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Tourism Marketing & Economic Sustainability of Tourist Destinations: Perspectives of Bale Mountains National Park

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Abstract: The economic sustainability of tourist destinations is crucial for the long-term success and growth of the tourism sector. In this regard, tourism marketing plays a great role in fostering economic growth and ensuring long-term resilience. The study focused on national parks in an effort to determine how tourism marketing affects the economic sustainability of the parks. Mixed research, in line with explanatory and descriptive research designs, was applied to achieve the aim of the study. A sample of 143 was collected from employees of the national park and small and medium-sized enterprises working in the park using the census sampling technique. The study revealed that tourism marketing has a significant impact on the economic sustainability of the national park, with price, place, and promotion having a high correlation with the economic sustainability of the tourism destination, while product has a moderate relationship. Fur-

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thermore, the regression result shows that independent variables have a significant impact on the economic sustainability of the study area. This implies that tourism marketing could act as an enabler for the economic sustainability and well-being of tourist destinations.

Keywords: *tourism marketing, economic sustainability, tourist destinations, national parks*

JEL Codes: *M31, Q01, Z32*

Introduction

The globalization of regional and national economies, the need for change, the growth of the economy, the growth of the population, and industrialization have all made it possible that the natural environment could be harmed in a way that cannot be fixed (Verbeek et al., 2011). The environment has historically been given less priority in development policy and planning, with limited attention only during major disasters such as famines, floods, chemical explosions, or nuclear leaks (Blaikie et al., 2014). However, the escalating occurrence and intensity of human-induced disasters, the mounting population pressures on limited resources, and the persistent poverty that many people in the Third World experience as a result of unequal global political and economic relations have collectively brought the environment into sharper focus as an essential aspect of development (Simon, 1987).

As a result, researchers have been paying close attention to the idea of sustainability ever since the 1980s, making it an area of the research fields with the fastest growth (Hashemkhani Zolfani et al., 2015). The concept has evolved as both a negative and positive response to numerous tourism difficulties (Bramwell and Lane, 2012). It was recognized as capable of bringing about better improvements and securing favorable societal benefits (Hashemkhani Zolfani et al., 2015). Moreover, the United Nations has identified sustainable tourism as one of the strategic initiatives capable of driving the transition to a green economy and making substantial contributions to sustainable development (Butler, 1999; Gunness, 2016). Liu et al. (2013) also asserted that sustainable tourism maintains cultural integrity while protecting the natural environment, promotes

economic advantages, and establishes social integrity by fulfilling the desires of communities for better living conditions both in the long and short term.

In the tourism sector, the concept of sustainability is used to preserve biodiversity and natural ecosystems, enhance the well-being of the community by making the best possible use of what the local economy can offer, and give visitors better adventures and a sense of satisfaction (Plummer & Fennell, 2009). Puhakka and Saarinen (2013) argued that for future sustainable tourism development, tourist destinations and sustainable tourism cannot be separated. Particularly, national parks have huge potential to boost tourism and keep a good balance of environmental, social, and economic conditions on our competitive planet (Sriarkarin & Lee, 2018; Valdivieso et al., 2014). Tourism marketing may produce high-paying jobs for sustainable economic development, alleviate destitution, and inspire environmental stewardship if properly marketed (Watson et al., 2013; Wearing et al., 2016; Ristic et al., 2019). However, there has not been much research on how tourism marketing might enable economic sustainability in tourist areas (Pomering et al., 2011), even though it has a lot to do with the economic sustainability of national parks (Mihanyar et al., 2016).

Specifically, Bale Mountains National Park (BMNP) is the biggest national park with exceptional and extraordinary attractiveness and enormous tourism capacity in Ethiopia (Belayneh et al., 2013; Asmamaw & Verma, 2013). There are 278 distinct bird species in the park, 16 of which are indigenous to Ethiopia, and 78 different animal species, 22 of which are native to the country (Alers et al., 2007). Besides wildlife resources, it has a range of climates and topographies, along with beautiful landscapes and aquatic features, enticing local cultures, handcrafted goods, and indigenous know-how (Welteji & Zerihun, 2018; Watson et al., 2013). Nevertheless, in spite of tremendous opportunity and significance, environmental destruction, rapid settlement construction adjacent to the park, agricultural new settlement, overexploitation, and frequent and prolonged wildfires are becoming serious jeopardy to the existence and sustainability of the national park as well as sustainable tourism in the area (Mamo et al., 2010; Mamo & Bekele, 2011; Teshome et al., 2011).

Furthermore, Hansilo-Tiki (2017) reveals that the park's high level of endemism and species richness has been degraded. Moreover, the deficiency of an effective and efficient marketing management strategy, including tourism products, placing (distribution), pricing, and promotional

activities, are key problems in national parks (Sharpley & Pearce, 2007). This impacts the tourism industry's long-term sustainability in terms of sociocultural, environmental, and economic conditions (Mayer et al., 2010). To minimize this impact, tourism marketing could play a vital part. By promoting responsible and sustainable tourism practices, tourism marketing reduces the negative impact on destinations (Tay et al., 2016). It educates travelers about local customs, conservation efforts, and responsible behavior, encourages off-peak travel to reduce congestion, highlights eco-friendly lodgings and activities, and supports responsible tour operators (Jamrozy, 2007).

Tourism marketing also prioritizes the use of eco-friendly transportation options, responsible tourism guidelines, and partnerships with conservation organizations, with the goal of ensuring that tourism benefits both travelers and the destination while preserving its cultural and environmental integrity (E. E. Aman & Papp-Váry, 2023). Additionally, tourism marketing plays a vital role in generating revenue and job opportunities for destinations while also mitigating adverse effects through the use of appropriate strategies such as focusing on particular tourist segments, broadening its range of offerings, and actively promoting sustainable enterprises (Rahmoun & Baeshen, 2021). Likewise, through the implementation of community participation, infrastructural investment, and regulatory measures, tourism marketing provides a chance for countries struggling with unemployment and poverty to create jobs and generate income for both national and regional socioeconomic growth (Ali, 2021).

This facilitates the improvement of life quality, excellent working conditions, and the sustainability of social, economic, cultural, and natural environments (De Sausmarez, 2007; Reihanian et al., 2012; Shaalan, 2005). However, because short-term economic gains are given more importance than long-term ones, environmental and economic sustainability can be affected by the adverse influences of tourism, especially in developing nations (UNWTO, 2020). Moreover, there is a lack of studies regarding tourism marketing and the economic sustainability of national parks. Also, this study is unique to previous research in two aspects. First, it focuses on national parks, specifically BMNP. Second, the researchers conducted the research from a marketing point of view, using a marketing mix to evaluate how it impacts the economic sustainability of the national park.

This study is primarily valuable because it provides new insights to comprehend the connection between tourism marketing and the economic

sustainability of national parks in light of recent trends toward achieving sustainable development goals. Hence, the primary intent of the study was to find out how tourism marketing impacts the economic sustainability of BMNP. Specifically, the aims of the research were:

- To analyze how tourism products impact the economic sustainability of BMNP.
- To assess the influence of distribution channels on the economic sustainability of BMNP.
- To examine how pricing affects the economic sustainability of BMNP.
- To analyze how promotion impacts the economic sustainability of BMNP.

Review of related literature

The notion of tourism marketing

To enhance tourism in a way that benefits both humans and the environment, it is clear that tourism marketing must be used in a way that optimizes socioeconomic advantages to the community while reducing the social and ecological costs (Benghadbane & Khreis, 2019; Dwyer et al., 2009). Hence, it is imperative to gain a comprehensive understanding of tourism marketing prior to delving into how it affects the economy in sustainable tourism destinations.

Tourism marketing refers to organized and systematic efforts made by tourism sectors at the international, national, and regional levels to increase visitor satisfaction in the face of sustained tourism development (Raju, 2009). The author asserts that it is a collection of interrelated operations, including the management of certain components to generate a customer-satisfying exchange. Furthermore, Ali Akasha et al. (2020) illustrated the concept of tourism marketing as a function of marketing theories and ideas for the leisure, hospitality, and travel sectors. Thus, it is marketing theories and principles that promote, encourage, and transform the tourism sector while reducing resource depletion, pollution, animal extinction, and climate change (Benoumer & Mohamed, 2018).

Moreover, in the literature, the socioeconomic and environmental significance of tourism marketing has also been emphasized. For instance, Sima (2015) stated that tourism marketing plays a crucial role in influenc-

ing economic growth at federal, regional, and local levels since the tourism sector is formed from the travel environment, the hospitality sector, and tourist destination products, including its natural resources, cultural heritage, and cuisines and foods from various cultural backgrounds. Likewise, Albrecht (2016) states that tourism marketing for preservation and viable tourist destinations is understood as pandering to a neo-liberal program that marketing managers use to achieve their goals. Consequently, to encourage more sustainable tourist destinations with minimal negative effects, it is expected that tourism marketing will have a broad impact (Truong et al., 2016).

Sustainable tourism development

The original notion of sustainability involved two fundamental components: social and environmental sustainability (Du Pisani, 2006). However, currently, sustainable development is understood to be the process that aims to enhance the living conditions of citizens, including the delivery of public services, the promotion of the general welfare of its citizens, and the protection of their fundamental rights and liberties (Bebbington & Humphreys, 2018).

Brundtland (1987, p. 292) defines sustainable development as „development that meets the desires of the present without compromising the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs." In the same way, UNWTO and UNDP (2005, P. 12) describe sustainable tourism development as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, and host communities." Similarly, UNWTO (2013, p. 17) explains sustainable tourism development as "producing optimal use of environmentally friendly resources that comprise a key element in tourism improvement, maintaining essential ecological processes, and helping to preserve natural heritage and biodiversity".

Tourism marketing mix

Tourism products and economic sustainability

In broad terms, a product refers to anything that would meet the needs, wants, or desires of customers (Armstrong et al., 2006). It encompasses a variety of elements, including tangible commodities or goods, events, services, people, activities, experience, assets, places, institutions, concepts, and information (Kotler & Keller, 2014). However, in tourism, attractions and facilities are two main types of tourism products. Attractions are both

man-made and naturally occurring elements that serve to attract tourists to a particular destination (Madafuri, 2018), whereas medical services, public safety, clean water, roads, airports, railways, parking facilities, reliable electricity, and comfortable accommodation options are all examples of facilities (Melese & Belda, 2021).

Collectively, the combination of facilities and attractions creates a collection of subjective and intangible personal experiences for travelers or tourists called a tourism product, which is the fundamental economic engine of the tourism sector (Femenia-Serra et al., 2019). In developed countries, it is considered a crucial factor in the growing footprint (Truong et al., 2016). However, in developing countries, the contribution of tourism products to economic development is minuscule or does not contribute at all. Such an implication implies that the tourism product has been either too narrowly focused or poorly promoted (Gunness, 2016). Based on these reviews of the empirical literature, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: Tourism products have a substantial and positive impact on the economic sustainability of a national park.

Pricing and the economic sustainability

Price is the marketing mix element that directly generates revenue (Eavani & Nazari, 2012). It is often based on the cost plus an extra amount that is added to make a profit or gain on the investment (Kim & Lee, 2017). Moreover, it is a determinant of perceived quality, especially for the first-time customer, and while it lasts so, subsequent purchases are much more concerned with the judgment of value for money (Ciriković, 2014). Organizational pricing strategies influenced organizational economic benefits and had a positive influence on an organization's economic growth (De Toni et al., 2017). Hence, the sustainability of destinations is influenced by the use of proper pricing strategies and tactics (Melese & Belda, 2021). The literature mentioned above prompts the following hypothesis to be developed:

H2: Tourism prices have a substantial and positive influence on the economic sustainability of a national park.

Place and economic sustainability

In the tourism sector, Place, also known as a "channel of distribution", refers to the various intermediaries and platforms through which tourism products are marketed to consumers (Kotler et al., 2017). This can include

tour operators, online travel agencies, travel agents, and other intermediaries that connect travelers with tourism providers such as hotels, airlines, and car rental companies (Kotler & Keller, 2014). The choice of channel of distribution significantly influences the overall effectiveness of a product or service (Melese & Belda, 2021). The distribution channel is essential to the success and growth of tourism destinations (Ciriković, 2014). This is because of the complexity and diversity of tourism products, such as flights, hotels, tour packages, transportation, and activities, that need to be coordinated and packaged together (Eavani & Nazari, 2012). The literature mentioned above prompts the following hypothesis to be developed:

H3: Tourism distribution channels have a substantial and positive influence on the economic sustainability of a national park.

Promotion and economic sustainability

Tourism promotion is a marketing concept that involves the development of a strategy to entice a visitor (Fakana & Kumar, 2018). It also provides information that will assist them in deciding to purchase a product or service, create awareness about it, build the brand's image, and determine its positioning in the market (Kotler & Keller, 2014). It is all about making prospective customers aware of the services and products in the tourism area, persuading them to buy, and telling them that they will be happy and better off if they do (Kotler et al., 2010). According to Florido (2022) to persuade people to visit destinations, it should be communicated in the best possible manner. Promotion is the method by which destinations communicate with potential tourists, and it is essential to the economic sustainability of tourist destinations (Eavani & Nazari, 2012). Having analyzed the contribution of promotion in the literature, the next hypothesis was proposed:

H4: Tourism promotion has a substantial and positive influence on the economic sustainability of a national park.

Methods and Materials

The description of the study area

The designated study area for this research is located in the southeast part of Ethiopia, between the latitudes of 6°29' and 7°10'N and the longitudes of 39°28' and 39°57'E (Alers et al., 2007). It is found in the Oromia National Regional State, approximately 400 kilometers to the southeast of

Addis Ababa (Asmamaw & Verma, 2013; Belayneh et al., 2013). As depicted in Figure 1, the national park is a part of the Bale-Arsi massif mountains and covers 2150 km2 and stretches 74 kilometers from south to north and 53 kilometers west to east (Sebsibe & Yihune, 2018). It covers five districts: Adaba, Dinsho, Goba, Dolomena, Harenna Buluk, and Berbere (Forest & Enterprise, 2014). It encompasses the most territory above 3000 meters above sea level in Africa. It is unquestionably placed among the world's most spectacular destinations (Aman & Papp-Váry, 2021), with the largest Afro-alpine ecosystem, the second-biggest moist tropical forest, and the sole rainy cloud forest in the country (Engedasew, 2010). At an altitude of 4377 m above sea level, Tulu Dimtu is the tallest mountain in the Bale Mountains National Park and the second tallest mountain in Ethiopia (Wario et al., 2006) (*Figure 1*).

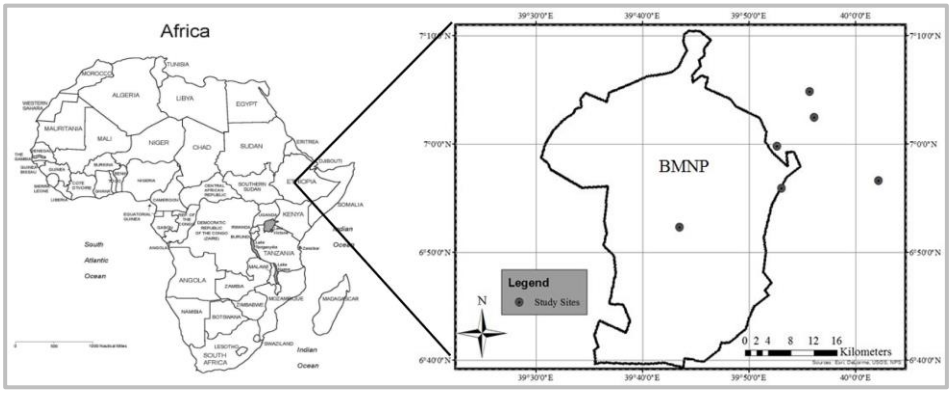

Figure 1: Study area map

Source: Sebsibe & Yihune, 2018.

Research Design

A mixed research approach, in line with explanatory and descriptive research designs, was applied to achieve the aim of the study. The explanatory design was proposed to explain the impact of independent variables (tourism marketing) on independent variables (the economic sustainability of destinations). The descriptive research design gives researchers a profile that describes significant characteristics of the phenomenon of interest from the standpoint of both individuals and organizations (Malhotra et al., 2002). The researchers also employed a descriptive research design to analyze and describe the respondent profiles and the mean ratings of the study variables.

To collect the data, both secondary and primary sources were used. The structured questionnaire was developed using a Likert scale, consisting of response options such as „strongly disagree," „disagree," „neutral," „agree," and „strongly agree." The questionnaire was designed to collect valuable insights regarding the tourism marketing and economic sustainability of tourist destinations, specifically focusing on the case of Bale Mountains National Park. The subject matter is divided into two distinct portions. The first section of this study focuses on the domain of tourism marketing, while the subsequent component delves into the assessment of the economic sustainability of Bale Mountains National Park.

Structured questionnaires were distributed to 143, including employees of the national park as well as different associations in the national park, such as the Nyala and Sanate guides associations, the Horse Renters' Association, the Walinjiregna wood providers, the Jedala Ferda cook association, the Handicraft providers, the Sanate and Dinsho coffee providers, the Sanate honey provider, and the Harenna Lodge, to collect primary data. Since the total number of employees from the national park and all associations was 143, the census sampling technique was applied. Secondary data was gathered through journals, books, other published and unpublished materials, different official documents, and websites.

Additionally, the key informant interviews were selected as a sample using the purposive sampling technique from the manager of the national park, the Bale cultural and tourism office, the Bale zone communication office, the Frankfurt Zoological Society, the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority, and the Oromia Tourism Commission, depending on the knowledge and skills of experts in the research area for the interview question. The data were collected from January 2023 to June 2023.

Data analysis and model specification

To illustrate the connection between explanatory and endogenous variable variables the following multiple regression model was applied.

$$Y = \beta o + \beta P + \ldots\ldots + Ɛ$$

Where: "Y" is the endogenous variable, "P" are explanatory variables, "β" is the coefficient of exogenous variables, "βo" is the intercept term, and "Ɛ" is the error term. Therefore, in line with the hypotheses of the research, the following multiple regression model was presented:

$$Y = \beta o \pm \beta 1\ (P1) + \beta 2\ (P2) + \beta 3\ (P3) + \beta 4\ (P4) + Ɛ$$

Where: „Y" is the economic sustainability and "P1" represents the product, "P2" the price, "P3" the place, and "P4" the promotion.

The model was tested using the analysis of variance (ANOVA). F-statistic and P-value allowed the model's significance to be determined at a 95% level of the confidence interval.

Validity and reliability

Content validity was employed to assess the extent to which a test or questionnaire measures all aspects of a study's variables. In this regard, all the study subjects were derived from the research of connected scholars and then evaluated by professionals in the field. Cronbach's alpha was utilized to determine the internal consistency of the constructs. The Cronbach's alpha values range from 0 to 1, whereas an acceptable value should be greater than 0.7 for the measure to be considered reliable (Hair et al. 2020). All of the construct's values are above 0.7, which is regarded as acceptable (see *Table 1*).

Table 1: The Cronbach's Alpha Value

Independent variables	α	N
Product	0.713	6
Price	0.785	5
Place	0.700	4
Promotion	0.735	5
Economic sustainability	0.826	7
Overall variable	0.923	27

Source: SPSS (Survey data, 2023)

Ethical consideration

To get ethical approval, the study's goal must be made clear to all relevant groups at all levels. The researcher was told that the information was secret, and the people who gave the information know that their identities and the information they gave will remain confidential.

Results and discussion

Participants profile

There were 143 survey forms distributed in all, 131 (91.6%) of which were legitimate and utilized for statistical analysis. Out of the respondents, the majority were male, accounting for 99 (75.6%), whereas only 32

(24.4%) were female. *Table 2* summarizes the general respondent characteristics.

Table 2: Profile of participants

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	99	75.6
	Female	32	24.4
	Total	131	100
Age	18-28	5	3.8
	29-39	80	61.1
	40-49	43	32.8
	50 and above	3	2.3
	Total	131	100
Level Education	Certificate (Secondary Education)	64	48.9
	Diploma (Vocational)	56	42.7
	First degree (Bachelor)	9	6.9
	Master's & above	2	1.5
	Total	131	100
Experience	1-2	2	1.5
	3-8	65	49.6
	9-13	48	36.6
	14 and above	16	12.2
	Total	131	100

Source: SPSS (Survey data, 2023)

Descriptive Statistics of Variables

As illustrated in *Table 3*, the study's result reveals that the tourism pricing score average and standard deviation are both higher than the group mean score at 17.4733 and 5.62457, respectively. With a mean and standard deviation of 16.6260; 4.75611 and 14.8855; 4.71273, respectively, the tourism product and promotion had roughly the same value, while the distribution channels for tourism had a lower mean value than the variables' combined mean score.

Table 3: Mean Rating

Study Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation

Product	131	16.6260	4.75611
Price	131	17.4733	5.62457
Place	131	11.6947	4.25693
Promotion	131	14.8855	4.71273

Source: SPSS (Survey data, 2023)

Tourism marketing and economic sustainability

Correlation analysis

The relationship between variables is calculated using Pearson correlation. According to Maiwada & Lawrence (2015), a correlation of less than 0.2 is considered to be extremely poor, while a correlation between 0.2 and 0.39 is regarded as modest. If the coefficient value falls between 0.40 and 0.59, the correlation is deemed moderately strong. If the correlation value is between 0.6 and 0.79, it strongly suggests a high correlation, and when it is between 0.8 and 1.0, it strongly suggests an extremely high correlation.

Table 4: Correlations result of the study

Correlations					
		Product	**Price**	**Place**	**Promotion**
Economic sustainability	*Pearson Correlation*	0.567*	0.716*	0.646*	0.758*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	131	131	131	131
* The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Source: SPSS (Survey data, 2023)

Table 4 shows the outcomes of the bivariate correlation, which was done to find out how variables are related to each other.

The p-value for the Person correlation table result is 0.000, which is significantly lower than the 0.05 threshold ($p<1$). The coefficient result of 0.567 demonstrates that there is a moderately strong association between explanatory variables (tourism product) and exogenous variables (economic sustainability of the destination). These findings suggest that the more tourism destination products are developed, the greater the economic sustainability of service providers and the profit of the tourist destination. In other words, tourist destinations' economic sustainability plummeted as tourism products fell.

The correlation (r) between price and economic sustainability is 0.716, proving a strong connection between price and the economic sustainability of destinations. This implies that the economic sustainability of Bale Mountains National Park improves when the charged price covers the full cost of the tourist, compensates for damage caused by the visitors, and takes into account what the consumer is willing to pay. However, if prices are not set appropriately, it contributes to a decline in the economic sustainability of tourist attractions.

The correlation (r) between place (distribution channel) and economic sustainability is 0.646, which shows there is a high correlation between price and economic sustainability of destinations. These relationships demonstrate that when a tourist destination's distribution channel performs well, it contributes to the destination's economic sustainability. Conversely, if there is an inadequate distribution channel for the products of tourist sites, it will hurt the economic competitiveness of tourist destinations.

The correlation (r) between promotion and economic sustainability is 0.758, which shows a high correlation exists among variables. These results indicated that, as the tourist destination is well promoted, its economic sustainability is also likely to increase at the same rate. In contrast, if there is not enough promotion of the destination, its economic sustainability will weaken. Overall, the correlation between independent variables (tourism marketing) and dependent variables (economic sustainability) in Bale Mountains National Park was found to be positive and significant.

Analysis of Multiple Regressions

Regression analysis is a mathematical technique that aims to measure the strength of the relationship between an independent variable and dependent variables. Furthermore, it is essential to comprehend how the mean value of the dependent variable varies when one of the independent variables is altered while the others remain unchanged (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Hence, to accomplish the main goal of this research, regression analysis is utilized to determine the influence of tourism marketing on the economic sustainability of Bale Mountains National Park.

The model assumptions and tests

- *Normality Test*
  Skewness and kurtosis are two basic approaches to checking the normality of the data. According to Fatih (2020), positive skewness values

indicate that clusters of data points occur at low levels, whereas negative skewness indicates clustering of data points at high levels. Consequently, the researchers confirmed from histograms, kurtosis, and skewness that the data were normally distributed. Bell-shaped histogram graphs demonstrate normality (see *Figure 2*).

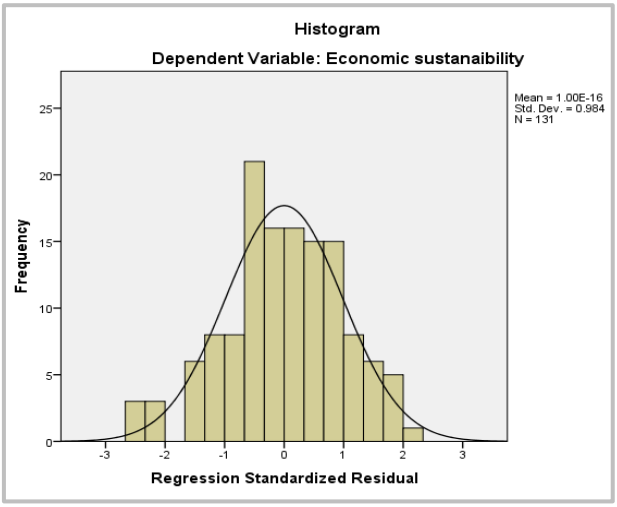

Figure 2: Regression Standardized Residual

Source: SPSS (Survey data, 2023)

If the skewness value is between -2 and +2, then the data is acceptable and normal. Whereas, if the kurtosis value of the data is less than 7, then the data are considered to be normal. An analysis of descriptive statistics was carried out, and the results show that the data is distributed normally (see *Table 5*).

Table 5: Normality test

	N	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	statistic	statistic	S.E	statistic	S.E
Product	131	0.851	0.212	1.114	0.420
Price	131	-0.972	0.212	0.136	0.420
Place	131	-0.547	0.212	-0.690	0.420
Promotion	131	-0.987	0.212	0.256	0.420
Economic sustainability	131	-1.037	0.212	0.239	0.420

Source: SPSS (Survey data, 2023)

- *Test of linearity*
  A P-P pilot test was used to test the linearity assumption of multiple regressions, and it was discovered that the correlation between economic sustainability and tourism marketing is linear. It is considered that a model satisfies the assumption of normality when the data is distributed around the diagonal and moves in the same direction as the diagonal. *Figure 3* demonstrates that the data have a normal distribution.

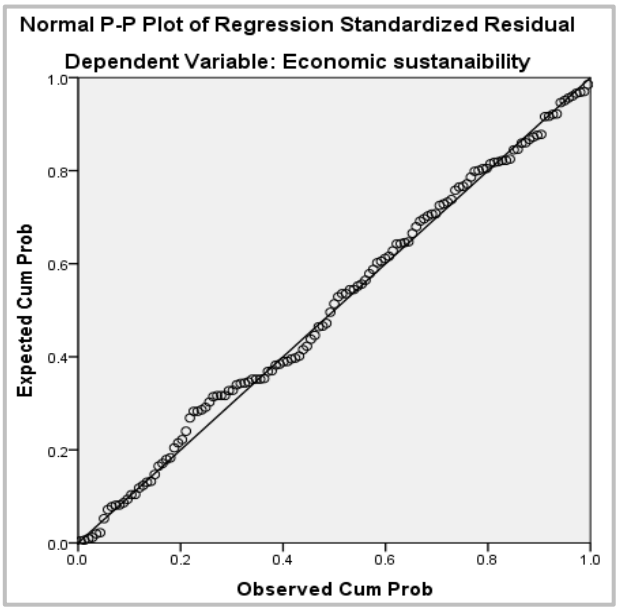

Figure 3: Normal P-P Plot

Source: SPSS (Survey data, 2023)

- *Homoscedasticity test*
  The homoscedasticity assumption asserts that the variation in the residual is fixed at each model point. The normality probability curve of the scatter plot demonstrates this (see *Figure 4*).

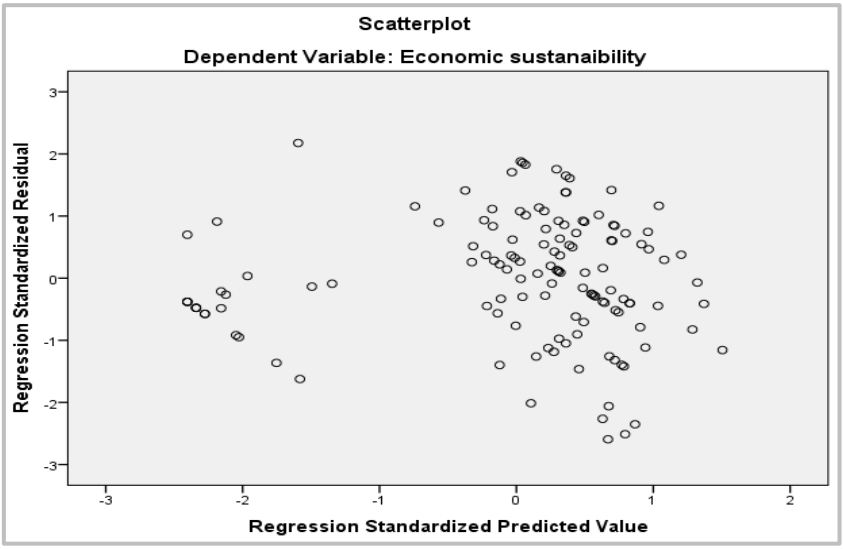

Figure 4: Regression standardized of predicted value

Source: SPSS (Survey data, 2023)

- *Multi-collinearity test*
  Gujarati (2004) defines „tolerance" as the percentage of predictor variance that cannot be explained by other predictors. Hence, extremely low numbers signify „overlap," or the distribution of predictive ability. Both the „tolerance" values exceeding 0.10 and the „variance inflation factor" values below 3 are pretty adequate. Furthermore, multicollinearity occurs when the relationship between the explanatory variables is high (r =0.9 or higher) (Pallant, 2016). *Table 6* demonstrated that the variation in inflation and tolerance exceeded the required score. This reveals that the independent variables are not affected by the multicollinearity issue.

Table 6: Tolerance and VTF result

Coefficients			
Model		**Collinearity Statistics**	
		Tolerance	**VIF**
	Promotion	0.370	2.700
	Place	0.498	2.009
	Price	0.447	2.238
	Product	0.793	1.260
a. Dependent Variable: Economic sustainability			

Source: SPSS (Survey data, 2023)

- *Auto- Correlation*
  The Durbin-Waston test can be used to validate this assumption. If the value is greater than 2, the correlation between the two residuals is negative. Alternatively, if the value is less than 2, a positive association exists (Pallant, 2016). Based on the data shown in the model summary, the Durbin-Watson value is 1.887, which is acceptable (see *Table 7*).
- *Model summary*
  Tourism marketing has a substantial and significant effect on the economic sustainability of Bale Mountains National Park, with an R2 of 0.702 (see *Table 7*). Moreover, Table 9 also revealed that all explanatory variables have a substantial effect on the economic sustainability of destinations.

Table 7: Model summary

Model Summary					
Model	R	R2	adjusted R2	Std. error	Durbin-Watson
1	0.838[a]	0.702	0.692	3.70425	1.887
a. Independent variables: (constant), product, price, place, and promotion. b. Dependent Variable: Economic sustainability					

Source: SPSS (Survey data, 2023)

- *ANOVA Test*
  The analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant F-statistic of 74,165 with a P value of 0.000, which is statistically significant and implies that the model is well-fit (see *Table 8*).

Table 8: ANOVA result

ANOVA[a]						
Model		**Sum of squares**	**df**	**Mean square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	*Regression*	4070.623	4	1017.656	74.165	.000[b]
	Residual	1728.904	126	13.721		
	Total	5799.527	130			
a. Independent variables: (constant), product, price, place, and promotion. b. Dependent variables: Economic sustainability						

Source: SPSS (Survey data, 2023)

The coefficient table demonstrates that promotion has a major impact on the dependent variable, followed by product, price, and place, respectively. The beta coefficient implies that when the explanatory variables change by a unit, the average change in economic sustainability of the study area changes (see *Table 9*). Hence, the researchers applied the following model to demonstrate the number of predictions for the determining factor:

$$Y = \beta o \pm \beta 1\ (P1) + \beta 2\ (P2) + \beta 3\ (P3) + \beta 4\ (P4) + Ɛ$$

Where: "Y" is the economic sustainability of a destination, βo = intercept term, and β1, β2, β3, and β4 are the regression coefficients of product, price, place, and promotion, respectively.

Table 9: Regression coefficient of Independent Variable

Coefficients						
Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**T**	**Sig.**
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
	(Constant)	0.129	1.358		0.095	0.925
	Product	0.359	0.077	0.256	4.688	0.000
	Price	0.304	0.086	0.256	3.515	0.001
	Place	0.222	0.108	0.141	2.049	0.042
	Promotion	0.528	0.113	0.372	4.660	0.000

Source: SPSS (Survey data, 2023)

Hence, from the above regression equation, the researchers derived β-values as follows:

$$Y = 0.129 + 0.359\ (P1) + 0.304\ (P2) + 0.222\ (P3) + 0.528\ (P4) + \varepsilon$$

The justification for the given equation is as follows:
Assuming all other independent variables are constant, a one-unit increment in the product will result in a 0.359% improvement in the Bale Mountains national park's economic sustainability; a one-unit increment in price will lead to an upsurge in the economic sustainability of the Bale Mountains national park by 0.304 units; a unit increase in place or channel of distribution will lead to an upsurge in the economic sustainability of the Bale Mountains national park by 0.222 units; and a unit increase in a promotion will lead to an upsurge in the economic sustainability of the Bale Mountains national park by 0.528 units.

- *The hypothesis testing*
  Table 10 shows that there is a significant relationship between independent variables (tourism marketing) and dependent variables (economic sustainability of destinations).

Table 10: Summary of hypothesis testing

Hypotheses	Betta Coefficients	p-value	Decision
H1: Tourism products have a substantial impact on the sustainability of destinations.	0.256	0.000	H1: Accepted.
H2: Tourism prices have a substantial influence on sustainability of destinations.	0.256	0.001	H2: Accepted.
H3: Tourism distribution channels have a substantial influence on sustainability of destinations.	0.141	0.042	H3: Accepted.
H4: Tourism promotion has a substantial influence on sustainability of destinations.	0.372	0.000	H4: Accepted.

Source: SPSS (Survey data, 2023)

The relationship between product and economic sustainability is substantial, with $\beta = 0.256$, $t = 4.688$, and $P = 0.000$ at a confidence level of 95%. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis that tourism products have a substantial impact on the sustainability of destinations is supported, and the null hypothesis is rejected. The outcomes of this research are coherent with the prior research done by Karini, 2016; Karnelis, 2017; Supriyanto & Taali, 2018; and Yamawati & Indiani, 2019; all of which concluded that if the services or products given are appeal-

ing, fulfill consumers' requirements and preferences, and are of exceptional quality, then visitors are more inclined to visit the location again and purchase the products. This implies that the availability of tourism products found in the park is crucial to the economic sustainability of the national park.

At a 95% confidence level, multiple regression revealed there is a substantial relationship between price and economic sustainability with β =.256, t=3.515 and p =.000<0.05). Hence, the alternative hypothesis that tourism prices have a substantial influence on the sustainability of destinations is supported, and the null hypothesis is rejected. These findings validate Awinasi & Rastini (2018), Karini (2016), Karnelis (2017), and Supriyanto & Taali (2018), who revealed that price has a favorable and substantial effect on the acquisition and stay intentions of tourists. This implies that the pricing of given goods and services is vital to the economic sustainability of the studied area. However, this study contradicted Karim et al.'s (2021) argument that pricing has no impact on tourism destination development.

The regression result revealed a substantial connection between the distribution channel and the economic sustainability of tourist destinations, with a value of (β =.141, t=2.049, and p =.000<0.05) at a 95% confidence level. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis that the tourism distribution channels (place) have a substantial influence on the sustainability of destinations was supported by the data set, and the null hypothesis was rejected. These results are consistent with those of prior studies by Awinasi & Rastini (2018) and Kavanillah & Ridlwan (2018), which found that channels of distribution have positive impact on product acquisition, revisiting an area, and spending more time in the area. This implies that the presence of distribution channels in the park is crucial to the economic sustainability of the area.

Multiple regressions also show a significant association between promotion and economic sustainability with β =.372, t=4.660, and p =.000<0.05) at a 95% confidence level. Hence, the study concluded that the data set supported the alternative hypothesis that tourism promotion has a substantial influence on the sustainability of destinations, and the null hypothesis was rejected. The results of this study corroborate those of (Awinasi and Rastini (2018) Karini (2016), Mariya and Christos (2019), who discovered that the influence of promotions on consumers' willingness and intentions to make a purchase of a product

or service is positive and statistically significant. This shows that promoting the national park is essential for the park's long-term economic sustainability.

Tourism marketing practices in Bale Mountains National Park

Regarding tourism products, an interviewee from the Bale Zone cultural and tourism office said that the local government has set up several small businesses that make a wide range of products for visitors to Bale Mountains National Park and to help the local economy grow. According to an interviewee, the wide range of tourist attractions in the park enables a rise in local and international visitors to the area and allows the community to offer different services to tourists. An informant interviewee from the Bale Mountain National Park manager also noted that they have seven tourism service provider associations that provide essential services to park visitors. The park and the associations generate revenue from the products and services that they offer. However, the park's revenue has experienced a decline as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to a reduction in visitor numbers during the preceding two years. Moreover, the interviewee said that there is a lack of infrastructure, particularly roads and transportation, which hinders a lot of local and international tourists from visiting the park. This implies that the park is not making sufficient income from the massive tourism product, despite the fact that it comprises one of Ethiopia's biggest national parks with exceptional and extraordinary attractions, wildlife resources, enticing local cultures, and enormous tourism potential.

Similarly, an informant interviewee from the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority and the Frankfurt Zoological Society stated that the park has outstanding environmental beauty and is home to endemic flora and fauna, which attracts tourists and helps the community support its economic well-being. The park also has a huge impact on climate change, the local economy, the lives of people, and biodiversity. Bale Zone cultural and tourism office said that the park is providing a water tower and flow regulation for up to 20 million downstream users through the provision of climate stability, the use of renewable assets, including wood, timber, grassland, and forest-based and non-timber products (e.g., wild coffee and honey), as well as substantial, mainly unrealized potential from tourism. This implies that the existence and sustainability of the park provide local and global people with significant environmental, social, and economic benefits.

Based on the interview with tourism experts at Bale Mountains National Park, if the national park uses a different pricing strategy, it will help to cover some environmental damage caused by tourists, generate a respectable amount of income for the national park, and yield an appropriate amount of advantages for the local community. The price the national parks charge is critical to creating excellent tourist experiences and assisting tourists in extending their stays at the destination. However, the price the national park charges for the available tourism product is very low, which affects the survival of the national park. Consequently, the price paid by tourists shouldn't cover all of the costs associated with their trip or promise them a pleasant experience.

Regarding channel distribution (place), the manager of the park stated that the national park is engaged with important stakeholders at different government levels, non-governmental organizations, various tour operators, and travel agencies. The Bale Zone Cultural and Tourism Office states that the availability of parks near Hawassa and Shashemane cities, as well as attractive natural resources and comfortable weather conditions, motivate visitors to the area.

Concerning tourism product promotion, interviewees (an informant interview from the Bale Zone Cultural and Tourism Office, the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority, the Ethiopian Tourism Organization, and the Oromia Tourism Commission) answered that Bale Mountains National Park promotes its products and services through its websites and different social media platforms. However, the National Park Manager stated the national park is working with both government and private media, such as the Ethiopia Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), the Oromia Broadcasting Network (OBN), Fana, Nahoo, the Oromia Broadcasting Service (OBS), and Walta, to promote and enhance the sustainability of tourism and the national park. All interviewees agreed that promoting the Bale Mountains National Park on broadcast media, social media, and websites enhances and maintains the national park's sustainability and sustainable tourism development. Finally, after comparing the information from the interview and the questionnaires that were collected and analyzed, the researchers came to the conclusion that tourism marketing has a substantial and positive effect on Bale Mountain National Park's ability to maintain the sustainability of tourism and the national park.

Conclusion

This research is intended to assess the effect of tourism marketing on the economic sustainability of a tourist destination in Bale Mountains National Park. Tourism products had modest but significant correlations with the economic sustainability of the tourist destination, while price, place, and promotion had a substantial correlation with the economic sustainability of the tourist destination. Furthermore, the regression results revealed that exogenous variables have a positive and significant effect on Bale Mountains National Park's economic sustainability.

Additionally, the regression analysis's findings indicated that tourism marketing was the first and most imperative element of Bale Mountains National Park's economic sustainability, followed by product, price, and place, respectively. Generally, the research's findings indicate that the independent variables (tourism marketing) could explain 70.2% of the dependent variables (economic sustainability). According to the study's findings and what the researchers observed, Bale Mountains National Park's tourism marketing practices are still in their infancy. Therefore, the following suggestions are expected to have a significant influence on enhancing sustainable tourism at the destination.

Primarily, providing quality tourism products and facilitating good infrastructure in the park could enhance environmental, social, and economic sustainability in the area. Hence, the federal government, regional governments, and local governments should work together to improve the national park's tourism products, such as attractions, medical services, public safety, clean water, roads, airports, parking facilities, reliable electricity, and comfortable accommodation options.

Moreover, the fee charged by the visitors should compensate for the entire expense of their trip, promise a good experience for the visitor, generate a respectable amount of income for the national park, yield an appropriate amount of advantages for the local community, and cover the environmental harm caused by visitors. As a result, to preserve and improve the sustainability of both tourism and the national park, different pricing strategies should be used.

Furthermore, to reach the target customers at the right time, place, and person, the national park should design and develop different means

of channel distribution in collaboration with the local, regional, and federal governments. Lastly, in addition to the current promotional tools, the national park should use digital marketing tools to promote itself.

5. Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research

The economic sustainability of tourist destinations is the most important part of sustainable tourism. The researchers acknowledged that tourism destinations could benefit from a tourism marketing mix and that using tourism marketing can reshape the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism destinations. This study thus focuses on four traditional tourism marketing mix elements, which include price, product, promotion, and place, to examine the economic sustainability of Bale Mountain National Park.

The researchers acknowledge that including both traditional and modern forms of tourism marketing elements in the study would have resulted in a more comprehensive research result and finding. Nevertheless, we believe that the traditional tourism marketing mix used in this study is still highly representative of the topic and is often regarded as an essential factor in measuring tourism marketing's effect on the economic sustainability of tourist destinations. Future researchers should take all tourism marketing mixes into account and include them in their studies.

Moreover, the research was performed only in Bale Mountains National Park, and the findings might not be generalized to all parks in Ethiopia. Therefore, future researchers could consider the other tourist destinations found in Ethiopia to make the research more statistically significant and infer generalizations from the findings accordingly. On the other hand, the study was conducted only on employee perception and did not include visitor perception. Hence, future researchers could consider customer perception.

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