs. With the initiative of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmad (PHD), the Ethiopian government has made the tourism sector one of the economic growth pillars of the country and has been investing heavily in creating new tourist attractions and new destinations throughout the country. This also enhances the

previous outlook towards the sector and brings an opportunity to integrate and use all of the marketing communication tools in order to revitalize Ethiopia's national brand.

**Objective two;** to identify ideal channels of communication to promote Ethiopia's national brand in an integrated manner

Looking at the aspects of promoting Ethiopia's national brand by using Public Relations and Media platforms, the study found out that MoT has been engaging with both local and international news outlets, by providing press releases and interviews to promote the country's national brand. But this was very limited to event-based communication, which lacks consistent engagement with the different media outlets. The ministry has also faced difficulty strategically selecting international media outlets to air promotional brand advertisements due to budget constraints. So far, engagement with local media and participation in trade fairs have been given attention to raise awareness of Ethiopia's national brand, but there is a lot to be done in terms of strategic engagement with international media and consistent communication.

This study also found that the ministry has recently given proper attention to its digital marketing efforts and is gaining a better presence in them. MoT has established a digital marketing department to exclusively work on content marketing, social media campaigns, and online advertising to reach a global audience. In addition to that, the ministry is in the final stages of launching a digital web portal that incorporates all the necessary information about the country for tourists, and the portal also includes several stakeholders, which makes the service much more convenient for the user.

A strong digital media presence can play significant roles as communicators in the digital space, creating a desirable mental image of the country as a tourism destination, and the MoT should work on using the ever-trending social media platforms in order to address a wider global audience.

Art has a significant impact on shaping people's perceptions of the world (Estes et al., 2018). In this study, the researcher noted that the implementation of an artistic approach to promote the Ethiopian national brand was very underwhelming. Even though some attempts were made in this regard, the study found that the use of art in promoting the Ethiopian national brand was not effective, highlighting the importance of a strategic approach to brand promotion.

Engaging in cultural diplomacy by showcasing Ethiopia's rich and vibrant culture, arts, heritage, and values through international cultural events, exhibitions, and exchange programs can bolster the nation's image and brand. The Ministry of Tourism, along with other stakeholders like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister's Office, the Government Communication Service, the Ministry of Culture and Sports, and others, can collaborate to organize cultural events, exhibitions, and exchange programs that highlight Ethiopia's rich cultural heritage and values.

**Objective Three;** to find out how the messaging of Ethiopia's national brand is communicated constantly across all channels

Even though consistency in brand messaging is key to the overall success of promoting the national brand, this study found that there is a gap between stakeholders and MoT on understanding the nature, objective, and general concept of the Ethiopian national brand. From the observations of the researcher, Ethiopia's national brand, "Land of Origins," is usually seen as a brand only to be used by Mot. This has highly impacted the dissemination of consistent messaging throughout all communication and marketing channels.

Objective Four; to examine the synergy of stakeholders in amplifying the impact of Ethiopia's national brand

As has been observed in the lack of consistent messaging, integrating stakeholder groups in order to boost Ethiopia's national brand has been a challenge and is still a dent. Assuming the national brand "Land of Origins" is only a tourism sector brand and not being aware of the importance of the national brand is still a challenge that needs to be addressed by the MoT by creating awareness and strategizing with all the ministerial offices.

This can give the national brand a better chance of success, as every government office and other private stakeholders can interpret the national brand and apply IMC to promoting it.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

- The government should fully support the efforts to promote Ethiopia's national brand by allocating a sufficient budget and recognizing the stakeholders.
- The government should look into the marketing and tourism strategic plan to revitalize and revise it according to the major changes in outlook in the sector seen in the past 5 years.

- Success for branding promotional strategies should be identified and shared to all of the stakeholders as best practices. Additionally, continuous monitoring and evaluation of the branding efforts should be conducted to ensure effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.
- Stakeholders involved in national brand promotional activities should have separate and independent departments to promote the brand and they should also incorporate digital media expertise
- The major stakeholders, including ministry of Tourism, should be given proper support in order to create strong institutions that can represent and promote Ethiopia’s national brand.
- The newly built tourist attractions of the country should be promoted in alliance with the national brand of the country as they can bring tremendous value in attracting tourists and improving the overall image of Ethiopia as a tourism destination
- Ministry of tourism and other government institutions should take the leading role of building the capacity of the media in order to lay the basic ground on the importance of a national brand and specifically Ethiopia’s brand “Land of Origins”
- Conductive rules and regulation that govern the relation among the stake and partners should be clear and workable
- To revitalize Ethiopia's national brand, the government should invest in promoting cultural events and festivals that showcase the country's rich history, heritage and traditions
- In order to enhance tourism, promote the national brand, and effectively rebuild the image of Ethiopia, the task of marketing and branding should not be left to only the MoT. It should involve all stakeholders in the tourism industry, including tour operators, hotels, restaurants, airlines, media houses and non-governmental organizations in order to create a unified and cohesive approach
- The researcher recommends that a high-level and inter-ministerial forum be formed within the government to oversee the implementation of the revitalization plans and branding strategies and ensure coordination among different institutions.

#### **5.4 Further Research areas**

Despite significant efforts to revitalize the national brand and bolster the image of Ethiopia globally, there remains a considerable distance to cover. Numerous aspects still require urgent

attention and have not been adequately addressed. The country has demonstrated excessive dependence on certain promotional approaches. Consequently, additional research is imperative regarding brand marketing strategy evaluation, the impact of new attraction sights on the image of the country, strategies to create cohesive nation branding messages, media engagement, the public relations sector and its impact on nation branding efforts, nation branding strategies in the digital world, the impact of artificial intelligence in nation branding, and its potential contribution to promoting Ethiopia's national brand and building the nation's true image in the world arena.

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