

Destination marketing: An analysis of tourists' perceptions of DMOs promotional activities

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Abstract

This study examines how Destination Marketing Organizations shape tourists' perceptions of Cape Coast through their promotional strategies. It investigates the information channels tourists rely on, assesses the effectiveness of these platforms, and evaluates overall perceptions of destination marketing efforts. A quantitative descriptive survey was employed, drawing on data from 396 tourists using structured questionnaires with closed-ended and Likert-scale items. Stratified random sampling ensured representation across key demographic groups, with respondents selected from prominent attractions, accommodation facilities, and heritage sites. The analysis combined descriptive and inferential techniques, including frequencies, percentages, mean rankings, and chi-square tests to examine relationships between tourist characteristics and marketing perceptions. The findings indicate that perceived credibility and accuracy of promotional content significantly influence tourist evaluations, with international visitors reporting higher levels of trust than domestic counterparts. Although marketing efforts effectively generate awareness and visitation, their sustained impact depends on alignment between promotional claims and on-site experiences. Inconsistencies tend to weaken satisfaction and future travel intentions. The study highlights the increasing relevance of digital platforms, particularly social media, and recommends a more integrated approach that prioritises authenticity, coherence, and long-term destination value.

Keywords

Keywords: Destination Marketing, Destination Marketing Organizations, Cape Coast Tourism, Marketing Strategies, Promotional Activities, Tourist Perception

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used at any stage of the study, including idea development, data analysis, text writing, or language editing. All aspects of the manuscript were developed solely by the authors. The authors assume full academic, ethical, and legal responsibility for the content, analysis, and conclusions presented in this article.



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1. Introduction

Destination marketing plays a decisive strategic role in today's global tourism competition. How a destination is perceived by potential visitors is largely shaped by the communication activities carried out by organizations responsible for promoting that destination. In this context, advertising and promotional activities create mental images prior to travel, thereby pre-structuring expectations; consequently, tourist perception is informed not only by direct experience but also by mediated representations (Armutcu et al., 2023).

Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) emerge as the key institutional actors at the center of this communication process. Well-designed promotional activities enhance tourists' trust in the destination; they exert a decisive influence on the intention to revisit and positive word-of-mouth communication (Lai & Vinh, 2013). With the digital transformation, the impact of social media and influencer collaborations on destination recognition and trust has grown significantly; however, these channels have also brought about the issue of misalignment between the projected image and the actual experience (Heung & Lee, 2024).

At this point, promotional effectiveness cannot be evaluated independently of the on-site experience. Discrepancies between pre-visit expectations and the reality experienced on-site lead to dissatisfaction and reputational damage (Lee & Chang, 2024). This situation necessitates an integrated approach where destination marketers design promotional messages in alignment with service quality and experiential uniqueness.

In the context of Ghana, tourism development relies on coordinated collaboration between public institutions and private-sector stakeholders. Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), led by the Ghana Tourism Authority, play a central role in positioning the country within the global tourism market (Lukaz, 2021). Steps have been taken to enhance Ghana's visibility through digital campaigns, participation in international fairs, and strategic partnerships (Acheampong, 2020; MoTAC, 2019).

Cape Coast, however, holds a unique position within this national tourism framework. The city, distinguished by its historical significance linked to the transatlantic slave trade, has become a focal point for heritage tourism (Preko et al., 2020). This appeal, bolstered by its UNESCO World Heritage status and cultural-natural assets, has been further reinforced by the "Year of Return" and its follow-up program, "Beyond the Return" (Asare, 2021; Graphic Online, 2019).

However, a notable gap in the literature is evident. Existing studies have primarily addressed promotional strategies and the challenges faced by destination marketers; they have not sufficiently examined how tourists evaluate these efforts (Quaye, 2025). Similarly, studies focusing on the promotion of local cuisine as a tourism product have excluded visitors' evaluative responses to these initiatives (Yeboah & Ashie, 2024). Methodological shortcomings also exist: Studies examining visitor motivation and experience have not directly addressed promotional effects; this has limited the capacity to develop generalizable, evidence-based marketing strategies (Okyere, 2020; Otoo, 2020).

This study aims to address these conceptual and methodological gaps by quantitatively analyzing the promotional channels through which tourists visiting Cape Coast access information, the perceived effectiveness of these platforms, and their overall evaluations of promotional efforts. The findings aim to provide an empirical foundation that will pave the way for more responsive and strategically consistent destination marketing practices.

2. Study Background

Tourist perceptions are shaped through a dynamic interaction between the intrinsic attributes of a destination and the manner in which these attributes are communicated to prospective visitors. Physical features such as cultural heritage, natural landscapes, and built attractions form the foundation of destination appeal; however, it is through promotional activity that these elements are interpreted and internalized by tourists. In this regard, Armutcu et al. (2023) argue that advertising constructs mental images that influence expectations prior to travel, which in turn shape the eventual evaluation of the experience. This relationship suggests that perception is not solely derived from direct encounter but is significantly pre-configured through mediated representations.

Building on this premise, promotional strategies serve as a critical interface between destinations and global tourism markets. Lai and Vinh (2013) observe that well-executed promotional efforts enhance tourists' confidence in a destination, thereby increasing the likelihood of revisit intentions and positive word-of-mouth. More recent work by Heung and Lee (2024) highlights the growing dominance of digital platforms, particularly social media and influencer partnerships, in shaping destination familiarity and trust. These channels allow destinations to present curated narratives that resonate with contemporary travel motivations, yet they also raise concerns regarding the alignment between projected images and lived experiences.

Consequently, the effectiveness of promotional efforts cannot be evaluated in isolation from the actual delivery of the tourism experience. Lee and Chang (2024) emphasize the importance of consistency between pre-visit expectations and

on-site realities, noting that discrepancies may lead to dissatisfaction and reputational damage. This underscores the need for destination marketers to adopt an integrated approach in which promotional messaging is closely aligned with service quality and experiential authenticity.

Within the Ghanaian context, tourism development has increasingly relied on coordinated efforts between public institutions and private stakeholders. Destination Marketing Organizations, particularly the Ghana Tourism Authority, play a central role in positioning the country within the competitive global tourism landscape (Lukaz, 2021). Through a combination of digital campaigns, international exhibitions, and strategic partnerships, the Authority has sought to enhance Ghana's visibility and attractiveness (Acheampong, 2020). Participation in major international tourism fairs, including events in Europe, reflects a deliberate strategy to engage key source markets and reinforce Ghana's brand identity (MoTAC, 2019).

Cape Coast occupies a distinctive position within this national tourism framework. Recognized for its historical significance, especially in relation to the transatlantic slave trade, the city has emerged as a focal point for heritage tourism (Preko et al., 2020). Its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, coupled with its cultural and natural assets, has strengthened its appeal to both domestic and international tourists. The momentum generated by the Year of Return initiative has further elevated Cape Coast's profile, prompting the introduction of the Beyond the Return programme as a long-term strategy to consolidate gains and stimulate sustained growth (Asare, 2021; Graphic Online, 2019). These initiatives collectively aim to enhance tourist arrivals, extend length of stay, and increase visitor expenditure by offering meaningful and memorable experiences.

Despite these developments, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning how tourists interpret and evaluate the promotional efforts associated with Cape Coast. Existing studies have largely focused on the strategies employed by destination authorities and tourism firms, with limited attention to the perceptions of the tourists themselves. Quaye (2025) documents the range of promotional activities and the challenges faced by destination marketers, yet does not examine how these efforts are received by visitors. Similarly, Yeboah & Ashie (2024) explore the promotion of local cuisine as a tourism product without assessing tourists' evaluative responses to such initiatives.

In addition to this conceptual gap, a methodological limitation is evident within the existing body of research. Prior studies have tended to examine related constructs such as visitor motivation and experience without explicitly linking these to promotional influences. Okyere (2020) employs a quantitative approach to analyze tourist motivation and experiences in Cape Coast, while Otoo (2020) adopts a mixed-methods design to investigate perceptions of tourist maps. However, neither study directly addresses the role of promotional activities in shaping tourist perceptions. This absence of focused quantitative analysis limits the ability to generate generalizable insights that can inform evidence-based marketing strategies.

Against this background, the present study seeks to address both the conceptual and methodological gaps identified. Specifically, it examines the promotional channels through which tourists access information about Cape Coast, evaluates the effectiveness of these platforms, and analyses tourists' overall perceptions of the promotional efforts. By adopting a quantitative approach, the study aims to provide empirically grounded insights that can support more responsive and strategically aligned destination marketing practices.

3. Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

The study relied on three theories to establish the relationships between the objectives and variables within the study, these are the Destination Image Theory, Information Credibility Theory, and Expectation–Confirmation Theory (ECT)

Destination Image Theory

Destination image theory holds that tourists form a cognitive and affective representation of a place from information sources before and during visits; that image shapes attitudes, decision-making and loyalty. this theory justifies the measuring of tourists' cognitive (knowledge, beliefs) and affective (feelings, liking) components of Cape Coast's image and testing how image mediates the effect of promotional channels on behavioral outcomes (satisfaction, revisit, recommendation) (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Kim, Styliadis, & Oh, 2019).

Information Credibility Theory

Information credibility theory states that receivers judge messages by the perceived expertise, trustworthiness and neutrality of the information source; higher credibility increases persuasion and adoption. Operationalise credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness/relatability of messenger) for each channel and test how credibility moderates

channel effectiveness on image and on expectation–experience congruence (Ohanian, 1990; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986 for related processing mechanisms)

Expectation–Confirmation Theory (ECT)

ECT (often used in consumer satisfaction research) proposes that satisfaction results from the comparison between prior expectations and perceived performance; confirmation (expectations met) yields satisfaction and positive behavioral intentions. It helps measure tourists’ pre-visit expectations (shaped by promotional activities), their perceived experience (on-site) and the confirmation/disconfirmation (difference). This explains how promotional-induced expectations translate (or fail to translate) into satisfaction and revisit/recommendation intentions (Oliver, 1980.)

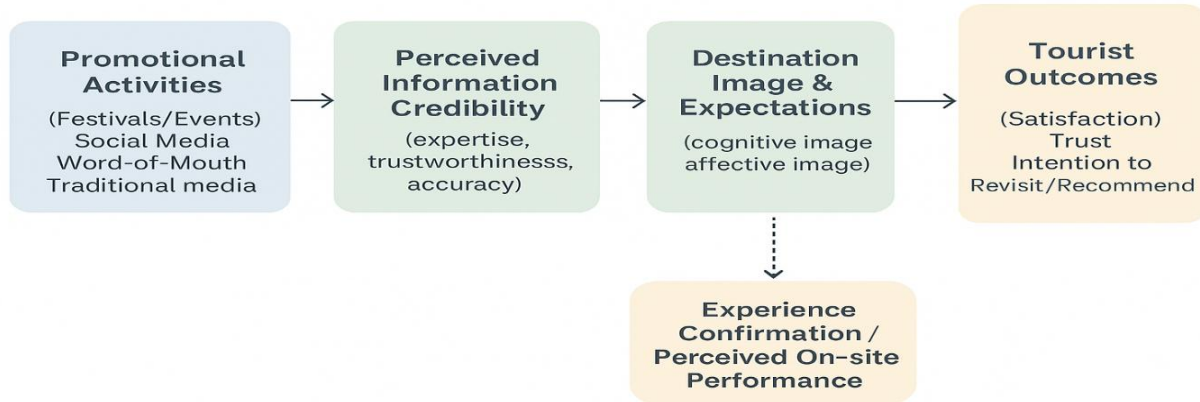


Figure 1: Analysis of Tourists’ Perceptions of DMOs Promotional Activities

Source: Authors Construct

This integrated model justifies how promotional activities drive destination image, shape expectations, influence satisfaction, and ultimately determine future behavioral intentions. DMOs employ various promotional activities that serve as external stimuli, influencing how tourists perceive Cape Coast’s image (Destination Image Formation Theory). Moreover, based on these promotions, tourists form expectations about their anticipated experience. Upon visiting, they compare the actual experience with the expectations (Expectation-Confirmation Theory). Furthermore, when experiences confirm or exceed expectations, tourists develop satisfaction and trust, which strengthen behavioral intentions, such as revisiting, recommending, or positively reviewing the destination.

Tourists’ Perception of Destination

Within tourism studies, a destination is commonly understood as the spatial expression of tourism consumption, where services and experiences are assembled and encountered by visitors (Andrades & Dimanche, 2017). In this sense, a destination may range from a multi-country region to a single city, provided that it functions as a unit whose economic activity is significantly linked to tourism (Andrades & Dimanche, 2017; Wang & Zhang, 2017). While the term destination broadly denotes any place visited by individuals, a tourist destination is more precisely a location selected for temporary stay and structured around visitor needs (Manhas et al., 2012). This distinction becomes clearer when considering that a tourism destination is not merely a place, but a coordinated system of services designed to meet tourist expectations, including infrastructure, accommodation, hospitality, and leisure provision (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Gao & Zhang, 2009).

Building on this, perception occupies a central role in shaping how destinations are understood and evaluated. Perception refers to the cognitive process through which individuals interpret and organize sensory inputs to form meaningful impressions (Hassan et al., 2010). In tourism contexts, these impressions reflect tourists’ interpretations of a destination’s attributes and service quality, which in turn inform expectations of the overall experience (Almeida-García et al., 2020). Consequently, perceived image has a direct influence on destination choice, as tourists tend to favour locations that align with their expectations and prior beliefs (Lian & Yu, 2019).

Moreover, positive perceptions are closely associated with behavioral intentions, particularly revisit intention and word-of-mouth recommendations (Kim et al., 2019). Such perceptions are not formed in isolation but emerge from a combination of pre-visit information and on-site experiences. Information acquired before travel, including media and promotional content, plays a critical role in shaping initial impressions (Lin & Kuo, 2016; Moon & Han, 2019). At the same time, tourists continuously evaluate aesthetic appeal, service quality, and perceived value during their stay, which further refines their overall judgement of the destination (Dedeoğlu, 2019).

In addition, individual differences introduce variation in how destinations are perceived. Travel motivations influence destination choice at the decision stage, while socio-demographic factors such as age, education, and personal outlook shape how information is interpreted (Anastassova, 2011; Chi, 2012). As a result, perceptions are inherently subjective, with each tourist constructing a unique understanding of the same place. Overall, destination perception should be viewed as a dynamic and multifaceted construct, formed through the interaction of external information sources, personal characteristics, and lived experiences within the destination (Dam, 2018).

Tourist perceived experiences with promotional activities

The concept of the tourist experience has received sustained research attention, particularly in relation to its role in shaping satisfaction and behavioral outcomes. Drawing on Pine, as cited in Chen (2023), the tourist experience may be understood as a significant event or sequence of events that an individual perceives as memorable. This framing underscores its inherently subjective nature. In this regard, Chen (2023) further conceptualizes the tourist experience as a complex construct comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, each reflecting how visitors interpret and evaluate their encounters within a destination context.

Building on this foundation, the literature consistently positions tourist experience as central to tourism development and competitiveness. Cifci et al. (2018) observe that contemporary tourists increasingly seek experiences that differ from routine daily life, suggesting a shift towards experiential consumption. This orientation is closely tied to behavioral outcomes, as experience quality has been shown to influence satisfaction levels and the likelihood of repeat visitation (Rini et al., 2021). Similarly, Chaney et al. (2018) emphasize that a nuanced understanding of tourist experience is essential for interpreting visitor behaviour within specific destinations.

In parallel, evolving tourist expectations have intensified the importance of strategic destination positioning. Vukovic et al. (2021) note that tourists are now more discerning, with heightened awareness influencing destination choice. Consequently, promotional strategies that accurately communicate the diversity and quality of destination offerings have become increasingly critical. Such initiatives not only attract visitors but also shape their expectations and experiences, thereby extending their stay and deepening engagement. This perspective aligns with the broader marketing literature, where Kotler and Keller (2016) argue that creating distinctive experiences is fundamental to sustaining both destinations and tourism enterprises.

Moreover, the interplay between marketing and tourist experience is widely acknowledged. Bobier et al. (2019) contend that promotional efforts significantly influence tourists' motivations and perceptions prior to travel, thereby shaping the overall experience trajectory. In this sense, effective marketing extends beyond attraction to encompass expectation management. Sotiriadis and Gursoy (2016) further caution that any shortcomings in service delivery can undermine the entire experience, as dissatisfaction in one aspect often diminishes overall satisfaction and perceived value.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the literature identifies several experiential dimensions that can be leveraged to enhance tourist outcomes. These include the physical environment, social interactions, cultural engagement, and the quality of services and activities (Ryu & Han, 2011; Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013; Hwang & Seo, 2016; Jauhari & Bharwani, 2017; Lorentzen, 2013). However, as these elements primarily manifest during on-site experiences, there remains a need for promotional strategies to address pre-visit perceptions more effectively. In doing so, destinations can better align expectations with actual experiences, thereby strengthening overall tourist satisfaction.

Tourist perception of the promotional efforts by DMOs

Promotion within marketing is commonly understood as the deliberate communication of persuasive information intended to influence attitudes and stimulate exchange relationships (Bagaihing & Conterius, 2020). Within tourism, its relevance becomes more pronounced, as destinations rely on effective communication to convert passive awareness into active visitation. Where promotional efforts are limited or fragmented, potential visitors may remain unaware of available attractions, thereby constraining destination competitiveness and overall tourism development.

In response, Destination Management Organizations in Ghana have adopted a range of integrated promotional approaches aimed at improving visibility and accessibility. Institutional efforts have included the establishment of information centers that provide guidance on recreational opportunities, alongside participation in international tourism exhibitions to position Ghana within the global market. More recently, digital transformation has reshaped promotional practice. The development of centralized online platforms that compile tourism destinations into accessible databases has improved information flow and reduced search costs for prospective tourists. Complementary initiatives, such as partnerships with private actors and the introduction of sector-focused publications, have further strengthened the dissemination of destination knowledge (Oxford Business Group, 2018).

At a strategic level, national stakeholders have intensified international engagement through seminars, workshops, and trade fairs targeted at both established and emerging markets. These efforts are not limited to awareness creation but are closely tied to the refinement and presentation of tourism products in ways that align with evolving tourist expectations (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture [MoTAC], 2019). In parallel, the increasing use of digital marketing channels reflects a shift towards more interactive and globally scalable forms of promotion. This is reinforced by the distribution of curated promotional materials through diplomatic missions and the placement of advertisements across international media platforms, thereby extending Ghana’s reach to diverse audiences.

Domestically, promotional campaigns have also been aligned with broader socio-economic objectives. Initiatives such as “See Ghana, Eat Ghana, Wear Ghana, and Feel Ghana” illustrate an attempt to integrate cultural identity with tourism marketing, encouraging both domestic participation and international interest (MoTAC, 2019). In addition, events including National Chocolate Day, the Okwahu Paragliding Festival, PANAFEST, and World Tourism Day function as strategic platforms for destination branding. Beyond attracting visitors, these events stimulate local enterprise development, particularly among small and medium-sized businesses, while generating employment opportunities and enhancing community-level economic benefits. Collectively, these promotional strategies demonstrate a shift towards a more coordinated and multi-scalar approach to destination marketing in Ghana.

4. Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative approach to examine tourists’ perceptions of destination marketing activities in Cape Coast. In line with the study objectives, a descriptive survey design was employed to generate measurable insights into how promotional efforts are interpreted across different visitor groups. This design was considered appropriate as it enables the systematic capture of attitudes, evaluations, and behavioral tendencies within a defined population.

The target population comprised both domestic and international tourists visiting key attractions within Cape Coast. To ensure adequate representation, stratified random sampling was applied, with strata defined by relevant demographic characteristics such as age, nationality, and purpose of visit. This procedure enhanced the representativeness of the sample while reducing selection bias. A total of 396 valid responses were obtained, providing a sufficient basis for statistical analysis.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of closed-ended and Likert-scale items. The instrument captured socio-demographic characteristics, preferred promotional channels, perceived effectiveness of these channels, and overall evaluations of marketing efforts. Prior to the main survey, the instrument was reviewed to ensure clarity, coherence, and alignment with the study constructs.

Subsequently, data analysis combined descriptive and inferential techniques. Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were used to summarize patterns in promotional exposure and perceived effectiveness. In addition, the chi-square test was employed to examine associations between tourist type and perception variables. This allowed for the identification of statistically significant differences in how promotional messages are interpreted. Ethical considerations were carefully observed, with participation remaining voluntary and responses treated with strict confidentiality.

5. Results And Discussion

This section of the paper presents and discusses data analysis on the socio-demographic characteristics of tourists, various promotional platforms tourist utilizes in accessing information, tourists perceived effectiveness of the utilized promotional platforms, and their general perception of the promotional efforts use for getting information about Cape Coast.

Socio-demographic and characteristics of tourists

This part examines the socio-demographic attributes encompassing sex, age, marital status, work position, educational attainment, tourist type, and the purpose of visit. The findings were summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Socio-demographic and characteristics of tourists

Item		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	217	55
	Female	178	45
	Total	396	100
Age	18-25	77	19.4
	26-35	136	34.3
	36-45	124	31.3
	46-55	34	8.6
	56 and above	25	6.3
	Total	396	100

Marital Status	Single	194	49
	Married	201	50.8
	Other (Divorce)	1	0.2
	Total	396	100
Employment Status	Employed	172	43.4
	Self-Employed	127	32.1
	Unemployed	97	24.5
	Total	396	100
Education Level	JHS Certificate	24	7
	SHS Certificate	85	21
	Diploma/Degree	206	52
	Post Graduate Degree	81	20
	Total	396	100
Tourist Type	Domestic Tourist	202	51
	International Tourist	194	49
	Total	396	100
Purpose of Visit	Leisure and Recreation	103	26
	Education	41	10.4
	Sports	38	9.6
	Visit Friends and Relation	113	28.5
	Business	96	24.2
	Others	4	1
	Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork

The survey suggested a higher proportion of males (55%) compared to females (45%), as seen in Table 1. This observation indicates a greater number of male tourists relative to female tourists visiting Cape Coast as a prominent tourist attraction.

The predominant age group of tourists was 26-35, with 34.3%, followed closely by those aged 36-45, who represented 31.3%. Furthermore, individuals aged 18-25 constitute 19.4% of the total tourist demographic. In contrast, tourists aged 46-55 comprise 8.6% of the total tourist demographic, whilst those aged 56 and above account for 6.3% of the general tourist population. This indicates that a segment of tourists selecting Cape Coast as their destination comprised adults possessing the physical endurance and inclination to participate in diverse tourism-related activities throughout their stay.

Table 1 reveals that the predominant number of tourists (50.8%) identified as married, although a marginally lesser percentage (49%) claimed as single. A minor percentage of respondents (0.2%) reported having undergone divorce. This indicates that a significant percentage of tourists visiting Cape Coast were accompanied by their families.

The survey data indicated that 43.4% of the participants were employed. Subsequently, 32.1% classified as self-employed, whereas 24.5% reported being unemployed. This finding suggests that a segment of visitors selecting Cape Coast as their destination has a stable income source, indicating they likely have a greater amount of discretionary income for acquiring goods and services.

Regarding educational qualifications, the majority of respondents held a diploma or first-degree qualification (52%). This was closely succeeded by individuals who reported possessing a Senior High School education (21%). Furthermore, it was discovered that 20% of the surveyed tourists held a Postgraduate Degree. Additionally, 7% reported possessing a Junior High School (JHS) certificate. This indicates that a segment of tourists selecting Cape Coast as a destination possesses literacy skills and the ability to employ specific advertising channels and understand the communicated information.

Table 1 indicates that the percentage of domestic tourists (51%) surpassed that of foreign tourists (32.1%) and Ghanaians from the Diaspora (16.9%). The primary demography of tourists visiting Cape Coast comprised Ghanaians from many locations of the nation. This observation indicates that Cape Coast was predominantly visited by domestic tourists.

Table 1 delineates the principal motivations for visitors' trips to Cape Coast as a tourist destination. The results indicate that 28.5% of tourists visited the venue to reconnect with friends and relatives. Furthermore, a proportion of tourists (26%) travelled to Cape Coast to partake in leisure and recreational pursuits. Additionally, 24.2 percent of respondents claimed that their usage was predominantly for business-related activities, while 10.4 percent reported utilizing it primarily for educational purposes. Additionally, a small percentage (1%) of respondents indicated visiting for reasons apart from the predominant motivations cited by most tourists. This study suggests that some tourists choose Cape Coast as their destination to see family and friends living in the region.

Promotional activities utilized by tourists

Table 2 below show the various promotional platforms tourist utilize in accessing information about Cape Coast.

Table 2: Promotional activities utilized by tourists for getting information on the destination

Promotional Activities	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage Rank
Traditional promotional activities (TV, Radio, Print Media)	110	28%	4
Digital marketing (social media, Website, Apps etc.)	254	64%	2
Word of mouth (referral, brand influencer/celebrity endorsement)	116	29%	3
Festivals and event promotion	290	73%	1

Source: Fieldwork

Table 2 above indicates that 290 tourists, comprising 73%, stated that they rely on festival and event promotions for information about Cape Coast as a tourist destination, followed by social media, which accounted for 254 tourists, or 64%. Additionally, 116 individuals, accounting for 29%, reported being influenced by word of mouth or brand influencer, while 110 visitors, representing 28%, confirmed the use of traditional promotional platforms such as brochures and flyers. This indicates that the majority of tourists participating in the survey predominantly use festivals and social media platforms to obtain information about Cape Coast as a tourist destination.

Effectiveness of the utilized promotional platforms

Table 3 below illustrates tourists perceived effectiveness of the utilization of promotional platforms implemented at Cape Coast as a tourist destination.

Table 3: Effectiveness of the utilized promotional platforms/activities by tourists

Promotional activities	Effective %	Undecided %	Not Effective %	Mean
Traditional promotional activities	56.3	35.6	8.1	1.52
Social media	60.9	28.3	10.6	1.49
Word of mouth/ brand influencers	77.5	19.7	2.8	1.25
Festivals and event promotion	78.8	20.5	8	1.22

Source: Fieldwork

Scale: (Mean): 1.0-1.50 = Effective; 1.51-2.00 = Undecided; 2.01 and above = Not Effective

Table 3 indicates that 56.3% of tourists utilizing traditional promotional efforts as a source of information validated their effectiveness. A portion of tourists (35.6%) expressed uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of traditional advertising activities as a means of acquiring information about Cape Coast as a tourist destination. Moreover, a segment of tourists (8.1%) indicated that local television stations were ineffective providing information, either through viewing or reliance.

Moreover, a percentage of tourists (60.9%) affirmed the effectiveness of employing social media platforms to get information regarding Cape Coast as a tourist destination. Furthermore, a segment of tourists (28.3%) expressed their doubt regarding the use of social media platforms for acquiring information about Cape Coast as a tourist destination. Additionally, tourists (10.6%) indicated that utilizing social media channels for obtaining information about Cape Coast was inefficient.

The study revealed that 77.5% of tourists who depended on verbal communication or word of mouth for information about Cape Coast as a tourist destination consider it effective. This was succeeded by tourists, with 19.7% expressing uncertainty. Additionally, a minor segment of tourists (2.8%) recognized that dependence on recommendations from persons or word-of-mouth sources for information was unsuccessful.

A significant majority of tourists (78.8%) indicated that their reliance on festival and occasion promotions for information about Cape Coast as a tourist destination is effective. Additionally, a segment of tourists (20.5%) indicated uncertainty regarding the efficacy of relying on festival and event promotions for information on the destination Cape Coast. A tiny percentage of tourists, 8%, also indicated that the promotion of festivals and events for destination information was unsuccessful.

In conclusion, the data presented in Table 7 indicates that Festival/Occasions promotion is the most effective promotional activity for tourists visiting Cape Coast, with a mean score of 1.22. Subsequently, Word of Mouth achieved a mean score of 1.25. Social media achieved a mean score of 1.49, while traditional promotional activities recorded a mean score of 1.52, both suggesting comparatively lower effectiveness than the previously listed activities.

Tourists' general perception of the promotional efforts

An analysis was carried out to establish the relationship between the types of tourists and the 5-item perception statements (dimensions) that tourists responded to. This analysis also ensured the grouping of the perceptions under strongly correlated constructs. The result reveals the percentage of responses as well as the significant relationship that exist between the type of tourists and each dimension of perception. Moreover, results of responses from the chi square analysis were presented in percentages, values, significant values and differences.

Table 4: Tourists' general perception of the promotional efforts

Dimensions of perception	Types of Tourists		X ² = Value	df	Sig
	Domestic Tourist	International Tourist			
Accuracy and authenticity of promotional messages	40.9	59.1	14.459	1	.000
Impact on tourists' decision-making process	58.1	41.9	10.857	1	.001
Builds level of trust and satisfaction	59.4	40.6	12.276	1	.000
Likelihood to recommending destination to others	59.4	40.6	12.276	1	.000

Source: Fieldwork

Table 4 indicates that 59.1% of international tourists confirmed the accuracy and authenticity of the promotional messages, whereas 40.9% of local tourists had the same opinion. The chi-square result (X² = 14.459; df = 1; P-value = .000) indicated a statistical relationship between tourist types and their overall perception of promotional activities. This indicates that the ratio of international tourists who typically regarded promotional efforts as accurate and authentic diverged from that of domestic tourists.

According to Table 4 above, 58.1% of domestic tourists agreed that promotional activities influence their decision-making process, while 41.9% of overseas tourists also declared that these activities impact their decision-making process. The chi-square result (X² = 10.857; df = 1; P-value = .001) indicated a statistical association between visitor categories and their overall perception of promotional activities affecting their decision-making process. This indicates that the ratio of domestic tourists who perceived promotional activities as influential in their decision-making differed from that of international tourists who held a similar perception.

A percentage of domestic tourists (59.4%) indicated that the promotional efforts foster a degree of confidence and contentment. International tourists (40.6%) indicated that the promotional efforts foster a degree of trust and satisfaction. The chi-square result (X² = 12.276; df = 1; P-value = .000) indicates a statistical relationship between visitor kinds and their overall perception of promotional efforts. This indicates that the proportion of domestic tourists who regard the promotional activities as fostering trust and satisfaction differs from that of overseas tourists.

Moreover, it was noted that a percentage (59.4%) of domestic tourists recognized the probability of endorsing the destination to others due to the promotional efforts. International tourists (40.1%) indicated a propensity to suggest the resort to others based on the promotional efforts. A statistical correlation exists between visitor kinds and their overall perception of promotional efforts, as indicated by the chi-square result (X² = 12.276; df = 1; P-value = .000). This indicates that the ratio of domestic visitors who typically believed in the likelihood of recommending the location to others, based on promotional activities, differed from that of international tourists.

6. Discussion

The findings provide a clear basis for situating tourists' perceptions of promotional efforts within established theoretical and empirical debates on destination marketing. To begin with, the prominence of festivals and event-based promotion, alongside social media engagement, reinforces the argument that experiential and interactive channels increasingly shape pre-visit impressions. This outcome aligns with the position advanced by Armutcu et al. (2023) and Heung & Lee (2024), who emphasize the persuasive capacity of digitally mediated and experience-driven content in constructing destination image. In the present study, however, the stronger influence of festivals suggests that tangible cultural encounters retain a distinctive credibility that purely digital formats may not fully replicate.

Moreover, the high effectiveness attributed to word-of-mouth communication lends further support to Information Credibility Theory. As suggested by Ohanian (1990), trustworthiness and perceived authenticity remain central to message acceptance. The findings indicate that interpersonal recommendations and influencer endorsements are not merely supplementary but function as critical validators of promotional claims. This reinforces the view that credibility moderates the relationship between promotional exposure and perception formation, particularly in contexts where tourists seek reassurance prior to travel.

At the same time, variations between domestic and international tourists introduce an important layer of complexity. International visitors' stronger confidence in the accuracy of promotional messages suggests that external audiences may rely more heavily on curated information, whereas domestic tourists draw on prior familiarity and contextual knowledge.

This distinction reflects the dynamic nature of destination image formation, as noted by Echtner and Ritchie (1991), where perception evolves through both mediated and lived experiences.

Finally, the observed link between promotional activities, satisfaction, and recommendation intentions substantiates the relevance of Expectation–Confirmation Theory. Where promotional content aligns with on-site experiences, positive evaluations emerge, thereby strengthening behavioral intentions. Conversely, any perceived inconsistency risks undermining trust and long-term destination loyalty. In this regard, the findings emphasize the necessity for integrated marketing approaches that prioritize rationality between projected images and actual service delivery.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how tourists perceive the promotional activities of destination marketing organizations in Cape Coast. The findings demonstrate that while promotional efforts are generally effective in generating awareness and influencing travel decisions, their long-term impact depends on credibility and experiential consistency. In particular, festival-based promotion and word-of-mouth communication emerged as the most influential channels, reflecting a broader shift towards experience-driven and socially reinforced marketing. Moreover, the study reveals that the perceived accuracy and authenticity of promotional messages play a decisive role in shaping tourist evaluations. Where promotional content aligns with on-site experiences, positive perceptions are reinforced, leading to higher satisfaction and stronger behavioral intentions. Conversely, inconsistencies between projected images and actual experiences tend to weaken trust and reduce the likelihood of recommendation.

The analysis also highlights notable differences between domestic and international tourists. While international visitors reported higher levels of trust in promotional content, domestic tourists exhibited more critical evaluations. This suggests that familiarity with the destination influences how marketing messages are interpreted and assessed. In summary, the findings highlight the need for a more integrated and a clear approach to destination marketing. Promotional strategies should not only attract visitors but also accurately reflect the destination experience. In this regard, sustained competitiveness depends on the ability of destination managers to balance persuasive communication with experiential authenticity. Such alignment is essential for building trust, enhancing satisfaction, and fostering long-term destination loyalty.

8. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The study contributes to theory by extending the application of Destination Image Theory, Information Credibility Theory, and Expectation–Confirmation Theory within a developing tourism context. By empirically linking promotional channels to perception outcomes, the study demonstrates how image formation is shaped not only by exposure but also by perceived credibility. This reinforces the view that destination image is dynamic and mediated by both communication processes and experiential validation. In addition, the findings provide support for the moderating role of credibility in shaping the effectiveness of promotional activities. The stronger influence of word-of-mouth communication suggests that trust remains central to persuasion, thereby enriching existing theoretical discussions on information processing in tourism. Similarly, the observed expectation–experience alignment offers further validation of Expectation–Confirmation Theory in explaining satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

From a practical standpoint, the study highlights the need for destination marketing organizations to prioritize authenticity in promotional messaging. Efforts should focus on presenting realistic and verifiable representations of the destination, particularly across digital platforms where exaggeration may undermine credibility. Furthermore, the effectiveness of festivals and events suggests that investment in experiential marketing can yield substantial returns in terms of visitor engagement and recall. Equally, the variation in perception between domestic and international tourists implies that segmentation strategies are necessary. Tailored communication that reflects the informational needs and prior knowledge of different tourist groups may enhance overall effectiveness. In operational terms, closer coordination between marketers and service providers is essential to ensure that promotional claims are consistently delivered in practice.

Limitation And Future Research

Despite its contributions, the study is subject to certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the reliance on a cross-sectional survey design restricts the ability to capture changes in perception over time. Tourist evaluations are inherently dynamic, and longitudinal approaches may provide deeper insight into how perceptions evolve from pre-visit expectations to post-visit reflections. Second, the use of self-reported data introduces the possibility of response bias. Although efforts were made to ensure clarity and neutrality in the questionnaire, respondents may have provided socially desirable answers or relied on imperfect recall. Future studies could address this limitation by incorporating observational or mixed-method approaches to validate reported perceptions. In addition, the study was geographically confined to Cape Coast. While this focus allows for context-specific insights, it limits the generalizability of the findings to other

destinations. Comparative studies across multiple destinations within Ghana or beyond would help establish broader patterns and strengthen external validity.

Future research should also explore the mix-method dimensions of tourist perception. In-depth questionnaire and interviews-based approaches may test as well as uncover complex interpretations of promotional content that are not easily captured through structured surveys only. Furthermore, there is scope to examine the role of emerging digital influencers and user-generated content in shaping destination image. Finally, subsequent studies could incorporate advanced analytical techniques, such as structural equation modelling, to test the causal relationships between promotional activities, perception, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. Such approaches would provide a more all-inclusive understanding of the mechanisms underlying destination marketing effectiveness.

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