



ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF COMMERCE

DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING MANAGEMENT

GRADUATE PROGRAM

**The use of social media as a marketing tool by selected Tour
Operators in Addis Ababa**

By: Abiy Nigussie

June, 2014
Addis Ababa

Addis Ababa
University
(Since 1950)



The use of social media as a marketing tool by selected Tour Operators in Addis Ababa

(A thesis submitted to the school of graduate studies of Addis Ababa University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts Degree in Marketing Management)

By: Abiy Nigussie

Advisor: Rakshit Negi(PhD)

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Approval of Board of Examiners

Advisor

Signature

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External Examiner

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Statement of Declaration

I hereby declare that the following Thesis report entitled **“The use of social media as a marketing tool by selected Tour Operators in Addis Ababa”** submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Degree of Masters in Marketing Management to Addis Ababa University, School of Commerce, is my original work and not for the submitted for the award of any Degree, Diploma, or any other similar qualifications by any until date.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

MOCT: Ministry of Culture and Tourism

(eWOM): electronic Word of Mouth

SMM-social media marketing

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Abstract

Social media is being continually promoted as a valuable business tool through the internet and has been feature in important business publications globally. Businessmen of all sorts have started addressing these tools to reach consumers, including those involved with the Travel Industry. An academic study about the use of social media within Tour Operation businesses in Addis Ababa is currently not available. This study intends to contribute to filling this research gap by investigating the experiences of Tour Operators in Addis Ababa using social media as a marketing tool. Mixed method was used to assess the experience and attitudes of Tour Operators regarding the use of social media as marketing tool. The results of both interviews and questionnaire survey demonstrated that social media tools are being used for diverse purposes and that it was certainly an effective marketing tool. However, this perception is based more on the user's confidence in the tool than on any measurable outcome. Furthermore, there is no evidence that social media marketing strategy is adopted by Tour Operators; even though the literature tends to indicate that this is one of the main factors for effective utilization of social media marketing potential. Further research would be needed as these platforms keep developing and new technologies emerge. This thesis contributes by indentifying areas for further research.

Keywords: social media, marketing, Tour Operator

CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

In this chapter the research study is presented. Background information to the subject of study is provided as well as the aim and objectives proposed to achieve. In addition, the insights of the researcher for choosing the subject are also shown.

1.1. Background of the study

Throughout these past years social media have become a worldwide cultural phenomenon since the internet boom that took place at the beginning of this century. As discussed by McKay (2009), the socialization of the web was the most important and transformational trend.

Social media can be simply defined as an interactive, participative and open virtual community. As proposed by Hill (2005), social media are the online technologies people use to share opinions, experiences, insights, content, perspectives and media themselves. It combines participation powered by network effects, making social media platforms almost the most powerful form of media yet created.

The travel industry is one of the largest and also one of the fastest changing industries in the World. The emergence of the internet has radically changed the way business is conducted throughout the industry. Travel businesses are also beginning to recognize the power of social media. Personal experiences are how businesses can differentiate their product over a competitor's. If a Tour company truly exceeds the guest's expectation, it might end up in an online community. It is the most powerful advertising form, word of mouth, of the new era. Social media is influencing people to buy , and consumer review can be the most potent tool a marketer can leverage, therefore its impact on the tourism industry cannot be ignored (Hill, 2005).

The Travel Marketer's Guide to Social Media and Social Networking points out that 'travel marketers should be plugged into the latest ways their customers are gathering and exchanging information'. The amount of savvy consumers and those not familiarized that much, are getting involved with the Internet's social media tools making users numbers increase. Gergely (2013)

confirms this by recognizing that there is a tsunami coming that few fully anticipate and it will dramatically change the marketing landscape in the tourism industry.

If social media is such an effective way to market travel businesses, how Tour Operators in Addis Ababa are using them for marketing purpose? The general conclusion to-date in this field is that, beside the repeated statements on importance and role, Tour operators have not yet fully understood the new technological world and still many concerns are brought forward.

The focus and attention of this study came up with the need to investigate the attitudes and experiences of Tour Operators in Addis Ababa towards using social media for marketing purpose. The existing studies on how to use social media platforms, developing social media marketing strategy, measuring the effects of social media activities has been analyzed. The thesis provides the Tour Operator an introduction to social media as a marketing tool to support the possible implementation of social media into their marketing activities. The experience and attitude towards using social media for marketing purpose to a sample of Tour Operators in Addis Ababa, and a sample of traveler's opinion towards interacting with Tour Operators through social media sites has been analyzed. The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 briefly describes marketing, social media marketing strategies. Section 3 describes the methods used. Results and discussion are reported in sections 4. Some concluding remarks close the paper in section 5.

1.2. Statement of the problem

The Internet has supposed a complete revolution on consumer behavior and its users are not anymore a passive character but a more interactive one able to interact with other users sharing experiences, information, ideas via forums, chat rooms, video and photo sharing platforms and so on. Living in this technological era acknowledging social media seems to be the way to reach a market differently in the travel and tourism industry by creating, monitoring and maintaining relationships with consumers, in a more convenient, user-friendly way (Dugan, 2007).

Today social media is a trending phenomenon and a huge part of people's everyday lives and at the same time gradually gaining more momentum in the business world. Consequently, marketing has received a totally new kind of approach with the rise of the Internet and e-

commerce. To compete in a global world, businesses cannot rely on traditional marketing anymore (Gergely, 2013).

Across the world, a number of organizations have been exploiting social media as their marketing and communication channel to listen and connect with their target customers. The extent to which Tour Operators are using social media platforms for marketing and communication purpose in Ethiopia is not much known to-date.

Ethiopia has immense potential owing to its nature, historical, and cultural endowments. The reason behind the sectors poor performance have not been studied in comprehensive way to develop the tourism potential and let it contribute in the effort to reduce poverty and under development in Ethiopia. Finding the main determinants of the tourist flows in the country is of great necessity (Walle, 2010).

Even though articles and reports of businesses familiarizing with social media appear regularly and there have been a number of research works that focused on the analysis on web based promotion and an assessment on applicability of online social networks for businesses in Addis Ababa (Gebreegziabher, 2013; Kenedi, 2013) no reliable data exist on how much Social media is employed by Tour Operators in Addis Ababa until now. This condition suggests for a focused research that would answer several related quires such as how to use social media platforms for marketing purpose within Tour Operators business, advantages and disadvantages of using social media for marketing purpose, and attitudes of travelers towards interacting with travel companies using social media.

Consequently, this research was conducted fill the above mentioned gaps, and the following research questions were the focus of the study.

1.3. Research questions

A research question is the question that a research is based on. A research starts from a question that needs to be answered. It helps the researcher focus on his or her topic. To start forming a research question, the general subject of the research has to be decided. The subject should be something that interests the researcher and motivates him or her to proceed with the project (The Writing Center at George Mason University, 2013).

The research questions for this investigation are the following:

- 1) To what extent Tour Operators in Addis Ababa are using Social Media as a platform to reach target customers?
- 2) How best the potential of Social Media as marketing tool can be witnessed by them to be maintained through social media?
- 3) What benefit they perceive from using social media?
- 4) What has been the experience of Tour Operators in Addis Ababa regarding the disadvantages of using social media?

1.4. Research objectives

1.4.1. General objective

The main objective of this study is to assess the use of social media as a marketing tool for Tour operators located in Addis Ababa.

1.4.2. Specific Objectives

- 1) To assess the extent to which Tour Operators in Addis Ababa are using Social Media to reach target customers.
- 2) To evaluate the potential of using Social Media as marketing tool for Tour Operators.
- 3) To identify benefits of using social media as marketing tool.
- 4) To analyze the disadvantage of using social media as a marketing tool.

1.5. Definition of terms

Web 2.0: coined by O'Reilly Media at the Web 2.0 Conference held in San Francisco in 2004, refers to “the second-generation of Internet-based services that let people collaborate and share information online in perceived new ways-such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, communication tools, and folks” (Turban et al., 2008).

Social media: Social media is defined as the online platform and tools that people use to share opinions and experiences, including photos, videos, music, insights, and perceptions with each other (Turban et al., 2008)

Social network: a place where people create their own space, or home page, on which they write blogs (Web logs); post pictures, videos or music; share ideas; and link to other Web locations they find interesting (Turban et al., 2008).

Tour Operators: the demand of organized trips is met by companies that plan, organize, sell and often also operate their own tour packages. These companies are called Tour Operators (Cook, Yale & Marqua, 2010)

1.6. Significance of the study

As Swarbrooke and Horner (2007) pointed out, understanding consumer behavior forms the base for developing successful marketing strategies. Assessing the use of social media as marketing tool within Tour Operators in Addis Ababa is considered an important topic to introduce because it is currently happening and research-based project investigating social media as a Marketing and Communication tool within Tour Operators in Ethiopia have yet to appear.

Living in this Web 2.0 era, where people are the main reason, acknowledging social media seems to be the way to reach a market differently in the travel industry by creating, monitoring and maintaining relationships with consumers, in a more convenient, user-friendly way. As described by Christie and Collin (2009), it is not anymore about commanding and controlling, is about collaborating and connecting.

So this research project deals with an issue which needs great attention and emphasis, mainly because of various reasons. Among these are the following, the literature reviewed briefly describe how to use social media as a marketing tool and measure the social media activities for Tour Operators interested to involve in social media marketing activities. The results of the primary data also contribute by assessing the experiences and attitudes selected Tour Operators towards using social media for marketing purpose. Besides, the opinions of a sample of travelers towards interacting with Tour Operators using social media sites were assessed. The research is also expected to extend its significance as starting point for further studies on the area.

1.7. Scope and limitations of the study

The scope of this study is to assess the experiences of selected Tour Operators located in Addis Ababa who are using social media as a marketing tool. The limitations of any study might be considered as the weaknesses founded when developing a research investigation. Thus the main weaknesses or limitations founded in the present study have been the following:

Firstly, in regards to secondary research a limitation perceived has been the lack of social media literature. Besides, lack secondary research about Tour Operators in Addis Ababa is also considered as limitations of this study. And secondly, concerning the instrument of the research, the interviews, and some limitations will be found. It will be difficult to find people likely to participate in the interviewing process because of a rigid time schedule in the day to day life.

1.8. Organization of the research report

In the first chapter the research study is presented. Background information to the subject of study is provided as well as the aim and objectives proposed to achieve. In addition, the insights of the researcher for choosing the subject are also shown.

In the second chapter the relevant theories to the topic of study are presented. In regards to the concept of tour operation will be discussed starting with the history of tour operation and explaining how the business works. After the introduction to tour operation, the basics of marketing will be gone through.

The marketing theory is a very important part of the thesis to gain an overall understanding of how the tourist's decision making process develops and how tourism companies and more specifically tour operator's structure and carry out their marketing plans. There will also be a glimpse on online marketing at the end of the chapter, which leads the reader to the next topic, very fundamental in this thesis, social media. The phenomenon will be defined and some of the most popular social media channels will be introduced. The chapter will be sealed with adaption of social media into marketing.

In the third chapter the research method and the approach used to achieve the aims and objectives will be presented and properly justified. Furthermore additional information related to the sample, when, where how and why the respondents were selected will be provided.

In the fourth chapter the results of the primary research will be exposed and linked to the main lines of theory presented in the literature review. Furthermore results will be complemented with discussion of the main findings of the study.

In the fifth chapter the conclusions extracted from the results will be discussed and complemented with the theory. Finally the researcher will propose some recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

2. Review of related literature

In this chapter the relevant theories to the topic of study are presented. In regards to the concept of tour operation will be discussed starting with the history of tour operation and explaining how the business works. There will also be a glimpse on online marketing at the end of the chapter, which leads the reader to the next topic, very fundamental in this thesis, social media. The phenomenon will be defined and some of the most popular social media channels will be introduced. The chapter will be sealed with adaption of social media into marketing.

2.1. Theoretical background

The theoretical background of the thesis consists of subjects such as Tourism industry, Tour Operators, marketing, integrated marketing communication, social media and social media marketing.

2.1.1 Tourism industry

Tourism can be described as travel for recreational, leisure or business purposes with the journey and the place being outside the usual environment as well as the nature of the travel being temporary (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill, 2008). The industry of tourism has been growing constantly during the past decades becoming one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. Tourism is considered to be one of the key players in international commerce representing the major income for many countries. Consequently, the success of tourism industry has spiked up the competition and diversification of the destinations (World Tourism Organization, 2011).

2.1.1.1. Tour operators

The demand of organized trips is met by companies that plan, organize, sell and often also operate their own tour packages. These companies are called tour operators. Tour operators offer tourists a safe way to travel and enjoy new places and sights with the support of an on-site guide. Tourists have it easy and carefree to travel and get everything in one purchase (Cook, Yale & Marqua, 2010).

2.1. 1.2. History of package tours

In the 1800s, trains were still very slow compared to modern trains, but back then, rail travel was the only means of transportation used for longer trips. Travel agents were the ones booking tickets to customers. However they were responsible only for booking rail tickets, which was changed by Thomas Cook who was the first to introduce charter transportation and tour packages starting from the early 1840s (Bhatia, 2012).

As time passed and transport modes developed, tourism professionals started to negotiate with hotels for bulk buying hotel rooms, which meant buying a big quantity of room bookings at the same time and therefore getting a discount. This was when organizing packages including transportation and accommodation became more popular. As ground transportation developed, tour operators started to transport customers not only to and from, but also within the destination, for example for sightseeing purposes or any short trips in the destination (Bhatia, 2012).

Due to the Industrial Revolution, the standard of living rose to the level where the working class people were able to travel in the early 20th century. This led to a boom in the tourism industry – tour operators became more and more important and new hotels, ships and trains were built to meet the increasing demand. When jet aircrafts started to operate, tour operators started to use air travel and were able to expand their area to far-off, exotic destinations in time (Bhatia, 2012).

2.1.1. 3. The tour operation business

Tour operators – sometimes called packagers or tour wholesalers – offer consumers their selection of tourism products that form complete packages of holiday services in destinations selected by the company. These services can include for example transportation, accommodation, possible day trips, sightseeing tours and meals. Most often holidays organized by tour operators are not longer than one to two weeks in length and include only one destination, but exceptions occur, such as trekking tours and other tour packages where tourism services in several locations are included (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill ,2008).

Tour operators can be divided into four different groups which are mass market operators, specialist tour operators, domestic operators and incoming operators. Mass market operators concentrate on mass tourism destinations.

They often own their own charter airline and their tours are divided into two seasons, winter and summer. Specialist tour operators offer tour packages which all have a unifying factor, such as same type of accommodation or transportation, same theme or same country of destination.

Domestic operators sell domestic customers tour packages taking place in their own country. Incoming operators organize and sell trips to incoming tourists taking place in a specific country or area, but some of them may organize only accommodation for a foreign tour operator or work as a guide service for other tour operators (Bhatia, 2012). Tour operators aim to create packages that can be sold to the consumers with a compatible and attractive price while at the same time making enough profit to run the business. This is assured by the concept called 'bulk buying', which means that the tour operator buys a large number of e.g. hotel rooms and airline seats to get discounts and be able to offer their packages to consumers at an attractive price. Other things often bought in bulk are airport transportation, taxi transportation and local entertainment that can be sold to the customers in advance or on site. The tour packages are sold to the public using different types of marketing tools, such as paper form (leaflets and brochures), TV advertising or online advertising (Cooper et al. 2008).

2.1.1.4. The new tourist

When concentrating on the tourism sector, this new innovation and the new digital user lead to the new tourist. This new tourist which according to Buhalis (2002) is more sophisticated, more demanding, and requires high quality products; this tourist has a wider knowledge of tourism destinations and products, he is more experienced and he gives high value to money and time. The new tourist has clear preferences and he is always comparing the different alternatives.

In addition, new tourists are more cultural and environmental educated, looking to get more involved in local societies when travelling. Tourists from all part of the most important tourism generating regions in the world are becoming frequent travellers, and they are linguistically and technologically skilled (Buhalis, 2002). The tourist is not anymore a passive customer who goes

to a travel agency and sits down for several hours so he goes out of the agency with a holiday purchased. The new tourist is more active, like to get involved in the purchase process and it is flexible in the choice and service delivery (Poon, 1993). Now he is using less travel agencies focusing more on the Internet as the main source of information and purchase of tourist products. According to Buhalis (2002) there are several factors which motivate tourists to use the Internet: first the richness and deepness of the information provided. Tourists can get a great amount of information of the different alternatives at the same time; second the information provided is easy to use; third tourists can access at the information at any time and with a low cost and fourth tourism products are usually offered at discounted prices as suppliers operate with fewer intermediaries. Apart from the reasons named before, tourists go to the Internet to seek for the so-called Social Media platforms in order to find other users experiences and opinions, to share photos, videos, experiences, ideas and create new relationships. And according to McGrath (2008) this is done for three main motives: Trust, it is non marketed information and thus it is perceived as more reliable; Simplicity, it is easier to participate; and Interactivity of the content, which is wide and varied.

2.1.1.5. Tour operators in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia most of Tour Operators offer a very familiar range of tour, including the one-day or half day Addis Ababa tours, the one-day Excursion from Addis Ababa and range of two-thirteen day tours to historic sites, national parks, and other tourist circuits of the country. Still, a number of Tour Operators are beginning to diversify other unique tours hat exploit the full diversity of Ethiopia, including hiking tours, birds hunting are emerging. Besides, there are many individuals and companies with Tour Operation licenses but have not yet fully started the business. Instead of this, they use the license for other purpose and sometimes for speculating in the sector so that they escape the government taxation. These need thorough inspection activities in order to suspend the illegal action (Sisay, 2009). More than 300 legally registered tour operators are working currently in Addis Ababa. (Source: Ministry of culture and Tourism).

2.1.2. Marketing

2.1.2.1. Definition of marketing

“Marketing is a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others” (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 1996).

Marketing is about understanding the customer. The main goal of marketing is to attract and deliver value to new and already existing customers in order to guarantee satisfaction (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). In other words, marketing is about dealing with customers in a profitable way. It is not an understatement to say that marketing plays a crucial role in any company’s success as every organization, no matter the size or location, uses marketing.

Over times marketing has evolved from production and selling oriented marketing to consumer driven marketing that regards the wants of the consumers as the drivers for the marketing strategy (Lahtinen & Isoviita, 2001). Nowadays marketing is all around you; on TV, magazines and mailbox. Furthermore, in today’s world with the new approaches, such digital marketing and social media marketing, the message is delivered to you more directly and more personally (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). It is clear that with the new kind of approach, the marketers aim to become part of our daily lives and we, as the consumers, have allowed them to. It should not be seen as a negative thing as it is not as interrupting anymore due to the ability to personalize the marketing to appeal to each individual.

The core concepts of marketing are used to describe the different elements that affect marketing. Armstrong & Kotler (2007) define the core marketing concepts as follows:

1. Needs, wants and demands
2. Products
3. Value and satisfaction
4. Exchange, transactions and relationships
5. Market

It is important to understand the basis for which the marketing decisions are made upon. The marketer addresses the customers unfulfilled needs and wants by offering a product that has value and provides satisfaction for the customers (Armstrong & Kotler, 2010). Kalb (2004) describes this approach in marketing as market- or customer-driven where the contradiction to this style is product-driven in which your company has a unique product with little competition in the market and can dictate what it offers without paying attention to the needs and wants of the customer. All in all, the goal for marketing is exchange and transaction where a transaction takes place and two parties trade something valued by the other.

The concept of relationships in marketing is not only about attracting new customers but also about retaining existing customer relationships. The fifth element, market, consists of the actual and potential buyers of a product. (Armstrong & Kotler, 2010) In digital marketing, the core concepts do not change regardless the non-physical market place of online marketing. As this thesis concentrates on social media marketing, it can also be stated that the market can be easily defined in social media marketing to the individual social media channel. Consequently, the relationship building is also emphasized in social media marketing due to communicative nature of social media.

2.1.2.2. Marketing mix

The marketing mix consists of product, place, price and promotion, and it is often referred as the 4 P's (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, 2009). These elements are used to describe the choices a company makes when marketing a product or a service. They help to discover the actions one needs to take in regards of positioning the product in the market.

Usually, the product is the starting point of the marketing mix. The product includes not only the physical unit of the actual product but also packaging, warranty, after-sale service, company image, brand name and value (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, 2009). As this thesis examines the practices of a tourism company, it should be noted that the product can also be a service. The place, also known as distribution strategies, is about making your product easily accessible for customers' .Basically, it means placing your product in the most convenient way for the customer in the designated place of purchase and it also emphasizes the strategies concerning the storage and transporting of the goods.

The price defines the value of the product or service to the customer. Consequently, the price is the element that changes the most as it is tied to the market conditions (Advertising, public relations, sales promotion and personal selling are all part of the promotion tools that are used to inform, educate, persuade and remind the customer of the benefits of your product and organization (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, 2009).

These marketing communications tools should be synchronized into an integrated marketing communications system and used in absolute harmony to convey the wanted message to the target market (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, 2009).

2.1.2.3. Integrated Marketing Communications

In most companies, the marketing is handled by a mix of various communication tools which is then referred as the communications mix. The main goal for any marketing communications, as suggested by Shimp (2010), is to influence behavior in a way that profits the company. These communication tools differ from each other and all of them need individual attention, but in order for these elements to succeed and profit your company, one needs to understand the importance of integration. Shimp (2010), describes integrated marketing communications (used as IMC) as a system where all the different parts of your marketing communications run together efficiently and produce more positive results than if ran separately. In other words, it is a system where all the different tools support each other and paint a synchronized picture of the organization or product. The philosophy behind IMC is that all the tools speak with one voice – meaning your main strategic message stays the same no matter which tool is used as Shimp (2010) ,describes it. Arens, Weigold & Arens (2011) ,continue stressing the point that the communication has to come united and seamlessly from every part of the organization to ensure the manifesting of the principal objective of IMC – earning a good reputation. It is true that the message, even though the content of the message does not change, is received differently depending on which medium is used to deliver the message. According to Armstrong & Kotler (2007) ,the main idea behind the concept of IMC is delivering a clear, consistent and compelling message about the organization and its brands. Thus, it is very important to understand this in the interest of preserving a strong unified brand image. No one wants to have duplicate or much

worse, contradictory messages that diminish your marketing communications. To which Arens et al. (2011) ,provide an excellent point by stating that with advertising you can create an image but a good reputation can only be earned by being consistent and trust-worthy. All in all, IMC provides you the tools, and thus, the ability to manage your communications effectively to allow the building of a reputable brand.

There are a lot of marketing communication tools for various purposes but the main six tools used are advertising, public relations, sales promotions, personal selling, direct marketing and sponsorship. These tools will be further explained and discussed in the paragraphs below.

Advertising, in general, is about raising awareness, educating, informing and persuading. The trick is to choose the right medium for your advertising – traditionally divided between broadcast and non-broadcast mediums. (Richardson, Gosnay & Carroll ,2010) But with today’s technology and digital media, the range of medias to choose from has grown tremendously. Armstrong & Kotler (2007) argue that traditional advertising lacks the ability to be personalized and relies largely on one-way-communication with the audience. Digital advertising does not have to be like that and due to the nature of e.g. social media, the communication is two sided. Digital media has also cut the costs of traditional marketing to a fraction and allowed the marketing to be much more targeted. Advertising in social media is complex as it can be done externally by for example your customers becoming ambassadors of your product in their blogs (also without even realizing it) or internally by for example you planting advertisements on social media networks (Richardson et al. 2010). Nowadays the bloggers use their popularity and followers by endorsing a certain brand or a product and the companies are using them as well by giving them free samples to promote and carry out competitions on their blogs. This can be seen as the digital era equivalent of word-of-mouth marketing and is very valuable source for your organization.

Public Relations (abbreviated as PR) differ radically from advertising with generally being more subtle and softer of a communication tool. It is used for building relationships, generating and fostering goodwill and trust, creating positive stories and conversations, developing a long-term positive reputation for the brand and organization and countering bad publicity. Activities in PR are such as press releases, press conferences, media relations, events and search engine marketing (Richardson et al. 2010.). PR can be used to counter negative attention and also for

internal communication. Digital revolution has also affected PR as it has become one of the most commonly used marketing tools in social media. However, the offline created PR buzz is often transformed into online buzz by bloggers which states the importance of engaging in two way conversation with them. You can maximize the impact of your PR campaign by studying who is saying what. Tracking the links between social media releases and customer interaction with your website et cetera can help you influence the conversation as controlling is not an option with social media (Richardson et al. 2010). As PR focuses on managing the conversation between the organization and the public, the feedback gained from it should be used to benefit the company. It is a good way to discover what it is that pleases your customers and what it is that does not. This information could prove to be crucial for the organization's success.

Sales promotion is referred to as a „behavioral“ tool as it is designed to affect the behavior of customers. It can be used to increase sales in the short term, encourage brand switching, encourage trading up, trial and use, increase frequency and amount purchased and balance seasonality if experienced. The activity, or technique, used should always match the goal you want to achieve. Examples of these activities include competitions, free prize draws, trial-sized products, money-off coupons, loyalty cards and bulk buying. Sales promotion online can come in many forms such as social media networks designed for coupons or e-coupons that can be redeemed online or printed and used offline. This presents an easy and cheap way to boost up the sales in short-term. It is essential, for measuring the effectiveness of such campaigns, to include a code and also it is wise to remember to add a time stamp or a use-by limit to your coupons. (Richardson et al. 2010). The goal for sales promotion is to increase sales and usage or trial of a product but on the other hand, these techniques are often creative and depend vastly on the nature of the business. Therefore, there is no such a thing called the one and only way to do sales promotion.

2.1.3. Social media

2.1.3.1. Definition of Social Media

Most people know what social media is, or at least think they should know, but still find it difficult to define the term in a simple way. And with half-knowledge and lack of confidence comes fear and uncertainty that people often attach to the things they do not understand. (Safko

& Brake, 2009). Therefore, it is important to understand what social media is, especially if it is to be used for business purposes.

The beginning of social media takes place long before computer science. People have always had the natural urge to communicate with other people around them. This need combined with the modern information technology has formed an extremely powerful communication tool that has opened up new doors for online marketing (Safko & Brake, 2009).

Social media can be best defined as a group of new kinds of online tools that allow users to participate by contributing with content visible and accessible to anyone. It is characterized by its openness as there are no access barriers, and by its connectedness making use of links, resources and people, and allowing the quickly creation of communities that can effectively communicate (Mayfield, 2008).

Social media can be viewed as the modern version of word-of-mouth. It takes the decision-making process back to what it used to be a long time ago when one's family, friends and acquaintances and their experiences were the main factor helping to form one's opinion on different things. It allows people to share content and to communicate and hold conversations with each other online. Instead of a one-way communication used in most media channels, two-way communication is the base and the meaning of social media (Sigala, Christou & Gretzel, 2012).

With a new and complex social media ecosystem, Safko & Brake (2009) argue that there is still a lot to learn about its functions and even more so for its functions in the business world. Hence, the social media ecosystem is very colorful and each social media channel has something the others do not. This might make social media seem like a difficult subject to tackle for some and especially if it is to be used for business where there is less room for experimenting due to the financial risks.

However, it should be emphasized that social media should not be viewed as a new and revolutionary phenomenon to the world of human interaction but rather as an improved version of communication. People have communicated via writing, pictures and videos for years and

years and social media just provides an online medium to continue this trade. Safko & Brake (2009) even argue that it is likely for one to have participated in social media without acknowledging it by e.g. reading a blog, messaging another member of a community or watching a YouTube video.

Traditional media and traditional marketing have long used the tools social media is founded upon; text, audio, video and photographs. In social media anyone can create and distribute content for free available for millions of people (Zarella, 2010). With this kind of a reach, the possibilities of social media are endless. Consequently, Safko & Brake (2009) explain that the difference with social media is that basically everyone with an Internet access has the ability to influence by e.g. becoming a citizen journalist by witnessing and capturing a crime on their camera phone, marketing a product by recommending it to others or sharing a story with mentions of companies or products.

Social media is about enabling conversation between people online and looking from a business perspective, this takes a little different meaning by also emphasizing the ways the conversation can be prompted, promoted and monetized (Safko & Brake ,2009). In the new world of social media and with the rapidly growing sum of different social media channels, it is almost impossible to not have people talk about your company or product. On that account, there is a need for social media understanding in every business in the modern world.

2.1.3. 2.Key social media platforms

There are hundreds of platforms where internet users can interact and share information with other users, starting from blogs, forums, wikis, video and photo sharing to social networks, virtual communities, chat rooms and podcast. According to the report presented by according to Bard (Bard) key social platforms can be appreciated in the figure below.



Figure 2.1: categories of Social Media according to Bard

Social Media may be segregated into classes of collaboration and sharing, here is one approach classifying social media into different categories (Bard, 2010):

- Micro-Blogging
- Publishing
- Photo Sharing
- Aggregators
- Audio
- Video
- Live-casting
- RSS
- Mobile
- Crowd Sourcing
- Virtual Worlds
- Gaming
- Search

These platforms promote different ways of interaction among users since they are designed to supply all segments of consumers. They encourage users and travellers to post and share their (travel) experiences, comments, opinions to serve as a source of information for other users (Xiang and Gretzel, 2009). Depending on the interests, motivations and attitudes of the users they will prefer to use one platform instead of another. It is also important to mention the fact that several platforms may be used as applications in the same webpage.

From the presented figure, it can be highlighted, described and analyzed the main platforms (blogs, social networks, chat rooms, forums, video sharing and photo sharing) which according to the author they may imply major sources of information and participation for tourists, as it is the main focus of the present study.

The most popular social media platforms are blogs, hotel rating systems, forums, RSS, podcasting and wikis, mash-ups etc (Chabot, 2007). Some details about them are the following:

- **Blogs** online diaries with a weak “communitarian” degree: readers can write and add comments. They encourage customers to give their opinions and to share their experiences, pictures and trips (Boni & Stemart, 2006).

There are many blogs in the tourism industry, such as tripadvisor.com, hotelchatter.com etc. Anyone can create a weblog by using a software offered for free at different websites, such as the search engine “Google”, can use it for publishing links to other blogs, texts, images, Webpages, audio and video files etc. Weblogs are becoming a very important information source for international travelers for getting travel advice and suggestions of tourism service providers (Sigala, 2007).

- **Forums** are also an important which enable a gathering of opinions around a topic or a common interest, developed through discussions. There are a lot of forums focused on tourism issues, where thousands of people exchange views and write comments. Some of them are: www.virtualtourist.com (World Travel Forum), www.tourismzone.com etc.

- **Hotel Rating Systems** are one of the first tourism collaborative tools. They give the opportunity for customers to give a mark for services provided during their stay in a hotel; so that other future consumers can make a decision about the hotels they will sleep in and find the best offer (Chabot, 2007).
- **Podcasting** is a contraction of iPod and broadcasting. It is a form of online “à la carte” radio, which uses the RSS technology (Boni & Stemart 2006). Podcasting refers to the uploading of audio and video files by users on websites. The most well-known website for sharing such content with others is www.youtube.com. Nowadays a lot of tourism service providers are using Podcasting as an effective form of marketing, as well as a communication tool.
- **RSS** stands for Really Simple Syndication, a file which allows the user to get updated information what he or she is the most interested in (Boni & Stemart, 2006). People do not need to click on each individual website that he/she is interesting to read any new information, because the RSS feeds all new updated information to the users’ RSS reader.
- **Tagging** is a form of keywords or category label used to identify specific contents in the data base. They give a direct access to the information needed. They are used for example by Flickr, the photo sharing website to “*find photos which have something in common*” (Chabot, 2007).
- **Social networks** such as Twitter, Facebook, MySpace are increasing the number of users as well as their role in the customer interaction arena. Social networks are becoming tourism organization destination marketing tools providing a great impact to the tourism markets markets. Organisations around the world can post valuable information, product videos, pictures, customer testimonials, create discussion forums, and much more (UNWTO, 2013).
- **Mash – ups**. Mash ups describe the seamlessly combination of two or more different sources of content and-or software for creating a new value added service to users (Sigala, 2007). Generally a mashup is any web feature that builds on services provided by

other sites. Some Mash – ups services are provided by Google Maps API services, for finding different locations through an easy and practical way. These application is used very often by tourists for finding hotels, restaurants and other touristic services when are on holidays.

- **Wikis.** A wiki is a Web site that allows users to add and update content on the site using their own web browsers. Those websites are developed collaboratively through their users. The most popular is the wikipedia.com, an online encyclopedia that is created and continually updated by its users. In tourism wikitravel.org represents the effort of Internet users to collaboratively create and continuously update an online global travel guide (Sigala, 2007).

2.1.3.3. Social media for business

Social media can be used to create business – a new kind of business. There is a chance you will have a niche somewhere in the social media ecosystem. On the other hand, there is no guarantee of success but the other alternative of waiting and seeing if social media is just one of those short-lived fads that come and go every now and then, is not very lucrative either. So even if you have not been involving yourself with social media before, you are not too late (Safko & Brake, 2009). As history has proven many times before, the early bird catches the worm but also that the people following the first wave of experimenters have been successful by having a good strategy and tactical alternations based upon the experiences by the first-wavers.

Evans & McKee (2010) state that the starting points for social media is often marketing but argues that the meaning of social media for businesses carries far beyond marketing. For businesses social media brings a new dimension to word-of-mouth marketing. If you have a service or a product people seem to enjoy and support, there is no better way to market your services than by word-of-mouth. It is not about controlling what is said about your company, as this is not really even possible with social media, but rather about influencing the conversation (Safko & Brake, 2009). With a good social media strategy and a little research into the social media fundamentals, your company will be able to take full advantage of social media. The fundament for all successful relationships with the customers, employees, vendors and friends is influence and in social media influencing the conversation is the goal.

Safko & Brake (2009) list three rules to social media usage for businesses that will help you form a clearer picture of social media and what its meaning is for your business: firstly, social media is about enabling conversation; secondly, it is not about controlling the conversations and as the third rule states the basis for all business relationships with economical viability is influence. As long as these three rules are accepted and followed, social media can be harnessed successfully as a marketing tool.

2.1.3.4. Social media advantages for travel businesses

While social media presents benefits and advantages for all types of businesses, this paper will just explore those advantages in terms of creating a receptive and responsive travel market for the Ethiopian Tour Operator business in general.

I. Humanizing the company

According to Finch (2009) the best way to humanize a company is by their willingness to listen: To listen and hold customer's words as a valuable commodity will increase a company's credibility. Humanizing the company is about reaching out and making marketing efforts to connect with customers on a human based level; and companies are blogging to reach that human element (Gergely, 2009).

By using social media platforms, travel companies do not only have an opportunity to share thoughts about business itself but they can be aware of people reactions and comprehend how they are perceived in the market. It also lets customers see how you respond to their comments and reviews (McKay, 2009).

II. Creating customer loyalty

One of the keys travel companies can use to increase customer retention and loyalty is to create customer engagement, but customers need a reason to engage. This is most simply and easily accomplished by offering compelling content that is not about only a company's product, but relevant to the customers' lifestyle.

Putting this content in social tools makes it more scalable and repeatable (McKay, 2009). Social media tools allow customers to get to know the people inside a company. They get to see real people with real personalities, and customers that have positive interactions with the people in a company feel a stronger sense of trust with that organization, a key factor in building customer loyalty (Carroll 2008); it deepens customer relationships and empower customers to become a company's best advocates (Creating customer loyalty through social media, 2008). The deal is not only to participate in digital communities but organize and promote community programs of their own that cultivate a loyal following of "friends". By nature, the community is a self-selecting loyalty program, and by providing tools do not only help to manage the company's identity, but communicate with loyal "friends" and strengthen the company's relevance (Vettese, 2009). As explained by Mott (2009) these tools will continue to influence the way marketers are executing loyalty building programs today as they are inexpensive and becoming a way of life, fulfilling that natural need to connect with others.

III. building and reinforcing a reputation

It is a certain fact that millions of people are getting online to criticize company's products and services, especially if they are related with travel experiences, which were supposed to be enjoyable. The internet has compounded the speed and the geographic distribution of any kind of information (Online Reputation Management, 2006).

With social media ordinary people can affect a business with erroneous rumors, malicious gossip, unfair opinions, and other bad news but it can also become a company's best partner. Businesses can use social media to monitor and control adverse information appearing in those online conversations. Monitoring is a cost-effective strategy that can help prevent negative campaigns and reviews online (Online Reputation Management, 2006). Businesses can also take advantage of these tools by being actively involved in online conversations with the opportunity to improve the perception of the business, as it allows you to respond directly to critics, clear out mislead information or public an honest comment about a true negative situation (Online Reputation Management, 2006). In the end, speaking the truth in an accessible media builds trust in your consumers and let them realize you are truly listening to them.

IV. search engine optimization

Search Engine Optimization represents an advantage for travel businesses as it is in many ways related with viral marketing. Here, word of mouth is not created through friends and families but with the use of networking in social bookmarking, video and photo sharing websites.

The concept is simple and implements the use of Rich Site Summary (RSS) feeds to deliver updated content promptly to the interested, social news buttons, blogging and third-party communities' functionalities like pictures and videos.

Basically, it implements changes in a company's site so it can become more highly visible in social media organic searches in search engines, and more frequently included in relevant posts, blogs, and podcasts and (Bhargava, 2006).

2.1.3.5. The disadvantages of social media

As explained by Racoma (2007), one of the main drawbacks of social media ironically comes from the fact that it is social. 'Like with any population or group within a population, social media can easily be gamed or manipulated by dominant factions'.

With the rise of social media there has also been a proliferation of unsolicited commercial content, deliberate self promotion and more savvy spammers, all intentional, with minimal incremental costs and little chances of getting caught (Kim, 2009). These online cheaters can deliver the wrong message to consumers about a business, and can damage a brand irrevocably. The accessibility of these tools, which is perhaps one of their main advantages, can also play for the other side allowing users to abuse from them since controlling what is being posted or not is still quite limited (Kim, 2009).

Another disadvantage observed is the lack of content delivery. Social media demands updated content consistently in order to motivate consumers to engage. In the words of Mckenzie (2008), 'these tools are easy to start but really hard to maintain and takes a significant time', which most companies never consider as an important factor, and can actually influence in the balance between work/life of those workers appointed to these communication channels. On the contrary, information overload and social networking overload can also be considered as a

drawback due to burnt-out users (Leonard, 2009). Also, the lack of good filters can difficult to find the best content causing lots of information being overlooked (Racoma, 2007).

2.1.3.6. Social media strategy

A strategy in general is defined as a plan to differentiate the organization from its competitors by having competitive advantage. The organization needs to know what it is they do, what they want to achieve and how they plan to achieve it (Harvard Business School Press, 2005) .Social media strategy is part of the organization's overall marketing strategy. It is basically like any other marketing strategy as the organization must decide upon two main things; what is our target market (customers) and what is the best way to serve them (value proposition)? The target market is chosen by dividing the market into segments (market segments) and then picking out the best segments to target (target marketing). The value proposition is about the values the organization promises for the customer to satisfy their needs (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007) .These values are what differentiate your brand from the others. Consequently, with a strong value proposition you have competitive advantage in your target market (Armstrong & Kotler, 20079). All in all, having competitive advantage is the aim of any strategic plan in marketing and by communicating it to your customers is the way to success.

Developing a social media strategy for your business starts with analyzing your organization and the business environment. It is critical for the success of your social media strategy. The first step is to assess your organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the context of social media by using the SWOT analysis (Safko & Brake 2009, 670). Acknowledging the key internal and external issues for your organization, help you in planning and forming of your strategic objectives. It is beneficial to examine your organization as a whole and in terms of social media, as this will allow you to view the bigger picture and not only a small part of the situation. The SWOT analysis is a good start for your situational analysis but it is important to also understand and analyze your customers, competitors and business environment. After the situational analysis has been conducted, the organization should set the strategic objectives and actions, which need to be taken in order to achieve the goals and objectives (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007).

As you design the communications in social media strategy, you select the right channels for your communications (Kotler & Keller, 2006). One should remember that the customer normally uses more than one social media. Thus, it makes sense for your organization to also market on various social media platforms. This does not mean you have to be present on every social media there is nor should the effort put into marketing be the same for all the Medias (Singh, 2010). For a successful marketing strategy, the organization should be aware of the main social media channels their customers use to be able to concentrate their marketing efforts. There are no single criteria for the choosing of the social media to market in but the main idea is to find the ones where your customers spend most of their time on. Overall, a strategy has little importance if it is not implemented successfully, thus, the organization needs to spend more time on the implementing part of the strategy and remember that it does not necessarily have to be perfect on the first go as you are likely to improve it along the way. Hence, it is essential to measure the effectiveness of your strategy and actions and the ways of measuring social media marketing are further discussed.

2.1.3. 7. Ways to market your business in social media

In this chapter, the different tactics of marketing in social media are discussed and some comparisons are made between the different tools. The focus is on the most important social medias chosen for this research by the researcher; Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and TripAdvisor. The purpose is to provide a concrete image of marketing in social media by giving examples of the various tactics.

When thinking about marketing in social media most methods are unpaid but as the social media phenomena has grown and businesses have become more aware of its benefits, there has been an addition of paid marketing tools for most of the media. Lastly, the paid tactics and tactics unique to individual social media channels are presented. On the other hand, the unpaid methods are the easiest and most convenient way to start marketing in social media and they could be considered as the primary method for the commissioner of this thesis as well. Marketing in these channels are all based on creating a profile for your organization and interacting with your audience.

It all starts with creating a profile page for your organization to connect with new and loyal customers that includes all the basic information about your business. The profile is created for

the organization to be able to share content which can be in form of text, picture, audio, video or links to other websites. The content should consist of your products, services and the expertise you have as well as the things you encourage your audience to contribute and the conversations you enable, influence and archive (Safko & Brake, 2009). In order for your efforts to gain attention, you need to have an audience – referred as fans, followers or subscribers depending on the social media channel. This means you should promote your profile by at least adding links and specialized buttons for Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and TripAdvisor onto your website and for example putting the URL to your business cards, in-store signs and flyers. Professional and compelling pictures and videos are a great way to promote your organization by building the brand image and get people excited about your products and business. You want people to comment on them, “like”, retweet and share them. Commenting and sharing is possible on all the five medias this thesis concentrates on. You want the customers to be engaged and more importantly, to contribute their own content. You should also use these social media channels for marketing campaigns, events, sales and specialized deals as they bring the audience closer to the events, generate buzz and allow them to participate in them already before the actual event.

After you have successfully started your social media campaign and established some kind of a presence on these channels, there are some paid marketing tactics you might want to consider. Facebook has banner and social advertisements as well as sponsored stories and gifts. Although, it should be noted that traditional banner advertisements do not work as efficiently as on other websites in social media due to the engaging nature of the content already on the site (Singh 2010, 109). Twitter offers advertising solutions such as promoted tweets, trends and accounts that provide more visibility for your business or product (Twitter for Business, 2011). On YouTube, you can advertise in various ways through Video Ads, Display Ads and via the Brand Channel. There is also opportunity for custom solutions in advertising (Youtube ,2011c).

On **Facebook**, location based services can be used for your marketing. On Facebook, location based services can be used for your marketing advantage as the content you post (e.g. status updates, events and pictures) can include your location so users can find your organization based on it. It is also essential to add the physical address of your business and as Facebook has a

feature called “check-in” you can claim the physical place of your business for your employees and customers to check in on Facebook (Facebook for Business, 2011).

Twitter also offers location based services that can be added to the tweets and the pictures posted on Twitter. Specifically on Twitter, there is an option to include your tweets to a specified subject by using a hashtag that Twitter refers as “the theme for your tweet”. Due to the limited character amount of each tweet, the messages posted on your account should be clear and short. Consequently, Twitter is good for news and promoting events for which additional information can be found on another website (Twitter for Business, 2011).

YouTube has also included location based services to its catalogue by allowing users to add the location where the video was shot to it so it shows up on a map. But a location is not the most convenient way for your audience to find your video. Hence, you should include an accurate title, description and tags (keyword or label for the theme of the content). This makes your video pop up in the search results. There is an option that puts the featured video of your account on autoplay and an opportunity to create a custom background for your profile. (Social Media Examiner, 2011).

On **Flickr** it is desirable to participate by joining the appropriate groups (e.g. travel related groups for tourism organizations). One tactic that emphasizes your organization is to use your website address as your Flickr screen name so that it appears every time you do something, such as comment or post pictures. Remember to use tags on YouTube and Flickr as well to describe the videos and photos (Small Business Search Marketing, 2010).

A company can create a free business account that makes it possible to update business details and upload photos, receive e-mail notifications of reviews, respond to guest reviews and also promote the business with free widgets and badges. For more advanced business solutions, TripAdvisor offers tourism organizations a chance to upgrade into “a business listing” for a fee that allows creating of special offers, direct contacting and increasing of visibility on the TripAdvisor site (TripAdvisor for Business, 2011).

Flickr offers a variety of paid advertising options such as advertisements on home page and sponsored groups (Yahoo! Advertising Solutions, 2011). You are able to place your advertisement on different parts of the site. Other advanced tactic is creating a Pro account that

entitles you to unlimited uploads and creates authority and respect in the community (Small Business Search Marketing, 2010).

The most essential thing to remember when marketing in social media is the communicative nature of the phenomena. Consequently, you should treat social media differently as a marketing tool compared to traditional media. It is a two way street and to get the most out of your social media campaign, you need to engage your audience and get them to participate in any way possible.

2.1.3. 8. Measuring the efforts

The myth of social media marketing being immeasurable has been hurting the phenomena's reputation in terms of becoming an accepted marketing tool. Furthermore, many marketers and consultants have argued that it is too early to measure it as well as measure the value of a conversation (Singh, 2010).

It might have been the case a couple of years ago but today, however, there are many ways to measure your social media marketing. It is true that there is a lack of standardized measurement but this does not mean it should not be measured at all (Practical Ecommerce, 2011). Evans & McKee (2010) state that the main reason for measuring the organizations social media marketing is that whole the organization (beyond the marketing department) is more capable of comprehending and accepting it.

In addition to this, social media marketing has a greater chance to succeed and not be a simple experiment, or a costly diversion, if there is a working measurement program in place. Moreover, measuring allows the marketers to track what actions are effective in their social media campaigns and what should be changed. This just proves that measuring the organization's marketing effectiveness is applicable to social media marketing as much as it is to traditional marketing.

There are various ways to classify the different measurement tools for social media marketing and as the usage of social media in marketing gains more momentum in the business world, the amount of measurement tools increase as well. Popular tools include Twitter Search, Google

Alerts (both for search results) and Google Analytics (reports website traffic). Aside the free options, there are also a lot of paid tools (such as SproutSocial) that are great for bigger organizations with larger social media campaigns. The traditional measurements such as page views, total and unique visitors might not be enough to measure the effectiveness of one's social media marketing. What's more important is to get the audience engaged in your social media campaign, so measuring the activity of your fans likes, comments, retweets, and shares tell you more about the effects (Practical Ecommerce, 2011).

For smaller businesses with presence and marketing efforts only in one or two social media channels, it might be easier to measure the effectiveness by using each channel's own measurement or analytics page. For example, Facebook (Page Insights) provides a lot of important measuring information by listing the number of fans, total comments, likes and even click-through-rate (Facebook Developers ,2011). The same goes with YouTube with its own Insight –page that offers information on page and video views, demographics, ratings, commenting and, of course, the number of subscribers (YouTube, 2011).Twitter has a page for Advertiser Analytics that offers insight into the fundamental metrics of your campaign; retweets, click-throughs, follows as well as timeline activity and followers (Twitter ,2011).

To summarize, it is important to find the right metrics for your organization that can be applied to your analytics program. This will make measuring the social media efforts a less challenging task and provide you the information necessary for making your social media strategy and operations a success.

2.2 The conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this research revolves around tourism industry, marketing, social media and its use in marketing. The thesis concentrates on social media and its usage in marketing.

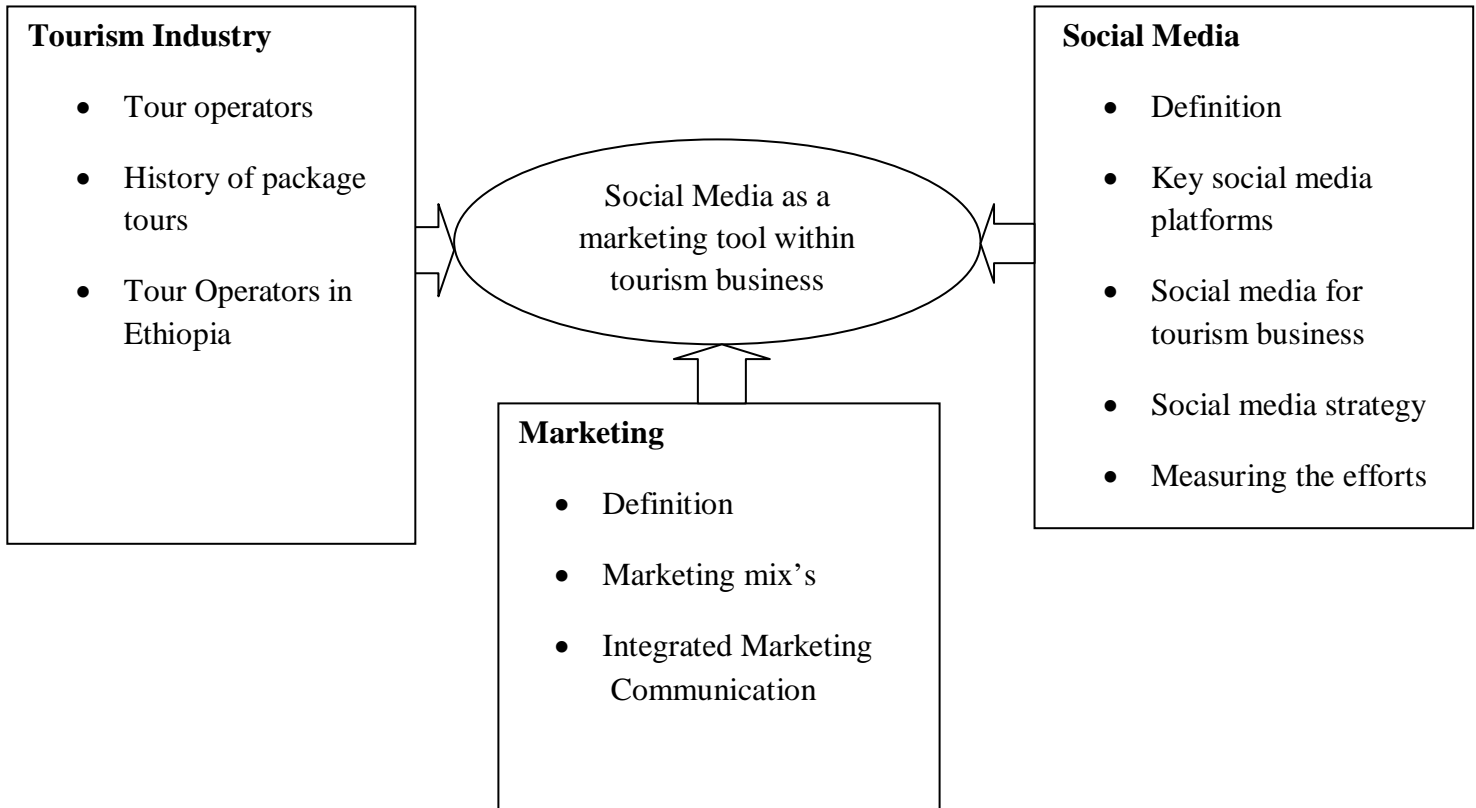


Fig.2.2 conceptual framework of the study

CHAPTER THREE

3. Research Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology used for this research project. The method, the instrument of the method, as well as the different approaches tackled will be presented and properly justified. Furthermore, limitations to the research process will be further discussed.

3.1. Research design and approach

In order to facilitate the understanding of the methodology, graph 3.1 illustrates the approaches used. The darker boxes show the path which has been followed.

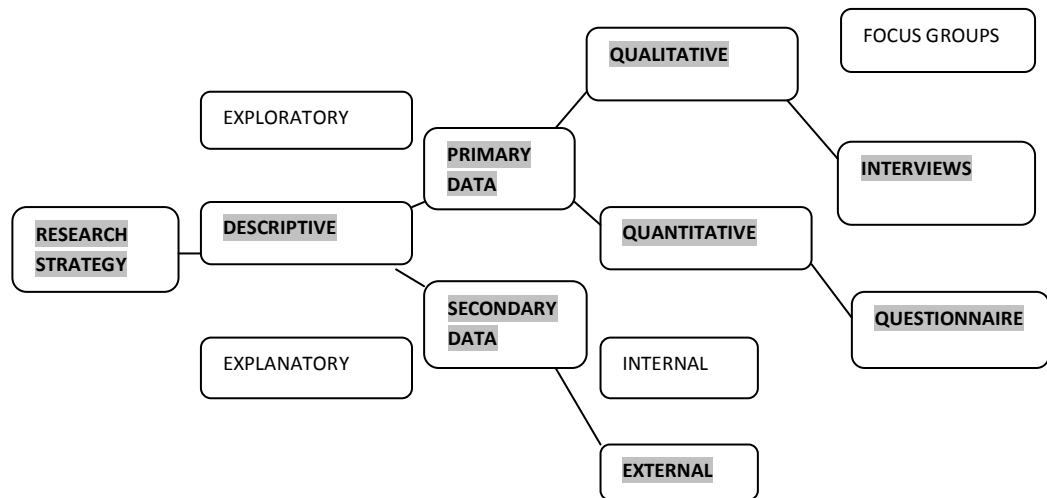


Fig3.1 Outline of the method

Every research project has to follow a plan in order to coordinate all the methods and approaches used within the methodology, as well as to give an answer to the research question (Silverman, 2005). Thereafter in order to accomplish the aims and objectives already proposed, the present study has been based on a descriptive approach to research. According to Salkind (2006) a descriptive research describes the characteristics of a specific phenomenon providing the picture of what is currently happening. Hence, in this particular case the picture of how Tour Operators in Addis Ababa use social media along the determining variables adopted from literature reviewed will be provided. Veal *et al.* (2005) points out that this type of research has been

widely used in the tourism sector because of the intrinsic changing nature of tourism. Due to the changing nature of tourism behaviors, from time to time they have to be described for a later analyses, comparison or evaluation.

For primary data collection this research paper used the mixed approach that comprises both the quantitative and qualitative approach to research works. The qualitative approach for this investigation is the phenomenological one, which can be simply defined as a way 'to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation' (Lester, 1999). The quantitative approach is deployed in terms of quantifying primary data, in the form of descriptive analysis for tabulations, percentage, and charts.

3.2. Population and Sampling

In order to apply the instrument of the research the people who is going to be investigated has to be selected. This process is called the sampling process (Trochim, 2006). For interview part, all the people interviewed in this research were not selected at random, they were selected purposively (Trochim, 2006); and in order to satisfy the focus of this study.

As demonstrated in the relevant literature, Facebook is the most commonly used social media platform in business companies of Addis Ababa. As consequence, the researcher decided to use Facebooks search to find the target population that comply with the required criteria for this research project, in order to find and contact people for the interviews. 15 Tour Operators of who were kind to spare some of their time to this research were received from phone calls. In addition, the entire sample was selected according the completion of three criteria mentioned under selection of participants.

For quantitative data collection from Tour Operators, the study applied purposive sampling technique. According to Ministry of Culture and Tourism annual report in the year 2012/2013 G.C, there were 360 legally registered tour operators that were based in Addis Ababa. Among these, top 20 Tour Operators were listed based on sales volume and number of tourist arrivals for the year 2012/2013 G.C. Thus, the researcher selected the listed top 20 tour operators after checking the completion of the selection criteria by using purposive sampling technique.

For quantitative data collection from Tourists, convenience sampling, non-probabilistic sampling technique, is employed. Convenience sampling was selected due to lack of accurate Tourist figure. The response of 68 Tourists who have visited Ethiopia on the month of June, 2014 through the top 20 Tour Operators were collected from the distributed questionnaire.

3.3. Selection of participants

For the selection of the Tour Operator business participants in this research the following criteria was taking in consideration:

- The business needed to have presence in one or several social media tools.
- The social media page needed to be dedicated to promoting a tourism business of Ethiopia.
- The participants must be willing to take part on the research.

3.4. Data collection technique

Within the research strategy the researcher decided to combine primary and secondary data in order to gain a wider understanding of how businesses use social media. Due to the fact that there is little literature concerning the social media's topic, the researcher has thought relevant to collect new data in order to contribute to the literature generating a framework of the use of social media.

The researcher has used a wide amount of secondary data sources in order to build the base of this research. Because as Finn *et al.* (2000) pointed out, a deep secondary data collection must be done before starting any type of primary collection to construct the foundations of any research. Therefore, for this research, the researcher has used extensively the existing literature as basic sources of information. Besides, the Internet has been extensively used for gathering the secondary data.

Regarding the primary data, Jennings (2001) defines primary research as the collection of first hand data such as observations, interviews or questionnaires; in order to use it in an own investigation project. Jennings (2001) remarks that the key interest of primary data research falls

on the relevance of the data; opposite to secondary data, primary data has been collected for the very main purposes of the researcher, thus it is appropriate for the sample studied.

The qualitative method selected in order to find the necessary data required for this study was the in-depth interview. Face-to-face interviews with selected Tour Operators were conducted. For the quantitative method a questionnaire was developed by analyzing similar previous research studies, and the questions asked were descriptive of nature.

3.5. Method of data analysis

After having identified the pertinent sources of information, those which contain information related to Travel businesses and Social media; the researcher analyses the information founded in order to present in the report the most relevant information (Veal, 2006). The search and analysis of secondary data has supposed an ongoing process along the research project as new data concerning the use of Social media and the Internet is published every day. The main existent models and theories Tour Operators, Tourism marketing and communication, key social media platforms and there use as marketing and communication tool have been used in the literature review to build the basis of the research as well as they will be used to support the study results and conclusion part.

Regarding the qualitative method, according to Hakim (2000) the raw data of the research provides a descriptive record of the project, but does not provide explanations, therefore the researcher needs to make sense of the data by separating and interpreting it. After organizing and having an overall picture of the complete set of data, relevant information will be taken from all the interviews and re-arranged under thematic headings. The main themes will be chosen on the basis of the research questions as suggested by Jennings (2001). Having the data arranged under thematic headings lead to the final step in the process. The process of interpretation is influenced by the original research objectives as well as by the themes that have emerged from the data themselves, making it easier to use the extracts from the data for breakdown and discussion in order to form the basis of the relevant part in the written study.

Regarding the quantitative method, the data collected through structured questionnaires and filtered in required manners tabulated and while analyzing the data proper coding de-coding as per requirement of data were used.

3.6. The instrument of the research method

In order to achieve the aims and objectives of this research, within the qualitative method approach the instrument chosen has been the interviews. Interview might be defined as “an interaction following a question- answer format (stimulus-response) or an interaction more akin to a conversation” (Ritchie *et al.* 2005 p. 101). Due to the intrinsic nature of the interview, which is concerned with the exchange of information between two persons and the advantages it provides to the researcher; the researcher decided to use the interviews instead of observation methods or focus groups.

Within the interview types, the qualitative interview (semi-structured or non-structured) was chosen because as Ritchie *et al.* (2005) pointed out, qualitative interviews build the base for the learning and knowledge understanding of the phenomenon studied. Therefore, it suits the main aims and objectives of the study.

For the quantitative method a questionnaire was developed by analyzing similar previous research studies, and the questions asked were descriptive of nature. In the questionnaire, a 5-point Likert scale was adopted defined as:(1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree and (5) strongly agree.

3.7. Instrument validity and reliability

For qualitative method used on this study, according to the literature read validity refers to the accuracy of an assessment. All the interviewees were able to elaborate and comment on their social media activity as users, and the data collected exemplified the ways in which social media being used by Tour Operators in Addis Ababa. Additionally, the semi-structured interview format, due to its flexibility, tended to enhance validity by allowing the questioning to be adapted to each individual user if necessary. This factor also assured credibility, and refers to the results of qualitative research being believable from the perspective of the participants. For the quantitative method, the questionnaires were pre-tested by those experienced in the field.

Triangulation was the approach taken to ensure that both validity and reliability of the research findings was ascertained. Through triangulation different sources of information are adopted. Besides, the use of multiple methods or different sources of information allowed the study to address the research questions and cross-check information exhaustively. Moreover, efforts were made to ensure that both validity and reliability of the empirical data was taken into consideration.

3.8. Ethical consideration

Neither the respondents nor the organizations will be mentioned by name in this study. This is done because the aim is to get accurate and honest data. By ensuring the anonymity of the respondents we ensured that the respondents' answers would be accurate and of honest nature. The interview, the transcription and all collected material will be handled confidentially.

This is to ensure that specific parts of the interviews were sensitive information regarding their competitive advantage would not be spread. This study may contain sensitive information when connected to each organization, therefore the importance of anonymity.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter will examine the interviewees' experiences and perceptions of using social media as a marketing tool. Furthermore the outcomes obtained through the interviews will be discussed with reference to the existent literature.

4.1. Interview results

A fundamental factor in this research project is to cross-examine the use of social media as marketing and tool for Tour Operators in Addis Ababa. Additionally, other factors such as the motivations for using social media, their attitude toward these tools and their experiences so far would be considered. What is intended is to let the interviewees share their understanding of the topic with their own words. The results of interview have been organized based on the interviews experience with regard to the four research questions for this study and incorporating the themes identified when performing the data analysis.

4.1.1. The extent tour operators in Addis Ababa are using social media as platform to reach target customers.

The interviews exposed that none of the Tour Operators were using their social media pages for a determined reason; each of the Tour Operators interviewed use their page for different factors. in fact, as it can be seen in the Social Media Use Matrix (Table 4.1) each of the travel businesses uses their page for different factors.

T	Humanizing Company	Communication	Public Relations	Networking	Brand Building	Sales Generator	Recruiting
1	X	X			X	X	
2	X	X			X		
3		X			X		
4	X	X	X		X	X	X
5	X	X			X		
6		X			X		
7	X	X			X		

8		X			X		
9		X			X		
10		X			X		
11	X	X			X		
12		X			X		
13		X			X		
14		X			X		
15		X			X		

Table 4.1 Social media use matrix

I. Social media as a sales generator

Only two interviewees mentioned the use of their social media page as a booking lead producer, indicating that the social media platform was not seen as a sales generator itself. One of the interviewee mentioned that:

"Here, I promote my packages and lots of people interested contact me about the promotional prices that I offer...I can say this is basic media for marketing ;Trip Advisor, Lonely planet Forum,Facebook attracted much more customer on significant level to my business." (T.1)

II. Social media as a communication tool

Communicating with customers and building a reputation was the most common reason for engaging in this tool, and all the interviewees mentioned this point. This result tends to confirm the view that social media can be an excellent tool for communicating with customers (e.g. Caroll 2009; Strout, 2009).

One of the interviewees sustains that social networks indeed provide contact and communication with customers:

"I get the chance to advertise my company and interact with my customers in a more personal way via online."(T.4)

III. Social media advantage over websites

Several interviewees agreed that a presence in a social network offers greater advantages than a traditional website. One of the interviewee which is owner and Tour Operator states that “it is easier to maintain than a webpage, with a minimal cost that helps to reinforce your product or brand”.

Another interviewee added “*you can identify those who are viewing your page while using social media such as Facebook and Twitter but not for your website viewers*” (T.14).

IV. The global factor

The global factor was important for most of the interviewees. One of the interviewee decided to use Social Media platforms for the reason that “*...so many people is using it to make contacts, and nowadays it is so popular that I wanted my business to be there as well*” (T.3). Another interviewee agreed that “Facebook has become one of the biggest social networks all over the world, and now it has even open spaces for business and advertisement so anyone can learn about us”(T.5). Another Interviewee took a similar view: "Social networks provide exposure and more importantly dialogue with millions of users. Exceptionally more than that can be reached by traditional one-way media and marketing" (T.1).

V. Social media for networking

Networking is another factor mentioned in the literature but not considered by interviews .While Tour Operators can work with Airline Companies, Hotels ,Travel Agents ,and International Tour Operators no interviewee has mentioned this. This indicates Tour Operators in Addis Ababa are not effectively utilizing social media’s potential of networking.

VI. Social media for recruitment

Only one of the Tour Operator mentioned usage of social media for recruitment: “*We post vacancy announcements on our Facebook when vacancies open though no one contacted as through this page (Facebook)*” (T.4).

VII. Social media for public relation

Only one Tour Operator mentioned the use of social media page for Public Relations: *“All the attraction belongs to Ethiopian people; we need to build the country image first before selling our products...you can find many among our people who like, share and comment on attractive pictures that we post on our Facebook page so they are following us” (T.4)*. This indicates Tour Operators in Addis Ababa are not yet utilizing social media potential for public relation.

VIII. Social media for small business

For small companies with limited resources, being present in any social media platform can become helpful while starting and building a marketing presence. For the tour Operator of new company established on 2013 social media is the main vehicle to reach mass people:

“Through social media we were exposed to the world because it keeps you in mind of everybody” .Also added "Our Company is not yet known not only internationally but also nationally to our people so it helps us to inform the world of our presence, fast and in an easy way"(T.3).

All in all, results pointed out that the interviewees were using the tool according to their own specific needs. Bailey (2009) considers that 'for best results, companies must plan their entry into social media carefully, build a strategy, and then dedicate the resources'. While social media is free, an investment of time is necessary; Martell cited through Chan (2009) suggests that is important 'to figure out what social platform is best for the characteristic of that person or that business owner' and if your target market is using it.

The social media landscape is dominated by just a handful of general social networking sites. Despite this huge amount of traffic, and growing popularity, Eye For Travel research shows that the industry is still unsure on how to effectively and profitably work with these vast horizontal networks (Social Media in Travel: Generating Brand Awareness is Not Enough, Monetization is Now the Top Priority, 2009).

The results of this study also confirms this as none of the Tour Operators mentioned the use of the tool through determining target market and the best way to serve them. Besides, none of the

Tour Operator interviewed mention the incorporation of SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis in to their marketing strategy.

The result indicate that most of the Tour Operators are not using it through developing social media strategy and the resulting SWOT analysis for effectively utilizing the existing potential of social media as a marketing tool. A strategy in general is defined as a plan to differentiate the organization from its competitors by having competitive advantage. The organization needs to know what it is they do, what they want to achieve and how they plan to achieve it(Harvard Business School Press ,2005) .Social media strategy is part of the organization's overall marketing strategy. It is basically like any other marketing strategy as the organization must decide upon two main things; what is our target market (customers) and what is the best way to serve them (value proposition)? The target market is chosen by dividing the market into segments (market segments) and then picking out the best segments to target (target marketing). The value proposition is about the values the organization promises for the customer to satisfy their needs (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007).

Developing a social media strategy for your business starts with analyzing your organization and the business environment. It is critical for the success of your social media strategy. The first step is to assess your organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the context of social media by using the SWOT analysis (Safko & Brake, 2009).

While several interviews were present on Facebook, Twitter, youtube ,TripAdvisor,Bradt Guide and Lonely Planet Forum, Only one of the interviewees had presence in other social networks:

"Our online presence includes social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Lonely Planet Forum,Bradt Guide,Google+,Youtube, as well as Flickr"(T.1).

4.1.2. The potential of social media as effective marketing tool witnessed by tour operators located in Addis Ababa.

Although none of the interviewees had measured the performance of their social media marketing campaign to determine the ROI (Return on Investment) of their social media activity, several were able to identify specific opportunities which had originated as a result of using it.

4.1.2. 1.Social media effectiveness for promoting business

Nearly all the interviewee mentioned the effectiveness of social media for promoting their business. *“Our products are not domestic and we are dealing with people we don’t even know so we must use social media to attract tourists to our business... I believe in social media more than I believe in having an asset because in the tourism industry your assets are meaningless if Tourists are not attracted to it” (T.3).* Other Tour Operator sustains *“Our business by its nature needs a huge promotional effort; social media pages has helped us on our promotional campaign.....our customers are involved on our social media pages through posting and commenting, this means they are promoting our product in effective way” (T.4).*

4.1.2.2. Social media effectiveness for brand reputation

Another factor perceived by most of the interviewees and also mentioned on relevant literature is the potential of social media for building brand reputation. As demonstrated by the existing literature, it is a certain fact that millions of people are getting online to criticize company's products and services, especially if they are related with travel experiences, which were supposed to be enjoyable. The internet has compounded the speed and the geographic distribution of any kind of information (Online Reputation Management, 2006).Several interviewees were able to witness the effectiveness of social media for building brand reputation:

“At first our company was not known to people though we have brochures and business cards but through posting attractive pictures on our facebook pages for example, we have got inquires from people who intended to know more about our company in this way we were exposed to the world”. (T.2)

“Your presence on highly reputed social Medias such as Trip Advisor by itself brings reputation of your brand” OtherI often post photos of well known people who took trips with my company, I found many people from their country who are eager to know more about us after watching those postsI can say we earned their trust”(T.4)

“If I tweet something, my followers will see it. If you are following me and you copy and paste what I’ve posted to your Twitter stream, your followers will see it, and one of them may also re

tweet it. This way, a message can spread virally through Twitter, reaching tens or hundreds of times as many people as it would if only a single person tweeted it” (T.5).

4.1.2.3. Social media effectiveness for humanizing the company

Humanizing the company is about reaching out and making marketing efforts to connect with customers on a human based level; and companies are blogging to reach that human element (Gergely, 2009). By using social media platforms, travel companies do not only have an opportunity to share thoughts about business itself but they can be aware of people reactions and comprehend how they are perceived in the market. It also lets customers see how you respond to their comments and reviews (McKay, 2009).

Businesses can also take advantage of these tools by being actively involved in online conversations with the opportunity to improve the perception of the business, as it allows you to respond directly to critics, clear out mislead information or public an honest comment about a true negative situation (Online Reputation Management, 2006). In the end, speaking the truth in an accessible media builds trust in your consumers and let them realize you are truly listening to them. One of the interviewee has mentioned that:

“After I review comments, I’ll respond by liking their post or thank them if it is on our Facebook page. If they comment on Trip advisor, I’ll send them a message using their personal email, in this way I maintained relationships with my customers” (T.1).

4.1.2.4. Social media effectiveness for search engine optimization

Other main factor for using social media which is agreed by most of the interviewees and mentioned on literature is search engine optimization .Most of the interviewees mentioned about search engine optimization and the benefit in terms of high ranking on Google search.

concept is simple and implements the use of Rich Site Summary (RSS) feeds to deliver updated content promptly to the interested, social news buttons, blogging and third-party communities' functionalities like pictures and videos. Basically, it implement changes in a company's site so it can become more highly visible in social media organic searches in search engines, and more frequently included in relevant posts, blogs, podcasts ,and (Bhargava ,2006).

“When we post photos on our facebook, people will comment and share our posts finally we will meet our goal, higher ranking on Google search and or search engine optimization” (T.2).

One of The Tour Operator who has got around 11,000 likes on the face book page of his company sustains that *“This is the main factor that I got higher ranking on Google search and you can get my company website address at the first page when you search with the title Tour Operators in Ethiopia”(T.4).*

4.1.2.5. Social media effectiveness for communicating with target market

One of the most outstanding advantages of social media platforms cited in the literature and by the interviewees themselves is communicating with customers. However, the traffic statistics only indicate how many people are visiting their pages, not of the 'conversation' which may be taking place. Customer feedback, via Facebook's wall to wall comments is potentially a valuable source of marketing information, and this was acknowledged by one of the interviewees:

"The personal experiences of a guest have a unique character and when they are shared they conform the most efficient marketing that exists, the most influential one: word of mouth". (T.1)

Most interviewees also sustain this by considering social media as initial contact. One of the interviewee mentioned *“we are now using social media as initial contact....after reviewing our posts on facebook for example ,we got inquires through our company email from those who are interested to learn more about our company”(T.3).*

4.1.3. Benefits of social media as perceived by tour operators in Addis Ababa

Updating and posting information in social networks represents an opportunity cost for companies, consuming resources that could be employed elsewhere. The question under examination is whether the users consider that the investment in time they do is justified by the results obtained. For this, it is imperative to learn how to measure it. Return on Investment (ROI) is a simple concept: it measures the profitability of returns, when compared against costs. However, measuring the ROI for social networking can be a little difficult because the returns out of networking via social media are not direct and immediate (Maki, 2008).

4.1.3. 1.Measuring the effort

Although none of the interviewees had measured the performance of their social media marketing campaign to determine the ROI of their social media activity, several were able to identify specific opportunities which had originated as a result of using it:

“We don’t have yet made cost benefit analysis on our social media pages as we do on our involvement on trade fare and exhibition but I believe the benefits we perceived are not comparable to what we pay for internet connectivity”(T.5).

4.1.3.2. Social media benefit over traditional printed media

One of the Tour Operator mentioned social media advantage over traditional printed media *“At early times we were using printed media such as brochures which are much costly, time consuming and inconvenient but now thanks to facebook we just post on it to reach mass people”* (T.5)

To summarize, while nearly all of the interviewees believed that their online presence in social platforms was bringing benefits to their company, none was able to measure the ROI in simply financial terms. When evaluating the costs of using social media the interviewees tended not to take into account the amount of time they spent on this activity: *“you need to update it regularly”, “ I am busy”* where the common answers. In some cases, using social media such as Facebook had become part of the daily routine, making it all but impossible to estimate its comparative cost in terms of time allocated.

4.1.4. The experience of tour operators in Addis Ababa regarding the disadvantages of using social media

Among social media users interviewed some perceived indirect disadvantages of using it. One of the interviewees pointed out that it was difficult to filter people that do not match target market while on these platforms:

“The disadvantage of facebook for example is that you don’t know who you interact with as it is free media” (T.5).

Another interviewee mentioned that *“Any company can upload pictures from your company page of Facebook or Youtube, and they will post it on their own pages as you can’t claim... Ones I have got a Tour Operator who uploaded from our company face book page with our logo on it”*(T.2). As explained by Racoma (2007), one of the main drawbacks of social media ironically comes from the fact that it is social. Like with any population or group within a population, social media can easily be gamed or manipulated.

Another risk mentioned by one of the tour Operators “Customers can exhibit their complain for millions of people.”(T.15)

As been read throughout the literature, social media platforms are one of the preferred ways to dialogue with customers. One of the users draws attention to the risks involved in such a dialogue:

“You have to try to not post much information about your company, only the necessary, because there are a lot of people dedicated to use that information for other means that can be prejudicial for your business”(T.12).

Rather than the perceived disadvantages, most interviewees mentioned lack of online payment in Ethiopia as a limitation for effectively utilizing social media potential for marketing tourism business.

4.2. Results of questionnaire survey on selected Tour Operators

Resulted obtained from questionnaire survey of selected Tour Operators for the study is presented as follows:

4.2.1. Commonly used social media platforms by Tour Operators

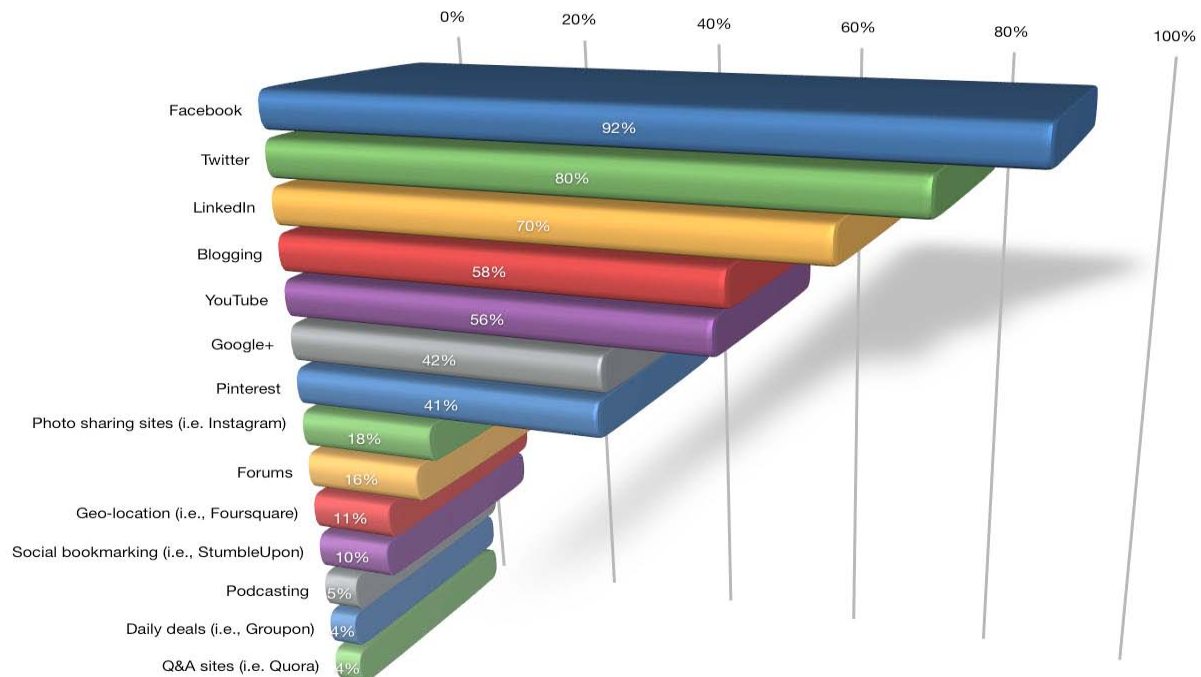


Fig 4.1. Commonly used social media platforms by Tour Operators

Source: Own survey, June 2014

From multiple choices were available on the questionnaire Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogging and YouTube were the top five platforms used by Tour Operators, with Facebook leading the pack. All of the other platforms paled in comparison to these top five.

4.2.2. The most important social platform for Tour Operators

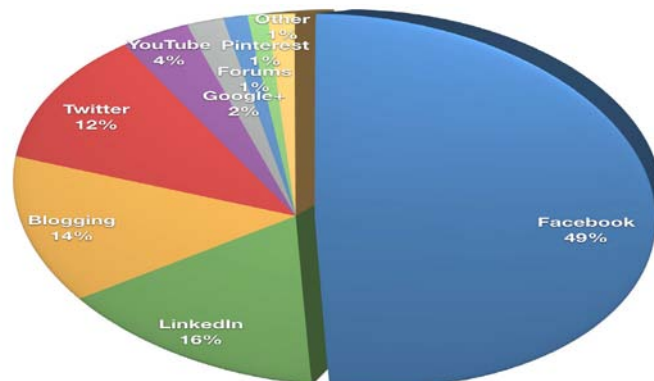


Fig.4.2. the most important social platform for Tour Operators

Source: Own survey, June 2014

Tour Operators were asked to select the single most important social platform for their business. Because only one choice was allowed, the findings are revealing. Nearly half of the Tour Operators (49%) chose Facebook as their most important platform, followed by LinkedIn (16%), blogging (14%) and then Twitter (12%). This chart clearly reveals Facebook is the powerhouse platform for marketers. However, it is interesting to note the prominence of blogging.

4.2.3. Benefits of social media marketing

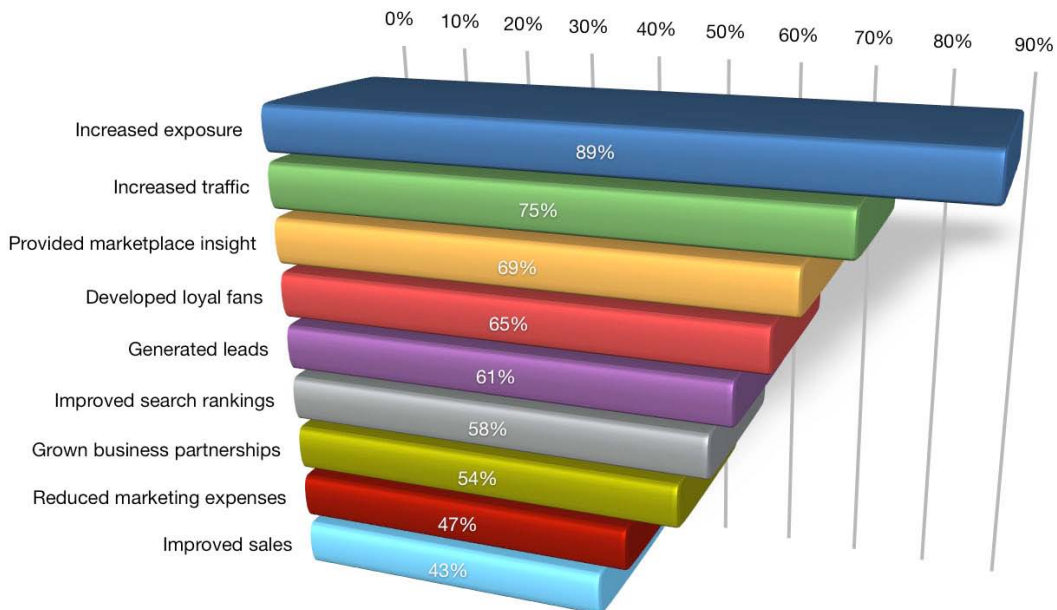


Fig.4.3. Benefits of social media marketing

Source: Own survey, June 2014

The top two benefits of social media marketing are increasing exposure and increasing traffic. Significant 89% of the respondents indicated that their social media efforts have generated more exposure for their businesses. Increasing traffic was the second major benefit, with 75% reporting positive results. Most Tour Operators are using social media to gain marketplace intelligence (69%) and develop loyal fans (65%).

4.2.4. Effectiveness of marketing using social media

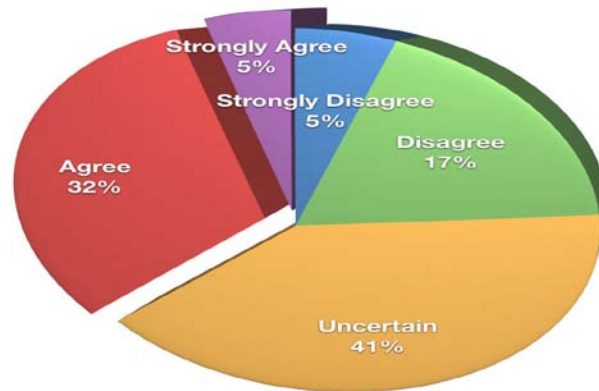


Fig.4.4. Effectiveness of marketing using social media
 Source: Own survey, June 2014

Tour Operators were asked if they agreed with the statement: "My social media marketing is effective." To our surprise, only slightly more than 1 in 3 (37%) agreed.

4.2.5. Integrating social media activities with traditional media

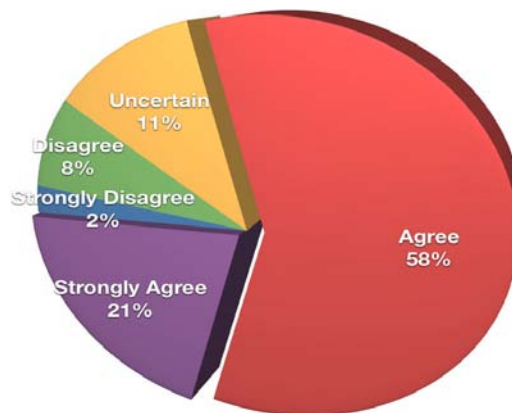


Fig.4.5. Integrating social media activities with traditional media
 Source: Own survey, June 2014

Tour Operators were asked to rate their agreement with the following statement: "I have integrated social media into my traditional marketing activities." A surprising 79% (16) agreed that they had integrated their social media and traditional marketing activities.

4.2.6. Measuring social media

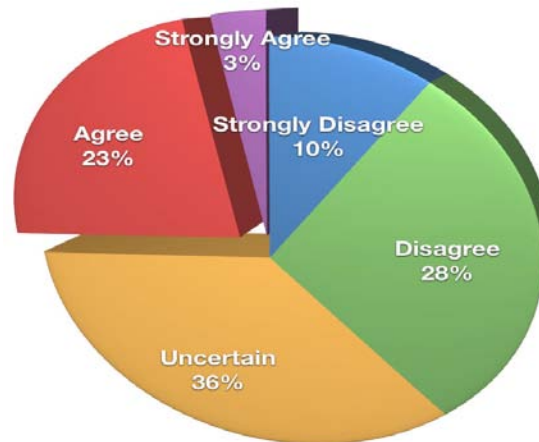


Fig.4.6. Measuring social media

Source: Own survey, June 2014

To understand Tour Operators ability to measure their social media activities, they were asked to rate their agreement with the following statement: "I am able to measure the return on investment for my social media activities." Only about one in four (26%) agreed they are able to measure their social activities. This indicates that most of the Tour Operators are not measuring their social media activity though they are investing resources on it.

4.3. Results of questionnaire survey of Tourists

Results obtained from questionnaire survey of tourists are presented as follows:

4.3.1. General profile of respondents

Table 4.2 below presented the characteristics of the survey respondents on the area of sex, age, and educational background. The sample population was 68 and of which 55.9% are male, and the remaining 44.1% were female. The general profile of the respondents will help to know about the participants responding to the questionnaire le.

Table 4.2. Sex, Age and Level of Education Distribution of the respondents

Answer	Total Respondents	
	TOTAL	
Gender	Count	Percent
Male	38	55.9
Female	30	44.1
Total	68	100%
Age	Count	Percent
Under 15	-	-
15-19	19	27.9
20-29	25	36.8
30-39	13	19.1
40-49	11	16.2
Above 49	11	16.2
Total	68	100%
Education Status	Count	Percent
Elementary school	-	-
High school	14	20.6
Diploma	20	29.4
First Degree	23	33.8
Masters Degree and above	11	16.2
Total	68	100%

Source: Own survey, June 2014

4.3.2. Social media platforms often used by tourists to interact with Tour companies

Table 4.3. Social media platforms often used by tourists to interact with Tour Operators

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Facebook	28	41.2	41.2	41.2
Youtube	3	4.4	4.4	45.6
Twitter	6	8.8	8.8	54.4
LinkledIn	6	8.8	8.8	63.2
Trip Advisor	17	25.0	25.0	88.2
Lonely planet forum	8	11.8	11.8	100.0
Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own survey, June 2014

Results revealed that the most often used social media site by travelers to interact with Tour companies is facebook(41.2%) ,followed by Tip advisor(25%), and lonely planet(11.8%).This confirms that facebook can be the power house for Tour Operators to interact with travelers.

4.3.3. Weekly time commitment for social media by tourists

Table 4.4 weekly time commitment for social media by tourists

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Throughout the day	4	5.9	5.9	5.9
At least one time per day	43	63.2	63.2	69.1
Few times per week	14	20.6	20.6	89.7
Atm least one time per week	7	10.3	10.3	100.0
Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own survey, June 2014

The majority (63.3%) are using social media at least one time per day, followed by those who spend few times per week. This indicates that using social media is among the daily activities of travelers.

4.3.4. The general opinion of travelers towards interacting with Tour Companies through social media

Table 4.5. The general opinion of travelers towards interacting with Tour Companies through social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Uncertain	6	8.8	8.8	8.8
	Agree	47	69.1	69.1	77.9
	Strongly agree	15	22.1	22.1	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own survey, June 2014

Tourists were asked to rate their agreement to the following statement “overall my attitude towards interacting with tour companies is positive.” To our surprise 90% were agreed to this statement, this revealed that the general attitude of travelers towards interacting with tour companies is positive. Besides, only 9% were uncertain about the statement and none of the respondents are either strongly disagree or disagree.

4.3.5. Opinion of travelers towards using social media to consult about products and services with Tour Operators

Table 4.6. The general opinion of travelers towards interacting with Tour Companies through social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Uncertain	14	20.6	20.6	20.6
	Agree	46	67.6	67.6	88.2
	Strongly agree	8	11.8	11.8	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own survey, June 2014

Tourists were asked to rate their agreement with the following statement” If I have a question or concern about products /services of Tour Company, I would use social media to consult with the company.”Results revealed that the great majority (88.2%) agreed to this statement. This indicates the potential of social media as a powerful tool to communicate with customers.

4.3.6. The interest of Tourists regarding the use of social media by Tour Operators to communicate with customers

Table 4.7. The interest of travelers regarding the use of social media by Tour Operators to communicate with customers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	4	5.9	5.9	5.9
Uncertain	11	16.2	16.2	22.1
Agree	23	33.8	33.8	55.9
Strongly agree	30	44.1	44.1	100.0
Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own survey, June 2014

Tourists were asked to rate their agreement on the following statement “Tour companies can make use of social media to communicate with their customers.” 77.9% of respondents agreed to this statement. This indicates tourists are interested to communicate with Tour Operators using social media platforms.

4.3.7. Opinion of Tourists regarding the promotional activities of Tour Operators

Table 4.8. Tourists Opinion regarding the promotional activities of Tour Operators

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly disagree	17	25.0	25.0	25.0
Disagree	41	60.3	60.3	85.3
Uncertain	10	14.7	14.7	100.0
Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own survey, June 2014

Tourists were asked to rate their agreement on the following statement “Promotional activities of Tour Operators should not appear on social media.” To our surprise 85.3% of tour operators disagree to this statement. Results revealed that the general attitude of tourists towards promotional activities of Tour Operators on social media platforms is positive.

4.3.8. The perception of tourists towards the benefit obtained from social media

Table.4.9. The perception of tourists towards the benefit obtained from social media

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Uncertain	4	5.9	5.9	5.9
Agree	44	64.7	64.7	70.6
Strongly Agree	20	29.4	29.4	100.0
Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own survey, June 2014

When travelers were asked to rate their agreement on the following question “It is for mutual benefit to share promotional information on social media.” Results revealed that 94.1% of respondents agreed to this statement. This is an indicator that social media benefits both Tour Operators and Tourists and this is among the outstanding advantages of using social media.

4.3.9. The experience of Tourists towards sharing benefits/disadvantages derived from products and services through social media sites

Table 4.10. The experience of Tourists towards sharing benefits/disadvantages derived from products and services through social media sites

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Uncertain	13	19.1	19.1	19.1
	Agree	39	57.4	57.4	76.5
	Strongly agree	16	23.5	23.5	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own survey, June 2014

When tourists were asked to rate their agreement to the following statement “I used to share benefits/disadvantages derived from products and services on social media.”80.9% of respondents were to agree on this statement, and the rest were uncertain. This revealed that tourists are sharing their experience to others using social media sites which indicates that social media potential for Tour Operators as words of mouth promotion.

4.3.10. The level of trust while using social media platforms

Table.4.11. The level of trust while using social media platforms

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	18	26.5	26.5	26.5
	Disagree	9	13.2	13.2	39.7
	Uncertain	37	54.4	54.4	94.1
	Agree	4	5.9	5.9	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Source: Own survey, June 2014

To evaluate the level of trust while using social media, tourists were asked to rate their agreement on the following statement “I would trust any product or service information that I got from Tour Operators”. To our surprise 54.4% of respondents were uncertain, 39.7%

disagree, and only 5.9% agreed. This indicates that tourists are unsure to trust information which is posted on social media. This result indicates that Tour Operators need to find ways on how their promotional activities on social media can be trusted.

4.3.11. Cross tabulation between age and social media platforms used often

Table 4.12. Cross tabulation between age and social media platforms used often

Count								
		Question number 1						
		facebook	Youtube	Twitter	LinkledIn	Trip Advisor	Lonely planet forum	Total
Age	15-19	7	3	3	1	5	0	19
	20-29	17	0	0	1	2	5	25
	30-39	3	0	0	2	5	3	13
	40-49	1	0	3	2	5	0	11
Total		28	3	6	6	17	8	68

Source: Own survey, June 2014

Cross tabulation of results between age and social media media sites used often indicate that facebook is most oftnely used by 15-29 age groups to interact with Tour Operators. Respondents with age 30-49 use Trip Advisor most often to interact with Tour Operators. This indicates Tour Operators need to select the age groups and the preferred social media site before interacting with tourists.

4.4. Discussion

This research project was put together to cross-examine the use of social media as a marketing and communication tool for Tour Operators in Addis Ababa. This chapter will be dedicated to discuss the outcomes obtained through the interviews and questionnaire survey with reference to the existent literature.

Through this study it has been confirmed what it has been already expressed in the literature published, that social media is indeed an effective marketing and communication medium for businesses in general, but particularly to travel businesses since experiences are involved, and people usually likes to share those experiences with others.

The main advantages attributed to social media as it can be used for multiple purposes depending on each company marketing strategy; it is most commonly used to increase exposure. Viral Marketing, best known as word of mouth, was also suggested as a benefit from social media.

Nearly all those interviewed and responded to questionnaire were able to express how their presence on social media platforms page had bring some benefits to their business, mostly for promoting their company. Besides they mentioned Search Engine Optimization (SEO), which is considered as an important advantage for social media since it allows pages and links to be more visible in search engines making it possible to drive traffic, which is a key factor for maintaining these types of interactive platforms online.

In the literature we found that the general concept established is that social media is good for any type of business. Though, several limitations became noticeable during the interviews. Lack of time was the problem cited most often. Besides, in Ethiopian case lack of online payment was a main limitation considered by participants of this research which is affecting the effective use social media as a marketing tool. Then again, certain obstacles regularly mentioned in the literature, including worries about users perceiving them as spammers, did not seem to be a problem for these users.

Shockingly, Return on Investment (ROI) was not even considered by both the interviewees and respondents of questionnaire survey as a determinant factor while investing time and resources in this medium. Most of them believed in the positive impact of being present in social Medias

despite the lack of measurable results in terms of increasing revenue and customers. Being present in social media sites was also perceived as an advantage over websites. This can also be found in the literature published, although having both channels is highly recommended.

The users' experiences and attitudes towards the tool varied to a great extent but all the participants had one view in common: a belief in the medium. They believed in the impact of social media as an effective marketing and communication tool. The belief and commitment to update their pages as a regular activity can be considered as the key success aspect for Tour Operators or any business in general, using social media.

The results from questionnaire survey of a sample of tourists revealed that the general opinion of Tourists towards interacting with Tour Operator is positive though they were unsure on trusting the information posted. This suggests for further research focused on making information posted on social media platforms more trustable.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In this final chapter the conclusions extracted from the results will be discussed and complemented with the theory. Finally the researcher will propose some recommendations for future research.

5.1. Conclusion

There is a groundswell support for social media in the published literature and businesses using these technologies seem to be more than just because is the latest trend. In theory, social media is indeed an effective business tool. There are many articles in the web, books, research-based evidence to prove it. The result of this study suggests that Tour Operators in Addis Ababa are able to use social media for a great variety of purposes from promotion to booking lead procedure. The consensus between all the interviewees was that social media represent a valuable tool for increasing the visibility and credibility of a business, regardless of the difficulties involved with it such as lack of time and/or updates. Besides, they are willing to accept new social media platform which can bring valuable outcomes to their business.

In addition, the results of this study indicate that most of the Tour Operators in Addis Ababa are not using social media through developing social media strategy and the resulting SWOT analysis for effectively utilizing the existing potential of social media as a marketing tool.

The role of social media in business as a marketing and communication tool is clearly an ongoing story. Perhaps, what is presented in this project might be the basis for a social media business success strategy for Tour Operators in Addis Ababa. The researcher looks forward to it.

5.2. Recommendation

Social media is the new platform for doing media, as mentioned in the definition it is opposed to traditional media and more customer focused. It is true that tourist behavior is a complex field; however, in order to develop a success marketing strategy it is of need importance to develop a

good strategy from the basis of tourist behavior. From there it is possible to satisfy in a better way tourists.

Regarding the limitations of using social media for marketing and communication purpose in Addis Ababa, they mentioned lack of online payment and internet connectivity problem. Therefore, the study recommend Ethiopian government to facilitate online payment and overcome internet connectivity problem in order to effectively utilize the social media potential for marketing tourism business and the resulting development of the tourism industry.

5.3. Implication for further research

Another factor that would be interesting to analyze is that the literature tends to take in to account the need for developing social media marketing strategy and consideration of the resulting SWOT analysis. The results of this indicate that most of the Tour Operators are not using it through developing social media strategy and the resulting SWOT analysis for effectively utilizing the existing potential of social media as a marketing tool. This is also an indication for further research.

One final point that the researcher would like to address is the little interest by the interviewees towards ROI measurement. This can also be an item for additional research.

All in all, there are countless opportunities for future studies due to the diverse nature of social media marketing and thus, Tour Operators should consider some of them to receive ideas and suggestions to advocate innovativeness and creativeness

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APPENDIX A

E-MAIL INVITATION

Dear Sir / Madam

Greetings!

My name is Abiy Nigussie, Instructor at Catering and Tourism Training Institute. I'm a Marketing Management graduate student at Addis Ababa University, School of Commerce. Currently I am researching about ***The use of Social Media as Marketing and Communication tool: The case of selected Tour Operators in Addis Ababa.*** If your organization is using social media platforms such as Trip Advisor Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube or any other as a marketing tool, I hope you can help me in obtaining a better investigation.

I would like to get to know more about your organization's perception and attitude towards the use of Social media as Marketing and Communication tool. Do you perceive it as effective or ineffective for marketing and communication? What benefits you perceived from using and what are the disadvantages of using social media?

Would it be possible to meet with you to further discuss on the *topic for not more than half an hour* and your possible involvement in research? I am available at any time which will be convenient for you.

I would like to thank you in advance for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Abiy Nigussie

Student ID:GSR/2106/05

Address :Addis Ababa

Phone 0921 34 67 10

E-mail: joinabiy@gmail.com

APPENDIX B

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

CODE/Gender	POSITION
T.1 M	Owner, Tour Operator and Guide
T.2 M	Tour Operator
T.3 M	Tour Operator and Tour Guide
T.4 M	Owner Tour Operator and Tour Guide
T.5 M	Owner and Tour Operator
T.6 F	Tour Operator
T.7 M	Tour Operator
T.8 M	Tour Operator
T.9 F	Owner and Tour Operator
T.10 M	Tour Operator
T.11 M	Tour Operator
T.12 M	Tour Operator
T.13 M	Owner and Tour Operator
T.14 M	Tour Operator
T.15 M	Owner and Tour Operator

APPENDIX C

Interview Guideline

The following questions is confidential and has the purpose of investigating the attitudes, perceptions, practices and motivations Tour Operators in Addis Ababa using social media as a marketing tool.

Interview Questions

1. In which social media platforms you maintained your presence?
2. How long you have been using social media platform/platforms for your business?
3. Why you decide to use social media platform in general for your business?
Please explain.
4. Does someone specifically in your organization is in charge of the social media page?
5. Do you perceive social media page/pages have been effective as a marketing tool for your business? Please explain in depth.
6. How effective do you perceive your social media page has been on the communication with your target groups? Please explain in depth.
7. What benefit in you perceived from using it and how?
8. Have you perceived any limitations of using social media to promote your business? Please explain.
9. Are you willing to adopt new social media platforms and technologies if necessary to your business? Please explain in depth.
10. What do you recommend about using social media as marketing and communication tool while using this media? Please explain.

APPENDIX D

Dear Respondents,

My name is Abiy Nigussie undertaking Masters Degree in Marketing Management at Addis Ababa University; School of Commerce .This questionnaire is prepared for fulfillment of the program.

The general objective of this study is to assess the use of social media as a marketing tool by Tour Operators in Addis Ababa. I assure you that all information you provide will be treated with strict confidentiality and it will be used only for educational purpose.

Filling this questionnaire will not take more than 15 minutes and there is no need to write your name in the questionnaire. Your honest and sincere response will highly contribute to the success of this research and I sincerely appreciate your cooperation in advance. If you have any query please do not hesitate to contact me through the following contact address

Email:joinabiy@gmail.com

Tel: 09-21 34 67 10

Note:-

- ✓ You are not required to write your name
- ✓ Please mark in the boxes available for your response
- ✓ Please skip this questionnaire if your Organization is not a social media user

Section A: Social media platforms used by your company

1. Which Social media platform often used by your company? Mark all possible

Faceboo Twitter LinkedIn Blogging
Youtube Google+ Pinterest Photo sharing sites (i.e.Instagram)
Forums Geo-location(i.e.Four square) Social bookmarking(i.e.StumbleUpon)
Producusting Daily deals (i.e. Groupon) Q&A sites (i.e. Quara)
Other Please specify _____

2. From the above question which social media platform is the most important for your business?

Please choose only one

Section B: Your Opinion towards Social media benefits

3. Which benefit/benefits your Company perceived from using social media? Mark all possible

- Increased exposure Increased traffic
Provide marketplace insight Develop loyal fans
Generates leads Improved search rankings
Grown business partnerships Reduced marketing expenses
Improved sales
Other please specify _____

4. "My social media marketing is effective."

Strongly Disagree Disagree Uncertain Agree Strongly Agree

Section C: Your social media marketing Activities

5. "I have integrated social media into my traditional marketing activities."

Strongly Disagree Disagree Uncertain Agree Strongly Agree

6. "I am able to measure the return on investment for my social media activities."

Strongly Disagree Disagree Uncertain Agree Strongly Agree

APPENDIX E

Dear Respondents,

My name is Abiy Nigussie undertaking Masters Degree in Marketing Management at Addis Ababa University, School of Commerce .This questionnaire is prepared for fulfillment of the program.

The general objective of this study is to assess the use of social media as a marketing tool by Tour Operators in Addis Ababa. I assure you that all information you provide will be treated with strict confidentiality and it will be used only for educational purpose.

Filling this questionnaire will not take more than 15 minutes and there is no need to write your name in the questionnaire. Your honest and sincere response will highly contribute to the success of this research and I sincerely appreciate your cooperation in advance. If you have any query please do not hesitate to contact me through the following contact address

Email:joinabiy@gmail.com

Tel: 09-21 34 67 10

Note:-

- ✓ You are not required to write your name
- ✓ Please mark in the boxes available for your response
- ✓ Please skip this questionnaire if you are not a social media user

Section A: Background information

1. Gender

Male Female

2. Age

Under 15 15-19 20-29 30-39

40-49 50-59 60 and above

3. Educational background

Elementary school High School Diploma

First Bachelor Degree Masters degree and above

Section B: Your Habits and preference

4. Which social media platform do you often use to interact with Tour companies?

Facebook YouTube Twitter LinkedIn TripAdvisor Lonely planet forum

Bradt Guide Other please specify _____

6. How often do you use social media?

Throughout the whole day At least one time per day

Few times per week At least one time per week

Section C: Your attitude towards interacting with Tour Operators through social networking sites

7. Overall my attitude towards interacting with Tour Operators in social media is positive

Strongly Disagree Disagree Uncertain Agree Strongly Agree

8. If I have a question or concern about products /services of Tour Operators, I would use social media to consult with the company

Strongly Disagree Disagree Uncertain Agree Strongly Agree

9. Tour Operators can make use of social media to communicate with their customer

Strongly Disagree Disagree Uncertain Agree Strongly Agree

10. Promotional activities of Tour Operators should not appear on social media

Strongly Disagree Disagree Uncertain Agree Strongly Agree

11. It is for mutual benefit to share promotional information on social media

Strongly Disagree Disagree Uncertain Agree Strongly Agree

12. I used to share benefits/Disadvantages I derived from products and services on social media

Strongly Disagree Disagree Uncertain Agree Strongly Agree

13. I would trust any products or services information that I got on social media from Tour Operators

Strongly Disagree Disagree Uncertain Agree Strongly Agree

