

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**An investigation into the role and practice of
Public relations in nation branding using
Cultural Heritages: The case of three selected
Government institutions in Ethiopia**

BY

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**November, 2020 ADDIS
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and Communication
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ETHIOPIA**

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and has neither been presented in any other university nor was published before and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been acknowledged.

Nebiyu Alemayehu Wendimagegn

Signature

Addis Ababa

November

2020

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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Nebiyu Alemayehu entitled: An investigation into the role and practice of Public Relations in Nation branding using Cultural Heritage: The case of three Governmental institutions in Ethiopia, and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and Communications, Specialization in Public Relations and Strategic Communications complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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List of acronyms

ARCCH	Authority for the Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage
ICS	Internal Communication Strategy
MOCT	Ministry of Culture and Tourism
PR	Public Relations
RQ	Research Questions
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Abstract

Nation branding has become a popular trend in the current highly competitive economic realm. This is mainly because an increasing number of countries are engaging in branding themselves targeting to reap the fruits of having a good country image and reputation. A country's good image is a necessary prerequisite to attract investment, tourism and skilled man-power. Countries use their potential resources which makes them unique from other countries- be it their geographical location, technological advancement, cultural heritages and economic strength. For any nation branding activity to become successful, building the necessary relationship between the country and its stakeholders is imperative. It is at this juncture that public relations posit as an essential component in creating a positive country image. Ethiopia, though blessed with a significant amount of cultural heritages, seems lagging behind in this endeavor. This study intends to examine the country's efforts in branding itself using its cultural heritages, particularly its use of strategic public relations in branding activities. The research is meant to look into the systematic practice and the role of public relations for branding a nation in the Ethiopian context by taking three relevant study sites- the Ministry of Culture and Tourism(MOCT), Tourism Ethiopia and, the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage(ARCCH). Hence, the core objective of this research is to investigate the role and practice of public relations in nation branding using the cultural heritages of the country. The research utilizes a qualitative research approach in order to gather and analyze the data gained through the in-depth interview with key informants which were picked using purposive sampling technique. The data garnered through the in-depth interview with nine key informants were analyzed thematically. Moreover, documents relevant for the research, such as manuals and online materials, are also analyzed through document analysis. The findings of the research demonstrated that the organizations are in most cases, without the proper and scientific ways of practicing public relations and the strategic ways of implementing public relations in nation branding activities. In this case, concerning the practice of public relations, findings in most cases do not correspond with the Excellence theory, which this study used as a theoretical framework to examine the practice of public relations in these organizations. In this regard, except for the empowerment of the public relations function in the dominant coalition, the organizations do not appear to have practiced some key tasks such as the integration of all communication functions under a single department, identifying the role of the PR professional, and the specific PR model that the organization intends to adapt. As far as the PR strategy that these organizations follow when conducting nation branding functions, findings revealed that they are more engaged in image management than the relationship building approach which is the core junction of most PR activities. Finally, this research forwarded recommendations emphasizing on the best practices of public relations and PR strategies that augment nation branding programs.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1. Introduction and Background of the study

The concept of nation branding is considered to be a recent phenomenon in its current form though its genesis has been present for quite some time. The gist of nation branding is creating a positive image of a nation to the outside world by using the history, culture, economy and politics of that particular nation (Li, 2016, p.15). There is no universally agreed definition towards the concept of nation branding. However, different scholars have presented their own definition in explaining the concept of nation branding. To mention some, for (Dinnie, 2008, p. 139)-

Nation branding is an active approach to creating positive perceptions of a country which would perhaps not arise if the nation's reputation was left solely to stereotypes and cliches, and thus, branding techniques are essential to differentiate one's nation from others and compete in the global market.

In the aforementioned definition, Dinnie considered nation branding as an approach employed for establishing a favorable image of a country. Besides, he further noted that nation branding and the reputation of a nation are interrelated. On the other hand, Anholt (2007), amongst the most revered scholar in the area, explain nation branding as a coordinating act among a country's governmental and non-governmental institutions, tourism agencies and cultural organizations so as to establish a favorable view of the nation.

The common understanding and consensus among many scholars, therefore, seem that the main function of nation branding is to create a positive image of a nation to back a nation's presence and its influence in the global arena. In general, the concept of nation branding is to enable countries to make a conscious effort in building their image. Currently there is hardly any country in the world that does not employ some sort of nation branding activities (Dinnie, 2008, p. 52). This clearly shows that nations are practicing branding of themselves exponentially in order to create a positive image that might have been distorted by their past history.

Nations conduct branding activities using their social, cultural, historical, economic and technological advancements. As such, culture is one of a powerful human tool that takes a center stage in branding a nation by exhibiting the unique characteristic of a given society and nation.

Basically, culture is quite a broad term with important themes in creating a distinctive feature to a particular society, referring to a given society and its way of life. It is defined as a set of beliefs, values and learned behaviors that people have in common in a particular society, providing a sense of identity and belongingness (Lebron, 2013, p.128). Similarly, for Walsham(2002, p. 370) culture is a shared value, norms and symbols that define a specific society. Therefore, culture is a common value among members of a certain particular society which is not displayed in other societies, and thus, local culture can serve as a major component in nation branding as any culture is attributed to a definite place and society.

Culture is displayed through some forms. According to Bodley(1999, p. 23), culture is mainly manifested in three fundamental components, namely- in what people think, in what they do, and in the material products they produce (their cultural heritage). Thus, in this sense, cultural heritages are important components of culture as they are key in demonstrating the values and norms of a specific society.

Cultural heritages are all the artifacts both tangible and intangible materials that portray the unique features of a specific society and passed on from generation to generation (UNESCO, 2019). Hence, cultural heritages reflect the traditional and cultural values of nations and can be employed in establishing the image of a place. Historical and cultural heritages, both past and present, are therefore the inherent part of place identity that can be employed for nation branding. On the other hand, for nations with rich cultural and tourism potentials, branding has a pivotal role and serve as a strategic tool and capital which enables them to benefit economically (Abankina, 2013, p. 5; Fan, 2014, p. 282).

Here, it is worth mentioning as an empirical evidence, the experience of the Tofu village in China which uses its cultural heritage as a tool to brand itself. Branding a place through its cultural heritage demands identifying local cultural features of the place, identifying what characteristics are prominent there, and designing ways of communicating them. The 4D place branding model, which the Tofu village in China employs to brand itself through its cultural heritages, is a theoretical framework targeting at unveiling the brand identity of a place from the business, tourist, and cultural dimension. It was designed to create a place image through carrying in-depth research in China

particularly to serve destination marketing projects. It consists four phases- Discover, Define, re(Design), and Deliver. In the Discovery phase, all relevant and available resources, such as cultural values and historical facts are garnered in order to produce the core themes of the brand image. The Define stage is meant to figure out a clear, simple and tangible definition for the brand positioning and begins with crafting a memorable word, phrase or even a sentence that best defines a place. In the re(Design) stage, the conceived or the existing images are converted into tangible branding resources. It consists a variety of strategies for brand positioning including cultural exhibition, physical design, business planning and environmental protection. In the last and Deliver stage, the main objective is to form the linkage or communicate the brand with its key messages to its target audiences. This phase is performed unabated to re-create or improve the image of an already established brand by communicating through a variety of channels, comprising Websites, social media, mass media, advertisements and promotions. Brand communication can be initiated at earlier stages, and it is imperative for the core brand messages to be continuously delivered throughout the entire branding process. This model was planned for a comprehensive application of place branding and can serve as a guideline in different programs. It also encompasses communication as its important component that contributes to establish the brand and its message with its stakeholders (Fan, 2014, p. 285).

Ethiopia is considered to be a land of different cultures and history, a country with one of the richest histories not only in the African continent but in the world with more than three thousand years. The country is home to more than 80 ethnic groups, each with their own distinct cultures and cultural manifestations (Baird, 2014, p. 14). Currently, Ethiopia has 13(9 tangibles and 4 intangible) heritages registered by UNESCO (2019) which makes it the number one country in Africa with the most cultural heritages. The nine (9) tangible and places of heritages are- the Rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, the Fasil Ghebbi, the Aksum Obelisk, the valley of the river Awash, the valley of the river Omo, the Simien mountains, the Tiya, HararJugol, the Konso cultural landscape, and the four (4) intangible and ritual ceremonies include the Meskel ceremony, Irreechaa, Fiche chambalala and Timket. But contrary to its cultural heritage potential, its current image has been tarnished by the near past history of extreme poverty, famine and civil war. Despite its cultural heritage resources, little has been done to manifest what the country possesses. Although many countries are competing for natural and man-made resources (such as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), talent attraction, tourism

and export incomes) through strategically communicating their country image, Ethiopia is remaining inert in its nation branding activity, which has now become omnipresent globally (Getu, 2010, p. 24).

In fact, Ethiopia has made some efforts to brand itself in previous times. “Thirteen Months of Sunshine” was the famous slogan that defined Ethiopia for the past 50 years. Because of its ineffectiveness to create a positive mental conception among the international community, in 2016, a new motto- “Land of Origins”- was introduced by the Ethiopian Tourism Organization, the recently renamed ‘Tourism Ethiopia’, to revitalize the nation’s declining tourism industry and falling image among the international community. The theme of the new motto was to introduce Ethiopia to the outside world as it is the source of the many wonders of the world, like for instance, it is the source of mankind and coffee. But, still the country holds a negative perception within the international community and should make great strides in order to make a sense of place on the minds and hearts of foreign publics (Desta, 2018).

Therefore, it appears that Ethiopia ought to brand itself in order to overcome its unfavorable image and exploit the benefits of branding more strategically and through effective communication practices. Maintaining good relations with other nations, attract foreign direct investment and boosting the tourist influx, can be mentioned as some of the benefits to be generated through branding heritages. In doing so, branding necessitates the involvement of many state actors, among them are communication professionals, particularly public relations and strategic communication professionals have an enormous role in nation branding. As such, Anholt (2007) mentioned that nation branding is a notion that produces a value in the mental conception of observers by employing verbal, emotional and visual communication techniques towards its stakeholders. In his opinion, Szondi (2010) further argued that public relations provide a framework for leadership and coordination among stakeholder organizations of nation branding advocates, in addition to engaging the local population into the nation branding approach. Consequently, public relations have an essential role to play in nation branding by creating the necessary linkage among stakeholders and make the nation branding activity flawless.

Thus, this research is conducted to investigate the role and practice of public relations and strategic communications in nation branding activities using cultural heritages as a tool in the Ethiopian context. As the country is endowed with rich cultural heritages, but unfavorably viewed by the outside world, employing cultural heritages can serve as a necessary tool in branding the nation. The research will be conducted on three governmental organizations, namely, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MOCT), Tourism Ethiopia, and the Authority for the Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH). These organizations are selected by the researcher as they are directly relevant to fulfill the research objective.

The research, consequently, tried to investigate how public relations is practiced and what nation branding approaches are employed by these organizations when they conduct nation branding activities using the aforementioned vast and untapped cultural heritages, so as to brand Ethiopia and reap the benefits out of it.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

In today's competitive and globalized world, nations are encouraged and increasingly obliged to create a 'good image' of themselves to cope up with the rapidly changing socio-economic activities. Many scholars agreed that establishing a unique national identity is becoming a matter of significant importance to contend with the ever-increasing new world order. To survive in this growingly competitive world, nations are very much committed in branding themselves to deal with the multi-faceted competition that they encounter in the world arena. It is at this juncture that the concept of nation branding becomes conclusive as it aims to create a positive image of a nation and boost its influence on the global scene. In this regard, Kavaratzis (2005) attested that the main focus of Nation branding is to attract tourists, skilled manpower, increase export and augment national pride.

Nation branding, a notion primarily emanated from marketing perspectives sought scholar's attention from the fields of public diplomacy, mass communication and culture studies. The concept of nation branding can be considered as a recent phenomenon despite bear in mind that the relationship between country image on product purchase has existed for long (Papadopolous, 2002; Li, 2016). Currently, nation branding has become widely popular and the number of researches conducted and articles published is growing immensely.

Several definitions have been forwarded by scholars regarding the concept of nation branding. For instance, for Fan Y., (2006), Nation branding is the practice of branding and marketing communication techniques to elevate a nation's image. On the other hand, Jaffe (2001, p.13) further elaborated the aim of nation branding as-

to create a clear, simple, differentiating idea built around emotional qualities which can be symbolized both verbally and visually and understood by diverse audiences in a variety of situations. To work effectively, nation branding must embrace political, cultural, business and sport activities.

Nation branding is conducted in many forms as it is an approach to promote a country based on its unique features compared to other countries. Countries make their branding moves based on the best resource they possess, for example, Italy is best known for fashion and design, Germany for good quality products, Japan for high and advanced products, Swiss for precision, watches, banks and chocolate, and so on (Gluvacevic, 2016). Other scholars like Kapferer (2008), argues that the image of a country is shaped by its history, art and geographical position. But, among nation branding tools, culture and heritages are one of the most important components of nation branding. Branding nations through cultural heritages appears to be more effective than commercial brands as consumers are always more skeptical towards commercial brands than cultural heritages (Gluvacevic, 2016; Anholt, 2007).

Cultural heritages are one of the primary and effective tools to be used by several nations to create a unique national identity so as to brand a nation. Hence, the tangible and intangible heritages of a nation can serve as a major tool in shaping its image and create a favorable view in the minds of its stakeholders.

the cultural aspects of national image are irreplaceable and uncopiable because it is uniquely linked to the country itself; it is reassuring because it links the country's past with its present; it is enriching because it deals with non-commercial activities; and it is dignifying because it shows the spiritual and intellectual qualities of the country's people and institutions (Anholt, 2002; p.236).

In commenting about the impact of cultural heritage for Nation branding (Henderson, 2002) also noted that historical elements have the capacity to investigate one's nation brand of its past, and spurs communication of that nation to both inside and abroad (international audiences). Even though the presence of cultural heritage is pivotal for one's nation branding, it doesn't have to be taken as a guarantee to brand a nation if it isn't communicated enough. In this state, the practice of well-organized public relations and strategic communications becomes pertinent.

Public relations can contribute to nation branding by avoiding propaganda and nurture a more open communication, additionally, through its environmental scanning and relationship management function, public relations can form a mutually beneficial relationship among stakeholders. Moreover, public relations make the nation branding campaign more adaptable to the changes that took place both inside and the outside environment. Thus, a strategic public relation provides a comprehensive communication framework in coordinating the different activities of nation branding within a single country (Li, 2016; Szondi, 2010).

Despite its vast cultural heritage resources Ethiopia has been associated with war, drought, famine, and considered to be one of the poorest and unknown African nation for tourism and investment. Generally, it has been molded by stories of wars, natural disasters and famine (Marcus, H. as cited by Mulugeta, 2012). Nevertheless, in reality, Ethiopia is a country endowed with ancient, rich heritages and cultural diversity, both tangible and intangible heritage. Ethiopia is adorned with archeological, cultural, historical and natural resources since paleontological researches found Ethiopia as the origin of mankind. According to UNESCO (2019) World Heritage list, Ethiopia ranks 1st with the largest number of world heritage sites in Africa, collectively of 13 (eight cultural, four intangible cultural heritage of humanity and one natural) heritage sites. But, the vast cultural heritages and glorious past of Ethiopia cannot prevent it from being viewed as a poor and backward country as its existing image is negatively affected by the near past images of drought, famine, war and poverty.

This is mainly because, although the country is bestowed with many cultural heritages, it lacks the necessary knowledge and skill in communicating itself to its stakeholders. Thus, the country needs to overhaul its nation branding activity through the use of public relations and strategic communications by utilizing its cultural heritage (Abdu, 2018). In addition to these, the World Bank

report that cited the country for suffering from the negative image of its past concluded that Ethiopia must plan to transform its unfavorable image through branding strategies and portraying its resource potentials using communication mechanisms (World Bank, 2012).

These trends clearly show that Ethiopia should seriously contemplate about branding itself using its vast resources in order to alter its existing unfavorable image, and one of these is its cultural heritage. For its realization, the role of strategic public relations is irreplaceable. This notion is further corroborated by Mulugeta (2012, p.5), as he asserted that-

it is no longer enough to simply to adopt free market economic and development policies, rather nations have to aggressively market their competitiveness through the tools of modern communications to brand themselves, in order to achieve a better place in the ever-increasing competitive world.

Therefore, it will be fair to argue that Ethiopia needs to re-brand itself in order to compete in the ever increasingly globalized world using its existing resources of cultural heritage. Hence, at this juncture, the country needs the role of a strategic public relations in order to connect with its stakeholders both domestically and internationally to create a positive image of the nation as public relations role in image management and relationship building contributes to the conceptualization of nation branding (Li, 2016).

Thus, this research is conducted to investigate the role and how public relations is practiced in branding a nation using its cultural heritage as a tool in the Ethiopian context. In doing so, the research is delimited to the three major government organizations that have the duty and responsibility for branding the nation and managing cultural heritages, namely, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MOCT), Tourism Ethiopia, and the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH).

1.3. Objective

1.3.1. General Objective

The main objective of the research is to study the role and practice of public relations for Nation branding using the cultural heritages of Ethiopia as a tool. It also examines the PR strategies that are employed by the organizations which this study is based upon. In accordance with the overall objective, the research will have the following specific objectives.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

- To examine the public relations practices of the organizations under this study in exploiting Ethiopia's immense cultural heritage potential so as to utilize the nation branding fortune.
- To scrutinize the public relations strategies that these institutions put forth when conducting Nation branding using the country's cultural heritage potentials.
- To identify the major causes for the prolonged unfavorable view of the country in the global arena.
- To evaluate the main causes that hindered the country's efforts to change its image.

1.4. Research Questions

- A) How do the research organizations practice public relations using the cultural heritage resources of the country while branding the nation?
- B) What public relations and communication strategies are used by the organizations for nation branding activities using the cultural heritage potentials?
- C) What are the causes for the prolonged negative image of the country in the international sphere?
- D) Why did the country fail to change its image?

1.5. Scope of the Study

Geographically: The research is conducted at three governmental institutions of Ethiopia. The organizations are headquartered in Addis Ababa. Therefore, in order to garner relevant data, the research was carried out at the head offices of the three organizations.

Thematically: Nation branding can be carried out in many forms using different geographical locations, technological products or cultural objects. But, for a Nation branding program to be successful, it needs a good public relations and strategic communication endeavor, as it is cited by different scholars. Hence, the subject scope or the theme of this research is to concentrate on investigating the public relations concept and its role for Nation branding using cultural heritage.

Methodologically: This study is delimited to implement a qualitative research approach, with the hope of acquiring the necessary relevant primary and secondary data. Therefore, in-depth interviews were conducted with a sum of nine key informants of public relations professionals using purposive sampling technique in the abovementioned three organizations, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Tourism Ethiopia, and the Authority for the Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Additionally, secondary data, including communication documents, newspapers, printed materials and online sources were also reviewed.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

Like many other studies, this research has its own limitations. One of the major problems to be stated is the difficulty to access archive materials, such as letters, press releases, reports and news stories. This is mainly because of the poor documentation practices within the organizations under study. As a result, this demands extra effort to gather pertinent secondary data. Hence, in order to overcome this limitation, the researcher tried to generate relevant data from the key informants of the research using interview as an alternative to replace documents.

1.7. Significance of the Research

This research attempts to examine the role and practice of public relations in nation branding using cultural heritages as a tool in the Ethiopian context. The outcome of this research will have the following contributions:

- > The Ministry of Culture, Tourism Ethiopia, and the Authority for Preservation and Conservation of Cultural Heritage, are considered to be first hand beneficiaries of the research as these institutions can employ the output of the research for their future functions.
- > In addition to the above governmental institutions, private organizations which are involved in nation branding activities and in tourism can also benefit from this research financially if they implement the recommended suggestions.
- > The findings of the study can prompt other academicians to carry out further researches by selecting the issues that this research fail to resolve.

1.8. Organization of the thesis

This research is composed of five chapters. The first chapter includes background of the research, the problem statement, objective, limitation and delimitation of the study. The second chapter deals with the literature review emphasizing on the conceptual and theoretical studies that are directly relevant to the research. The third chapter is allotted for the research methodology being implemented to reveal the research approach and method of the study. The fourth chapter will deliver the findings of the study and analyze them by relating with what researches and academicians put forth which are elaborated in the literature review section. The final and fifth chapter presents the principal findings of the study, accompanied by recommendations based on the results of the research.

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Conceptual Literature

In this section, the main concepts employed in this research, comprising Nation branding, Cultural heritage, and Public relations and its role in Nation branding are discussed.

2.1.1. The concept of Nation Branding

Nation branding is a term that combines two concepts, a *Nation* and a *brand*. A Nation, according to Lehtonen(2012), is the people and the geographical location of a country enfolding the history, cultural, economic, political values and everything within and related to it. A brand, on the other hand, can be defined as the mental conception that a client has towards a product or a service based on previous experience (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009). Thus, nation branding can be construed as influencing people's perception to have a favorable view of one's nation using its potential resources. Infact, the term 'Nation branding' is said to have been coined by Simon Anholt in 1996 (Anholt, 2007; Szondi, 2008), though place branding and place marketing predates Nation branding with its emphasis on branding and marketing to the early 1990's (Szondi, 2008).

There is no single or definite definition about Nation branding. For instance, Aronczyk(2013) defines Nation branding as the interaction between commercial and public sector interests to publicize a national agenda among domestic and international audiences for different mutually related reasons. On the other hand, Gudjonsson(2005) argued that nation branding is a process monopolized by the government which uses its power to change a nation's image. He opined that the government is the one that initiates branding the nation. Other scholars, like Szondi (2007) related nation branding to marketing, by conceptualizing nation branding as the marketing of country's political, economic, and commercial interests to domestic and foreign stakeholders. Among others, nation branding guru, Anholt(2007) proposed a more comprehensive definition of nation branding when he defined nation branding as "*constructing and communicating a unique image about a specific nation to the rest of the world through public diplomacy, trade, exports promotion, culture and tourism* " (p. 3). In his view, Anholt articulated that in order to establish a unique image about a

certain nation, communicating it is crucial in order to achieve an effective nation brand.

Although Nation branding lacks an authoritative definition, there are some comprehensive viewpoints that can be stated about the concept. The first dimension of Nation branding is that, it is a technique to raise capital by coordinating public and private sector potentials with the aim of assisting the nation-state to contend for global markets, such as tourism, foreign direct investment, import-export trade and skilled man-power. The second notion is that; Nation branding is a useful tool in facilitating a conducive environment for states and state leaders to access a seat at powerful multinational organizations in order to influence decisions. Thirdly, Nation branding is an activity conducted to “generate a positive foreign public opinion” and nurture national pride (Aronczyk, 2013). Thus, in this regard, it is evident that nation branding demands the systematic use of a nation’s potential resources in order to create a successful nation brand and conceive a pleasing image in the minds of foreign publics.

Nation branding has become an international phenomenon as more and more countries are engaged in branding activities aiming to alter or sustain their image abroad. The core objectives to be accomplished through Nation branding activities are to entice tourists, professional talent and Foreign Direct Investment(FDI), besides boosting exports and elevate national pride (Dinnie K. , 2008).

As branding yields its origin within the field of marketing, thus, Nation branding is the process of branding a Nation by utilizing product promotion techniques (Szondi, 2008). Fan Y.(2006) went further to relate Nation branding with the marketing theory of “Country-Of-Origin” (COO). Thus, Nation branding bases its root in product branding, in which its main purpose is promoting a company’s products and services, and hence, corporate branding’s features quite resembles that of Nation branding(Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009; Dinnie, 2008).

But, not all academicians have the same stance about Nation branding. For example, Ritson (2010) argued that there is no such thing as ‘Nation branding’ because countries are not brands and branding strategy should be kept for products not nations. Lehtonen (2012) further articulated that it is impossible to use product branding techniques in Nation branding as the latter is multidimensional and involves multiple number of stakeholders.Unlike product or corporate branding, Nation

branding involves both the government and the private sector, thus, include many stakeholders in the management structure which makes it difficult to coordinate. Financing a Nation branding initiative is also problematic as it involves different stakeholders and convincing them to fund such a significant program would be difficult and time consuming (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009; Dinnie, 2008). However, the concept of Nation branding is steadily gaining prominence among scholars, and nations around the world are committing resources to brand themselves.

Branding became a necessity for a nation in order to be competitive in the globalised world. Basically, nation branding was conducted using advertising and marketing campaigns. But, nowadays, nation branding has become more planned and organised by employing marketing, branding and communication approaches and this results in a more fruitful nation branding stories (Anholt, 2007; Jansen, 2008).

As to its significance, branding takes many forms and to create a brand, it is not only essential to make great efforts but also to have a product or a service which can be branded, and thus in this sense, cultural heritage is a powerful tool in branding, particularly in tourism development (Gluvacevic, 2016)

2.1.2. Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage is a notion that combines two broad concepts, culture and heritage. Culture is a broad term that consists ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting, and gained and passed on from generation to generation for the most part by symbols and norms. It is the unique feature of a social group, the norms and values shared by its members makes the distinction from other societies and is affected by conscious beliefs (Lebron, 2013). A heritage, on the other hand, is a set of properties that articulates the history of a people, a city and a country, and is transferred through generations. Heritage serves as a spyglass to the present generation by conveying their past history and social background. It is also a potential for people to manifest their uniqueness among others, to show their own way of understanding the world and to demonstrate their aptness in cultural creativity (Bernard M. Feilden and Jukka Jokilehto, 1993 ; cited in Selam, 2011). Therefore, cultural heritages can serve as a tool to portray the unique features of a social group or even a country, and yet, can also be used

to brand a nation through the manifestation of its unequalled characteristics.

At present, many cultural artifacts become symbolic representative of the place in which they are found. For instance, the Eiffel tower in Paris, the statue of Liberty in New York and the pyramids in Egypt are some of the items used to showcase the value of cultural heritage in portraying the uniqueness of a place. Cultural heritage differentiates one place from another and serves as a major distinguisher to a specific destination (Gluvacevic, 2016).

Cultural heritage, as defined by UNESCO, is-

“the legacy of physical artifacts(tangible) and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations” (see: <http://www.unesco.org> retrieved Dec. 2019).

Cultural heritage is an inherent component of place identity, infrastructure and landscape. Branding using cultural heritage necessitates the identification of local culture, exploring the unique features of a place and communicate those features to the target audience. Cultural heritage encompasses traditional and cultural values of some place, incorporating beliefs, ideas, traditions and cuisine. It can be employed to generate the desired place image as it can mold the perception of the uniqueness of a place and in influencing the desired level of engagement with it (Fan, H., 2014; Mainolfi et al., 2015).

There are some importances of cultural heritage in creating the identity of a nation and its people. As Buckland(2013) puts it:

- > Cultural heritage influences a persons’ self-identity, self-esteem, and relationship with others.
- > Cultural heritage is formative in the creation of social groups.
- > Similarities and differences in cultural heritage affects the perceptions of ones own and of others.
- > Cultural heritages has the potential to create a sense of identity and can be utilised to sway peoples perception, particularly to inculcate loyalty.
- > It serves as a tool in shaping the outlook of the history and heritage of the people that

possess cultural heritages, and thus facilitates branding a nation and its people.

- > Cultural heritages also enables governments and institutions to influence and change the attitudes, behaviour and values of the people and stakeholders which previously held a negative image towards one's country.

Therefore, cultural heritages can be considered as vital components of nation branding as it disclose the unique features of a nation. It can be used to positively influence or even change previously held misconceptions about a nation's history and culture and build a favorable image of a nation, and hence, can be utilised as an important tool in nation branding.

2.1.3. Ethiopia's cultural heritage potentials and opportunities

Ethiopia is an ancient country with an extraordinarily rich cultural and heritage diversity. This diversity includes both tangible and intangible heritages with both traditional and modern cultural identities, languages, and centuries old know how in handicraft manufacturing. Basically, Ethiopia's cultural heritage is considered to be one of the oldest in the world and is remarkably distinct. The intangible heritage of Ethiopia is also rich with an exceptional variety of festivals, celebrations, ceremonies, rituals and other manifestations. Furthermore, currently, Ethiopia has a total of 13 cultural heritages registered by UNESCO, which makes it the first country in Africa with the most number of heritages. Nine (9) of the heritages are tangible, and they are- the Rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, the Fasil Ghebbi in Gondar, the Aksum obelisk in Tigray, the valley of the river Awash, the valley of the river Omo, the Simien Mountains, the Tiya standing stones, the Harar Jugol, and the Konso cultural landscape. The rest four (4) are intangible ones, and they are- Meskel celebrations, Irreechaa, Chambalala, and Timket festivity.

These heritages are uniquely distributed within the country, portraying that the country is rich in cultural heritages in its every corner. The rich cultural landscape is further augmented by the peaceful coexistence of the three major religions of the world- Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and also other traditional religions.

Therefore, Ethiopia has the potential and the opportunity to brand itself using its cultural heritage resources as a tool, as these resources would provide the country with a unique status, atleast, among

African countries. But, it is imperative that the country needs to communicate its cultural heritage resources particularly by using public relations and strategic communication programs to overcome its existing negative publicity.

2.1.4. Public relations conceptualisation and its role for nation branding

Public relations has been applied by different fields and organizations, which leads to its practice with different skills and competencies among practitioners. As a result, there is no agreed single definition of Public relations (Moloney, 2000). This is mainly because the profession is still young (Tench and Yeomans, 2009).

However, after analysing 472 different definitions about Public relations, Harlow coined his own definition about Public relations as follows-

“Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics” (Harlow, as cited in Tench and Yeomans, 2009, p.5).

On the other hand, Grunig and Hunt defined Public relations in a single sentence as *“the management of communication between an organization and its publics”* and Public relations professionals are those who *“plan, manage and execute communication for the organization as a whole”* (as cited in Tench and Yeomans, 2009, p.5). Thus, public relations can be considered as a bridge that connects and creates relationships between an organization and its stakeholders.

Similar to public relations, strategic communications is also a concept wholly used for demonstrating a planned communication campaign based on sharing key messages between an organization and its publics. Strategic communication includes planning, organizing, create tactics, devising coding to present effective perception of the message, transmitting the message to the target audience through the most developed and an up-to-date technology. These unique features of strategic communications make it valuable and effective use of it would further enhance successful outcomes (Ozkan, 2015).

2.1.4.1. Public Relations Role in Nation Branding

The aim of any Nation branding, according to Kaneva & Popescu(2011), is to present a nation's image by projecting and communicating its unique characteristics, and through improving collective memories and a sense of self-identification. Hence, in this regard, public relations and strategic ways of communication seem to have a significant role in nation branding. As Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier, 2002 puts it, if the public relation programs are crucial in helping any entity to achieve their goals by creating relationships with strategic publics and affect the perception of both publics and members of the organization, therefore, it can also serve as a significant profession among others in nation branding by establishing the relationship between a nation and its stakeholders.

Nation branding has remained ignorant in using Public relations contribution which could have further developed its theoretical foundation (Szondi, 2010). Many Nation branding studies fail to focus on the techniques used in Nation branding, particularly the public relations techniques, because academicians mainly concentrate on the importance of public relations at the corporate level and not at the national level. Hence, they disregard the application of public relations to Nation branding, despite in essence, public relations is a management function (Li, 2016).

Public relations certainly constructs strong brands, but it takes a while to build a brand and also durable brands need Public relations in order to remain strong in the market share. Public relations with its tools plays a significant role in both creating and sustaining brands(Kotler et al., 2006). Public relations is conducted using several tools. Any nation branding activity can also utilize these tools to reach out to its target audience. PR tools such as- media relations, advertorials, social media, newsletters and press releases are pivotal in creating the necessary link between a nation brand and its stakeholders. They serve as a necessary and easy platform in building and maintaining a good image of a nation through building a mutually beneficial relationship among nation brand interest groups. These PR tools are also time and cost efficient as they address large number of people within a limited time and at a minimum price.

There are few researches that fundamentally examines Public relations role in Nation branding activities. Among them, Szondi(2010) makes an endeavour in analysing Public relations contribution for branding a Nation.

There are myriad ways of using PR to establish and sustain relationships with stakeholders in Nation branding. PR enables a Nation branding initiative to be planned in a local setting by creating

coordination among the institutions and the domestic population, as involving the local population in branding activities is imperative and makes the brand durable.

Another contribution of PR in Nation branding initiative is its role in media relations and media monitoring. PR helps a Nation branding campaign by establishing strategic relationships with media outlets, who can manipulate any Nation branding activity. Similarly, through media monitoring, PR aids Nation branding to assess the core viewpoints that are raised and discussed in the media, both domestic and the international (Szondi, 2010).

Additionally, through its environmental scanning capabilities, PR allows a Nation branding initiative to come up with an up-to-date version that adapt the ongoing environmental instances of a specific Nation. It also help to design a more specific and attainable objectives by meticulously segmenting stakeholders as addressing the general public of the target country is impossible to perform. Moreover, through its issues management function, PR can identify contentious issues and address them before they end up being a crisis that will hurt the Nation branding effort.

Furthermore, with its relationship building role, PR encourages public participation and creates ‘brand communities’, which lets people to form and engage in Nation branding. One of these ‘brand communities’ is the diaspora community residing in another country, who should be inspired to participate in the branding activity(Szondi, 2010). PR can also secure funds and sponsorships for Nation branding, as many Nation branding activities are short-lived resulting from financial constraints. Besides, PR also paves the way for Nations to organize big cultural, sporting and political events as it enables to create relationships with key decision makers (Szondi, 2010).

2.3. Theoretical Framework

A theory, as Kerlinger defined it, is *“a set of interrelated constructs(variables), definitions, and propositions that presents a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining natural phenomena”*(Kerlinger, as cited in Creswell, 2009, p.51). Similarly, Creswell(2009) briefly define a theory as a rationale that helps to elaborate or predict phenomena that took place in the world. Therefore, applying theories to cases would help to understand a situation better than doing it customarily. In Public relations researches, as Sallot(2005) point out that there is a tendency among researchers in PR to bring study cases under theoretical frameworks.

Several theories and models are being investigated to ground this research. Accordingly, the four

models of Public relations and the Excellence theory are found to be the prevalent theories in the field of Public relations practice. These theories are examined in order to base the research as they are directly related to evaluating Public relations practice in any organization. The four models of public relations developed by James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt proposed four different typologies in the practice of public relations. These are the press agency, public information, two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric (Seitel, 2011). This model has two main parameters- direction(one-way/two-way) and the objectivity of intended outcome(asymmetrical/symmetrical) (Li, 2016). Meanwhile, the Excellence theory is a more exhaustive and detailed theory, than the approaches presented in the four models, as it explains public relations practice better in terms of its fundamental aspect than the four distinct models (Grammer, 2005).

Therefore, since the aim of this research is to investigate the role of public relations for Nation branding, inquiring how PR is practiced is basic, and thus the Excellence theory has been favored to ground the research. Furthermore, the ‘Relationship building’ approach is also included within the theoretical framework since, for the most part, it concurs with building and managing relationships with stakeholders.

2.3.1. The Excellence Theory

Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier(2002) opine that public relations activities are essential as they succor organizations to realize their goals by creating relationships with their stakeholders. They argued-

“Individual communication programs such as media relations, community relations, or customer relations are successful when they affect the cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors of both publics and members of the organization- that is, the cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral relationships among organizations and their publics ” (p. 91).

Hence, successful public relations programs are vital to organizations since they contribute to accomplish organizational mission and goals. Public relations programs are intended to communicate and create relationships with strategic publics(Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier, 2002).

Although there has been a widespread consensus that public relations plays a key role in forming relationships globally, there is an absence of a clear model that demonstrate how public relations should be practiced in the global context(Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier, 2002). Academicians have

argued that organizations employed communication programs that are adapted from local and global values, or a combination of both when engaging with their publics in different nations (Molleda, 2000). Therefore, it can be argued that there is no universally accepted public relations practising model that can be applied to every country in the world regardless of culture, economy and social status.

But, in a response to the call for a more normative theory of public relations that can be applied to different circumstances, a group of scholars headed by James E. Grunig have conducted a multi-year research to investigate what factors constitute for an effective public relations practice. The research was named the “Excellence study” because the principles that construct the theory are the characteristics that define most efficient public relations activities of an excellent public relations departments.

This model can be employed as a guideline for effective public relations programs that will help an organization to achieve its goals. Grunig(1992) argued that *“Excellent public relations departments will practice public relations in a way that is similar to our normative model, in contrast to the way that public relations is practiced in the typical, less excellent department”* (as cited by Long, 2006).

According to the Excellence theory, the generic principles of excellent public relations programs include:

- > Involvement of public relations in strategic management.
- > Empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalition or a direct reporting relationship to senior management.
- > Integrated public relations function.
- > Public relations as a management function, separate from other functions.
- > Public relations unit headed by a manager rather than a technician.
- > Two-way symmetrical model of public relations.
- > A symmetrical system of internal communication.
- > Knowledge potential for managerial role and symmetrical public relations.
- > Diversity embodied in all roles.
- > Organizational context for excellence.

Although the Excellence Theory is used as a theoretical framework in this study, examining the whole generic principles of the Excellence theory is beyond the scope of this research. Rather this

thesis will focus on those principles that are pertinent to it. Hence, it will concentrate on the four major principles that are considered to be the pillars of the Excellence theory, each comprising several features that can be examined. These are- Empowerment of the public relations function or a direct reporting relationship to senior management, Communicator roles, Organization of the communication function and its relationship to other management functions and, Models of public relations (Zerfass et al., 2008).

2.3.1.1. Empowerment of the public relations function

If public relations is expected to contribute to organizational effectiveness, it must be empowered and included in the dominant coalition as an essential management function (Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier, 2002). Thus, the empowerment of public relations would enable an organization to benefit from the expertise of the public relations function, which would presumably take place, if the public relations function is part of the strategic management of an organization.

The significance of empowering public relations in strategic management is obvious, as crucial organizational impediments are classified and decisions are reached about how to resolve those obstacles is made by the strategic management. Strategic decisions are made by the dominant coalition and public relations can not be wielded systematically unless it is involved in the strategic choices being made (Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier, 2002; Bowen, 2000). In favor of arguing that public relations must be included in the dominant coalition, White and Dozier asserted the PR practitioner must “*function at a high level of decision making, and participate in strategic management if public relations is to be excellent and is to make the organization more effective*” (cited in Bowen, 2000). Empowerment of public relations enables the senior public relations person to have access to the top management that makes strategic decisions for the organization. As such, empowerment seems imperative if public relations looks for to participate in strategic management and decision making.

Thus, empowerment of public relations and its inclusion in the dominant coalition is considered to have a direct impact on nation branding activities. If the public relations function has access in the top management, it will directly address and enlighten the dominant coalition about the necessity and the strategy to brand the nation. Furthermore, with its issues detecting capabilities, public relations can bring, like any other issues, the issue of nation branding to the attention of the dominant coalition without under pressure from any other department. Additionally, an

empowered PR function will have a direct influence on policies of nation branding as it is part of the top management. Therefore, public relations inclusion in the dominant coalition seem to have a positive impact on nation branding activities.

2.3.1.2. Communicator Roles

The role that a public relations practitioner adheres determine the overall worth of the communication department within an organization. Roles are “abstractions about the patterned behaviors of individuals in organizations, a way of classifying and summarising the myriad activities that an individual might perform as a member of an organization” (L. Grunig et al. ,2002; p.196).

Different scholars have researched and identified two major roles that PR practitioners play in organizations- the *manager* and *technician* roles(Zerfass et al., 2008; Dozier and Broom, cited in Tench and Yeomans, 2009).

- The PR practitioner as a *communication manager*- in this case, the role of the PR practitioner is to plan and manage PR programs, consult management, identify communication policy choices and examine their implementation.

Excellence in public relations that are associated with the managerial role has three main features(Zerfass et al., 2008)> The public relations department is required to be headed by a strategic manager rather than a technician or an administrative manager. As the Excellence study posits administrative managers only manages the daily activities of the communication function and supervise communication technicians, and thus, can not be considered as strategic managers.

- > The PR department must be headed by a senior executive who has the knowledge potential for the managerial role in order for the department to own a seat in the senior management. Excellence in PR is achieved through professional practitioners who have the knowledge and skills gained from university education and work experience.
- > The senior management role of the PR function must be equally accessible for both genders. When this is the case, the criteria for the position of the managerial role will be based on merit, not gender-based qualifications.

- The PR practitioner as a *communication technician*- at this stage, the role of the PR practitioner is to carry out PR programmes, such as writing press releases, coordinating

events and analyzing web sites. At this position, the PR practitioner does not involve in strategic decision making.

The identification of PR role into manager and technician function does not imply that these roles perform independently. Many PR practitioners also conduct PR practice by blending both the managerial and technician roles (Tench& Yeomans, 2009).

So, in this case, nation branding programs will have a greater chance of success if public relations has a managerial role because in this role the PR manager is able to plan and execute PR programs and advise the management. As a result, nation branding programs under a managerial role of PR function will have the opportunity to be planned and managed properly and get the attention of the top management as the PR manager consult the management in PR issues in general and nation branding in particular.

2.3.1.3. Integrated PR function

According to the Excellence theory, there are two principles that are related to the organization of the PR function. One argument is that *Public relations should be an integrated communication function*. In an excellent public relations function, all communication programmes should be integrated into a single department. This integration will help organizations to design new and an up-to-date communication programs that suits the fast changing strategic publics and also helps to manage resources under a single unit. Another argument is that *Public relations should be a management function separate from other functions*. Besides integrating all communication functions into a single department, the public relations function should not be subsumed to other departments. If public relations is sublimated to other functions, it is difficult to manage it systematically because the subordination impedes the movement of resources from one strategic public to another (Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier, 2002).

Hence, an integrated Public relations functions will help nation branding initiatives in two ways. Firstly, if all the public relations programs are organised under the PR department, nation branding activities will also be carried out more uniformly and strategically. Secondly, if the public relations department is subsumed to other departments, public relations will not have the privilege to contribute to nation branding activities as the subordination constrains the value and capability of PR for nation branding activities.

2.3.1.4. Models of Public Relations

The origins of the models of Public relations proposed by J. Grunig is based on Thayer's(1968) *synchronic* and *diachronic* communication concepts, that elaborate a one-way communication flow and a two-way communication flow, respectively(Bowen, 2000). According to J. Grunig, the synchronic communication concept is equivalent to asymmetrical public relations functions focussing on altering the behaviors and attitudes of the communication receiver, while the diachronic communication concept was equated with symmetrical communication practices that demands mutual understanding between the sender and receiver of a message (Bowen, 2000). Later, in 1984, J. Grunig together with Todd Hunt, suggested two parameters that further can expound different public relations functions. These are direction of communication and intention of the communication(Grunig and Hunt 1984, cited in Li, 2016). These two parameters are the concepts that lay the foundation for the Four models of public relations.The four models of public relations suggested by J. Grunig and T. Hunt clarifies four distinct approaches to the practice of public relations (Seitel, 2011).

2.3.1.5. Press agency(publicity) Model

Originally, press agency was the initial model of public relations to be conducted by publicists of the mid-1800s (J. Grunig and L. Grunig, 1992; cited in Bowen, 2000). In this model, communication took a linear form and focusses on transferring message from the sender to the receiver. It is propagandistic in nature and uses manipulation to change strategic publics attitudes to the benefit of the organization(Li, 2016). As Seitel(2011: 81) explained, “This model is essentially one way communication where messages will be sent from a source to a receiver with the deliberate intention of winning favorable media attention”. It uses a one-way communication when it speaks to its publics and is reluctant in considering feedbacks from its stakeholders. This model is generally known for its exaggeration, manipulation and deception(Bowen, 2000).

2.3.1.6. Public Information Model

Similar to the press agency model, the public information model also favors a one-way communication but with little feedback from its publics. The main characteristic that differentiate this model from the press agency is that the information disseminated is based on truth and accuracy. But, negative postings about the organization is intentionally left out. This model focusses on persuading the public to perceive issues in a way that promote the organization. Alike the press

agency model, the public information model neither seek attitudinal change on the part of the organization nor advocates dialogue with stakeholders. This model is dependent upon mediated communication that affect the behaviors and attitudes of the strategic publics. It does not also conduct research, which could have been used to discover public opinion. This model is familiar with the public relations functions of most government organizations (Bowen, 2000; Li, 2016).

2.3.1.7. Two-way Assymetrical model

This model is the first of the two managerial models. The origin of this model is associated with social and behavioral sciences, specifically in psychology. The essential factor that differentiates the two-way models from the one-way models (the press agency and public information models) is the research that the two-way models use while communicating their strategic publics (J. Grunig and L. Grunig, 1992; cited in Bowen, 2000).

The notion of the two-way assymetrical model is brought as a result of the desire to gather a feedback from strategic publics, that became part of the communication process. But, the aim of inquiring feedback is not to change the stance that an organization held, instead it is intended to derive another mechanism aspiring to influence stakeholders to accept the position of the organization (Seitel, 2011). The goal of this model is that the organization seeks a change in attitude or behavior on the public side, without a major change in the organization's stand. Its objective is also to convince the public to come to the position of the organization based on the feedbacks gained from research.

2.3.1.8. Two-Way Symmetrical Model

The proponents of this model suggest that this model is the best model among the four models of public relations. As Seitel(2011) puts it, the two-way symmetrical model spur the free and balanced information flow between an organization and its stakeholders based on mutual understanding. It also enables PR practitioners to balance the relationship between their organization and its publics. The two-way symmetrical model also uses research to comprehend the attitudes and behaviors of publics. However, the objective of the research is to create mutual understanding between an organization and its publics, not to persuade them as in the case of the asymmetrical model. Through this model, PR professionals employ research and dialogue to bring about mutual changes in the behaviors and attitudes of both the organization and its publics (Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier, 2002; Bowen, 2000).

The two-way symmetrical communication results in a better long term relationships than the other PR models because symmetrical PR programs are more ethical than the ones conducted within the rest of the communication models. This helps to balance the interests of both the organization and the public (Zerfass et al., 2008).

According to Zerfass et al.(2008), there are four distinctive factors of excellence that are related to this model> The communication department should fundamentally set its goals and its communication activities on the two-way symmetrical model of PR with the cognizance of the dominant coalition.

- > Communication programs that target specific publics are based on two-way symmetrical strategies in order to build and maintain relationships.
- > The senior public relations personnel must have the knowledge potential to conduct the two-way symmetrical model of PR.
- > The internal communication system of the organization must be organized symmetrically.

This model also matches with the theory of meaning co-creation, a theory that provides strategic publics the opportunity to participate in establishing a common value and objective through twoway symmetric communication (Botan& Taylor, 2004). A major portion of this model gets in the creation of a win-win relationships between organizations and their publics. Besides, this model, with its capacity of establishing mutual understanding among stakeholders, can be the ideal approach which all future Nation branding activities are thriving towards(Li, 2016).

Accordingly, among all models of public relations, the two-way symmetrical model seem to be the best model in nation branding activities as it involves all stakeholders. It takes into consideration the ideas of its strategic publics, and this inturn will bring success to the branding activity as all stakeholders will exert its maximum effort with a sense of ownership.

2.3.2. Public Relations strategies in Nation branding; Image Management Vs Relationship building

i. Image Management

At present, under the influence of globalization and mediatization, countries are forced to project a good image of themselves because they are publicly rated and compared based on their economic development, political stability, the effectiveness and morality of their national and international policies, or the attractiveness of their culture (Buhmann and Ingenhoff, 2015). A country image, as “the cognitive representation that a person holds about a given country”, has different aspects, as country images critically influences foreign direct investment, the prosperity of national tourist industries, as well as the stability of international relations and the degree of a country’s political influence in the international arena (Buhmann& Ingenhoff, 2015). Political leaders are growingly concerned about their country’s image abroad and began to apply practices of communication management at the national level(Dinnie, 2008).

Communication science, until now, focused on mass-mediated country images, as patterns of the international news flow shows the unbalanced presentation of countries in the international news, indicates the strong effects of mass-mediated country images on the creation of public views about foreign countries (Buhmann and Ingenhoff, 2015).

Even though the concept of images in public relations can be associated with mental images in psychology and overlap with marketing’s concept, public relations concept of image has a wider scope (Grunig, as cited in Li, 2016). Images in public relations are not confined to visuals but include all symbols ranging from visual, oral and written symbols that communicators can employ when they address their publics. Moreover, images are considered as the process of cognition, perception and construction (Li, 2016).

According to Li (2016), Image theory in public relations has a positive impact as it is very much linked with the concept of brand perception and corporate reputation. He further argued that the image management concept organizes an entire process by which a brand, organization or even an individual is cognizant of the symbolic and psychological word.

The concept of image management in Nation branding takes its audiences as homogenous and

passive receivers of nation brand messages where the cultural differences of the receiving Nations are not considered. This makes image management a daunting task as there is always a discrepancy between the image conveyed by the sender and the image construed by the receiver. All stakeholder's perception towards an organization are not alike, and thus, organizations should monitor their environment and adapt public segmentation when addressing their stakeholders (Szondi, 2010; Li, 2016).

Previously, branding a place was mainly carried out through communication tools mainly of advertising, slogans and logos. Many brand managers opt to use these communication means because they are swift and efficient tools. This kind of approach to Nation branding mainly focusses on creating an image in the minds and hearts of consumers. This image management of a Nation brand is, lately, considered as 'propagandists and ideologically charged' and also unethical (Szondi, 2010:334; Kavaratzis, 2012).

Contrary to the image management approach, place branding is going through a new phase in recent years. This new approach, which is referred as *Relationship building*, encourages the participation of stakeholders in the creation, development and ownership of the Nation brand activity. This approach is suitable for branding a nation as it is more ethical than the image management approach. Moreover, it increases the validity of the nation brand by involving its stakeholders and mitigates marketing expenses through engaging with stakeholders and word-of-mouth than intensive advertising campaign (Szondi, 2010; Kavaratzis, 2012).

ii. Relationship Building(Management)

The relationship management perspective stressed that public relations adjusts the interests of both the publics and organizations through the management of organization-public relationships. Through this perspective, public relations is considered as "*the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics on whom its success or failure depends*" (Ledingham, 2003).

Both Grunig and Repper argued that "*public relations make organizations more effective by building long-term relationships with strategic publics* " and specially by "*developing relations with stakeholders in the internal and external environment that constrain or enhance the ability of an*

organization to accomplish its mission". (Grunig and Repper, as cited by Long, 2006). Considering the significance of this relationship building function in realizing organizational goals, it will be reasonable to conclude that building relationships with strategic publics is the fundamental objective of most public relations activities (Long, 2006). It is imperative to manage relationships with strategic publics because, as Long(2006) puts it "*they have the ability to facilitate or hinder the achievement of organizational and program goals*" (p. 16).

Accordingly (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002, p. 550) proposed that an excellent public relations program will reveal that it had augmented the relationship between an organization and its publics. They went on to argue the importance of relationship building and how relationships with strategic publics should be wielded-

because the value of public relations to an organization and society exists in the relationships developed with strategic publics, objectives should consist of strategies to develop, maintain and enhance relationships and the relationship outcomes that the organization strives to achieve with these strategies.

Formerly, traditional branding activities favors the use of a linear (one-way) form of information dissemination where branding efforts use the mass media to address stakeholders, ignoring to involve strategic publics (Szondi, 2010). But, in recent years, relationship building has become a new conceptualization in place and Nation branding. Relationship building enables Nation branding to take a new form by creating mutual understanding and dialogue with stakeholders. In the relationship building approach, the stakeholders will own the branding activity and participate in the creation of brand identity (Kavaratzis, 2012; Szondi,2010). This approach offers consumers to take part as co-creators of a brand. Thus, it will minimise the ownership of brand identity by elite managing coalition, as different stakeholders will be engaged in the branding function (Hankinson, 2004). The stakeholders will have a say in the formation of the brand, and this enables the branding activity to become more adaptable to the changes that occurs across the environment (Szondi, 2010). The key for the success of a place branding

strategy which enables stakeholder involvement is effective communication, a tool used to create relationships with strategic publics. The communication between the strategy and the strategic publics must be systematic and up-to-date, in order to preserve the brand from becoming tedious (Hankinson, 2004).

To put the distinguishing characteristics between the image management and the relationship building approaches, Szondi (2010) outlines a list to summarise the notion:

Table 1. *Image management* versus *Relationship building* approach to Nation branding.

Image Management	Relationship building
Views audiences as passive receivers	Engagement and fostering(brand) communities
Unidirectional from sender to receiver	Multidirectional among participants Co-creation of
Pre-defined and static brand message	meaning and values Coordination
dissemination Message control	Decentralised approach, tailored towards local
Centralised approach(one-size-fits all)tailored	(Nation brand managers in each country)
publics	Meaning-driven
towards a global and homogenous audience	Mutual understanding
Message-driven	Evaluating relationships and behavior Social
Image management is the ultimate goal	media and networks Medium and long term
Emphasis on measuring attitudes	Communication is an instrument to achieve
Mass media channels (advertising)	relations policy-driven (continuous)
Short term	Interdisciplinary
Communication is an end in itself	
Campaign-driven (time bound)	
<u>Embedded in marketing</u>	

Szondi, 2010: 341.

The relationship building approach mainly focusses on two aspects- *stakeholder engagement* and *brand meaning co-creation* (Hedman, 2013).

iii. Stakeholder(Customer) Engagement

Stakeholder (Customer) engagement is considered as an element of relationship marketing in which an organization regard its customers as its component instead of considering them only as profit making machines (Hedman, 2013). The purpose of customer engagement is to retain customers and create relationships, enabling customers to engage with the organization, and persuade customers to serve as brand ambassadors to create a positive image of the organization (Hardwood et al., 2008). In this case, Hakala& Lemmetyinen (2013) argued that the more stakeholders are engaged, the higher visibility of a durable place brand identity.

A successful customer engagement results in trust, loyalty, a sense of belongingness and ofcourse, a positive word-of-mouth, which in itself is a core element of relationship building (Roberts & Alpert, 2010). It also gives the privilege for an organization to attract new customers as the result of a positive image portrayed by its already existing active customers. It is about creating an emotional and psychological relationship with customers, which at the end of the day makes a sense in the heart and minds of customers (Barnes, 2003). In some instances, the consumers themselves will form brand communities to make the brand as their own, and at the same time also to create a good image of the brand, if they are engaged enough in the brand identity creation (Fournier et al., 2005).

iv. Brand Meaning Co-Creation

In the relationship building approach, the notion of co-creation has a paramount importance. In defining the concept, Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) suggested that brand co-creation is the sharing of ideas and concepts between an organization and its stakeholders while creating a brand value. Co-creation empower stakeholders to take part in the development of the brand, and thus, it shapes the perception of the customers to have a positive image of the brand as they are an important component of the creation process (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). The participation of customers in brand creation also promotes the emotional bond that the stakeholders have on the brand. The concept of co-creation play a significant role in Nation branding, in which the citizens of the Nation present the brand identity to the customers of the brand. The citizens must have the impression that they have a voice in brand identity creation and implementation. This approach is considered pivotal in guaranteeing the validity of the Nation brand activity (Szondi, 2010; Kavaratzis, 2012; Hedman, 2013).

CHAPTER THREE- RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Introduction

Under this section, the methods used in the research are to be presented. Hence, the research methodology inclusive of the research method and instrument, the design and data analysis approaches are going to be deal with.

3.2. Description of the study organizations

As the aim of this research is to examine the role and practice of public relations in branding a nation using cultural heritage in the Ethiopian setting, the major organizations pertinent to the study are included. All the three organizations contacted for the research are based in the city of Addis Ababa, namely- the Ministry of Culture and Tourism(MOCT), Tourism Ethiopia and, the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage(ARCCH). The major reason for the selection of these organizations to ground the research is that they are the organizations that are deligated by the government with the mandate of conservation, promotion and development of the country's cultural heritages.

3.3. Research Design

3.3.1. Research Approach

Basically, there are two types of research approaches- the qualitative and the quantitative. The qualitative approach is utilised when a research aims to investigate, explain and explore the views, opinions, perceptions and attitudes of a certain group of people towards a particular subject. The data collection methods are flexible and evolving. The quantitative approach, on the other hand, requires the gathering of relevant information quantitatively and the data collection methods are more rigid, more structured and fixed compared to the qualitative approach (Kumar, 2011). In gathering the related data for a research, the quantitative approach mainly uses data collection techniques such as questionnaires, whereas, the qualitative approach applies personal observation, interviews and focus group discussions when dealing with data gathering.

This research employed a qualitative approach with the aim of exploring the role and practice of Public relations in Nation branding using cultural heritage as a tool. As this research tries to examine

the views and perceptions of public relations and communications professionals towards their practice of PR in nation branding, the qualitative research approach is more suitable than the quantitative one, as the former is efficient in exploring the opinions and attitudes of the PR professionals when conducting nation branding programs in detail.

3.4. Data Type

There are two fundamental types of data, *Primary* and *Secondary*. Primary data are gathered through the constant interaction with the relevant bodies of the research using in-depth interview and direct observation. On the other hand, secondary data are found in documentary sources in the form of Written (publications such as books, journals, advertising copy and so on), Unwritten (TV and radio programs, tape recordings, documentaries and so on) and Survey data (economic data, population census,...). In addition to providing supplementary evidence to the research, such data are crucial as they “cuts out the need for time consuming fieldwork” (Walliman, 2011, p.78). This research uses both primary and secondary data sources.

In this study so as to gather the primary data, an in-depth interview with key informants of those who held the position and have the knowledge about the subject matter of the study is conducted. All the informants are from the headquarters of the relevant organizations under study.

As far as secondary sources are concerned, it is evident that the analysis of such sources is vital in extracting the necessary data from these documents for the research in order to corroborate a research with documented sources. Accordingly, this research also uses the available secondary data sources, including communication documents, newspapers and, printed materials and online sources to analyse the nation branding activities of the concerned organizations using cultural heritages as their tool.

3.5. Data Collection Instruments

3.5.1. In-depth interview

Interviews are a widely used form of data collection in qualitative research and it allows researchers to attain personal perspectives and detailed views of interviewees. Specifically, when it comes to Public relations and Marketing communications, interviews are a vital form of data collection as they enable researchers to examine the opinions and outlook of different stakeholders (Creswell, 2016;

Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

In a qualitative research, there are mainly two types of interview approaches, the *Unstructured* and the *Semi-structured* interview types. In an unstructured interview, questions are not preplanned apart from the initial stage of the interview, where a general question is being asked about the broad area of the research. Unstructured interviews are highly flexible and demands the constant follow up of the interviewer to keep the interviewees from getting out of the subject area under study. On the other hand, in the semi-structured interview, questions are predetermined focussing on the subject matter of the research. Interviewees are allowed to express their views openly but guided to concentrate on the main issue of the study by the interviewer. It is less flexible compared to the unstructured interview type (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Hence, for this research, in order to fulfill the objectives of the research and to gather the relevant primary data, the interview questions are organized in a semi-structured way, as it helps to address specifically the research problem being investigated.

3.5.2. Interview Guide

To carry out the in-depth interview more efficiently, an interview guide has been prepared which is directly related to the theme of the research. An interview guide is a compilation of issues targeting on the thematic areas of the research to be covered and the steps of enquiry to be carried out. An interview guide enables a researcher to gather similar types of data from all of its interviewees (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

Thus, for this research, an interview guide is prepared with the intention of enabling the key informants of the research to expound their views utmost. Furthermore, besides to the interview guide, a checklist is also prepared to ensure the fundamental issues or themes of the research has not been left unanswered.

3.6. Sampling Technique

In a research, researchers use either *probability* or *non-probability* sampling techniques to set their representation basis. Probability sampling enables a researcher to generalize the outcome of the research from the sample taken from the population of the research, as every element has the chance to be part of the sample. Unlike probability, non-probability sampling avoids selecting each element of the population as its sample, rather sample selection is based on the assumption that the researcher

wants to identify, analyze, and understand the case under study and must therefore opt a sample with the richest data source among others. Hence, non-probability sampling is the most preferred sampling technique among qualitative researchers with its common form of sample selection, which is purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, in relation to this study, the selection of informants for the in-depth interview is purposeful or intentional sampling technique in order to generate appropriate, detailed and reliable data from the knowledgeable and suitable sources.

3.7. Key informant interview

The key informants for this research are selected based on two grounds. Firstly, they are chosen based on their position they possess in their respective organizations. The position they held serves as a backdrop when examining the practice and role of PR in Nation branding activities. As the objective of the research is to examine the role of PR when practising Nation branding, it is appropriate to garner data from the PR professionals of the organizations under study. Secondly, as a qualitative study that demands the opinions and perceptions of key informants, their inclusion in the research is considered reasonable and relevant to fulfill the research objective.

Generally, there have been nine key informants interviewed for this research: three key informants from the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH), three key informants from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MOCT), and another three key informants from Tourism Ethiopia.

3.8. Ethical Considerations of the research

As Alderson (cited in Abdelhay, 2014) stated that there are three pillars that an ethical research is based upon- Primarily, a research must show respect towards its participants and inform them about the purpose of the research in order to utilise resources efficiently (such as time, money...etc.). Secondly, it must recognise the rights of its informants and keep their identity concealed based on their consent. Thirdly, it has to minimise any negative consequences that can encounter its informants as a result of their participation in the research.

Hence, this research has carried out the following tasks prior to the start of the study in order to keep its ethical standards.

The participants of the study were informed about the purpose of the study.

- > Throughout the research, the identity of the informants remained covert.
- > In order to secure confidentiality, the name of the participants' is substituted with a pseudonym.

3.9. Data Analysis Method

In analysing the data, the research uses two separate methods of data analysis in order to give meaning to the generated data acquired through the in-depth interview (primary data) and document analysis (secondary data). In analysing the primary data, the research uses the thematic framework of data analysis, as it allows a qualitative research to identify and analyse data in accordance with the key concepts and themes of the research (Ritchie et al., 2003).

With regards to analysing the secondary data, the research employs content (document) analysis to analyse relevant documents concerning the research theme, as content analysis is the best way to draw meanings from documented materials. (Kothari, 2004).

CHAPTER FOUR- DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter provides the data analysis, presentation and discussion of the findings of the research. The main objective of this part is to examine the practice of Public relations in nation branding using cultural heritages in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MOCT), the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH), and Tourism Ethiopia. In order to keep the anonymity of informants, the researcher decided to use codes instead of their names for privacy concerns. In this chapter, letters and numbers are combined in order to give informants their code names. Accordingly, for instance, I1 and I2 stands for ‘Informant 1’ and ‘Informant 2’ respectively. The letter ‘I’ represents the informant while the numbers stands for the interviewee. Therefore, the data gained through the in-depth interview will be provided and analyzed in relation to the research questions and objectives.

4.2. Examining the nation branding perception

As it is discussed earlier, nation branding has been perceived differently among scholars. But, the general notion is that, it is a strategy to create a good image of a nation through communicating its cultural, historical, and natural resources to the outside world. Thus, this section is allotted in order to examine the perception of the key informants of the research about the concept of nation branding.

Regarding this, all the key informants of the research seem to have identical views about nation branding. For instance, I1, from ARCCH, opined that nation branding is all about promoting the country’s resources to the international community in order to build a good image in the minds of foreign publics. This same notion has been shared by another key informant, I3, from the same organization who explained that nation branding is to present a country’s positive image to the outside world using the different resources of the country.

In this sense, all the key informants from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism also share the same notion about nation branding. As such, key informant from the Ministry, I5, explained that nation branding is a technique used to portrait the positive side of a nation.

The concept of nation branding is broad. It is used to create a favorable view of a nation by magnifying the cultural, modern, and the tourism attractions of a nation.

We are cognizant about the concept of nation branding and our organization has been doing its best to brand Ethiopia since its inception(15, 5/10/2020).

Similarly, the key informants from Tourism Ethiopia also reflect the same kind of views about nation branding and its meaning. In this case, 18, for instance, commented that nation branding is an activity used to manifest the unique features of a nation to the outside world. This view is also shared by another key informant from the same organization, I7, stating that-

For me, nation branding is to portray a favorable image of a nation to the outside world with the intension of creating and possessing a pleasant perception among the views of the different publics around the world in order to be the center of tourists and investment (I7, 7/10/2020).

Therefore, the above findings conveys that the concept of nation branding is not unknown among the key informants of the research. Moreover, their views about nation branding has also been corresponds with scholars like Anholt (2007) who proposed that nation branding is about creating and communicating a specific national image to the rest of the world through the comprehensive use of its resources. Thus, one can conclude that the key informants of the research have a common understanding about what nation branding is, and its use for any given nation.

4.3. Assessing Ethiopia's potential for nation branding using its cultural heritages

In the literature review chapter of this research, it had been discussed that Ethiopia has enormous resources of cultural heritages that can serve as a branding tool, and can be employed to create a positive image of itself in the international arena. But, it has been observed that these resources are not well managed and effectively communicated to the outside world to change the existing negative outlook of the country. Hence, this section is assigned to assess the country's cultural heritage resources through the eyes of the key informants of the research, and its potential to use these resources to brand itself.

In relation to this, all the key informants of the research unanimously agreed that Ethiopia has an extraordinary potential for branding itself using its cultural heritage resources. For instance, I2, from ARCCH, commented that Ethiopia has immense cultural heritage resources, but these resources are insignificant when it comes to utilizing them to brand itself because they are not known by the

outside world for the lack of a well organized communication function. This view is also observed among the other key informants of the organization. As such, I1, explained the following-

Ethiopia has a huge potential of cultural heritage resources. It is the leading country among African nations with the largest number of cultural heritages being registered by UNESCO. This shows how the country is endowed with a vast cultural heritage potentials. But, it is the least among African countries to be visited by tourists. For me, it is because of the lack of portraying these resources in a systematic way that the country is still suffering from having bad image (I1, 24/09/2020).

Likewise, the responses of the key informants from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has also been similar with each other, and with the other key informants from the other organizations which this study is based upon. In this case, I6, from the Ministry stressed that, infact, Ethiopia has been bestowed with cultural heritages that can be utilized to promote its image and attract tourists. Nevertheless, the lack of knowledge and skill in communicating these heritages incapacitates these potentials from becoming important subjects of nation branding. In this similar manner, another key informant viewed that-

It is obvious that Ethiopia is the leading country in terms of the amount of cultural heritages being registered by UNESCO. But, it is observable that the country is least in attracting tourists and also other investments. The reason, I think, is that Ethiopia is lagging behind when it comes to manifesting its cultural heritage resources in a sustained and systematic manner (I4, 1/10/2020).

Again, all the informants from Tourism Ethiopia also suggested that Ethiopia has untapped cultural heritage resources that can be used not only to change the existing negative image of the country but it can also be employed to create a new, durable nation brand identity, with a well planned and effectively communicated nation branding initiatives.

In this case, in his news paper article at the Ethiopian Herald, entitled “ The 13 Ethiopian Heritages under UNESCO” Hizkel (2020), listed out all the 13 heritages of Ethiopia with some detail and argued that the country is blessed with many cultural heritages but suffers from negative images because the country failed to make its case to the international community both systematically and in an informed way of communicating its resources (see <http://www.press.et/english>; retrieved on Nov.10, 2020).

4.4. Inquiring the role of Public relations for nation branding

In the above section, all the key informants of the research gave their assent that although Ethiopia is blessed with a variety of cultural heritages, which could have been used to brand itself, the country is still suffering from its negative image in the eyes of the international community. One of the major reason for this, according to the key informants, is the lack of a proper communication mechanism to reach out to its stakeholders in the world arena. It is at this juncture that the role of communication, especially, that of public relations comes to the forefront to serve as a bridge to connect the brand identity with the target audience. Hence, this section is designated to inquire the viewpoints among the key informants of the research about the role that public relations can have for nation branding.

Regarding this, all key informants of the research revealed that public relations can play a significant role in nation branding, if it is systematically utilized and given the proper attention in nation branding programs. In this respect, for example, I2, from the ARCCH, commented that public relations, with its relationship making capacity, can have a major role to play in nation branding but in most cases it has not been given due attention. Similar to this view, I1, from the same organization elaborated that-

In my opinion, public relations can have a huge role to play in nation branding activities because the main function of public relations is to build the bridge between an organization, or a program and its stakeholders. However, the interest to use public relations in nation branding is not that much positive because the core function of public relations is considered to be limited to serve as a mouthpiece of the organization, and not to involve in other activities (I1, 24/09/2020).

Identical to this, the key informants from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism also shared the same idea about the role that public relations can have for nation branding. In this sense, I4, in particular, explained that public relations can serve as a major tool in nation branding as its main function is to create a mutual understanding between stakeholders, and also with its potential to actively engage with people, public relations can also enable all the stakeholders of a nation brand activity to participate more actively than any other brand identity creation.

In a similar notion, the key informants from Tourism Ethiopia also expressed their views about the

significant role that public relations can have for branding a nation. Concerning this, I7, said that public relations can be an important factor in nation branding, as its function is to build the necessary relationship between stakeholders, so its implementation in nation branding programs will have a positive impact by establishing the necessary linkage between a nation brand and its interest groups. In corroborating this viewpoint, another key informant from the same organization, I9, stressed the contribution that public relations can make to nation branding by saying-

In essence, public relations is about creating and managing relationships between an organization and its publics. Therefore, in my understanding, in branding any nation, public relations can play a positive role by smoothing the relationship between the nation brand and the target audience. Among any other functions, public relations has the potential to engage people in any activity, as its main focus is to create relationships among the different stakeholders of an organization or an activity (I9, 13/10/2020).

Hence, from these findings one can observe that the key informants of the research acknowledged the role and importance of public relations for nation branding function by encouraging the participation of stakeholders among others. This is, in fact, in accordance with the views of PR scholars like Szondi (2010) who argue that public relations with its relationship building role, encourages public participation and forms brand communities which enables people to engage in nation branding, and the public participation in nation branding initiatives ensures the originality of the nation brand identity.

In this respect, the role of public relations for nation branding can be considered significant and the use of public relations, among others, in nation branding initiatives is as such productive in order to fulfill the objective of the nation brand identity. Thus, in order to use public relations for nation branding functions, its proper practice is imperative if the nation branding function intends to achieve and create an effective nation brand identity. Therefore, the next sections try to evaluate how public relations is being practised in the organizations of this research, and what PR strategies they are using when conducting nation branding functions.

4.5. Evaluating the practice of Public Relations

Public relations has been conducted by different organizations for a variety of reasons. Hence, its proper practice is pivotal for achieving the desired goal of the organization. Empowerment of the public relations function, the communicator role of the public relations professional, Integrated Public relations function, and the Models of Public relations are the major standards to gauge the successful implementation of a Public relations practice. Accordingly, this section is assigned to evaluate these important features of PR practice in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MOCT), Tourism Ethiopia, and the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH) when conducting nation branding.

4.5.1. Empowerment of the Public relations function in the dominant coalition

Different public relations scholars advocated that empowering public relations and its inclusion in the dominant coalition is crucial to achieve organizational goals and objectives. Hence, in this sub-section, the status given to public relations at the concerned organizations under this study is presented.

In this regard, the findings indicated that public relations departments in all the organizations under the study has a position in the dominant coalition of their respective organizations. The indepth interview data provides the evidence that all the PR departments of the concerned organizations participate in the decision making processes in their organizations. Thus, signaling their inclusion in the dominant coalition for strategic decisions and management. For instance, I1 attested that:

In our organization (ARCCH), public relations has a place in the dominant coalition. There is no decision that will be passed without the participation of the PR department, whether it is a strategic decision or not. Furthermore, our mandate is to report to the General-Director, no one else (I2, 24/09/2020).

As to this issue, 13 confirmed that public relations fully participates in decision making and agenda setting, wholly involves in all affairs of the organization.

This similar notion is also observed in the other two organizations which this research is based. In this respect, 14 (from MOCT), articulated the status that the PR department has in their organization as follows:

Our department has a place in the dominant coalition. We share ideas with other members of the top management, participate in every committee established in the organization, and involve in decision making. Besides, we are in a position to set our own agenda and also involve in the decision making process within the dominant coalition. As such, we have a direct relationship with the top management(I4, 1/10/2020).

In commenting about this issue, I5 stressed that the public relations department in the MOCT has been granted a position in the dominant coalition. As a result, this provides the opportunity to participate in decision making.

The involvement of public relations in the dominant coalition is also one feature of public relations practice in Tourism Ethiopia, as the researcher witnessed, the PR department's involvement in a meeting with the dominant coalition of the organization. In this regard, I8 explained that-

Previously, our department has been playing the role of supporting other core departments of the organization. But, recently it was restructured and has its own directorate, which directly reports to the CEO and participate in managerial meetings(I8, 12/10/2020).

Regarding this, I9 further noted that the PR department in Tourism Ethiopia has access to the top management, participates in decision making, and directly reports to the Director- General of the organization.

Generally, these findings indicates that the PR departments of the organizations under this study has access to their respective top management and participate in the decision making process. This is in accordance with the systematic way of public relations practice. According to the Excellence theory, if public relations is expected to contribute for organizational effectiveness, it is required to be included in the dominant coalition of the organization (Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier, 2002). Hence, it is worthy of arguing that the empowerment of public relations in these organizations directly contributes for organizational effectiveness, as public relations has a seat in the top management and participate in idea sharing and decision making process. Being part of the top management helps to deliver outputs in nation branding by providing nation branding policies and strategies.

4.5.2. Examining the role of the PR professional

According to the Excellence theory, a public relations professional has two major roles- a *managerial* and *technician* role. As it is stated in the literature review, identifying the role that the PR professional plays determine the overall effectiveness of the PR department, which in turn affects organizational outcomes. Hence, the aim of this subsection is to evaluate the role that the PR professionals of the organizations under this research is conducting, in relation to the scholastic view of PR academicians.

As it is stated in the Excellence theory (Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier, 2002), the role that a public relations professional plays generally sets the value of the public relations department within an organization. Accordingly, if the public relations department is expected to contribute for organizational effectiveness, it should assume the managerial role than the technician one, as the former enables the PR professional to involve in the strategic management of an organization.

However, in the organizations which this study is based, the role that the PR professionals plays seem to be inclined towards the technician role than the managerial one. For example,

I1 from the ARCCCH noted that, the main task that the PR professional conduct is to promote the organization to the public through media relations (both electronics and print), events, and managing the organization's web site.

On this issue, I2 from this similar organization expressed that the role given to the PR professional is to administer PR programmes, mainly of informing the public about what the organization has done so far.

Our main job is to communicate the overall activities of the organization to our stakeholders. We mainly focus on managing the day-to-day operations of public relations like giving press releases to the media, organizing exhibitions, and producing the weekly television and radio programs about heritages. Until now, we are not entitled to advise the management about communication issues (I2, 24/09/2020).

Infact, through document analysis, the researcher of this study could find out that the organization has a public relations manual which clearly states the role of the public relations function within the organization. Based on the PR manual, the role given to the public relations department is to communicate the overall activities of the organization to the public through media relations, printed

materials, and other communication means. The manual begins with defining public relations and continues to suggest how it could help to create a smooth relationship between the organization and its stakeholders. Accordingly, on the manual, the role of the public relations professional is to manage the daily communication functions of the organization and create a favorable view of the organization in the minds of its stakeholders.

The major function of the PR professional is to communicate the overall activities of the organization to the public and its stakeholders with the intention of creating a good image of the organization. To achieve this, the PR professional shall use the different available communication mechanisms to address the stakeholders of the organization.

(Extracted from the Public Relations Manual of the organization).

The above citation obviously demonstrated that the role given to the PR professional is more of a technician than a manager. This finding corroborates the data being provided by the key informants from the ARCCCH, in that the role of the PR professional within the organization is to conduct the communication function within the technician framework.

Nevertheless, this similar notion is also shared by the PR professional from Tourism Ethiopia, I9, who stated that, the main task of the PR department in the organization is to coordinate all the communication activities of the organization, like media briefing and event organizing, but not advising the top management about communication policies.

Regarding this, I8, from the same organization (Tourism Ethiopia), further stressed that apart from operating the daily communication activities of the organization, the PR department does not involve in designing communication policies but to execute tourism policies designed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

In the document analysis which the researcher of this study conducted in order to find out the role given to the PR professional, it has been declared in the Internal Communication Strategy (ICS) document of the organization that the main task given to the PR department is to administer the everyday communications function with the media and other stakeholders. In the ICS document, public relations has been given the role of serving the organization to create a positive internal and external relationships with its stakeholders both inside and outside of the organization.

The PR department of the organization is intended to serve as a bridge between the organization and its stakeholders, both internal and external. Its main task is to address the public and the media on issues that are relevant to both the public and the organization using various technological platforms (Extracted from the Internal Communication Strategy of the organization).

In this case, the above quotation emphasised that the role of the PR professional within the organization leans towards the technician role, which is more concerned with performing the daily activities of the PR department in particular and the communication function in general. Thus, findings from the key informants also claim the technician role of the PR professional within the organization.

With respect to the role of the PR professional in an organization, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism seem to follow a different approach. In this regard, the in-depth interview demonstrated that, the communication professional in the PR department is entitled to plan communication strategies of its own besides performing the daily PR activities.

Our communication department has its own responsibilities. We have an annual plan, and design communication strategies that are intended to fulfill the mission and objectives of the organization, besides carrying out the regular PR activities of media relations, advocacy, giving out press releases and press conferences (I6, 2/10/2020).

As a whole, with the exception of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, in the other organizations the role of the PR professionals seems to be more of a technician than a manager. This is in direct contradiction with what communication scholars suggest. Scholars like Zerfass and Van Ruler opine that, the role that the public relations professional has decides the value of the PR department within an organization. Consequently, they propose that it is better for a PR professional to be a manager than a technician, as the managerial role enables the PR professional to have a position in the dominant coalition and influence policies (Zerfass et al., 2008). On this basis, it is acceptable to argue that the technician role of the PR professional within organizations- ARCCCH and Tourism Ethiopia, can hinder the fruitful implementation of PR programs and the design of a successful communication policy.

4.5.3. Opinions on the integration of the PR function

As to the Excellence theory, PR functions must be carried out under the authority of a single department and, this department should be managed separately from other departments in order to conduct a successful PR activity. Thus, this subsection intends to investigate the status given to the PR departments within the organizations under this research.

In the organizations which this research refers, all has a PR department separate from other functions, but in some instances public relations activities are conducted without involving the organizations' PR departments.

In this regard, during the in-depth interview, it became clear that although all the organizations selected for this research has an independent PR department, the way they conduct their public relations function is some what different. For instance, in the case of the ARCCH, I1 noted that their department is organized independently and all communication activities are carried only by the PR department.

But, during the in-depth interview, an informant from the same organization stressed that although public relations has its own department separate from other functions, all communication functions are not integrated into the PR department.

Our department is organized independently and has its own directorate. But, all the communication function of the organization is not solely conducted by the PR department. Other departments also transmit information to media outlets skipping our department which makes it difficult for us to organize the communication function. Besides, sometimes, there are some officials who refuse to provide us the necessary information, and thus, hinder our efforts for a successful public relations function (I2, 24/09/2020).

On this particular issue, another key informant, I3, seem to agree with key informant, I2, in that, although PR is separate from other functions, the communication work within the organization is not solely left for the PR department but other departments are also involved in providing information to different media sources.

On the aforementioned PR manual of the organization, it is declared that all the communication functions of the organization must be conducted by the PR department in order to keep uniformity of

the information being passed on from the organization to the public.

No other department of the organization shall be involved in conducting the PR and communication function other than the PR department. All communications functions are carried out under the supervision of the PR department, and if other departments wants a communication function, they must let the PR department know about it prior to providing information to media outlets (Extracted from the organization's PR manual).

In the above quotation, it is clear to observe that the PR department is the only subdivision within the organization to perform PR and communication function. Nevertheless, findings revealed that other departments are also involved in communication functions, contrary to the manual's stipulation.

On this similar issue, the key informants from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has also a different view. In this case, I5, for example, commented that the PR department is organized at the directorate level and except for the PR department, no other department is entitled to perform communication activities. Nevertheless, this view is contrary to another key informant from the same Ministry who explained that-

Infact, our department is headed by a directorate and other departments sought our service when they need a communication function. But, there are some individuals who has a personal grudge towards our department, and without our knowledge, they provide information and also carry communication activities on their own. Moreover, recently, there is a new concept called 'Deliverology' in our organization. Under this new concept, all communication efforts are organized under this new concept headed by an advisor to the Minister and PR is subsumed under it. This new business process overtakes our duty and hinders our contribution to fulfill our organization's objectives (I4, 1/10/2020).

The above quotation is also shared by another key informant from the Ministry, I6, who confirmed that PR as an independent function within the organization but not all communication functions are integrated into the PR department as other departments are involved in communication activities.

However, in the case of Tourism Ethiopia, when the key informants were asked to put forth their opinion about whether public relations and communications function is integrated into a single

department, they all seem to agree in that, all public relations and communication functions are carried only by the PR department, which is organized independently separate from other functions. In this regard, I8, noted that PR is an independent entity and all communication functions are done under the supervision of the PR department and no other department is engaged in communication efforts other than the PR department. Infact, there are other key informants who confirm the above view to be true, I7, specially, stressed that the PR department has an internal communication strategy to create a smooth relationship with other departments of the organization on equal basis. Furthermore, the communication work is only given to the PR department by excluding other departments.

In our organization, PR is run by a directorate. Based on our internal communication strategy, we facilitate an enabling environment for all the departments to have a favorable relationship among themselves. Our marketing department conducts the marketing and promotional works, whereas, the public relations and communications function is only allotted for the PR department (I7, 7/10/2020).

Thus, from the above findings, one can observe that although all the organizations under this study has an independent PR department separate from other functions, all communication functions are not integrated into the PR department. Particularly, in the case of the ARCCH and MOCT, the communication function seem to be conducted also by other departments by avoiding the PR department. In this case, it does not correspond with what PR scholars suggest to organizations in that, in order to be successful in organizational communication function all PR and communication functions must be run by the PR department of the organization. According to Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002) it is imperative to integrate all communication functions under the PR department, as integration provides organizations the opportunity to plan communication programs by utilizing resources under a single department. So, in this state, it seems easy to conclude that the integration of public relations function within the organizations, particularly in ARCCH and MOCT, is not robust enough and not scientifically supported by what PR scholars has recommended.

4.5.4. Views on the Model of the Public Relations function

Scholars put forth that the PR model that an organization advocates determine the overall effectiveness of the PR function. The Press agency, Public information, the Two-way assymetric and, the Two-way symmetric are the four models of public relations in which most public relation

practices are dependent upon. Thus, this subsection intends to scrutinize the PR model that the organizations under this study has adapted when practising public relations and communication functions.

In this regard, during the in-depth interview, the key informants from the ARCCH were asked to explain how their organization is practising public relations. Their response, however, is somewhat different and sometimes even contradicts each other. In this respect, for instance, I1, commented that when practising public relations, besides giving out information to the public, their department is also engaged in involving its stakeholders in its communication functions, and the feedbacks gathered from the stakeholders about the PR function will be used to modify some working procedures.

But, I3, from the same organization seem to have a different view about the issue of PR practice. The key informant expressed that the PR department mainly focusses on transferring information to the public without paying much attention to gather feedbacks from its stakeholders.

We only focus on the generation and transmission of information to the public. We have a gap in gathering feedbacks from our stakeholders. We do not conduct researches to assess our shortcomings when we deliver our service, so, we lack the knowledge on how to practice public relations in a better way. This hinders our potential to improve our inner workings within the department. In general, other than disseminating information to the public, we do not engaged in gathering feedbacks in a more organized and scientific basis (I3, 25/09/2020).

This view is being shared by another key informant in the organization. In this case, I2, added that the main task of the PR department is to propagate information to the public, without engaging with them and gathering their feedbacks to create a win-win situation between the organization and its stakeholders.

In relation to this, the key informants were also asked what PR tools they use when engaging with their publics specially during nation branding activities, and also whether they do analysis on the effectiveness of the tools they implement, particularly when conducting nation branding activities. In this regard, all the informants suggested that the PR tools they use, not only in branding activities but also in the overall PR activities of the organization, are simple PR tools of everyday use. But, they all explained that analysing the effectiveness of these PR tools in their organization is poor and not

being considered as an important task. Concerning this, I2, particularly stated that-

In our public relations practice, we mainly use the basic PR tools like brochures, magazines, fliers and pamphlets. We use them in every aspect of our public relations function, but we do not usually do conduct a research to analyse their effectiveness with the intention of measuring what changes they brought in the perceptions of our stakeholders (I2, 24/09/2020).

Thus, the lack of research and evaluation in the PR department regarding the effectiveness of the PR tools can hinder a successful PR practice because the organization will not have the chance to whether it should change its use of the PR tools or to continue as it is in order to achieve a positive view about the nation branding initiatives being implemented.

Hence, from the above findings, it will be fair to argue that the organization (ARCCH) has adapted the press agency model of PR when carrying out communication functions. The press agency model, as it is stated in the Excellence theory, uses a one-way communication and does not consider the opinions and feedbacks from its stakeholders. This inturn impedes an effective PR function in an organization by ignoring stakeholders involvement in the PR practice. Therefore, one can conclude that ARCCH has adapted the least favored PR model that does not consider the interests of its stakeholders, as it ignores to participate them when practising public relations and communication functions.

Similarly, the key informants from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MOCT) were asked to forward their views about how their organization is conducting public relations. In this sense, I5, stressed that besides serving as an information provider, the PR department also garner feedbacks from the different stakeholders about the performance of the organization, and thus, these feedbacks are analyzed among the concerned departments in order to use it to improve organizational effectiveness.

But, another key informant from the same organization seems to disagree with this notion. In this respect, I4, commented that the PR function in the organization is only limited to information transmission and serving as a spokesperson of the organization.

Previously, our department assess public opinion in order to measure customer satisfaction in our service and advise the Minister based on the results of our survey

about what to do next. But, nowadays, we do not do such a thing, rather we focussed on informing the public and serving as a spokesperson of the organization. We do not usually gather feedbacks and analyze them, it is not even in our plan to do so (I4, 1/10/2020).

When another key informant of this organization, I6, is asked for an opinion regarding the issue of public relations practice in the Minister of Culture and Tourism, it explained that public relations practice so far is like a one-way traffic, in that, information is sent from the organization to the public, without considering the interests and opinions of its stakeholders.

When evaluating about their public relations practice, the key informants were also asked what PR tools are used when they carried out nation branding activities, and their analysis and evaluation efforts to figure out what impact does these tools brought on the views and perceptions of their stakeholders, as evaluating the effectiveness of the PR tools helps to continue to use these tools or change them if they are ineffective. Thus, in this regard, all the key informants explained that, other than the usual PR tools used to conduct the public relations function, there are no different tools reserved for nation branding programs. However, the informants stressed that besides using the common PR tools in nation branding activities, there is no formal way of evaluating or analysing the influence being brought upon the opinions of stakeholders through the use of these PR tools, regarding the nation brand identity. In this respect, I4, specifically mentioned that-

Our department employs the simple PR tools when conducting all communication works. We do not design a different kind of PR tools targeting only for nation branding. Our PR tools, such as brochures, magazines, and fliers are designated for all PR activities. But, as far as evaluating the impact of the PR tools that we use on our stakeholders, we are not active in doing research in order to analyze the impact of the PR tools in changing the perceptions of our stakeholders and to have a positive image of the brand identity (I4, 1/10/2020).

Therefore, the PR tools that the organization is using are mainly focussed on a one-way communication as the organization failed to include the views from its stakeholders through research and evaluation processes.

Thus, to summarize, it can be observed from the above findings that, the public relations function within the Minister of Culture and Tourism is carried out using the press agency model of public

relations. Hence, as it is discussed above, this model is a deterrent to an effective public relations and communications function, and not scientifically supported, as it is reluctant to include the feedbacks and opinions of the organization's stakeholders when practising public relations and communication functions.

Likewise, during the in-depth interview, this similar question of how public relations is being practised in their organization has been forwarded to the key informants from Tourism Ethiopia. In this regard, their answers more or less look the same. For instance, I7, in the indepth interview expressed that the PR department not only disseminates but also gathers information from the public about the organization using different techniques.

We do not only transmit information to the public but we are also engaged in gathering feedbacks from our stakeholders. Using our telephone Hot Line-6168, we are reaching out to our strategic publics. Moreover, we use our social media platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter, to engage with our stakeholders.

We have also a quarterly meeting with our stakeholders, which enables us to get the views and perceptions of our strategic publics. But, we do not usually do analysis on the feedbacks we gained from our stakeholders, and yet we are not engaged in doing research about customer satisfaction (I7, 7/10/2020).

Besides agreeing to the above viewpoints, another key informant from the same organization, I9, added that although the PR department does not do analysis on the feedbacks from its stakeholders, it has been planning to begin doing research and analyzing the feedbacks gained from customer service which can be used for survey studies.

The above two notions are further corroborated by another key informant from the organization, I8, stating that their department lacks doing research to evaluate customer satisfaction, rather it prefers to gather a mere feedbacks and opinions from stakeholders in meetings and trainings.

Like the other two organizations, the key informants from Tourism Ethiopia were also asked about the PR tools that they use while practising public relations programs, and the evaluation and analysis process whether these tools achieved the desired goals and objectives in the hearts and minds of the strategic publics. In this case, all the key informants stressed that the PR tools they adapt are that of every day use in PR and communication functions. In this regard, I8, commented that-

In every aspect of our public relations functions, we use mostly the same PR tools when we engage with our stakeholders like magazines, brochures, fliers and so on. But, regarding the evaluation of the effects of these PR tools on the views of our strategic publics, our research and analysis effort is poor and we can also conclude that we do not conduct any evaluation and analysis about what changes does our PR tools bring in the perceptions of our stakeholders towards our service (I8, 12/10/2020).

From this citation, one can conclude that the organization does not involve its stakeholders in its public relations practice as it does not include the views of its strategic publics. The lack of evaluation and analysis about the perceptions that the stakeholders has towards the organization indicates the exclusion of the stakeholders in the PR function, indicating a oneway PR practice by the organization.

Accordingly, from the above findings, one can come to a conclusion that among the four models of PR practice, it seems fair to argue that Tourism Ethiopia has leaned towards using the public information model when practising public relations. This model, as it is stated in the Excellence theory, although it is not propagandistic in nature like the press agentry model, it focusses on convincing its stakeholders to have a favorable view of the organization by ignoring the opinions and views of its stakeholders, thus creating a one-way communication.

4.6. Assessing the nation branding activities using Public relations strategies

Academicians suggest that there are mainly two strategies under public relations that are employed when conducting nation branding activities. These are the image management, and the relationship building approaches, with its stakeholder engagement and brand meaning co-creation strategies (Szondi, 2010). Hence, the main objective of this section is to assess the public relations strategies used by the organizations of this research when they conduct nation branding activities using cultural heritages as a tool.

In this respect, the key informants from the ARCCH were asked to forward their views about the PR strategy that their organization opt when conducting nation branding. In this regard, there is a discrepancy in their views among the key informants about the nation branding activities being implemented in their organization. For instance, I1, commented that their organization performs

nation branding activities using the cultural heritage resources of the country, and the main task of the PR department in the nation branding initiative is to portrait a good image of the country to the outside world.

As cultural heritages have a significant importance to any society, we, as an organization, also use them to promote the country. In this regard, the PR department also took part in this nation branding activities. Our duty in this process is building a good image of the country in the minds of foreigners, so maintaining a positive image of the country among our stakeholders is our priority (I1, 24/09/2020).

When asked about the participation of stakeholders in nation branding initiatives, the key informant also expressed that stakeholders are engaged in the creation of a nation brand identity, and every branding activity is carried out with the involvement of stakeholders.

But, another key informant from the same organization has a different view of the issue of public relations use in nation branding. In this regard, I2, explained that ARCCH does not involve much in nation branding activities, though it manages the overall cultural heritages of the country.

Since its inception, our organization does not participate in nation branding initiatives. Though we are mandated to manage the cultural heritages of the country, we are not engaged in nation branding functions using these cultural heritage resources. For example, when the 'Land of Origins' logo has become public, our organization had not been a participant in the process of brand creation. As a result, our department does not actually do nation branding activities (I2, 24/09/2020).

In this case, another key informant, I3, has forwarded its view which is similar to that of I2, stating that there was no any effort by the organization or rather by the PR department to get involved in nation branding, despite the organization is actually responsible for the development of the cultural heritages of the country.

However, in this regard, the findings do not correspond with scholars like Hakala and Lemmetyinen (2013) who suggest that stakeholder involvement in the creation of a place brand identity makes the branding effort more permanent. Therefore, it will be fair to argue that ARCCH with its PR department, first should be involved as a major stakeholder in nation branding initiatives and secondly, the organization inturn should also include its stakeholders in nation branding activities

using the cultural heritages of the country, as it has the authority to manage and conserve the cultural heritages of the country.

Similarly, in an in-depth interview, the key informants from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MOCT) were also asked to have a say in the PR strategies that their organization is implementing when conducting nation branding functions.

In this aspect, the key informants seem to have the same notion about their use of cultural heritages in nation branding programs, and the PR strategies that their organization put forth when carrying out nation branding. Concerning this, I4, for instance, mentioned that their organization (MOCT), though it is entitled with the development and promotion of the country's diverse cultures, it has little to do with nation branding activities using the cultural heritages of the country.

The Ministry is mandated with the development and promotion of the different cultures of the country, but when it comes to nation branding using the cultural heritages of the diverse cultures, our organization is not that much active mainly because all branding activities are solely given to Tourism Ethiopia. Hence, our contribution to nation branding is minimal, but as a Ministry, we try to promote the cultural heritages of the country as a whole (I4, 1/10/2020).

When asked about what PR strategy that the Ministry is utilizing during nation branding initiatives, the key informant, I4, also expressed that the main objective of the nation brand activity in the organization is to build a positive image of the country, so that, every nation branding activities are geared towards creating a good image of the country.

During the in-depth interview, the key informants were asked whether their organization looks for the participation of its stakeholders when designing a nation brand identity. In this sense, another key informant from the Ministry, I5, explained that every time the Ministry intends to carry out nation branding functions using cultural heritages, it involves members of the specific community with some degree, like community leaders, to create a sense of ownership of the brand identity being conceived.

Thus, in this regard, there are some aspects of the findings that goes with what scholars has suggested, like the participation of stakeholders in the creation of a brand identity. As Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) pointed that the participation of stakeholders in developing the brand is pivotal for the

brand identity being created because the stakeholders will have a good image of the brand as they are active participants of the creation process. But, there are also some aspects that goes contrary to what scholars has suggested effective. For instance, when conducting nation branding initiatives, the Ministry opt to use the image management approach. But, in recent studies, scholars like Szondi (2010) and Kavartzis (2012) proposed that rather than the image management approach, which is unidirectional in that message is only transmitted from the sender to the receiver, the relationship building approach is more favorable as it enables stakeholders to own the brand activity and took part in the creation of brand identity.

Likewise, in an in-depth interview, the key informants from Tourism Ethiopia has been asked to present their views about the use of cultural heritages in nation branding programs, what role has been given to PR in their nation branding activities, and the participation of stakeholders in nation branding initiatives.

Concerning the use of cultural heritages as a tool in nation branding activities, all key informants stressed that as Ethiopia is rich in cultural heritages, the use of these resources is imperative if the country intends to create a unique place brand identity, and thus, their organization employs cultural heritages for nation branding functions.

However, concerning the role given to PR in the nation branding programs, the key informants explained that PR does not involve in branding activities, rather its task is limited to serving as a bridge between the organization and the public. In this regard, I9, for instance, explained that the nation branding activities of the organization are carried out by the marketing department.

In our organization, branding has been mandated to and all functions of market development are performed by the marketing department. In this case, the role of the PR department will be to communicate the tasks done by the marketing department to our stakeholders. Therefore, our department does not involve in branding initiatives, but to inform our stakeholders about what has been done regarding nation branding activities (I9, 13/10/2020).

In this case, the researcher of this study has also observed that materials, whether printed or online, concerning nation branding functions are prepared and managed by the marketing department of the organization. The materials has focussed on the promotion of some destinations, cultural heritages, and religious festivals. As such, public relations has been left from nation branding activities and

with that the creation of a genuine nation brand involving its stakeholders.

The key informants also expressed that the main task given to the PR department is to build a positive image of the organization in the minds and hearts of their stakeholders, not to involve in nation branding activities. In this respect, I7, said the following-

In the case of our organization, public relations is used to depict a good image about our organization, to serve as a bridge between the government and the public, in order to provide the necessary information to our stakeholders. The nation branding and marketing function is not in our to-do-list (I7, 7/10/2020).

In this sense, these findings are in direct contradiction with what scholars suggest to follow. Scholars like Szondi (2010) and Hankinson (2004) argued that with its relationship building capability, public relations and strategic communications can play a pivotal role in nation branding activities, as the goal of any public relations function is to create a mutually beneficial relationship among stakeholders. Hence, in this sense, it will be acceptable to argue that the exclusion of public relations from the nation branding activities of the organization significantly minimise the effectiveness of the nation branding initiatives, as public relations enables nation branding programs to make a more closer linkage among its stakeholders.

Regarding the involvement of stakeholders in nation branding programs, all the key informants views seems to agree. Thus, they explained that,as public relations is excluded from the nation branding activities of the organization, it minimizes their department's engagement with its stakeholders in nation branding initiatives, and this practice infact disagrees with scholars like Fournier (2005) and Szondi (2010) who suggest that public relations must be involved in nation branding functions because with its relationship building role, PR can create strong relationships among stakeholders of a nation brand identity, and if stakeholders are involved enough in the brand identity creation, they can also create a good image of the brand.

CHAPTER FIVE- SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Summary of Main Findings

In this research, the role of public relations for nation branding has been investigated with the objective of how the practice and strategies of public relations can contribute for a successful nation branding initiatives. To fulfill the research objective, four research questions were raised focussing on the practice of public relations and the specific public relations strategies used by the organizations which this study is based. Hence, the purpose of this section is to summarize the main findings of the research.

Accordingly, the researcher tried to evaluate the perception of the key informants about their views on nation branding, Ethiopia's potential for branding itself using its cultural heritage resources, and public relations role for nation branding. In their response, all the key informants of the research shared the same perception on the above themes during the indepth interview with them. Concerning the issue of nation branding, all the key informants suggested that it is about to let people to know the unique features that a nation has using its distinct resources in order to create a favorable view in the minds of its stakeholders. In this respect, they acknowledged that Ethiopia is a country with rich cultural heritage resources but lacks to communicate its potential resources to brand itself. Hence, in this regard, as the key informants also argued that public relations with its proper practice will have an important role in filling the communication gap in nation branding activities, and create a common understanding between the brand identity and the stakeholders of the brand.

Regarding the practice of public relations in nation branding, the research garnered relevant data on the perception and practice of public relations in the organizations under this study. As it has been explained in the previous sections that the scientific practice of public relations is pivotal for the success of any organization, programs, and activities. In public relations practise, there are some key concepts that guarantee the successful implementation of public relation. Among these concepts, the study, specifically, paid attention and investigated the

organization's public relations departments empowerment of the public relations function in the dominant coalition, the role of the public relations professional, the integration of all communication functions under a single department, and the PR model being implemented in the organizations, which this research is based upon.

Public relations and communication scholars argued that the empowerment of the public relations function in the dominant decision making coalition of an organization is decisive, as empowerment gives the PR department of an organization to participate in the decision making processes of the organization in every aspect. Therefore, this research tried to study the empowerment of the public relations function in the dominant coalitions of each organization selected for the research. In this respect, the findings about the empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalitions of the concerned organizations of this study showed that the public relations departments in all the organizations have a seat in the dominant coalitions of their respective institutions. Consequently, an empowered public relations departments can initiate nation branding programs using the cultural heritages of the country, and also influence decisions about how to use these cultural heritage resources in nation branding initiatives.

In the previous discussions, it has been stated that the role that a public relations professional has affects the overall status of the public relations function. There are mainly two roles assigned for PR professionals in most public relations functions, the managerial and the technician roles. In the managerial role, PR professionals are entitled to design PR policies and advise the top management in communication affairs of the organization, while in the technician role, the role given to the PR professional tends to be limited to carry out the daily activities of the communication function of the PR department. Hence, this research attempts to study the role given to the PR professionals of the organizations under this study. In this regard, the findings of the research suggest that except from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, in the other two organizations, in the ARCCH and Tourism Ethiopia, the role given to the PR professionals is more of a technician than a manager.

As it is previously discussed, integrating all communication functions under a single

department and to let all PR and communication activities to be carried out only by the PR department creates a more fruitful relationship between an organization and its stakeholders, and makes the communication function more effective. However, although all organizations of the research has an independent PR department to conduct all the communication functions, in some instances, there are also other departments that are involved in doing the communication work which the PR departments of the respective organizations are supposed to do. In this case, the study unveiled that, in the ARCCH and MOCT, the communication function is also carried out by other departments of the organizations, while in Tourism Ethiopia, all the PR and communication functions of the organization are only done by the PR department.

As far as the PR model that the organizations of this study have put in place while practising public relations, the findings of the research showed that apart from Tourism Ethiopia, the other two organizations of the research have inclined to use the press agency model of the public relations function, while in the case of Tourism Ethiopia, the PR function is performed using more of the public information model. As it is discussed in the above sections, the press agency model favors a one-way communication, from the sender to the receiver, while the public information model is also a one-way communication but with little feedback from its stakeholders. In this regard, the Excellence theory, which this research uses as a theoretical framework, favors the use of the two-way symmetrical model of communication in order to achieve a successful public relations function, but none of the organizations under this study has been able to adapt it when practising public relations activities.

Similarly, the study endeavors to investigate the PR strategies that the organizations of this research has favored to follow when they are conducting nation branding initiatives. Different PR scholars suggest that there are mainly two PR strategies used in nation branding functions, the image management and the relationship building approaches, where the image management focusses on addressing the stakeholders of a nation brand in a oneway communication, while on the other hand, the relationship building approach engages with its stakeholders and seeks the participation of its strategic publics in nation brand creation.

Hence, under this part of the study, the research gave due emphasis on investigating how these PR strategies for nation branding are being managed among the organizations selected for this research.

In this regard, the findings portrayed that all the organizations under this study has favored to follow the image management approach. To be more specific, in the case of the ARCCH, the PR department does not involve in any kind of nation branding activities, and consequently, it does not involve its strategic publics in nation branding programs. The main task of the PR department is to promote the various activities of the organization to its publics. Generally, the findings presented that the organization is not an active participant in the nation branding activities of the country, and its PR department is only limited to communicating the overall activities of the organization to its stakeholders. There is no involvement of the organization or its PR department in nation branding initiatives. Hence, involving its stakeholders for nation branding activities is not observed, signaling the use of the image management approach by the organization in every aspect of its PR functions.

As far as the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MOCT) is concerned, the findings revealed that the organization involves itself in nation branding initiatives minimally, and to some extent it involves its stakeholders when conducting nation branding activities. This aspect is indicative of the fact that the organization is basically using the image management approach than the relationship building strategy of nation branding, as the relationship approach demands the participation of stakeholder groups in every aspect of the nation branding process.

Regarding Tourism Ethiopia, the findings from the key informants showed that the organization uses the country's cultural heritages when conducting nation branding functions, as the country is rich with unique cultural heritage potentials. But, in the nation branding process, their PR department is excluded from participating in nation branding activities, as the nation branding programs are only mandated to the marketing department.

The findings also indicated that the main task given to the PR department is to serve as a bridge between the organization and its stakeholders besides building a positive image of the organization among the minds of its stakeholders.

5.2. Conclusion

As it is stated in this study, nation branding has become an important aspect in the current highly competitive and globalized world and, it has been used in order to overcome the negative perceptions of nations among the stakeholders of a specific nation. Nations utilize their potentials in order to create a positive image of themselves among the international audience, whether it is their economic, natural, cultural, or technological resources. In order to create a positive image of one's nation, the role of public relations and communications is pivotal as it enables nations to establish the relationship between the nation brand identity and its stakeholders. Ethiopia is a country with the richest cultural heritage resources among African countries, but as it is stated in the statement of the problem, currently its image within the international community is tarnished by its past history of war, famine, and poverty, posing a threat to attract investment and tourism.

The objective of this research was to assess the role that public relations can play in nation branding initiatives using cultural heritage resources as a means in the Ethiopian context. Therefore, in order to give actuality to the research, three organizations are selected and their public relations practise has been examined when conducting nation branding initiatives using the cultural heritages of the country. The three organizations which this research is based are- the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MOCT), the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCCH), and Tourism Ethiopia. These organizations are the major institutions in the country mandated for the protection, management and promotion of the cultural heritages of the nation. Accordingly, by considering these organizations, the research tried to emphasize the role of public relations for nation branding and how these organizations are implementing systematic approaches when they are conducting nation branding initiatives.

In this regard, four research questions were formulated with the aim of investigating how public relations is being practiced, what public relations strategies are carried out by these organizations when managing nation branding programs, what are the main causes for the protracted negative images of the country, and the country's failure in changing its image.

(RQ1) How do the research organizations practice public relations using the cultural heritage resources of the country while branding the nation? (RQ2) What public relations and

communication strategies are used by the organizations for nation branding activities using the cultural heritage potentials? (RQ3) What are the causes for the prolonged negative image of the country in the international sphere? (RQ4) Why did the country fail to change its image?

As to analyzing the research questions, different views from scholars and researchers were evaluated in order to correspond with the findings of the data. Moreover, as this study is a qualitative one, it uses both primary and secondary data sources, in which the primary data were garnered through an in-depth interview with key informants from the organizations of the study, while document review was used to gather secondary data.

In order to assess the practice of public relations in the organizations, the research tried to examine some important aspects of public relations practices pivotal for a successful PR function. Therefore, the empowerment of the public relations function in the dominant coalition of the organization, the role assigned to the PR professional, the integration of all the communication functions of the organization under the PR department, and the PR model that the organization implements when conducting PR activities were assessed and evaluated. In this regard, it is difficult to put all the organizations under the same category because the findings appear to be the same in some instances, but also it varies from one organization to the other in other circumstances.

In this case, for instance, all the PR departments under this study have a place in the dominant coalitions of their respective organizations which is also advisable among PR scholars in order to influence decisions. But, on the other hand, the role given to the PR professionals within the organizations is somewhat different. As scholars suggest, the role of the PR professional within an organization determines the overall effectiveness of the PR function. These roles are the managerial and technician roles, in which the managerial role is favored as key for a successful PR function. But, except in the MOCT, the role given to the PR professional in the ARCCH and Tourism Ethiopia is a technician role. Thus, except the MOCT, the other two organizations lack to follow the scientific ways of conducting PR function.

Concerning the integration of all communication functions under a single department separate from other functions, the findings and analysis showed that except for Tourism Ethiopia, the PR

and communication function in the MOCT and ARCCH is also carried out by other departments of the organizations, although all of the organizations have an independent PR departments. Hence, this would subsequently lead to a fragmented communication function and prevents the scientific way of conducting a standardized communication works.

Regarding the PR model that the organizations use to adapt when they are practising public relations, it is in fact acceptable to argue that all are conducting their PR function in a linear way, in that the communication is characterized by the flow of information from the sender to the receiver, without considering the interests and demands of the stakeholders of the organizations.

So, in general, as it is discussed in the research findings and analysis section, the organizations are not pursuing the scientific method of PR practice, which is manifested through the participation of stakeholders in the communication process via the two-way communication of engagement between the organization and its strategic publics.

The research also strives to examine the nation branding efforts of the organizations through the lenses of the public relation strategies of image management and relationship building approaches. In this regard, recent literatures suggest that the relationship building approach, with its stakeholder engagement and creating a mutually beneficial relationship between a nation brand and its stakeholders, is more scientific and standardized way of nation branding strategy than the image management approach which favors a one-way communication from the sender to the receiver. Nevertheless, findings portrayed that the organizations are committing themselves in using the image management approach than the relationship building one, signaling the lack of efforts to participate stakeholders in nation branding initiatives.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendations are forwarded:

- Generally, as it is indicated in the findings of the research, apart from the empowerment of the public relations departments in the dominant coalitions of their respective organizations, other key PR functions such as the role given to the PR professional, the integration of the PR function under a single department and the PR function being independently organized, the role of the PR professional, and the PR model adapted by the organizations when conducting PR functions seem to be missing and does not correspond with what scholars suggest to do.
- As the role given to the PR professional has an impact in the performance of the PR function of the communication department, such role must be a managerial role in order to influence policies and strategies in the dominant coalition. But, in the PR manual of the ARCCH and, in the Internal Communication Strategy document of Tourism Ethiopia, the role given to the PR professional is a technician one. Thus, these organizations must change the role they have given to their PR professional by revising their PR and communication documents.
- As the research conveyed, although all the organizations under this study has an independent PR department, all communication functions are not integrated into the communication function, particularly in the ARCCH and the MOCT, PR and communication activities are also carried out by other departments. Thus, all communication functions must be included under the PR department in order to conduct an organized and systematic public relations function.
- In the findings of this research, it became obvious that all organizations' communication activities are conducted using a one-way PR and communication functions, thus there is only information flow from the sender to the receiver, avoiding the participation of stakeholders in the communication process and fail to create an important link and relationship between stakeholders. Nevertheless, if the organizations intends to deliver an effective communication function, they must adapt the two-way symmetrical model of PR function in which PR is conducted with the participation of stakeholders in every aspect

and the views and opinions of the various stakeholders will be included in the PR function in order to establish a common understanding and a mutually beneficial relationship.

- Based on the findings of the research, among the PR strategies used for nation branding initiatives, the organizations seem to have favored to use the image management approach in which they address their target audience in a one-way communication, not considering the participation of stakeholders in the nation branding activities. In this regard, the organizations must contemplate about using the relationship building approach of public relations strategy when conducting nation branding initiatives, as it allows the participation of stakeholders and engages customers in every bit of the nation branding activities. The full scale participation of stakeholders in nation brand creation secures the sustainability and originality of the nation brand identity.
- When conducting the nation branding activities, the organizations must also consider to use the vast majority of the Ethiopian diaspora and members of the diplomatic community in order to reach out to the international community by building the necessary relationship through engaging and involving the stakeholders in nation brand creation and also throughout the nation branding process.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

Interview Guide - for the key informants from the selected organizations of the research

1. How does PR practitioners of the organization participate in administrative issues? Do public relations have a seat in the dominant coalition?
2. Does the PR department have a direct relationship with the dominant coalition?
3. What role does the PR practitioner have within the organization?
4. What is the relationship between the public relations and other departments of the organization? Is public relations subordinate to other departments?
5. How does the organization perform (practice) public relations?
6. Does the organization use cultural heritages when conducting nation branding activities?
7. In what way (For what reason) does the organization employs public relations in nation branding using cultural heritages?
8. Does the organization involve stakeholders in its nation branding activities using cultural heritages? If so, how?