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**MASTER OF ARTS PROGRAM OF PUBLIC RELATIONS &
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION**

**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR NATION BRANDING IN
ETHIOPIA: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY**

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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Mihiret Worede; entitled THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR NATION BRANDING IN ETHIOPIA: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY is a product of my work and that all sources of materials used for my thesis have been appropriately acknowledged. It is submitted to partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts Public Relations and Strategic Communication compiles in accordance with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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Abstract

This study explores the role of social media in Ethiopia's nation branding, employing a grounded theory approach to analyze how platforms and influencers impact the country's global image. In today's interconnected world, social media has transformed global identity formation by allowing direct engagement with diverse international audiences. Despite Ethiopia's rich history and cultural diversity, misconceptions persist, such as perceptions of the country as famine-stricken, underdeveloped, and culturally homogenous. Ethiopian branding government bodies, influencers and content creators play a crucial role in countering these stereotypes by highlighting Ethiopia's modern infrastructure, economic reforms, and cultural vibrancy. However, challenges like political conflicts, misinformation, limited digital literacy, and fragmented messaging hinder cohesive branding efforts. This research emphasizes that for social media to reach its full potential in Ethiopia's nation branding, a coordinated approach involving policymakers, brand managers, and digital stakeholders is essential for fostering a consistent, interactive global engagement strategy.

Keywords: *Social media, Nation branding, Grounded theory.*

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CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Ethiopia, an East African nation known for its rich cultural heritage, ancient history, and diverse landscapes, holds a distinctive place in global history. It is celebrated as the birthplace of coffee, the origin of the oldest known human ancestors, and a country with unique traditions, languages, and religions that set it apart on the African continent. Despite its long-standing independence, diverse religious heritage—including communities practicing Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—and distinct cultural features like a unique calendar and clock system, Ethiopia remains unfamiliar to much of the global population. Despite its historic and cultural wealth, long-standing independence, diverse religious heritage—including communities practicing Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—and distinct cultural features like a unique calendar and clock system, Ethiopia remains unfamiliar to much of the global population (Kebede, 2010). Ethiopia's national image has been complicated by a range of internal and external challenges that affect its global perception. Political conflicts, such as recent regional tensions and the Northern Ethiopia conflict, along with socioeconomic disparities and challenges in access to digital technology, have led to fragmented and at times negative portrayals of Ethiopia on the international stage.

In Ethiopia, the role of nation branding is largely overseen by multiple governmental bodies, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MoCT) playing central roles. The MoFA primarily handles diplomatic efforts and international relations, promoting Ethiopia's image abroad through its embassies and consulates, while the MoCT focuses on highlighting Ethiopia's cultural heritage and tourism potential to attract visitors and investments. Additionally, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) and affiliated media outlets contribute by managing public messaging within and outside the country.

Another important player is the Ethiopian Investment Commission (EIC), which actively promotes Ethiopia as an investment destination. The EIC aims to attract foreign direct investment by showcasing Ethiopia's economic reforms, market potential, and infrastructure

developments. This agency works closely with international investors and has engaged in targeted campaigns to improve Ethiopia's business-friendly image.

In recent years, social media has emerged as a crucial platform for shaping public opinion and disseminating information about Ethiopia. Government bodies, Influencers and content creators have increasingly taken to digital platforms to counter stereotypes and showcase Ethiopia's beauty, resilience, and achievements. Yet, the nation faces challenges in maintaining a cohesive, positive image due to issues like misinformation, political polarization, and inconsistent messaging. With varying levels of digital literacy and internet access across regions, the representation of Ethiopia's multifaceted identity remains uneven, often influenced by differing agendas and perspectives.

Amid these challenges, Ethiopia's government, cultural institutions, and digital influencers strive to promote a positive national image, leveraging social media as a modern tool for nation branding. This study aims to explore the role of social media in constructing and enhancing Ethiopia's national image, addressing both the potential and limitations of digital platforms in representing the country in a unified and favorable light to its citizen. By analyzing Ethiopia's specific social, political, and technological context, the study provides insights into how social media can serve as a strategic tool for overcoming these challenges and building a cohesive and compelling national brand.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

In recent years, Ethiopia has encountered significant challenges in shaping and sustaining a positive nation image both locally and internationally. Political instability, ethnic conflicts, and recurring humanitarian crises have intensified negative perceptions, leading to increased scrutiny from the global community. Misinformation and bias, often amplified by social media, contribute to a fragmented understanding of Ethiopia's complex socio-political landscape, which undermines efforts to project a cohesive national identity. This problematic narrative has not only impacted Ethiopia's image abroad but has also affected the morale and self-perception of Ethiopian citizens, fostering a sense of disenfranchisement and skepticism toward national institutions.

Ethiopian citizens often find themselves misrepresented or misunderstood, with their identity perceived through narrow lenses of conflict and crisis rather than through the rich cultural, historical, and economic diversity that the nation encompasses. These prevailing issues hinder Ethiopia's aspirations in sectors such as tourism, foreign investment, and international relations, and they challenge the government and other stakeholders to reimagine a narrative that better reflects the resilience and aspirations of its people.

Therefore, a closer examination is required to understand how various forces, especially social media platforms and influencers, impact the nation's image. Investigating how Ethiopian citizens perceive and interact with these narratives will provide valuable insights for developing effective nation branding strategies. Such strategies are essential for promoting a balanced, resilient identity for Ethiopia in the face of ongoing challenges, ultimately fostering a stronger sense of national pride and unity among its citizens and a more positive image on the global stage.

Using social media for positive nation branding, remains as a gap in the strategic use platforms to reshape such misconceptions. However, gaps in inter-agency coordination and limited use of interactive social media strategies can dilute the effectiveness of these efforts. Ethiopia's approach to social media largely mirrors traditional public relations methods, focusing on one-sided communication rather than fostering interactive engagement. This limits the potential impact of social media to counter outdated perceptions and showcase Ethiopia's contemporary identity, marked by economic growth, cultural richness, and modernization. Interactive engagement would allow Ethiopia to better convey its narrative, correct misconceptions, and reach broader audiences with greater impact (Ayalew, 2017).

The country's complex socio-economic, political, and ideological landscape adds to these challenges. This is further complicated by regional disparities in digital literacy and access, which result in uneven portrayal of Ethiopia's rich cultural, social, and historical diversity.

Recent socio-political events have further highlighted the need for a cohesive and responsive national branding strategy. Following conflicts in Northern Ethiopia, the country has faced challenges from international organizations, with polarized narratives shaping public opinion both domestically and abroad. Additionally, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project has intensified regional tensions, particularly with Egypt and Sudan, which have

expressed concerns over water security. This geopolitical friction has amplified Ethiopia's challenges in managing its national image and complicates diplomatic engagement efforts.

Domestically, misinformation and polarized media coverage have further fragmented Ethiopia's image, making it difficult to present a unified narrative. The unchecked spread of negative narratives on social media has heightened the risk of damaging stereotypes, making it critical for Ethiopia to develop a strategic, coordinated approach. To effectively utilize social media for nation branding, Ethiopia must not only promote positive aspects of its identity but also actively counteract misinformation and build resilience against divisive narratives. Developing a cohesive social media strategy could enable Ethiopia to project a stronger, more consistent national image that reflects its true socio-cultural and political identity.

1.3. Objective of the Study

1.3.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study is to comprehensively investigate the use of social media in nation branding in Ethiopia.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the factors that enhance or hinder the effectiveness of social media in shaping a nation's image in the case of Ethiopia.
2. To assess the potential long-term implications of leveraging social media for countries' Nation branding campaigns.

1.4. Research Questions

The primary research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How does social media contribute to the Nation branding efforts of the country?
2. What factors influence the effectiveness of social media influencers in shaping the perception of a nation in the case of Ethiopia?
3. What are the potential implications of using social media influencers for nation branding?

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it addresses the critical role that social media plays in the modern practice of nation branding, particularly in the context of Ethiopia. By exploring the intersection of social media content creators and Ethiopia's nation branding government bodies, the study contributes valuable insights into how digital platforms can be strategically leveraged to shape and enhance a nation's image on the global stage. This research not only adds to the existing body of knowledge in public relations and strategic communication but also provides practical recommendations for policymakers, brand managers, and communication strategists in Ethiopia.

The findings of this study are expected to guide the development of more effective nation branding strategies, helping Ethiopia to present a cohesive and attractive national identity that resonates with diverse local and international audiences. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of a coordinated approach to digital communication, emphasizing the need for collaboration between governmental bodies, influencers, and other key stakeholders. By understanding the potential and pitfalls of social media in nation branding, this research offers a roadmap for maximizing the benefits of digital platforms while mitigating the risks of misinformation and fragmented messaging.

Ultimately, this study has broader implications for other developing nations facing similar challenges, offering a model for how social media can be harnessed to build and maintain a strong national brand in an increasingly digital world.

1.6. Scope of the Study

Geographical Scope: This study focuses on the role of social media in nation branding within the specific context of Ethiopia with particular attention to prominent social media influencers, content creators, and thought leaders—specifically those with a following of over 500,000 on Photo and video —Focused on showcasing Ethiopian's unique attributes. Additionally, it is essential to enable a detailed exploration of how nation branding strategies are influenced by regional, political, and socio-cultural factors within Ethiopia.

Thematic Scope: This research focuses on how social media influencers and content creators impact Ethiopia's nation branding. Key themes include content selection, collaboration strategies, and influence mechanisms that shape public perceptions. It also examines

authenticity, credibility, and audience engagement as influencers contribute to projecting Ethiopia's national identity online. By analyzing these digital storytelling efforts within Ethiopia's socio-political and cultural context, the study provides insights into social media's role in creating a cohesive and locally appealing national image.

Methodological Scope: The study utilized a qualitative approach based on grounded theory methodology. While this allows for in-depth exploration and theory generation, the scope acknowledges the depth of understanding sought over a broad representation of cases.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Nation Branding – a raise of profile, improvement of the standing, enhance knowledge about or generate admiration for the country. In the context of the particular thesis it is related to locally situated, “a brand destined to citizens”.

Social Media - The collection of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration like Facebook,, YouTube, Instagram, and Tik Tok.

Grounded theory – a qualitative research methodology that aims to generate theory from empirical data. Its unique inductive approach sets it apart from traditional deductive methods, allowing researchers to explore complex social processes and phenomena.

1.8 Limitations of the study

The study faces several limitations. First, the representativeness of the sample is restricted, as samples were drawn exclusively from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. A more diverse sample, including participants from various regions across the country, would provide a more comprehensive view of national branding activities and enhance the generalizability of findings to a broader population. Additionally, the study is limited by its timeframe, constraining its depth and the potential to expand the sample size of interviewees and viral themes for richer insights. Another limitation is that it does not address foreign audiences, as the concept of branding is confined to specific contexts relevant to the local audiences of the analyzed social media. The study is further limited by the restricted scope of languages used on these social media platforms, which may not fully capture the nation's broader branding efforts. Moreover, time constraints prevented a detailed evaluation of government plans. Finally, the research encountered challenges due to the lack of publicly available, reliable data and the limited availability of prior local studies on the topic.

CHAPTER TWO

2. RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Review

2.1.1. The Concept of Nation Branding

Defining 'nation brand' is complex, with varied interpretations among scholars. Anholt, who introduced the concept in 1996, suggests that a nation inherently has an image whether cultivated or not (Anholt, 1996). Szondi (2007) describes it as an umbrella for various sub-brands linked to national identity, while Walsh and Wiedmann highlight that it reflects the perceptions and evaluations of both internal and external stakeholders (Abdalmajid, 2019). Nation branding, as Sun and Paswan (2017) argue, applies marketing and communication techniques to present a positive national image and attract tourism and investment. This process involves aligning symbols and narratives to convey a nation's identity and goals.

In today's competitive global landscape, countries are increasingly adopting branding strategies to shape their international image, a shift from when only private enterprises engaged in profit-driven branding efforts. As Gudjonsson (2005) notes, a well-crafted nation brand helps countries gain an advantage, enhancing their image and restoring lost international credibility. The strategic approach to nation branding aims to increase a country's global impact and foster long-lasting partnerships (Dinnie, 2015). This recognition of nation branding's importance has led leaders to develop strategies to improve the nation's reputation in areas like tourism, foreign investment, exports, and skilled migration (Anholt, 2007; Kaneva, 2011).

Combining 'nation' and 'brand' concepts involves leveraging a nation's unique assets, such as culture, history, and values, to positively shape public perception. Moilanen and Rainisto (2009) view a brand as the mental image consumers form of a product, and similarly, nation branding aims to favorably influence global perceptions. According to Aaker, a brand comprises functional, emotional, relational, and strategic dimensions (Bottomley & Doyle, 1996), while Kotler & Gertner emphasize the importance of distinguishing a nation on the global map through symbols and narratives (Sena, 2012). An effective nation brand harnesses the intellectual and spiritual capital unique to each country.

While branding has its roots in marketing, it is increasingly tied to international relations and public diplomacy. Nation branding strategies aim not merely at campaigns but at creating a compelling national narrative. However, scholars like Ritson argue that countries should not be treated as brands, suggesting branding suits products more than nations (Ritson et al., 2010). In contrast, Lehtonen (2012) contends that branding techniques can be valuable but are complex due to the multidimensional nature of nations and stakeholder involvement. Ultimately, nation branding has evolved into a crucial tool for crafting a country's image, shaping how it is perceived and valued on the global stage.

2.1.2. Components of Nation Branding

The design of a nation's brand is in fact a very deep strategic initiative, which is not only focused on the surface level advertisement of a country; it is rather about the establishment of a special identity for the particular country which can set it apart from the others in the world stage (Szondi, 2010). The complex process sets in motion several interrelated aspects, each giving a particular value to the image and bully attainment of a country. In principle, this concept refers to the desired perception of the country among the international community. It manifests itself through cultural identity and heritage, economic capacity, effective governance, and diplomatic initiatives. This exploration goes into the fundamental parts that make the complex blanket of national branding stay with the underlying fact that these elements are interwoven in their intricate manner to develop a very convincing, positive, and resonant image of a nation.

Cultural identity and heritage:

Nation branding often starts with showcasing a country's cultural assets—such as art, music, literature, historical sites, and landmarks—to build a unique brand identity and differentiate from other nations. Cultural awareness and a strong brand image are essential to this strategy, as Anholt (2007) notes, with national reputations formed through the cultivation of cultural symbols and heritage.

Key elements include cultural differentiation, where nations highlight unique arts and traditions, and historical narratives that tie heritage sites and historic milestones to national identity. National symbols and traditions, such as flags and rituals, reinforce identity, while cultural diplomacy fosters international cooperation and mutual respect.

Tourism often serves as a major economic driver, boosting the nation's economy by attracting visitors to historical and cultural sites. Additionally, modern cultural expressions, including contemporary art and new media, play a role in defining a nation's brand. Adaptability and innovation in preserving heritage and embracing modernity further enhance a nation's cultural brand, strengthening its appeal globally.

Authenticity and Credibility in Nation Branding:

The realm of nation branding is much better characterized by the terms authenticity and credibility, according to Kavartzis (Kavartzis, 2004). Nation branding hinges on authenticity and credibility, as Kavartzis (2004) asserts, emphasizing the need for an accurate representation of a nation's true character. Authenticity helps build a positive international brand by aligning the country's image with the lived experiences of its citizens and real conditions. When branding diverges from reality, it risks fostering cynicism, harming the nation's global reputation.

Genuine nation branding involves a balanced portrayal of both achievements and challenges, promoting trustworthiness and relatability. Credibility, linked closely to authenticity, grows from reliability and fulfilling promises, establishing the nation as a dependable partner. Strategic communication should thus be value-driven and factual, highlighting real cultural traditions and achievements. Ultimately, authenticity and trust are the foundations of a strong, enduring national reputation, positively influencing global perceptions.

Economic Competitiveness

Economic competitiveness is a vital component of nation branding, emphasizing the role of economic strength and stability in shaping a nation's international image (Gertner & Kotler, 2017). Countries with robust economies are often viewed favorably, as factors like financial stability and growth positively influence perceptions.

Innovation and technology signal a forward-thinking attitude, boosting a nation's appeal through its commitment to cutting-edge advancements. Additionally, a business-friendly environment, characterized by transparency and low barriers, attracts both domestic and foreign enterprises. Economic competitiveness also draws investments, stimulating job creation and economic prosperity, and attracts global talent, making the nation more desirable.

Active participation in global trade relations reinforces a positive national brand by showcasing the country's integration into the global economic system. Effective strategic communication further highlights economic successes, while perceived stability offers confidence to trade and investment partners. Altogether, these factors build a compelling, economically competitive nation brand that resonates globally.

Soft Power and Diplomacy in Nation Branding

Soft power, as introduced by Nye (Colona, 2012), is essential for nation branding, enabling countries to attract admiration and influence without coercion. This gentle form of influence goes beyond military or economic power, drawing on a nation's cultural heritage, values, and diplomacy to inspire others to follow its example. Nye's work underscores the power of cultural assets, education, and collaboration as influential tools within international relations.

Through cultural diplomacy—such as exchange programs, partnerships in art and education, and sharing cultural products abroad—soft power helps nations build empathetic connections. Successful nation branding via soft power can shape favorable narratives and foster support by creating mutual understanding and respect. Nations excelling in soft power gain a positive reputation, becoming influential players in shaping global perspectives and countering negative influences.

Communication Strategies in Nation Branding:

Effective communication forms the foundation of the nation branding process, shaping a country's image globally (Fan, 2010). Governments employ various communication strategies—digital media, public relations, and advertising—to construct and promote a positive national narrative. Digital media has transformed these efforts, allowing countries to control and shape their image on platforms like social media and websites, bypassing the need for traditional media gatekeepers.

Media policy plays a crucial role, with governments carefully managing relationships with the press to ensure accurate, positive coverage. Press releases, interviews, and partnerships with influential media outlets contribute to a favorable public perception. Additionally, advertising—both traditional and digital—enhances national visibility, portraying the country's culture and economic assets in a well-rounded campaign that appeals broadly, beyond tourism.

A consistent and integrated narrative across channels is essential, helping build a cohesive, recognizable brand. Two-way communication further enhances engagement, allowing governments to interact with international audiences directly. Feedback from social media helps governments fine-tune messaging, ensuring it remains appealing and responsive to public opinion, thus strengthening the national brand over time.

Political and Social Dynamics in Nation Branding:

Political and social stability are essential for effective nation branding, as instability can damage a country's global perception, reducing tourism, investment, and appeal. Gilmore (2002) emphasizes that a stable political framework and proactive social policies that address inequality and human rights are crucial for projecting a positive, unified image. Conflicts can deter international interest, making diplomacy and resilience vital in maintaining a strong nation brand. A holistic nation branding approach that highlights strengths, mitigates weaknesses, and authentically represents the national identity fosters global recognition, attracting economic, cultural, and diplomatic opportunities.

2.1.3. The Concept of Social Media

Social media has reshaped the communication landscape, transitioning from traditional media to interactive digital platforms. Diga & Kelleher (2009) emphasize its role in changing information production and distribution, moving beyond broadcasting to emphasize audience engagement. Defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as applications facilitating user-generated content, social media fosters interactive, community-based relationships (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). This broad scope—encompassing blogs, social networks, and multimedia platforms—democratizes communication, enabling diverse voices to shape public discourse and create collaborative narratives.

Impact on Communication: Phillips and Young (2009) define traditional mass media as newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio, operating in a one-to-many model where information was shared centrally without considering audience engagement. This form of communication was asymmetrical, with limited interaction. By contrast, digital media has fundamentally transformed communication by enabling instantaneous, accessible information sharing. The internet's democratic nature supports transparency, allowing information to be shared openly and interactively. This shift has fostered symmetrical communication, promoting greater

engagement and interaction between organizations and individuals within the public sphere, redefining the impact and reach of communication activities.

Identity and Self-Presentation: Literature on digital identity formation often draws on Goffman's "presentation of self," viewing social media as a stage for curated self-presentation (Leary, 2014). Toma and Hancock's "Profile as a Pledge" concept suggests users shape profiles to align with social norms, enhancing desirability (Toma, 2010). Marwick and Boyd (2011) add that social media encourages a "global self" adaptable to diverse audiences. Overall, research highlights how users strategically craft online personas, prompting questions about the authenticity of these portrayals and their impact on offline relationships.

Social capital and the network theory Social capital, as discussed by Putnam, underscores the significance of social networks and connections for societal well-being (Putnam, 2000). In his view, these networks are essential for fostering civic engagement and the overall prosperity of community members. Reduced social capital can lead to diminished community engagement and weaken societal bonds, highlighting the importance of interpersonal relationships as a foundational element of social cohesion (Luoma-Aho, 2018).

Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe built on Putnam's framework by investigating how social media influences the formation of both bridging and bonding social capital (Ellison et al., 2007). Bridging social capital connects individuals from diverse backgrounds, facilitating broader networks and understanding, while bonding social capital strengthens ties within specific groups, such as family or close friends. Their research indicates that social media platforms enable users to cultivate both types of social capital, allowing them to connect with a wide range of people globally while also reinforcing their close relationships.

These theories interconnect, particularly in exploring how social networks operate on digital platforms. Network theory examines the structure of relationships and interactions within these networks, analyzing how information flows and influences individuals. This framework is crucial for studying patterns of connectivity in social media, as well as addressing issues such as information diffusion, online influence, and community formation. By employing both social capital and network theory, researchers can gain insights into the dynamics of online interactions and their implications for social structures.

2.1.4. Types of Social Media

Social media has come to be an integral part of our digital environment, offering a variety of wetlands of interest to users from many sectors. For instance, as portrayed by Foreman, social media networks are a multipurpose concept whose employment in effecting influence or in advertising, communication, and networking is defined by the kind of platform chosen (Foreman-Wernet, 2017). Which are:

Social networking Sites (SNS): like Facebook and LinkedIn are crucial for global connectivity, allowing users to create profiles and interact with friends, family, and like-minded individuals. They primarily facilitate networking and knowledge exchange. For organizations, SNS provide opportunities to enhance their online presence by creating dedicated pages or accounts. This engagement fosters community around the brand, increases visibility, and builds customer loyalty through personal interactions.

The interconnected nature of social networks amplifies brand messages as users share content within their circles, turning them into advocates. This organic sharing boosts reach and influence, while the multilateral network effects contribute to sustainable engagement and communication. Overall, SNS are essential for personal connection and organizational growth in the digital age.

Media Sharing Networks: such as Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube, play a pivotal role in content consumption and visual sharing on social media.

- Instagram excels in storytelling through images, making it ideal for businesses with visually appealing products.
- Snapchat leverages ephemeral content to create urgency and exclusivity, allowing users to share fleeting moments.
- YouTube enables in-depth videos, tutorials, and product demonstrations, enhancing public awareness.

These platforms encourage creativity and provide businesses with opportunities to engage their target audience. By facilitating the creation of visually compelling narratives, media sharing networks enhance brand visibility and foster customer connections in an audio-visual environment.

Professional and business Networks: Professional networks like LinkedIn are essential for career growth and business connections, allowing users to showcase qualifications and ambitions through detailed profiles. Designed for B2B interactions, LinkedIn enables companies to share expertise, build brand presence, and engage in social network marketing. Research highlights LinkedIn's role in fostering business relationships, providing professionals with tools to interact, innovate, and excel (Dabbagh et al., 2016; McKay et al., 2014).

Live streaming platforms: Live streaming platforms, such as Twitch, YouTube Live, Facebook Live, and Instagram Live, represent a significant trend in social media, allowing users to broadcast live videos to a global audience. Research highlights the role of these platforms in transforming consumption patterns and enhancing viewer engagement (Hamilton et al., 2014).

Live streaming enables content creators to interact synchronously with audiences, fostering instant feedback and community interaction. These platforms explore the dynamics that keep viewers engaged, the social interactions surrounding creators, and how these affect user perceptions and consumption behaviors (Wendt et al., 2018).

Additionally, various monetization models, including virtual gifts, sponsorships, and advertising revenue, characterize live streaming (Hu et al., 2021). Ongoing research focuses on technological affordability, user behavior, community dynamics, and economic models, illustrating how live streaming continues to reshape social interactions, content creation, and economic benefits within the social media landscape.

Audio-Based Social Platforms: Audio-based social platforms, such as Clubhouse and Twitter Spaces, represent a distinct segment of social media where audio communication replaces traditional text-based interactions. Clubhouse facilitates real-time conversations, while Twitter Spaces integrates audio into text-based discussions.

Research indicates that audio-based social media fosters intimacy and authenticity, as vocal nuances enhance personal engagement (Williams et al., 2021). The interactive nature of these platforms is essential for promoting user engagement and building virtual communities (Trepte, 2021).

As the number of audio-based platforms increases, studying their dynamics offers insights into users' communication habits, preferences, and the socio-technical challenges that arise in this evolving communication landscape.

2.1.5. Social Media Platforms

Social networking sites are powerful tools for individuals to share information, connect with others, and expand their social circles, offering significant value in their societal, cultural, and psychological impacts.

An essential aspect of Facebook is its group feature, which fosters focused discussions among members with shared interests, enhancing a sense of community. The Pages feature also allows businesses, celebrities, and organizations to engage with their audience more broadly (Wolff et al., 2018).

X (formerly Twitter): Known for its 280-character limit, X enables real-time news sharing and concise information exchange. Features like retweets, favorites, and hashtags boost content discoverability and community engagement, while lists and Moments help users follow specific conversations and events (Chai et al., 2017).

Instagram: Acquired by Facebook, Instagram is a visually-driven platform popular among youth, focusing on photo and video content with minimal text. IGTV supports longer videos, while Reels promote spontaneous short-form content, emphasizing visual storytelling and generational preferences (Instagram, 2016; Huang & Su, 2018).

Facebook: As one of the most widely-used social media platforms, Facebook connects users globally through profiles, posts, and multimedia sharing. Key features like News Feed, groups, and events foster community building and engagement. Facebook also supports business pages and marketplace functions, making it versatile for both personal and professional use. Its integration of Messenger for direct communication and robust advertising tools aids in targeted marketing, allowing brands to reach specific audiences effectively.

YouTube: serves as a hub for user-generated video content across diverse topics. With features like channel subscriptions, playlists, and live streaming, it caters to both

entertainment and education. YouTube Premium offers ad-free viewing and exclusive content for an enhanced experience.

TikTok: TikTok encourages creativity through short 15-60 second videos. The "For You Page" curates personalized content, and trends and challenges foster community. TikTok's unique format highlights user interaction and creativity, adapting to dynamic interests and preferences.

2.1.6. Social Media Influence Model: Soft Power and Nation Branding

A. Soft Power Theory

Theory Overview: Soft power theory, introduced by Joseph Nye in 1990, emphasizes the ability of a country to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction rather than coercion or payment. According to Nye, soft power is derived from a country's cultural values, political ideals, and foreign policies that resonate positively with others (Nye Jr, 2004). Social media plays a critical role in leveraging soft power by enhancing the visibility and appeal of a nation's culture and values to a global audience.

Relevance to social media and Nation Branding: Social media platforms allow nations to project their cultural values and achievements directly to international audiences, thereby enhancing their soft power. For example, a country that effectively uses social media to promote its cultural festivals, technological innovations, and social progress can attract global admiration and support. Social media also facilitates real-time engagement, allowing countries to respond quickly to global events and shape international perceptions positively. This theory helps explain how social media can be used strategically to build a nation's brand by appealing to global audiences through cultural and ideological attraction.

B. Nation Branding Theory

Theory Overview: Nation branding theory, as developed by Simon Anholt and others, focuses on how countries can manage their image and reputation to achieve specific national objectives. Anholt argues that nation branding involves creating a coherent and positive national image that reflects a country's strengths, values, and aspirations (Anholt, 2005). This approach integrates various elements, including cultural heritage, economic achievements, and social progress, to construct a compelling national narrative.

Relevance to social media and Nation Branding: Nation branding theory is highly relevant for understanding how social media can be used as a tool to build and maintain a nation's brand. Social media platforms provide a dynamic space for disseminating messages that highlight a country's unique attributes and successes. The theory emphasizes the importance of strategic communication and consistent messaging across different media channels to reinforce the nation's image. Social media enhances this process by enabling real-time updates and interactive engagement, allowing countries to adapt their branding strategies based on audience feedback and global trends (Anholt, 2010).

2.2. Social Media Contents Creators and Influencers

Social media is pushing the creativity of a new generation of content creators and influencers. It is changing how people communicate and interact with brands, businesses, and each other in their everyday lives. The creative power of human beings as catalysts, aggregates, and amplifiers mix with technological advancements to bring about an age where people can command an unprecedented amount of influence through the material they generate and distribute over diverse social media channels. This situation has not only changed the strategy of information dissemination but has also gained power over determining opinions, trending topics, and consumer aspects.

Content Creators

The digital age has transformed media, introducing the role of content creators who bridge traditional and digital media. As highlighted by Jenkins, this shift has led to increased audience participation and the rise of user-generated content, which significantly alters publication power. Content creators play a crucial role in online marketing, building brand identity and fostering connections with audiences through influencer marketing (Smith & Zook, 2024). Their authenticity and familiarity enhance brand partnerships, influencing social media dynamics (Lam et al., 2019).

Jenkins emphasizes that content creators contribute to collective intelligence, fostering community and shared knowledge (Jenkins, 2009). However, some, like Morozov, express concerns over misinformation and propaganda, underscoring the need for critical media literacy (Morozov, 2011). As content creation continues to evolve, ethical considerations, including transparency, authenticity, and accountability, are increasingly relevant. Fuchs

stresses that ethical criteria should guide content production, ensuring a moral filter in the creative process (Füss, 2018)

Influencers

Social media influencers have become pivotal figures in the virtual environment, significantly affecting trends, opinions, and consumer behavior. They leverage their online presence, particularly on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter, to shape their followers' views and preferences. The definition of "influencer" has evolved, now encompassing not only traditional celebrities but also individuals with expertise in specific areas like beauty, fashion, and travel. Influencers build their brands through curated content and selective self-representation.

According to a study by Grin, 69% of marketers find influencer marketing effective for achieving their goals (Wei & Zainullin, 2011). Authenticity and credibility are central to influencer success, fostering personal connections that build trust with audiences. This individual engagement distinguishes influencer marketing from traditional advertising, as noted by Influencity (Abad & Borbon, 2021).

As influential marketing powerhouses, social media influencers significantly impact customer buying behaviors, making them valuable allies for brands targeting relevant audiences and shaping trends. However, the evolving landscape of influencer marketing requires adherence to ethical norms and regulatory frameworks to maintain trust and transparency in the digital space.

2.3. The Role of Social Media in Nation Branding

Social media has revolutionized the way nations project their identities and manage their reputations on the global stage. It offers a powerful platform for countries to engage directly with international audiences, thus transforming traditional nation branding strategies. Here's an in-depth exploration of how social media influences nation branding:

a. Direct Communication and Global Reach

Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube provide nations with powerful tools to disseminate information and shape public perception. According to Kaplan and Haenlein, these platforms enable countries to communicate directly with international audiences, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This direct access allows for more tailored and immediate messaging, which can be crucial during times of crisis or when promoting national achievements. For instance, countries can leverage social media to highlight cultural festivals, economic opportunities, and positive social developments, thereby enhancing their global image.

b. Storytelling and Content Creation

One of the primary roles of social media in nation branding is content creation and storytelling. Countries use social media to share narratives that highlight their cultural heritage, economic opportunities, and social achievements. Through visually engaging content, such as photos, videos, and infographics, nations can showcase their unique attributes and strengths. Research by Kavoura et al. demonstrates that storytelling through social media helps nations create compelling narratives that resonate with global audiences and enhance their national image (Kavoura, 2014). For example, national tourism boards often use social media to promote travel destinations, cultural events, and local experiences, thereby attracting tourists and investors.

c. Shaping National Identity and Image

Social media plays a significant role in shaping and reinforcing national identity. As noted by Kavoura et al., nations use social media to showcase their cultural heritage, values, and unique characteristics (Kavoura, 2014). By curating content that highlights national achievements, cultural traditions, and social progress, countries can construct a favourable and coherent national narrative. This strategic use of content helps in building a positive national brand that resonates with both domestic and international audiences.

d. Engagement and Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy has been significantly transformed by social media. According to Melissen, social media platforms offer new avenues for public diplomacy, enabling nations to engage with foreign publics in a more personalized and interactive manner (Melissen, 2005).

Through social media, countries can initiate dialogues, respond to global events, and participate in discussions that influence public opinion. This engagement is crucial for building relationships and fostering mutual understanding between nations and international communities.

e. Influencer Partnerships and Digital Ambassadors

Social media influencers and digital ambassadors play a significant role in shaping national brand perceptions. These individuals, who have substantial followings, can amplify a nation's message and reach diverse audiences. By partnering with influencers who align with a country's branding objectives, nations can leverage their credibility and popularity to promote positive images and values. Studies by Dinnie highlight how influencer collaborations can enhance the effectiveness of nation branding campaigns by tapping into the influencers' established trust and engagement with their audiences (Dinnie, 2015).

f. Crisis Management and Reputation Repair

Social media also plays a critical role in crisis management and reputation repair. In times of political instability, natural disasters, or other crises, social media provides a platform for nations to communicate their responses and manage public perception. Effective use of social media can help countries mitigate negative impacts, address misinformation, and convey their commitment to resolving issues. For instance, during humanitarian crises, nations can use social media to coordinate aid efforts, provide updates, and showcase their resilience and response strategies.

g. Measurement and Analytics

Social media platforms offer valuable tools for measuring the effectiveness of nation branding efforts. Analytics and monitoring tools allow nations to track engagement metrics, sentiment analysis, and audience demographics. By analyzing this data, countries can assess the impact of their social media campaigns, identify trends, and make data-driven decisions to refine their branding strategies. Research by Mazzoleni & Schulz emphasizes the importance of using social media analytics to evaluate the success of branding initiatives and adjust strategies as needed (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999).

2.4 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory, developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960s, has emerged as a prominent qualitative research methodology that aims to generate theory from empirical data. Its unique inductive approach sets it apart from traditional deductive methods, allowing researchers to explore complex social processes and phenomena. This section examines the foundational principles of grounded theory, its methodological framework, applications across disciplines, and its strengths and limitations in qualitative research.

2.4.1 Historical Context and Development

Grounded theory originated from the desire to develop a systematic methodology that could accommodate the complexities of social phenomena. In their seminal work, "The Discovery of Grounded Theory" (1967), Glaser and Strauss criticized the dominance of quantitative methods in social research, arguing that these approaches often failed to capture the richness of human experience. They emphasized the importance of allowing theories to emerge from data rather than imposing preconceived notions onto it. This paradigm shift facilitated a more nuanced understanding of social realities and encouraged researchers to engage deeply with their subjects (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

2.4.2 Methodological Framework

Inductive Approach

The hallmark of grounded theory is its inductive nature. Researchers begin without predefined hypotheses, focusing instead on data collection and analysis to uncover underlying patterns and themes (Charmaz, 2006). This process enables the development of theories that are closely aligned with the realities of the participants' experiences.

Data Collection and Analysis

Grounded theory employs a systematic coding process, which includes open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

1. **Open Coding:** This initial stage involves identifying and labeling concepts within the data.
2. **Axial Coding:** Researchers then connect these concepts, exploring relationships and categories.
3. **Selective Coding:** Finally, a central category is identified, integrating the various elements into a cohesive theory.

This iterative process allows researchers to refine their understanding as they engage with the data, fostering a continuous dialogue between theory and empirical evidence.

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling, a distinctive feature of grounded theory, involves collecting data based on emerging concepts and categories. Researchers seek out participants who can provide additional insights into these developing ideas, ensuring that the resulting theory is comprehensive and grounded in diverse experiences (Draucker et al., 2007).

Saturation

Saturation is achieved when no new themes or concepts emerge from the data, indicating that the theory has reached a level of depth and robustness (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process ensures that researchers do not stop data collection prematurely, leading to well-developed and credible theories.

2.4.3 Applications of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory has found widespread application across various disciplines, including sociology, nursing, education, and organizational studies. Its flexibility allows researchers to explore diverse phenomena, from understanding patient experiences in healthcare (Holloway & Galvin, 2016) to investigating organizational change processes (Cummings & Worley, 2015).

In education, grounded theory has been employed to examine teacher-student interactions and the dynamics of classroom environments (Becker & Geer, 1957). In nursing, researchers have utilized grounded theory to understand the complexities of patient care and the relationships

between healthcare providers and patients (Simmons, 2010). These diverse applications demonstrate the method's versatility and its ability to uncover rich, context-specific insights.

Strengths of Grounded Theory

One of the primary strengths of grounded theory is its capacity to generate new theories that are deeply rooted in empirical data. This approach enhances the relevance and applicability of research findings, as theories developed through grounded theory often resonate with the lived experiences of participants (Charmaz, 2006).

Additionally, the iterative nature of data collection and analysis promotes a rich, nuanced understanding of social phenomena, allowing researchers to explore the complexities of human behavior and interactions (Draucker et al., 2007). The emphasis on participant perspectives fosters a more inclusive research process, ensuring that diverse voices are represented in the resulting theories.

Limitations of Grounded Theory

Despite its strengths, grounded theory also has limitations. The time-consuming nature of the iterative process can be a significant challenge, particularly for researchers with limited resources (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Additionally, the quality of the resulting theory heavily relies on the researcher's skill in data analysis and coding. Inexperienced researchers may struggle to effectively navigate the complexities of grounded theory, leading to superficial or poorly developed theories.

Moreover, the context-specific nature of grounded theory may limit the generalizability of findings. While the resulting theories are rich and nuanced, they may not be applicable across different settings or populations (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This raises important questions about the transferability of grounded theories and their relevance to broader contexts.

In conclusion, the grounded theory approach guided both the data collection and analysis in this study, ensuring that insights into Ethiopia's nation branding through social media were derived directly from the participants' experiences and content patterns observed in the digital landscape. By using purposive sampling to select key stakeholders, including influencers, content creators, and public relations professionals, and analyzing specific viral topics, the study rooted itself in the real-world dynamics of social media interactions.

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts enabled the identification of common perspectives and strategies among stakeholders, while a systematic coding framework for content analysis allowed for an inductive exploration of messaging strategies, sentiment, and engagement patterns. Quantitative measures, like frequency and engagement levels, complemented qualitative insights, adding depth to the emerging categories and themes. This integration of grounded theory into both data collection and analysis enabled the development of nuanced, data-driven insights into how social media shapes and reflects Ethiopia's national identity, ensuring that the findings are empirically grounded and contextually relevant.

2.5 Review of local Studies

Research on nation branding in Ethiopia has been limited, with much of the scholarship coming from non-Ethiopian researchers who examine the field through an external lens. and lack studies that explore the role of social media for nation branding in ethiopia. However, few studies related to nation branding in Ethiopia have been explored in this section Getu Kebede Kidane’s study, ‘*Branding Ethiopia: Opportunities and Challenges, (2010)*’ takes a focused look at how Ethiopia might leverage nation branding to spur economic growth and alleviate poverty. Ethiopia’s rich history, cultural diversity, and unique biodiversity are often overshadowed globally by past images of poverty, famine, and conflict. Kidane argues that a strategic nation branding approach could reshape this narrative, enhancing Ethiopia’s attractiveness for foreign direct investment (FDI), tourism, and trade. The study employs frameworks such as SWOT analysis, Porter’s Diamond Model, and Anholt’s Nation Brand Hexagon to evaluate Ethiopia’s distinctive resources, proposing ways to elevate these assets on the international stage while addressing domestic obstacles, including infrastructure challenges and political complexities.

Drawing on successful branding efforts from countries like Spain and New Zealand, the thesis underscores that a cohesive, positive brand can have substantial economic benefits. For instance, New Zealand’s “100% Pure” campaign significantly boosted tourism, and Spain’s rebranding after the Franco era helped it attract substantial foreign investment. Ethiopia can similarly reframe its narrative by promoting its historical sites, natural beauty, and unique culture, aligning its branding with well-defined goals in tourism, export, and investment. Kidane suggests that the Ethiopian government could drive this process by forming a dedicated nation branding committee, ensuring consistent messaging across sectors and

fostering collaboration among government bodies, private stakeholders, and international partners.

Ultimately, Kidane's research offers a strategic roadmap for Ethiopian policymakers, highlighting the potential of nation branding as a tool for economic development and poverty reduction. By addressing Ethiopia's internal and external branding challenges and building a cohesive national image, the country could become a more attractive destination for investors, tourists, and trade partners. Kidane's work emphasizes that nation branding is more than just marketing; it's a means of actively shaping Ethiopia's place in the global economy, with the potential to foster long-term, sustainable growth.

The other local study of Ethiopia's nation branding highlights challenges, opportunities, and the evolving role of digital diplomacy (DD) as a central tool. Ethiopia's efforts to shape its international image face multiple hurdles, especially due to limited technological adoption and resources, as well as a lack of cohesive digital strategies. Hibamo Ayalew's (2017) research emphasizes the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) reliance on traditional, often monologist communication. This approach hampers active engagement with global audiences, limiting Ethiopia's capacity to leverage digital diplomacy for image-building and soft power enhancement.

The concept of nation branding (NB) involves applying marketing techniques to build a favorable international reputation. Ethiopia's approach has historically been limited by resource constraints and the challenges associated with digital inclusion. Hibamo's study suggests that Ethiopia's current framework is underdeveloped compared to countries with more extensive digital outreach and collaboration strategies, which use platforms like social media to facilitate public dialogue. Ethiopia's MFA, primarily tasked with international engagement, has yet to fully integrate these tools into its branding efforts, which are crucial for addressing global misconceptions and promoting a more nuanced national identity.

Additionally, Ethiopia's digital diplomacy faces specific socio-political challenges. Given the nation's complex historical and political context, Ethiopia's image is sometimes overshadowed by past crises. Nation branding, supported by digital diplomacy, could offer a pathway to redefine Ethiopia's image and highlight its cultural heritage, economic potential

and strategic value. However, Hibamo's analysis reveals that realizing this vision requires a substantial shift toward open, dialogic, and technologically equipped diplomatic practices.

The study by Sisay Hagos, titled '*Assessing the Perceptions and Challenges of the New Ethiopian Tourism Brand "Ethiopia: Land of Origins" (2020) for Country Branding*', provides an in-depth examination of Ethiopia's nation branding strategies within its tourism sector. This study, presented for a Master of Arts degree in Tourism Development and Management, focuses on understanding the stakeholders' perceptions, challenges, and contributions related to promoting Ethiopia's tourism brand, launched in 2016. The thesis discusses how the new brand, '*Ethiopia: Land of Origins*', has influenced the tourism industry's perception both domestically and internationally, considering the significant role it could play in improving Ethiopia's tourism performance and its image on the global stage.

Hagos contextualizes the importance of nation branding within the Ethiopian landscape by detailing the challenges that Ethiopia has historically faced in branding and promoting its unique cultural, natural, and historical assets. The thesis makes clear that Ethiopia's brand image has been hindered by past political and economic instability. The study highlights how stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector representatives, and local tourism businesses, are integral to the success of the nation brand. However, it also points out that a lack of collaboration among these stakeholders has hampered cohesive brand promotion efforts. By using quantitative methods, including surveys distributed to tourism stakeholders and visitors, and qualitative interviews, Hagos explores the extent to which stakeholders are aligned with the goals of the new brand and where significant challenges still exist.

The findings of this research provide valuable insights into Ethiopia's tourism branding landscape. Hagos reveals that although the '*Land of Origins*' brand has brought attention to Ethiopia's historical depth and cultural wealth, there is an uneven awareness and engagement level among stakeholders, limiting the brand's impact. This thesis also identifies specific barriers to effective brand promotion, such as insufficient infrastructure, limited financial resources, and lack of professional skills within the tourism sector. Additionally, Hagos discusses the discrepancies between the tourism experiences in urban centers, like Addis Ababa, and rural areas, where infrastructure and service quality are often inadequate to support international tourism.

The thesis contributes to the field by proposing actionable strategies to strengthen Ethiopia's tourism brand, focusing on enhanced stakeholder collaboration and strategic marketing approaches. It suggests that increased training for tourism service providers and improved alignment between the Ethiopian Tourism Organization (ETO) and local tourism entities could foster a more coherent national brand message. Furthermore, the research implies that Ethiopia's tourism sector could benefit from adopting best practices in nation branding, as observed in other African countries like Kenya and Rwanda.

In summary, Sisay Hagos's thesis effectively presents a nuanced examination of Ethiopia's tourism brand '*Ethiopia: Land of Origins*', evaluating its achievements and identifying areas for improvement. The research underscores the potential of nation branding as a strategic tool for economic development in Ethiopia, though it also highlights significant internal challenges that must be addressed to enhance the brand's efficacy and appeal.

2.6 Empirical Review

The empirical analysis of social media's role in nation branding across different countries reveals a range of successes, challenges, and evolving strategies. For example, South Korea's strategic embrace of social media through the "Hallyu" or Korean Wave exemplifies effective nation branding. By leveraging platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, South Korea has successfully promoted its cultural exports, including K-pop and Korean drama, to a global audience. Research by Kim and Lee underscores how social media has enabled South Korea to enhance its soft power, build a positive national image, and attract international tourism and investment (Han et al., 2018). The country's ability to harness the viral nature of social media has created a powerful narrative that extends beyond traditional diplomatic channels.

Similarly, India's "Incredible India" campaign has utilized social media to promote its diverse cultural heritage and tourist destinations. According to Reddy, the campaign employed a multifaceted approach, using platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to engage with both domestic and international audiences (Reddy et al., 2021). This digital strategy has helped counter negative stereotypes and reposition India as a vibrant and attractive destination for tourism and business. The campaign's success highlights the effectiveness of social media in crafting and disseminating a positive national image.

However, the use of social media in nation branding is not without its challenges. The case of Myanmar, for instance, demonstrates the darker side of social media influence. During the Rohingya crisis in 2018, misinformation and hate speech spread rapidly on platforms such as Facebook, exacerbating ethnic tensions and undermining the country's international image (Elsayed, 2020; Maung & Win, 2019). This example illustrates how social media can be a double-edged sword, with the potential to both enhance and damage a nation's reputation depending on how it is managed.

In the context of Ethiopia, social media has played a complex role in nation branding. On one hand, platforms like Twitter and Facebook have been used to highlight Ethiopia's rich cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and socio-economic achievements. For instance, campaigns promoting Ethiopia's diverse cultural festivals and historical sites have contributed to a positive national image and increased global awareness (Ayalew, 2017). On the other hand, Ethiopia has faced significant challenges, particularly related to recent political conflicts and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute with Egypt and Sudan. Social media has been a battleground for these geopolitical issues, with various narratives influencing public perceptions both domestically and internationally. The GERD dispute, in particular, has seen social media used to rally nationalistic sentiments and counter international criticisms, illustrating the platform's role in shaping and reflecting national identity in times of crisis.

The experiences of these countries, including Ethiopia, highlight the multifaceted role of social media in nation branding. Social media offers opportunities for nations to project their image and engage with a global audience, but it also requires careful management to navigate the potential risks and challenges associated with misinformation and negative sentiment. The ongoing evolution of digital platforms continues to shape how nations approach their branding strategies, underscoring the importance of adapting to the rapidly changing media landscape.

Summary of reviews

The literature review in this study lays a critical foundation by examining the role of social media in Ethiopia's nation branding, rooted in key theoretical concepts and empirical research. It highlights the significance of nation branding in shaping global perceptions through strategic communication—an effort essential for Ethiopia to build a positive international image, especially in addressing stereotypes of poverty and conflict. Core theories, like Anholt's on intrinsic national image and Dinnie and Gudjonsson's on credibility in nation branding, emphasize the need for proactive branding, a strategy increasingly mediated by social media.

Social media's power to create and disseminate narratives in real time is explored, with scholars such as Kaplan and Haenlein noting its capacity to bridge communication gaps and amplify a nation's soft power. Empirical cases, including South Korea's "Hallyu" and India's "Incredible India," demonstrate the potential for platforms and influencers to reshape global perceptions. Yet, the review acknowledges challenges—like political instability and limited technological access—that Ethiopia faces in implementing these strategies.

In summary, the literature review substantiates the study's focus on social media as a transformative tool in Ethiopia's nation branding strategy. It provides theoretical and empirical insights into the ways digital platforms can influence national identity, while also identifying the practical challenges Ethiopia faces in implementing a cohesive branding strategy through social media. This groundwork emphasizes the importance of a unified approach involving government agencies, influencers, and stakeholders to promote Ethiopia's image effectively on local and the global stage.

CHAPTER THREE

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Philosophy

This study adopts an interpretive research philosophy, which aligns with grounded theory's focus on understanding social phenomena through the perspectives of those directly involved. In examining the role of social media in nation branding, interpretivism facilitates a nuanced exploration of how influencers, content creators, and other stakeholders perceive and contribute to the construction of national identity. Grounded theory emphasizes the importance of allowing theories to emerge from empirical data, making it particularly suitable for investigating the subjective meanings individuals assign to their experiences.

While positivist philosophy asserts that reality is objective and can be measured as it occurs, the interpretive standpoint, as embraced by grounded theory, acknowledges that people actively construct meaning in their social contexts. This subjectivity is crucial in understanding the processes involved in national branding, particularly as influencers and stakeholders engage in diverse and often conflicting narratives. By adopting an interpretive approach, this study can delve into the complexities of how social media interactions shape and reflect Ethiopia's national image, capturing the varied and subjective experiences that inform the construction of national identity. This perspective allows for the development of grounded theories that are deeply rooted in the lived experiences of individuals, thus enriching the understanding of the dynamics of nation branding in the digital age.

3.2. Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how social media influences nation branding. Qualitative research is particularly suited for capturing the lived experiences and perceptions of social media influencers and content creators, allowing for a rich and nuanced examination of the factors that shape Ethiopia's national image on digital platforms.

The study utilized semi-structured interviews and content analysis as primary methods, both of which are integral to grounded theory's iterative and exploratory nature. Semi-structured interviews enabled a flexible dialogue with key stakeholders involved in social media-driven nation branding efforts, facilitating open-ended responses that allow participants to share their insights in their own words. This method is crucial for identifying themes and patterns that emerge from the data, a core principle of grounded theory.

Additionally, content analysis was employed to examine social media posts, campaigns, and interactions, helping to identify recurring themes and narratives related to Ethiopia's nation branding. By analyzing the content generated within these digital spaces, the study captures the interplay between stakeholder experiences and the broader cultural context. This combination of qualitative methods fosters a comprehensive analysis of the role of social media in shaping national identity, adhering to grounded theory's goal of developing theories that are deeply rooted in the empirical realities of participants. Ultimately, this approach enhances the understanding of how social media influences the construction of national identity, revealing the complex, context-dependent processes at play.

3.3. Research Design

The research design for this study adopts a descriptive design approach, focusing on Ethiopia's nation branding through social media. This approach facilitates an exploration of the specific context of Ethiopia, allowing for detailed insights into how social media strategies and practices influence national image and branding efforts. By emphasizing descriptive analysis, the study aims to capture the nuances of social media interactions and their implications for nation branding.

The descriptive design is particularly effective for examining complex and context-specific phenomena, making it ideal for understanding the multifaceted role of social media in nation branding. This method enables the researcher to gather rich, qualitative data that reflects the lived experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders involved in social media-driven nation branding initiatives. By systematically describing these interactions and strategies, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital platforms shape and reflect Ethiopia's national identity. Ultimately, this descriptive design approach provides a valuable

framework for analyzing the intricate dynamics of social media's impact on nation branding within the Ethiopian context.

3.4. Target Population

Social Media Influencers: Individuals with large followings on platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook (generally over 500,000 followers) on Facebook/Instagram, YouTube and Tik Tok.

Content Creators: Both professional and amateur bloggers, vloggers, and multimedia creators who produce content related to Ethiopian culture, tourism, and national identity on Facebook/Instagram, YouTube and Tik Tok.

Marketing and Public Relations Professionals: Experts involved in the strategic planning and execution of nation branding campaigns. Their role is essential in understanding the goals, strategies, and outcomes of social media initiatives that aim to enhance Ethiopia's international image.

Target audience: The branding efforts of the country aim to shape the perceptions of its own citizens, in this study case targeting the local Ethiopian audience.

3.5. Sampling Method

The study employs purposive sampling to ensure the selection of highly relevant participants, a method that aligns well with grounded theory's focus on gathering rich, contextually relevant data. This sampling approach targets specific individuals who are directly involved in or significantly influence Ethiopia's nation branding through social media, allowing for the exploration of diverse perspectives and experiences.

The sample comprises social media influencers with over 500,000 followers, content creators who produce material related to Ethiopia's culture and identity, and marketing and public relations professionals engaged in nation branding campaigns. In-depth interviews were conducted with 17 participants, following a rigorous sampling procedure that prioritizes the experiences of key stakeholders. This aligns with grounded theory's emphasis on theoretical sampling, which seeks participants who can provide valuable insights into the emerging categories and themes of the research.

In addition to interviews, content analysis under four specific viral topics that have relation to national imaging to Ethiopia was performed on a minimum of 500 social media posts and comments. This included examining content from official government accounts, influencers, and general users participating in discussions about the themes. The sampling process was conducted in an unbiased manner, considering the intensity and diversity of the viral topics and evaluating the diffusion of content through various digital channels.

3.6. Data Collection Methods

3.6.1. In-depth Interview

The in-depth interviews were conducted with a targeted sample of key stakeholders to gather detailed insights into the role of social media in nation branding, aligning with grounded theory's emphasis on understanding participants' perspectives. Approximately seven social media influencers, each with followings exceeding 500,000 on major platforms such as YouTube, Tik Tok, and Instagram/Facebook, were interviewed. This selection allows for the exploration of their impact on shaping Ethiopia's national image, providing context-specific insights that are essential for grounded theory development.

Additionally, around six content creators—including bloggers, vloggers, and multimedia producers—were interviewed to investigate how their content contributes to the country's branding efforts. Their experiences can reveal underlying patterns and themes related to the construction of national identity through social media. The inclusion of four marketing and public relations professionals involved in strategic nation branding campaigns further the data set by providing insights into the objectives and strategies guiding these initiatives.

Each interview was designed to last between 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted in-person and virtually, depending on participant availability. The open-ended nature of the interviews encourages participants to share their experiences and insights freely, allowing for the emergence of themes that can inform the development of grounded theories.

3.6.2. Qualitative Content Analysis

In addition to interviews, the study utilized content analysis focused on four specific viral topics related to Ethiopia's national imaging, examining a minimum of 500 social media posts

and comments. This included content from official government accounts, influencers, and general users engaged in discussions about these themes.

By allowing for the exploration of key themes that emerge from real-world social media interactions, ensuring that findings are rooted in actual discourse rather than pre-existing theories. The unbiased sampling process considered the intensity and diversity of the viral topics, reflecting grounded theory's iterative nature.

By evaluating the diffusion of content across various digital channels, the analysis captures audience engagement and response, ultimately providing nuanced insights into how these viral discussions shape and reflect Ethiopia's national identity.

3.7. Data Analysis Methods

The analysis of data in this study utilized qualitative methods tailored to the two primary data collection approaches: in-depth interviews and content analysis.

1. **Thematic Analysis for In-Depth Interviews:** The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, by facilitating the identification and coding of key themes and patterns within the interview data. This method allowed for an inductive analysis, where codes were derived directly from the data.

By focusing on the stakeholders' perspectives, strategies, and experiences regarding social media's role in nation branding, thematic analysis helped uncover commonalities and nuances in their responses. Recurring themes were organized into categories, revealing overarching patterns and insights that are critical for developing grounded theories. This process of systematic coding and categorization ensures that the analysis remains closely tied to the lived experiences of the participants, ultimately enriching the understanding of how social media influences Ethiopia's national image.

2. **Content Analysis for Social Media Posts:** For the content analysis of social media posts, a systematic coding framework was developed to categorize and quantify content related to Ethiopia's nation branding. This framework involved coding posts under specific viral topics based on themes such as messaging strategies, sentiment, and engagement metrics, allowing for an inductive approach that lets patterns emerge

from the data itself. The analysis included evaluating the frequency and context of key terms and hashtags, assessing their impact and relevance to the nation's branding efforts.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations for this study were prioritized informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants. Before interviews, all participants received clear information about the study's purpose and procedures and provided written consent, with an understanding that participation is voluntary and they may withdraw at any time. Personal data was anonymized to protect privacy, and only authorized personnel were accessing the data. The research adhered to transparency and integrity in reporting findings and complied with the ethical guidelines set by Addis Ababa University's review board. Additionally, a formal letter of approval from Addis Ababa University was obtained to ensure compliance with institutional ethical standards. These measures ensure that the study upholds high ethical standards and respects participants' rights.

CHAPTER FOUR

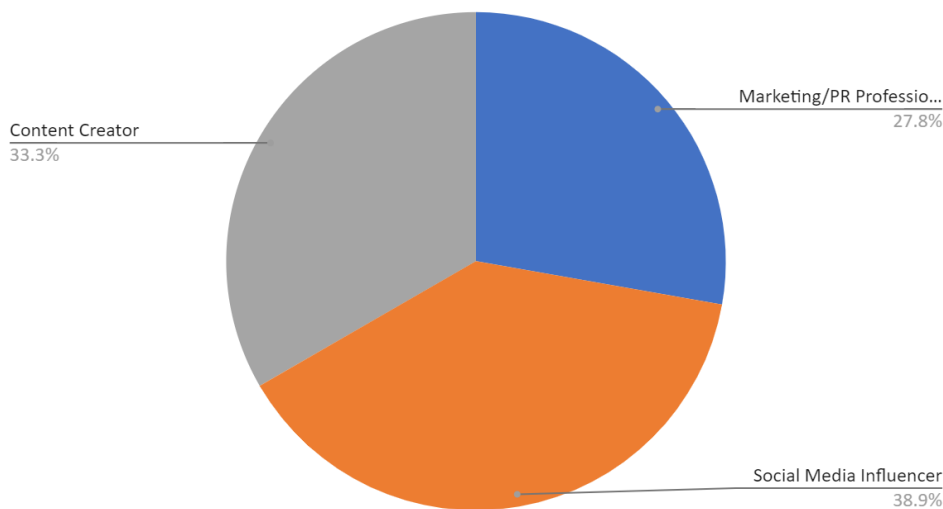
4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of how social media influencers and content creators contribute to Ethiopia’s nation branding efforts. The analysis is based on interviews conducted with a diverse group of informants, including travel bloggers, PR professionals, and digital marketing experts. These informants were selected to provide a comprehensive overview of the strategies employed in aligning content with national branding objectives.

In this section, we explore how social media influencers and content creators strategically align their content with Ethiopia’s nation branding objectives. This analysis examines the methods and approaches used by influencers to enhance Ethiopia’s national image, reflecting their roles in shaping public perception and promoting cultural identity.

The informants include 17 individuals representing various sectors related to tourism, culture, and digital marketing. The age range of the informants is primarily between 25 and 40 years, with a majority possessing a higher education background in fields such as communications, marketing, and cultural studies.

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4.1. Content Strategies and Nation Branding

In this section, we explore how social media influencers and content creators strategically align their content with Ethiopia's nation branding objectives. This analysis examines the methods and approaches used by influencers to enhance Ethiopia's national image, reflecting their roles in shaping public perception and promoting cultural identity.

4.1.1. Strategic Alignment with Nation Branding Objectives

Social media influencers employ a variety of strategies to align their content with Ethiopia's nation branding goals. Each influencer's approach varies depending on their platform, audience, and personal style, yet common themes emerge in their alignment with nation branding objectives. For instance, Interview Thirteen, a travel blogger, (instagram @ethiopia_culture_tours conducted on August 12, 2024), a travel blogger with a substantial following on Instagram, emphasizes Ethiopia's natural beauty and cultural heritage. He notes, *"I primarily work as a travel blogger, sharing my experiences exploring various parts of Ethiopia. I engage with my audience through visually compelling content, such as photos and videos, and by providing travel tips, cultural insights, and personal anecdotes."* His content showcases Ethiopia's diverse landscapes, aligning with the broader nation branding goal of highlighting the country's unique attributes.

Similarly, Interview Fourteenth 'Visit Ethiopia' initiative (conducted on August 14, 2024), a PR Manager for a tourism board, focuses on promoting both well-known and hidden attractions across Ethiopia. She states, *"As a PR Manager for a Tourism Board, my primary role involves crafting and executing social media campaigns to promote tourism in Ethiopia."* Her strategic use of Facebook to share travel tips and promotional content aligns closely with the tourism board's objectives, enhancing Ethiopia's image as a vibrant and appealing destination. Her campaigns, such as the 'Discover Ethiopia' initiative, incorporate elements like local traditions and historical landmarks, supporting the nation branding strategy of presenting an authentic and multifaceted image of Ethiopia.

4.1.2. Content Selection and Highlighting Key Aspects

Influencers strategically select content that reflects key aspects of Ethiopian culture and identity. For instance, Interview Fifteenth (Instagram @akush.travel conducted on August 15, 2024), a travel blogger and influencer, highlights lesser-known travel destinations. He explains, *“My content helps to highlight the beauty and uniqueness of Ethiopia’s regions, helping to promote a positive image of the country as a tourist destination.”* By focusing on hidden gems, he diversifies the image of Ethiopia presented to the public, aligning with the nation's branding objective of showcasing the country’s wide-ranging attractions.

Sixth Interviewee (conducted on August 16, 2024), a TikTok creator, uses current trends to present Ethiopian dance and music in a modern format. He shares, *“I create engaging short videos about Ethiopian dance and music, using popular trends and challenges to connect with my audience.”* This approach not only promotes Ethiopia’s cultural heritage but also reaches a younger, global audience. His incorporation of traditional dance moves into viral challenges resonates with contemporary audiences, reinforcing Ethiopia’s cultural identity while aligning with nation branding goals.

4.1.3. Integration with Nation Branding Themes

Effective content strategies integrate nation branding themes that resonate with Ethiopia’s strategic objectives. Seventeenth Interviewee (conducted on August 17, 2024), a digital marketing expert, focuses on Ethiopian innovation and technological advancements. He notes, *“I manage and strategize digital campaigns for various clients, including nation branding projects. One impactful campaign I led was the 'Ethiopian Innovation Spotlight,' which featured Ethiopian startups and technological advancements.”* This campaign supports the branding objective of positioning Ethiopia as a hub of innovation, reflecting a strategic emphasis on the country’s progress and potential.

Influencers often collaborate with local businesses, cultural institutions, and tourism boards to ensure that their content aligns with national branding themes. Eighth Interviewee (YouTube @HarambeTube, conducted on August 18, 2024), highlights this collaboration, stating, *“I use data-driven insights to tailor content that appeals to both domestic and international audiences.”* By integrating feedback from stakeholders, influencers create

content that supports the nation branding strategy and effectively communicates Ethiopia's unique value propositions.

4.2. The role of social media for Ethiopia's National branding

This section examines the influence of social media influencers and content creators on shaping and enhancing Ethiopia's national image. By analyzing the effectiveness and impact of their content, we gain insights into how these digital efforts contribute to the broader nation branding objectives and affect public perceptions of Ethiopia.

4.2.1. Contribution to National Image Enhancement

Social media influencers play a significant role in enhancing Ethiopia's national image by showcasing the country's cultural richness and natural beauty. Seventh Interviewee (instagram @ethiopian.wildlife conducted on August 09, 2024), a prominent travel blogger, highlights this impact through his Instagram content. He explains, *"My content helps to highlight the positive aspects of Ethiopia, especially its natural beauty and cultural heritage. By showcasing lesser-known destinations and telling the stories of the people I meet, I aim to challenge stereotypes and present a more nuanced and vibrant image of Ethiopia to the world."* His focus on diverse landscapes and personal anecdotes contributes to a more comprehensive and appealing portrayal of Ethiopia.

Fifth Interviewee (conducted on August 8, 2024), as a PR Manager, similarly contributes to enhancing Ethiopia's image through targeted campaigns. She notes, *"One significant campaign was 'Discover Ethiopia,' which featured a series of posts and live sessions about different regions of the country."* This initiative not only highlighted well-known landmarks but also uncovered hidden gems, resulting in increased interest and positive public perception. Her approach underscores the importance of presenting both familiar and lesser-known aspects of Ethiopia to build a well-rounded national image.

4.2.2. Measurable Impact and Effectiveness

The effectiveness of content in shaping Ethiopia's national image is measured through various metrics, including engagement rates, audience feedback, and direct impacts on tourism. For instance, Fifteenth Interviewee (Instagram @akush.travel conducted on August 19, 2024), successful campaign on lesser-known destinations led to a noticeable increase in

interest and tourism in those areas. He observes, “*One successful campaign featured a series on Ethiopia’s lesser-known travel destinations, which significantly increased interest and tourism in those areas.*” This demonstrates how targeted content can directly influence public interest and travel behavior.

Influencers also track metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and follower growth to gauge their content’s impact. Sixth Interviewee (conducted on August 17, 2024), a TikTok creator, emphasizes this with his focus on Ethiopian dance and music. He states, “*I track effectiveness through metrics such as views, likes, and shares, as well as audience comments that reflect the impact and reach of the videos.*” The positive feedback and increased engagement on his posts reflect a successful contribution to enhancing Ethiopia’s cultural image, particularly among younger, global audiences.

4.2.3. Feedback and Public Perception

Audience feedback provides valuable insights into how content influences perceptions of Ethiopia. Influencers frequently receive positive responses from followers who express newfound interest in Ethiopian culture and tourism. Thirteenth interviewee, a travel blogger, (Instagram @ethiopia_culture_tours conducted on August 12, 2024), shares, “*The feedback has been generally positive, with many appreciating the professional and detailed approach to showcasing Ethiopia’s strengths.*” This feedback indicates that well-crafted content can effectively shift public perception and build a positive image of Ethiopia’s achievements and cultural heritage.

However, challenges such as overcoming negative stereotypes and addressing misinformation also impact how content influences national image. Interviewee Eighteenth (YouTube @HarambeTube conducted on August 18, 2024), a cultural historian and blogger, acknowledges these challenges: “*One of the biggest challenges is overcoming the negative stereotypes that some people still associate with Ethiopia.*” Despite these obstacles, the overall positive feedback and increased interest in Ethiopia’s culture and tourism underscore the significant impact that social media content has on shaping and enhancing the country’s national image.

4.3. Audience Engagement and Feedback

This section explores how social media influencers and content creators engage with their audiences and the nature of the feedback they receive. Understanding audience engagement and feedback is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of content in shaping Ethiopia's national image and identifying areas for improvement.

4.3.1. Strategies for Audience Engagement

Social media influencers employ various strategies to engage their audiences effectively. These strategies often include interactive content, real-time updates, and personalized responses. Fourth Interviewee (YouTube @jwalkingtour conducted on August 12, 2024), a travel YouTuber, emphasizes the importance of interactive engagement, stating, *“I engage with my audience through visually compelling content, such as photos and videos, and by providing travel tips, cultural insights, and personal anecdotes. I also host live Q&A sessions to interact directly with my followers.”* His approach of using live sessions and engaging content helps maintain a dynamic interaction with his audience, enhancing their connection with Ethiopian culture and travel experiences.

Interview Fourteenth (conducted on August 14, 2024), PR Manager for a Tourism Board, uses a different approach by integrating audience feedback into her content strategy. She explains, *“We focus on showcasing diverse elements such as historical sites, cultural festivals, and traditional cuisine, ensuring a well-rounded representation of Ethiopia.”* By considering audience interests and feedback, She aligns her content with the evolving preferences of potential tourists, thus fostering a more engaging and relevant experience.

4.3.2. Measuring Engagement and Effectiveness

The effectiveness of audience engagement is measured through various metrics, including likes, comments, shares, and direct messages. Influencers often analyze these metrics to assess the impact of their content. Interview Fifteenth, (Instagram @akush.travel conducted on August 15, 2024) notes, *“I track engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and direct messages from followers who express interest in visiting Ethiopia.”* This method of tracking engagement provides insights into how well content resonates with audiences and can indicate the success of efforts to promote Ethiopian tourism and culture.

Additionally, feedback from followers plays a crucial role in evaluating content effectiveness. Interview Sixth (conducted on August 05, 2024), a TikTok creator, shares, “*Positive feedback includes excitement about the unique presentation of Ethiopian dance and music, with viewers expressing interest in learning more.*” Such feedback highlights the success of his content in sparking interest and curiosity about Ethiopian culture among a global audience.

4.3.3. Analyzing Feedback for Content Improvement

Feedback from audiences often includes suggestions for improvement and new content ideas. This feedback can be instrumental in refining content strategies and addressing any shortcomings. Interview Eighteenth (YouTube @HarambeTube conducted on August 18, 2024), a cultural historian, reflects on the constructive feedback he receives: “*The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with viewers expressing gratitude for the in-depth historical content and gaining a greater appreciation for Ethiopia’s past.*” However, he also acknowledges the challenge of limited reach compared to entertainment-focused content, suggesting a need for more innovative approaches to engage a wider audience.

Influencers and content creators use feedback to adapt and enhance their content. Interview Seventeenth (conducted on August 17, 2024), a digital marketing expert, highlights this process: “*We analyze audience sentiment and feedback to assess how well the content is resonating and impacting perceptions of Ethiopia.*” By incorporating audience suggestions and addressing any negative feedback, content creators can improve their engagement strategies and better align with audience expectations.

4.3.4. Challenges in Audience Engagement

Despite the successes, there are challenges in maintaining effective audience engagement. Common issues include dealing with negative comments, misinformation, and managing the diverse interests of a broad audience. Interview Fifteenth (Instagram @akush.travel conducted on August 19, 2024) points out, “*A challenge is dealing with misinformation about travel safety and access, which can impact potential visitors’ perceptions.*” Addressing these challenges requires careful content management and proactive communication strategies to maintain a positive engagement experience.

4.4. Challenges in Promoting National Image

Promoting a nation's image through social media and content creation comes with a unique set of challenges. These challenges can impact the effectiveness of efforts to shape and enhance Ethiopia's national image. This section explores the key obstacles faced by social media influencers and content creators and discusses potential strategies to overcome them.

4.4.1. Overcoming Stereotypes and Misconceptions

One of the significant challenges is addressing and overcoming negative stereotypes and misconceptions associated with Ethiopia. Thirteenth Interviewee (instagram @ethiopia_culture_tours, conducted on August 12, 2024), a travel blogger, notes, *“One of the biggest challenges is overcoming the negative stereotypes that some people still associate with Ethiopia.”* These stereotypes can hinder the ability to present a positive and accurate image of the country. To combat this, Seventeenth Interviewee focuses on highlighting Ethiopia’s diverse landscapes and cultural richness, aiming to shift perceptions through compelling and authentic content.

Similarly, Fourteenth Interviewee (conducted on August 14, 2024), PR Manager for a Tourism Board, faces difficulties in dispelling misconceptions about Ethiopia. She explains, *“Challenges include overcoming misconceptions about Ethiopia and dealing with negative comments or misinformation.”* Effective strategies to address these issues include proactively correcting misinformation, emphasizing positive stories, and leveraging partnerships with local experts and influencers to reinforce a more accurate narrative.

4.4.2. Securing Support and Recognition

Another challenge is obtaining adequate support and recognition from official bodies and tourism organizations. Influencers often encounter difficulties in securing collaboration opportunities and endorsements that could enhance the reach and impact of their content. Seventeenth Interviewee (conducted on August 17, 2024), a digital marketing expert, reflects on this issue: *“Challenges include navigating cultural sensitivities and managing negative perceptions that may arise from misinformation or misrepresentations.”* This lack of support can limit the effectiveness of promotional efforts and requires influencers to be resourceful in finding alternative ways to amplify their content.

4.4.3. Logistical and Access Issues

Logistical challenges, such as accessing remote or underserved areas, can also pose significant obstacles. Fifteenth Interviewee (Instagram @akush.travel conducted on August 15, 2024) highlights this issue: “A challenge is dealing with misinformation about travel safety and access, which can impact potential visitors’ perceptions.” Difficulties in reaching certain locations can affect the authenticity and diversity of content. Addressing these challenges involves careful planning, collaboration with local guides and communities, and innovative approaches to content creation that can showcase Ethiopia’s rich heritage despite logistical constraints.

4.4.4. Managing Diverse Audience Interests

Content creators often face the challenge of catering to a diverse audience with varying interests and preferences. This can make it difficult to create content that resonates with all segments of the audience while remaining true to the nation's branding goals. Sixth Interviewee (conducted on August 05, 2024), a TikTok influencer, describes this challenge: “Keeping up with rapidly changing trends on TikTok can be challenging, requiring constant adaptation and creativity.” Balancing diverse audience interests requires a strategic approach, including audience segmentation, targeted content, and ongoing engagement with followers to understand their preferences.

4.4.5. Addressing Limited Reach of Educational Content

Educational content, while valuable, often struggles with limited reach compared to more entertainment-focused material. Eighth Interviewee (@Harambe Tube, conducted on August 18, 2024), a cultural historian, points out, “A challenge is the limited reach of educational content compared to more entertainment-focused videos.” To overcome this, there is a need to innovate in content presentation, integrate educational elements with entertaining formats, and utilize various platforms to broaden the audience base.

4.4.6. Constraints Due to Security and Internet Connectivity Issues

In some parts of Ethiopia, security concerns and prolonged conflict can significantly hinder travel and content creation. Areas under ongoing conflict or with restricted access can limit the ability of influencers to produce content that reflects the full diversity of Ethiopian

experiences. Additionally, the lack of reliable internet connectivity in certain regions means that audiences living in these areas may not have access to the content being produced. As Sixth Interviewee (conducted on August 05, 2024) notes, *“Travel restrictions and connectivity issues in some areas limit our ability to showcase Ethiopia’s peaceful movements and business for investment.”* Addressing these constraints requires strategic planning, including partnerships with local stakeholders and the use of alternative content distribution methods, to ensure that the national image presented is comprehensive and representative. This Interviewee adds, *“Working with local partners and utilizing offline methods of content dissemination can help bridge the gap created by these constraints.”*

4.5. Comparative Analysis of Influencer Strategies

To understand how different influencers contribute to Ethiopia’s national branding, it is essential to compare their strategies and approaches. This section provides a comparative analysis of the strategies used by social media influencers and content creators, highlighting similarities and differences in their methods, goals, and impacts.

4.5.1. Content Platforms and Formats

Influencers use various social media platforms to reach their audiences, each with distinct content formats and engagement mechanisms. For example, Fourteenth (conducted on August 14, 2024) and Fifteenth (Instagram @akush.travel conducted on August 15, 2024) Interviewee utilize Instagram to share visually appealing travel content and cultural insights. Fourteenth Interviewee focuses on photo-driven narratives, stating, *“I engage with my audience through visually compelling content, such as photos and videos.”* This approach helps capture the beauty of Ethiopia’s landscapes and cultural sites. Fifteenth Interviewee, on the other hand, combines photos with interactive stories and Q&A sessions to provide real-time updates.

In contrast, Sixth Interviewee (conducted on August 05, 2024) leverages TikTok for short-form video content, which capitalizes on popular trends to engage a younger, global audience. He notes, *“I create engaging short videos about Ethiopian dance and music, using popular trends and challenges to connect with my audience.”* This format allows for rapid content dissemination and high engagement through trends and challenges.

Eighth Interviewee (@Harambe Tube conducted on August 18, 2024) employs YouTube for long-form educational content, focusing on Ethiopia's historical heritage. His content is characterized by in-depth storytelling and visual aids, aiming to educate and inform viewers. He explains, *"I create educational videos about Ethiopia's history, focusing on ancient civilizations (astronomy, and Bahire Hasab calendar) and cultural heritage."* YouTube's platform supports detailed and comprehensive presentations, which cater to viewers seeking deeper knowledge.

4.5.2. Strategic Goals and Content Alignment

The strategic goals of influencers vary based on their platform and audience. For instance, Fourteenth Interviewee's primary goal as a PR Manager is to enhance Ethiopia's tourism profile through Facebook campaigns. Her approach involves sharing travel tips and highlighting attractions to build a positive image. Fourteenth Interviewee (conducted on August 14, 2024), *"My content contributes by promoting Ethiopia's unique attractions and cultural experiences."* Her strategy aligns with the broader goals of nation branding by focusing on tourism and cultural heritage.

Conversely, Seventeenth Interviewee (conducted on August 17, 2024), as a digital marketing expert, aims to provide professional insights into digital marketing and its role in nation branding. His strategy includes sharing case studies and successful campaigns to demonstrate Ethiopia's achievements. He notes, *"My content provides a professional perspective on how digital marketing can elevate Ethiopia's national image."* His approach supports nation branding through an emphasis on economic growth and innovation.

4.5.3. Audience Engagement and Feedback

Engagement strategies and audience feedback reveal how influencers connect with their followers and assess their impact. Thirteenth Interviewee (conducted on August 12, 2024) measures effectiveness through engagement metrics like likes, comments, and follower growth. He values direct interactions with his audience, stating, *"I track engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and direct messages from followers who express interest in visiting Ethiopia."*

In comparison, Fourteenth Interviewee (conducted on August 14, 2024) focuses on metrics such as referral traffic to the tourism website and sentiment analysis of feedback. She

assesses the success of campaigns based on increased tourist inquiries and bookings. She explains, “*Effectiveness is measured through engagement rates, referral traffic to our tourism website, and sentiment analysis of audience feedback.*”

Sixth Interviewee uses TikTok’s analytics tools to track views, likes, and shares, reflecting the viral nature of his content. He’s feedback often includes excitement and curiosity about Ethiopian dance and music, indicating a successful connection with his audience.

4.5.4. Addressing Challenges and Leveraging Opportunities

Challenges faced by influencers vary based on their platform and content focus. Thirteenth and Fourteenth Interviewee both encounter difficulties in overcoming negative stereotypes and securing support from official bodies. Thirteenth Interviewee addresses these by showcasing Ethiopia’s beauty and cultural richness, while Fourteenth Interviewee works to correct misinformation and enhance the credibility of her campaigns.

On the other hand, Sixth Interviewee and Seventeenth Interviewee face challenges related to platform-specific trends and managing diverse content formats. Sixth Interviewee deals with rapidly changing trends on TikTok, while Seventeenth Interviewee navigates cultural sensitivities and the need for balanced portrayals.

Opportunities for improvement include the integration of emerging technologies and collaboration with other influencers. Seventeenth Interviewee (conducted on August 17, 2024) suggests, “*An underutilized opportunity is the integration of interactive and immersive experiences, such as virtual reality tours and interactive infographics.*” This can provide a more engaging way to showcase Ethiopia’s culture and achievements.

4.6. Opportunities for Enhancing Nation Branding

Ethiopia has significant opportunities to strengthen its nation branding through strategic initiatives that capitalize on its unique cultural, historical, and technological assets. Leveraging the growing influence of social media, the country can enhance its global image by fostering greater engagement with international audiences and promoting positive narratives about its rich heritage. To achieve this, Ethiopia should focus on empowering social media influencers and content creators to amplify authentic stories and highlight national achievements. Additionally, implementing robust media literacy programs and fact-

checking tools will ensure the credibility of information shared online. Investing in comprehensive training programs for media professionals on current technologies and social media best practices will further elevate the quality of content and engagement. Expanding internet access nationwide will enable broader participation and representation in the digital space. Furthermore, advocating for updated press laws and regulations tailored to the digital age will support a more transparent and responsible media environment. By harnessing these opportunities, Ethiopia can effectively enhance its nation branding and establish a stronger, more positive presence on the global stage.

4.7. Thematic Analysis of Social Media Content for Nation Branding

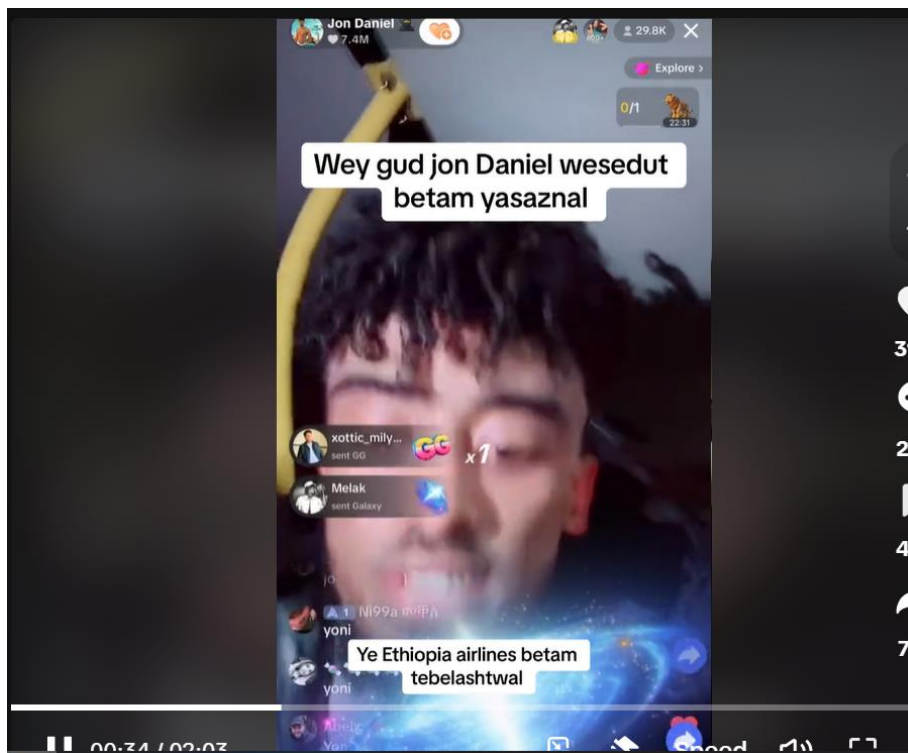
In the thematic analysis of a recent TikTok live stream post, an incident at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport provided valuable insights into how social media engagement shapes public perceptions of Ethiopian Airlines. The live stream, conducted by a passenger onboard a plane scheduled to fly to Mekelle, North Ethiopia, captured the tense moment when passengers were informed that due to unsafe weather conditions, the flight would be canceled. While most passengers complied, the live stream host vehemently refused to exit the plane, expressing frustration and disbelief, stating that he had paid for the ticket and demanded the flight proceed regardless of the safety warnings. This broadcast quickly went viral, with viewers engaging through comments, shares, and likes, further amplifying the situation.

A key theme that emerged from the comments was passenger dissatisfaction, with several viewers aligning with the host's frustration, citing previous negative experiences with Ethiopian Airlines. Some referenced past allegations made by international media, such as Reporter during the North Ethiopian war that the airline had transported soldiers and military equipment, as well as reports from 2017 claiming that Eritrean passengers had faced theft and poor service aboard Ethiopian Airlines flights. These past incidents have cultivated a negative public perception, which was reignited by the live stream, with many users expressing distrust in the airline's commitment to passenger safety and service quality.

On the other hand, a theme of support for safety protocols also surfaced, with a few commenters arguing that the passengers should have accepted the pilot's decision to cancel the flight for safety reasons. These users emphasized that risking lives for the sake of maintaining a schedule was unreasonable and unethical. Additionally, this scenario opened

up a broader conversation about Ethiopian ethics, particularly values like humility and respect, which were challenged by the passenger's disruptive behavior.

This incident, coupled with prior controversies, highlights how social media can rapidly amplify isolated events, contributing to the deterioration of a brand's reputation. Ethiopian Airlines, once lauded for its service, now faces increasing scrutiny due to both real and perceived shortcomings. Addressing these concerns through transparent communication and improving customer experiences will be crucial in reshaping the airline's brand in the public eye.



Furthermore, in a recent social media discourse surrounding the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC), a planned celebration of the Timket (Epiphany) holiday in Addis Ababa ignited a wave of intense online debates. The event, which was set to feature a large spiritual song performance ("የአለላፍ ዝግሬ") and other traditional Orthodox rituals, became a focal point for broader discussions about the current challenges facing the EOTC. The event's organizing committee had emphasized that the celebration would adhere to the ethics of Orthodox Christianity, but this announcement triggered a significant backlash from many social media influencers and YouTubers who aligned themselves with the Church.

The core theme that emerged from these discussions was religious persecution and resistance, with many users linking the planned Timket celebration to the ongoing political and social

struggles faced by the EOTC. Influential social media figures voiced strong opposition to holding a grand celebration in light of the recent hardships faced by Orthodox believers, including the burning of churches, the displacement of followers, continued genocide, and the perceived government negligence or involvement in these acts. Many argued that celebrating this significant religious holiday, in its traditional manner, would divert attention from the critical issues facing the Church and would serve to positively bolster the government's image at the expense of the Church's suffering. This stance was often accompanied by the hashtag #OneChurchOneSynodOnePatriarch, emphasizing unity and resistance within the EOTC.

Another key theme that surfaced was symbolic protest, with some groups advocating for an alternative approach to the Timket celebration. These individuals supported holding the event but suggested that attendees wear black instead of the customary white, symbolizing mourning and solidarity with the Church's plight. This group saw the black attire as a peaceful way to protest the hardships endured by the EOTC while still honoring the religious significance of Timket. This strategy was viewed as a way to maintain the sanctity of the religious festival while simultaneously communicating dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs.

A smaller group of commenters focused on spiritual perseverance, arguing that, despite the difficult circumstances, the Church should continue to celebrate Timket in its full glory. They pointed to Orthodox teachings of forgiveness and endurance, emphasizing that continuing with the celebration would not signify complicity with the government but would instead reflect the Church's steadfast faith. This group believed that maintaining the religious traditions, despite external pressures, would bring divine assistance and show the Church's strength in the face of adversity.

This discourse reveals a highly polarized online debate where religious traditions, political realities, and social protest intersect. The thematic analysis demonstrates the complexity of nation branding in Ethiopia, where social media platforms serve as spaces for both spiritual celebration and resistance. While some see the festival as an opportunity to uphold Ethiopia's Orthodox heritage, others view it as a chance to protest against political injustices and government interference in religious affairs.



Likewise, the following also exemplifies a highly emotional and divisive social media discourse that emerged in Ethiopia following the tragic death of a 7-year-old child, who was allegedly raped and murdered. The child’s mother shared her heartbreaking story in an interview with a YouTuber, revealing the difficult circumstances surrounding her daughter’s death and the threats she faced from the family and friends of the accused. This sparked widespread public outrage across various social media platforms, with many users, influencers, associations, and even international media outlets calling for justice for the deceased child.

One of the central themes in this discourse is the call for justice. Many social media users rallied behind the mother, supporting her plea for accountability and demanding that the judicial system take firm action against the accused. This group, driven by empathy and anger, viewed the situation as part of a broader issue of violence against women and children in Ethiopia, and they used the case as a rallying point for broader social reforms. The discourse around this theme was intense, with hashtags and posts urging authorities to ensure that the accused remains in custody and receives appropriate punishment, not only for justice but to set a precedent that such crimes would not be tolerated.

Another group, however, emerged with a contrasting narrative, emphasizing doubts and skepticism. This was fueled by a follow-up interview conducted by another YouTuber, who spoke with the family of the accused. The family strongly refuted the rape allegations, claiming that the medical results were flawed and that the child’s death was caused by an accidental fall during playtime. They insisted on the innocence of their relative and sought to appeal to the courts to release him. This narrative, combined with the uncertainty and lack of concrete evidence for some, led a portion of the public to question the initial accusations. These individuals called for a more thorough investigation, arguing that the suspect should not be convicted based on public perception or media influence alone.

This discourse also raised concerns about Ethiopia’s national image, especially given the international attention the case attracted. Ethiopia, traditionally known for its religious values and conservative social fabric, faced questions about the state of justice and human rights in the country. Some international observers, following the case through social media, expressed concerns about whether justice could be fairly administered in a country where religious and cultural perceptions sometimes play a strong role in public and legal discourse. This aspect of the discussion touched on Ethiopia’s nation branding, with some international media outlets and commentators highlighting the case as indicative of broader societal issues, including violence against women and children, and potential flaws in the justice system.

The thematic analysis of this social media discourse reveals the complexity of public sentiment, where emotions, facts, and perceptions intertwine. The case sparked deep divisions, with some pushing for unwavering justice based on the mother’s testimony, while others sought to highlight possible misinterpretations of events. The case continues to serve as a reflection of the broader societal challenges in Ethiopia, particularly regarding how social media can shape public opinion and influence justice-related matters.



Finally, the following story showcases a heartbreaking social media moment where a 4-year-old Ethiopian child/girl went viral after an interview on a popular YouTube channel. Within a month, the video amassed over 3.5 million views, capturing the attention of viewers worldwide. The young girl had memorized and perfectly mimicked the lectures of a highly respected Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) scholar, known for their spiritual teachings. She not only replicated the scholar’s accent and language but also delivered the lecture flawlessly in both Ge’ez and Amharic, impressing audiences with her profound knowledge at such a young age.

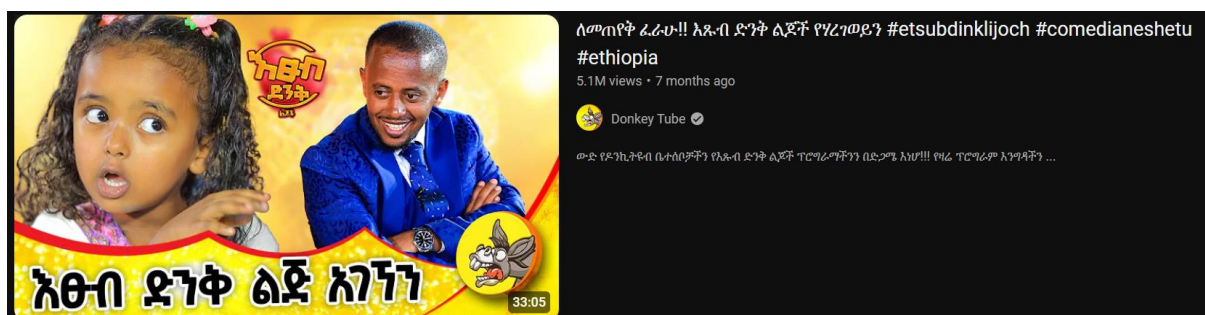
This content received an overwhelmingly positive response, as viewers were struck by her ability to imitate such a complex lecture style. The hashtags #etsubdinklijoch and #dinklijoch,

meaning "wise children," became viral as people shared the video across various social media platforms. Many admired the girl's impressive retention and articulation of the EOTC scholar's teachings, which demonstrated the depth and grace of Ethiopia's spiritual education.

One major theme of this discourse was admiration for Ethiopian child-rearing practices, with many commenters highlighting the strong educational and cultural values instilled in children. The girl's ability to deliver the lecture in Ge'ez—a liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church—added a layer of respect for traditional language preservation and cultural heritage. People praised her parents for encouraging her to learn such profound teachings at such a young age, showing how Ethiopian child-rearing styles foster not only discipline but also deep respect for religious and cultural traditions.

Another key theme was the celebration of Ethiopia's rich spiritual heritage, with viewers expressing a renewed appreciation for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and its impact on shaping moral and ethical values in society. This post not only served as a delightful reminder of the intellectual curiosity and capacity of Ethiopian children but also highlighted the nation's spiritual depth, which resonated with many viewers, both locally and internationally. The girl's ability to channel the respected scholar's teachings helped to reignite interest and pride in the EOTC's role in shaping Ethiopia's identity.

Overall, this viral post contributed to positive nation branding by emphasizing Ethiopia's rich spiritual and educational traditions, the strength of its cultural heritage, and the promising intellectual potential of its younger generation. It also demonstrated the power of social media in highlighting the beauty and depth of Ethiopia's culture, attracting admiration from people worldwide.



CHAPTER FIVE

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1. Conclusion

This study has provided a multifaceted analysis of Ethiopia's nation branding efforts, integrating both thematic social media content analysis and in-depth interviews to offer a nuanced understanding of the nation's image and its challenges.

The in-depth interviews reveal a predominantly positive portrayal of Ethiopia's cultural richness and national identity. Themes of cultural celebrations, tourism, cuisine, and historical heritage are prominently featured, with government accounts and content creators actively shaping Ethiopia's image on social media. Posts highlighting the Timkat festival, Enkutatash, and Ethiopia's unique cuisine and landscapes have generated substantial engagement, reflecting a successful use of social media to foster a deeper appreciation for the country.

However, the study also identifies significant challenges impacting Ethiopia's national branding. Insights from in-depth interviews with stakeholders, including government officials, social media influencers, and community leaders, reveal that while cultural and natural aspects are celebrated, there are critical concerns related to governance and human rights that affect the country's image. The tensions within the Ethiopian Orthodox Holy Synod and issues surrounding the Ethiopian Defence Force's operations in Amhara and Oromia regions introduce negative sentiment into the narrative. The interviews highlight that these issues complicate the nation branding efforts and risk undermining the positive portrayal achieved through cultural and natural highlights.

The mixed sentiment observed in social media content and the in-depth interviews underscores the complexity of Ethiopia's nation branding. The positive aspects of Ethiopian culture and heritage are well-represented and appreciated, yet the challenges related to religious tensions and human rights abuses present significant hurdles. Addressing these issues transparently and effectively is essential for enhancing Ethiopia's global image and ensuring a balanced and positive representation to its citizens .

In summary, while Ethiopia's nation branding efforts have made significant strides in promoting its cultural and natural heritage, the negative aspects revealed through both social media and in-depth interviews highlight areas that need focused attention. A balanced approach that addresses governance and human rights issues, alongside celebrating Ethiopia's rich cultural identity, will be crucial for achieving a comprehensive and positive international image.

5.2. Recommendation

To address the challenges identified and enhance the effectiveness of social media in shaping a nation's image Ethiopia's social media landscape, a well-rounded strategy involving influencers, content creators, and professional nation branding experts is essential. The following actionable recommendations are proposed.

1. Leverage Social Media Influencers for Positive Storytelling:

- **Engage Key Influencers:** Partner with local and international influencers who have strong followings and are passionate about Ethiopia's cultural heritage, tourism, and cuisine. These influencers can create engaging content showcasing Ethiopia's positive image, emphasizing themes like the Timkat festival, Enkutatash, and unique landscapes.
- **Encourage Authentic Narratives:** Influencers should be encouraged to share authentic, personal experiences of Ethiopia, highlighting not only the beauty and culture but also addressing common misconceptions or challenges faced by the country in a balanced way.
- **Run Targeted Campaigns:** Conduct campaigns such as #DiscoverEthiopia or #ExperienceEthiopia that centers around Ethiopia's rich history, cultural festivities, and natural beauty. These campaigns can increase engagement, driving positive sentiment across multiple platforms.
- **Empower Social Media Influencers:** The Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Culture should support and collaborate with influencers to promote Ethiopia's cultural and natural attributes.

2. Shaping Policy and Media literacy:

- **Provide Intensive Training:** The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Technology should offer training programs on current technologies, social media skills, and content creation.
- **Promote Media Literacy and Fact-Checking:** The Ethiopian Media Authority and civil society organizations should advocate for media literacy and implement fact-checking tools to combat misinformation.
- **Develop Social Media Regulations:** The Ethiopian Parliament and Ministry of Information should create and enforce regulations that guide responsible social media use and address abuses.
- **Ensure Nationwide Internet Access:** The Ministry of Communications and Technology must expand internet infrastructure to provide widespread access across Ethiopia.

3. Promote User-Generated Content (UGC):

- **Encourage UGC Participation:** Invite social media users, particularly tourists and locals, to share their experiences of Ethiopian culture, festivals, and landmarks using dedicated hashtags. This can build a community of storytellers and multiply positive representations of Ethiopia online.
- **Incentivize Content Creation:** Provide incentives for high-quality content creation, such as contests, giveaways, or features on official government and tourism boards' social media pages.

4 Address Negative Sentiments Transparently:

- **Acknowledge Governance Challenges:** To maintain credibility, the Ethiopian government and influencers should not ignore governance and human rights concerns. Instead, communicate openly about efforts being made to improve governance and resolve conflicts.
- **Work with Experts:** Collaborate with nation branding professionals to craft narratives that recognize Ethiopia's progress in governance and human rights while keeping the spotlight on the nation's rich cultural assets. A transparent approach will enhance trust and authenticity.

5. Professional Nation Branding Campaigns:

- **Expert-Led Strategy Development:** Partner with nation branding professionals to develop a long-term social media strategy that balances Ethiopia's cultural richness with its social and political realities. This should include consistent messaging that ties together the efforts of influencers, government accounts, and tourism organizations.
- **Crisis Management Protocols:** Develop protocols for addressing negative press or online controversies. Nation branding experts can help mitigate potential damage by rapidly responding to crises and reframing the narrative.
- **Targeted International Campaigns:** Collaborate with international influencers and experts to run campaigns aimed at key tourism markets. Highlight Ethiopia's unique cultural and natural heritage to attract global attention, while strategically downplaying internal conflicts.
- **Implement Free Press Laws:** The Ethiopian Parliament and Ministry of Information need to enact and enforce laws ensuring a free and independent press.

6. Continuous Monitoring and Feedback:

- **Analyze Social Media Trends:** Regularly monitor social media engagement and sentiment to understand public perception and adjust the strategy as needed. Use analytics tools to track the effectiveness of campaigns and influencer content.
- **Community Engagement:** Encourage active interaction between followers and official accounts through Q&A sessions, live streams, and responses to comments to foster a sense of inclusion and dialogue.

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Annex A: Consent Form

Title of Study: The Role of Social Media in Nation Branding: A Grounded Theory Study

Researcher: Mihiret Worede

Institution: Addis Ababa University

Department: School of Journalism & Communication, MA Program of Public Relations & Strategic Communication

Contact Information: +251-946351650

Purpose of the Study:

You are invited to participate in a research study examining the role of social media in nation branding, specifically focusing on Ethiopia. The aim is to understand how social media influencers, content creators, and public relations professionals contribute to shaping the national image.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an in-depth interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will be conducted either in person or virtually at a time that suits you. With your permission, the interview will be recorded for accuracy.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

Confidentiality:

All information provided will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. Personal identifiers will be removed, and data will be anonymized. Records of your participation will be securely stored and accessible only to authorized research personnel.

Risks and Benefits:

There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. Your involvement will contribute valuable insights into how social media impacts nation branding efforts and may benefit public relations strategies in Ethiopia.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions about the study or your participation, please contact Mihiret Worede at +251-946351650. For questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Addis Ababa University Institutional Review Board at +251-11.

Consent:

By signing this form, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information provided, and you consent to participate in this study under the conditions described.

Annex B. Questionnaire for In-Depth Interviews

For Social Media Influencers and Content Creators

1. Background and Role:

- Can you describe your primary role and how you engage with your audience on social media?
- How did you become involved in creating content related to Ethiopia's culture or identity?

2. Impact on Nation Branding:

- In your view, how does your content contribute to shaping Ethiopia's national image?
- Can you provide examples of specific campaigns or content that have had a notable impact on Ethiopia's nation branding?

3. Strategies and Goals:

- What strategies do you use to align your content with the goals of nation branding?
- How do you decide which aspects of Ethiopian culture or identity to highlight in your content?

4. Audience Engagement:

- How do you measure the effectiveness of your content in influencing public perception of Ethiopia?
- What feedback have you received from your audience regarding your portrayal of Ethiopia?

5. Challenges and Opportunities:

- What challenges have you faced in using social media to promote Ethiopia's national image?
- Are there any opportunities you believe are currently underutilized in the context of nation branding?

For Marketing and Public Relations Professionals

1. **Role and Responsibilities:**

- Can you describe your role in developing and executing nation branding strategies for Ethiopia?
- How do you incorporate social media into your nation branding campaigns?

2. **Strategy and Planning:**

- What key elements do you consider when planning a social media campaign for nation branding?
- How do you ensure that your social media strategies align with Ethiopia's national branding objectives?

3. **Evaluation and Impact:**

- How do you evaluate the success of social media campaigns in terms of their impact on Ethiopia's national image?
- What metrics or indicators do you use to measure the effectiveness of these campaigns?

4. **Challenges and Solutions:**

- What are the primary challenges you encounter in using social media for nation branding?
- How have you addressed or overcome these challenges?

5. **Future Trends:**

- What emerging trends in social media do you think will impact nation branding efforts in the future?
- How is your organization preparing to adapt to these trends?

Annex C: Content Analysis Protocol

1. Objective

The goal of the content analysis is to systematically evaluate social media content related to Ethiopia to understand how different messages contribute to the nation branding efforts. This includes analyzing the themes, tone, and effectiveness of posts from government accounts, influencers, and general users.

2. Data Collection

Source Selection:

- Official Government Accounts: Collect posts from at least 100 official government social media accounts.
- Influencers: Analyze content from 50 influencers with substantial followings (above 500,000) who frequently discuss Ethiopia.
- General Users: Include a sample of posts from general users who engage in conversations about Ethiopia.

2. Sampling:

- Time Frame: Focus on posts from the past six months to ensure relevance.
- Content-Type: Include various types of posts such as text, images, videos, and links.

3. Data Coding

A. Develop a Coding Scheme:

- Themes: Identify and categorize recurring themes (e.g., tourism, culture, political issues).
- Tone: Assess the tone of the content (positive, negative, neutral).
- Engagement: Measure engagement metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and views.

B. Coding Process:

- Create Codebooks: Develop detailed codebooks outlining categories and criteria for coding.
- Train Coders: Ensure all coders understand the codebook and apply codes consistently.
- Code Content: Apply the coding scheme to the collected content, ensuring accuracy and reliability.

4. Data Analysis

A. Quantitative Analysis:

- Frequency Counts: Calculate the frequency of different themes and tones.

- **Engagement Metrics:** Analyze engagement data to assess which types of content generate the most interaction.

B. Qualitative Analysis:

- **Content Patterns:** Identify patterns in how Ethiopia is portrayed in different types of posts.
- **Narrative Analysis:** Examine the narratives and messaging strategies used by different sources.

C. Comparative Analysis:

- **Cross-Source Comparison:** Compare content from official government accounts, influencers, and general users to identify differences and similarities in messaging and impact.

5. Interpretation and Reporting

A. Summarize Findings:

- **Themes and Trends:** Highlight the main themes and trends found in the content analysis.
- **Impact Assessment:** Assess the overall impact of social media content on Ethiopia's nation branding.

B. Report Preparation:

- **Detailed Report:** Prepare a detailed report including methodology, findings, and interpretations.
- **Visuals:** Use charts, graphs, and examples to illustrate key points.

C. Recommendations:

- **Strategic Insights:** Provide recommendations based on the analysis for improving Ethiopia's nation branding efforts through social media.

Appendix

Supporting Tables: Table 1: Thematic Analysis of Social Media Posts on Ethiopian Nation Branding

No.	Post Title	Views	Likes	Dislikes	Comments	Shares	Posted Date	Platform	User Engagement Level	Key Themes	Brand Impact	Hashtags	Link
1	Incident at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport	7.4M	1.2M	High	28.8K	705K	Aug 23, 2024	TikTok	High	Passenger dissatisfaction, Safety protocols, Airline reputation	Negative	#EthiopianAirlines #FlightCancellation #SafetyFirst	https://www.tiktok.com/@amenu396/video/7406072676747398405?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7424158066457216519
2	Timket Holiday Debate	14K	N/A	Moderate	37	N/A	Apr 9, 2024	Social Media	High	Religious persecution, Symbolic protest, Cultural heritage	Mixed	#Timket #EOTC #ReligiousFreedom	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZOZLDVPRN8&pp=ygUn4Yuo4Yqg4Yql4YiL4Y2NIOGLneGIm-GlrcBmYW50YWh1biB3YWtl
3	Outrage Over Child's Death	1M	34K	N/A	17,573	N/A	Oct 5, 2024	YouTube	Very High	Call for justice, Public skepticism, Justice system	Negative	#JusticeForChildren #EndViolence #Ethiopia	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Le-clVZgx0&pp=ygUKaGV2ZW4gYXdldA%3D%3D
4	Viral Moment: 4-Year-Old Girl Recites EOTC Scholar's Teachings	5.1M	157K	N/A	10,164	N/A	Mar 9, 2024	YouTube	Very High	Educational values, Spiritual heritage, Cultural pride	Positive	#WiseChildren #EOTC #CulturalHeritage	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRKiuAEcqOs