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**THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN BRANDING OF NATURAL TOURIST
DESTINATIONS IN ETHIOPIA. THE CASE OF ETHIOPIAN WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY**

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Declaration

This is certify that the thesis by Nakachew Birlew, entitled “The Challenges and Prospects in Branding of Natural Tourist Destinations in Ethiopia. The case of Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority” and submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the Degree Master of Public Relation and Strategic Communication complies with the regulations of the University and notes the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the Examining Committee

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Chair of the Department of Graduate Coordinator

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AWF	African Wildlife Foundation
BMNP	Bale Mountains National Park
EFCCC	Ethiopian Environment, Forest and Climate Change Commission
EWCA	Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority
FZS	Frankfurt Zoological Society
KWS	Kenyan Wildlife Service
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
PR	Public Relations
SMNP	Simien Mountain National Park
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Abstract

This study was designed to be conducted on branding natural tourist destinations and role of public relations in the organization. In this case Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority was selected for the study. Purpose of this study was to show prospects and challenges in branding natural tourist destinations from the public relations professions aspect. Therefore, this study focused on the prospects, challenges, roles and practices of public relations in branding national parks in Ethiopia Wildlife Conservation Authority.

This study showed and assessed the prospects and challenges in building brands of natural tourist destination and indicated potentials of public relations to develop natural tourist destination brand specifically in the authority.

Purposive Sampling technique was taken to clearly examine the case and the data were collected through using group interview, in depth interview, document analysis and observation of data collection methods.

Including the Authority management bodies, stakeholders and other participants in group interview and in depth interviewees were taken purposely sampling technique from the Authority, Simien and Bale mountain national parks. And also stakeholders and focal persons from the partners were participated. By analyzing the data collected through using different methods the researcher has found out that Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority PR directorate practices are not as effective as they are expected to be.

According to the findings, the PR directorate practices were not directly doing its activities to brand national parks and its activities don't have continuity and the PR directorate is considered less important in the authority for the sake of branding. On the prospects side the PR directorate has many opportunities but as the finding indicated that it doesn't use it properly. And also the trained of sharing a better experiences from the neighboring country, Kenya in branding national parks from the public relations aspect is so weak.

Chapter One

Background of the study

1. Introduction

Corporate communication is a management function that offers a framework for the effective coordination of all internal and external communication with the overall purpose of establishing and maintaining favorable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organization is dependent. It also demands an integrated approach to manage communication (Cornelissen, 2014).

It is a total communication activity that generated by an organization to its public, both internally and externally with employees, stakeholders, agencies, channel partners, media, government, education institutes in order to achieve its planned objectives (van Riel and Fombrun, 2007).

According to van Riel and Fombrun, it has primary, secondary and tertiary dimensions. The primary dimension refers a communication effect of products, services, management, staff and corporate behavior. The secondary dimension also refers effects of controlled forms and it is similar to integrated communications. A communication which is given by third parties such as competitor and media commentary which provides a tripartite bridge between an organization's identity and corporate image and reputation are referred under the tertiary dimensions.

According to (Cornelissen, 2014), corporate communication transcends the special ties of communication among individual practitioners on different aspects, such as: branding, media relations, investor relations, public affairs, employee communication, etc. Unlike specialist's frame of reference, it also crosses these boundaries to harness the strategic interests of an organization at large.

Branding is a term closely linked with places of products or services of an organization's image and reputation. It also captures the idea of observed, valued and managed reputation which considered as a combination of its name and identity (Anholt, 2010).

Whereas corporate branding is the process of creating and maintaining favorable reputation of the company and its constituent elements, by sending signals to stakeholders using the corporate brand" (Maathuis, 1999).

Corporate branding also contributes a lot in building the images of an organization and its community by communicating a combination of verbal, visual, and emotional cues.

The way of communication towards tangible and intangible sum of organizational products has its own impact on the values of its name, history, symbol or logo, destination, service packages, price and reputation, to influence stakeholders and audiences' attitude and behavior (Fombrun and van Riel, 2007).

Destination branding is a general concept; destinations can be branded like products or people. In this case, the power of branding is making people aware of the location and linking desirable associations. Destinations are a large entity with sets of material and identification. This identification is usually recognized as the images which projected towards our audience.

In the tourism sector, public relations has crucial purposes on gaining the audience's understanding and acceptance, as well as on maintain good relationship between an organization and its public. It also represents a unique way of promoting products or services, by building a higher visibility in the public space.

The main challenges in branding natural tourist destinations are identifying efficient ways of promoting products, building effective image for the destination areas and working for the visibility of tourist destination areas by using different promotional tools in order to attract tourists. Public relations has a power for being a bridge towards the way of solving these challenges. It also works as means for adjusting the new attitude triggered towards the destination areas. Starting from these considerations, the purpose of the research is twofold: to analyze the applicative role of public relations in the tourist sector, respectively, to identify the perception of the Ethiopian public of responsible tourism in Ethiopia natural tourist destinations branding.

The role of public relations in branding is various among those are public relations are generally associated with communication activities designed to craft and preserve and organization's image and relationship with its public.

Ethiopia is a home of various charismatic national parks and endemic wild animals in the country wide those manage by the federal government and regional states. Among those natural tourist destinations thirteen of them including Simien mountains national park and Bale mountains national parks are being manage by Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority.

Ethiopia's natural tourist destinations including national parks are not only important to preserve the diverse and unique wildlife and their associated ecosystems, but also are significantly contributing to sustainable development the country. These are flagships of the country and play invaluable role in country image building, attracting tourists from across the world, thereby attracting foreign currency and creating job opportunities for many of the people, and providing ecosystem service that crucial to the survival and well-being of Ethiopia's nations, such as climate change regulation, water supply (for human and livestock, irrigation and hydroelectric power generation) prevention of erosion and flooding, etc.

1.1. Background of the Organization

Ethiopia has around 27 National parks in different parts of the country. Among these national parks 13 of them have been managing by Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority as a Federal level of Ethiopia. The history of wildlife conservation was begun during the regime of emperor Minilik II. Before 1944 there were no legal proclamations and rule oriented official regulation documents concerning Ethiopia's wildlife conservation.

But after around five decades the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation was reestablished in 2008 G.C under the authority of Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The establishment was made on the bases of proclamation No. 581/2007 E.C which gave a full responsibility to administer national parks and wildlife sanctuaries independently.

Currently Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority became under the organizational structure of Ethiopian Environment, Forest and Climate Change Commission (EFCCC). At the federal level EWCA administers eleven National Parks and two wildlife sanctuaries; it also supports regional national parks and wildlife protected areas.

EWCA conserves and manages Ethiopian wildlife and its habitats in collaboration with communities and stakeholders for the ecological, economic and social benefits of the present generation, and pass to the next generation as a heritage. And to bring Ethiopia one of the top five countries for wildlife tourism in Africa by 2025.

Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority, which is now about a decade old, has been committed towards attaining its conservation goals thereby ensuring sound management of wildlife resources of the country.

Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority's Public Relation Directorate is in charge of introducing the authority's vision, mission, strategies, reforms, and new changes taking place to employees and external stakeholders through their public relations and communication practices of its respective organizations. In this regard, the PRs of an authority has to start developing a good relationship with its internal publics and external public's understanding created about the Authority can help develop the external public's understanding and view of the Authority on the wildlife conservation and promotion.

1.2 Place of Public Relations Directorate in the Organization

Before two years the directorate was called as public relation and promotional process and it was accountable to the Director General of the authority. After a year, it was reformed as public relation directorate, but it is still accountable to the General Director of the authority.

The directorate has different activities, various roles and functions based on the goals, vision, mission, values and objectives of the Authority. As stated in the Authority's BPR the directorate needs 10 employees to carry out all its expected duties with its full human resource capacity. But currently it has two public relation practitioners and director who have different educational background and experience. Two of them were graduated and BA holders in journalism. But the director has tourism educational ground back. The remaining some positions are vacant.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

A public relations, both as a term and as a job is mentioned on a daily basis and widely applied in all segments of life in society. It is a specific form of communication with special application importance of PR and promotion in tourism in Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority. It is a communication model and one of its main purposes is to create a recognisable public relations image. This purpose is very important in tourism, in particular in the creation of a positive image for Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority or for a country as a tourist destination. Public relations is the predominant activity in promotion and communication in the tourism industry.

Public relations gives legs and life to brand attitudes and the essential brand promise by telling credible stories and providing support for the truth of a brands advertising images. Although Public relation is used for a wide variety of purposes in organizational communication, that of

the representation of the organization, its goals and its self-understanding has been increasingly influential with publics.

Currently, as the whole in the authority the attention towards brand natural tourist destinations, there are many gaps on the area. Even if there is an organization Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority which is legally authorized to conserve, manage and develop natural tourist destinations of national parks in the country wide in collaboration with communities and stake holders for various benefits of the generation and as a whole for the country.

According to (Anholt, 2010) stated that Public Relations has a lot of functions and roles in branding of natural tourist destinations but on the ground there are many challenges and misleading perception to implement PR as effective as it needs for branding natural tourist destinations.

In this study we have tried to analyse and dig out the importance of PR in branding natural tourist destinations and the challenges it faced through practicing in Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority.

1.4 Objectives of the Research

This thesis has both the general and specific objectives. The general objective is the overall objective that the study aims to address and the specific objectives are aimed at particularly addressing issues the study intended to deal with.

1.4.1 General Objective

The overall objective of the study is to assess the prospects and challenges in building brands of natural tourist destination and indicate potentials of public relation to develop natural tourist destination brand in the case of Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of study are to:

1. assess the ways of branding natural tourist destinations in Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority.
2. identify the prospects and challenges in branding of natural tourist destinations in Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority.

3. identify the effective PR activities and their implementations on the aspects of branding natural tourist destinations in Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority.
4. compare the Kenyan public relation department's experiences, with the experiences of the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority's public relation directorate in branding natural tourist destinations.

1.5. Research Questions

This thesis attempts to study the prospects and challenges in branding of natural tourist destinations in the case study of Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority. It offers valuable recommendations to enhance the branding of the national parks as well as the overall Ethiopian natural tourist destinations. The following are the main research questions:

1. What is branding and are the common practices of the PR directorate in Ethiopian wildlife conservation authority in branding of natural tourist destinations?
2. What are the current challenges in branding natural tourist destinations in Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority?
3. What are the prospects in branding of natural tourist destinations in Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority?
4. Which activities are effective and should be used by the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority PR practitioners in branding natural tourist destinations?
5. What is the difference between the Kenyan Wildlife Service corporate communication directorate experiences and the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority PR directorate in branding natural tourist destinations?

1.6. Significance of the study

This research would contribute a lot on the role of public relation to dig out the prospects and challenges in branding of natural tourist destinations for the sake of income and to build the country image. And to investigate the challenges and prospects in branding of natural tourist destinations were portrayed. It would also show public relation communication tools to improve reputation national parks in order to brand natural tourist destinations in Ethiopia.

1.7. Scope of the study

The research relied on Simien Mountain National park and Bale Mountain National parks which managed by Ethiopian wildlife conservation authority. The purposes of selecting these two natural tourist destinations were 1; both of them are home of many endemic wild animals. 2; both of them have many unique landscape.3; both of them represent almost all ecosystem of the Ethiopian wildlife diversity and natural tourist destination. 4. Simien is a world heritage site and Bale is also in a tentative list in world heritage site. This helped the researcher to investigate the challenges and prospects in corporate branding of natural tourist destinations in Ethiopia.

1.8 Limitations of the study

When this study was conducted, the researcher faced serious problem because of the pandemic disease, as it is known as in the world and also in our country, the pandemic corona various was occurred and different activities were banned by state of emergency to prevent the virus. Because of the pandemic corona virus (Covid 19), I couldn't conduct a focus group discussion even with minimum group numbers of 6 then the researcher used group interview. And also the researcher was not freely move to the destinations in order to collect data because of Corona virus. The other problem was lack of literature reviews about branding natural tourist destinations. The researcher was patient and wise enough to convince the sources and got all properly.

1.9 Organization of the Study

The content of the paper organized under five chapters. Chapter one included, background of the study, statement of the problem, objective of the study, research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study, limitation of the study and the like. Chapter two included review of related literature on the concept brands, public relation role to build brands of natural tourist destination. Chapter three included the methodology aspect such as, research method, data collection and analysis method, sampling size and techniques. Chapter four included data presentations, analysis and interpretations. Chapter five finally a summary of the whole thesis including conclusion about the study is made. It also offers some recommendations to enhance or promote the branding of natural tourist destination as country level.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, the thesis aims to present available concepts, theories and models of brand identity in the branding literature, which is directly linked to the research topic.

It outlined the theoretical background to the frameworks and concepts that organizations use to build strong and distinctive images or reputations with their stakeholders. One important observation that was made is that communication practitioners need to look inside their organizations for the core values that define their organization and that can give them a competitive edge in communications with internal and external stakeholders. Indeed, many organizations which have not thought seriously about their corporate identity and whether their profile is appreciated by stakeholder groups, often appear to hire and fire outside agencies with regularity, trying to find the one with the ability to ‘sell’ a message that people do not seem to be ‘buying’. In other words, such organizations have not given enough care to crafting an identity that is authentic and distinctive, and also meaningful to stakeholders.

2. Corporate Branding

Reputation scholars Fombrun and Van Riel carried out comparative analyses of the corporate reputations of the most visible and reputable organizations across the world. Based upon stakeholder evaluations of companies within different countries, they found that organizations with the strongest reputations are on average characterized by high levels of visibility (the degree to which corporate themes are visible in all internal and external communication), distinctiveness (the degree to which the corporate identity or positioning of the organization is distinctive), authenticity (the degree to which an organization communicates values that are embedded in its culture), transparency (the degree to which an organization is open and transparent about its behavior), and consistency (the degree to which organizations communicate consistent messages through all internal and external communication channels) in corporate communication. (van Riel and Fombrun, 2007).

In other words, a key driver for the strength of an organization’s reputation is the degree to which the values that it communicates are not only authentic but also distinctive. Many

communication practitioners indeed draw heavily on the idea of uniqueness or distinctiveness in corporate identity because it encapsulates the idea that the organization needs to express its uniqueness in the market and with other stakeholders. The principle behind this idea is that it enables an organization to differentiate itself from its competitors and to attain a preferred position in the minds of consumers and other stakeholders. (Cornelissen, Haslam, and Balmer, 2007).

Recently, the term ‘corporate branding’ has become fashionable alongside corporate identity to highlight the importance of distinctiveness. The idea of an organization as a brand is a logical extension of the product branding approach, with its original focus on products and brand benefits and on individual consumers. The notion of a ‘corporate brand’ was also inspired by Wally Olins’ framework on monolithic corporate, endorsed and branded identities (Cornelissen, 2014).

The monolithic corporate identity refers to a corporate brand: a structure where all products and services, buildings, official communication and employee behavior are labeled or branded with the same company name. Examples include Disney, Coca-Cola, Nike, McDonald’s, Wal-Mart and BMW. The fully branded identity refers to a structure whereby products and services are brought to the market each with their own brand name and brand values. Companies such as Unilever and Procter and Gamble have traditionally followed this branded identity structure where neither the company’s name nor its core values figured in the positioning and communication of its products (Cornelissen, Haslam and Balmer, 2007).

This branded strategy traditionally made sense for Unilever and Procter & Gamble as they were addressing very different market segments through the different products in their product portfolio. An increasing number of organizations that were previously branded giants are changing their organizations into monolithic corporate brands. Kingfisher and Unilever are good examples of organizations that have moved towards endorsed and monolithic identities and aim to have their product brands more important reason for organizations to move from branded to endorsed and monolithic identities is that monolithic identities have become enormously valuable assets; companies with strong monolithic identities, and the reputations associated with them, can have market values that are more than twice their book values ; and can save money as

marketing and communication campaigns can be leveraged across the company (Cornelissen, Haslam and Balmer, 2007).

Many academic writers and communication professionals have emphasized the importance of branding the entire organization and of focusing communication and marketing on the organization rather than on individual products and services. Where previously the brand portfolio strategy of an organization may have been geared towards the branded end, with different consumer brands targeted at separate market segments, increasingly companies consolidate their portfolio around a more limited monolithic or endorsed range (Schultz, 2002).

The distinctive identity of the organization is the core foundation of corporate branding and forms a key differentiator in the marketplace. In this sense, the idea of corporate branding is in principle not that different from the more traditional idea of corporate image management (Schultz, 2002).

Further Schultz and Mary Hatch emphasized on Article in European Journal of Marketing, August 2003, that the core of corporate branding is the alignment between the company's vision, culture and image. The culture and image relate to how the organization and its identity are seen by employees (culture) and the company's external stakeholders (i.e., the external image). The vision of senior managers adds a strategic dimension in that by setting directions for possible ways of changing or transforming who we are as an organization it may change how the company is seen internally and externally. For example, the vision of senior managers in Unilever of strengthening and highlighting the corporate brand behind its products is one that sets a strategic direction for the company.

It fundamentally changes the identity of the organization and how it is seen by customers and other stakeholders (image). Importantly, it also presents a break from the company's past strategy and internal culture where brand and product managers had executive responsibility to plan communication and marketing strategies (culture). The new identity would have to go hand in hand with a new culture that fosters collaboration between managers and employees and a commitment to a monolithic Unilever identity. As in this example, the role of all employees (not just communication and marketing staff) becomes much more important in corporate branding as employees are the brand ambassadors of the organization. Ideally, the identity behind the corporate brand would thus pervade the entire organization, from top to bottom. Organizations

often therefore provide support to employees in the form of brand manuals, intranet resources and brand briefings or workshops to ensure that employees do not just know about the corporate brand but also live and enact it as part of their day-to-day jobs, regardless of whether those jobs involve direct contact with stakeholders (Cornelissen, Haslam, and Balmer, 2007).

2. 1. A Framework for Corporate Branding

The purpose of this thesis is to suggest that how to overcome challenges, how to use the prospects and a strategic focus on build natural tourist destination brand. Strategy, identity, brand and reputation therefore jointly define the “strategy points” for building the corporate communication system. The corporate brand is expressed by creating a sustainable corporate story that serves as a frame around which to hang the full array of communications the organization disseminates (van Riel and Fombrun, 2007).

On the other hand a strong corporate brand acts as a focal point for the attention, interest and activity stakeholders bring to a corporation. Like a beacon in the fog, a corporate brand attracts and orients relevant audiences, stakeholders and constituencies around the recognizable values and symbols that differentiate the organization. But corporate branding is not only about differentiation, it is also about belonging. When corporate branding works, it is because it expresses the values and/or sources of desire that attract the key stakeholders to the organization and encourage them to feel a sense of belonging. It is this attraction and sense of belonging that affects the key decisions and behaviors upon which a company is built a strong corporate brand taps this attractive force and offers symbols that help stakeholders experience and express their values and thereby keep them active.

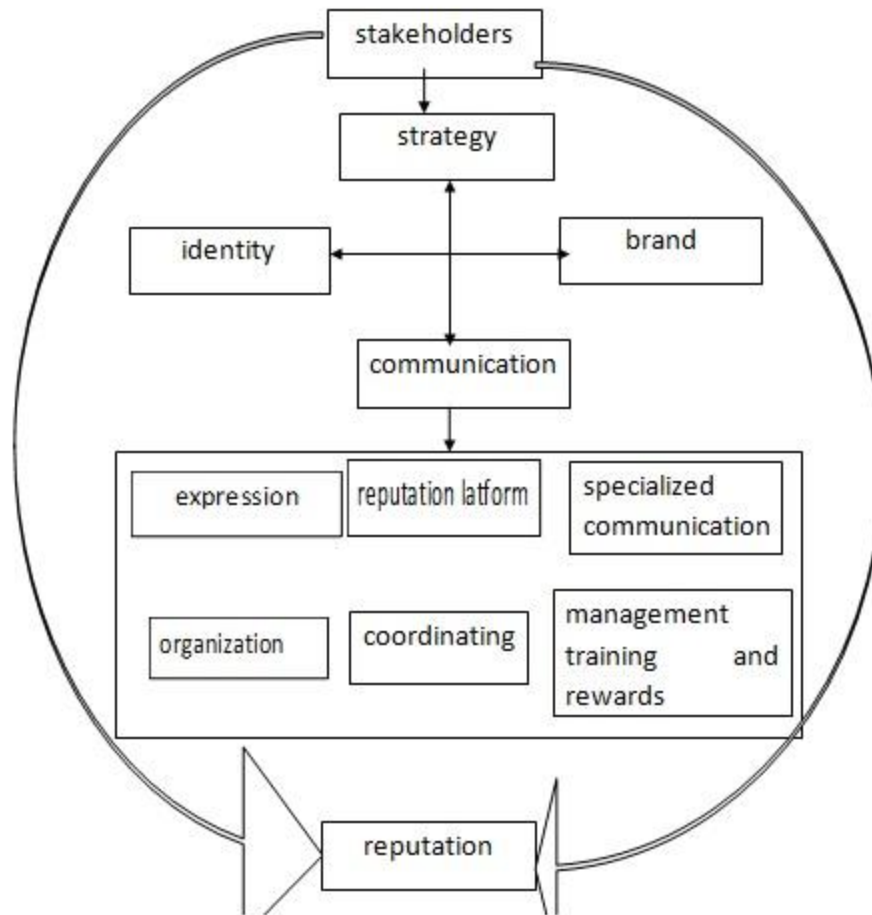


Figure 2.1. Framework for branding

Framework for understanding corporate branding as embedded within processes linking strategic vision, organizational culture and corporate images (Hatch and Schultz 2001). These three elements form the foundation of corporate branding and are defined as follows:

- 1) Strategic vision; the central idea behind the company that embodies and expresses top Management's aspiration for what the company will achieve in the future.
- 2) Organizational culture; the internal values, beliefs and basic assumptions that embody the heritage of the company and communicate its meanings to its members; manifests in the ways employees all through the ranks feel about the company they are working for.
- 3) Corporate images; views of the organization developed by its stakeholders; the outside world's overall impression of the company including the views of customers, shareholders, the media, the general public, and so on.

2.2. The conception of “brand” and “brand identity”

2.2.1 What is brand?

Brand seems to be a highly broad topic especially when going through a dozen of definitions of brand does not make it easier to grasp a comprehensive answer to “What is the definition of brand?”. This is likely because “each expert comes up with his or her own definition of brand or nuances of definition” (Kapferer, 2008). According to L. Wood, brand may be defined from the consumers’ perspective or from the brand owner’s perspective. A brand is far more than a visual symbol and memorable tag line. It anchors the mission and vision, operating principles and tactics of an organization.

Branding is the process of promoting selected images in order to establish a favorable reputation (Anholt, 2007). Branding plays a role in most spheres of life, including political, social, and cultural, official and unofficial, private and public (Anholt, 2010). Brand has various values, it provided they manage to create a favorable impression in the consumer’s mind, brands can be of immense value:

A strong, positive brand image helps places to differentiate themselves from others (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Brands’ differentiating and identifying functions make them a powerful influence on consumer thinking, attitudes, and behavior (Heilbrunn, 2006). Brands are a powerful device to communicate a preferred image of products, services, or indeed place (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2004).

2.2.2. What is identity and brand identity?

In order to know what brand identity is, it is important to understand the denotation of identity and its characteristics. The etymology of identity indicates that an entity has an identity if it remains the same over a certain period and repetition, continuity and consistency over the time are primary characteristics of identity (Franzenand Moriarty, 2009).

Several researchers have applied this concept of identity to brand while highlighting its characteristics of being consistent, continual, individual, unique and distinctive. For example, Aaker defines brand identity as a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain (Aaker, 1996). In addition, the brand identity must express the particular

vision and uniqueness of the brand, and the brand identity must be of a long-lasting or permanent nature (Heding, 2009).

2.3. Destination Branding, Brand Image, and Brand Personality Concepts in the Context of Destinations

Destinations offer an amalgamation of tourism products and services, which are consumed under the brand name of the destination, providing tourists with an integrated experience. (Leiper, 1995) explained that destinations are “places towards which people travel and where they choose to stay for a while in order to experience certain features or characteristics a perceived attraction of some sort,” but a destination can also be a perceptual concept, which can be interpreted subjectively by consumers. Before visiting, tourists develop an image destination as well as a set of expectations based on previous experience, word of mouth, media reports, advertising, and common beliefs (Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997) differentiates one destination from another. The complex process of creating a brand for a destination appears to be correlated with the desirable image of the destination, the experience of the destination, and consequent differentiation between destinations. (Ekinici and Hosany, 2006) argue that destination personality moderates the relationship between destination image (cognitive) and the intention to recommend.

Although there has been a proliferation of branding and destination image studies during the past three decades, destination brand personality has been largely unexplored. The term brand has been over time used for different meanings and in different contexts. Since brand entered marketing in the early 1920s, it has been associated with several other terms to denominate different concepts. When “brand” is associated with “image” it relates to the set of feelings, ideas and attitudes that consumers have about a brand. When brand is associated with personality it refers to the human characteristics of a brand which differentiate it from its competitors. Brands are perceived to possess a “personality” that consumers use to self-express or to experience the emotional benefits of the brand (Phau and Lau, 2000).

Similarly, while destination image is a multidimensional construct comprising of two primary dimensions: cognitive (beliefs and knowledge about the physical attributes of a destination) and affective (appraisal of the affective quality and feelings towards the attributes and the surroundings environment), destination personality is also viewed as a multidimensional

construct and is defined as the set of human characteristics associated with a tourism destination (Ekinci and Uysal, 2006).

On the other hand every brand of destination is unique because of its resources construct a unique identification. This identification is usually recognized as the images projected to tourists. The images and the identity of a specific brand of destination offers may be similar to others, but never the same.

Elements of a destination are the foundation of destination; they generate identification and build up the destination image. What matters here is the ways in which the destination generates the identification or the ways of branding. Destination branding can be defined as a way to communicate a destination's unique identity by differentiating a destination from its competitors (Morrison and Anderson, 2002).

The development of destination branding is one example of how public relation practitioners borrow and use ideas in academic debates (Murphy, 2007). Several authors have suggested specific destination branding processes, making a number of statements about the value of the branding concept for improving tourism destination marketing (Morgan and Pritchard, 2002). Their arguments are based on the assumption that a strong brand can have a positive differential marketing effect because: 1) it attracts more favorable attributes and benefits perceptions and overall preferences, 2) it can also attract greater price premiums and 3) it can result in consumers paying greater attention to communications, retaining more information from them and reacting in a more positive way (Hoeffler and Keller, 2003). Furthermore, a destination brand can assist tourists in consolidating and reinforcing their perceptions of the destination after their travel.

As we have seen above corporate branding refers alongside corporate identity to highlight the importance of distinctiveness. It is a logical extension of the product branding approach, with its original focus on products and brand benefits on individual consumers. On the other hand destination image is not only the perceptions of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impression made by the corporate brand of the destination (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991).

Promoting these destinations and their image is inessential for initial publicity of tourist and for general public attractions. Electronic media such as websites, emails, YouTube; Facebook etc. are the leading international communication and promotion tools in this modern age. These tools

are the cheapest way of communication and have no border limit. Through which customers can get all information like price, facilities, opening time, contract information, and recent activities of the company and history of the company easily. Through those links Customers can mail to the service provider for any information if they needed. (Sweeney,2008).

2.4. Public relations: its definitions and conceptual foundation

Public relations as a professional area of work is in use in a range of companies, industries and organizations. The involvement of public relations practices in different organizations has helped for the development and usage of differing public relations skills and competencies by the practitioners. As a result of the differences in the practitioners' skills and competency areas, public relations have no universally agreed definition. Scholars and public relations practitioners, since their area of involvement differs, the definitions they provided for public relations also differ. Harlow (1976) was known for he has collected 472 definitions of public relations and finally coined a new definition by himself, which says:

Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinions; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change; serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools (Harlow, 1976).

This definition of Harlow put the position of public relation in an organization as a management role. Other scholars, like Grunig and Hunt, defined public relations differently, but in short sentence. Public relation, according to these scholars, is 'the management of communication between an organization and its publics' (1984). Later on, Grunig (1997) improved this definition in one sentence by saying that a public relations is an organization's managed communications behavior.

According to Cutlip (2000) stated that the success or failure of an organization highly depends on the function of the public relations organ of an organization. According to cutlip (2000), public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial

relationships between an organization and the public on whom its success or failure depends (Cutlip, 2000).

Public relations practitioner view of the concept is more based on the real life day to day practice of public relations activity. They often use the term public relations interchangeably with other terms like corporate communication or organizational communication (Grunig 1992; Hutton 1999). Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2006) admitted that many practitioners associate public relations with the media relations, although some others realize its role as management function that guides the interaction of the organization with its publics.

2.5. The Role of Public Relations in corporate branding

Public relations gives “legs” and life to brand attitudes and the essential brand promise by telling credible stories and providing support for the truth of a brand’s advertising images. This is all the more important in an evolving media and business environment. Although public relations is used for a wide variety of purposes in organizational communication, that of the representation of the organization, its goals, and its self-understanding has been increasingly influential with publics (Petra, 2013).

Public relations is generally associated with communication activities to craft and preserve an organization's image and relationships with its publics (Thomas and Lane, 1990). And also Public relation is a management tools designed to establish support among a firm's various internal and external publics (Thomas and Lane, 1990).

It differs from other marketing tools mainly promoting in communicating messages because it is the public relations that best creates the launch of a brand, as it has a greater credibility. Moreover, public relations is quite inexpensive compared to advertising (Raza, 2004).

Public relations is an important profession. It involves measures designed to improve the image of a service, to create a more favorable climate for its promotion and build support activities on the organization. And also it helps the product or service acquires a positive, powerful and solid reputation, this becomes an asset of enormous value probably more valuable, in fact, than all its tangible assets, because it promotes the ability of the place or organization to continue to trade at a healthy margin for as long as its brand image stays intact. Hereby public relation feeds necessity information before visiting, tourists develop an image destination as well as a set of

expectations based on previous experience, word of mouth, media reports, advertising, and common beliefs to differentiate one destination from another (Petra, 2013).

Public relations is important to brand strategy and, building and sustaining corporate reputation.

The development of a successful public relation strategy involves four elements (Petra, 2014).

- Identification of the various attributes and characteristics of the brand; for example, its values and supporting behaviours, its positioning and identity. Once these have been identified an assessment must be made of their implications with regard to an organization's culture and opportunities for motivating performance. Then a public relations platform can be built on the brand's attributed, characteristics and promise.
- The perception of all external stakeholders must be assessed. This should extend beyond perception about products to include such drivers of reputation as leadership, innovation, financial value, quality of management and corporate citizenship.
- The corporate communications function should use the brand's attributes and characteristics internally to inform employees of the company's positioning on different issues to support change initiatives to underscore credibility in crisis and to guide behaviour.
- An annual, measurable public relations plan should be created, anchored by the brand promise, with the objectives of shaping key audiences' perceptions of leadership, customer connections, marketplace innovation and corporate responsibility.

2.6. Experience of Ethiopia in Wildlife Management and Natural Tourist Destinations Branding

The history of wildlife conservation in Ethiopia was begun during the regime of emperor Minilk II. Before 1944 there were no legal proclamation and rule oriented official regulations documents concerning wildlife conservation and management.

Ethiopia was in a serious civil war in the last forty years, most of the national parks were a camp of armed fighters. For instance Bale mountain national park was a hiding place of armed fighters. There was no land policy, wildlife management policy, there were political problems. Because of such problems there was no the concept of tourism because it has a direct impact on the tourism promotion.

But after 5 decades the Ethiopian government proclaimed with proclamation number 575/2008 and established the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority.

Ethiopia possesses divers, rare and endemic species of wildlife with attractive landscapes which are of great value to tourism, education and science, with lack of government attention towards to brand the wildlife resources, almost all national parks in the country are in risk, destruction by various illegal activities rather than to conserve, manage and promote like as other African countries.

Even if the structure was not line down up to the regional states, in a country level the authorised governmental organization is the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority which manages and conserves national parks.

Currently Ethiopia has 27 national parks. The authority manages 13 national parks and the other 14 national parks of the country do not manage and conserve by the authority, these manage under regional government. The authority collects entrance fee from the 13 national parks butit direct transferred the money to the central government of Ethiopia. But other African country such as Kenya gives service for the park activities and promotion by the collected entrance fee.

Even if the country has world heritage site of national park, it is not well promoted and branded, we saw a trained to give high attention to the historical, cultural and religious tourist sights but not to the natural tourist destinations. In addition in a country level through misunderstanding and in a traditional way a person who hunted or killed wild animals believes that as hero and

there is still lack of awareness on the surrounding communities, political leaders, policy makers. Because of such problems the wildlife resources were not managed, conserved and promoted.

2.7. Experience of Kenya in Wildlife Management and Natural Tourist Destinations

Branding

Wildlife conservation and management in Kenya is not a fairly recent phenomenon, but rather than an activity that existed even in early times. Although formal conservation and management of wildlife in Kenya was introduced by the west settlers, Kenya has not been quick to adapt to the changing paradigm of conservation and management of wildlife. Instead, Kenya has continued following the out dated western guidelines and philosophies of nature conservation, branding and promotion which though effective at first, they have now become out dated in need of reform.

Wildlife conservation and management in Kenya is perhaps as old as humanity because even in early times there were traditional customs, rules, taboos, beliefs and practices of the various ethnic groups relating to wildlife. However, formal wildlife management began with the arrival of the British colonialists around 1895. This was brought pioneer wildlife conservation and management plans imported into Kenya by the British colonialists. The Kenyan government follows the western guidelines and philosophies of nature conservation.

With tourism being one of the biggest foreign exchange earns for Kenya, wildlife management, conservation and promotion is necessary if Kenya is to maintain or improve its earnings from the tourism sector industry. This therefore means that wildlife conservation and management in Kenya is meant to preserve the ecosystem for aesthetic, scientific and economic purpose. At this time the Kenya Wildlife Service plays its usual great role be make Kenya one of the natural tourist destinations in East Africa.

And at the institutional level, the Kenya Wildlife Service is charged with the duty of overseeing the conservation and management of wildlife in Kenya. The Kenya Wildlife Service also manages the national parks and reserves in Kenya and the money collected as entrance fees in the parks is used to help the conservation and promotion of the natural resources in the parks. Among its mandates promoting the natural tourist destinations in the country for the purpose of achieving sustainable wildlife conservation and tourism. (Article 3A of the wildlife management and conservation, Act cap 376).

Kenya was colonized more than 50 years by British. This helped the country to follow the philosophy of British to conserve and manage wildlife resources in the country. And Kenya cascaded its system even after free from colonized and has vibrant branding of wildlife resources. Currently the country has well developed and branded national parks and became at the front stage of natural tourist destinations country in East Africa.

Chapter Three

Research Methods

The aim of this chapter is to state the types of theoretical perspectives and describe the methods of research used in the study of challenges and prospects in branding of natural tourist destinations in Ethiopia. The case of Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority.

3.1 Introduction

In this part of the thesis, I presented the ways in which data were collected and analyzed. This research used qualitative approach.

Qualitative approach is an inquiry aiming at understanding how to develop more holistic picture of reality by analyzing words, reports and views to study a situation in a more naturalistic procedure. (Deribsa, 2018)

Other scholars also define qualitative approaches to research are based on a "world view" which is holistic and has the following beliefs: there is not a single reality where reality based upon perceptions that are different for each person and change over time and what to know has meaning only within a given situation or context (Myers and Avison, 2002).

On the other hand qualitative research is collecting; analyzing and interpreting data by observing what people do and say that refers to the measure of things. Qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things.

Qualitative method involves collecting data from those who are immersed in every life of a situation under investigation. The assumption of qualitative method is that the people who are part of a situation understanding it much better than others who are external to it. More ever, in qualitative method, the data analysis technique also bases on the values the participants give to their world than neutrality of positions (Deribsa, 2018).

Typically, qualitative method focuses on distinction or attributes than amount. As such, it applies tools that enable researchers to capture information as deeply as possible. It typically deals with words and essentially exploratory (Deribsa, 2018).

As tools of data collection, I selected and used the most common techniques of data gathering of qualitative method such as, focus group interview, document analysis, and in depth interview.

This research approaches helped the researcher make a detailed view on the study area, to validate and strengthen the findings, deeper investigation and discussions of ideas of study

participants is of great importance and also this approaches helped the researchers to generate rich data and enables the researcher to have a deeper insight on the status of the study area.

3.2 Research Design

According to Huysamen (1997), research design defined as a plan, blueprint, or guide for data collection and interpretation-sets of rules that enable the investigator to conceptualize and observe the problem under study.

Also a research design refers to the feature of the research project in broader view that determines the overall organization of the study (Deribsa, 2018). This is divided in different broad categories; among those I used case study design. This research design helped me to investigate the case. It also helped me to pinpoint the unique features within the particular case to reflect uniqueness. Also helped me to identify the problem accurately, demarcate the population, and take representative sample from population, record what has been perceived and organize and present the report.

Also a research design constitutes decisions regarding what, where, when, how much, by what means concerning an inquiry or research study. It also constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. So as to get answers for the research questions; I will employ one data collection and analysis method (i.e. qualitative approach). This is because using qualitative approach is a single piece of research makes the data collection and analysis strong, and it narrows the limitations of the method that will be used across the study.

The rational for employing qualitative method is that, qualitative research method enables the researcher to answer questions concerning with developing an understanding of the meaning and experiences of humans' lives and social worlds. It also provides rich data and deeper understanding of the phenomena under study. In addition to this, qualitative research explores attitudes, behavior and experiences through in-depth interviews, focus group discussion with key informants who have knowledge about the issue under study.

Document analysis is one of the methods that will use in this research to analyze the prospects and challenges in branding of natural tourist destinations in Ethiopia. The case of Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority.

3.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

For this research I used non- probability sampling which is also known as non-random sampling and I used the most common types of non-probability sampling technique is purposive sampling.

3.3.1 Sampling Size

This research took the organization and two natural tourist destinations, one from the northern part of Ethiopia, Simien Mountains National Park and the other from the South East part of our country, Bale Mountains National Park. from Bale mountains National park, one tourism expert, one tour guide, one stakeholder in total 3 participants were taken for in-depth interview and also from Simien Mountains National Park, like as Bale one tourism expert, one tour guide, one stakeholder in total 3 participants were participated, and from EWCA two tourism officers and two PR practitioners were taken for in-depth interview, and group interview with 3 management bodies including the Director General of the Authority, and a Public Relation Directorate Director from the Authority, in total 4 participants were taken in group interview. Totally 10 interviewee and one group interview with four members addressed on this research.

3.3.2 Sampling Technique

Based on the research problem that the study intended to address, purposive sampling techniques used or employed. This study chooses purposive sampling technique to clearly examine challenges and prospects in branding of natural tourist destinations in Ethiopia. The case of Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority. Purposive sampling helped to pick cases that are typical to a problem in focus.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

The data collection was the main part of the study. In qualitative analysis, personal feelings and experiences were presented in sentences in the process of data analysis.

According to the case I used triangulation technique method that helped me to use a variety of data collection approaches such as in depth interview, group interview, document analysis, and observation and researcher participatory method. It helped me to combine the collection data during the research and to saw ideas from different perspectives.

3.4.1 Source of Data

This study utilized both primary and secondary data sources so as to attain the desired information that answered the stated research questions and achieved the objective. Primary data

was collected through in-depth interview, group interview, personal observation and secondary data was collected from the document analysis.

The information source was basically focused on primary data through in depth interview, observation and group interview. Similarly, secondary data was collected from different published and unpublished documents.

3.4.2 Data Collection Tools

The researcher used group interview, in-depth interview, observation and document analysis to get sufficient information from the information sources.

Interview allowed also capturing the perspectives of the interviewee. And also this helped me to conduct face to face with the interviewees. The interviewees were two tourism officers and two PR practitioners from the EWCA, two tourism experts, two tourism guides and two stakeholders from both Bale and Simien Mountains National Parks. The stakeholders were from Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS), in Bale and African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) in Simien. Fortunately all the informants were got a chance to visit the neighboring country Kenya and almost all have minimum of BA degree holder and could speak English next to their first language. Because of their educational back ground I prepared the interviews with English language.

Group interview helped me to make a small group interview on the case with similar background participants in order to get firsthand data. The participants are 3 management bodies from the authority including the Director General of the Authority, and the public relations directorate director from the head office who were not the subject of in depth interview. In total 4 participants were participated.

Observation refers to see the actual practices on the ground. And document analysis refers to any preserved recorded, published or unpublished materials which are related to the situations on the organization and the national parks, such as, Guide books, Booklets, marketing strategy books, tourism development books, magazines, brushers, the organization web site and its face book page.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter comes up with data analysis and discussion of the data collected from both primary and secondary sources which were collected by using in-depth interview, group interview, observation and document analysis. The study has used in-depth interview and group interview data collected from EWCA PR directorate, management bodies, experts, Bale and Simien mountains national park staffs, tour guides and partners. And the document analysis and observation were from EWCA PR directorate and from the parks.

The interview was conducted in English; all of the interviewees can speak English. Because, all of them have minimum BA degree holder background. And all of the interviewees got a chance and were visited the neighboring country Kenya. I interviewed and recorded an hour for per person and two hour and half for the group interview, totally I interviewed and recorded 12 hours and half. Then after I transcribed the interview recorded in to hard copy.

4.1. Analysis and discussion of data gathered through conducting in depth interview, group interview and document analysis with the EWCA public relation directorate

As indicated in the sub topic 4.1, presented about the analysis of in depth interviewee and group interviewee response including the document analysis. For better understanding, there for, interviewees are coded as interviewee EWCA1, interviewee EWCA 2, interviewee EWCA3, interviewee EWCA 4, from Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority, interviewee SMNP1, interviewee SMNP 2, interviewee SMNP 3, from Simian Mountain National Park and interviewee BMNP 1, Interviewees BMNP 2, and Interviewees BMNP 3 from Bale Mountain National Park. Whereas group interview participants were coding GI 1.

4.1.1. Understanding the Common PR activities and branding of natural tourist destinations

Interviewees were asked the common public relation activities and branding natural tourist destinations.

Interviewee EWCA 1, responded regarding to common practices, it is traditional without building of a linked brand. However, branding activities are related to destination marketing. These include, increasing competitive wildlife products, printed materials, electronic media (like social media) communication with stakeholders etc.

In addition to this, another interviewee, EWCA 2 said that the PR directorate has been working or participating in labeling the national parks with key species found in the park, promoting through big endemic mammals found in the park, most importantly as Ethiopia is a home of endemic birds and mammals. In addition that interviewee added that the directorate depends on labeling with this endemic unique species.

Interviewee EWCA 3 explained that public relation practices included development of web site for the institution and protected areas, development of institutional and site specific brands, promoting, undertaking promotion of the existing values and destinations and naming.

Furthermore, interviewee EWCA 4 expressed that even though the directorate tried all its bests, I think additional activities are required in this regard, very few activities are done on branding the endemic species and landscapes, promoting workshops or meeting not on branding the natural tourist destination, but a number of modern and strategic implementations real, scientific information are remain or not addressed as expected in branding of natural tourist destinations. It is because of knowledge gap and misleading attitude towards the area in our country.

And also interviewee SMNP 3, said that many PR activities are implemented in the authority. Even though it needs further studies I am not sure many of them concerned on the issue of branding natural tourist destinations. As we are observing in our day to day activities the PR department focused on media relations concerning on issues of management, plan implementation, schedule meetings and promoting the general figures of the authority. Promoting the Specific issues of branding natural tourist destinations or national parks has its own limitations in the aspects of permanent PR practices.

From the group interviewee GI 1, explained that the public relation directorate is trying to develop a brand guideline and web site to promote natural tourist destinations in the Authority. The PR directorate prepared the brand guideline based on the vision of the organization, culture of the organization and corporate communication of the organization.

The group elaborated the directorate published different promotional and informational materials such 'Dur Ledur' bilingual magazine, brochures about national parks, endemic wild animals, attractive areas, wild life and landscape posters, post cards of birds and wild animals, and address different events or panel discussion on the authority's Facebook page.

From my document analysis, I tried to dig out different printing materials about national parks and I have seen news, press release on the authority's Facebook page with English and Amharic languages which targeted Ethiopian and foreigners. For instance this year the PR directorate published one 'Dur Ledur' bilingual magazine, eight different brushes of parks, endemic birds and wild animals, five different poster of birds and wild animals, five different postcards, and also the directorate has sixty minutes weekly or 48 hours yearly radio program and thirty minutes weekly or 24 hours yearly TV program with Amharic language, one exhibition program was held in Addis Ababa exhibition hall, one spot was prepared by famous Ethiopian Artists with Amharic language, one documentary film was also produced with Amharic language, and one folktale book was published with English, Afan Oromo and Amharic languages. In addition I have got 11 campaigns were conducted on different national parks with communities who live around the protected areas and stakeholders which targeted to create awareness on the communities and to protect illegal activities that happened around national parks and wildlife sanctuaries and 4 press conferences were carried out from the annual report of the directorate and I have also got 320 posts on the authority's Facebook page. While I saw the PR directorate activities, there was no continuity and most of the Facebook posts were news of workshops but there were not targeted specifically to brand natural tourist destinations in the authority.

As I understand from the above information, I got from the interviewee, focus group interview, and document analysis, the PR directorate using different communication channels, communication mediums, modern technologies, are expected to brand natural tourist destinations.

4.1.2 Implementation intervals of public relation activities

Interviewees were asked a question that says 'what are the activities and implementation intervals in branding natural tourist destinations?'

As the interviewee EWCA 1, explained that there were no clear communication strategies and implementation schedules in the authority and in the PR directorate

In addition interviewee EWCA 3 responded that regarding to the base of their implementation the directorate carried out a number of activities throughout the year according to its annual plan. Such as addressing news, printing brochures, leaflets, different posters, postcards, magazines, developing different news, press releases, press conference, preparing different workshops, panel discussions. The activities are not implemented based on their schedule and plan permanently.

The interval of publishing or addressing issues of the authority fluctuate because of budget, disconcerted of the management bodies, logistics, limitation of human resources in the department, lack of skilled man power. So from the aspect of branding natural tourist destinations the department carried out group of artists and journalists familiarization trip, workshop, and campaigns in its annual plan. Some of the activities were prepared in branding natural destinations and some of them were about wildlife conservation and utilization. Even though these activities were scheduled and had specific time which indicated on the PR directorate annual plan, there were limitations.

And also interviewee EWCA 4 added that the implementation interval was not seen in a sustainable way. And there were no considerable efforts made so far especially in terms of image building, updating the promotional activities.

Interviewee from SMNP 3 expressed that the department published different printing promotional materials but do not have clear implementation intervals.

GI 1, explained that even if there is in the directorate annual plan example the magazine will plan to publish two times per year but because of different challenges, it couldn't keep the interval.

My document analysis I have tried to analysis the printing or publishing schedules or intervals of the printing materials, press conference and posts on face book page. From the document analysis as I observed the PR practices are not implemented as they are planned on the schedule.

All the above analysis showed that even though the PR activities are carried out but they are not implemented according to their schedule or to be implemented. This can tell us the information that planned to address about branding natural tourist destinations has timing problem.

4.1.3 Understanding of the natural tourist destination branding and its purpose

Regarding to the concept of branding and its purpose interviewees were asked. As interviewee EWCA 1, said that it emphasizes the uniqueness of tourist destinations. It is about sustaining natural destinations for tourists based on quality, continuity and balance between the needs of tourism industry, environment protection and local community by an equitable distribution of benefits among stake holders.

And interviewee EWCA 2, explained that branding is a key and pivotal issue one should extensively work on development. Selecting the destinations is always the first thing in branding. When we come to planning to work in branding natural tourist destinations in tourism activities,

we should set up clear channels of information, awareness creations on cultural and historical back grounds of the natural tourist destinations.

On the other hand interviewee EWCA 3 explained that branding natural tourist destination is making a focus on specific natural attractions/ products which are unique to the place as tourist destination attractions. The main purpose could be promoting tourist products which are of main interest to attract tourist, through which tourism could be promoted to improve the economic and social earnings of a country.

In addition interviewee EWCA 4 defined that branding is a sign which can represent an area or a country. The main purpose of branding in the context of the authority is to enhance conservation business and promote around wildlife protection development and sustainable utilization. In this regard, target markets (customers), the existing unique references and competitors brand strategy and positioning, brand characters and tourism products need to be examined.

Whereas interviewee BMNP 2 explained the concept of brand is not just even related to the natural asset you are facing. Any brand, you know it is starting you from other products, other opportunities in the market place. In my opinion, the effort towards branding of our natural resources is still on infant stage. We can't deny the fact that some of our protected areas have relatively well-developed brand with distinctive logo and slogan. But most of our protected areas don't even have properly organized information.

And interviewee BMNP 3 defined his understanding, branding is the strategy of marketing. It is the core of conservation, culture, communities. Uniqueness is the main point in branding

GI 1 pointed out that the concept branding is a serious concept and it didn't go as much as in Ethiopia. Brand is not what you see but what the other person knows. It is hard enough to know it and use it. The influence you have on people is called branding. We have not tried much in our country. Not only is the natural destination branding, customer branding by itself was not made. We did not use branding due to our exposure to the wealth being poorly maintained. Communication network were not done and applied. Ground resources did not identify and it weren't promoted well, the resources were not well researched and identified by professionals. Brand has a great role to promote eco-tourism.

Regarding to this point I analyzed the contents of the published postcards, posters, magazine articles, brushers and Facebook posts. The PR practitioners brand the natural tourist destinations

by default. It published these materials only to address information on the aspects of wildlife resources and natural tourist destinations conservation. It was not specifically to brand natural tourist destinations.

4.1.4 Role of the public relations in branding the natural tourist destinations

Informants were asked to discuss the role of public relation practitioners in branding. Regarding to this the role of PR in branding the natural tourist destinations interviewee EWCA 1, explained that communicating the key or target consumers of the natural attraction. They could influence policy makers, customers and stakeholders, enhanced awareness. In branding natural tourist destinations PR practitioners have remarkable roles especially in image building, awareness creation and communicating culture and social interactions.

And interviewee EWCA 2 said that in one or another way PR practitioners were expected to address vital information for the public in-need of information. In the context of EWCA PR practitioners were expected to promote natural tourist attractions, wonder areas that capable the domestic and foreign tourists to visit the national parks. Branding, PR practitioners were expected to develop essential promotional materials and disseminate for public and monitored people's response and comments regarding to the PR directorate activities.

In addition to the above EWCA 3 expressed that the public relations role could be undertaking promotion of the main attractions and wildlife utilization approaches, developed web site to brand national parks, and use of different media to make the general public and foreign visitors awake of the existing unique attractions.

On the other hand interviewee EWCA 4, explained that the main role of PR practitioners in tourist attraction activities could be; understand the unique features of the attractions that a country has, define the need of tourist interests and facilities, help to incorporate the interest of tourist in the design of facilities, Identify unique features for branding, develop products to serve as branding, Promote the brands.

From the park interviewee BMNP 1 said that currently public relation profession is developing in our country. The public practitioners could promote wildlife resources through web site, mass media, and twitter and with different communication tools. According to our country resource, the practitioners should work many and promote variously. We have diversity and wide wildlife resources on the ground but we could not work as expected. While you make a brand, it must

different from others and we can make it unique. Because we have many resources which are very special and unique; but it needs profession how to promote and how to use it. For instance simien mountain national park is known as roof of Africa but still we did not promote and work well, the time has been going. It should be re-branded. Nature based brand could not change but we could revise it because we have natural resources. That resources helped us to compare our country with other countries in Africa or in the world and show our resources are unique and special. Brand could be promoted through web site, you tube, magazine, leaflet, and using social media. Brand has a power that could be the symbol of a country. And also he added that we can attract through tag line, slogan while we gig out from the ground, we can catch up the attention of others. I saw many countries in the world but I have never seen a country like as Ethiopia which has various natural resources. Ethiopia is a gifted country in Africa. We are so rich but we could not promote and use it properly.

On the other hand interviewee BMNP 2 explained that it's up to everyone who is involved in the sector directly or indirectly. Now a day the issue with conservation and natural resources management is not a task you can leave for a few person or organization, it needs multi sectorial approach.

And interviewee BMNP 3, said that effective communication could answer different questions from tourists and observed through branding. Public relation practitioners role is communicate with the public. For example in bale "one park many world" it is creative but not represented the main area of the park and was not well communicated. The menze Gusa is the best in Ethiopia because it includes the whole diversity. It labeled "our gussa is your experience." It prepared and developed with branding steps. Branding should be the objective of the national park. First see the gaps of branding, the reason. Second, to build brands on the organizational or park level. It should communicate, work, what is the public image of the park on the public mind.

In addition interviewee SMNP 1 explained that the role of public relation is promoting the natural tourist destinations to be brand and awareness creation about the destination through various communication methods.

Whereas interviewee SMNP 2, said that Ethiopia has unique natural environment and also unique culture and social values associated with that environment. There are the people living in

and around those natural tourist destinations so offer the possibilities brand and something unique especial with this relationship. He thought historically Ethiopia was not explored this relationship. They just one to become another safari (nature tourist) destination , go and see elephant, Chilada baboon, Simien Wolf, instead of saying yes you can see these species but in certain of context see how the people are living next these species. So at this time the PR practitioners should seat on the driver seat.

And interviewee SMNP 3, explained that at this time public relation role is very high to arrange and prepare the strategies. On the other hand public relation has a role to create awareness for different companies or business institutes to contribute for the wildlife resource conservation. Not only these companies and also other eco-system service organizations and bodies.

On the government aspect, it gives high attention to any hydroelectric power or irrigation building dam but it couldn't give the same attention to the natural tourist destinations which are the source of water. So the public relation practitioners should fill this gaps and misleading view.

On the other hand from focus group interview FGI 1, pointed that role of public relation practitioners in branding of natural tourist destinations is identifying and showing the opportunities and challenges of natural tourist destinations, and also mobilized and promoted through various communication tools and media.

They also elaborated with example, such as, social media, it can mobilize the followers and communities, even from the political aspect also have a great role. We need to have a nature activist, environmental activist, wildlife professional activist, and we have to public relation practitioners who work from the aspect of natural tourist destinations branding. And also who can promote the nature, ask professionals, read different books then PR practitioners should show to the public or communities by publishing different materials, those could create awareness on the communities.

From my document analysis, I tried to see the role of the PR directorate on the issues of creating awareness on wildlife conservation and utilization, tourist attraction. The directorate did all these activities to implement day to day duties and responsibilities. In my document analysis I tried to dig out documents on branding natural tourist destinations. I found posters, brushers, TV program, TV spot, and postcards. These show the directorate working to promote natural tourist

destinations. But the directorate focuses on wildlife conservation and utilization issues. Still the role of the directorate in branding natural tourist destinations issues were not much. The published materials didn't have continuity.

As we have understood from the above discussion on the role of PR in branding natural tourist destinations. The PR practitioners have plenty of roles and responsibilities in branding natural tourist destinations, the directorate was not working as it expected.

4.2. Challenges in branding natural tourist destinations

Informants were asked to discuss the challenges in branding natural tourist destinations. According to the above questions interviewee EWCA 1, responded that there is no natural tourism branding strategy in the authority, as there is no standard for promotional materials in the sector, duplication, data miss much, unattractive and incomprehensiveness are common problems to be occurred, mostly updated information missed out due to dissemination of out of date publications, in a country wise, in Ethiopia tourist attractions did not well networked with one another especially the nature, culture, history and religious once.

On the other hand interviewee EWCA 2 expressed that the challenges include lack of skilled man power, and technology inputs, existence of significance difference between the reality on the ground in terms of establishing sound conservation and what is promotes through branding, limited coverage of branding, limited message between conservation and tourism.

In addition interviewee EWCA 3 said that lack of organizational commitment, deterioration of exceptional resource values in national parks, wildlife crime, visitor complaints in wildlife conservation, poor documentation of wildlife resources, lack of skill, lack of computations identity (tourism and investment policy), lack of effective communications, limited tourism marketing strategy, lack of awareness by marketers, negative reputations etc.

And also interviewee EWCA 4 explained that lack of knowledge and proper attention regarding branding, undermined consideration of the resources, human encroachment in national parks that spoil the natural sceneries, lack of infrastructure development and inaccessibility.

On the other side interviewee BMNP 1, expressed that the attitude of tour operators towards branding natural destinations can be taken as a challenge in branding natural tourist destinations. Tour operators are ambassadors for their country while they guide tourists on the way or in the park. Tourists do not have to concern on the currency or the money. Their concern is the service because tourists come here with program and understand the country based on the information they given. Tour guides speech whether it is good or bad, it represents Ethiopia. But most of the time tour guides in the country concerns on the currency that they will get from the tourist. They do not care on the coming day. Most of the time tourists come with program to visit so the tour agent should fulfill the necessary things including the transport services.

Interviewee BMNP 2 responded that when it comes to natural tourist destination the approach in developing brand must be multidimensional, but in reality it is not in Ethiopia. Generally we can't manufacture national parks brand like a consumer product brand. It has inherit and reflect its core assets: landscape, Wildlife, people, culture, history etc. It should magnify these assets for the potential visitors and the emotional value they attach to experiencing them. The brands should be developed by professionals following all the necessary steps, focus on core market and communication segments, Supported by research to get perception of our customers, all Stakeholders need to be evolved (political, commercial, travel businesses and residents) and finally, brands should be managed and well promoted.

On the other hand interviewee BMNP 3 explained that officially promoting natural tourist destinations as a brand is not fully implemented. For instance EWCA has a logo, but Bale and Simien mountains national parks have their own brands but do not officially introduced and communicated as “one park, many world” and “the roof of Africa” respectively except labeling them on guide books which prepared and published by NGOs. Investors, tour operators, and other concerned bodies do not know these brands. Because it was not participatory (stakeholders were not participated). Brand campaign was not conducted, As Ethiopia, it needs professionals, experts and well organized organization. Currently social media influence the marketing area such as off line for elders and on line for youth.

Also he added that brand should be measure but still there is no in Ethiopia. What is the impact, image building, to promote the destination? Does the brand communicate well? The answer is no, and on the other hand in branding natural tourist destinations first identify the use of

branding, create awareness; there is a gap of awareness regarding to branding, branding role, significance. Second identify the present and represent with stakeholders.

The interviewee also added that most of the time the management bodies did not have a positive attitude towards to public relation practitioners and did not believe that public relation practitioners have a role in branding of natural tourist destinations in Ethiopia. On the other hand you heard that the management bodies said that other African countries have well developed national park brand and have the technology system on their hand. So there is a paradox one attitude and supporting of the practitioners.

He concluded that most of the time the management bodies of the authority shifts their gaps to the expert before they create a conducive environment which fully participate the PR professionals to play their role in branding natural tourist destinations.

In addition interviewee SMNP1, responded that absence of integrating marketing communication. It is hard to achieve successful branding without integrating marketing communications, for instance the Ethiopian football national team which named as “Waliawochu” and other institutes have used the natural resources of SMNP and BMNP as their brand and symbol. Even if they have been promoting the natural tourist destinations, they did not have willingness to give incentives as a reward for the conservation of the park, in general no branding fee at all. The main reason of this challenge, the authority does not have branding communication strategy and brand mandate policy in the country level.

On the other hand interviewee SMNP 2 explained that because of poor communication strategy and poor communication infrastructures, we did not know the interest of visitors why are they come, how long they stay, their choices to visit, these are all important question to be answered. Let say social media, more young people are traveling to wards different tourist destinations. They come from a society, using modern communication technologies is essential due to globalization. These tools are every day experience for tourists, this equipment may use as communication tools, information tools, plan tools. And they are using every communication activities in package. The problem of connection and integration which helps to use their time properly and manage their every movements easily because some of the communication technologies did not work properly in Ethiopia. For instance, getting an internet card, GPS,

national master card, bank access, internet access, hotel facilities, good and scheduled visiting guides and information tools are not accessible to use in every natural tourist destination corridors.

He also added that the PR practitioners should be free from different political influences as they work in promoting the natural tourist destinations as a brand of a country. They should be allowed to use every essential equipment, incentives and different services that arose their working interests as professionals.

And also interviewee SMNP 3 expressed that Wildlife tourism development around the park is connected with brand. There is expert's gap and potential. There is no manageable expert for branding development in Ethiopia. The surrounding communities are not incentivized properly. So generally from the aspect of park management, there are a lot of challenges but we prevent those challenges with well managed park, well managed resources, on the way tourism will develop, then there will be well advanced service, well advanced product, then we can develop brand and will have also public relation activities.

On the other side GI 1, added that the challenges take in lack of capable man power, and technology inputs, existence of significant difference between the reality on the ground in terms of establishing sound conservation and what is going to promote through branding, limited coverage of branding, limited message between conservation and tourism.

From document analysis, I tried to analyze annual report documents on the issues of challenges on the Authority, there was no permanent organizational structure, lack of promotion, and lack of technological inputs, lack of trained man power on branding natural tourist destinations. There is no natural tourism branding strategy in the authority and there is no organizational strategic communication.

From the above discussion we understood that the Authority had challenges on implementing branding natural tourist destinations. These challenges had their own impact directly or indirectly on the activities of the PR directorate.

4.2.1. Challenges in branding the natural destinations of Bale and Simien Mountains National Parks

Interviewees were asked specifically the challenges in branding of Bale and Simian mountains national park. According to interviewee EWCA1, expressed that lack of strategic communication and tourism marketing strategy in the national parks, limited participation of stakeholders in developing the sector to be brand, should not focus of its core communications and market segments, lack of upgrade the branding, no brand campaign, lack of quality service and limited communication infrastructures etc.

And also interviewee EWCA 2 explained that the major challenges; as a world heritage site (note that BMNP is nominated) they did not have their own branding strategy and communication strategy (they need have their own strategy as world heritage site) separately each of the parks do not have branding standard. The directorate still is looking them like as all other parks. Still the directorate did not give a special attention to promote and overcome the visual challenges. They did not meet standardization for world heritage site.

In addition interviewee EWCA 3, explained that the main challenges are both national parks are highly affected by anthropogenic factors and thus there was difference between what was promoted and what we saw on the ground, the service provided for the visitors were below the expected standard.

On the other hand interviewee EWCA 4 explained from the Communication aspect the spectacular landscape and the unique species were not well promoted. Natural tourist attractions are under severe threat, so there was a gap on the communication activities to show these sever threat to the concerned bodies.

And also interviewee SMNP 2 expressed that Ethiopia does not have raw boast internet presence and this is the weakness in terms of communication and attracting international tourism. Today many young people want to able to book a holiday and organize everything on line, they did not want to call some body or even email, they want the information click a few button, then they paid on line, they could get the ticket or every things already clear, they had ticket, they presented, but in our country, especially in the authority, there were no such facilities. The visitors wanted to able to meet with you and you said ok, you booked on this visitors experiences

it will take one day or three days, the charge is included if you go and you have a good experience. So these are some of the practical challenges which are currently facing in terms of poor communication infrastructures both in Bale and Simien mountains national parks.

Furthermore interviewee SMNP 3 expressed that the great problem was unable to identify the unique resources and to brand them, then to market. But before brand and marketing them. Strategically communication is very important but there is no now. To communicate strategically, tools are very important in order to advertise, promote and brand national parks but there is no now in our country. It may come from gap of skills, using systems, not digitalize.

From the group interview GI 1, explained from the aspect of brand natural tourist destinations in the authority for instance, Bale mountains National Park has a brand known as “One park, many world and Smien Mountains National Park has also “the rough of Africa”. Both of them were developed by foreigners and NGO, the authority was not involved in branding. We had have a skill gap but currently there is a change and also we couldn't use and promote it well. We could not promote them with various communication tools including the electronics and printing media.

And also they added that Simien, which is known as the rough of African mean that it is in the group of mountains in Africa and there is no any landscape in Africa which can replace Simien mountains National Park, May be Argentina's mountain. We could not use this opportunities to promote well with communication activities.

On the other hand from the document analysis regarding to challenges of Bale and Simien mountains national parks

“ባጠቃላይ ከአገሪቱ ሁኔታ አንጻር ሲታይ ለዱር እንስሳትና የመኖሪያ አካባቢያቸው ጥበቃ ፈታኝ መንስዔ ሆኖ በተለያዩ ጥናቶች ከተለዩ ቁልፍ ጉዳዮች መካከል ለምሳሌ፡- የህዝብ ቁጥር በፍጥነት መጨመር ፣የተቀናጀ የመሬት አጠቃቀም ዕቅድና ስርዓት አለመኖር ፣ያልተቀናጀ የልማት እቅድና ትግበራ ክፍተት፣ ከባለድርሻ አካላት ጋር ጠንካራ ቅንጅታዊ አሰራር አለመፈጠር፣ በዱር እንስሳት ሀብት ጥበቃና ልማት ፋይዳዎች ዙሪያ የግንዛቤ እጥረት መኖር፣ የዱር እንስሳት ልማትና ጥበቃ አንዱ የልማት አጀንዳ ሆኖ በቂ የፖለቲካ ትርጉም ተሰጥቶት በሁሉም አካል በተቆርቋሪነት መንፈስ አለመያዝ፣ የዱር እንስሳት ልማት፣ ጥበቃና አጠቃቀም የህግ ማዕቀፍ ክፍተት መኖርና በስራ ላይ ያለውም በተሟላ ሁኔታ አለመተግበርና አለመከበር፣ የአካባቢው ህብረተሰብ ተሳትፎና ተጠቃሚነት በሚፈልገው ደረጃ

አለማደግ፣ ዘለቁታዊ ያልሆነ እና ያልተመጣጠነ ተፈጥሮ ሃብት አጠቃቀም፣ ተቋማዊ የአቅም ክፍተት መኖር፣ በተለይ የሀብት ውስንነት፣ የቴክኖሎጂ አጠቃቀም እጥረት ዋናዎቻቸው ናቸው።” (የኢትዮጵያ ዱር እንስሳት ልማት፣ጥበቃና ዘለቁታዊ አጠቃቀ፣2010)

This means that in Ethiopia, the main challenges of Ethiopian national parks and wildlife sanctuaries are increasing the number population and their interest around the national parks, lack of integrated investments around the park, weak relationship among stakeholders, lack of awareness, lack of political attention to the natural resources, lack of law enforcement policy towards to the use of wildlife conservation and utilization, unable to implement the policy on the ground, unable to develop the benefit of the surrounding communities from the natural resource, implementation gap of the organization and shortage and lack of technology products in the area.(translated by the researcher)

As indicated on the above discussion, the challenges of the national parks have its own impact on branding their natural tourist destinations. Because national parks were not well conserved and utilized, gap of using technological equipment, had no smooth communication strategies and there was no PR practitioners in the national parks. It was not easy to create awareness and branding the national tourist destinations as well.

4.2.2. Challenges of the public relations

Informants were asked ‘what are the challenges of the public relations practitioners in branding? As the interviewee EWCA 1, explained that changing of media landscape and customer expectation in the dynamic world, absence of assessing stakeholder’s perception, lack of innovations and responsibility, absence of brand communication, programs, flexibility etc.

In addition interviewee EWCA 2, responded that the authority PR directorate was busy in other tasks, as there is also called tourism department in the authority, the directorate did not have branding and marketing officer neither related professional that is hard to handle these tasks.

And also interviewee EWCA 3, elaborated that other people think of us for “what we want to be famous for” is in a serious problem due to the challenges indicated above.

On the other hand interviewee EWCA 4, explained that lack of proper knowledge, financial support, commitment and passion, not seeing branding as one of the priorities under PR job and activities.

Furthermore interviewee BMNP 2, explained that branding of natural tourist destination is a complex task. Unlike other branding customer focused brands, this natural destination brand should clearly reflect its core assets: Social (local people, history, tradition etc.), economic and ecological. Because of different reasons the PR practitioners were not actively participating to brand natural tourist destinations.

And interviewee SMNP 2, expressed that the communication barrier between the federal and the regional government communication activities. Branding needed constant across the government, for example, the regional body is responsible for tourism for national parks, they needed to some level of communication and engagement. So that again for the perspectives of the visitors, we did not create confusion, so if EWCA has certain brand Ethiopian parks and visitors visit Simien which is in Amhara region and the Amhara region tourism office has a different and contradictory message. These now confused the visitors.

On the other hand, he elaborated that even if the authority PR directorate played its role in branding; it didn't work jointly with PR practitioners of ministry of tourism and culture, tourism commission Ethiopia, Ethiopian Airline and any other related institutions and with the regional government communication practitioners to brand natural tourist destinations in the country level.

In addition interviewee SMNP 3, explained that the Public relations role is very great while we use properly but most of the time we look and understand public relation is not a profession and the practitioners apply and perform only the political role of the government, we think they are tools for the government who performs the policy and strategy of the government political system. We believed that they stood to the government side but not on the side of the communities. This is the misconception towards the profession. Frankly, without communication we couldn't any, it had better the organization has a strategic plan, communication strategy and clearly show the public relation practitioners role but still the organization did not have these strategies. Even from the head quarter there is a lack of skilled man power, the directorate was

not well equipped, and it doesn't have a structure on each park. Simply willingness and other experts gave and addressed information.

On the other hand from group interview GII, pointed out that in addition to the limitation of skilled man power, most of the time the PR practitioners and the public relation directorate works actively on the workshop or the meeting not on the natural tourist destination branding. Real, scientific information is not addressed. It had better to work to address all. Only the panel discussions were nothing to attract tourists and to brand natural tourist destinations. They elaborated that there is a knowledge gap on the practitioners and the strategic documents should prepare that guides the public relations practitioners in order to brand natural tourist destinations.

From my document analysis, I tried to analysis the annual reports of the directorate. During my analysis I have dig out the following challenges. These are; attitudes of other directorate towards the directorate, lack of engagements on decision making on the Authority, lack of skilled man power, there is no strategic communication plan, not well equipped working situations, knowledge gap, strategic implementation document, communication barrier between the head office and regional state on the ownership of the national parks.

There for as we could observe from the above discussion, the directorate has a number of challenges which hinder its activities and communication practices in the Authority. It is obvious that these challenges have their own impacts on the practices of branding natural tourist destinations which implemented by the directorate.

4.2.3. Contributions of PR to overcome the challenges

Informants were asked 'what are the contributions of the public relations practitioners to overcome facing challenges? Based on the given point interviewee EWCA 1, explained that the contribution of PR directorate began from understanding that branding is one of the destinations promoting, mainly the PR role is focused on internal and external brand communication programs and activities.

And also interviewee EWCA 2, expressed that one of the most notable action that has been taken by PR directorate and developed a new branding strategy for the authority but still it is not active.

On the other hand interviewee EWCA 3, explained that the contribution of public relation directorate could be coordinating awareness creation programs, public mobilization to address the conservation challenges by creating message between conservation and tourism (ensuring sound creation and sustainable utilization)

In addition interviewee EWCA 4, focused on the major contributions of PR includes Provide proper attention for branding, promote the importance at large and convince the decision makers through indication of the role that branding can playing a great in attracting tourist.

And interviewee BMNP 1 expressed that PR directorate could contribute by creating a flat form and networking the communications channels with Stakeholders to play their role on branding natural tourist destinations. Brand has more value than money. The PR directorate can contribute by promoting well.

Furthermore interviewee SMNP 3 explained that through communication, the practitioners used various communication tools for branding natural tourist destinations. during this time public relation practitioners should address seasonal, update information through media, address to the right body on the right time but what is the problem is the structures, skill gaps, busy with political believes and concern on balance less activities.

On the other hand from group interviewee GI 1, indicated that using social media by addressing the current information and actively involved it can overcome the challenges, it can contribute by mobilizing the followers and communities, even from the political aspect also have a great role. We need to have a nature activist, environmental activist, wildlife professional activist, and we have to public relation practitioners who work from the aspect of natural tourist destinations branding. And also who can promote the nature, ask professionals, read different books then who can show to the public or communities by publishing through printing materials that can create awareness on the communities.

According to the above discussion, the PR directorate has different ways that should be implemented in order to overcome the challenges. These are; creating awareness about duties and responsibilities of the directorate to increase the mutual participation of other directorate, organizing public mobilization in order to strength the public participation, creating a flat form

of implementation and networking the communication to cooperate others, use various strategies and communication tools.

4.3.Prospects in branding of natural tourist destinations

Interviewees were asked ‘what are the prospects in branding? As the interviewee EWCA 1, explained that increasing of wildlife tourism, increasing the interest of private investment on these areas, increasing competitive environment, motivation on wildlife tourism among stakeholders are the major prospects in the sector.

Interviewee EWCA 2, pointed out that the authority has unique destinations of nature that it can promote in different perspectives from other attraction safari destinations, the promoted historical, cultural and religious attractions can be connected to the nature one and could be promoted in a very successful manner.

Interviewee EWCA 4 added that using different ways of communications tools including the social media are the prospect in branding natural tourist destinations. And also day to day flow of tourist increases at this time the natural tourist destinations would get well promoted and tourist income increase.

Interviewee BMNP 1, explained that the attitude of the communities have changed towards natural resources. For instance before two decades years ago they used to hunt the endemic species and the flag ship species of simian mountains national park Walia Ibex and Mountain Nyala in Bale mountains national park for food purpose, but now the community thought has changed and they are keeping and maintain for it when they know the benefits through tourism income. These are the main prospects of the authority. Tourism itself requires the community and management strategy must be planned. We have to make some integrated progress and also we have to provide pasture for the community, at this time PR practitioners have a great role to create more awareness on the community.

Also interviewee BMNP 2, pointed out there is a progress and the progress can be seen clearly, for example the logo of Simein mountains national park and EWCA used to confuse but an interesting update was done by EWCA PR directorate. When we compared with Other African countries our progress needs to be improved by expanding the actions up to park level. We need

to focus to integrate the communication and the marketing strategies to brand natural tourist destinations.

Interviewee BMNP 3, said that the authority has various prospects to promote natural tourist destinations including the national parks. Prepare the brand and communicate the brand through on meeting, exhibition, social media, web site, communication tools. While we develop brands it should prepare with knowledge by identifying the target or oriented customers, follow the process, and outreach campaign. And follow the steps in branding process; such as, brand identification, brand formation, brand outreach, measurement.

Interviewee SMNP 3, pointed out each national park has its own exceptional products. For instance, in Simien Mountain National park most of the time many tourists come for trekking. This is one product in simian also in Bale. But the trekking route is not well organized to show the route. Every year 25-30 thousands of tourists came to visit. Among them 20 % of the hundred purposely come for trekking. The others are from the resources aspects. It has attractive landscape, unique wildlife resources, the sum these products are the attractive factors for national parks. Other national parks have also their own unique nature and resources. So the authority has a prospect to brand national parks by using these natural unique features.

From the group interviewee GI 1, said that Ethiopia is relatively underdeveloped, the national parks and wildlife sanctuaries combine a grandeur that is second to none in Africa with many distinctive features and unique species that are not found elsewhere. Thus, from the wildlife tourism perspective, the protected areas have much to offer both general visitors looking for a genuine African wildlife experience and those pursuing more specialized interests. Both kinds of attraction need to be captured in the information materials. At this time the PR practitioners have a great role.

On the other hand they said that at the national level, the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority may be thought as a mother caring for all national parks and wildlife resources in the country and it should develop its own brand based on the realities and features of the present conservation efforts of the natural tourist destinations and their respective tourism products. They also added that the brand served to distinguish the wildlife resources of Ethiopia as one of the country's most valuable and unique assets. At the same time, it should differentiate the

wildlife and wildlife tourism on offer in Ethiopia from that in the well-developed wildlife tourism countries of East Africa.

In my document analysis, I tried to analysis different published documents such as guide books, magazines, poster, postcards, and brushers and different documentaries based on the natural tourist destinations of Ethiopia. All these documents owned by the Authority. These documents are targeted on emphasizing to promote wildlife tourism, promote interest of private investment on these areas, endemic species, unique landscapes, trekking roots, and the biodiversity of the national parks.

On the other hand in Ethiopia different business centers, tour agents and organizations have got their name from the endemic wild animals, unique landscapes and natural tourist destinations areas such as “waliyawochu” national football team, walia beer, Dashin bear, Dashin bank etc.

There for the Authority could use these sectors as opportunities and promotion areas of endemic wild species, unique landscapes and natural tourist destinations to build effective brand of natural tourist destinations.

As we have seen in the above discussion the authority has different prospects which helped to brand natural tourist destinations. These prospects are the natural gifts of the country and can be seen as special and unique features that is why different business centers, tour agents and organizations possess their name as their title. Using these prospects, the Authority can make these special areas and species as an influential aspects in order to brand the natural tourist destinations easily.

4.3.1. Prospects of Public Relations in branding

Informants of individual and group were asked about the common prospects of public relations in branding. According to this interviewee EWCA 2, said that the common for the authority is common for the public relation directorate, hence the Authority has unique destinations of nature that it can promote in different perspectives from other attraction safari destinations, and the promoted historical, cultural and religious attractions can be connected to the nature one and could be promoted in a very successful manner.

In addition interviewee EWCA 3, explained that Public relation practitioners may play significant role in updating the existing information, developing web site and brand that can properly fit the sector and also undertaking promotion using different media.

Interviewee EWCA 4, said that PR directorate considered delivering its responsibility of creating and promoting branding.

Interviewee BMNP 1, pointed out tourism can blossom when the community uses it. Public relations professionals must identify the problem and work on it. They should know it well. And now the expansion of education has created a good opportunity for the PR practitioners.

On the other hand group interview GII, pointed out there are various opportunities to access information and promote the brand by using different communication tools but the gap is the way of using these things.

In my document analysis, I tried to analysis different published documents such as the guide books of the national parks which promote by connecting the natural tourist destinations with the surrounding historical and cultural tourist destinations and developed web sites including them. These materials can be used as an essential source documents and good opportunities to the PR directorate to brand natural tourist destinations. But the web site was not active.

The above discussion indicated that having a unique destinations of nature, historical, cultural and religious attractions areas, updating the existing information about the natural tourist destinations, developing web site and brand that can properly fit the sector and also undertaking promotion using different media are essential opportunities for the PR directorate to implement branding natural tourist destinations easily. Public relations professionals need to identify the problem and work on it. It used to create various opportunities to access information and promote brand through communication tools.

4.3.2. Prospects in Bale and Simien mountains national parks for branding

Informants were asked individually and in group about the common prospects of Bale and Simien mountains national park specifically. According to this interviewee EWCA1, said that both national parks have distinctive, symbolic and endemic wildlife, world class landscapes, these national parks are described in the major tourist roots in the country and representative of

the national branding, world heritage lists, interest of tourism conservation PR practitioner can promote the areas, build the image of the country, various communication related development plans suitable for branding of the activities.

In addition interviewee EWCA 2, pointed out both are world heritage sites, they have various unique biodiversity other than national parks around the world, they are diverse in endemism, they both can be connected with other historically cultural destinations, for example simian mountains national park with Gonder Fisiledes palace, Lalibela and Axum tourist destinations and Bale mountains national park with sofourmer cave, Dirie shake husien Mosques. They both promoted than other national parks in the country, and there are fertile ground to work on both in branding and marketing.

On the other hand interviewee EWCA 3, added that both national parks are locations for unique features and outstanding values since they are center of endemism and scenic features, these national parks comprise of the unique ecosystem (afro-alpine and semi-afro-alpine) which constitutes over 80 % of Africa's portion and the landscape of both protected areas are also scenic ones. As a result various types of utilization or increase utilization diversity can achieved through PR practitioners active participation by addressing the update information to the concerned bodies.

Interviewee EWCA 4, said that both national parks are rich with various natural resources and branding can contribute towards resource conservation, and provide lesson how branding benefit for the nations, indicate landscape features and unique species are most useful products of branding. So the PR directorate can use these golden opportunities in branding these national parks.

Interviewee BMNP 1, pointed out currently the hidden is coming out but the time is passing without using it for instance Simien mountain national park is a world heritage site but still we could not develop the products. Still there is only one trekking route but we can make many because we have the resources. Siemien is known as a place that God played a drama on it. Every day simien is new and can create something new on your mind. Bale is also near to the same natural features but we can't use and promote it. Still we can't know the whole resources

yet and the way how to promote and brand them because the authority does not have strategic communication and marketing plan.

Also interviewee BMNP 3, explained that Simien is a world heritage site. If it has a brand, it can promote very well, international significance, glorify. Bale is the same to simien. “Santtie amba” is the uniqueness. Both national parks have web sites which developed and outsourced by NGOs but the PR directorate could not use these opportunities to address the update information and in branding the national parks. And also both web sites were not active, the authority should involve it.

G11, from the group interviewee pointed out because of this landscape and diversity of wild animals, it became a world natural heritage sight. UNESCO registered it by calling there is no any place in the world which can replace it. Both Simien and Bale mountains National Parks almost have the same unique features. They added that we can get all unique creatures in both of them except Walia Ibex. It locates only in Simien. The opportunities are many in branding them by using different communication channels.

Also they added that we have very amazing landscape, wildlife resources, diversity of culture, we have real wildlife in the forest, we feel happy while we see wild in the wild but not on street or on the road like Kenya or Tanzania. These uniqueness make the natural tourist destinations special and the PR practitioners can use these opportunities in branding natural tourist destinations in Ethiopia.

I have tried to analysis document by using the guide book of Bale Mountains National Park showed that the best of the Bale mountains national park by grouping with different types. Such as; Best Natural Experience: Trekking: Forget about the hustle and bustle of the city and lose yourself among the wilds of the bale mountains national park. Live like the locals while exploring the awesome terrain on foot or on horseback.

Best Animal Experience: Ethiopian Wolf: Watch as Africa's rarest canid hunts for giant mole rats on the vast Sanetti Plateau, its beautiful colored coat just visible amongst the lichen-covered rocks, BMNP is home to over 50% of the global population of the Ethiopian Wolf.

Best Birding Experience: Birds of Prey on the Sanetti Plateau: Stand amongst soaring birds of prey as they search for rodents on the Sanetti Plateau. Watch the Golden Eagle (Bale has the most southern resident and breeding population in the world) swoop down and fly off with a meal in its talons. (Bale Mountains National Park a Traveler's Guide Book)

And also regarding to the uniqueness of Bale it expressed "..... It is essential to recognize the huge importance of the Bale Mountains National Park, which was established in 1969 and includes extensive tracts of montane grassland, forest and Afro-alpine moorland at altitude of 1500-4377m. (Bale Mountains National Park Birding Booklet)

In addition I tried to analysis documents about Simian mountain national park, its guide book pointed out.... the Simien Mountains National Park or the "Roof of Africa" is home to isolated and unique wildlife such as the Walia ibex, Ethiopian Wolf, and Gelada. And soaring above their rugged realm is the bearded vulture or " Lord of the Plateau', who finds refuge in theses remarkable mountains.

And also it is not only the abundant fauna of the park that is so stunning, but also the flora. The majestic mountain plant -giant lobelia- stands tall and proud on the harsh plateaus. Red-hot poker huddles in clusters, displaying their vibrant colors. For these and many more reasons, the Simien Mountains National Park became one of the world's first UNESCO Natural World Heritage Sites. It is in this park where nature lovers find an undreamed paradise and mountaineers an unforgettable trekking experience. (Simien Mountains National Park a Traveller's Guidebook)

As we understand from the above discussion the Bale and Simien Mountains national parks are registered world's UNESCO Natural World Heritage Sites and have their own identical features which uses as supportive indications for the PR activities during branding these natural tourist destinations areas. There for the PR directorate identify these special characteristics and features of these natural tourist destinations to brand effectively and separately by connecting the natural tourist destinations with historical and cultural heritages which found in the surrounding area.

4.3.3. Managing methods of prospects in branding

Informants were asked to discuss ‘how the PR practitioners manages the prospects in branding in the authority? Interviewee EWCA 1, pointed out the PR had better build their Capacity, increased technology based public relation activities, innovative communication strategies, revise organizational structure or reforms to fulfill the man power.

In addition interviewee EWCA 2, explained that design branding strategy for these world heritages sites and implement appropriately, designing branding strategy should mark upon the authority’s guide line, use brand guide line extensively and frequently.

The interviewee EWCA 3, said that that the practitioners should play significant role in updating the existing information and undertaking promotion and awareness programs using different media.

The interviewee EWCA 4, pointed out understand the nature of branding, make consensus on features, species, products to be used as branding, convince the decision makers to promote further, make clear planning before branding development, Indicate the ultimate benefits and beneficiaries through active communications.

The interviewee BMNP 1, explained that Public relation practitioner is the key person and profession. It had better work on publics. PR feeds all the stakeholders, communities and governmental bodies. To brand natural tourist destinations in our country and to solve the problems, we have to invest on communities, let invest our money, time on the people around the park.

In addition to interviewee BMNP 2, responded that as a responsible body in branding natural tourist destinations of the country, EWCA PR practitioners should take the initiative and be on the driver seat. This can be reflected directly on national parks that it’s managing and by proving assistance and guidance to regional authorities which are responsible for national parks at region level. And there should be a standard guide line for natural tourist destination Branding which promotes an environment of creating synergies between stakeholders, active involvement or participation as well as in it helps to have up to standard brands that can penetrate to the international market.”

Interviewee BMNP 3, said that in addition to the PR practitioners, in branding development not only the professionals but also the local communities should participate because they are the major stakeholders. Because most of the time they know the local area, they can call different things then the PR practitioners can take this one as an opportunity.

GI 1, from the group interviewee, pointed out in Simien most of the visitors visit small part of the park in relation to the long term to brand the park, we have other products geographically spaced across the park, to understand the nature of the park, the product is interesting for visitors and to brand those to encourage visitors more across the whole area rather than concentrating in one or two areas.

As we have seen in the above discussion the PR directorate didn't manage the prospects properly to make branding the natural tourist destinations effectively. It had better build its capacity in branding, increase technology based public relation activities, develop innovative communication strategies, design branding strategy, update the existing information and undertake promotion and awareness programs using different medias, work on publics and participate the local communities, cooperate with all the stakeholders, governmental bodies, take the initiative and be on the driver seat. If this commitments implemented effectively, it may have smooth the way of the PR directorate moves towards branding the natural tourist destinations.

4.4. Effective activities of the PR practitioners in the authority

This sub-topic covers the informants' responses on the question what are the effective activities of the PR practitioners in the authority in branding natural tourist destinations. Interviewee EWCA 2, pointed out the newly developed brand guide line is one of the most effective activities, archiving of data (photograph, video, written updated documents) in which we can work on branding.

Interviewee EWCA 3, on his side, explained that activities done so far including, awareness creating, public campaign, web site development, information updating, and how to promote, the affirmative ones plus facilitations of technology, capacity building, updating the information, developing brand for EWCA and national parks etc.

Interviewee BMNP 1, pointed out the directorate has prepared brand guide line, this is the effective activities and then this may be lead to prepare communication strategy because communication needs skill and needs experts.

On the other hand interviewee BMNP 3, explained that branding is not advisable to outsource, it should not. It is the core business of the organization and the country. It is the image so public relation practitioners should create awareness and promote.

Interviewee SMNP 3, explained that at the national level, we would have a brand which can include all national parks and can express all of them, even including the social value, according to the authority's mission and vision, objectives. It can exposure the authority's image and also the country's image and known at the world level.

In my document analysis, I tried to analysis different published documents such as magazine, poster, postcard, and stickers. These documents were targeted and emphasized to promote wildlife resources and natural tourist destinations which published based on the new guide line and the new logo of the Authority. And also I tried to see the new developed web site of the Authority, even though it developed by the PR directorate but it is not active to up load update information and post news on the web site page.

As we have seen in the above discussion the PR directorate did various effective activities in branding natural tourist destinations. It developed web site and brand guide line for the authority and the national parks for archiving update data including photograph, video, written updated documents in which we can work on branding and awareness creation activities. On the other hand the directorate has prepared public campaign.

4.4.1. Measuring of the effectiveness PR activities

Interviewees of in depth and group interview participants were asked to discuss public relations effective activities and measuring trends of PR activities in the authority. According to interviewee EWCA 2, on his part said that it was just in a very beginning phase, we couldn't say that it was really working effectively as it is expected.

Interviewee EWCA 3, responded that the directorate needed to consider the authority as part of its strategic plan and the plan need to be inter-linked vertically and horizontally, in such a way the plan would be monitored by using the regular measurement and evaluation approach.

In addition interviewee EWCA 4, explained that based on the planned monitoring and evaluation methods that had been established prior to branding design, promotion and implementation.

On the other hand interviewee SMNP 2, pointed out EWCA need have a very clear guide line which could be covering all the national parks. It helped the PR directorate to measure their effective activities.

And using certain type of communication materials and insuring them in the authority because these are mandatory part of the communication. So that whether it on web site, social media, in print media, the communication is always very easily identified. Then the customer then Oh! This is the brand; this is who I am getting the information from. And the part of this guide line should also indicate a sort of a simple groups where by some quality checks could be insured.

GII, responded that to measure the effectiveness of activities by identifying its partners and what are the key brands and what are the sub key brands. The PR directorate could measure the activities based on the guide line, this is the brand, and these are the sub brands. In addition the directorate did in details with its work plan.

In my document analysis, I tried to analysis the annual plan and the annual report of the directorate. From its planning it showed that the directorate' s activities evaluated quarterly but while I tried to analysis the effectiveness of activities measure per six month yearly and also the directorate didn't have its own clear guide line to measure the effective activities. And I saw the directorate has developed a brand guide line but did not use effectively and it was not active.

As we have seen in the above discussion the PR directorate was just in a very beginning phase to measure the effectiveness of activities and it was not really working effectively as it is expected. In addition by identifying its partners by showing the key brands and the sub key brands, then evaluating the success of branding campaign, and using participatory approach could measure the effectiveness. And also EWCA needed have a very clear guide line which should cover all the national parks. It helped the PR directorate to measure the effective activities. So the PR

practitioners had better follow such steps and can measure their work effectiveness in branding natural tourist destinations but the trained was weak.

4.4.2. What should PR practitioners do to be effective

In depth and group interviewees were asked to discuss, what should the PR practitioners do to be effective in branding natural tourist destinations in EWCA. According to this interviewee EWCA 2, said that, developing a strategy with concerned partners and implementing as per guide lines, arrange a separate department for communication, marketing and branding tasks collaborate with Ethiopia Tourism Organization, Minister of Culture and Tourism, Ethiopian Airport Organization in designing country wise strategy for natural tourist destination branding.

On the other hand interviewee EWCA 3, explained that updating the existing available information, capacity building both in terms of human resource and inputs with technology, specific brand development, improving protected areas management effectiveness.

In addition interviewee EWCA 4, elaborated that the plan and the implementation ways should be participatory, and knowledge based, identify priorities of the people and best practices in the area, was better because a pioneer in the area require basic scientific knowledge, commitment and passion.

Besides, interviewee BMNP 1, on his part recommended that first let us to know our resource then we can come on the market front to sell them. Let us work on brand and branding through solving our internal problems.

On the other hand interviewee SMNP 2, explained that Ethiopia has very poor visitors' statics. We see if we want to brand we need to know our target audiences, we can't specialized the type of message or type of communication we wanted to understand.

He also elaborated that it was very important for EWCA or other governmental and nongovernmental organization to know who the main visitors are coming to a particular place in the country.

Besides interview SMNP 3, on his part recommended that Public relations would be well designed to show the whole resources, trekking roots which could show the whole area of the

park. Show the existing trekking routes, strategically organized the communication ways, to inform the tourists. Most of the time tourists went for two or three days trekking, so communicate them to extend their trekking to other parts of the park directions. And showed the products clearly, the trekking route would increase then the tourists would wait many days and also the income increase.

On the other hand group interview G11, pointed out brand should develop scientifically, and it should have scientific justification to brand our natural tourist destinations first, it depends on knowledge but we lack it. And they added that the public relation practitioners should have enough data, or information about the park to develop a brand and many professionals should elaborate them together and before we developed a brand, we have to jot down scientific justification. Some time, we called a brand but we couldn't operate it then we could create a brand which can be owned which others couldn't get it.

And a brand couldn't copy while we use that brand, we could promote a lot, could attract many tourists, it depended on the using system of it, so the PR practitioners had better do more and more communication activities on this area.

As we saw in the above discussion the PR directorate should be practiced to develop strategy with concerned partners and implement as per guide lines, arrange a separate department for communication, marketing and branding tasks collaborate with other sectors in designing country wise strategy for natural tourist destination branding, updating the existing available information, capacity building has been conducted both in terms of human resource and inputs with technology, specific brand development, specialize the type of message or type of communication to make branding natural tourist destinations effective in the Authority. And also the Public relation directorate would be well design to show the whole resources of natural tourist destinations.

4.5.Experiences of KWS and EWCA in branding natural tourist destinations

In depth and group interviewees were asked to discuss the experiences of the two countries in wildlife management and in branding national parks in a country as well as in the world level. According to the above points interviewee EWCA 2, KWS is in the era of service while we are

still tackling activities on conservation alone, he suggested that the authority should work on conservation and branding and marketing together in which it could be manage.

In addition interviewee EWCA 3, explained that things are incomparable for example from the PR aspect KWS has its own film hall, well organized PR equipment including set of PR vehicle, used all means including web site, electronic media , social media, communicate with its diplomats and their approach is aligned with their strategic plan . And also specific brands were developed for their national parks.

As the interviewee EWCA 4, responded that the Kenya government understood the importance of branding and how to promote in general, PR practitioners in Kenya operated in full force, and they had lots of successful experiences but not in our authority, even we couldn't make up the limitation of the PR expert.

Interviewee BMNP 1, explained that in history EWCA has begun with Kenya but for the last 40 years but it was not well known. He elaborated that it could not come with branding and tourism is sensitive unless we used the communication activities.

On other hand interviewee BMNP 3, stressed that other African countries' national parks have brands, so we could learn many experiences from them even from our neighbor Kenya. We were not promoting our national parks by using various ways of communication tools and mediums, simply we describe but not like as one destination. Because it created image on everyone mind such as for business suppliers.

And Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority management bodies are mandated for wildlife management, including wildlife tourism and responsible for developing and promoting the tourism products of Ethiopia with in the country and internationally through different media wings. In performing this role EWCA should work closely with different national and international stakeholders and media agents to publicize the country's tourist attractions and encouraged the development of natural tourist destinations facilities in our country.

On other hand interviewee SMNP 3, pointed out from the natural set up, it is very important to promote the country and make it differ from others. Most of the time, the authority was not

stable for the last 10 years. The infrastructure had its own influences to build a brand through communication.

On the other hand GI 1, explained that currently our protected areas size is decreasing because of challenges. Kenya's has many NGOs but we didn't have, they have air craft, they patrol by sniffer dog, they have 24 hour radio communication, they have a capacity to promote their natural tourist destinations through national geography channel. In Ethiopia we didn't have this capacity.

KWS had a good relationship with the communities. They educated their staffs with MA, BA, PHD and other short training but still in our country there is a limitation. In addition to this they educate the community regularly, but we didn't do it in such way. The politics of federalism and regulation in Ethiopia has its own influence. Actually public relation has a great role in wildlife tourism and brand development but it is in the infant stage.

And also they added that we Ethiopian have quality wildlife resources and attractive tourist destinations but there is a communication gap, especially it was closed for the last decades, there was no promotion and it was not addressed to the public but currently after five years ago the media technology created good opportunities to communicate well. While we saw Kenya wildlife service has well organized corporate communication directorate, and they promoted and branded their natural tourist destinations very well.

In addition I tried to see the Kenyan wildlife service web site and tried to exchange information through email with the corporate communication director, KWS has well organized communication directorate with technology products and professional man power that has lined up to the national parks. Including the wildlife service, all of their national parks had well developed web sites and brands. They have been using you tube and face book page to promote their natural tourist destinations. We can see every update information, every activities on their web sites. In addition any one could get any information about each national park from the web site. But in our Authority not only the national parks but also the Authority didn't have such kinds of work culture. In KWS the media technology created good opportunities to communicate well and they promoted and branded their natural tourist destinations in worldwide.

As we have seen in the above discussion the KWS has transferred from the conservation in to the era of service while we are still tackling activities on conservation alone. It is recoiling back and things are incomparable. For example KWS has its own film hall, well organized PR equipment including set of PR vehicle, used all electronic and social media communication. And also specific brands were developed for their national parks. In KWS, the country's government understood the importance of branding and promotion in general, PR practitioners in KWS operate their tasks in full force, and they had lots of successful experiences but not in our Authority, even it couldn't make up the limitation of the PR expert.

Most of the time, the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority was not stable for the last 10 years and there was limitation of technology products and infrastructure. The infrastructure had its own influences to build a brand through communication.

In addition from the simplest one the Kenyan wildlife service PR practitioners have 24 hour radio communication which helped them to exchange update information one another and each national park has PR practitioners but there no in EWCA and its national parks. And also KWS has financial capacity to promote their natural tourist destinations through national geography TV channel. In Ethiopia we don't have this capacity because of budget.

4.5.1. Working experience of KWS Corporate Communications and EWCA Public Relations Directorate

In depth and group interviewees were asked to discuss the working experiences of the KWS corporate communication directorate and EWCA public relations directorate in branding national parks. According to the given points interviewee EWCA 1, expressed that the Kenyan wildlife service has a corporate communication and well organized with human skill, technology and finance. The same should be apply to Ethiopian wildlife conservation authority and needs reform. The KWS has also close linkage with relevant institutions.

On other hand interviewee EWCA 2, explained that Kenya is well known by its natural tourist destinations in East Africa. And the KWS conserved and promoted through various communication way. Because of this many tourists come to visit the Kenyan Safari from the world. The EWCA experience is totally different from KWS.

In addition interviewee EWCA 3, pointed out KWS is well organized, well equipped (interms of equipment and skilled man power) and well integrated and they collaborate globally.

Interviewee EWCA 4, explained that PR practitioners in Kenya delivers their role as PR practitioners in all aspect, such as, filming collaborating with film crews, making news, promoting aspects (branding, facilities, events...), The EWCA is none existence compared to Kenya.

On the other hand interviewee BMNP 1, stressed, both we and Kenya's began equally since Emperor Haile Silasie but while the Derg regime came, tourism had blocked. At that time Kenya had achieved it conservation and developed well known natural tourist destination brand and stand on the front. Policy direction has a great value on communication and tourism. Currently it is good to develop a brand because we have different accesses to communicate and promote.

The interviewee SMNP 3, responded that in Kenya every national park has its own unique brand to attract tourists, show the experience and the product. It is very important for tourists who want to know the specific area. But this trained is not develop in our country.

On other hand G11, answered that while Kenya colonized by British, they played a great role for wildlife conservation, because white people do not negotiate to apply the law. Historically we began during the same time but they stood at the top because of British. During a time British was feared economically, psychologically. British interconnected their economy with their citizens. British educated Kenyan communication and develop the management, conservation system of wildlife. Lastly when Kenya became independent from British, it inherited these style from British. Because of this Kenya built its internal capacity, infrastructures, the outpost, radio communication, management style, they kept and performed the law, their government also helped them and gave attention but when we see in EWCA, there are a lot of challenges, even EWCA didn't have a radio communication in all national parks to address the current information to the concerned bodies.

And also they discussed that Kenya wildlife service has its own persecute or courts which can to investigate, can catch, can judge illegal activity participants but we didn't have. The park has at least 20 high standard vehicles or cars, have enough budget. We didn't have all the above appealing things to promote and conserve our wildlife resources in Ethiopia. There is less

attention from the government side, we lost our resources simply. Still we are constructing camp site, road, and organization. There is no well-developed structure for the conservation and communication at all. In addition while Kenya became independent from British, they kept on the system but in EWCA, it went back.

On the other hand Kenya's didn't negotiate for the sake of conservation. While we conserved the natural eco-system by itself it could be attractive. Kenya's did this one but we didn't do in our country. For instance, in Bale, if we can free it from illegal settlement and over grazing, it become very attractive because it has very attractive landscape, bio diversity. At this time the communication practitioners should participate actively. On the other hand Kenya's has very admirable wildlife management style to conserve and promote their national park but not in Ethiopia.

As we have seen from above discussion, the role of PR practitioners in KWS to promote natural tourist destinations and the experience of EWCA PR, the Kenyan wildlife service has a corporate communication and well organized with human skill, technology and finance. On the other hand the Ethiopian wildlife conservation authority experience is totally different from the KWS.

Because KWS public relation corporate directorate is well organized, well equipped (in terms of equipment and skilled man power) and well integrated and delivered their role as PR practitioners in all aspect. Such as, filming collaborating with film crews, making news, promoting aspects (branding, facilities, events...), but EWCA is on the infant stage when we compared to KWS in promoting natural tourist destinations.

In addition KWS national parks have their own unique brand to attract tourists, show the experience and the product. It is very important for tourists who wanted to know the specific area. But this trained was not develop in EWCA.

4.5.2. Common practices of KWS Corporate Communications PR practitioners and EWCA Public relations practitioners

In depth and group interviewees were asked to discuss the common practices the two countries organizations public relations practitioners in branding national parks. Based on the above points Interviewee EWCA 1, explained that KWS public relations practitioners' have adapted their

communication skills to outreach each protected areas branding to customers. The practitioners prepared massive public campaign, established, monitored online pages like social media, developed content, prepared standard documents, speeches, managed crisis communication, established strong stakeholders relations. But not that much in EWCA PR directorate.

In addition EWCA 2, pointed out it is really very hard to compare the experience they both have, as they are in different era of conservation.

On the other hand interviewee EWCA 3, explained that we lagged behind in terms of expertise, equipment, technology, in the context of elaboration, integration and lose of different means for disseminating information.

Interviewee EWCA 4, stressed on his response, both are authorized to identify and promote attractions for branding, both are responsible for establishing natural attractions or products branding, both determines the success nature based branding, both are the speaker of the authority for information source but the difference is the ways of using the communication channels.

In addition interviewee SMNP 2, responded that in Kenya, the government has given quiet flexibility in terms of managing national parks and KWS has a specific brand for each national parks.

Interviewee SMNP 3, pointed out there are many challenges to prepare strategic communication plan to fulfill sound set communication tools. In Kenya and Tanzania they are successful, they fulfilled the communication facilities but not in our country.

On the other hand from group interviewee GII, pointed out in Ethiopia there is a gap to use both the opportunities and capacities. So it should organize the structure with professional man power. Most of our national parks have not well organized promotion department, limitation of budget, limitation of professionals, and lack of communication materials, tools, and logistics, there is no training, all the problems are the back log. For instance during Emperor Haile Silasie and Derg regime there were good support from the government for natural tourist destinations but currently there is a gap to support in order to brand our national park. And even if we have a lot of wildlife resources but our great challenge is management style. If we can operate and address

information by using different communication tools and communicate effectively like as Kenya PR practitioners, we can brand our natural tourist destinations and can handle all international tourists but we couldn't.

On the other hand, currently we constructed the new organization by distracting the built one. When it shifted from one government system to another government system, automatically the management system had changed, we couldn't keep up the system but KWS did it. For example during Emperor Haile Silasie even if there was no PR practitioners, our national parks were well known and there was a better conservation system but while the Derg regime came there was certain gap but the federal government system came, even if there are PR practitioners in the area and in the country because of the political influence the conservation system has already changed. On the other hand Derg had done something good but during the current government or federal system, almost all national parks have distracted and there was a communication gap. As a country it is a big lose. But after two years there was certain change and attention to the natural tourist destinations and the PR practitioners began to work professionally.

As we have seen from the above discussion both EWCA and KWS have different experience and both are in different era of conservation and using communication channels. KWS has adapted communication skills to outreach each protected areas branding and promoting well. But the EWCA PR directorate is not experienced. EWCA public relation directorate has lagged behind in terms of using technologies products for disseminating information and to promote natural tourist destinations. The big difference is the way of using the communication channels.

EWCA has a gap to use both the opportunities and capacities. So it had better organize its structure with professional man power. Most of its national parks have not well organized and there is PR practitioners in each national park, limitation of budget, limitation of professionals, and lack of communication materials, tools, and logistics, all the problems were the back log. If the directorate can operate, address information by using different communication tools and communicate effectively like as Kenya PR practitioners. EWCA public relation directorate can brand its natural tourist destinations and can handle all international tourists but it didn't. When the country shifted from one political system to another political system, automatically the wildlife management system had changed. The authority didn't have a trained to keep on the previous wildlife management system it began as a new. But Kenya wildlife service has still the

same wildlife management system since it was colonized by British. Because of this Kenya became known for natural tourist destinations country in East Africa.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to examine the challenges and prospects in branding of natural tourist destinations in Ethiopia which was conducted in Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority. And by doing so the researcher has identified that the following major findings:

- The PR directorate is using different communication channels, communication mediums, modern technologies, which are expected to brand natural tourist destinations in the authority as well as in Ethiopia. But there is no continuity, there is a gap of using modern technology products.
- The PR activities are carried out but they did not implemented according to their schedule or to be implemented. In the authority branding natural tourist destinations has timing problem.
- EWCA's public relation practitioners brand the natural tourist destinations of national parks by default. The directorate published different printing materials only to address information on the aspects of wildlife resources and natural tourist destinations conservation. It was not specifically to brand natural tourist destinations.
- The PR directorate was working to promote natural tourist destinations but it focused on wildlife conservation and utilization issues. Still the role of the directorate in branding natural tourist destinations issues were not much. And Even though the PR has plenty of roles and responsibilities in branding natural tourist destinations, it was not working as it expected.
- The authority has different challenges in branding natural tourist destinations, such as, it has no permanent organizational structure, lack of promotion, and lack of technological imputes, lack of trained man power on branding natural tourist destinations. The authority didn't have natural tourism branding strategy and organizational strategic communication. These challenges have their own impact directly or in directly on the activities of the PR directorate.
- Both Bale and Simien mountains national Parks have various challenges and these challenges have their own impact on branding natural tourist destinations. Because they

were not well conserved and utilized, has no technological equipment, has no smooth communication strategies and have no PR practitioners around. It is not easy to create awareness and branding the national tourist destinations as well.

- Attitudes of other directorate towards the directorate, lack of engagements on decision making on the authority, lack of skilled man power, there is no strategic communication plan, not well equipped working situations, knowledge gap, strategic implementation document, communication barrier between the head office and regional state on the ownership of the national parks are the PR directorate challenges. These challenges hinder its activities and communication practices in the authority. It is obvious that these challenges have their own impacts on the practices of branding natural tourist destinations which implemented by the directorate.
- Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority has different prosperities which use to brand natural tourist destinations. These prosperities are the natural gifts of the country and can be seen as special and unique features that is why different business centers, tour agents and organizations possess their name as their title. Using these prosperities, the authority can make these special areas and species as an influential aspects in order to brand the natural tourist destinations easily.
- Having a unique destinations of nature, historical, cultural and religious attractions areas, updating the existing information about the natural tourist destinations, developing web site and brand that can properly fit the sector and also undertaking promotion using different media are essential opportunities for the PR directorate to implement branding natural tourist destinations easily.
- The PR directorate do not manage the prospects properly to make branding the natural tourist destinations effectively.
- The PR directorate has done different effective activities in branding natural tourist destinations. It developed web site and brand guide line for the Authority and the national parks for archiving update data including photograph, video, written updated documents in which we can work on branding and awareness creation activities but currently it is not active.
- The PR directorate is in a very beginning phase to measure the effectiveness of activities and it is not really working effectively as it is expected.

- The Kenyan wildlife service is in the era of service while Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority still tackling activities on conservation alone, and things are incomparable. For instance KWS has its own film hall, well organized PR equipment including set of PR practitioners vehicle, used all means of communications including web site, electronic media, social media, communicate with its diplomats and their approach is aligned with their strategic plan. And also specific brands were developed for each national parks. In Kenya Wildlife Service the country's government understood the importance of branding and promotion in general. PR practitioners in Kenya operated their activities in full force, and they had lots of successful experiences but not in EWCA PR directorate, even it couldn't make up the limitation of the skilled man power the directorate.
- Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority was not stable for the last 10 years and there was limitation of technology products and infrastructure. The infrastructure has its own influences to build a brand through communication. Kenya branded and communicated well its national parks but in EWCA, it is on the infant stage.
- The Kenyan wildlife service PR practitioners have 24 hour radio communication which help them to exchange update information one another and there are PR practitioners on each national parks but there no in EWCA's national parks. And also they have a capacity to promote their natural tourist destinations through national geography TV channel. In EWCA, it didn't have this capacity because of budget.
- The Kenyan wildlife service has a corporate communication and well organized with skilled man power, technology and finance to promote national parks but the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority experience is totally different from the Kenyan.
- KWS corporate communication is well organized, well equipped (in terms of equipment and skilled man power) and well integrated and delivering their role as PR in all aspect. Such as, filming collaborating with film crews, making news, promoting aspects (branding, facilities, events...), but EWCA is none existence compared to Kenya in terms of branding natural tourist destinations.
- In Kenya every park has its own unique brand to attract tourists but in Ethiopia's national parks don't have.

- When Kenya's became independent from Britain, they inherited these style from British. Because of this Kenya built its internal capacity, radio communication, management style, their government also helped them and gave attention to wildlife management system but when we see in Ethiopia there are a lot of challenges, even there is a limitation of radio communications to address the current information to the concerned bodies.
- It is really very hard to compare the experience of both Ethiopian Wildlife conservation Authority and Kenyan Wildlife Service. They are in different era of conservation and using communication channels. KWS has adapted communication skills to outreach each national parks branding to customers. But not that much in EWCA PR directorate. EWCA has lagged behind in terms of fulfill the gaps.
- EWCA PR directorate has a gap to use both the opportunities and capacities. So it had better organize the structure with professional man power. Most of the national parks have not well organized promotion department, limitation of budget, limitation of professionals, and lack of communication materials, tools, and logistics. All the problems were the back log. Currently EWCA constructed the new organization by distracting the built one. When it shifts from one political system to another political system, automatically it changed the wildlife management system. EWCA didn't have a trained to keep on the system but Kenya wildlife service did it.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the above major research findings, the following points of recommendations are provided for bridging the gaps:

- EWCA public relations directorate should use modern and update technologies and always work with integrate way in branding natural tourist destinations through different communication mediums.
- The PR directorate should implement the activities based on the schedule and implement the right communication practices at the right time and at the right place.
- The PR practitioners should plan and design different PR activities, strategies to brand the natural tourist destinations.
- It will better that the PR directorate uses continuous branding campaign, technologies, worldwide media networks and develop experiences from other countries which have effective branding strategies in branding natural tourist destinations and public relations, for instance from Kenya.
- EWCA should work to change the organizational human resources structure because that need to assign PR practitioners on each national parks. And should develop smooth communication strategy and work on the inclusion and participation of the community around the national parks to help the government for the elimination of risks and for the attraction of tourists. And should work for the availability of telecom infrastructures with ethio-telecom and other stakeholder bodies.
- The PR directorate should build itself and restructure itself in getting capable human power and equip with necessary communication equipment and work for the reality in branding natural tourist destinations and be influential on the face of other directorate in the authority to change the negative attitudes of other directorates.
- The PR directorate had better use different ways that should implement in order to overcome the challenges by creating awareness about duties and responsibilities of the directorate. It helps to increase the mutual participation of other directorate, organize public mobilization, strength public participation, create a flat form of implementation and networking the communication to cooperate others, use various strategies and communication tools.

- Both Bale and Simien mountain national parks were registered by UNESCO as natural world heritage sites and have their own identical features which uses as supportive indications for the PR activities during branding these natural tourist destinations areas. There for the PR directorate should identify these special characteristics and features of these natural tourist destinations to brand effectively and separately by connecting the natural tourist destinations with historical and cultural heritages which found in the surrounding.
- Ethiopia is well defined in a brand as thirteen months sun shine and currently known as land of origin. It has a unique landscape and different endemic species. The authority should use these as an opportunity in branding natural tourist destinations. And the country has different historical sites, religious occasions, cultural event, beautiful socio-cultural relationship attachments, hospitality then the PR directorate should integrate and use these things an opportunity.
- The PR directorate should manage the prospects and the opportunities properly by building its capacity in branding, by doing technology based public relation activities, develop innovative communication strategies, design branding strategy, update the existing information and undertake promotion and awareness programs using different medias, work on publics and participate the local communities, cooperate with all the stakeholders, governmental bodies, take the initiative and be on the driver seat.
- The PR directorate should make active the authority's web site to address update information regarding to brand natural tourist destinations.
- EWCA had better follow the KWS experience in branding natural tourist destinations by practicing and using web site, electronic media, and social media and develop specific brands for each national parks. And also EWCA should work on the government side to change the misunderstanding towards branding natural tourist destinations and give a chance to the PR practitioners to operate their activities in full force.
- The Authority should develop its capacity with man power and budget to promote the natural tourist destinations through different media including national geography TV channel like as Kenya wildlife service.

- EWCA had better share the good experiences of KWS to organize the PR directorate as corporate communication and well organize with skilled man power, technology and finance in order to brand natural tourist destinations.
- The PR directorate should practice to develop strategy with concerned partners and implement as per guide lines, arrange a separate department for communication, marketing and branding tasks collaborate with other sectors.
- EWCA should organize, well equip, well integrate and deliver the role of PR activities in all aspects like as Kenya, such as filming collaborating with film crews, making news and promoting aspects.
- The PR directorate should develop unique brands for each national parks by collaborating with other directorates in the authority.
- EWCA should push the Ethiopian government to give attention to build its internal capacity of the authority with different technology products, management style.
- EWCA PR practitioners should adapt communication skills to outreach branding each national parks for tourists or customers by preparing massive public campaign, monitoring and using on line media.

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Appendixes

Appendix I: Interview Questions for in-depth interviewees

- I. Common practices of the PR directorate in Ethiopian wildlife conservation authority in branding of natural tourist destinations
 1. What practices are common in the directorate in branding natural tourist destinations in Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority?
 2. Can you explain their implementation intervals specifically based on branding natural tourist destination in the authority?
 3. What do you know about branding natural tourist destination and its purpose?
 4. What are the public relations role in tourist attractions activities in general and branding the natural tourist destination in particular?
- II. the current challenges in branding natural tourist destinations in EWCA
 1. What are the current challenges in branding natural tourist destinations in the authority?
 2. What are the current challenges in branding the natural destinations of Bale and Simien Mountains National Parks?
 3. What are the specific current challenges of the PR directorate in branding natural tourist destinations in the authority?
 4. What are the contributions of PR directorate to overcome the challenges in branding natural tourist destinations?
- III. The prospects in branding of natural tourist destination in EWCA
 1. What are the common prosperities in the authority in branding natural tourist destinations?
 2. What are the common PR directorate prosperities in branding natural tourist destinations in the authority?
 3. What are the common prospects in branding natural tourist destinations of Bale and Simien mountains national parks?
 4. What did the PR directorate do to manage these prospects properly to make branding the natural tourist destinations effectively in the authority?
- IV. Effective activities and should be used by the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority PR practitioners in branding natural tourist destinations

1. What are the effective activities done by the PR directorate in branding natural tourist destinations?
 2. How the directorates measure the effectiveness of the implemented activities in branding natural tourist destinations?
 3. What are the remaining PR practices that you think should practice to make branding natural tourist destinations effective in the authority?
- V. The Kenyan Wildlife Service PR department experiences and the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation authority PR directorate, in branding natural tourist destinations
1. What is the experience of the Kenyan PR department based on the awareness of branding natural tourist destinations? What is the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority PR directorate?
 2. What are the roles of the PR in Kenyan public relations department in promoting national parks as the natural tourist destinations? What about the experience of Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority?
 3. What practices are common in Kenyan PR department in branding natural tourist destinations as we compare with the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority PR directorate?

Appendix II: Focus group interviewee questions

- I. What are the Common practices of the PR directorate in Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority in branding of natural tourist destinations?
- II. What are the current challenges in branding natural tourist destinations in EWCA?
- III. What are the prospects in branding of natural tourist destination sin EWCA?
- IV. What are the effective activities and should use by the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority PR practitioners in branding natural tourist destinations?
- V. The Kenyan Wildlife Service PR corporate directorate experiences and the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority PR directorate, in branding natural tourist destinations?