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Applying the Engell–Kollat–Blackwell model in understanding international tourists' use of social media for travel decision to Ghana

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Abstract The emergence of social media has affected every sector and/or industry. In tourism, social media has become prevalent in tourists' decision-making to travel to any destination. The main aim of the study was to explore the stages in the decision-making process that social media is more influential on the decision to travel to Ghana. The study adopted the cross-sectional design and was underpinned by the quantitative method of research. The study revealed that tourists use social media for travel planning across all the stages in the decision-making process. However, tourists predominantly use social media at the need awareness and information search stages. Interestingly, the multiple regression analysis revealed that the use of social media at the evaluation and purchase stages positively influenced tourists' decision to Ghana. In conclusion, social media is influential in tourists' decision to travel to Ghana. It is recommended that GTA and tourism business should have their businesses visible on these social media platforms to quickly reach tourists who use them.

Keywords Social media · Web 2.0 · UGC · Travel 2.0 · Decision-making · EKB model

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1 Introduction

The internet has fundamentally changed how travellers access information; the way they plan for and book trips; the way they share their travel experiences; and their access to computerised reservation and database system regardless of geography time zone or computer system (Buhalis and Law 2008; Senecal and Nantel 2004; Xiang and Gretzel 2010; Hays et al. 2013). This is because tourism is an information-based and information-intensive industry (Rathonyi 2013).

In the last few years, a “revolution” associated with the development of internet (Web 2.0) has impacted the way people communicate, work and conduct business. Web 2.0 sites provide a platform for users to interact and collaborate with each other and facilitate the integration of the following five functional properties: information representation, collaboration, communication, interactivity, and transactions (Gretzel et al. 2008; p. 111). The key difference between traditional websites (Web 1.0) and Web 2.0 is the participation of the users.

Building on the foundation of Web 2.0, was the apparition of interactive platforms termed “social media”. This abrupt transition was defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (UGC)” (p. 61). In recent times, several of the social media platforms exist with different purposes and functionality (Rathonyi 2013). They digitise human social connections offering people more friends, while decreasing face to face interactions. The content created by consumers through this platform is generally termed as UGC or consumer generated media (CGM).

Moreover, the past few years have also observed remarkable interest in the application of social media to the hospitality and tourism industry. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) posited that social media is becoming the primary medium by which travel information is shared among travellers. In the same vein, Gretzel et al. (2008) asserted that UGC such as online travel reviews written by tourists and posted to virtual communities are being used more frequently to communicate and share travel-related information.

The influence of the social media on tourism has attracted the attention of practitioners and researchers in tourism and hospitality. Most studies have looked at the influence of social media on travel planning process (Ayeh et al. 2013a, b; Cox et al. 2009; Fotis et al. 2012; Rathonyi 2013; Simms 2012; Xiang and Gretzel 2010); social media’s impact on destination marketing and management (Hays et al. 2013; Lange-Faria and Elliot 2012); literature review of social media usage in tourism and hospitality management (Leung et al. 2013; Khan 2012); and online travellers’ adoption and perceptions of online travel communities and tourism websites (Ayeh et al. 2013a, b; Leung et al. 2011a, b; Miguéns et al. 2008; Millano et al. 2011; O’Connor 2010).

Even though social media is not new to scientific studies, most of the empirical studies in tourism and hospitality have been conducted in the setting of the developed world. In Ghana, research has seldom focused on social media, much less on tourist’s travel decision. Leung et al. (2011a, b) further opined that “though

social media in tourism and hospitality have been widely examined and discussed, social media research is still in its infancy” (p. 18). Also, some studies were done with particular reference to certain social networking sites and/or travel communities such as Facebook and Twitter (Rathonyi 2013) or TripAdvisor (Ayeh et al. 2013a, b; Miguéns et al. 2008).

Furthermore, available literature on the influence of social media on travel in the tourism and hospitality industry has indicated that social media use as a global phenomenon varies by culture (Gretzel et al. 2008; Cox et al. 2009; Fotis et al. 2012; Rathonyi 2013). Hence, Fotis et al. (2012) alluded that an adequate number of cross-cultural studies of social media influence on tourism are needed to substantiate such a claim (p. 22). Hence, the main aim of this cross-cultural study was to explore the use of social media by international tourists across the stages in the decision-making process to Ghana. In addition, how influential social media is to tourists pertaining to the stages of the decision-making process is unknown. Hence, this study addresses these gaps by examining the influence of diverse social media platforms on travel decision-making of international tourists from diverse backgrounds.

2 Literature review

2.1 Engel, Kollat and Blackwell model of consumer decision

Engel et al. (1978) developed a model of consumer decision-making. This model is also known as EKB model. It describes consumers' decision process and how decisions are made when choosing among a list of alternatives available. The model builds on the field of consumer psychology theories and models such as Howard's (1963) theory of buyer behaviour and Nicosia's (1976) theory of consumer decision process. However, with the EKB Model, environmental factors are additional variables that influence the formation of consumer decisions. The EKB model is considered one of the most important works in the field of consumer behaviour (Schiffman and Kanuk 2008).

EKB model basically consists of five sequential steps where information is processed before consumption decisions are made. The first stage starts with the need or problem recognition. This is followed by a search for alternative solutions which involves obtaining relevant information from various sources; both the external environment as well as internal self (e.g. memory and experiences). The third stage involves the evaluation of alternatives that is subjected to the consumer's personal criterion in deducing the preference. Once the decision is made, the consumer moves onto the fourth stage where the purchasing of the selected alternative takes place. The final step involves post-purchase evaluation. The basic framework of the EKB model begins with the state of unfulfilled needs and wants.

The EKB model went through a series of revisions and modifications and finally became the Engel, Blackwell and Miniard Model (2001). The revised model consists of four sections namely; information input, information processing, decision process and external variables influencing the decision process. The variables and the working relationship are similar to the EKB model but have been

slightly modified. For instance, consumption and divestment are other variables that were included in the revised model. According to some researchers, this is one of its major key strengths because the added factors embrace contemporary definitions of consumer behaviour which include such stages of consumption in their scope (Solomon 2006; Schiffman and Kanuk 2008).

However, this well acclaimed model is also without criticisms. In parallel with the theory of behaviour, the model also suffers the weakness of a clear definition of variables, vagueness and complexity. The model attempts to define the variables and specify functional relationships between the various constructs. However, the model fails to adequately explain as to how each of these influences consumer decision making. In the view of Loudon and Bitta (2002), the environmental and individual variables have drawn criticism due to the vagueness of their definition and role within the decision process. They further explained that the influence of the environmental variables is identified, but their role in affecting behaviour is not well developed.

Again, the EKB model has been criticised as being too restrictive to adequately accommodate the variety of consumer decision situations. The EKB model, like other consumer decision theories, suggests that consumer's purchase decision process consists of stages through which the consumer goes through in purchasing a product or service. However, it is not necessary for every consumer to go through all the five stages when making a decision to purchase and in fact, some of the stages can be skipped. It rather depends on the situation in which the consumer finds himself or herself, whether the problem is an extensive or a routine problem-solving behaviour.

2.2 Social media

Concerning social media definition, there exist different and confusing concepts among researchers. In the academic literature, some of the terms used to refer to social media are online social web sites (Lange-Faria and Elliot 2012; Hays et al. 2013), social networking sites (Miguéns et al. 2008; Asabere 2012), consumer generated media (Gretzel et al. 2008; Ayeh et al. 2013a, b), user-generated content websites (Cox et al. 2009; Khan 2012; Simms 2012), and/or even Web 2.0 (Constantinides 2009; Leung et al. 2011a, b; Millano et al. 2011).

However, the two substantive definitions that are dominant in the literature are the ones defined by Brake and Safko (2009) and Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). According to Brake and Safko (2009: p. 6), "social media refers to activities, practices, and behaviours among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media". According to the researcher, conversational media are Web-based applications that make it possible to create and easily transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos, and audios.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: p. 61) also defined social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of UGC". Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) further added that social media introduce both

substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organisations, communities, and individuals.

According to academics in tourism and hospitality such as Cox et al. (2009), Fotis et al. (2011) and Rathonyi (2013), the definition by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) is more broader and in-depth than the one given by Brake and Safko (2009). For instance, Fotis et al. (2011) explained that the latter describes only a subset of social media which refers to online systems enabling users to become members, create a profile, build a personal network connecting them to other users with whom they exchange on a frequent basis skills, talents, knowledge, preferences and other information. The researchers further emphasized that Social Media as a term should not be associated exclusively with social networking sites.

2.3 Types of social media

Similarly, just as there is no existence of an agreed definition of the terminology 'Social Media' in academic literature, so is the categorisation of the different kinds of Social Media platforms. It has been postulated in academic literature that there is no systematic way in which different social Media applications can be categorised (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Fischer and Reuber 2011; Fotis et al. 2011; Rathonyi 2013). However, some researchers have tried to come out with their taxonomies that explain the categorisation of different social media applications.

Constantinides (2009) categorised the wide variety of social media applications into five main types namely; social networks, blogs, content communities, forums/bulletin boards and content aggregators. Mangold and Faulds (2009) also identified fifteen types of social media namely; invitation-only social networks, creativity works sharing sites, user-sponsored blogs, company-sponsored websites/blogs, company-sponsored cause/help sites, business networking sites, collaborative websites, virtual worlds, commerce communities, podcasts, news delivery sites, educational materials sharing, open source software communities, social bookmarking sites and social networking sites.

Kim et al. (2010), however, proposed only two types namely social networking sites and social media sites. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) also categorised and explained six types of social media, which are social networking websites, blogs, content communities, collaborative projects, virtual social worlds and virtual game worlds. Fischer and Reuber (2011) on the other hand proposed eight types namely social networking, professional networking, blogs, microblogging, picture sharing, video sharing, social bookmarking and user forums.

A major issue of concern among these taxonomies is that there exist similar examples but with different names. Also, among the categories of these taxonomies, there are some major types of social media that are almost prevalent among the different taxonomies. For the purpose of this study, the major types that have been identified and used are Blogs, Collaborative projects, Social Networking Sites, Media Sharing Sites and Content Aggregators. In the context of tourism research, most of these types have been used by some researchers in their studies (Cox et al. 2009; Fotis et al. 2012; Lange-Faria and Elliot 2012; Rathonyi 2013).

2.4 Conceptualising usage of the EKB consumer decision model in understanding the use of social media by international tourists to Ghana

The aim of this study was to explore international tourists' use of social media for decision-making to Ghana. This deals with the way they perceive and use social media, hence the study considered the use of cognitive approach to decision-making. Example of such approaches or theories by researchers include; Theory of Buyer Behaviour (Howard and Sheth 1969), Consumer Decision Model (Engel et al. 1968), and Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). For instance, the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) and Technology Acceptance Model (Davis 1989) have been widely use in contemporary scientific researches on social media and tourism. However, the Theory of Consumer Decision-Making by Engel, Kollat and Blackwell (1968) has received less attention by researchers with respect to social media and tourism.

Secondly, the study did not see the suitability of other theories of consumer decision-making. This is because the goal is to explore international tourists' decision prior to their coming as well as purchase but not the post-consumption activities as looked out by other theories of consumer decision such as; Theory of Consumer Decision Process (Nicosia 1976) and The Model of Goal Directed Behaviour (Perugini and Bagozzi 2001).

Furthermore, the EKB model was chosen because it considers a wide range of factors influencing the consumer (tourist), and acknowledges a broad range of consumption activities beyond purchase. In relation to this study, this model highlights activities that tourists who uses social media passes through before embarking on their travel to the destination (Ghana). These activities commonly include; need recognition, information search, building of purchase intentions (i.e. alternatives' evaluation), and purchasing.

Penultimately, the use of other decision-making theories would have made it difficult in defining variables and questions for such a study on social media and tourism. EKB model spells out clear stages that were used as variables in the study and questions were constructed from literatures that were responded by international tourists. The adoption of the EKB model for this study is mainly because of the nature of the theory and its ability to ensure consistency with the general objective of the study.

2.5 Theoretical foundations of tourists' use of social media across the decision-making process

Within the context of tourism and hospitality, decision-making related to holiday travel purchases is a complex information intensive exercise. This exercise according to Rathonyi (2013) involves a series of searches that are due to the composite and experiential nature of the tourism product. Since information about goods with experience qualities cannot easily be determined before purchase, potential tourists rely on others' experiences and/or recommendations for their

decision making in an effort to decrease uncertainty and increase the exchange utility (Fotis et al. 2012).

According to Rathonyi (2013), “social media have a great impact on searching in connection with tourism and that we can find even more updated information or opinions of tourists in the searching results” (p: 111). The opinions, reviews and recommendations of millions of real or potential tourists in different social media platforms have exerted an influence on potential tourists. Senecal and Nantel (2004) suggested that consumers who had previously consulted a product’s recommendation were more likely to purchase that product than those who did not. However, in the absence of recommendations, consumers looking to purchase conducted even more searches for information (Fotis et al. 2011).

In tourism and hospitality literature, there are numerous studies that attempt to explore or describe the role and impact of social media in consumer behaviour and more specifically on the decision making process (e.g. Fotis et al. 2012; Rathonyi 2013; Simms 2012; Cox et al. 2009; Xiang and Gretzel 2010). Social media influence several components of consumer decision making process such as need awareness, information search and acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behaviour and post-purchase communications and evaluation. However, there is yet to be an applicable research or literature in the study of social media and tourism that have applied the EKB model, hence the need for this study to add to existing literature.

2.6 Hypotheses

H1. Social media use by international tourists is influential at the need awareness stage for travel decision.

H2. Social media use by international tourists is influential at the information search stage for travel decision.

H3. Social media use by international tourists is influential at the evaluation of alternatives stage for travel decision.

H4. Social media use by international tourists is influential at the purchase stage for travel decision.

2.7 Study area

The study was conducted in the Central Region of Ghana. Specifically Cape Coast, Elmina and Abrafo towns were used as the areas for the study. This is because these three towns house three most prominent attractions in Ghana; namely, Cape Coast Castle, Elmina Castle and Kakum National Park respectively. According to Ghana Tourism Authority, the Central Region of Ghana receives the highest number of attractions and tourists in Ghana (GTA 2014).

The major reason for the popularity of the region as a tourist destination is the United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites, namely; Cape Coast castle, Elmina castle and Fort St. Jago as

well as the Kakum National Park with its unique canopy walkway. Data for the study were collected from these three popular attractions in the Central Region, namely; Cape Coast Castle, Elmina Castle and Kakum National Park. These three attractions receive the highest number of international tourists in the Central Region of Ghana (GTA 2014).

2.8 Methodology

The study adopted cross-sectional survey design. A cross-sectional study examines current attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or practices (Creswell 2012). The cross-sectional survey design was well thought out to be appropriate for this study because the objective of this study is to basically explore the use of social media by international tourists on their travel decision to Ghana.

Questionnaires were administered to international tourists at the three selected attractions. The questionnaire for the study was divided into three (2) main modules. The first module sought to find out the socio-demographic characteristics of the tourists. The second module emphasised social media usage across the stages of the decision-making process. In all, 200 questionnaires were administered through the convenience sampling technique at the three selected attractions. In all, 196 were found to be useful for analysis due to issues relating to errors and non-responses to questionnaires. The data was coded and entered into the Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 21 software for analysis. The data was carefully edited (cleaned) to remove all outliers which could affect the validity of the results. It was analysed using descriptive statistics, crosstabs and multiple regression analysis. The researcher used a 4-point Likert scale with anchors 1.0–3.0; and developed items to measure the variables related to the EKB stages.

3 Results

3.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of international tourists

Table 1 provides a summarised result of the socio-demographic characteristics of international tourists to the Cape Coast-Elmina-Abrafo area. The gender distribution of respondents was 60.7 % females and 39.3 % males, showing that more females participated in the study than their male counterparts. Furthermore, majority of the tourists (71.4 %) were unmarried whereas 28.6 % of them were married. With regard to the age of international tourists, respondents aged between 20–29 (39.8 %) dominated, which is followed by those aged less than 20 (26.5 %). Tourists within the 30–40 age group appeared to be the least (15.8 %) among the age groupings after the over 40 age group which represented 17.9 %. On the whole, the average age of international tourists was 29 years.

About a quarter of the international tourists (26.5 %) were Technicians or Professionals. This was followed closely by students (20.4 %). Educators (4.1 %) were the least. More than half of the respondents (62.3 %) were Christians, 34.6 % were Atheists and 3.1 % were Hindus. Table 1 further indicates that 46.4 % of the

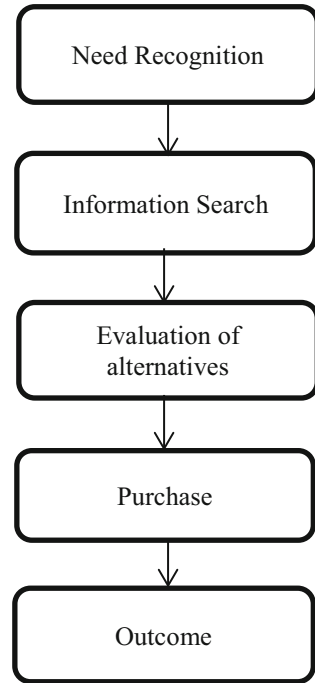
Table 1 Socio-demographic characteristics of international tourists

Background characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	77	39.3
Female	119	60.7
Total	196	100.0
Marital status		
Married	56	28.6
Unmarried	140	71.4
Total	196	100.0
Age		
<20	52	26.5
20–29	78	39.8
30–40	31	15.8
40+	35	17.9
Total	196	100.0
Highest level of education		
Senior high school	55	28.1
University/college	68	34.7
Post graduate	73	37.2
Total	196	100.0
Profession		
Student	40	25.3
Service/sales person	15	9.5
Educator	8	5.1
Volunteer	21	13.3
Professional/technician	52	32.9
Health worker	22	13.9
Total	158	100.0
Religion		
Christian	119	62.3
Atheist	66	34.6
Hindu	6	3.1
Total	191	100
Average monthly income (US\$)		
<300	36	21.3
300–599	26	15.4
600–900	16	9.5
>900	91	53.8
Total	169	100
Generating continents		
Africa	8	4.1
Europe	144	73.5
Asia	9	4.6

Table 1 continued

Background characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
North America	24	12.2
South America	3	1.5
Australia	8	4.1
Total	196	100.00

Fig. 1 Model of consumer decision-making. Source: Engel et al. (1968)



respondents had an average monthly income of more than US\$900.00, whereas 8.2 % had average monthly incomes ranging between US\$600.00 and US\$900.00. Also, 18.4 % had an average monthly income less than US\$300, whereas 13.3 % had an average monthly income ranging between US\$300.00 and US\$599.00 (Fig. 1).

Majority of the respondents (73.5 %) travelled to Ghana from Europe, with the Germans, Dutch and Danes recording 29.1, 10.3 and 6.7 % respectively. North Americans accounted for 12.2 % of the respondents, with all of them from the United States of America. The Asian continent followed with 4.6 % with India, China and Japan recording 3.1, 1.0 and 0.5 % respectively. Respondents from Africa (4.1 %) were at par with those from Australia. South America was the least (1.5 %) among the generating continents of the tourists.

3.2 Social media usage by socio-demographic characteristics

The use of social media by tourists was further explored in relation to their background characteristics as presented in Table 2. With respect to gender, 18.8 % of males frequently used Facebook and 6.5 % also used Twitter. For females, 19.6 % used Facebook while 6.5 % used Twitter. However, 18.2 % of both males and females used Content Aggregators.

From the results presented in Table 2, it came out that 20.1 % of those below 20 years used Facebook and 17.7 % used media sharing sites over other types of social media. 19.0 % of those between 21–39 years used Facebook and 17.2 % used media sharing sites. For those aged between 30–40 years, 19.3 % of them used Facebook and 17.9 % also used content aggregators. For the elderly who were above 40 years, most of them of respondents used Facebook and Content Aggregators, representing 18.6 and 17.9 % respectively, than the other types of social media. The Chi square test of social media usage across tourists socio-demographic characteristics revealed a significant relationship ($p = 0.00$) between respondents' age and the types of social media used. A Chi square test of independence post hoc test revealed that the significance occurred among those who used Facebook and media sharing sites.

With monthly income, 21.5 % of tourists with an average income below US\$300 were found to have used Facebook whereas 16.6 % used media sharing sites. Furthermore, 18.3 % of those who earned between US\$300–599 used Content Aggregators and 22.7 % of those who also earned between US\$600–900 used Facebook. Also 18.0 % of those who earned above US\$900.00 used Facebook whereas 17.6 % used Content Aggregators. Again, there were variation between the monthly income of tourists and the types of social media used. The Chi square test revealed that a significant relationship existed between tourists' monthly income earnings and the use of social media types. The Chi square test revealed that the significance occurred among those who used TripAdvisor and Collaborative projects.

Although research has it that educational level influence the use of social media (Fotis et al. 2012; Rathonyi 2013), this study did not find a significant relationship between the level of education and social media usage ($p = 0.38$). Majority of high school students (19.5 %) used Facebook. In addition, post-graduate students were found to have used Facebook (18.9 %).

Furthermore, it appears from Table 2 that most of the tourists from Europe used Facebook and content aggregators, whereas their North American counterparts mostly used Facebook and media sharing sites. The Africans, aside the use of Facebook, used collaborative projects, media sharing sites and content aggregators. Unlike the South Americans, the Asians used blogs in addition to media sharing sites and content aggregators. It is also worth noting that there was a significant relationship ($p = 0.02$) between the tourists' generating continent and the use of different social media types. Further analysis revealed that the significance occurred among those who used collaborative projects and content aggregators.

Table 2 Social media usage by socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristic	Social media types						Total	χ^2 statistic (p value)
	Facebook	Blogs	TripAdvisor	Collaborative projects	Twitter	Media sharing sites		
Sex								
Male	18.8	10.2	13.4	17.0	6.5	15.9	18.2	13.29
Female	19.6	11.7	13.3	15.5	6.5	15.9	18.2	(0.07)
Age (years)								
<20	20.1*	11.6	10.4	16.5	6.4	17.7*	17.3	
21–29	19.0	11.5	13.2	15.2	7.2	17.2	16.7	49.40
30–40	19.3	9.7	14.5	16.6	6.9	15.2	17.9	(0.00)*
40+	18.6	11.0	17.2	17.2	4.1	13.8	17.9	
Income (US\$)								
<300	21.5	13.5	11.7*	15.3*	5.5	16.6	16.0	
300–599	17.6	13.7	8.4	18.3	6.1	17.6	18.3	49.67
600–900	22.7	12.1	16.7	10.6	4.5	16.7	16.7	(0.00)*
>900	18.0	10.5	14.9	17.1	6.2	15.6	17.6	
Education								
High school	19.5	12.8	10.1	16.3	6.2	17.5	17.5	
Tertiary	19.5	10.0	14.6	15.8	5.8	17.0	17.3	15.05
Post graduate	18.9	11.0	14.4	16.1	7.3	15.3	16.9	(0.38)
Generating continents								
Africa	21.2	9.1	12.1	15.2*	12.1	15.2	15.2*	
Europe	18.8	11.0	13.4	16.8	5.6	16.4	17.9	
North America	18.5	12.1	12.9	16.1	8.9	16.9	14.5	54.77
South America	30.0	10.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	20.0	(0.02)*

Table 2 continued

Socio-demographic characteristic	Social media types					Total	χ^2 statistic (<i>p</i> value)
	Facebook	Blogs	TripAdvisor	Collaborative projects	Twitter		
Asia	23.5	14.7	11.8	8.8	11.8	14.7	100.0
Australia	22.6	9.7	12.9	12.9	6.5	19.4	100.0

Significance level $p \leq 0.05$

* Cells that produced the statistically significant difference

3.3 Social media usage across the stages of the decision-making process

This study sought to explore the usage of social media across the stages of the decision-making process based on sixteen statements (see Table 3). The table presents the basic issues taken into consideration in measuring social media usage across the decision-making process using frequency distribution of responses to each statement, percentage in agreement, means and standard deviations.

Table 3 indicates that on the whole, tourists strongly agreed (mean = 2.79) to issues pertaining to social media usage at the need awareness stage. Specifically tourists strongly agreed that social media use enhanced their desire to travel to Ghana (mean = 2.74); enabled them acquire a place (Ghana) for a holiday (mean 2.83); helped them to identify where they wanted to go for holidays (mean = 2.71) and also compelled them to travel to Ghana as a result of the influence of other travellers' reviews on social media (mean = 2.87).

Table 3 Social media usage across the stages of the decision-making process

	N	% that agree	M	SD
Need awareness stage				
Enhance my desire to go for a holiday	195	69.2	2.74	0.80
Help me find place for a holiday	196	75.0	2.83	0.76
Help me know where to go for holidays	196	64.8	2.71	0.74
Traveller's reviews compel me to travel	195	75.9	2.87	0.83
Overall score	195.75	71.22	2.79	0.78
Information search stage				
Help me to get travel information on Ghana	196	72.0	2.77	0.76
Help me to get travel information on attractions in Ghana	196	74.0	2.79	0.79
Help me to get travel information on hotels in Ghana	196	59.7	2.60	0.79
Help me to know what other travellers are saying about Ghana	194	71.6	2.78	0.77
Overall score	195.5	69.33	2.74	0.78
Evaluation stage				
Help me to evaluate other destinations	195	66.2	2.66	0.74
Help me to evaluate attractions in Ghana	196	66.4	2.68	0.71
Help me to evaluate hotels in Ghana	196	52.0	2.49	0.74
Help me assess tourism services in Ghana	196	46.0	2.39	0.70
Overall score	195.75	57.65	2.56	0.72
Purchase stage				
Help me make flight reservations	196	50.5	2.47	0.95
Help me make transportation reservations	196	31.7	2.10	0.79
Help me make hotel reservations	195	42.1	2.29	0.84
Help me make attractions reservations	195	33.4	2.14	0.77
Overall score	195.5	39.43	2.25	0.83

Scale: 1–1.49 = strongly disagree; 1.5–1.99 = disagree; 2–2.49 = agree; 2.5–3 = strongly agree

Furthermore, on the whole, tourists strongly agreed (mean = 2.74) to issues concerning social media usage at the information search stage. For instance, tourists strongly agreed (mean = 2.77) that social media helped them to get travel information about Ghana. Also, tourists strongly agreed (mean = 2.79) that social media helped them to acquire information about the various attractions in Ghana. Again, tourists strongly agreed (mean = 2.60) that social media enabled them to get information on hotels in Ghana. Tourists also strongly agreed (mean = 2.78) that social media enabled them to know and get access to what other travellers are saying about Ghana.

In addition, on the average, tourists strongly agreed (mean = 2.56) to issues pertaining social media usage at the evaluation stage. Specifically, tourists strongly agreed (mean = 2.66) that social media enabled them to evaluate other destinations in relation to Ghana. Again, tourists strongly agreed (mean = 2.68) that social media allowed them to evaluate various attractions in Ghana. On the other hand, tourists agreed that social media enabled them to evaluate hotels in Ghana (mean = 2.49) and also enabled them to assess tourism services in Ghana (mean = 2.39).

Also, on the whole, tourists agreed (mean = 2.25) to issues pertaining to social media usage at the purchase decision stage. Tourists agreed (mean = 2.47) that social media sites were used to make airline reservations to Ghana. However, only a third (31.0 and 33.4 %) of the tourists agreed that social media sites were used to make transportation reservations and attractions reservations respectively in Ghana. On the contrary, tourists agreed (mean = 2.29) that social media sites were used to make accommodation reservations at hotels in Ghana.

Generally, most of the respondents (71.2 %) used social media at the need awareness stage than the other stages of the decision-making process. This was closely followed by the information search stage (69.33 %). The purchase stage was the least among the stages (39.43 %) where social media was used by tourists.

3.4 Social media influence across the decision-making stages for travel decision to Ghana

The multiple regression analysis was undertaken to predict which stages of the decision-making process that social media use by international tourists' were influential for travel decision to Ghana. Before the regression analysis, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance value were inspected to ensure that there was no multi-collinearity. Accordingly, there was no multi-collinearity. The result of the test is presented in Table 4.

Generally, the linear regression model was able to explain 24 % (Adjusted R^2) of the variation on how social media influenced tourists' decision-making to Ghana. However, the independent variables had different influence on the dependent variable. With respect to need awareness stage and social media influence on travel decision, there was no significant relationship between the two variables ($p = 0.06$). Nonetheless, tourists who used social media at the need awareness stage had a positive influence on their travel decision to Ghana ($\beta = 0.15$). This means that, the more tourists used social media at the need awareness stage, the more influential

Table 4 Social media influence at the decision-making stages for travel decision to Ghana

Independent variables	Dependent variable Social media influence on travel decision					
	B	SE β	β	p value	Tolerance	VIF
Need awareness stage	0.17	0.08	0.15	0.06	0.55	1.81
Information search stage	0.01	0.10	0.01	0.91	0.37	2.67
Evaluation stage	0.34	0.13	0.28	0.01*	0.32	3.08
Purchase stage	0.15	0.08	0.15	0.05*	0.64	1.54
Constant	0.53	0.22		0.02		

R-square = 0.260; adjusted R-squared = 0.244

* $p < 0.05$

social media was on their travel decision to Ghana. Also, tourists' use of social media at the information search stage had a positive influence on social media influence on their travel decision to Ghana. However, their relationship was not significant ($\beta = 0.01$, $p = 0.91$). This denotes that as tourists' use social media at the information search stage increased, influence of social media on their decision-making also increased.

On the contrary, there were significant relationships between the independent variables (evaluation and purchase stages) and the dependent variable. Specifically, tourists' use of social media at the evaluation stage had a positive effect on social media influence on tourists' travel decision to Ghana ($\beta = 0.28$, $p = 0.01$). This means that as tourists' use social media for the purpose of evaluation and/or assessment increased, influence of such use for travel decision-making to Ghana increased correspondingly. Again, tourists who used social media for the purpose of purchasing travel-related products had a positive effect on social media influence on their decision-making to Ghana ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.05$). This denotes that as tourists' use of social media at the purchase stage increased, social media influence on travel decision-making to Ghana also increased correspondingly.

4 Discussion

A number of studies have shown that socio-demographic characteristics play a significant role in the use of social media (Brake and Safko 2009; Cox et al. 2009; Rathonyi 2013). The Chi square test revealed a significant relationship between tourists' age and the use of social media types. The test revealed that the significance occurred among those who used Facebook and media sharing sites. This finding supports Rathonyi's (2013) claim that the youth (students) utilise social networking sites and media sharing sites to share texts, images and videos. Also, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) posited that the young generation utilises social networking sites and media sharing sites (Youtube) more than other types of social media because they increase social presence and media richness by enabling the sharing of texts, pictures and videos. On the other hand, the elderly preferred using

Content Aggregators, such as Google maps, and Facebook so as to really get to know and identify the places they visit.

Also, the Chi square test revealed that a significant relationship existed between tourists' generating continents and the use of social media types. Further analysis revealed that the significance occurred among those who used collaborative projects and content aggregators. This finding could be buttressed by the fact that social media use as a global phenomenon varies by people and their exposure to these platforms (Gretzel et al. 2008; Fotis et al. 2012). For instance, Russians prefer the use of media sharing sites (Fotis et al. 2012), while Hungarians also prefer social networking sites (Rathonyi 2013).

With social media usage across the decision-making process, tourists showed that they use it at all the stages. However it was predominantly used at the need awareness stage. Need awareness or recognition in this study simply refers to a tourist's realisation that he/she needs to embark on a travel to Ghana to get back to his/her normal state of comfort both physically and psychologically. This strong agreement to the use of social media at this stage confirms Engel et al.'s (1978) assertion that new experiences, information, advertising, technology and other external stimuli can arouse and trigger the perception of discrepancy that drives the purchase and consumption activities of consumers.

Also the use of social media at the information search stage can be attributed to the fact that contemporarily a lot of organisations place advertisements and also have a hyper link connecting their websites to social media sites such as Facebook, TripAdvisor, etc. In agreement with Cox et al.'s (2009) findings, social media is often used at the information search stage of the decision making process to seek information about destinations, attractions, hotels and other tourism-related services. Again, the use of social media for purchase reasons can be attributed to the fact that some travel communities like TripAdvisor and IgoUgo allow tourists to book or make reservations of airlines and hotels online.

In identifying the stages of the decision-making process that the use of social media is influential for travel planning, evaluation and purchase stages were found to be influential. It is interesting to note that, although social media was used immensely by tourists at the need awareness stage and information search stage (Table 3), none of them had a significant effect on travel decision-making. Even though very few of the tourists used social media at the evaluation and the purchase stages as compared to the other stages, there were significant relationships with the use of social media at these stages on tourists' decision-making to Ghana. This finding is in disagreement with most researches on social media and travel decision-making. Most studies have identified that social media is influential at the information search stage for travel planning (Gretzel et al. 2008; De Valek et al. 2009; Rathonyi 2013).

However, social media being influential at the evaluation stage for travel decision can be supported by Fotis et al.'s (2012; p. 15) assertion that tourists read reviews on social media sites before they travel, which serves as a source of information and as a means to narrow down various choices. Hence, social media sites such as TripAdvisor, Facebook, Wikipedia, blogs, etc. help tourists to evaluate alternatives (travel destinations and products) chosen through reviews posted by other tourists to

enable them narrow down choices and arrive at a decision. Likewise, social media being influential at the purchase stage for travel decision to Ghana can be attributed to the fact that some social media sites such as travel communities (TripAdvisor) enable tourists to book air tickets and accommodation online. This can be supported by the findings in Table 3 where tourists agreed that they used social media in making reservations with airlines and hotels.

5 Conclusion

It is concluded that most of the tourists that visited attractions within the Cape Coast-Elmina-Abrafo area are females within the age of 21–30 years, mostly unmarried, with an average income of more than US \$ 900 and most of them originate from Europe. The most utilised social media by international tourists was Facebook. Generally, there was a significant relationship between social media usage and background characteristics (age, income and generating continent). However, there was no significant relationship between social media usage and education.

In general, tourists indicated that they used social media at all the stages of the decision-making process. However, it was predominantly used at the need awareness stage. On the contrary, the use of social media at the evaluation and purchase stages influenced social media use for decision-making to Ghana.

5.1 Theoretical contributions

The EKB model has been used by most researchers and they have proved the validity of the model in studying consumer decision-making in different fields. Likewise, this study has also proven the validity of the model in studying social media usage and influence of travel decision-making on Ghana. The study proved that tourists use social media across all the decision-making processes, namely need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives and purchase. However, the study further proved that it was social media usage for the purpose of evaluation of alternatives and purchase that influence their travel decision to Ghana.

The study has added its voice to the scanty literature on social media usage across the decision making process and the use of EKB model to be precise. It has shifted the discourse in literature which posited that social media is influential on tourists' decision-making for the purpose of information search and need recognition (Cox et al. 2009; Fotis et al. 2012; Rathonyi 2013). This also calls for more studies to substantiate such a claim.

5.2 Recommendations

This study has revealed that Facebook is the most used social media types. Hence, it is recommended that Ghana Tourism Authority and tourism businesses should create profiles of their establishments on Facebook in order to reach the tourists who use Facebook. This will serve as a source of free marketing and advertising platform

for these businesses. They can then post their products and services on their Facebook page and address reviews posted by customers online.

Again, the study revealed that social media were seen to be used at all the stages of the decision-making process. However, they were influential on tourists' decision-making at the evaluation and purchase stages. Therefore, tourism businesses should understand that social media is now pervasive among tourists. These businesses should adopt sites such as TripAdvisor, which allows users to make travel purchases and arrangements.

5.3 Limitation and delimitation of the study

It would have been impossible to use probability sampling techniques to select the international tourists because there was no sampling frame from which the selections would have been done. Thus convenience sampling procedure was used. Hence, generalizations and further extrapolations based on the outcome of the study were made with caution, since the samples selected may not be representative of the target population. However, reliability and validity were assured through the pre-testing of the research instrument in order to effectively measure the specific objectives that have been set and to achieve consistency of results.

The study was limited to some major areas as far as the study of social media role on international tourists' travel decision to Ghana is concerned. The focus of this study is on international tourists who visit the Cape Coast-Elmina-Abrafo area. More imperatively, the study also examined the types of social media usage and how they influenced travel decision of international to Ghana.

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