



The Role of Promotional Strategies in Remarketing Tourism Demand: Evidence from the Central and Eastern Zones of the Tigray, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Tourism destinations in post-conflict and post-pandemic contexts face significant challenges in restoring visitor demand and rebuilding destination image. Promotion plays a critical role in remarketing destinations, particularly in regions with rich cultural and historical resources but weakened market confidence. This study examines the role of promotional strategies in remarketing tourism destination demand in the Central and Eastern zones of the Tigray region, Ethiopia. Using a mixed-methods approach, primary data were collected from 384 domestic tourists through structured questionnaires and complemented by key informant interviews conducted at major destination sites, including Axum, Yeha, Wukro, and Gheralta. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed. The findings reveal that promotional mix elements-advertising, public relations, personal selling, sales promotion, and direct marketing-have a statistically significant and positive effect on tourism destination demand. Advertising and public relations emerged as the most influential tools in shaping destination awareness and revisit intentions. The study highlights the importance of integrated, digitally driven, and experience-oriented promotional strategies to restore confidence and stimulate domestic tourism demand. The findings contribute to tourism marketing literature in post-conflict destinations and provide practical implications for destination marketing organizations, policymakers, and tourism stakeholders in Ethiopia and similar contexts.

Keywords: Promotion; Destination remarketing; Domestic tourism; Destination demand; Tigray Region.

1 Introduction

Tourism promotion has become increasingly vital in an era characterized by intense destination competition, digital transformation, and heightened traveler sensitivity to risk. Effective promotion not only creates awareness but also shapes destination image, stimulates demand, and supports post-crisis recovery. In developing countries, particularly those affected by conflict and instability, promotion is central to restoring tourist confidence and revitalizing destination demand.

Ethiopia possesses exceptional cultural, historical, and natural tourism assets; however, its tourism sector remains underdeveloped relative to its potential. The Tigray region, renowned for its ancient civilizations, rock-hewn churches, and archaeological heritage, experienced a severe decline in tourism due to the COVID-



19 pandemic and armed conflict. Following the Pretoria ceasefire agreement, regional tourism authorities have increasingly relied on promotional strategies to remarket destinations and re-engage domestic visitors.

Despite these efforts, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of promotion in remarketing tourism destinations in post-conflict contexts remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining the role of promotion in remarketing tourism destination demand in Central and Eastern Tigray from the perspective of domestic tourists.

Research Objectives

The study aims to:

Examine the effect of promotional tools on tourism destination demand;

Assess current destination marketing and promotion practices in the study area;

Identify key challenges faced in promoting tourism destinations in Tigray.

2 Literature Review

Tourism Marketing and Destination Promotion

Tourism marketing involves identifying and satisfying tourist needs through value creation, communication, and relationship building. Promotion, as a core element of the marketing mix, plays a crucial role in influencing tourist perceptions, destination choice, and revisit intentions. In destination contexts, promotion integrates advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling, and direct marketing to communicate destination value propositions.

Destination Branding and Remarketing

Destination branding differentiates places by creating distinctive identities and emotional associations. Remarketing focuses on re-engaging previous visitors or interested audiences through targeted communication and personalized messaging. In tourism, remarketing is particularly relevant in recovery phases, as it leverages familiarity, trust, and past experiences to rebuild demand.

Promotion and Domestic Tourism

Domestic tourism is increasingly recognized as a stabilizing force during crises, given its resilience and lower sensitivity to international travel restrictions. Promotion targeted at domestic tourists can stimulate short-term recovery while supporting long-term destination sustainability.

3 Methodology

Study Area

The research was conducted in major tourism destinations located in the Central and Eastern Zones of the Tigray Region, Northern Ethiopia, namely Axum, Yeha, Wukro, and the Gheralta cluster. These destinations represent the most significant cultural and archaeological attractions in the region and were among the first sites reopened to domestic tourism following the Pretoria Peace Agreement.

Research Design and Approach

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the influence of promotional strategies on the remarketing of tourism destination demand in post-

conflict settings. A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect quantitative data from domestic tourists, complemented by key informant interviews to gain contextual and managerial insights.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised domestic tourists visiting the selected destinations during the 2024 peak and shoulder tourism seasons. Since no comprehensive visitor registry existed, a non-probability convenience sampling technique was applied. Following Cochran's (1977) sample size determination formula for large populations with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, a minimum sample of 384 respondents was deemed adequate. Accordingly, 384 questionnaires were distributed, of which 376 were returned usable, yielding a response rate of 97.9%.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of four sections: (1) demographic characteristics (gender, age, education, travel purpose, frequency of visit); (2) advertising; (3) public relations and publicity; (4) personal selling, direct marketing, and sales promotion; and (5) perceived destination demand and revisit intention. All construct items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Reliability and Validity Test

The internal consistency of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The overall reliability coefficient was 0.87, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability. Content validity was ensured through expert review by tourism marketing scholars and pre-testing of the questionnaire with 30 domestic tourists prior to the main survey.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) were used to profile respondents and summarize perceptions of promotional tools. Multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the effect of promotional mix elements (advertising, public relations, personal selling, direct marketing, and sales promotion) on tourism destination demand. Qualitative interview data were analyzed thematically to triangulate survey findings and enrich interpretation.

4 Results and Discussion

Profile of the Respondents

A total of 376 usable questionnaires were analyzed. The sample comprised 58.3% male and 41.7% female respondents. The majority (46.6%) were aged between 25–34 years, followed by 18–24 years (21.4%), 35–44 years (19.8%), and above 45 years (12.2%). Regarding educational attainment, 52.1% held a bachelor's degree, 24.7% a diploma, 13.5% a master's degree, and 9.7% secondary education. Most respondents (61.5%) were first-time visitors, while 38.5% had previously visited the destinations. Leisure and heritage appreciation constituted the primary travel motives (68.2%), followed by religious pilgrimage (21.9%) and business or official travel (9.9%).

Measurement Reliability

The internal consistency of the constructs was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Advertising ($\alpha = 0.88$), Public Relations and Publicity ($\alpha = 0.85$), Personal Selling ($\alpha = 0.81$), Direct Marketing ($\alpha = 0.79$), Sales Promotion ($\alpha = 0.83$), and Destination Demand ($\alpha = 0.87$) all exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming satisfactory reliability.

Effect of Promotional Strategies on Destination Demand

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of promotional mix elements on tourism destination demand. The model was statistically significant ($F = 42.36$, $p < 0.001$) and explained 63.4% of the variance in destination demand ($R^2 = 0.634$). Advertising ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$) and public relations ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$) exerted the strongest positive effects, followed by direct marketing ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$), personal selling ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$), and sales promotion ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$).

5 Discussion

The findings confirm that promotional strategies play a decisive role in restoring and stimulating tourism demand in post-conflict heritage destinations. The dominant influence of advertising and public relations underscores the importance of image rebuilding and trust restoration, consistent with crisis recovery and destination branding theories. In the context of Tigray, where safety perceptions and information asymmetry remain critical barriers, mass and digital media campaigns supported by credible public relations initiatives are essential to reassure domestic travelers.

The significant contribution of direct marketing and personal selling highlights the growing relevance of personalized communication, social media engagement, and tour operator intermediation in remarketing efforts. Sales promotion, while statistically weaker, provides short-term incentives that can accelerate initial visitation flows during recovery phases. These results align with integrated marketing communication theory, which emphasizes synergy among promotional tools in influencing consumer decision-making.

Overall, the study extends heritage tourism and post-crisis marketing literature by empirically demonstrating how a coordinated promotional mix can effectively support destination demand recovery in a previously conflict-affected region.

Conclusion and Implications

This study demonstrates that promotion plays a decisive role in remarketing tourism destination demand in post-conflict contexts. An integrated promotional strategy that emphasizes digital platforms, storytelling, community engagement, and experiential value is essential for rebuilding destination confidence and stimulating domestic tourism.

Practical Implications

Destination marketing organizations should prioritize coordinated campaigns, invest in digital marketing capacity, and strengthen public-private partnerships. Policymakers should support sustainable promotion strategies aligned with heritage conservation and community development.

Limitations and Future Research

The study focuses on domestic tourists in selected destinations; future research could incorporate international markets and longitudinal designs to assess long-term remarketing effectiveness.

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