# THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON DESTINATIONS IMAGE: THE CASE OF HOSPITALITY & TOURISM INDUSTRY IN GONDAR CITY, ETHIOPIA

**Fentaye Kassa (Ph.D)[1], Aschalew Adane[2] and Addisu Melkamu[3]**

1. Assistant professor in the department of marketing management, University of Gondar.
2. Assistant professor in the department of marketing management, University of Gondar.
3. MA student in the department of marketing management, University of Gondar.

**Abstract:** *Social media being information-intensive activity for every business and recognized as irresistible for tourism sector. Tourism consumers need information that can help them in the process of travel planning and decision making related to the selection of tourist destinations as well as of different types of tourism products. This study was aimed to determine the effect of social media marketing on destination image of hospitality and tourism industry in Gondar city. The study employed explanatory research design with convenience sampling technique to select samples from the target population of foreign and domestic tourists. Statistical data was collected from 367 through structured self-administered survey questionnaire. The data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics by using SPSS version 20. The finding of the study revealed that quality contents of social media, trust, Involvement of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) and Integration of social media with other marketing activities have positive and significant effect on destination image of hospitality and tourism industry. It is recommended that hospitality and tourism marketers should increase their efficiency in promoting their activities through effective utilization of social media platform along with other marketing activities to showcase at large the City and Country as tourist destinations of choice.*

*Keywords: social media, Destination image, Destination Marketing Organizations, Tourism and hospitality.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the study

Tourism has become a crucial, vital which is constantly increasing in modern industrial life. It has made important contributions to the economic development structure and become has been the key industry in many cities and many countries in the world. According to UNWTO (2015), tourism has become one of the "key drivers for socio–economic progress". Its contribution for the growth of the national economy is significant as well as its contribution for the global economy. Total tourism contribution for 2014 was approximately more than 7.5 trillion U.S. dollars (Statista, 2015).

The internet and other new technologies have changed most of the industry from service, industry to business sector on an unprecedented scale. Internet information is now one of the important influences to the customer decisions in many major markets. The tourist tends to book travel trips, arrange their air ticket and accommodation as well as find the information of destination in travel forum, online group or social networking website in the internet. As a result, it is clear that the internet and new information technologies have become a priority for both tourism enterprises and DMOs. Travelers have become increasingly knowledgeable and sophisticated as they could know about their destinations before arriving destination by searching information in travel blogs, asking questions on travel forum to get instant answers. Social media has also gradually changed tourist's behavior in finding information from asking travel agent's advices to that of asking friends and peer reviews, word of mouth through social media networking websites and other source from internet.

Social media has become ubiquitous and omnipresent, and has changed the world in which we live and various aspects of our lives (Theunissen, 2015). Of the circa 7.2 billion individuals that make up the world's population, over 3 billion of these (42%) are internet users and just over 2 billion are active social media users (29%) (We Are Social 2015).One could say that social media gets more and more popular thanks to the new technologies, especially social network sites

and its usage. According to latest data, Facebook is absolute leader with more than one billion open accounts until November 2015. They also forecast 2.44 billion social network users in total (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) until 2018.

Social media can be included in promotional mix as one of integrated marketing communications (IMC). IMC manages collaboration between various marketing tools to create unified communication of marketing strategy to target markets (Boone & Kurtz, 2007).

Much research on social media has been done in the context of the business community. The question has been raised regarding the applicability of social media as marketing tool for cities.

While there is a need for comprehensive investigation into the impact of social media on the tourism industry in general (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014), this need is even more pronounced in regards to emerging markets. Building on a single case, this study aims to advance our knowledge on how to create a successful social media campaign to promote a tourism destination in Gondar city, Ethiopia.

Internet platforms encourage users to share media content, such as photos and images, on blogs and social networking sites. Visual images, such as photographs, typically play a crucial part in successful tourism destination marketing (Hunter, 2008; MacKay and Fesenmaier, 1997).

This study will address how DMOs have taken to social media and sought to ensure their destination remains high on the list of potential suitors to prospective travelers. The findings from this study will not only complement the limited, but ever-increasing, volume of social media-related studies, and also inform destination marketers of the state of social media and provide an outline strategy which may be adopted in furtherance of their social media marketing activities. To this end, the main objective of this study is to determine the effect of social media marketing on destinations image of hospitality and tourism industry in Gondar city, Ethiopia.

## 2.2  Objective of the study

1. To ascertain the effect of Good quality of social media content on destination image.

2. To determine the effect of trust of social media on destination image.
3. To determine the effect of DMOs' involvement has a significant effect on destination image.
4. To ascertain the effect of Social media integration with other marketing activities on destination image.

**Hypothesis:**

**H1**:  Good quality of social media content has a significant effect on destination image.
**H2**: Trust on social media has a significant effect on destination image.
**H3:** Involvement of DMOs as a whole has a significant effect on destination image.
**H4**: Social media in integration with other marketing activities has a significant effect on destination image.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the theoretical foundation of social media. The theoretical framework draws the conceptual link between the social media marketing concept and destination image.

### 2.1. Social media

According to Hays *et al.* (2013) social media refers to practices, behaviors, and activities among communities of people who gather online to share knowledge, opinions, and information using conversational media. Social media is based on user-generated content and it includes public services and applications such as virtual worlds, social networking sites, customer review sites, video sharing platforms, and many others. Social media is the most popular marketing strategy presently. It is also a tool for the companies to obtain more traffic through interacting with the customers. (Admin, 2010) Social media has impacted the way of communication for both companies and customers. It offers a platform which is easily to access by everyone through Internet. By using this platform, people can communicate and interact with each other, share information, and it also provides wider opportunities for companies to reach customers and build company brands. The companies create different advertisements with keywords and place them on the related websites. The more the

company pays for the click the more its advertisement appears on the search engine (Admin, 2010). In order to succeed at pay per click (PPC) advertising, one of the most important factors is the ability to persuade people to take action by using just a few well-chosen words. And this also can help the companies to discover which words and messages are most effective at persuading customers to buy. By using this information companies can design other online and offline campaigns. To achieve optimal results, all elements of a PPC campaign must be in good working order, operating together synergistically (Szetela and Kerschbaum, 2010).

### 2.2. Social media marketing

Among these attempts, Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) typology has received special recognition among the researchers in the field of social media (Lange-Faria and Elliot, 2012). According to them, the higher level of efficiency available in using social media compared to traditional communication channels prompted tourism industry leaders to state that tourism companies, like any other company, must participate on Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, and other social media sites in order to succeed in today's business and technological environment. Social media is more relevant in today's tourism business environment where customer loyalty can vanish through a small mistake which can be followed by online propagation of the unfortunate encounter with a certain tourist destination, company, product, service or brand (Mersey, Malthouse and Calder 2011).The authors argue that these theories build the foundation of social media. Thus, the categories include six types of social media including blogs, social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life), collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), content communities (e.g. YouTube) and virtual game networks (e.g. World of War craft). Still, this systemic taxonomy neglects some types of social media such as micro blogging (e.g. Twitter).

Social media marketing is a new trend and rapidly growing way in which businesses are reaching out to targeted customers easily. Social media marketing can be simply defined as the use of social media channels to promote a company and its products. This kind of marketing can be thought of as a subset of online marketing activities that complete traditional Web-based promotion strategies, such as e-mail newsletters and online advertising campaigns Barefoot & Szabo 2010). By encouraging users to spread messages to personal contacts, social media marketing has injected a new term of exponential dissemination and trust to mass- communication and mass marketing (Hafele, 2011). By this new approach of outreach and marketing, new tools are being developed and increased in turn for businesses. Social media marketers are now going better and more effective insight through the introduction of analytic applications by official social network site platforms (Hafele, 2011).

### 2.3. Destination marketing

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization UNWTO (2004), destination marketing "covers all the activities and processes to bring buyers and sellers together; focuses on responding to consumer demands and competitive positioning; is a continuous coordinated set of activities associated with efficient distribution of products to high potential markets; involves making decisions about the product, branding, the price, market segmentation, promotion and distribution".

Destination marketing facilitates the success of tourism policy, which should ideally be in line with the strategic plan for overall regional development (Buhalis, 2000). Baker and Cameron (2007) point out that destination marketing involves using tourism for reasons like improving the overall image of the area in order to attract industry, increasing infrastructure that can also be used by the local community, achieving changes in the environment, or giving the locals more pride in their area. Thereby, tourism is often used as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Anyhow, the fact that marketing has the power to positively influence destination development is widely acknowledged.

International tourism is a highly competitive, dynamic and trend-leading market. To cultivate a positive destination image, maintain market share and attract tourism, places must allocate resources for various marketing tools such as advertising, public relations, sales promotion and social media (McCartney, 2005 and Lahav et al., 2013). According to the American Marketing Association, marketing is "a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers". Effective marketing efforts are a key factor for the destination's success, while ineffective marketing carries negative consequences to the place's ability to attract tourists, visitors and investors. In tourism,

marketing is used to shape the market's demand and affect the behavior, motivations and decision-making process of potential visitors (Middleton et al., 2009).

Destination marketers strive to promote a positive image of their tourism destination region. However, destination promotion can be undermined because places encounter difficulties and crises due to external factors including, natural disaster, war, terror attack, crime waves, and political tensions. Such occurrences keep potential visitors from the destination (Ritchie, 2009).

### 2.4 Destination image

The concept of image presents the visual representation and pictures that one person imagining about products and places and can be defined as the series of beliefs, individual impressions and opinions (Gibson, Qi, & Zhang, 2008). Country image, destination image, country of origin image and product image are some of main concepts regarding image from the marketing perspective and those concepts are connected, closely related and they affected each other, directly and/or indirectly. According to the Martin and Eroglu (1993), country image is defined as "the total of all descriptive, inferential and informational belief one has about a particular country". This definition of the concept country image is very used in the literature as well as Kotler  et al. (1993) definition, according to country image is defined as "sum of all beliefs, ideas and impressions that people associate with a country" (as cited in Lopes, S, 2011). Image about country can be perceived before visiting destination, known as secondary image and after destination is visited, known as primary image.

*According to the definition of Crompton (1979), destination image is "the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination. Destination image is probably one of the most important criteria for travelers to decide whether to travel to that destination (Buhalis, 2000). Chi and Qu (2008) stated that the image of the*

*destination positively affects the tourists' behavioral intentions in the future. Thus, a more favorable destination image will be a competitive advantage for the destination in differentiating with others. A favorable destination image can raise both immediate as well as future intention to revisit or recommend a destination (Assaker et al., 2011).*

### 2.5 Tourism industry in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one of main tourist destination among African countries and the most visited destinations in the world as it has a wide array of attractions with developed cities.  Though the sector is still at its infant stage, it has been keep growing since 2001. But now days, tourist arrivals to Ethiopia grew by a total of 50% over 2003-2010. This impressive increase can be attributed to the socio-economic development and relative stability of the country over the past decade or so. The most important reason cited by tourists for visiting the country is still its rich cultural and historical heritage. Ethiopia has a long and proud history that extends back to the known beginnings of humankind. For leisure tourists, the main attractions are Ethiopia's unique culture and history, its magnificent scenery and archaeological sites, and the country's diverse and exotic flora and fauna. The government has officially recognised the value of these national resources and taken steps to preserve them, such as with the setting up of the Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project. Infrustructure: Luxury Hotels, Lodges, travel agencies and tour operators, car rentals, suvenir shops are booming in Addis Ababa and capitals of historical routes. For example, Gondar city is one of the historic route in Ethiopia.

The total receipt from the industry in 2010 was around 204.9 million USD.   As of 2010, international tourist's arrival was reached to 383,399. However, the sector's share to GDP is remains very small (0.77% in 2010).

   ➢ **Conceptual Model**

In this research, social responsibility which is measured with 4 indexes using questionnaire is considered as independent variable and destination image as dependent variable.
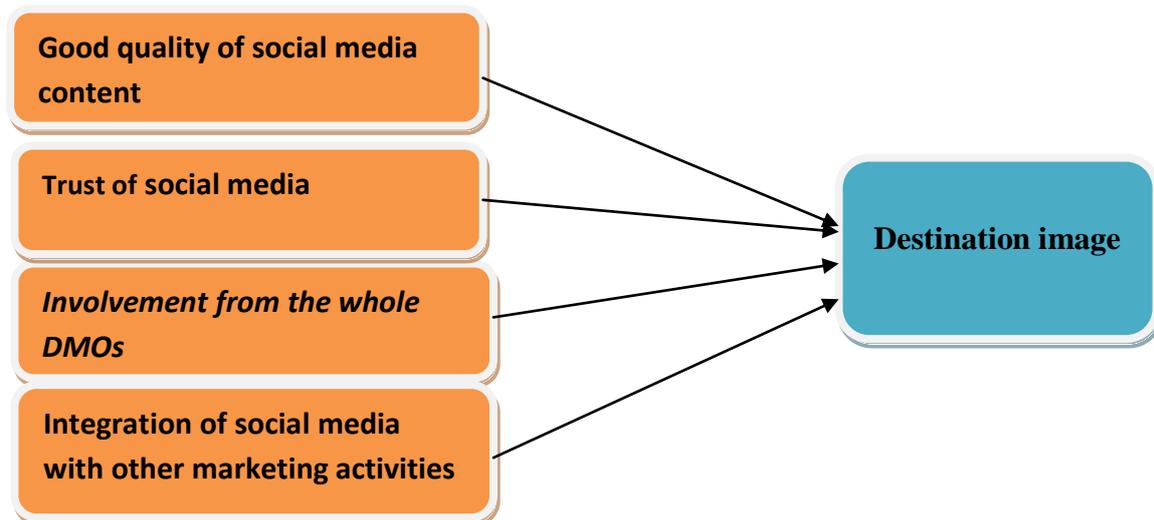
Source: Pradiptarini's (2011)

## 3  RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed explanatory research design. It has been used to establish the magnitude, direction and significance of various effects of social media marketing on destination image of hospitality and tourism industry.

The samples utilized in this study were drawn based on convenience. Convenience sampling is commonly used when the researcher does not have access to all the population (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

The sample size was determined by using the following formula (Cochran, 1963)

$$n = \frac{z^2 \times p \times q}{e^2}$$

Where *n* is the sample size, z=1.96 (95% of confidence level), P= percentage or presence of the study characteristics (0.5, maximum variability), q=1-P and e=accepted margin of error (±5% of precision). Therefore, 385 samples are calculated from the unknown population of domestic and foreign tourists.

The researchers employed self-administered survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in a structured manner which captures all the variables under study. In this case, there were closed ended questionnaire which allow for various responses by the respondents. Therefore, after the questionnaires

were thoroughly reviewed, 385 copies were sent out as planned but 367copies were fully completed and valid.

For all the measures, employees' participants were asked to respond to a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5(Strongly Agree). Items were averaged to form the indices of the variables with larger numbers indicating higher levels. Social media marketing and destination image were measured using 20-item and 6 item scale respectively.

In this research study quantitative research was carried out and thus, involved some quantitative analyses with the use of statistical tools (descriptive and inferential) with the help SPSS version 20.

## 4  RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 depicts the gender distribution of the respondents. Accordingly, about 84 (23 %) of the respondents were females and the rest were males 283(77%). This shows that majority of the respondents were male. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 30 to 60 (63.7%). It can be noted that 201(54%) of the respondents were foreign tourists and 166 (46 %) were domestic tourists. The educational background of the respondents reveals that 26(7%) have completed grade 10th, 36(9.8%) were college diploma holder, whereas 230(62.67%) respondents were first degree holders and 75(20 %) have masters and above. This

indicates that overwhelming number of respondents has first degree and above.

Table 1. Demographic characteristic of the sample respondents

| Demographic variables | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 283 | 77 |
| | Female | 84 | 23 |
| | Total | 367 | 100.0 |
| Age | 18-29 | 64 | 17.4 |
| | 30-60 | 197 | 63.7 |
| | Over 60 | 106 | 28.9 |
| | Total | 367 | 100.0 |
| | | | |
| Education | Grade 10 | 26 | 7.1 |
| | complete | 36 | 9.8 |
| | Diploma | 230 | 62.7 |
| | Degree | 75 | 20.4 |
| | Masters and | 367 | 100.0 |
| | above | | |
| | Total | | |
| Type of | Domestic | 166 | 46 |
| tourist | Foreign | 201 | 54 |
| | Total | 367 | 100 |

Survey data, 2018

The hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis. The normal distribution condition for the dependent variable and degree of multicollinearity in the independent variables were assessed prior to the regression analysis.

Reliability test has been carried out in the analytical process. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to test the level of consistency among the items. Alpha coefficient for independent variables and dependent variable were above 0.70, which indicated an acceptable level of reliability (Nunnaly and Bernstein, 1994). correlation coefficient indicated that there were some interesting positive and significant relationships between the constructed variables. The skewness and the kurtosis statistics for the dependent as well as the independent variables fell within the fell within the ±2 cut-off range, commonly used to establish whether a variable is normally distributed.

According to Field (2009), multicollinerity was not a problem as long as the variance inflation factor (VIF) was lower than 10 and the tolerance statistic was greater than 0.10. The variance inflation factors for all independent variables were under 10; therefore, a multicollinearity problem was not observed. To this end, the four independent variables measuring social media marketing were regressed against the dependent measure of destination image.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations and reliability test

| Variables | Skewness | Kurtosis | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1)Quality content | 0.007 | -0.141 | 4.50 | .267 | 1 | .332** | .343** | .951** | .913** | .903 |
| (2) Trust of social media | -0.465 | 0.219 | 4.59 | .447 | | 1 | .715** | .164** | .188** | .951 |
| (3)Involvement of DMOs | -0.976 | 0.869 | 4.52 | .261 | | | 1 | .269** | .309** | .823 |
| (4) Integration of social media with other marketing Activities | -0.224 | -0.115 | 4.43 | .320 | | | | 1 | .914** | .951 |
| (5) Destination Image | -0.136 | .935 | 4.38 | .330 | | | | | 1 | .838 |

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis.

| Variables | Competitive advantage | | Collinearity statistics | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Beta | t-values | Tolerance | VIP |
| (1)Quality content | .804* | 12.795 | .126 | 7.955 |
| (2) Trust | -.124* | -1.383 | .222 | 4.514 |
| (3)Involvement of DMOs | .163* | 3.191 | .477 | 2.097 |
| (4) Integration with other marketing Activities | .297* | 5.481 | .230 | 4.343 |
| Model fit statistics,$R^2$= .87% ,F=603.559* | | | | |

Dependent Variable: Destination Image

\*    Indicates variables significant at P<0.05

**Table 4.  Summary of the hypotheses results**

| Hypothesis | Results | Decision |
|---|---|---|
| **H1**: Good quality of social media content has a significant effect on destination image | (Beta =.804, t=12.795, P=.000) | Accepted |
| **H2**: Trust of social media has a significant effect on destination image. | (Beta= --.124, t= -1.383, P=.000) | Accepted |
| **H3:** Involvement of DMOs as a whole has a significant effect on destination image. | (Beta= .163, t= 3.191,  P=.000) | Accepted |
| **H4**: Social media integration with other marketing activities has a significant effect on destination image. | ( Beta = .297, t= 5.481, P=.000) | Accepted |

Significant at P<0.05

Source: Survey result, 2018

The result of multiple regression analysis in the Table 3 has depicted that  four  hypothesis that showing quality content of social media marketing

($H_1$), Trust ($H_2$), involvement of DMOs  ($H_3$), and Integration of social media with other marketing activities($H_4$) will result in higher level of destination image were confirmed in a statistical significant way (Beta=.804, t=12.795, p< 0.05), (Beta=--.124, t= -1.383, p< 0.05), (Beta=.163, t=3.191, p< 0.05)and ( Beta=- .297, t= 5.481, p< 0.05) respectively. R square indicates the extent or percentage the independent variables explained the variations in the dependent variable. From the result shown, independent variables can explain 87% of the variations in dependent variable (destination image).    However, the remaining 13% is unexplained in this research study.

## 5.   CONCLUSION

Tourists refer to social media at all stages of their trips. Predominantly, social media is used for information search prior to the trip, updating friends about departures, arrivals and destinations during the trip, and sharing experiences after the trip. Social media influences the final decision of a tourist to a considerable extent. The extent and implications of the influences exerted by social media to the tourist's decision making process caused fundamental changes to the tourists' decisions.

Based on the conceptual framework of the current study, the researcher utilized four key dimensions of social media marketing such as quality content of social media marketing, trust of social media marketing, involvement of destination marketing organization in the social media and the integration of social media with other marketing activities and examined their effect on destination image.

The relationship between the social media marketing components and the destination image was examined. The result of the study has shown that there is a positive relationship between the independent variable and dependent variables. It was confirmed that all the components of social media marketing (quality content of social media marketing, trust of social media marketing, involvement of destination marketing organization in the social media and the integration of social media with other marketing activities) have significant effect on the destination image of hospitality and tourism industry in Gondar city.

The finding shows that the social media has significant effect on destination image which consist with the findings from Um and Crompton (1990) and Ghazali and Cai (2014).

This study strongly encourages tourism providers to actively participate in social media in order to engage the potential tourists through developing and implementing innovative and interesting content while providing users with adequate information and timely responses to their concerns and enquiries. Given the potential effectiveness of social media in promoting tourism in recent years, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are encouraged to adopt and integrate this new technology so that they can better communicate with their online target audience.  It is also recommended that hospitality and tourism marketer should increase their efficiency in promoting their activities through effective utilization of social media platform with other marketing activities to showcase the City and the Country at large as tourist destinations of choice.

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