

Marketing Mix Elements and Tourists' Satisfaction in Northern Ethiopia, Afar Region: The Case of Erta Ale and Dallol

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Abstract: The study tried to examine the Marketing mix factors that influence tourists' satisfaction in Ethiopia, Afar region, taking the case of Erta Ale and Dallol. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed to analyze the data obtained from the 61 completed questionnaires, made up of foreign tourists supplemented by interview conducted with 4 tourism officials and 3 tour operator managers selected purposely. The expectancy disconfirmation model and a paired t-test statistical method of analysis were used to examine the expectation and satisfaction of tourists toward the various destination attributes categorized under each marketing mix. The result revealed that the most important product mix attributes with higher mean difference and positively disconfirmed as satisfaction drivers were "Attractiveness of the destinations", "Accessibility of the visitor attractions", and "Services in the visitor Attractions." Among the price attributes tourists were satisfied only with "Price for food and beverage" and "Value for Money to Transportation". With regard to place attributes, the tourists were satisfied with "Hotel and guest house service in Mekelle", "Service by regional office and local Carriers", "Quality of the transportation system". Interestingly, the survey result shows the tourists were satisfied with all people attributes. However, most of the promotion attributes related to information are negatively disconfirmed that tourists were dissatisfied with "Pre arrival information about attractions", "Availability of tourist information at the site", "About additional products and events", "Accommodations", "Other facilities, including banking, shops, and transportation" except "the image of the region". Besides one major setback tourists experienced from the process related attributes was poor "trip planning". Finally, the multiple-regression analysis result shows that, promotion, process and price were found to be positively and statistically significant correlates of tourists overall satisfaction. Thus, there need to be a well developed tourism marketing mix strategies by the marketers.

Key words: Tourism, Marketing mix, satisfaction, expectancy-disconfirmation model.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia's enormous tourism growth potential is noted frequently, but the researcher did not go into detail in this study. To say it possesses practically all forms of primary tourism items is an understatement: historical sites, national parks with indigenous wildlife, and cultural and religious festivals. Ethiopia, on the other hand, has been unable to fully realize its tourism potential due to a lack of appropriate marketing and promotion operations that meet contemporary world tourism standards (Elias, 2014).

The Afar region is also endowed with diverse tourism destinations attracting many foreign tourists to the area. Although tourist service provision facilities are in an infant stage the tourist flow has shown increment in the region. According to the Afar regional culture and tourism bureau the number of tourists visiting the region and revenue generated increases from year to year (Timer G. & M. Ayele, 2017). Foreign tourist arrival is promising while there are very few Ethiopians coming to the region indicating the very low level of domestic tourism. Thus, this study used only international tourists as a target population and provides an investigative research outcome on how the tourism marketing is generally performing as well as regarding the influence of marketing mix elements on tourists' satisfaction in Afar region, particularly the case of Erta Ale active volcano lake, the so called '*smoking mountain*' and '*Dalol depression*' known as 'the other planet', as tourist attractions.

1.2. Research Objectives

- To analyze the expectation and satisfaction level of tourists on marketing mix elements of Erta Ale and Dallol attractions.
- To examine marketing mix factors affecting tourists' overall satisfaction in Erta Ale and Dallol.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. The Tourism Service Marketing Mix

Tourism marketing refers to the stage of the tourist process when tourism firms can define the process of market segmentation, positioning, and product life cycle application. Effective communications through promotion, as well as the selection of the correct distribution channels, such as tour and travel trade coordinator firms, as well as various destination marketing organisations and trade intermediaries, are all important factors in marketing success (Kotler et.al, 2006). It's a strategy, planning, marketing, and distribution process by which destination regions and tourism businesses promote their services and facilities to potential clients, with a focus on effective promotion and distribution channels.

Tourism organizations have manipulated their marketing mix or 4'P's' to reflect the nature of their target markets, according to Kannan and Srinivasan (2009), once they have obtained their research data on consumer behaviour. These include: Product: tangible aspects, service element, branding; Price: discounting, value-for-money; Place: the role of intermediaries, direct sells; Advertising, brochures, and sales promos are all examples of promotion. The 4Ps have been expanded to 8Ps in the tourism business. Physical environment, purchasing process, packaging, and involvement are the others. The tourism industry's marketing technique is known as the 8 Ps (Morrison, 1996). The marketing mix, as defined by Kotler et al. (2006), consists of four P's that have a substantial impact on tourism marketing. He added three more P's to the service organisation. People, physical evidence, and method are the three categories. The high level of direct contact between the firm and the consumer, as well as the highly visible character of the business, necessitates the simultaneity of production and consumption.

While it is possible to discuss people, physical evidence and process within the original 4Ps framework, the extension allows a more thorough analysis of the marketing ingredients necessary for successful service marketing (Jobber, 2004). The researcher has selected six elements; *Products, price, place, promotion people* and *process* from service marketing mix elements.

2.1.1. Product and Services

A tourism product is described as a collection of tourist attractions. Consumer demands and wishes must be reflected in the tourism offering, which must be designed or changed. Product positioning, described by Kotler et al. (2006) as "the way in which the product is defined by customers on significant attributes - the location the product occupies in the consumers' minds," is one of the most important goals for any tourism organisation. When a product is properly positioned, the consumer will be able to distinguish it from the competition's product since it will be unique; often, intangible elements are linked with the product, allowing the company to differentiate its products.

Seaton (1996) elaborates on the aforementioned concept by stating that tourism encompasses such a diverse range of products that it must be viewed in terms of sectors rather than a single industry. Transportation is the business of transporting tourists by air, road, rail, and water; accommodation is the business of providing retail travel services to customers for commission on behalf of other tourism industry sectors; transportation is the business of transporting tourists by air, road, rail, and water; accommodation is the business of providing commercial facilities primarily intended to host stay over tourists for overnight stays. Hotels are the most common type of tourist lodging; food and beverage establishments, such as restaurants, provide meals and beverages to tourists and other customers; tour operators provide a package of tourism-related services for the consumer, which may include some combination of lodging, transportation, restaurants, and attraction visits; and merchandise is goods purchased as part of the anticipated or actual tourism experience;

2.1.2. Price

The price of a product, service, or the overall value exchanged by consumers for the benefits of owning or utilizing that product or service is referred to as the price (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006). When a consumer compares the value and price of a service, he or she is more likely to purchase if the value outweighs the price. As a result, the price of a service should be clearly set in relation to the degree of service so that customers can understand the difference. A number of elements will influence an organization's pricing decisions, including pricing objectives, legal and regulatory difficulties, competition, and expenses. However, according to Seaton (1996), the most critical aspect is the consumer's impression of pricing in connection to quality and value for money. As a result, pricing is critical to marketing strategy, serving not only as a weapon against competitors but also as a means of ensuring the company's existence.

2.1.3. Place

The location where distribution channels will be used is referred to as the place. Regardless of the distribution strategy employed, location is a significant factor in determining where buyers look for products or services and how they can gain access to the appropriate distribution channels. According to Philip Kotler et al. (2006), the place (distribution) in tourism serves as a reference to various tourist destinations. It also gives ideas for alternate travel routes, selects attractions and support services along different travel routes, and informs potential tourists (customers) about alternative travel routes.

The middlemen in the distribution chain have an impact on tourists as consumers. When it comes to purchasing decisions, the store is frequently the most potent influence on the consumer. The retail travel agent, for example, plays a crucial role in the package holiday operator's contact with the consumer. In regard to the consumer, the travel agent plays a significant role. In terms of consumer choice, they can be a potent persuader. They also serve as a point of contact for customer concerns whenever a holiday-related issue arises (Kannan & Srinivasan, 2009). Furthermore, Musa and Adamu (2011) discovered that transportation is a key factor in tourism development. Other reasons that contribute to the growth of this industry include recreational and social facilities, as well as security. As a result, consumers value location since they may enjoy a product and be able and willing to pay the asking price, but if they can't get to it, there will be no sale.

2.1.4. Promotion

Advertising, sales promotions, personal selling, and publicity are examples of activities that marketers do to interact with customers in order to acknowledge their product. All of these activities have the potential to influence a customer's way of thinking, emotions, experience, and purchasing decisions. Promotion is extremely vital in offering information and guidance to the target market, as well as persuading them. It will instruct the user on how to utilise the product and receive the best results from it at a certain time (Bowie & Buttle, 2004). Tourism organisations, according to Bowie and Buttle (2004), use a number of marketing communication tactics that have distinct effects on consumer behavior:

- Public relations or press techniques - the tourism organization will utilise these when it wishes to leave a positive impression on the consumer's mind.
- Brochure is used by tourism organizations when they are trying to initiate sales. The brochure should be used to reassure consumers about the product offering which is particularly important in a market where there is a high spend feature.
- Advertising is used by tourism organizations when they want to reach large audiences in an efficient manner. Television advertising is often used by tourism companies at the beginning of the booking season to encourage early interest. Advertising is often used to repeat the marketing communication messages in an attractive and appealing manner. The logic here is that repetition of messages will have a greater positive effect on the consumer.
- Sales promotion is often used by tourism organizations to try to encourage the potential consumer to try the product for the first time, or to attract repeat purchases.
- Personal selling is very important in tourism because services by their very nature involve a high degree of face-to-face selling activity. Personal selling is used by tourism organizations either directly or indirectly to initiate sales or encourage consumers to buy more.

2.1.5. People

People are described as a service in the marketing mix, and it refers to all human actors involved in service delivery and who influence the buyer's view of the service environment. People refer to human resource in hospitality and tourism firms, and it plays a key part in performance, quality control, and personal selling (Kotler et.al, 2006). To be able to provide better customer satisfaction than competitors, this aspect necessitates recruitment, training, and motivation. It is all about the relationship between the service provider and the consumer, thus employees must be knowledgeable and have the mindset to respond to customers, as well as problem-solving skills, creativity, and the ability to provide value to the company.

2.1.6. Process

The protocols, techniques, and flow of activities used to obtain a service are referred to as the process. How a service Process is delivered can have a significant impact on a customer's decision. Waiting for a service to arrive is a typical occurrence and a factor in overall satisfaction. (2004) (Jobber). It could be a rule or a set of procedures to assure correct and timely service. Tourism processes, according to Kannan and Srinivasan (2009), include (a) trip planning and anticipation, (b) travel to the site/area, (c) recall, and (d) trip planning packages. Maps, attractions en route and on site, information on lodging, cuisine, and high-quality souvenirs and mementos are all included in the trip planning packages.

All methods, timetables, mechanisms, activities, and routines that are used during the tour should be considered by tourism marketing. Customers often do not distinguish between the process and the product because the processes are part of the service delivery system. For example, if a visitor is forced to wait an unreasonable amount of time for information from a tourism office, he is likely to be unsatisfied even if he receives all of the information he requires at the conclusion of the wait.

2.2. Tourists' Satisfaction

In this study, it's critical to define what "tourist satisfaction" means. Tourism satisfaction has been discovered to be the result of a comparison of expectations and experiences. Pre-travel expectations and post-travel experiences are the two main factors that influence satisfaction. When experiences exceed expectations and result in feelings of fulfilment, tourists are satisfied and leave with a positive impression of the destination. The tourist, on the other hand, is unsatisfied when they result in negative sentiments (Reisinger & Turner, 2003).

Tourist satisfaction is defined by Neal and Gursoy (2008) as "the total of travellers' satisfaction with each service facet of the entire system." To put it another way, a traveler's satisfaction with tourist services is the sum of his or her contentment with pre-trip services, services at the destination, and transit route services. Travelers' happiness with travel and tourism services is likely to decline if they have a negative experience with any part of the service. Other academics agree, believing that tourism destinations or attractions are a collection of components relating to the food, lodging, transportation, and entertainment available.

For example, Laws (1998) found that when tourists visit a destination, they interact with a variety of components of the destination product, which is a collection of diverse attributes that includes not only historical sites and breathtaking scenery, but also services and facilities that cater to tourists' everyday needs. With so many encounters throughout the complete holiday experience, the quality of these interactions and experiences is the foundation for overall holiday discontent and future travel selections.

Another study found that contentment with lodging and cuisine, people, price, and culture all had a substantial impact on Japanese tourists' satisfaction with Hong Kong as a travel destination (Heung & Cheng, 2000). Joppe, Marting, and Waalen (2001) discovered similar major determinants in tourists' satisfaction with Toronto, Canada. Transportation, shopping facilities, and cultural activities were among the destination aspects that were rated highly in terms of satisfaction. Safety, value for money, cleanliness, signage and family-oriented activities, and people's hospitality were all rated bad. Researchers have so examined travellers' total satisfaction as a function of their contentment with several site-specific features in the tourism industry.

2.3. Measuring Customer Satisfaction: Disconfirmation Model

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The disconfirmation theory emerges as the major foundation for satisfaction models in marketing literature as well as current information system studies (McKinney et al., 2002). Consumer pleasure or unhappiness is a result of disconfirmation emerging from inconsistencies between past expectations and actual performance, according to the expectation-perception model, or expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1980). (Chen & Chen, 2010). If the actual performance exceeds their expectations, they are more likely to have a positive disconfirmation, indicating that customers are very happy and will be more inclined to buy the same product again. However, if actual performance falls short of expectations, they are more likely to receive a negative disconfirmation, implying that customers are unhappy (Heung & Cheng, et al., 2000). Confirmation, on the other hand, comes when actual performance fits prior expectations, resulting in a good perceived experience. As a result, tourists, like any other consumers, have preconceived notions about what they will encounter at a place based on numerous sources of information they have examined or come into touch with. Their happiness is then determined by how successfully their expectations are realised when they arrive at their destination.

The expectation-disconfirmation model was used to investigate the impact of marketing mix elements on tourist satisfaction in the Erta Ale and Dallol locations in this study. The marketing mix was studied, with 6ps out of 7ps - dimensions such as product, price, place, promotion, personnel, physical evidence, and process - as variables. Physical evidence, according to the study, may be conceptually blended or merged with the product in the tourism sector. As tourism deals with service marketing, these aspects constitute the perfect mix.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to meet the study's predefined goals, a mixed method approach was used to collect data and analyse it at the same time. The researcher attempted to express the quantitative data by combining it with qualitative data. In addition, descriptive statistics were used. Furthermore, the study used a cross sectional survey research design, which collected data at a single point in time for the goal at hand, as one of the numerous approaches of a descriptive research design.

Both primary and secondary data sources were used to collect the data kinds. Through the use of questionnaires, interviews, and observations, primary data was obtained from international tourists who visited the sites, tour operators or travel agencies, and area tourism officials who provide tourism services. Secondary data was gathered from both published and unpublished materials, as well as organisational papers such as marketing reports from federal and regional tourism authorities, different manuals and reports from tour and travel agents regarding their tourism marketing were used to supplement the primary data for analysis.

Convenience sampling method was applied due to the seasonal nature of tourists' flow to the region and lack of accurate and genuine data. The only information obtained from the Culture and Tourism Bureau of Afar national regional state was from the annual estimated 2500 gross total number of tourists, 800 tourists who entered the region from November 2019 to January, 2020, which was not logical to use it to determine the sample size using scientific sampling formula. Thus, the researcher was forced to determine the sample size for the study using non-probability sampling with convenience plus purposive sampling designs. As such a total of 80 tourists were selected of which 61 (76.25%) tourists who visited Erta Ale and Dallol attractions responded and completed the questionnaires.

Regarding the interview, 3 out of 9 legally certified tour operators and travel agents, centered in Mekelle city were selected conveniently, 2 tourism officials and 2 tourism marketing expert from Afar regional

state Culture and Tourism Bureau, were selected purposively. To this end, structured questions were prepared and interview was conducted. In addition to the questionnaire survey and interview, the researcher's travel to the attractions in person helped him to get practical insights about the travel experience of Tourists, their interaction with tour operator and local people.

After sorting out the invalid questionnaires, 61 completed questionnaires, made up of tourists of different nationalities, were used for the analysis. The data were coded, computed, and analyzed using STATA version 11. Then the researcher analyzed and interpreted the data collected from the respondents using quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. Quantitative method of analysis was used for the data which was collected from tourists. Statistical analyses such as frequencies, paired mean t tests, and multiple regressions were used according to the respective objectives.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Demographic profiles of the Tourists

The tourists' demographic characteristics used were sex, age, nationality, educational status, occupation and purpose of visit. Thus, the sex distribution of the respondents resulted as majority of male tourists with 63.93% of the total respondents and 36.07% female respondents. The dominant age group of the respondents was 30-39 years (32.79%), followed by 40-49 years (26.23%), 20-29 years, (21.31%) and 50-59(14.75%). The Age group of 60 years and older made up 4.92 % of the respondents.

With regard to nationality, tourists from England accounted for the majority of the response rate (26.23%); followed by Germany (11.48%), Denmark (11.48%), Australia (9.84%), Finland (8.20%), and Netherlands (6.56%). Tourists from Poland, Russia, Israel, USA, Israel and other countries constitute the rest of the respondents (26.24%). Thus, according to the survey result, the four top tourist generating countries to the study area were England, Denmark, Germany, and Australia; represent more than 60% of international tourist arrivals.

In terms of the status of education, 77.04 % of the respondents had been educated to the higher Diploma and Bachelor Degree level or above and 22.96% had been educated to the secondary school and vocational School level. This shows the relatively high educational attainment of the respondents who can easily understand the tourism activities in the areas and provides constructive comments to improve the sector. In the occupation category, the two most dominant groups were private employees and business owners, each representing 39.34 % and 26.23% of the respondents, followed by government employee accounted 19.67%. The rest of the respondents under the categories of retired and others represent 9.84% all together.

Concerning the purpose of visit, about 74% of the respondents came to Erta Ale and Dallol to see the unique nature of Scenery /landscape, whereas those who came to the site to experience the natural and cultural heritage of the attractions besides their unique landscape accounted for 13 % of the respondents and the remaining 13% came to experience the dangerous travel or trekking to the sites. This question was asked in order to find out the major attractions that had fascinated the international tourists to visit Dallolo and Erta Ale active volcano and to know what attractions the areas hold in the minds of tourists who have decided to visit the destinations. Thus, the survey showed that the majority the tourists have flown to the area in order to see the unique landscape followed by trekking activity.

4.2. Sources of Information

The respondents were asked a question how they got the first information about Dallol and Erta Ale. This question was asked in order to identify the tool of communication by which most tourists have heard for the first time about the attractions. The answer would help to know the major tool that possibly was promoting the area in other countries and to identify which mechanism was popularly used by tourists. As a result the key tourism information sources about Erta Ale and Dallol, which is relatively dominated by the internet and travel books/guides, or brochures that share 34.43% and 29.51% respectively followed by friends and relatives (27.87 %), indicating the importance of word of mouth recommendation and repeat visitation. Tourists who used travel agent (4.92%) rank fourth as information sources for tourists. There was only one tourist who had previous visit experience while other respondents who used Advertising/travel articles or TV and radio documentaries together accounted for 3.28%.

From the above result, the internet and travel books/guides are the most dominant of the tourism information source. This proves that majority of the tourists got the information from tour company's website and individuals who posted about the site in social medias like face book. This result is similar with the finding by Tsang, N.K. (2010) who found that internet can play a vital role in attracting tourism for many developing countries. Therefore, there need to be maximum exploitation of the internet since it is the easiest way of advertisement for potential tourists all over the world.

4.3. Tourists' Satisfaction with marketing mix elements of Erta Ale and Dallol

Nowadays with increasing competition among tourism destinations, tourist satisfaction is a critical factor to get a better destination image, attract more consumption of services and products, generate customer loyalty and return business (Tepanon, Uysal, & Meng, 2008).

In order to examine the marketing mix elements that influence tourists' satisfaction, this study used six elements of tourism marketing mix, comprised of product with 6 attributes, price with 6 attributes, place with 6 attributes, promotion with 6 attributes, people with 6 attributes, , and process with 4 attributes.

In this study, satisfactory attributes are defined as those attributes with Satisfaction scores above expectation scores (i.e., positive mean difference) with a *t* value significant at the .05 level. Whereas dissatisfying attributes were defined as those attributes with expectation scores outweighing satisfaction scores (negative mean score), regardless of a significant or non-significant *t*-value at the .05 level or below. As depicted in the tables followed, the tourists' expectation and level of satisfaction toward the marketing mix attributes were analyzed using a paired *t*-test and disconfirmation model.

4.3.1. Tourists' Satisfaction with Product and Service of Erta Ale and Dallol

To solicit tourists' feedback about tourism products and hospitality services in Erta Ale And Dallol, tourists were asked to rate their expectation and satisfaction with travel attributes they experienced in the destinations. The attributes are "*Attractiveness of the destinations*," "*Accessibility of the visitor attractions*," "*Activities and Services in the visitor Attractions*" , "*Additional products and events*," "*Accommodation*", and "*Good condition to stay on the site*" as shown below in the table. This idea is shared by other researchers who believe that tourism destinations or attractions are a bundle of components related to accommodation, transportation and entertainment offered. For example, Bowen, D.(2001) grouped destination attributes in the "six A"s": attractions, amenities, available packages, activities, access, and ancillary services.

Table-4.1.Product attributes’ paired t-test between Expectation and satisfaction of Tourists

Attributes’	Satisfaction Mean	Expectation Mean	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Attractiveness of destinations	4.8361(0.3733)	4.4098(0.7827)	0.4262	4.1334	0.0001
Accessibility of the attractions	3.3934(1.0997)	3.0328(1.0796)	0.3606	1.9749	0.0529
Activities and Services in attractions	3.3770(1.0671)	3.0492(1.1317)	0.3279	2.2837	0.0259
Additional products and events	3.1475(0.9632)	3.0819(0.9182)	0.0656	0.5742	0.5680
Accommodation	3.3115(1.0884)	3.1475(0.9099)	0.1639	1.1823	0.2417
Good condition to stay on the site	2.9016(1.1210)	3.0656(0.9638)	-0.1639	-0.9803	0.3309

(Source: Survey Data February-March 2020)

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses. Satisfaction mean ranges from 1 (Very Dissatisfied) to 5(Very Satisfied). Expectations mean ranges from 1 (Very unfavorable) to 5 (Very favorable). P ≤ 0.05

Table.4.1. Illustrates the survey result that tourists showed significantly higher satisfaction with “Attractiveness of the destinations”, “Accessibility of the visitor attractions”, “Activities and Services in the visitor Attractions” .The respondents’ perceptions of these three attributes of the product were positively disconfirmed with their expectations, which led to satisfaction in relation to those attributes (see Table 4.1).

The destinations of Erta ale and Dallol with a unique nature have no match on the African continent, or rarely anywhere else. The wide mean difference between tourists' expectation and perceived satisfactions of the attractiveness of the destinations indicated their invaluable significance to the overall tourist satisfaction. Most of the interviewees from the tour operators and the regional officials agree that the inherent quality of the visitor attractions is the major driver of tourist satisfaction. And during the researcher’s field visit, he observed that most of the tourists, especially first time Visitors, were overwhelmed by the unique and diverse nature of the attractions which usually exceeds their expectations.

Regarding the accessibility to the visitor attractions, there is a slight disagreement between the result of the Paired t-test and the interview. The t-test was positively disconfirmed that may be due to the accessibility of Dalloland Half way to Erta Ale with a new asphalt road that satisfied tourists. However, most interviewees from the tour operators and regional office as well as researcher’s observation show that accessibility to the visitor attraction of Erta Ale, still requires much improvement.

On the other hand, the major causes of tourist dissatisfaction were “ Accommodation”, “Additional products and events”, and “Good condition to stay on the site” with the mean difference of 0.1639, 0.0656, and -0.1639 respectively. This indicated that respondents' satisfaction in relation to those attributes was negatively disconfirmed with their expectations, which resulted in dissatisfaction (see Table 4.3). The result contradicts with similar significant factors that were found by Joppe, Martin and Waleen (2001)

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who examined tourists' satisfaction with Toronto, Canada. The destination attributes perceived as high in satisfaction were factors such as accommodations, shopping facilities and cultural events.

The result revealed that tourists were dissatisfied with Accommodation service as well as additional products and events. The researcher has also observed no accommodation service at the sites. There were only open air camps with tradition bed in HamdeEla for Dallol and Community hats Kuswa-dar in Erta Ale where the tourists spent the night.

The tourists were complaining about the poor condition to stay on the sites. Even there is no toilet service as a minimal requirement. The regional bureau head in his interview had admitted that there are no accommodations and additional products but they have a plan to build Community lodge and cooperatives were organized by the bureau to avail additional traditional products and show Afar cultural events.

4.3.2. Tourists' Satisfaction with Price of Erta Ale and Dallol

A customer is likely to compare the value and price of service, and decide to purchase if the value exceed price. The study identified six attributes to examine the tourists' expectation and level of satisfaction towards the price of Erta Ale and Dallol attractions. The attributes are *Value for Money to the Attractions*," *Value for Money with accommodation*"," *Quality of Services in the visitor attractions*"," *Price for food and beverage*"," *Value for Money to Transportation*"," *Value for Money with tour operators' service*". In the tourism field, values are always related to goods, services, and experiences by market ex-change system. The value of the products is compared with the customer behavior. There has always been the class of the people from the different society at different times making attribution of values (Fennell 2006).

Table-4.2.Price attributes' paired t-test between Expectation and satisfaction

Attributes'	Satisfaction Mean	Expectation Mean	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Value for Money to the Attractions	3.6885(1.1625)	3.7049(1.1305)	-0.0164	-0.1363	0.8921
Value for Money with accommodation	3.2787(1.2265)	3.3770(1.1279)	-0.0984	-0.7143	0.4778
Quality of Services in the visitor attractions	3.1147(1.1416)	3.1639(0.9862)	-0.0492	-0.3586	0.7212
Price for food and beverage.	3.8361(0.8978)	3.4754(0.8288)	0.3606	3.7383	0.0004
Value for Money toTransportation	3.7377(1.1240)	3.3279(1.0283)	0.4098	2.8677	0.0057
Value for Money with tour operators' service	3.6885(1.0730)	3.6721(0.8509)	0.0164	0.1270	0.8994

Source: Own Survey result, 2020

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses. Satisfaction mean ranges from 1 (Very Dissatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied). Expectations mean ranges from 1 (Very unfavorable) to 5 (Very favorable). $P \leq 0.05$

Table.4.2. Shows that tourists were satisfied with “Price for food and beverage” and “Value for Money to Transportation”. Price for food and beverage as well as Value for Money to Transportation” were all rated above average mean value and were also positively disconfirmed (mean differences 0.4098 and 0.3606 respectively). This result is consistency with the idea of Ethio Tour-Travel manager who noted that tourists are especially delighted by the traditional food and drinks like 'Injera Be wat', 'Tebs' and the cultural coffee served in Abala guest house by the company. This is also line with Japanese tourists" satisfaction in Hong Kong as a travel destination was significantly influenced by their satisfaction with food, people, price, and culture (Heung & Cheng, 2000).

However, the dissatisfying price attributes were “Value for Money to the Attractions”, “Value for Money with accommodation”, “Quality of Services in the visitor attractions” and “Value for Money with tour operators’ service”. This indicated that respondents' satisfaction in relation to those attributes was negatively disconfirmed with their expectations, which resulted in dissatisfaction (see Table 4.2). The result is in agreement with the view on pricing by tour operators that most of the tour operators were not inspired to take their customer to Dallol and Erta Ale active volcano. Their reason as revealed from the structured interview was the cost of the destination as a major problem. The overall cost of the attractions expected to be covered by tourists’ fee which is not acceptable by most tourists. In an informal interview with some tourists during the researcher’s field visit, they complained that the quality of service they get and the price they paid did not match the value for money with quality accommodation and other services in and around the areas. It is obvious that customers always expect quality service if they pay more.

4.3.3. Tourists’ Satisfaction with Placement of Erta Ale and Dallol

Travel intermediaries are defined as members in the distribution chain in the tourism-marketing channel. Tourists are affected by the intermediaries who are able to combine travel products and offer them to customers as a package at a price generally lower than those available to individuals provides travel economy and convenience for a significant segment of tourists. Based on this fact, the study identified six attributes to examine the tourists’ expectation and level satisfaction towards the placement of Erta Ale and Dallol attractions.

The attributes are “the service given by tour operators”, “Hotel and guest house service in Mekele” , “Service by regional office and local Carriers”, “Quality of Service of the transportation systems”, “Internet and booking service” and “Other facilities, including banking and shops within Erta Ale and Daloll”. This also in line with the confirmation by Seaton (1996) that the tourism organizations providing goods and services wholly or mainly for tourist consumption; tour operators are businesses providing a package of tourism-related services for the consumer, including some combination of attraction visits, accommodation, transportation, and merchandise or goods purchased as part of the anticipated or actual tourism experience.

Table-4.3. Place attributes’ paired t-test between Expectation and satisfaction

Attributes’	Satisfaction Mean	Expectation Mean	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
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The service given by tour operators in Mekele	3.4426(1.1478)	3.8852(0.8386)	-0.4426	-2.3042	0.0247
Hotel and guest house service in Mekele	3.9508(0.9206)	3.7213(0.8781)	0.2295	1.7523	0.0848
Service by regional office and local Carriers	3.6393(0.8762)	3.4918(0.8291)	0.1475	1.6968	0.0949
Quality of transportation service	4.0000(0.9831)	3.4426(1.0728)	0.5574	4.2467	0.0001
Internet and booking service	3.0492(1.0071)	3.1475(0.9280)	-0.0984	-0.6595	0.5121
Other facilities, including banking and shops	2.7869(0.9681)	3.0984(0.8104)	-0.3115	-2.0429	0.0455

Source: Own Survey result, 2020

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses. Satisfaction mean ranges from 1 (Very Dissatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied). Expectations mean ranges from 1 (Very unfavorable) to 5 (Very favorable). $P \leq 0.05$

Table 4.3. Survey result indicated that tourists were satisfied with “Hotel and guest house service in Mekele” “Service by regional office and local Carriers”, “Quality of Service of the transportation systems”. The respondents’ perceptions of these three attributes were positively disconfirmed with their expectations, which led to satisfaction in relation to those attributes (see Table 4.3). The result is in line with Albayrak, T. et. al (2010) who argues that many natural and cultural attractions, by themselves are insufficient to satisfy the tourist since they must be complemented by other tourist’s facilities and a supporting infrastructure.

The result indicated that there is an encouraging condition for a more improved quality service in transportation to the destinations as well as Hotel and guest house service in Mekelle. Most Interviewees of tour operators responded to this by saying the problem of finding the right hotels and restaurants for tourists is being resolved gradually with the increase in both the number and quality of newly constructed star hotels, standard restaurants and guest houses in Mekelle city.

On the other hand, the result shows tourists were dissatisfied with “the service given by tour operators”, “Internet and booking service” and “Other facilities, including banking and shops, within Erta Ale and Dalol”. The efficiency of services by tour operators and travel agents was also negatively disconfirmed as observed from the paired t-test. As pointed out by tourist in the open-ended questions, the weaknesses of tour operators and travel agents, include the limited information available especially on their websites, the changing of contents of trip packages, lack of professional guides, poor communication and information exchange with international tour operators. This result is in line with the finding by Elias (2014) that foreign tourist were dissatisfied with tour operators service in Bale Mountains park.

Despite the interview from tour operators indicated that there is an encouraging condition for a more improved quality service of tour operators, tourists were not satisfied with the overall service of tour operators. The researcher has also observed that the mattresses and sleeping bags availed to tourists at the sites were very old and below standard. This is the major reason for the tourists' dissatisfaction. Thus, the tour operators should improve their service by availing quality materials such as sleeping bag and professional guides.

Tourists ranked the destination's facilities as poor in their standard. Majority of the tourists suggested that the problem of facility is the critical challenge in the destinations. Similarly, all of the tour company managers believed that the site is not comfortable for tourists. Tour operators felt that telecommunication facilities and internet were to be developed and recommended that additional tourism products should be improved as foreign tourists need entertainment and leisure facilities in destination area. As commented by the tour operators, the researcher also recommended that it is possible to develop a lodge, recreation center and other facilities in and around the site by government and private investors engaged in tourism business.

4.3.4. Tourists' Satisfaction with Promotion of Erta Ale and Dallol

Promotion should include the knowledge of using a product or service. At what time a service goes out to the customer, it is essential that a company helps all the customers see what they are buying or not. Based on this fact, the study identified six attributes to examine the tourists' expectation and level satisfaction towards the promotion of Erta Ale and Dallol attractions. The attributes are "Pre arrival information about attractions including how to get there", "Availability of tourist information at the site", "About additional products around at site", "Accommodations (hotel, guest house, bungalow, resort, and etc.)", "Other facilities like banking" and "the image of the region".

Table-4.4.Promotion attributes' paired t-test between Expectation and satisfaction

Attributes'	Satisfaction Mean	Expectation Mean	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Pre arrival information about attractions.	3.1147(1.1416)	3.3606(1.0493)	-0.2459	-1.5742	0.1207
Availability of tourist information at the site	2.9344(1.2365)	3.0656(1.0625)	-0.1311	-0.6683	0.5065
About additional products	2.8688(0.9912)	3.1475(0.8334)	-0.2787	-1.6838	0.0974
About Accommodations.	2.8197(1.1476)	3.2295(0.9556)	-0.4098	-2.3775	0.0206
Other facilities, like banking	2.8524(1.1378)	3.0819(0.8991)	-0.2295	-1.1960	0.2364
The image of the region in general	3.9672(0.6046)	3.5902(1.0063)	0.3770	2.8009	0.0068

Source: Own Survey result, 2020

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses. Satisfaction mean ranges from 1 (Very Dissatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied). Expectations mean ranges from 1 (Very unfavorable) to 5 (Very favorable). P ≤ 0.05

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As it can be seen from Table 4.4., the result shows the tourists were dissatisfied with “*Pre arrival information about attractions*”, “*Availability of tourist information at the site*”, “*About additional products around at site*”, “*Accommodations (hotel, guest house, bungalow, resort, and etc.)*”, “*Other facilities like banking*”. Most of these promotion variables related to information are negatively disconfirmed (see table 4.4). The result of the paired t-test indicated that the major causes of tourist dissatisfaction are availability of tourist information about Erta ale and Dallol. This is in line with finding concerning promotion and distribution activities in Bale Mountain National park by Elias (2014) that foreign tourists were dissatisfied. The relevance and true value of any tourist site is highly questionable without the necessary information to back it. Interviewees agree that there is a dearth of information mainly with the additional products or cultural aspect of the tourism product that complement the attractions, accommodation, and other facilities.

From the open ended questions, the tourists also revealed that at least the basic information regarding facility (Hotel/restaurant features, descriptions, meeting facilities etc.) surrounding area information (main attractions, transportation, airport information), should have been available. Even after their arrival, Tourist information service is scarcely known at the destinations. From the researcher’s field observation, the only source of information was the tour guides who briefed about the attractions by the time we arrive at the actual sites. We haven’t seen any signage and billboards that directs visitors on where and how to conduct their visit.

In general, there were very limited promotional materials like tourist guide handbook, brochures and poster distributed by the Afar region and some other private tour operators that don’t reach properly to the tourists visiting the attractions. Thus, it is rational to conclude that even though Afar region especially Dallol and Erta Ale active volcano are unique natural attractions of the country and endowed with diverse tourism resources, the promotional activities that have been made so far either at national or international level are inadequate. Therefore, the region and other concerned bodies have to develop an appropriate marketing and promotion mechanisms.

The result shows “*the image of the region*” was the only positively disconfirmed promotional attribute. This means, tourists had bad expectation about Dallol and Erta Ale security without traveling to the area as Middleton (2003) said destinations have images, often based on past story rather than current situation. According to the interviewees from the Afar tourism office, the country’s poor image had its own impact on lowering the tourists' expectation which often leads to a surprise by the tourist after their visit. However, this day, the Ethiopian image in general and the Afar region in particular, has been improving globally due to the intensive works of the government in promoting the good image of the country and the overall economic, social and political changes taking place in the country. A good international image is among the top concerns that can stir up international tourists to visit a particular country. Thus, the above statement has helped in determining the views of international tourists towards the image of Afar region in general and Dallol and Erta Ale destinations in particular.

4.3.5. Tourists’ Satisfaction with People of Erta Ale and Dallol.

It has long been a fact that many services involve personal interactions between customers and the site's employees, and they strongly influence the customer’s perception of service quality. Hence, the courtesy and willingness of the people involved in tourism service delivery is important. Taking this fact into account, the study identified six attributes to examine the tourists’ expectation and level satisfaction toward the people engaged in tourism activities of Erta Ale and Dallol attractions. The attributes are

“Courtesy of tour operator people”, “Courtesy and Willingness of Local people to help”, “Hospitality of hotel and on site guest house representatives and receptionists”, “Courtesy and Willingness of Regional Employees to help”. The manner and responsibility of those people has a great impact on tourists’ satisfaction.

Table-4.5. People attributes’ paired t-test between Expectation and satisfaction

Attributes	Satisfaction Mean	Expectation Mean	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Courtesy tour operator people	4.2951(0.6669)	3.8524(0.7491)	0.4426	4.0812	0.0001
Courtesy of local people	3.9672(0.9655)	3.3770(1.0826)	0.5902	3.3330	0.0015
Willingness of Local people to help	3.9836(0.9397)	3.4590(1.0095)	0.5246	3.3601	0.0014
Hospitality of hotel and on site guest house representatives	4.2623(0.6558)	3.5082(0.8874)	0.7541	7.2763	0.0000
Courtesy of Regional Employees	4.2623(0.7280)	3.7049(0.8630)	0.5574	4.3157	0.0001
Willingness of employees to help	4.2787(0.6091)	3.7049(0.8435)	0.5738	5.5642	0.0000

Source: Own Survey result, 2020

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses. Satisfaction mean ranges from 1 (Very Dissatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied). Expectations mean ranges from 1 (Very unfavorable) to 5 (Very favorable). $P \leq 0.05$

Interestingly, the result in Table 4.5 revealed that the tourists were satisfied with all people attributes used. This is consistent with the result by Ö. Özer (2012) in the case of Dalyan, Turkey, that the variables representing the person were examined and found; “Level of hospitality and customer care at destination” “Accommodation facilities employee characteristics” and “Destination government offices employee characteristic” as satisfactory attributes.

Tourists are usually amazed by the genuine friendliness and manner of Ethiopians in general. Especially they are very much happy with the courtesy and appealing reception of hotel and guest house people. The courtesy of local people and employees and their willingness to help was positively disconfirmed by most respondents (see table 4.5).

4.3.6. Tourists’ Satisfaction with Process of Erta Ale and Dallol

The study has identified four attributes to examine the tourists’ expectation and level satisfaction toward the process in Erta Ale and Dallol attractions. The attributes are “Speed of service”, “Trip planning”, “Travel to the site/area”, “Safety and Security”. This is in line with the report of Kannan and Srinivasan

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(2009) that the process in Tourism include, (a) trip planning and anticipation (b) travel to the site/area, (c) recollection, (d) trip planning packages in route and on site, information regarding lodging, food and mementoes.

Table-4.6.Process attributes’ paired t-test between Expectation and satisfaction

Attributes’	Satisfaction Mean	Expectation Mean	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Safety and Security	4.3606(0.5783)	3.7377(0.8347)	0.6229	5.5370	0.0000
Speed of service	3.9508(0.9561)	3.4426(0.8855)	0.5082	2.9415	0.0046
Trip planning	3.5574(1.0412)	3.6885(0.7861)	-0.1311	-1.0000	0.3213
Travel to the site/area	4.2131(0.7982)	3.6229(0.8975)	0.5902	5.2216	0.0000

Source: Own Survey result, 2020

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses. Satisfaction mean ranges from 1 (Very Dissatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied). Expectations mean ranges from 1 (Very unfavorable) to 5 (Very favorable). $P \leq 0.05$

The result of the paired t- test (Table4.6.) on process related attributes, has indicated one major setback that the tourists experienced was poor “*trip planning*” and inconsistencies of departure and arrival from different places where breakfast and lunch are served on the way to Erta ale and Dallol. Thus, trip planning was a negatively disconfirmed by the tourists. This result is similar with the finding by Elias, (2014)that foreign tourists have been displeased by trip plan and packaging in Bale Mountain National park.

On the other hand, the result shows the “*safety and security*”, “*travel to the site*” and *overall speed of service delivery*” by all actors under the study area are positively disconfirmed. This result contradicts with the complaint by tour operators on the pace of the process as well as the skill of the service providers by regional officials that clearly revealed was the main problem in their speed of service delivery. The process should be clear to the customer and it forms the basis of tourists’ satisfaction with the purchase of the destinations. This is also very important in the field of tour-ism marketing in various projects like planning, implementing, etc. It relates to the technique and procedure of providing a service and is therefore important to have systematic information on whether the services are useful to the consumers, if they are provided in instance, if the customers are informed in hand about the services and many such things.

Regarding the travel to the sites, it was easy to witness from the researcher’s observation that the travel to the attractions was entertaining since the survey study was conducted during the cold and tourist peak months of February and March,. As a result, tourists are positively disconfirmed in this regard. The study also intended to know the impacts of stability and Security in the area, since Dallol and Erta Ale are located nearby Ethio- Ertrea disputed boundary, the result revealed that the tourists were satisfied with safety and security in the area. The result is consistent with the general agreement among tour operators and regional government officials that the security and safety issues in and around Ertale

and Dallol is getting improvement. The researcher also has observed that the Ethiopian national defense soldiers in Dallol and the Afar special police force in Erta Ale have been providing security service with a great care for tourists.

4.4. The Examination of marketing mix that has more Impact on Tourist Satisfaction

Respondents were also requested to rate and evaluate their overall experience or stay in Erta Ale and Dallolin terms of satisfaction. From the research finding, 83.61 % of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied, 14.75% were very satisfied and only 1.64 % of the respondents were dissatisfied.

The mean value of respondents' overall perceived level of satisfaction was 4.1, which suggests that tourists had a satisfactory overall experience. This finding was taken as a base to examine the relative impact of marketing mix factors (independent variables) on tourist overall satisfaction (the dependent variable). To this end, the researcher has made a Correlation analysis before jumping into the multiple regression analysis. The relationships between the six independent variables and the dependent variable examined using Spearman's rank correlation (r) lies between 0 and ± 1 , where 0 means there is no correlation between the constructs, and ± 1 means there is a perfect positive or negative correlation between the variables. Hence, the result shows a positive relationship exists between the overall tourists' satisfaction and the six marketing mix factors.

In addition to the Spearman's rank correlation test, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was employed to test the presence of multicollinearity among independent variables. After assuring these tests as statistically significant, the multiple regression analysis was done as follows.

4.5.2 Multiple regression analysis

The equation for tourists' overall level of satisfaction, based on the marketing mix elements derived from regression analysis in this study, was expressed in the following equation:

$$\text{ToS} = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + e$$

Where, ToS = Tourists overall Satisfaction

X1 = Product

X2 = Price

X3 = Place

X4 = Promotion

X5 = People

X6 = Process and α is constant and $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4, \beta_5$ and β_6 are coefficient to estimate, and e is the error.

Table-4.7. shows the results of the multiple regression analysis. The adjusted R^2 indicated that 35.53 percent of the variation in tourist overall satisfaction is explained by the marketing mix elements. Furthermore, the F test indicated that the explanatory variables all together statistically significantly affect the dependent variable (overall tourist satisfaction).

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Table-4.7. The multiple regression analysis of the marketing mix elements.

Variable	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P >t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Product	-.0042	.0933	-0.04	0.965	-.1913	.1829
Price	.1206	.0671	1.80	0.078	-.0140	.2553
Place	-.1831	.1112	-1.65	0.106	-.4060	.0399
Promotion	.2237	.0815	2.75	0.008	.0604	.3871
People	.1618	.1087	1.49	0.143	-.0562	.3797
Process	.2731	.1105	2.47	0.017	.0515	.4948
_cons	1.871121	.4601	4.07	0.000	.9487	2.7935

Source: Own Estimation Result, 2020

N= 61 F(6, 54) = 6.51 Prob> F= 0.0000 R-squared = 0.4198 Adj R-squared= 0.3553

The result in Table 4.7, indicated that Promotion and Process were found to be positively and statistically significant correlates of tourists overall satisfaction at 95% level of significance and price at 90%. Therefore, these variables make a significant contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable (tourist satisfaction). On the other hand, product, places and people found to be statistically insignificant determinants of tourist overall satisfaction.

Conclusion

Tourism business in Afar region, Ethiopia, has a great potential and bright prospect that could contribute to the economy in large extent, but the region has the lacking of proper study and attention on tourism marketing. In the face of worldwide stiff competition, intangible nature of tourism services, there need to be a well developed tourism marketing mix strategies by the marketers. This study, for the first time tried to examine the influence each marketing mix elements with their predetermined attributes on tourist satisfaction, using paired t-test and disconfirmation model.

Based on the paired t- test of the product mix attributes, the most important satisfaction drivers with higher mean difference and positively disconfirmed were “*Attractiveness of the destinations*”, “*Accessibility of the visitor attractions*,” “*Activities of Services in the visitor Attractions*” . However, the major causes of tourist dissatisfaction are “*Accommodation*”, “*Additional products and events*“, and “*Good condition to stay on the site*”.

The paired t-test result on price attributes also revealed that tourists were satisfied with “*Price for food and beverage*” and” *Value for Money to Transportation*”. They were all rated above average mean value and were also positively disconfirmed whereas the dissatisfying price attributes were “*Value for Money to the Attractions*,” “*Value for Money with accommodation*,” “*Quality of Services in the visitor attractions*” and “*Value for Money with tour operator service*”

With regard to place attributes, the paired t-test also indicated tourists were satisfied with “*Hotel and guest house service in Mekelle*”, “*Service by regional office and local Carriers*”, “*Quality of Service of the transportation systems*”. However, the result shows tourists were dissatisfied with “*the service given by tour operators*,” “*Internet and booking service*” and “*Other facilities, including banking and shops, within Erta Ale and Dalol*”. The efficiency of services by tour operators and travel agents was also negatively disconfirmed and as pointed out by tourist in the open-ended questions, the weaknesses of tour

operators include the limited information available especially on their websites, the changing of contents of trip packages and lack of professional guides.

Moreover, the result of the paired t-test proves most of the promotion attributes related to information are negatively disconfirmed that tourists were dissatisfied with “*Pre arrival information about attractions*”, “*Availability of tourist information at the site*”, “*About additional products and events*”, “*Accommodations*,” “*Other facilities, including banking, shops, and transportation*” but “*the image of the region*”. In general, the promotional materials, distributed by the Afar region and some other private tour operators, bear limited information about the tourist product and don't reach properly to the tourists visiting the attractions.

Interestingly, the survey result shows the tourists were satisfied with all people attributes such as “*Courtesy tour operator people*”, “*Courtesy and Willingness of Local people to help*,” “*Hospitality of hotel and on site guest house representatives and receptionists*” ,”*Courtesy and Willingness of Regional Employees to help*”. This is not a surprise as tourists are usually amazed by the genuine friendliness and manner of Ethiopians in general.

As per the result of the paired t- test, one major setback tourists experienced from the process related attributes was poor “*trip planning*” and negatively disconfirmed by the tourists. The researcher also observed inconsistencies with the departure and arrival from different places where breakfast and lunch are served on the way to Erta ale and Dallol. However, the result shows the “*safety and security*”, “*travel to the site*” and “*overall speed of service delivery*” by all actors under the study area were positively disconfirmed.

The multiple-Regression analysis result shows that, promotion, process and price were found to be positively and statistically significant correlates of tourists overall satisfaction. On the other hand, product, places and people found to be statistically insignificant determinants of tourist overall satisfaction.

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