



Research Article

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Leveraging Social Media as a Marketing Tool to Combat Crime in African Destination Marketing: Ghana in Perspective

Ronald Osei Mensah

*Social Development Section,
Centre for Languages and Liberal Studies,
Takoradi Technical University,
Takoradi, Ghana;
Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
Faculty of Social Sciences,
University of Cape Coast,
Cape Coast, Ghana*

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Abstract

This research explores the potential of leveraging social media as a marketing tool to combat crime in destination marketing, with a focus on Ghana as a representative case study in Africa. As tourism plays a vital role in Ghana's economy, addressing crime concerns is crucial for attracting international visitors. The study aims to investigate how social media can be harnessed strategically to dispel crime perceptions, promote safety, and enhance destination marketing efforts. With a constructivism research philosophical position, the study adopted a case study research approach. Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews, which were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data was processed using Nvivo version 12.1 analyzed with the help of content analysis approach. The findings provided valuable insights for Ghana, highlighting the significance of social media in building a positive destination image while ensuring visitor safety. It was evident that crime-related discussions on social media significantly impact the perception of Ghana as a tourist destination. The investigation into the strategies and approaches employed by Ghanaian tourism authorities and stakeholders in managing and addressing crime-related concerns on social media provided valuable insights into their efforts to promote safety and enhance destination marketing. Successful practices were identified, including user-Generated Content Promotion and collaboration with law enforcement. It was recommended that Ghanaian tourism authorities may regularly engage with social media users, respond promptly to concerns and inquiries, and provide accurate and up-to-date information about safety measures and crime statistics in the country.

Keywords: Africa; Crime; Decision-making processes; Destination marketing; Developing country; Social media; Tourists

1. Introduction

The influence of social media on destination perceptions is a global phenomenon (Osei, Mensah, & Amenumey, 2018). In recent years, social media platforms have transformed how travelers interact with and perceive potential destinations. Discussions related to crime and safety on social media play a significant role in shaping travelers' attitudes and decisions (Japutra et al., 2019). Potential tourists often turn to social media for information, seeking insights from other travelers and locals about their experiences with safety and security in various destinations (Osei et al., 2018). Many countries worldwide have recognized the importance of managing crime-related discussions on social media to enhance their destination marketing efforts. Successful practices from different regions include real-time engagement with users, addressing concerns transparently, and sharing updates on safety measures (Ahmad, Abu Bakar & Ahmad, 2019). By actively managing social media conversations about crime, destinations can establish trust, demonstrate their commitment to visitor safety, and create a positive image that appeals to potential tourists (Law, Buhalis & Cobanoglu, 2014).

Similarly, in Ghana, the influence of social media on destination perceptions and attitudes towards crime is undeniable. According to Maphanga and Henama (2019), as one of the leading tourism destinations in West Africa, Ghana's tourism industry depends on portraying itself as a safe and secure country for travelers. Potential tourists are increasingly turning to social media to gather information about the safety situation in the country before making travel decisions. The tourism industry plays a pivotal role in Ghana's economic growth and development, contributing significantly to foreign exchange earnings and employment opportunities. However, like many other destinations, Ghana faces the challenge of managing crime-related concerns that can impact its image as a safe and attractive destination for potential tourists (Deichmann & Frempong, 2016). In today's digital age, social media platforms have become influential channels where perceptions and attitudes towards travel destinations are formed and disseminated (Adhikari & Adhikari, 2020). Understanding how crime in Ghana is portrayed on social media and the factors influencing potential tourists' perceptions is crucial for destination marketing authorities and stakeholders.

The study focused specifically to offer answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: How do potential tourists perceive and approach the issue of crime in Ghana, as reflected in discussions on social media?

RQ2: How do Ghanaian tourism authorities utilize strategies and approaches in addressing crime-related concerns on social media platforms?

The significance of the study lies in its potential to inform effective destination marketing strategies, enhance visitor safety, improve social media management, contribute to policymaking, advance academic knowledge, and promote sustainable tourism development in Ghana. By addressing the research question, this study can play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of Ghana as a safe and attractive destination for

global travelers.

2. Literature Review

The pertinent literature is summarized in this section.

2.1 Related literature

The use of social media as a marketing tool for destination marketing in developing nations has been the subject of numerous studies. For example, a study by Islam et al. (2019) looked into how social media influenced Bangladeshi tourists' decision-making. The study discovered that by giving travelers information about vacation spots, lodging, and other relevant services, social media has a favorable effect on their decision-making process. Similarly, a study by Musa and Omar (2019) on the use of social media in destination marketing in Malaysia found that social media has underwrote significantly to the promotion of tourism destinations in the country. While these studies by Islam et al. (2019) and Musa and Omar (2019) afford concrete insight of social media's impact on promoting tourism in developing countries like Bangladesh and Malaysia. The literature fails to present a holistic view of the topic, neglecting key aspects like the digital divide, technological infrastructure, and cultural sensitivities in developing nations. Hence, by acknowledging these challenges and engaging in a more rigorous analysis, we can develop effective and responsible social media strategies such as developing measures to combat misinformation and online scams that can damage the reputation of destinations and harm tourists and as well contribute to sustainable tourism development in all nations, including those still developing.

Moreover, research has exposed that social media has facilitated the expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector in emerging states. A study by Cruz and Koens (2019) on the use of social media in SMEs in the tourism sector in Costa Rica found that social media has enabled SMEs to reach a wider audience, improve customer engagement, and increase revenue. Additionally, a study by Siahaan et al. (2020) on the role of social media in SMEs in the tourism sector in Indonesia found that social media has significantly contributed to the growth and development of SMEs in the country. The use of studies by Cruz and Koens (2019) and Siahaan et al. (2020) strengthens the argument by providing concrete examples of successful SME utilization of social media platforms in Costa Rica and Indonesia, respectively. While the literature provides valuable insights, a critical analysis reveals certain limitations and calls for a more comprehensive approach by equipping SME owners and employees with adequate digital skills and the technical know-how for effective social media marketing and engagement and as well to address the financial limitations and providing access to affordable technology and internet connectivity for SMEs to leverage social media effectively.

Furthermore, social media has been found to have a substantial consequence on the brand image of tourist destinations in developing countries. A study by Olorunfemi and Akanbi (2019) on the effect of social media on destination branding in Nigeria found that social media has an impressive impact on the brand image of tourist destinations in the country. Similarly, a study by Kim and Lee (2019) on the consequence of social media on destination branding in South Korea found that social media has significantly contributed to the promotion and branding of tourist destinations in the country. The studies by Olorunfemi and Akanbi (2019) and Kim and Lee (2019) provides concrete examples of how destinations in Nigeria and South Korea have successfully leveraged social media for branding purposes. The literature effectively presents how social media can positively influence destination image by increasing awareness, shaping perceptions, and building relationships with potential tourists and highlighting its potential to overcome traditional marketing challenges and reach wider audiences. However, the literature fails to add that creating compelling and authentic content that showcases the unique culture, attractions, and experiences of a destination is crucial for attracting audience interest and building brand associations. Hence, fostering two-way communication with potential tourists through social media platforms allows destinations to build relationships, address concerns, and create a sense of community. This can be attained by collaborating with relevant and trusted influencers to significantly increase reach and credibility, especially among target audiences with specific interests.

Moreover, social media has been found to be an effective tool for engaging tourists and improving their satisfaction levels. A study by Akinyemi et al. (2019) on the influence of social media on tourists' satisfaction in Ghana revealed that social media has an impressive consequence on tourists' satisfaction levels by providing them with timely and accurate information, facilitating communication with tourism service providers, and enhancing their overall experience. Additionally, a study by Pinto et al. (2019) on the role of social media in tourists' engagement in Brazil found that social media has contributed meaningfully to tourists' interaction and involvement in various tourism activities. The literature effectively presents how social media can enhance tourist engagement and satisfaction by providing information, facilitating communication, and enabling participation in tourism activities. Yet fails to acknowledge potential downsides like information overload, misinformation, and unrealistic expectations that could negatively affect satisfaction.

The promotion of sustainable tourism practices in underdeveloped nations has also been proven to be greatly aided by social media. According to a study by Shahid et al. (2021) on the use of social media to promote sustainable tourism in Pakistan, social media has the potential to do so by fostering stakeholder communication, promoting awareness of environmental issues, and encouraging responsible tourism behavior. Similarly, a study by Gao et al. (2019) on the role of social media in promoting sustainable tourism in China found that social media has underwritten significantly to

the advancement of sustainable tourism practices in the country. The literature effectively presents how social media can contribute to sustainable tourism by facilitating communication, raising awareness, and encouraging responsible behavior among stakeholders. These studies by Shahid et al. (2021) and Gao et al. (2019) provide concrete examples of how social media has been utilized for sustainability purposes in Pakistan and China, respectively. In contrast, the literature fails to address the diverse needs and contexts of different underdeveloped nations and how social media strategies should be adapted accordingly. Therefore, building partnerships with local organizations, NGOs, and sustainability experts can enhance the reach and impact of social media campaigns.

In addition, social media is an operative tool for crisis management in the tourism section in developing countries. A study by Shang and Pan (2020) on the role of social media in crisis management in the tourism industry in China found that social media has enabled tourism service providers to respond quickly and effectively to crisis situations, reducing the impact on tourists and the industry. Moreover, a study by Zeng and Gerritsen (2014), on the use of social media in crisis administration in the tourism sector in Spain revealed that social media has enabled communication among tourism service offers and tourists during crisis situations enhancing their safety and security. Specifically citing the studies conducted by Shang and Pan (2020) in China and Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) in Spain emphasizes the positive impact of social media on communication frameworks during crisis situations in the tourism sector. The findings reveal that social media facilitates communication between tourism service providers and tourists, contributing to enhanced safety and security measures. However, it is essential to acknowledge potential limitations which may include variations in crisis types, cultural contexts, and the evolving nature of social media platforms. Moreso, the generalizability of findings from China and Spain to other developing countries might be subject to contextual differences.

Another study conducted in India by Khanna and Verma (2020) explored the consequence of social media on higher education in the country. The study revealed that the way students learn and connect with their peers and professors has altered as an outcome of the use of social media sites like Facebook and WhatsApp. Additionally, it was discovered that social media gave kids access to a variety of learning opportunities and tools.

Similarly, a study by Sulaiman and Khalid (2019) investigated the use of social media as a teaching tool in Malaysian universities. The study revealed that social media can be an active tool for enhancing students' appointment and participation in learning activities. Social media was also found to facilitate communication between students and teachers, allowing for quick and easy feedback. The literature underscores the transformative impact of social media on higher education in India and Malaysia. However, a comprehensive understanding of the broader implications and potential challenges requires further exploration. Future research could benefit from addressing

cultural variations and critically examining both positive and negative aspects of integrating social media into educational settings.

A study by Adhikari and Adhikari (2020) on the consequence of social media on education in Nepal found that social media can be a powerful tool for improving students' access to educational resources and for promoting collaborative learning. The study also showed that social media can be used to surge student interaction and motivation in learning development.

Furthermore, a study by Zafar and Rana (2020) explored the effect of social media on education in Pakistan. The study revealed that social media can be an impressive tool for enhancing the value of education and for offering students access to a wealth of learning resources. Social media was also found to facilitate communication and collaboration among students, leading to improved academic performance. The studies above by Adhikari and Adhikari (2020) as well as Zafar and Rana (2020) primarily focused on the positive aspects of social media in education, and there is a lack of exploration into potential drawbacks or challenges associated with its use. The effects of social media on education could be influenced by variations in educational systems, technological infrastructure, and sociocultural factors across different regions or countries.

Another study by Ahmed and Hussain (2021) investigated the use of social media in higher education in Bangladesh. The study found that social media can be a relevant tool for encouraging student interaction and participation in learning activities. Social media was also found to provide students with access to a wide range of educational resources, leading to improved academic performance. A study by Mendoza and Garcia (2020) on the effect of social media on tutoring in the Philippines revealed that social media can be an active tool for enhancing student interaction and participation in learning activities. Social media was also found to facilitate communication between students and teachers, leading to improved academic performance. In as much as both studies emphasize the role of social media in encouraging student interaction and participation in learning activities. However, the nature of student interaction on social media platforms may vary, ranging from meaningful academic discussions to more casual or distracting exchanges.

Similarly, a study by Nadeem and Bilal (2020) investigated the consequence of social media on education in Pakistan. The study found that social media can be a useful tool for promoting group learning and providing students with access to a range of educational resources. It has been discovered that social media helps students and teachers communicate better, which improves academic results. A study by Sathishkumar and Ragupathi (2019) explored the use of social media as a teaching tool in Indian higher education. The study revealed that social media can be an active tool for encouraging student interactions and participation in learning activities. Social media was also found to offer students with access to a wide range of educational resources, leading to improved academic performance. The literature above expressly hints social

media can be a valuable tool for bridging the gap between students and teachers. It enables students to ask questions, receive feedback, and participate in discussions outside of the classroom, potentially enhancing engagement and learning. However, unequal access to technology and internet connectivity can exacerbate existing inequalities and limit the potential benefits of social media for all students.

Another study by Ogunleye and Adeoye (2019) investigated the use of social media in Nigerian higher education. The study exposed that social media can be an active tool for encouraging student interaction and participation in learning activities. Social media was also found to facilitate communication and collaboration among students, leading to improved academic outcomes. Again, a study by Singh and Tripathi (2019) on the use of social media in Indian higher instruction exposed that social media can be an active tool for encouraging collaborative learning and for providing students with entry to a wide range of educational resources. Social media was also found to facilitate communication between students and teachers, leading to improved academic performance. The literature highlights the positive impact of social media on higher education in both Nigeria and India with both studies indicating that social media platforms facilitate active engagement through discussions, collaborative projects, and interactive learning activities. This leads to a more dynamic and engaging educational environment compared to traditional classrooms.

Guisti and Raya (2019), undertook a study to analyze the effect of crime perception and information format on tourists' willingness/intention to travel. The study examines the influence of four cognitive primes on participants' willingness to travel to Colombia in a hypothetical scenario. Participants were exposed to different stimuli in the form of videos. The findings reveal that when crime perception is evoked in the stimuli, there is a significant negative impact on participants' willingness to travel. Additionally, the study identifies significant differences in the effectiveness of message delivery formats. Negative messages have a more pronounced effect when delivered through a TV-news-type format, while positive messages are more effective when presented in a promotional video format. The study by Guisti and Raya (2019) sheds light on the complex relationship between crime perception, message format, and tourists' willingness to travel. For example, when exposed to stimuli evoking crime perception, participants were less likely to travel to Colombia, showcasing the significant influence of perceived safety on travel decisions. However, positive messages were more effective in promoting travel intentions when presented in a promotional video format. This highlights the need for specific formats to effectively communicate positive aspects of a destination when facing negative perceptions.

Avraham and Ketter (2017) state that their study looks on the media tactics used by Sub-Saharan African (SSA) nations to repair their destination image during and after crises, with the aim of luring in foreign tourists. The study looked at a variety of case studies to discover similar tactics employed by SSA states in order to accomplish this goal. The "multi-step model for altering place image" is the theoretical foundation for

the research. The study's foundation is qualitative content analysis of news articles, press interviews, campaigns, and other marketing endeavours. According to the study's conclusions, SSA marketers and decision-makers used three different categories of techniques to market their destinations before, during, and after tourism crises. These strategies include source-focused strategies, such as media cooperation, media relations, managing physical and economic threats, employing the internet as an alternative source; message-focused strategies, such as ignoring the crisis, acknowledging negative image, reducing the scale of the crisis, delivering counter-messages, associating with well-known brands and celebrities, addressing the crisis directly, and turning liabilities into assets; and audience-focused strategies, such as invoking patriotism and emphasizing personal/national heritage while adapting target audiences. Despite the variations among the countries, the research demonstrated that marketers in the SSA region have adopted similar strategies to tackle crises and restore their destination images effectively. These findings provided valuable insights for destination marketing practitioners and policymakers in Sub-Saharan Africa to handle crises and attract international tourism successfully. Avraham and Ketter's (2017) study provide a valuable contribution to understanding how SSA nations manage destination image during and after crises. However, there is the need to investigate the effectiveness of specific tactics across different crises and within diverse contexts as well as examine the long-term impact of crisis communication strategies on destination image and tourist behavior.

In summary, the study on "Leveraging Social Media as a Marketing Tool to Combat Crime in African Destination Marketing: Ghana in Perspective" stands out due to its specific focus on crime perception, destination marketing in Ghana, and its aim to examine how social media can be utilized to address crime-related concerns and promote tourism in African countries. On the other hand, the other studies cover a broader range of topics related to the impact of social media in tourism, branding, sustainability, education, and crisis management across different countries and contexts.

2.2 Theoretical framework

The theory that best guides the study is the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Ruggiero, 2000; Evans, 1990). The Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory is a communication theory that focuses on understanding why and how individuals actively seek and use media to satisfy their specific needs and desires. In the context of social media and destination marketing, this theory is relevant because it helps to explain why potential tourists engage with social media platforms to gather information about crime in Ghana and how this information shapes their perceptions and attitudes towards the destination.

The U&G theory remains currently relevant in the face of a rapidly changing media environment. The theory insights are valuable for understanding how audiences engage

with diverse media platforms, including social media, streaming services, and mobile technologies. Empirical evidence suggest researchers are applying the U&G theory to explore topics such as social media addiction, fake news and misinformation, impact of mobile media on social interaction as well as use of media for political engagement and activism (Kaur et al., 2020).

According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, individuals are active consumers of media content, and they select specific media channels based on their needs and goals (Weiyan, 2015; Katz et al., 1974; Levy & Windahl, 1984). In the case of potential tourists exploring crime-related discussions on social media platforms, they seek gratifications such as information, social interaction, and reassurance about their safety concerns. By analyzing the prevailing perceptions and attitudes towards crime on social media, this study can shed light on the specific gratifications that potential tourists seek when engaging with crime-related content related to Ghana. The theory also emphasizes the active role of the audience in interpreting and using media content. Through in-depth interviews, the study gain insights into how potential tourists interpret crime-related information on social media and how this interpretation influenced their attitudes and decision-making process. Understanding these interpretations is crucial for destination marketers and tourism authorities to develop tailored communication strategies to address concerns, provide relevant information, and foster positive perceptions of Ghana as a safe destination. In conclusion, the Uses and Gratifications Theory is the most suitable framework to guide this study because it provides a comprehensive understanding of how potential tourists actively engage with social media to satisfy their needs related to crime information, thereby shaping their perceptions and attitudes towards Ghana as a tourist destination.

2.3 Conceptual framework

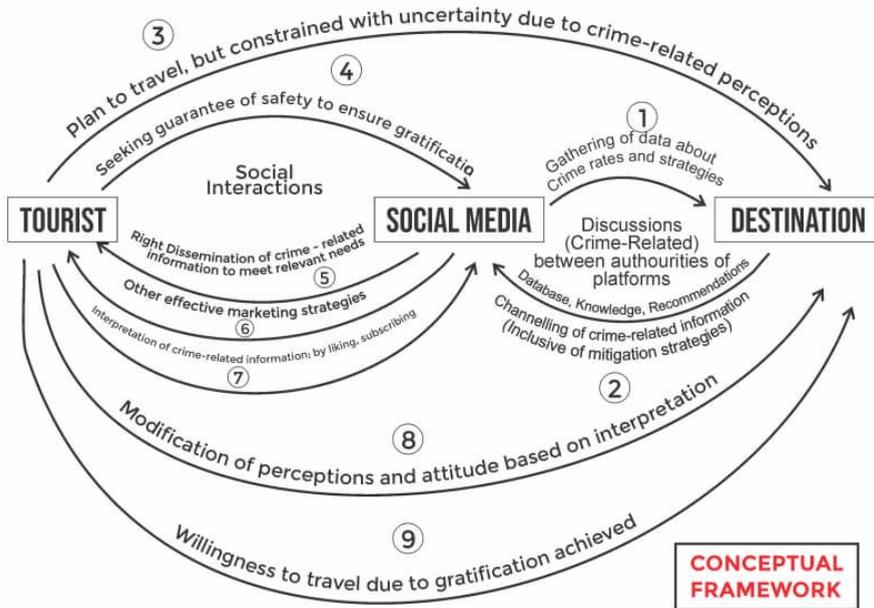


Figure 1: Conceptual framework: Tourist-Social Media Interactions model

The developed conceptual framework as shown in figure 1 above for this study presents a model of how tourist interactions with social media influence their decision-making process. The framework highlights key relationships between social media exposure and social media engagement. On the part of social media exposure, tourists are exposed to social media content from a variety of sources, including tourism websites, travel bloggers, and social media influencers. This exposure can influence their awareness of destinations, attractions, and experiences. Again, social media engagement affords tourists opportunities to engage with social media content by liking, sharing, and commenting on posts. This engagement can lead to increased knowledge and interest in specific destinations or experiences.

Hence, social media-based decision-making fosters tourists to use social media information to make decisions about their travel plans, such as where to go, what to do, and where to stay.

Additionally, the Tourist-Social Media Interactions model also identifies several factors that can moderate the relationship between social media and tourist decision-making, including tourist characteristics such as tourists' demographics, interests, and travel experience which tends to influence how they use social media and how social media influences their decision-making. For example, younger travelers may be more likely to use social media to research travel destinations, while older travelers may rely

more on traditional sources of information such as travel brochures.

Moreso, the choice of social media platform thus the specific social media platforms that tourists use can also influence their decision-making. For example, tourists may use Instagram to find inspiration for visually appealing destinations, while they may use TripAdvisor to read reviews of hotels and restaurants.

Similarly, the available social media content that tourists are exposed to can also influence their decision-making. For example, tourists may be more likely to be influenced by user-generated content such as photos and videos shared by other travelers than by advertising content.

The developed Tourist-Social Media Interactions conceptual framework in figure 1 above for this study is supported by a growing body of research. For example, a study by Alam et al. (2022) found that social media has a significant influence on Bangladeshi tourists' decision-making process. The study found that tourists use social media to learn about destinations, attractions, and services, and that social media exposure can lead to increased interest in specific destinations and experiences.

The conceptual framework has important implications for tourism marketers. It suggests that marketers should focus on creating engaging and informative social media content that is tailored to the specific needs and interests of their target audiences. Marketers should also use social media to build relationships with potential tourists and to encourage them to share their experiences.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employed a phenomenological design to investigate how potential tourists experience and make sense of crime-related content on social media platforms and its impact on their perceptions of Ghana as a tourist destination. Phenomenological research focuses on individuals' lived experiences and interpretations of a particular phenomenon (Kafle, 2011). This approach was chosen to gain deeper insights into the subjective experiences of potential tourists interacting with crime-related content and how it shapes their image of Ghana. A purposive sampling method was utilized to recruit 10 participants who have engaged with crime-related content about Ghana on social media platforms. Diversity was ensured by including individuals from different geographical locations, age groups, genders, and travel preferences. This diverse sample provided a broader and more nuanced understanding of crime perception in Ghana. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted via video calls, allowing participants to freely express their opinions, feelings, and experiences regarding crime perception in Ghana. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Qualitative analysis techniques were employed to analyze the interview data using Nvivo version 12 software to facilitate the data analysis. This included thematic analysis, which involved identifying key themes, patterns, and insights related to the perceptions and attitudes of potential tourists towards crime in Ghana as portrayed on social media

platforms. In an attempt to reduce biases and ensure reliability the researchers utilized the Cohen's Kappa statistic as proposed by Pérez et al., (2020) to measure the level of agreement between the two research coders with a deductive code for the analysis. The two research coders independently performed an open coding and after compared their findings to avoid biases and presume validity and reliability. Their target score of interrater reliability as according to McHugh (2012) was a substantial value of obtaining almost perfect agreement ($k > 0.8$). The Cohen's kappa statistic may be performed according to the following formula in figure 2 below:

KAPPA CALCULATION

$$\kappa = \frac{\text{Pr}(a) - \text{Pr}(e)}{1 - \text{Pr}(e)}$$

Kappa calculation formula by McHugh (2012)

Figure 2: Calculation of the kappa statistic

Data confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the research process. All data was transcribed and organized in a manner that protected participants' identities. The analysis of the interview data revealed several key themes related to potential tourists' experiences with crime-related content and its impact on their perceptions of Ghana. These findings can provide valuable insights for tourism stakeholders in Ghana to develop effective communication strategies addressing crime perception and fostering a more positive image of the country as a tourist destination.

Ethical principles were upheld throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the questions were answered on the research instrument. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using pseudonyms and not specific names. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Before any data was collected, all participants' informed consent was sought. All during the study, participants' confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity was maintained. During analysis and reporting, all personally identifiable information was taken out of the data. To protect the ethical integrity of the study, ethical permission was sought verbally and agreed from respondents (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders et al., 2018). Informed consent from participants was sought and this consent was verbal. Participants consented to the study before it was conducted. This

consent was voluntary, specific and without coercion. As a result, researchers did not contact any institutional review board for a written clearance. The research was adequately described to participants.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Participants' demographic characteristics

From table one below, the participants represent a diverse range of ages, spanning from 22 to 40 years old. This diversity implies that the study captures insights from both younger and older individuals, each with their unique outlooks on travel and social media. Again, it is evident in the study that the youngest (22 years) subscribed to 5 social media platforms. Younger participants, such as those in their twenties, may be more accustomed to using a variety of social media platforms for travel-related information and interaction. Older participants might lean towards specific platforms they are more familiar with. Moreover, from table one, younger participants might prioritize the influence of social media on their travel decisions, seeking firsthand experiences and recommendations shared by peers. Older participants may blend traditional sources of information with social media insights. These assertions are consistent with the study of Huang, Basu, & Hsu (2010), as they explored motivations of travel knowledge sharing on social network sites: an empirical investigation of US college students.

The study includes both male and female participants, providing insights into how crime perception and destination marketing strategies is perceived differently by individuals of different genders. There were 5 males and 5 female participants in the study. Considering participants' Sex in the study offers a nuanced perspective on how crime perception and destination marketing intersect. Recognizing the potential differences in risk perception, preferences, and concerns may guide destination marketers in tailoring their strategies to effectively combat crime perception and promote Ghana as a safe and desirable tourist destination for individuals of all genders. Johnson, and Repta (2012), study supports the sex concept regarding this study.

The study encompasses a range of nationalities, reflecting diverse cultural backgrounds and perspectives. Different cultural norms and values might influence how participants perceive and respond to crime-related information. These nationalities included 3 British, 1 Chinese, 1 Nigerian, 1 German, 2 Americans and 2 Canadians. Furthermore, based on the participants' travel experiences in table 1, the participants exhibited a range of travel experiences, including frequent travelers, first-time travelers, family vacationers, luxury travelers, and backpackers. This diversity provided insights into how crime perception and destination marketing strategies are perceived by individuals with varying levels of travel exposure.

With respect to the participants' social media preferences in table 1, the participants

exhibited a wide range of social media preferences, including platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, WeChat, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp. This diversity suggests varying levels of engagement with different types of content and communication styles.

Table 1: Category of Participants

Participants	Age	Sex	Nationality	Travel Experience	Social Media
Tourist 1	25	Male	American	Frequent traveler	Instagram, YouTube
Tourist 2	30	Female	Canadian	First-time traveler to Ghana	Twitter, Instagram
Tourist 3	22	Female	British	First-time traveler to Ghana	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn
Tourist 4	28	Female	German	Family vacation traveler	Facebook, Twitter
Tourist 5	40	Male	Nigerian	Frequent traveler	Instagram
Tourist 6	35	Female	Chinese		WeChat
Tourist 7	26	Male	American	First-time traveler to Ghana	Facebook, YouTube, TikTok
Tourist 8	32	Male	Canadian	Family vacation traveler	LinkedIn, Instagram
Tourist 9	24	Female	British	Backpacker traveler	Twitter, YouTube
Tourist 10	38	Male	British	Luxury traveler	Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp

Source: Field Survey 2023

4.2 RQ1: What are the prevailing perceptions and attitudes of potential tourists towards crime in Ghana, as portrayed in social media discussions?

The study aimed to investigate the prevailing perceptions and attitudes of potential tourists towards crime in Ghana as portrayed in social media discussions. Based on the responses from the 10 participants, the following findings were identified. Themes such as diverse perceptions, impact of content, influence on decision were developed.

Theme one: Diverse Perceptions

The participants exhibited a wide range of perceptions regarding crime in Ghana. Some participants expressed concerns about safety based on crime-related content they encountered on social media, while others perceived Ghana as relatively safe and focused on positive travel experiences. The participants responded;

Tourist 1: When I saw those news articles and videos about crime incidents in Ghana on social media, I got really worried. It made me question whether it's a safe place to visit. I mean, who wants to travel to a destination with such issues?"

Tourist 2: Honestly, social media can blow things out of proportion sometimes. Yeah, I saw some crime stuff related to Ghana, but I also saw these amazing travel vlogs showing the beauty of the country. I think every place has its challenges, but I believe in making an informed decision.

Tourist 3: I've traveled a lot, and I know that sometimes what you see on social media isn't the whole picture. Yeah, there might be crime incidents here and there, but that doesn't define an entire country. I'll take precautions, like I would anywhere else.

Tourist 4: I can't deny that the crime stories on social media got to me. Especially those images, they kind of stick with you. But then, I started reading more about Ghana's efforts to improve safety for tourists, and that gave me some reassurance.

Tourist 10: Luxury travel means I want a worry-free experience. I saw some negative stuff on social media, but I also found luxury travelers who had no issues. I think the key is being informed and making choices that match my preferences.

The above self-reported speech excerpts from participants highlight their varying perceptions of crime in Ghana based on their interactions with crime-related content on social media. The diverse range of opinions underscores the complexity of forming attitudes toward a destination influenced by online narratives.

Theme two: Impact of Content

The findings revealed that crime-related content on social media had a significant impact on participants' perceptions. Visual content, such as images and videos depicting crime incidents, had a stronger influence in shaping negative perceptions compared to textual content. Participants responded;

Tourist 9: Reading about crime is one thing, but seeing it in videos is different. It's more vivid and immediate. I saw a video on social media, and it did make me reconsider my plans for Ghana.

Tourist 10: Visuals stay with you. I watched a video about crime incidents, and it definitely made me think twice. It's like you're witnessing something firsthand, even though you're just watching a screen.

Tourist 6: Videos seem more authentic, you know? When I watched a video discussing crime in Ghana, it made me feel concerned. Text is one thing, but videos can really impact how you perceive something.

Tourist 7: Videos can really change your perspective. I saw a video of someone talking about their experience with crime, and it made me worry about my safety. It's like you're here with them in that moment.

Tourist 8: I think visuals have a stronger impact. I saw a few images that showed crime incidents, and they stuck with me. It's like they're etched in your memory, and you can't easily forget them.

These self-reported speech excerpts from participants highlight the impact of visual content, such as images and videos, in shaping their perceptions of crime in Ghana. The power of visuals to evoke emotional responses and create lasting impressions is evident in how participants recall their reactions to crime-related content on social media.

Theme three: Influence on Decision

The study found that crime-related discussions on social media influenced participants' travel decisions. Those who encountered alarming content, reported feeling hesitant about visiting Ghana, while participants exposed to positive stories were more likely to consider the destination. The participants responded;

Tourist 7: I was really looking forward to exploring Ghana, but then I saw those crime stories. It made me hesitant, especially since it's my first time there. I need to think more before making a decision.

Tourist 8: I'm a bit of a worrier, so when I saw those crime discussions on social media, it did make me pause. I'm traveling with my family, and their safety is my priority."

Tourist 9: I'm a backpacker, and I'm used to some risks. But those crime stories on social media did give me second thoughts about Ghana. I want my backpacking experience to be fun, not stressful.

Tourist 10: I saw some positive posts about Ghana, which got me interested. But then I also saw those crime discussions. It's a mixed bag, and I needed to weigh the pros and cons before making a decision.

These self-reported speech excerpts from participants reflect how crime-related discussions on social media influenced their travel decisions regarding visiting Ghana. The contrasting reactions between those who felt hesitant and those who were more open to considering the destination emphasize the power of online narratives in shaping travelers' perceptions and choices.

4.3 RQ2: *What strategies and approaches are currently employed by Ghanaian tourism authorities to manage crime-related concerns on social media platforms?*

Theme one: *Collaboration with Law Enforcement*

The participants in the study consistently identified a noteworthy strategy employed by Ghanaian tourism authorities: collaboration with local law enforcement agencies. This collaborative approach has been implemented to enhance safety, deter crime, and create a tangible sense of security within the destination. Participants recognized and appreciated the efforts made in this regard, perceiving it as a proactive step toward ensuring the well-being of tourists.

Tourist 6 responded: I saw some joint campaigns between tourism authorities and the police. It's smart to work together for safety. I think it sends a strong message to potential visitors.

The findings related to collaboration between tourism authorities and law enforcement agencies shed light on an effective approach that can significantly impact tourists' perceptions and attitudes towards safety. This collaboration demonstrates a comprehensive and well-coordinated effort to address crime-related concerns through multiple channels, including social media. Participants noted that collaborations between tourism authorities and law enforcement agencies instilled a sense of trust and confidence. This cooperative approach signifies that safety is a priority for both entities, which can greatly influence potential tourists' perception of safety levels in the destination. The visible cooperation may help ease concerns and mitigate apprehensions. Participants viewed collaboration as a demonstration of commitment by both tourism authorities and law enforcement agencies to ensuring the safety of visitors. This commitment may address concerns expressed on social media and even counterbalance negative narratives. When potential tourists witness active efforts, it can significantly influence their attitudes toward the destination.

The findings underscore the importance of collaboration between tourism authorities and law enforcement agencies in managing crime-related concerns on social media platforms. Joint initiatives not only contribute to enhancing safety and deterring

crime but also send a strong message to potential tourists about the commitment to their well-being. This collaborative approach may play a pivotal role in shaping positive perceptions and attitudes toward visiting Ghana as a tourist destination.

Theme two: User-Generated Content Promotion

Participants in the study noticed and acknowledged the use of user-generated content by Ghanaian tourism authorities to counterbalance negative perceptions related to crime on social media platforms. This strategy involves showcasing authentic experiences and positive narratives shared by travelers themselves. The findings highlight the impact of this approach on participants' perceptions and attitudes towards safety and travel to Ghana.

Participants responded: They featured photos and videos from travelers who had positive experiences in Ghana. It helped balance out the negative stuff and made me consider that it's not all bad.

5. Discussions

The findings to the research question one above shed light on the intricate interplay between social media, crime perception, and potential tourists' attitudes toward Ghana as a travel destination. The diversity of perceptions and attitudes among the participants underscores the complexity of this issue. This affirms what the study conducted by Guisti and Raya (2019) hinting on the complex relationship between crime perception, message format, and tourists' willingness to travel.

The study highlights the digital impact of social media on forming perceptions. Visual content's power in evoking emotional responses suggests that both positive and negative imagery may shape tourists' views.

The findings reveal a mix of cautious optimism and skepticism among potential tourists. While some participants exhibited apprehension, others displayed resilience against overly alarming portrayals, seeking more balanced information. Hence, reechoing what the study by Akinyemi et al. (2019) share on the influence of social media on tourists' satisfaction in Ghana indicating that social media has an impressive consequence on tourists' satisfaction levels by providing them with timely and accurate information, facilitating communication with tourism service providers, and enhancing their overall experience at their tourist destination. Participants' reliance on social media indicates the need for accurate and balanced crime-related information dissemination. Destination marketers should consider actively engaging with online discussions to provide context, accurate data, and safety measures. Moreover, the findings underscore the significance of engaging with potential tourists on social media. Showcasing local perspectives, and addressing safety measures directly could help counterbalance sensationalized content.

In summary, these research findings highlight the intricate relationship between social media discussions, crime perception, and tourists' attitudes.

The findings of the study for research question two as well shed light on the

collaborative venture between stakeholders of the tourism industry and law enforcement agencies on the relations of social media, crime perception, and potential tourists' attitudes toward Ghana as a travel destination. The study by Avraham and Ketter (2017) underscores the techniques by Sub-Saharan African (SSA) nations to repair their destination image during and after crises, with the aim of luring in foreign tourists. Such tactics emanating from them aligns with the findings of this study to utilize the media-space for positive impact on the tourism sector.

Again, the findings from the study relating to the promotion of user-generated content revealed a strategic approach that holds significant potential in managing crime-related concerns and influencing potential tourists' viewpoints. Participants appreciated the use of authentic content created by fellow travelers. This content provides a relatable perspective that potential tourists can connect with. Genuine experiences shared by others may resonate more strongly than official marketing messages and contribute to a sense of authenticity. By highlighting positive experiences through user-generated content, tourism authorities effectively create a counter-narrative to negative perceptions which is collaborated as confirmed by Hua, Li, and Zhang (2020). This approach showcases the diverse and enriching aspects of visiting Ghana, demonstrating that the destination offers more than just crime-related concerns. In the study of Hua et al., (2020) on crime research in hospitality and tourism, they recommended that High-technology tools are encouraged to be applied to detect and track criminal activities. Meanwhile, diverse applications of the media should be used as useful tools to control criminal activities in the hospitality and tourism industry.

6. Conclusion

The exploration of perceptions and attitudes of potential tourists towards crime in Ghana as portrayed on social media platforms revealed valuable insights into the concerns and sentiments of travelers. It was evident that crime-related discussions on social media significantly impact the perception of Ghana as a tourist destination. Potential tourists expressed varying levels of apprehension and uncertainty regarding safety in the country, which could potentially deter them from visiting. The research highlighted the significance of addressing crime perception on social media as a crucial aspect of destination marketing in Ghana.

The investigation into the strategies and approaches employed by Ghanaian tourism authorities and stakeholders in managing and addressing crime-related concerns on social media provided valuable insights into their efforts to promote safety and enhance destination marketing. Successful practices were identified, including, user-Generated Content Promotion and collaboration with law enforcement.

7. Recommendations

To address the negative impact of crime-related discussions on social media and alleviate potential tourists' apprehensions, Ghanaian tourism authorities may focus on implementing a proactive and transparent communication strategy. This can be achieved by regularly engaging with social media users, responding promptly to concerns and inquiries, and providing accurate and up-to-date information about safety measures and crime statistics in the country. By actively addressing crime-related discussions and portraying a commitment to visitor safety, Ghana can foster a sense of trust and security among potential tourists, ultimately encouraging more travelers to consider the country as a favorable destination.

Furthermore, it is recommended that user-Generated Content Promotion and collaboration with law enforcement may not be enough mechanisms employed as perceived by the tourist. Ghanaian tourism authorities and stakeholders may prioritize the establishment of a dedicated social media monitoring and response team. This team should be well-trained to handle real-time communication on social media platforms, swiftly addressing any crime-related incidents or concerns that may arise. Additionally, data analytics tools may be utilized to monitor sentiment and emerging discussions related to crime, enabling proactive interventions before negative perceptions escalate. Regular performance evaluations and feedback from users can help fine-tune their approach, ensuring that responses remain timely, relevant, and reassuring. By leveraging the power of social media as a responsive and transparent communication tool, Ghana can demonstrate its commitment to ensuring visitor safety, thus positively influencing destination marketing efforts.

8. Suggestions for Future Studies

Conduct a comparative study that explores how different African countries utilize social media to address crime-related concerns in their destination marketing strategies. Compare the effectiveness of various approaches and strategies to identify best practices.

Explore how local communities within Ghana perceive the utilization of social media as a tool to combat crime-related concerns.

Examine the role of traditional media alongside social media in shaping tourists' perceptions of crime in Ghana.

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