

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TRAVEL DECISION-MAKING ON
GHANA BY INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS

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BY

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DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Name: Benjamin Appiah Osei

Signature:..... Date:.....

Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

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ABSTRACT

Over the last ten years, social media has become pervasive in tourists' decision-making to travel to any destination. The main aim of the study was to assess the role of social media in travel decision-making on Ghana by international tourists. The study adopted the cross-sectional research design and was underpinned by the quantitative research methodology. Questionnaires were used to collect data from international tourists visiting Ghana.

The study revealed that most of the tourists who visited the Cape Coast-Elmina-Abrafo area were young female students within the age of 21-30 years, originating from Europe. Social media platform frequently used by the tourists was Facebook with some also using Content Aggregators (e.g. Google map). However, TripAdvisor and blogs were identified by tourists as the most influential social media types. Also, there was a significant relationship between social media usage and background characteristics (age, income and generating continent). The study also revealed that tourists consider social media platforms as useful and trustworthy for travel planning. On the whole, tourists agreed that they use social media at all the stages of the decision-making process. Nonetheless, the use of social media at the evaluation and purchase stages influenced its use for the decision to travel 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.

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DEDICATION

To my lovely mother Mrs Felicity Osei and fiancée Awurama Nyenkua
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
CCMA	Cape Coast Metropolitan Area
CGC	Consumer Generated Content
CGM	Consumer Generated Media
GTA	Ghana Tourism Authority
DMO	Destination Marketing Organisations
EKB	Engel, Kollat and Blackwell
eWOM	Electronic Word-Of-Mouth
ICT	Information Communication Technology
KEEA	Komenda Edina Eguafo Abrem district
LSD	Least Significant Difference
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SPSS	Statistical Product and Service Solution
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
THLDD	Twifo Heman Lower Denkyira district
TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action
UGC	User Generated Content
UNESCO	United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The evolution of the internet has revolutionised almost every industry in the world, including tourism. Since its emergence, the internet has radically transformed most of our economic and social lives (Millano, Baggio & Piatelli, 2011). 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 & Law, 2008; Senecal & Nantel, 2004; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013). This is because tourism is an information-based and information-intensive industry (Ráthonyi, 2013).

In the last few years, a “revolution” associated with the development of internet has impacted the way people communicate, work and conduct business. The buzzword for this is ‘Web 2.0’. Web 2.0 is a concept originally coined during a brainstorming session between O’Reilly and MediaLive International conference in 2004. O’Reilly (2007) described it as “an attitude rather than a technology” (p. 1). The key difference between traditional websites (Web 1.0) and Web 2.0 is the participation of the users. Web 2.0 sites provide a platform for users to interact and collaborate with each other, in contrast to other websites (Web 1.0) where users are limited to the passive viewing of content that was created for them (Brake & Safko, 2009; Buhalis & Law, 2008; Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008; Miguéns, Baggio & Costa, 2008). Web 2.0 facilitates the integration of the following five functional

properties: information representation, collaboration, communication, interactivity, and transactions (Gretzel, Kang & Lee, 2008; p. 111).

Building on the foundation of Web 2.0, was the apparition of interactive platforms termed “social media”. Lange-Faria and Elliot (2012) opined that “social media have become the modus operandi of the 21st century” (p. 193), with applications that foster unprecedented growth in human interaction in modern times. 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). These social media platforms are key platforms where users can become members, create a profile, and build a personal network connecting them to other users with whom they share their own content (Boyd & Ellison 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein 2010; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube are few examples of social media sites.

In recent times, several of the social media platforms exist with different purposes and functionality (Ráthonyi, 2013). They digitise human social connections offering people more friends, while decreasing face to face interactions. For instance, Facebook which was a closed network for students of a university a few years ago has become the most important social networking service in the world for people of all ages, and a good communication platform for businesses. In Ghana, one of the most popular and important social networking site is Facebook, with more than 1.6 million users in the country (Internet World Stats, 2012).

The content created by consumers through this platform is generally termed as User Generated Content (UGC) or Consumer Generated Media (CGM). Social media offers an unequalled platform for consumers to share their experiences and opinions online in the form of text, photographs and videos through consumer review sites, social networking sites, blogs, and media sharing sites, among others (Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013; Boyd & Ellison, 2008; White & White, 2007; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

The hospitality and tourism industry represents one of the major industries being influenced by social media (Ayeh et al., 2013). It has influenced both travellers' behaviour and the operations of tourism businesses. This is manifested in social media being widely adopted by travellers to search, organise, share, and annotate their travel stories and experiences through blogs and micro blogs such as Blogger and Twitter; online communities like TripAdvisor and RenRen; media sharing sites like Flickr and YouTube; social bookmarking sites like Delicious, social knowledge sharing sites like Wikitravel; and other tools in a collaborative way (Leung, Law, Hoof & Buhalis, 2013: p. 4).

The extension and customization of the concept of Web 2.0 in the tourism sector is a term referred to as 'Travel 2.0'. Travel 2.0 describes a new generation of travel websites with new technologies which enable social collaboration among travellers, and where tourists can share their experiences with fellow travellers (Ráthonyi, 2013, p. 106). TripAdvisor is the world's largest Travel 2.0 site. It serves more than 74 million users per month who seek advice about their travel plans, and hosts more than 75 million real travel reviews and opinions (Ayeh et al., 2013).

Ayeh, Au and Law (2013) categorised social media evolution impact on hospitality and tourism into three. The first category addressed the burgeoning of numerous online communities' centres on travel discussions, with even general social networking sites integrating special "apps" to stimulate travel discussions. The second centred on the changing behaviour of travellers with regards to information search and travel planning while the third category talked about the incorporation of social media into the marketing strategies of hospitality and tourism organisations (p. 132).

In the same vein, social media provide tourism businesses with unprecedented opportunities to easily, cheaply and quickly reach scores of people, understand a market's reaction to their offerings and subsequently feed this information in their product development and quality control process (Dellarocas, 2003; Leung, Lee & Law, 2011; Ráthonyi, 2013). This makes social media inevitable and/or pervasive in tourism and hospitality industry.

The travel decision of tourists is a complex one. This is due to the fact that the tourism product is experiential; as a result tourists do not get the chance to have a feel of the product before its purchase. Also, information about such intangible and experiential products cannot be easily determined prior to the purchase. Hence, in order for the tourists to decrease their uncertainty and obtain value for money, they rely on recommendations from other tourists in taking their decision (Fotis et al., 2012). Social media platforms serve as fertile grounds for the generation of such information. Tourists live their experiences and recommendations on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor. These reviews then become a pool of information that influence other tourists travel planning. For

instance, a study by Cox, Burgess, Sellitto and Buultjens (2009) disclosed that tourists who had consulted an online review of tourism product were more likely to purchase the product than those who did not.

Problem Statement

The increasing prevalence of social media platforms is one significant development in the evolution of the internet. It enables internet users to collaborate, communicate and publish original content such as blogs, videos, wikis, reviews, or photos (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). According to Leung et al. (2011), “social media appears to be a strategic tool that plays an important role in tourism and hospitality management” (p. 18). 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., 2013; Cox et al., 2009; Fotis et al., 2012; Ráthonyi, 2013; Simms, 2012; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010); social media’s impact on destination marketing and management (Hays et al., 2013; Lange-Faria & 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, Au & Law, 2013; Leung et al., 2011; Miguéns et al., 2008; Millano et al., 2011; O'Connor, 2010).

However, these studies have largely been done in western and Asian contexts. 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. (2011: p. 18) further opined that "though social media in tourism and hospitality have been widely examined and discussed, social media research is still in its infancy".

In addition to the above, the target population for previous studies have been people who use the internet instead of the generality of tourists. These include online travel consumers from tourism websites (e.g. Ayeh et al., 2013; Cox et al., 2009; Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008; Leung et al., 2011; Miguéns et al., 2008; Millano et al., 2011; O'Connor, 2010); students and citizens who had embarked on a trip not long ago (Rathonyi, 2013; Fotis et al., 2012; Simms, 2012). This raises concerns or issues such as nature of respondents used for these studies, respondents' ability to fully recall how social media influenced their travel decision, and whether online travel recommendations concerns translate specifically to the use of social media for travel purposes.

For instance, Rathonyi (2013) in his study on the influence of social media on tourism, used students from a specific geographical context (Hungary) and therefore stated that the study could not be generalized especially to other national markets with distant cultural characteristics. The researcher further explained that his respondents were inexperienced in

organising their trips because of their age group and only a very few of them had jobs so they were not independent from their parents financially (Rathonyi, 2013: p. 111).

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., 2013; Miguens et al., 2008). 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.

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; Ráthonyi 2013). Cox et al. (2009), Fotis et al. (2012) and Ráthonyi (2013) supported the claim made by Gretzel et al. (2008) that the impact of social media on holiday-related travel planning differs among national tourism markets, with cultural differences contributing to such a difference. 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). It is against this backdrop that this study examines the influence of social media on international tourists' travel decision making to Ghana.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the types of social media used by international tourists in Ghana?
2. Is social media useful for international tourists in Ghana?
3. Is CGM from social media a trustworthy source of travel information for international tourists in Ghana?
4. Which stages of the decision making process influence international tourists' use of social media for travel decision to Ghana?

Research Objectives

The main objective is to assess the role of social media in travel decision-making by international tourists on Ghana.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the types of social media used by international tourists visiting Ghana;
2. Examine the usefulness of social media to international tourists;
3. Examine the trustworthiness of social media to international tourists;
and
4. Explore the influence of social media across the various travel decision-making processes.

Significance of the Study

This study will help to identify the types of social media that international tourists who visits Ghana uses for travel decision. Additionally, this study will provide knowledge on how useful and trustworthy social media is to international tourists. Likewise, this study will provide results on the use of social media across the various travel decision-making processes.

With the reasons given above, this study will inform management of tourism and hospitality businesses in Ghana about the influence social media have on their operations. With this, they will be able to know the types of social media platforms that tourists use. These businesses will also comprehend how useful and trustworthy UGC from social media sites is for tourists in making their travel decisions to Ghana. This will help tourism and hospitality businesses to effectively incorporate and manage social networking sites for their benefit.

In effect, this study will help tourism and hospitality businesses to analyse the CGM on the webpages. They will be able to monitor and get better understanding of their customers' behaviours as well as their competitors. Also they will be able to track negative updates about the businesses on these platforms and address them immediately. This will help these businesses to strengthen weaknesses, whiles maintaining and improving what tourists like (Leung et al., 2011).

Closely linked to the above, this study will also provide pertinent information to Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), whose functions include the marketing of tourism locally and internationally. Findings from this study will inform GTA of the influence of social media on Ghana's destination choice.

Again, social media sites have been classified as a free of charge marketing tool used by tourism businesses and Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) (Fotis et al., 2012). Hence, knowledge on the kinds of social media used by international tourists to Ghana will help GTA to determine the kind of social media sites to utilise in marketing Ghana as a tourist destination.

Further significance of this study lies in its potential to provide useful information to potential investors. The findings of this study will become a useful guide to people who are interested in entering the tourism and hospitality sector on some of the various social media platforms that international tourists use and how they can incorporate it into their operations. Also, the level of influence of these sites on Ghana's destination choice as well as how trustworthy CGM is as a source of travel related information for international tourists in Ghana.

Finally, findings from this study will also serve as useful information for tourism and hospitality educators in Ghana. With this, there will be available findings on how social media influence travel decision in the Ghanaian context since most of the studies of social media influence on travel decision are centred in developed economies. In addition, this study will help bridge the knowledge gap on social media influence on international tourists' decision making to Ghana. Hence, this study will enhance and add to existing knowledge on the influence of social media on travel decision making of foreigners (international tourists) in a different national tourism market (Ghana). Again, findings from this study will provide a baseline for further studies.

Limitations of the Study

It would be impossible to use probability sampling techniques to select the tourists because there is no sampling frame from which the selections would be done. Thus convenience sampling procedure was used. Hence, generalizations and further extrapolations based on the outcome of the study will be done with caution, since the samples selected may not be representative of the target population. However, reliability and validity will be 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.

Delimitation of the Study

This study could have taken into consideration issues relating to social media influence on the pre-travel, during the travel and post-travel decisions of international tourists in other parts of Ghana. Also, the study could have taken into consideration social media influence on the travel decision of Ghanaians travelling outside the country as well.

However, the study is 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 will also examine the types of social media usage and how tourists use and trust contents in social media platforms as well as its influence on their travel decision to Ghana.

Organisation of Thesis

The thesis is organized into five (5) main chapters and each of the chapters has specific sub-topics that are discussed. Chapter one is basically an introductory chapter to the research. Sub-topics discussed under this chapter include the background to the study, problem statement, research questions, research objectives, significance of the study, limitations, delimitation and organisation of the thesis.

Chapter two was a review of related literature. Sub topics include conceptualising Web 2.0, social media, UGC and Travel 2.0. The chapter further examines the types of social media, social media influence on tourists, consumer behaviour in tourism and hospitality. This chapter also discussed theoretical and conceptual frameworks that were relevant to the study.

Chapter three outlines the research methodology employed in the study. Sub-headings here include the study area, study design, research paradigm, data and sources, target population, sample size determination, sampling procedures, data collection and instrument, fieldwork and challenges, ethical issues, and data processing and analysis.

Chapter four has to do with the presentation of results and discussions. The discussion and analysis was based on the research questions and objectives for the study.

Chapter five, deals with the presentation of main findings from the study and conclusions. Recommendations as well as suggestions on possible areas for future studies are also presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter reviews related literature on social media and tourists' decision making. The issues covered include conceptualisation of Web 2.0, User Generated Content (UGC) & social media, Travel 2.0, types of social media, social media influence on tourists, consumer behaviour in tourism and hospitality, and consumer decision-making models. The concluding part of the chapter examines the conceptual framework that guided the study.

Conceptualising Web 2.0, Social Media & User Generated Content (UGC)

The emergence of Web 2.0, Social Media and User Generated Content (UGC) has dramatically changed almost the operations of every industry, including tourism and hospitality. Any industry that is technologically prone is subject to failure, if it does not incorporate these three different but interrelated technological concepts in its operations. Among management and academic researchers, these three technological concepts have been abused, confused and/or used interchangeably to mean the same thing (Brake and Safko, 2009; Hays et al., 2013; Lange-Faria & Elliott, 2012). On the contrary, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: p. 60) posit that, "social media differs from the seemingly-interchangeable related concepts of Web 2.0 and User Generated Content". Therefore, these three technological concepts are explained in turns in the sub-headings below to provide insight regarding where these concepts originate and what they denote for the purpose of this study.

Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is one of the numerous concepts in academic literature that is yet to achieve a better definition as a result of its complexity. According to Rathonyi (2013: p. 106), It's complexity shows that Web 2.0 has got different dimensions of use, such as; technological, business, philosophical and sociological.

It is believed that the term was first used by Darcy Dinucci in 1999 and was popularised by O'Reilly at the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 conference in 2004. O'Reilly, according to academic literature, described the term as people's attitude rather than just being a technology (Fotis et al., 2012; Leung et al., 2011; Millano et al., 2011; Rathonyi, 2013). In addition Milano et al. (2011) shared a similar view describing Web 2.0 as not just being a technological advancement but rather identifying the changes that have occurred in the ways software developers and internet users make and use the web.

Turban, Mclean and Wetherbe (2011) gave a more detailed definition of Web 2.0. They described it as the second-generation of internet-based services that enables people to collaborate and share information online in perceived new ways such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, web applications, and communication tools. According to Millano et al. (2011), Web 2.0 obviously cannot remain unnoticed as it happened for the first internet revolution (i.e. Web 1.0). Unlike Web 1.0, Web 2.0 allows internet users to be more active, and offers unlimited creation of content (Leung et al., 2011; Rathonyi, 2013; Milano et al. 2011; Miguens et al., 2008). It also allows for users to collaborate and share information online.

This technological concept portrays the transition from static hypertext mark-up language (HTML) Web pages to a more unique Web that is very interactive and dynamic.

User Generated Content

In the academic literature, there exist different definitions and classifications of UGC. The technological term UGC has also been synonymously used as Consumer Generated Content (CGC), Consumer Generated Media (CGM) or Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Ayeh et al., 2013, Cox et al., 2009; Fotis et al., 2012; Leung et al., 2011; Leung et al., 2013). UGC simply refers to the personalised contents created by consumers through Web 2.0 platforms (Ayeh et al., 2013: p. 132).

It is believed that UGC has already been available prior to Web 2.0. Hence, it is prudent to harness the fact that UGC nowadays is fundamentally different from what was observed in the early 1980s as a result of the combination of certain forces. These forces or drivers as identified by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) are technological (e.g. increased broadband availability and hardware capacity), economic (e.g. increased availability of tools for the creation of UGC), and social (e.g. rise of a generation of “digital natives” and “screenagers” who are younger age groups with substantial technical knowledge and willingness to engage online).

Ye, Law, Gu and Chen (2011) also referred to UGC as a general term for any publicly-distributed digitized content originally created by users rather than professionals. A more in-depth definition of UGC was given by Thevenot (2007) to mean any content created and uploaded to the internet by non-professionals, which is the aggregation and leveraging of users' contributions

on the web. UGC can take various forms including text, sounds, images, and videos. It has also been characterised as 'conversational media' which is a two-way process in contrast to the one-way distribution of the 'packaged goods media' of the past century. This encourages the publishing of one's own content and commenting on other people's posts.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) described the three basic criteria UGC needs to meet as stated by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2007). First, UGC needs to be published publicly online to distinguish it from email or instant messengers with limited accessibility. Second, it needs to reflect certain creative or innovative effort, excluding simple copy and paste and finally, it needs to be created by common internet users and not professionals.

Millano et al. (2011) in their study on effects of online media, acknowledged the fact that contents generated by users are pervasive in all fields; showing that their positive effects have recognised repercussions on quantifiable phenomena such as e-commerce, and also on intangible matters such as those related to the image or the informational side of specific products or services. Nonetheless, it should be noted that with the emergence and development of new technology and platform, new elements may appear with the definition and characteristics of UGC.

Social Media

Like Web 2.0 and UGC, description of an agreed term for "Social Media" has been futile among academics. In the academic literature, some of the terms used to refer to social media are online social web sites (Lange-Faria & Elliott, 2012; Hays et al., 2013), social networking sites (Miguens et al.,

2008; Asabere, 2012), consumer generated media (Gretzel et al., 2008; Ayeh et al, 2013;), user-generated content websites (Cox et al,2009; Khan, 2012; Simms 2012), and/or even Web 2.0 (Constantinides, 2009; Leung et al., 2011; Millano et al., 2011).

Concerning Social Media definition, there exist different and confusing concepts among researchers. 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.

Contemporarily, social media platforms have enabled the evolution of the internet from a broadcasting medium to a participatory platform which allows people to become the “media” themselves for collaborating and sharing information. According to Internet World Stats (2012), internet users continue to spend more time on social media sites than any other type of website. Social media has been credited with the advantage of reaching global audience, even in remote corners of the world; its high immediacy with no time lag; easy accessibility by receivers as long as they can get their hands on a computer keyboard; twenty four hours, seven day operations thereby overcoming the time difference; and ubiquitous versatility for interactive exchanges (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Travel 2.0

Travel 2.0 is a term that represents the extension and customization of the concept of Web 2.0 in the tourism sector (Rathonyi, 2013). In simple terms, Travel 2.0 refers to collaborative websites (Web 2.0) on the World Wide Web that is dedicated to travel. According to the Rathonyi (2013), “Travel 2.0 describes a new generation of travel websites with new technologies which enable social collaboration among travellers, where they can share their experiences with fellow travellers” (p. 106). These websites may be focused on online travel reviews, the booking of travel, or an

amalgamation of both.

In reality, most of these travel websites are online travelogues or travel journals, usually created by individual travellers and hosted by businesses that generally provide their information to consumers for free. These businesses generate revenue through advertisements or by providing services to other businesses (Lange-Faria & Elliott, 2011). Travel 2.0 sites generate a wide variety of styles, often incorporating maps, photographs, and graphics. It has often been postulated that TripAdvisor is the most high-profiled and largest Travel 2.0 site (Ayeh et al, 2013; Fotis et al, 2012; Rathonyi; 2013). Virtualtourist, GLOBOsapiens, IgoUgo, and Cruise Critic are also other examples of Travel 2.0 websites that use a combination of travel reviews and the booking of travel.

In short, for the purpose of this study Web 2.0 is seen as the platform for the evolution of social Media. While Web 2.0 represents the ideological and technological bedrock of social Media, UGC can be seen as the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media. As Flavian and Guinaliu (2006) posited, UGC is the essence of social media; this study also recognises it as such, giving its ability to help users create and share their own content to other active users on the social media platforms. The relationship between these technological concepts is shown in the diagram below.

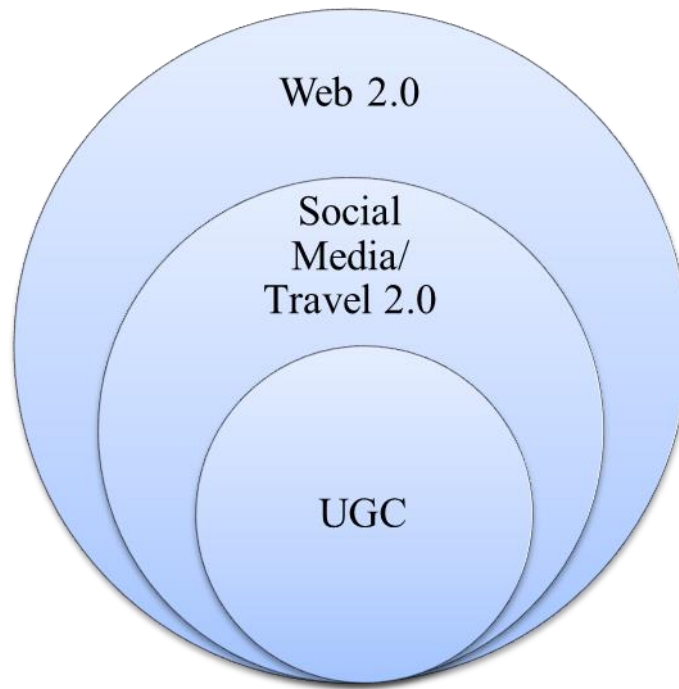


Figure 1: Relationship between Technological concepts

Source: Author (2015)

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 & Haenlein, 2010; Fischer & 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, Jeong and Lee (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 & Elliott, 2012; Rathonyi, 2013).

Blogs

Blogs are the type of social media which are equivalents of personal web pages and come in a multitude of different variations; from personal diaries describing the author's life to summaries of all relevant information in one specific content area (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; p. 63). Constantinides (2009) opined that blogs are the most known and fastest growing category of Web 2.0 applications. Blogs are usually managed by one person only, but provide the possibility of interaction with others through the addition of comments. Blogs are also mostly combined with Podcasts or Videocasts.

Mangold and Faulds (2009) also identified three major kinds of blogs in their study on social media. These are user-sponsored blogs such as Cnet.com; company-sponsored blogs like Apple.com; and company-sponsored help sites like click2quit.com. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) posited that many companies are already using blogs to update employees, customers, and shareholders on developments they consider to be important.

Although blogs have become very influential information sources (Constantinides, 2009), they also pose some risks to companies if not well managed (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). With this, dissatisfied customers may decide to engage in virtual complaints in the form of protest websites or blogs resulting in negative eWOM against a company in online space. Again, a company that encourages employees to be active on their blogs faces the consequences of employees writing negatively about the company. Therefore, businesses that use blogs need to provide quality services and better working conditions to both customers and employees respectively; or risk having bad publicity on the internet.

Collaborative Projects

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: p. 62) explained Collaborative projects as websites that enable the joint and simultaneous creation of content by many end-users and are, in this sense, probably the most democratic manifestation of UGC. Constantinides (2009), in his study, identified them as forums/bulletin boards and described them as interactive sites for the exchange of ideas and information usually around special interests. Mangold and Faulds (2009) also, in their comprehensive taxonomy of social media, categorised some types of social media as forms of collaborative projects namely; collaborative websites, podcasts, social bookmarking sites and educational materials sharing.

Within collaborative projects, wikis are websites which allow users to add, remove, and change text-based content; social bookmarking applications, on the other hand, enable the group-based collection and rating of Internet links or media content. The famous online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, Delicious, Digg, Newsvine, Mixx it, Reddit, Merlot, etc. are examples of collaborative projects. The main idea underlying collaborative projects is that the joint effort of many users leads to a better outcome than any user could achieve individually (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social Networking Sites

Kim et al. (2010: p. 217) defined social networking sites as “Web sites that allow people to stay connected with other people in online communities”. In the view of Constantinides (2009), social networks play an important role in the distribution of information and word-of-mouth which allows high level of communication and interaction. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: p. 63) also gave a comprehensive definition of social networking sites as “applications that

enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other”.

There are diverse forms of applications under social networking sites. These include the well-known social networks like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Faceparty and Habbo; professional/business networking sites like LinkedIn; and invitation-only social networks such as ASmallWorld.net. The personal profiles created by the users can include any type of information, such as photos, video, audio files, and blogs. Facebook is the world largest social networking site with over 4,619 employees and more than 1.31 billion active monthly registered users worldwide (Facebook Statistics, 2014). Also, social networking sites are of high popularity and especially used among younger internet users. As of July, 2014, 76% of the numbers of Facebook users worldwide who check Facebook daily were between the ages of 18-34 years (Facebook Statistics, 2014).

Media Sharing Sites/ Content Communities

Media sharing sites or content communities are web sites that allow users to organise and share particular types of contents [UGC] (Constantinides, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kim et al., 2010). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) were of the view that the major aim of content communities is the sharing of media content between users. Media sharing sites exist for a wide range of different media types. This sharing can be in the form of text, photos, videos, and PowerPoint presentations. With media sharing sites or content communities, users are not required to create a personal profile page. If they do, these pages usually only contain basic

information, such as the date they joined the community and the number of videos shared.

Examples of media-sharing sites are photo sharing sites like Flickr, Instagram and Snapchat); video sharing sites like YouTube and Ning; text-sharing sites like BookCrossing and Slideshare; music sharing sites like Jamendo and iTunes; virtual worlds like Second Life; and general intellectual property sharing sites like Creative Commons. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) opined that content communities carry the risk of being used as platforms for the sharing of copyright-protected materials as well as the difficulty in placing bans on the upload of such illegal contents. However, they are attractive channels for many businesses.

Content Aggregators

Content aggregators are types of social media in which individuals or organisations gather or collect web content (and/or sometimes applications) from different online sources for reuse or resale. Constantinides (2009) explained that content aggregators take two different categories. The first form includes applications that allow users to easily access fully customized, syndicated web content. These sites make use of a technique known as Real Simple Syndication. Examples of this category are uk.my.yahoo.com/, google.com/ig and netvibes.com/. The second category of the content aggregators is web sites gathering material from different sources and creating a new customized product or service. Google Maps is a good example of this type of content aggregators.

Table 1: Similarities and Differences among the taxonomies of Social media

Types of Social Media	Constantinides (2009)	Mangold and Faulds (2009)	Kim et al. (2010)	Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)	Fischer and Reuber (2011)
I. Blogs	Blogs	User-sponsored Blogs, Company-sponsored Blogs, Company-sponsored help sites		Blogs	Weblogs
II. Collaborative Projects	Forums/bulletin boards	Collaborative websites, Podcasts, Educational materials sharing, Social bookmarking sites		Collaborative projects	Social bookmarking, User forums
III. Social Networking Sites	Social Networks	Social Networking sites, Invitation-only social networks, Business Networking sites	Social Networking sites	Social Networking sites, Virtual game worlds	Social Networking, Professional Networking, Microblogging
IV. Media Sharing sites	Content communities	Creativity works sharing sites, virtual worlds, news delivery sites	Social media sites	Content communities, Virtual social world	Video-sharing, Picture-sharing
V. Content aggregators	Content aggregators	Commerce communities, Open software			

Source: Author (2015)

Social Media Influence on Tourists

Within the academic literature on social media and tourism, it has often been postulated that consumers' behaviour, in terms of how they plan and consume travel related products, has always been influenced by developments in Information Communication Technologies (ICT) and most especially, social media applications (Fotis et al., 2012; Leung et al., 2013; Ayeh et al, 2013). Gretzel et al. (2008) further predicted that social media impacts on travel will continue to be tremendous (Fotis et al., 2012: 13). In recent years, social media sites have become the method and/or medium through which contemporary tourists make their travel related purchasing decisions. This is evidenced by the huge impact social media sites have on the way tourists create, search, organise and share tourism experiences (Rathonyi, 2013).

Most studies have proved that tourists use the internet as a planning resource for their travel (Cox et al., 2009; Fotis et al. 2011; O'Connor 2010). In addition, Leung et al. (2013: p. 8) quote Xiang and Gretzel's (2010) report that, "social media constitute more than one-tenth of the search results used by online tourists during their web search processes". For instance, TripAdvisor which is the leader among travel related consumer review websites serves more than 50 million users per month who seek advice about their travel plans and hosts more than 50 million travel reviews and opinions (TripAdvisor, 2014). This proves that social media plays an important role in tourists' decisions concerning their travels.

The absence of direct experience with a tourism product has long and often been argued as a pertinent issue in tourism and hospitality (Cox et al., 2009; Lange-Faria and Elliott, 2012; Millano et al., 2011). This is because the

quality and perceived benefits of tourism and hospitality products can hardly be evaluated before the product is consumed. There is a high risk associated with the purchase of a travel product because it is intangible and experiential. As a result of its experiential nature, it requires extensive information search in order to arrive at a decision (Cox et al., 2009).

According to Rathonyi (2013), tourists in order to decrease this uncertainty in making travel decisions collect more and more indispensable information in connection with the travel. Social media applications such as TripAdvisor, offer tourists the opportunity to collect and review various forms of travel information early in the travel decision-making process in order to minimize the risk of making wrong decisions. The review of travel-related information on social media sites helps to reduce traveller's uncertainty in their travel decision and stimulate self confidence in the organisation of their travel.

Furthermore, most studies have recognised CGM or UGC as one of the important external sources of information for travel planning because of its high credibility (Fotis et al., 2012; Ayeh et al., 2013; Rathonyi, 2013). For some tourists, a recommendation from an acquaintance or friend has a huge impact on their travel decision making process. Also for other tourists, they need to obtain confirmation from other users that they have planned the best trip (Rathonyi, 2013). Leung et al. (2013: 9) posited that consumers often see themselves in the reviews of others and understand the products based on the perception of their "friends" or fellow consumers.

In short, social media applications exert influence on tourists' behaviour; most especially, providing tourists with a pool of travel information and contents from other users to aid their travel planning and decision. Again,

they provide information with an access beyond the boundaries of one's immediate social circle; enabling the acquisition of more extensive information from internet users around the world (Leung et al., 2013: 8). However, it has been found that tourists' proposition to use social media or CGM on social media platforms is determined by several characteristics of the CGM and some socio-demographic characteristics of the tourists like sex and age (Cox et al., 2009; Fotis et al., 2012; Rathonyi, 2013).

Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour is a field of discipline which is informed by contributions from many other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, management and economics. This is because the field of consumer behaviour covers a lot of grounds in academic research (Abdallat & El-Emam, 2011). In simple terms, the study of consumer behaviour is to understand the way consumers behave in acquiring a product or service. Consumer behaviour has long been of interest to researchers dating about 300 years ago with economists such as Nicholas Bernoulli, John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern. The works of these authors approached the field from the economic perspective and focused solely on the act of purchase. The most prevalent model from this perspective is the 'Utility Theory' which proposes that consumers make choices based on the expected outcomes of their decisions (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2008).

However, it was in the 1950's that the concept of consumer behaviour responded to the conception and growth of modern research to encompass more holistic range of activities that impact upon consumer decision (Blackwell, Miniard & Engel, 2001). Contemporary research on consumer

behaviour considers a wide range of factors influencing the consumer, and acknowledges a broad range of consumption activities beyond purchasing. These activities commonly include need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, building of purchase intention, purchasing, consumption and finally, disposal. This has reflected in the definition of consumer behaviour by contemporary academics.

Belch and Belch (2004: p. 2) defined consumer behaviour as “the process and activities people engage in when searching for, selecting, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products and services so as to satisfy their needs and desires”. Schiffman and Kanuk (2008) also defined consumer behaviour as “the behaviour that consumers display in searching for, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products and services that they expect will satisfy their needs” (p.3). Solomon (2006, p. 7) takes a similar view and defines consumer behaviour as the “processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires”. This more complete view of consumer behaviour has evolved through a number of discernable stages over the past century in light of new research methodologies and paradigmatic approaches being adopted (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2008).

Furthermore, there are a number of different approaches that have been adopted in the study of consumer behaviour and/or decision-making, drawing on differing traditions of psychology. Writers suggest different typological classifications of these works with five major approaches emerging (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2008). According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2008), each of these five approaches posits alternate models or theories of man and emphasises the need

to examine quite different variables. According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2008: p. 155), “these five major approaches include; Economic Man Approach, Psychodynamic Approach, Behaviourist Approach, Classical Conditioning Cognitive Approach, Humanistic Approach”.

Consumer Behaviour and Decision Making in Tourism

Of all these approaches to the study of consumer behaviour, it is the theories emanating from the Cognitive Approach that have received much attention and use by contemporary researchers in diverse fields such as marketing, technology, business management and tourism. In tourism, the study of consumer (tourist) behaviour has been classified by most writers and researchers as a complex one (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007; Akyeampong & Asiedu, 2008; Mensah, 2009).

In understanding how tourists behave, academics in tourism have studied it in relation to different concepts (Vinerean, 2013). These concepts include tourist typologies (Plog, 1974; Cohen, 1979; Pearce, 1982; Plog, 2001); tourist segmentation (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007); tourist motivations (Crompton, 1979, Pearce & Stringer, 1991; Fodness, 1994); tourists’ decision-making (Mathieson & Wall, 1982).

All these different but interrelated concepts enable a better understanding of tourist behaviour. This is because in the tourism sector, an understanding of the tourist is a *sine qua non* for any successful tourism business (Vinerean, 2013). According to Ricci and Missier (2004), travel decision making is one of the most comprehensively investigated areas in tourism research. Nonetheless, most researchers have described the study of decision making in tourism as a complicated process both for tourists and

tourism businesses alike (Fotis et al., 2013; Rathonyi, 2013). However, it is prudent to note that the complexity of the tourist behaviour and lack of agreement among researchers about tourist behaviour has rendered futile the achievement of a generic theory or model for how tourists behave.

Theoretical Underpinnings and Conceptual Framework

This part discusses the theoretical frameworks which guided the study. They comprise Consumer Decision models, the Technology Acceptance Model by Davis (1989) and an adapted conceptual framework for examining the role of social media on international tourists' decision making to Ghana. The conceptual framework was adapted from Davis (1989) and Engel et al. (1978).

Consumer Decision Making Theories

The theories of consumer decision-making process assume that the consumer's purchase decision process consists of steps through which the buyer passes in purchasing a product or service (Abdallat & Emam, 2011: p. 1). Many theories have been proposed to study and explain consumer behaviour. In addition, models were developed due to the complexity of the proposed theories to give a better comprehension of how consumers behave. The earlier models of consumer behaviour were developed in the fifteenth century, emanating from theories in other sciences such as psychology or sociology. Researchers such as Andreason (1965); Nicosia (1976); Howard and Sheth (1969); and Engell, Kollat and Blackwell (1978) also proposed models that were later described as the classical models of consumer behaviour. These models are explained in turns.

Nicosia Theory of Consumer Decision Process

Nicosia (1976) also proposed a model which concentrates on the buying decision for a new product. The model portrays the relationship between the firm and its potential consumers. The model is divided into four fields. The first field which focuses on the attitude of the consumer on the firm's message is divided into two subfields. These subfields concentrate on the firm's attempts to communicate with the consumer, and the consumers' predisposition to act in a certain way based on his or her interpretation of the message. Again, the second field is the search and evaluation process of other firm's brand, which is influenced by consumer's attitudes. The third field focuses on the actual purchasing process which could be influenced by a firm's ability to convince the consumer. The final field is the feedback process after the purchase.

This model has been criticised by most researchers. For instance, Loudon and Bitta (2002) asserted that most commentators critiqued the model because it was not empirically tested and many of the variables were not defined (Abdallat & Emam 2011). In the same vein, Abdallat and Emam (2011) also criticised that the model offers no detailed explanation of the internal factors, and this may affect the personality of the consumer as well as how the consumer develops his attitude towards the product.

Howard and Sheth Theory of Buyer Behaviour

Howard and Sheth (1969) developed a model of buyer behaviour. The model focused on three stages of decision making. The first stage explains the extensive problem solving; where the consumer does not have any basic information or knowledge about the brand but rather, seeks information about all the different brands in the market before purchasing. The second stage is the

limited problem solving and here, the consumer with the little knowledge about what they want to purchase, resort to some comparative brand information in order to arrive at a brand preference. The final stage is termed as habitual response behaviour and illustrates a consumer who is well-versed with the different brands, can differentiate between the different characteristics of each product and already decides which particular product to purchase. Howard and Sheth (1969) also proposed four sets of variables that influence consumer decision, namely; inputs, hypothetical constructs, output, and external variables.

Most researchers have asserted that the Howard and Sheth model is the most frequently quoted of all consumer behaviour models; emphasising that it is comprehensive as a result of its development through empirical scientific research (Solomon, 2006; Schiffman & Kanuk 2008; Abdallat & Emam, 2011). This model is useful to the study of consumer behaviour because it highlights the importance of inputs to the consumer buying process and suggests ways in which the consumer orders these inputs before making a final decision (Abdallat & Emam, 2011). On the contrary, this model has also been criticised by some researchers.

In the view of some researchers, the influence of the external factors is purportedly specific to certain processes within the model. This is counter intuitive, and ignores other impacts that such variables may have on the wider processes (Schiffman & Kanuk 2008). For instance, no direct relation was drawn on the role of religion (external factor) in influencing the consumer's decision making processes. This enhances the model obvious weakness in anticipating the consumer decision (Abdallat & Emam, 2011).

Engel, Kollat and Blackwell Theory of Consumer Decision

Engel, Kollat and Blackwell (1978) also 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 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 & 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 Blackwell, Miniard and Engel 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 & 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.

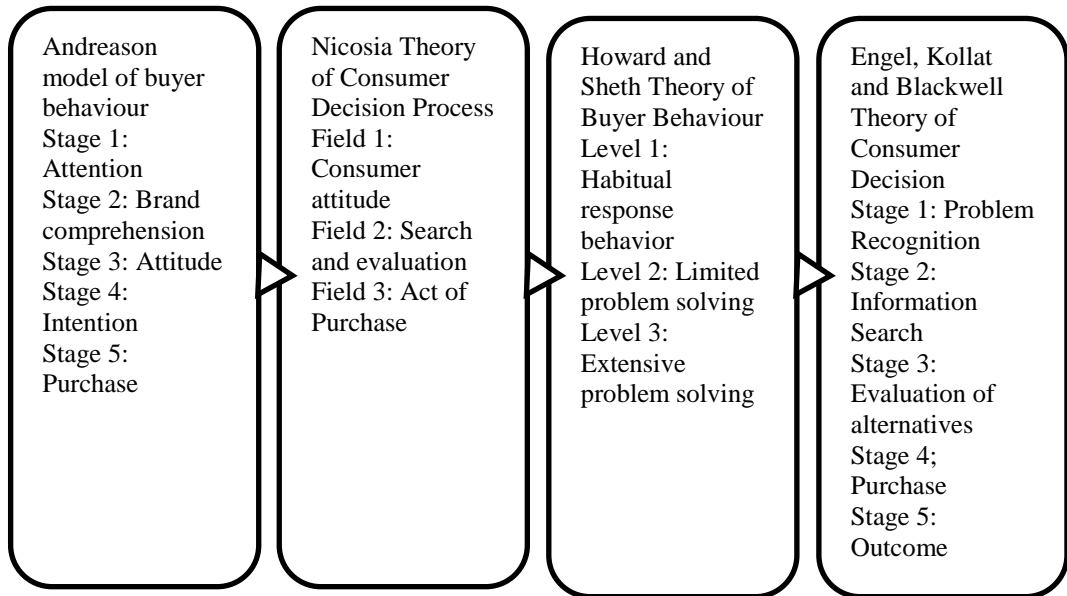


Figure 2: Classical Theories of Consumer Behaviour

Source: Author (2015)

Technology Acceptance Model

Technology Acceptance Model [TAM] (Davis, 1989), derived from the Theory of Reasoned Action [TRA] (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), offers a powerful explanation for user acceptance and usage behaviour of information technology. TAM is one of the most influential models widely used in studies on the determinant of information technology acceptance. Many previous studies have adopted and expanded this model which was empirically proven to have high validity (Lee et al., 2003; Nunkoo, Juhaweer & Rambhunjun, 2013; Morosan, 2010; Ayeh et al., 2013)

TAM theorizes that an individual's behavioural intention to adopt a system is determined by two beliefs; perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Perceived usefulness is defined as "the degree to which an individual believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her productivity"

while perceived ease of use is defined as “ the degree an individual believes that using a particular system would be free of effort” (Davis, 1989). Among these two, perceived ease of use has a direct effect on perceived usefulness.

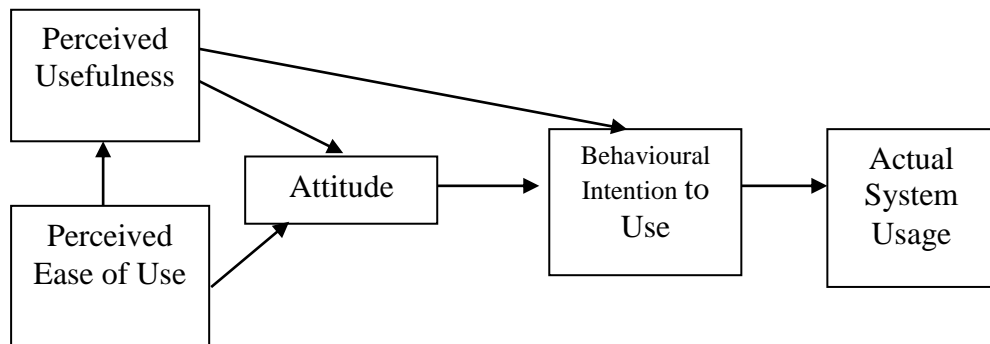


Figure 3: Technology Acceptance Model

Source: Davis (1989)

Davis (1989) also elucidated that there is a relationship between users’ beliefs about a technology’s usefulness and the attitude and the intention to use the technology. This means that an individual may adopt a technology if he or she perceives it as convenient, useful and socially desirable even though they do not enjoy using the technology (Ayeh et al., 2013). However, perceived usefulness exerts stronger and more consistent relationship on usage than did other variables reported in the literature. Thus, there will be a possibility of a direct relationship between beliefs (perceived usefulness) and usage. Hence, the variable perceived usefulness was used in the context of this study.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptualising Tourists’ Usefulness of Social Media

Perceived usefulness, in the context of this study, is taken to mean that international tourists’ use of a specific social media platform for the purpose of travel decision-making are influenced by their perceptions of its usefulness for

that purpose. Hence, perceived usefulness is defined in this study as international tourists' expectations that using a particular social media will enhance their travel decision-making. Ayeh et al. (2013) suggested that, the common belief among travellers' use of social media is that they would make use of an application if they consider it as useful for achieving a specific result. However, such usefulness is relative to specific tasks, hence, the social media sites can lose their usefulness when moved out of the specific context. For prospective travellers in search of travel information, the usefulness of these social media is related to the extent to which such sites help them in their travel decision making.

The TAM assumes a direct relationship between perceived usefulness and intentions. The reason for such a relationship is based on the belief that people develop their intentions toward behaviours they consider as useful, over and above any positive or negative feelings they may have toward the behaviour per se (Davis, 1989). A number of studies have confirmed the importance of perceived usefulness as a basic component of social media utilization in hospitality and tourism settings (e.g. Law & Jogaratnam, 2005; Huh, Kim, & Law, 2009; Morosan, 2010; Casaló, Flavián & Guinalú, 2010; Ayeh et al., 2013). For instance, Casaló et al. (2010) and Ayeh et al. (2013) support the claim that a direct relationship exists between perceived usefulness and members' use of social media for travel planning.

Conceptualising Tourists' Trustworthiness of Social Media

There is no universally accepted definition of 'trust' (Cox et al., 2009). According to Chen (2006), there are two schools of thought about trust. The first school regards trust as a belief or expectation about another party's

trustworthiness; the other school regards trust as a behaviour that reflects a reliance on others and some uncertainty (and vulnerability) from the person who is 'doing the trusting' (Cox et al., 2009). The difference is in how trust is actually measured in a research context.

Hence, in the context of this study, trust relates to the relationship between the tourist and the provider of trust. Since the study is examining the trustworthiness of social media on international tourists to Ghana, it is therefore appropriate to adopt the second school of thought, where we consider tourists reliance on the trustworthiness of people providing the comments on these social media platforms in influencing their travel purchase decision.

In addition, several studies indicate that due to the lack of commercial self-interest associated with electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) recommendations, consumers tend to trust and are influenced by CGM more than commercial sources such as travel agents or accommodation operators. This is because the provider of the information is not generally aiming to make a financial gain from sharing their experiences and views with others (Cox et al., 2009, Senecal & Nantel, 2004). In the social media context, trustworthy contributors or reviewers are assumed to have no intention to mislead the prospective traveller and will thus tell the truth about their experience (Ayeh et al., 2013).

Fotis et al. (2012) postulated that these comments can either be trusted because they are 'real' experiences by 'real' people who are independent or not trusted because the content that is posted may be faked by someone with a vested interest. There are also issues of concerns about the trustworthiness of social media sources of information. One major concern raised about the use of

contents in social media sites when planning travel is how can the consumer be assured that the contents on social media are in fact independent and hence trustworthy (Gretzel, 2006; Cox et al., 2009). Litvin et al. (2008) also pointed out that employees of some businesses might 'act' as consumers to post positive comments about their businesses or to post negative comments about their competitors. Therefore, tourists who follow comments and/or reviews on social media sites may be concerned about the trustworthiness of the individuals posting the contents. Hence, trustworthiness of social media in the context of this study is measured in two forms (i.e. social media trustworthiness as a source of information and trustworthiness of UGC providers on social media platforms).

Conceptualising Usage of Social Media in 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).

In the 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; Ráthonyi, 2013; Simms, 2012; Cox et al., 2009; Xiang & 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.

In the context of this study, travel decision-making refers to the processes international tourists go through in finalising their decision to visit Ghana. This is further explored through the four phases of the EKB model that consumers (i.e. tourists) go through before their visit to Ghana. These include the need awareness, search for travel information, making of purchase intentions (evaluation of alternatives) and purchase.

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 the same vein, Gretzel et al. (2008) found that online reviews posted in a travel related consumer review and rating website increase travellers' confidence during decision making, reduce risk, assist them in selecting accommodation and therefore, facilitate decision making. In addition, it has been found that travellers', before the travel, read accommodation reviews as a mean to narrow down choices, and post their accommodation choices on social media in order to confirm the choice made (Fotis et al., 2012: 15).

According to Ráthonyi (2013: p. 111), "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". The opinions, reviews and recommendations of millions of real or potential tourists

in different social media platforms have exerted an influence on potential tourists.

In short, international tourists' usefulness and trustworthiness of social media platforms are postulated to influence their use of social media for travel decision making to Ghana. Further, it has been discovered that the actual social media sites are used at the various stages of the decision making process to travel to Ghana; which affect their purchasing decision. This is shown in the figure below.

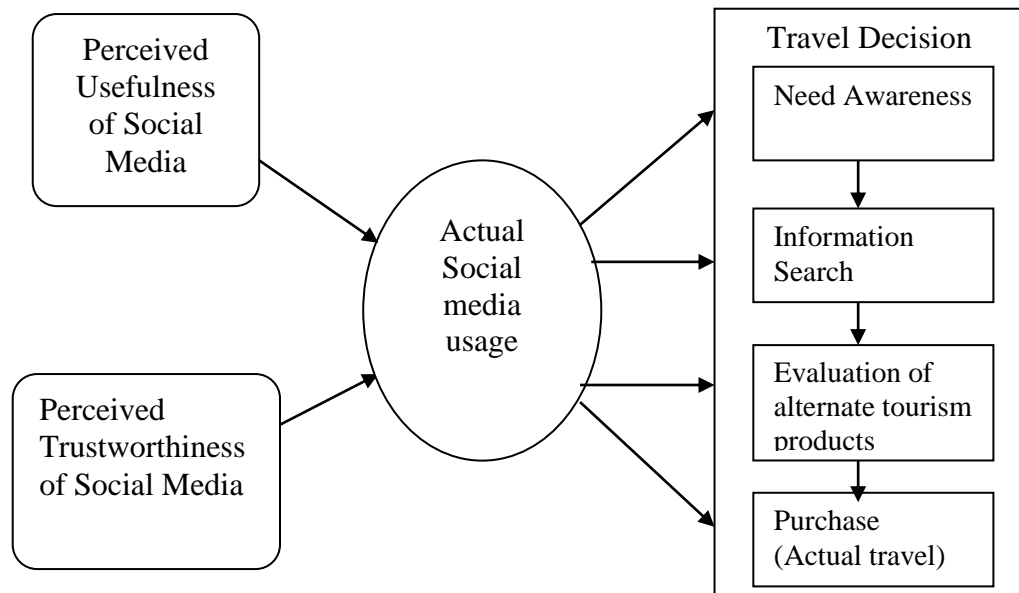


Figure 4: Conceptual Model for the Influence of Social Media on International Tourists' Decision-Making on Ghana.

Source: Adapted from Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) and Model of Consumer decision-making (Engel, Kollat and Blackwell, 1978)

Summary

The chapter reviewed related literature, which is of relevance to the study. The chapter commenced by making readers comprehend what social media is and what it is not. With this, the three different but interrelated technological concepts (Web 2.0, UGC and Social Media) were clearly explained. It has been evident in the literature that, there are no agreed types of social media platforms by researchers. Therefore, in order to understand the types of social media, typologies from different researchers were reviewed. Furthermore, it has been asserted that social media, as a new external factor, now has an influence on tourists and tourism businesses. Hence, a critical look was taken at the influence of social media on tourists' decision-making. Also, the chapter discussed consumer behaviour and decision making in tourism and hospitality as well as the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding the study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the research methods that were used to collect and analyse data to achieve the objectives of the study. It also describes the study area, the study design, target population, sampling procedure, sample size, research instruments used, as well as the data processing, analysis plan and ethical issues.

Study Area

Since the location in which a research is conducted plays an important role in the overall process of a research (Kumar, 2005); it is appropriate to outline some basic features of the study area. The spatial focus of the study was the Cape Coast Metropolitan Area (CCMA), Komenda Edina Eguafo Abrem (KEEA) district and Twifo Heman Lower Denkyira district (THLDD). All these three districts are in the Central Region of Ghana.

Cape Coast, the capital town of the Central Region, is located in the Cape Coast Metropolis. It is 165 km west of Accra on the Gulf of Guinea. Also, Elmina, which is located in the Komenda Edina Eguafo Abrem (KEEA) district, is about 6 km west of Cape Coast. On the other hand, Abrafo, which is located in THLDD, is about 30 km north of Cape Coast.

Cape Coast is largely inhabited by the Fantes, with fishing and trading being the dominant economic activities in this area. The area has a minimum temperature of about 26.5⁰C and a maximum average temperature of 31⁰C. Its sunny atmospheric condition coupled with high humidity drive a lot of tourists towards the beaches in this area. Cape Coast has been described as the tourism

'hub' of the Central Region because of the numerous tourist facilities and services (Akyeampong & Asiedu, 2008; Boakye, 2012; Dayour, 2013). The striking historical attraction (Cape Coast castle) receives large numbers of both domestic and international tourists each year. Other attractions include the palace of the paramount chief of the Oguaa traditional area and the famous Oguaa Fetu festival which is celebrated annually.

Elmina is also inhabited by the Fantes, and dominantly a fishing community. The town is also attractive to tourists because of the eminent Elmina Castle, Fort St. Jago, Dutch cemetery and the colourful fishing harbour near the castle. The area also has quite a number of tourist facilities, such as beach resorts and restaurants.

Abrafo is also a small village dominated by the Fantes, and dominantly a farming community. The village is accessible by a paved road from Cape Coast. Abrafo is situated at the entrance to Kakum National Park. Apart from the national park that makes the village attractive, there is also a craft centre.

The Cape Coast-Elmina-Abrafo area was selected as the study area because of the following reasons. The Central Region of Ghana receives the highest number of attractions and tourists (GTA, 2014). Also, the region is endowed with a diversity of attractions including historical, ecological and cultural attractions. 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.

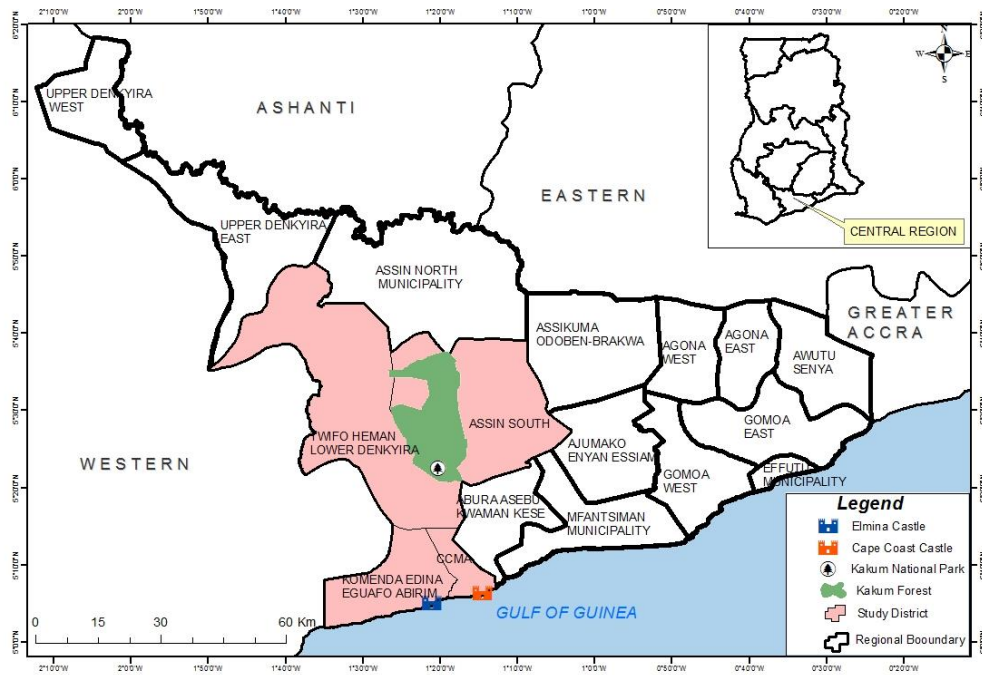


Figure 5: Map of Cape Coast-Elmina-Abrafo area

Source: Cartography Unit, Department of Geography & Regional Planning, University of Cape Coast (2015)

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. According to GTA (2014), these three attractions receive the highest number of international tourists in the Central Region of Ghana. These tourist attractions are identified as hot spots or hubs for international tourists who visit Ghana (Akyeampong & Asiedu, 2008; Dayour, 2013; Mensah, 2009).

Research Paradigm

This study was grounded in the positivist paradigm of research. The positivists believe that reality is stable and can be observed and described from an objective point without interfering with the phenomenon being studied

(Sarantakos, 2005). Drawing on this, a quantitative method of data collection and analysis was adopted for the study.

A quantitative research is the numerical representation of observations for the purpose of describing and explaining the phenomena that those observations reflect (Creswell, 2012). It is used in a wide variety of natural and social sciences, including physics, biology, psychology and sociology. Survey researches as well as descriptive and experimental researches are common approaches to quantitative research.

Among its advantages are the provision of results which can be condensed statistically, and statistical comparisons between various groups. Epistemologically, the researcher is independent of what is being researched which makes it value-free and unbiased. Consequently, issues regarding respondents' use of social media, background characteristics and travel-decision, and the test for differences between variables were measured and analysed quantitatively.

Research Design

The study adopts a non-experimental research design. This is because tourists who travel to Ghana would have already made their travel decisions, and hence will not allow for any manipulation of the key variables. Specifically, the study adopts cross-sectional survey design. Cross-sectional survey design involves collection of data from a sample of individuals (or groups) at a particular point in time as a basis for inferring the characteristics of the population from which the sample comes (Creswell, 2012). A cross-sectional study examines current attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or practices. The attitudes, beliefs, and opinions are ways in which individuals think about

issues, whereas the practices are their actual behaviours. A cross-sectional survey design, with respect to this study, is concerned with the types of social media platforms used by international tourists, usefulness and trustworthy opinions that international tourists hold on CGM from social media sites, and influence and/or effect of these contents on their travel decision to Ghana.

A cross-sectional research is concerned with quantitative method of data collection and statistical analysis of data to describe trends about responses to questions and to test research questions or hypotheses. The cross-sectional survey design was well thought out to be appropriate for this study because the objective of this study is to basically assess the role of social media on travel decision-making of international tourists to Ghana.

Data and Sources

Primarily, data was sourced from international tourists at Cape Coast Castle, Elmina Castle and Kakum National Park; while secondary information was sourced from journals, internet and books. The literature on Web 2.0, social media, Travel 2.0, consumer behaviour, as well as the impact of social media on the tourism and hospitality industry was sourced from books, journals, and social networking sites. Secondary information on international tourists' arrivals was also obtained from Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB) and Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission in Central Region, Ghana. This data assisted the researcher in calculating the sample size for the study.

Target Population

The target population for the study comprised international tourists who visit Kakum National Park, Elmina and Cape Coast Castles between the months of December, 2014 and February, 2015. In the literature, international tourists are described as temporary visitors who cross a national border into another country and spend at least one night pursuing leisure or any other activities for which they do not earn remuneration at that destination (Akyeampong & Asiedu, 2008). The sampling of data from international tourists was to enable the researcher to gather the views of tourists who use social media and how social media influenced their travel decision to Ghana.

Sample Size Determination

In order to derive the sample size for the study, the Fisher, Laing, Stoeckel and Townsend (1998) formula for determining sample size was used. This formula is used when the target population is more than 10,000. The available information obtained from the GMMB and the Wildlife Division (2014) in the Central Region suggests that international tourists' arrivals in Cape Coast Castle, Elmina Castle and Kakum National Park for July and August 2014 stood at 15,680. This figure suggests the suitability of using the formula in calculating the sample size for the study.

However, it is worth noting that the figure obtained from the GMMB and the Wildlife Division might not be a true reflection of all the arrivals in 2014 since the data was only collected from the three main attractions in Cape Coast, Elmina and Abrafo (namely, Cape Coast Castle, Elmina Castle and Kakum National Park). Therefore, international tourists who might have visited other areas either than these three attractions were not captured.

However, in order not to arbitrarily select a sample, and also arrive at a sample size that will not be too low or too high, it deemed right to do an estimation based on the available data on the international tourists' population which was obtained from GMMB and the Wildlife Division.

Fisher et al.'s (1998) formula is given as:

$$n = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

Where:

n = the desired sample size when the population is more than 10,000

z = the normal standard deviation, usually set at 1.96 which corresponds to 95 % confidence level;

p = the proportion of the target population that has similar characteristics;

q = 1.0 minus 'p' and

d = the margin of error which is equal to 0.05

If the z-statistic is equal to 1.96, margin of error (d) equals to 0.05% and the proportion of the target population with similar characteristic (p) equals to 85% (0.85), then (n) is:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{(1.96)^2 (0.85) (0.15)}{0.05^2} \\ &= 196 \end{aligned}$$

The calculated sample size was equal to 196. This constitutes the sample size for the study. A total of 196 international tourists were interviewed with extra 10 (5%) to cater for errors and non-responses that will occur in some instruments. According to the argument made by Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black (1998), the issue of how large a sample size should be is

unanswered. They are, however, of the opinion that based on a large sample distribution theory, reliable estimates can be obtained from samples between 100 to 150 respondents.

Sample Technique

Data was collected from international tourists in Cape Coast Castle, Elmina castle and Kakum National Park. The convenience sampling procedure was used to select the tourists who participated in the study. Thus, the tourists were selected as and when they became readily available and were willing to respond to the questionnaires. Nutsugbodo (2013) used this method of sampling in a study involving international tourists' perceptions of service quality of public transportation in the Accra Metropolis of Ghana. The breakdown of the selected hot spots and their respective sample size allocation is presented in Table 2 below. The allocations were done based on the volume of international tourists that patronise the various attraction sites.

Table 2: Sample Size Allocation for Attraction Sites

Attraction Site	Location	International tourists received (July-August, 2014)	Sample size allocated
Cape Coast Castle	Cape Coast	4186	55
Elmina Castle	Elmina	3815	50
Kakum National Park	Abrafo	7679	101
Total		15680	206

Source: Fieldwork (2015)

The three selected hot spots were visited and questionnaires were administered to tourists, using the convenience sampling method of data collection. This procedure enabled the researcher to interview respondents that were readily available and satisfied initial conditions of whether or not they had used social media and how it influenced their travel decision-making to Ghana.

Data Collection Instrument

This research is cross-sectional in nature and follows a quantitative approach. Thus, questionnaires were administered to international tourists at the three selected hot spots by the researcher and field assistants. Questionnaires are very efficient for collecting statistically quantifiable information in social science research (Twumasi, 2001; Sarantakos, 2005). The questionnaire approach to data collection was used because most international tourists who visit Ghana can read, write and understand English. The use of questionnaire also ensures the independence and anonymity of respondents in the study. Nonetheless, unlike in-depth interviews, questionnaires will not allow the researcher to probe into intriguing issues in the research since its usage stresses the independence of respondents.

The questionnaire was divided into six (6) main modules. Each module examined different issues relating to the study. Module one addressed issues on international tourists' usage of social media, types of social media used and how influential they were in their travel decision to Ghana. Module two sought to find out the usefulness of social media to the tourists. Module three also addressed issues relating to international tourists' agreement to statements on the trustworthiness of social media against other sources of travel information

as well as their level of trust about providers of contents on social media. Module four probed the influence of social media across the stages of the travel decision-making process. Module five also covered travel characteristics of the tourists. Lastly, module six covered the socio-demographic characteristics of the tourists. For each of the modules, there was a mix of open and close-ended questions. A Four (4) point Likert scale was employed to measure respondents' extent of agreement or disagreement on various issues.

Field Work Challenges

The field work was preceded with a pre-testing of the research instrument on twenty tourists for a week in November 2014 within the Accra Metropolis with selected hotspots being the Kotoka International Airport and Movenpick International Hotel. This initial study area was chosen for the pre-testing since it is the first region or place international tourists coming into the country find themselves because of the international airport there. The exercise was relevant as it afforded the researcher to test the reliability of the instrument and also re-shape the questionnaire before undertaking the actual field work. The actual field work took place within December, 2014 to February, 2015.

During the data collection, two Field Assistants were selected and trained to assist in the data collection. They were undergraduate students. A training session was held for them to better equip them to understand the nature of questions and how best to interact with the tourists to achieve their maximum cooperation.

The field assistants helped with the administration of the questionnaires at the various sites during the main data collection. The purpose of the study was always unequivocally explained to respondents before questionnaires were

handed over to them. As it is with most research works, this particular study was not without challenges. The main challenges encountered during the field work are discussed below.

One major challenge was the unwillingness of some tourists to participate in the study. This was because they could not understand and speak the English language and as such were not in the position to answer the questions. This resulted in some of the questionnaires being partially answered. As a result, such incomplete questionnaires were filtered and discarded.

Another major challenge was that some of the tourists mistakenly took members of the research team to be people who usually harass them for money and gifts. It was evident that some 'beach boys' tried to extort money from tourists. This made it very difficult to approach those tourists who have been initially approached by some beach boys. However, some tourists gave in after a brief discussion with them on what the entire study is about.

Ethical Issues

The ethical dimensions of every research and how they are addressed are imperative to talk about. The research took into account the issues of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. According to Neuman (2007), researchers must not coerce anyone into participating in research. Participation must be voluntary at all times. Informed consent was sought from respondents and attractions' management, before the research was done. The purpose of the study was explicitly made known to them, but respondents who declined participation were not forced or influenced to do so.

Furthermore, the issue of anonymity was also ensured. Anonymity protects privacy by not disclosing a participant's identity after information is

gathered. Respondents were assured of their anonymity since names and other personal details were not associated with specific responses given. Neuman (2007) posits that even if a researcher cannot guarantee anonymity, he or she should always protect participants' confidentiality. For this study, respondents were also assured of their confidentiality; the information they provided were not divulged to any third party other than its intended purpose, which was an academic exercise.

Data Processing and Analysis

The Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 21 was used to analyse the data from the field. The SPSS software serves as a tool for transforming responses from a population of study into figures through coding. The data was coded and entered into the SPSS software for analysis. The data was carefully edited (cleaned) to remove all outliers or extreme values which could affect the validity of the results.

Descriptive statistical presentations which involve organisation and summarization of data were undertaken as a prelude to the analysis and generalization of results from the study. Some of these descriptive statistics included averages, bar charts, cross-tabulations and frequencies which were presented to display various background and travel characteristics of tourists.

Inferential statistical measures included independent samples T-test and one-way analysis of variance which were used to test for differences in perceived usefulness and perceived trustworthiness of social media across international tourists' background characteristics. For the test for differences using the independent samples t-test and one-way analysis of variance, the dependent (response) and independent (explanatory) variables were identified.

The independent variables included all the background characteristics of the respondents which were captured in the study, such as age, sex, level of education, income, occupation and continent of origin. The dependent variables included international tourists' perceived usefulness and trustworthiness of social media. Also, the multiple regression analysis was used to identify statistically significant relationships among the variables.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the methods used in the research. The chapter discussed issues relating to the study area. The study was guided by the positivist philosophy of research. Hence, the researcher adopted a quantitative method of data collection and analysis. Moreover, the chapter also stated the sources of data and information, target population, sample size used and sampling procedures. The instruments for data collection as well as how the data was analysed and presented were also considered in the chapter. Lastly, the entire fieldwork and the challenges that emanated from it were also looked at as well as some ethical dimensions and how they were also addressed.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter outlines and discusses the results of the data in line with the objectives of the study. It commences by providing a description of the background characteristics of international tourists who visited the Cape Coast-Elmina-Abrafo area in the Central Region of Ghana from December, 2014 to February, 2015. Other issues covered include the travel characteristics of the tourists, types of social media used, influence of the social media used on their travel decision to Ghana, usefulness of the social media to the tourists, trustworthiness of the social media, the use of social media at various stages of the decision-making process and how social media influenced travel decision to Ghana. Lastly, the chapter analyses the willingness of tourists to share their experiences in Ghana on social media sites.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of International Tourists

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). Table 3 provides a summarised result of the socio-demographic characteristics of international tourists to the Cape Coast-Elmina-Abrafo area.

Table 3: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of International Tourists

Background characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	77	39.3
Female	119	60.7
<i>Total</i>	196	100.0
Marital Status		
Married	56	28.6
Unmarried	140	71.4
<i>Total</i>	196	100.0
Age		
<20	52	26.5
20-29	78	39.8
30-39	31	15.8
40+	35	17.9
<i>Total</i>	196	100.0
Highest level of education		
Senior High School	55	28.1
University/College	68	34.7
Post Graduate	73	37.2
<i>Total</i>	196	100.0
Profession		
Student	40	25.3
Service/Sales Person	15	9.5
Educator	8	5.1
Volunteer	21	13.3
Professional/technical	52	32.9
Health Worker	22	13.9
<i>Total</i>	158	100.0
Average Monthly Income (US \$)		

Table 3 continued.

< 300	36	21.3
300-599	26	15.4
600-899	16	9.5
> 900	91	53.8
<i>Total</i>	169	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

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. This is in line with Fotis et al. (2012) and Rathonyi (2013) findings who also recorded more female tourists than male tourists in their study of social media influence on tourism.

Furthermore, it is evident from Table 3 that the majority of the tourists (71.4%) were unmarried whereas 28.6% of them were married. The large number of unmarried tourists could be due to the fact that they were relatively young, that is, between the ages of 21-30 years and also most of them were students and volunteers. Also, this can be attributed to the fact that 'young adults' mostly have free time at their disposal to travel and experience novelty with little or no marital commitments back home (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, & Wanhill, 2008).

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 30-39 age group appeared to be the least (15.8%) among the age groupings after the over 40 age group which represented 17.9%. However, related studies by Dayour (2013) and Nutsugbodo (2013) found that tourists above age 40 years of age group were

the least recorded among tourists visiting Ghana. On the whole, the average age of international tourists to Ghana was 29 years.

In general, all the international tourists had attained some level of formal education. Table 2 shows that, 37.2% of the respondents had attained post-graduate degrees, 34.7% had attained tertiary degrees, and about 28.1% had Senior High School qualifications. 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.

Table 3 further indicates that 46.4% of the 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\$899.00. 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.

The study further identified the continents from which tourists came. In doing so, countries captured in the data were grouped based on the six (6) main continents, that is, Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, South America and Australia as presented in Figure 6. Majority of the respondents (73.5%) were 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. According to a UNWTO (2014) report, Europe is the

world's leading tourist generating region with 51% of the world's total arrivals.

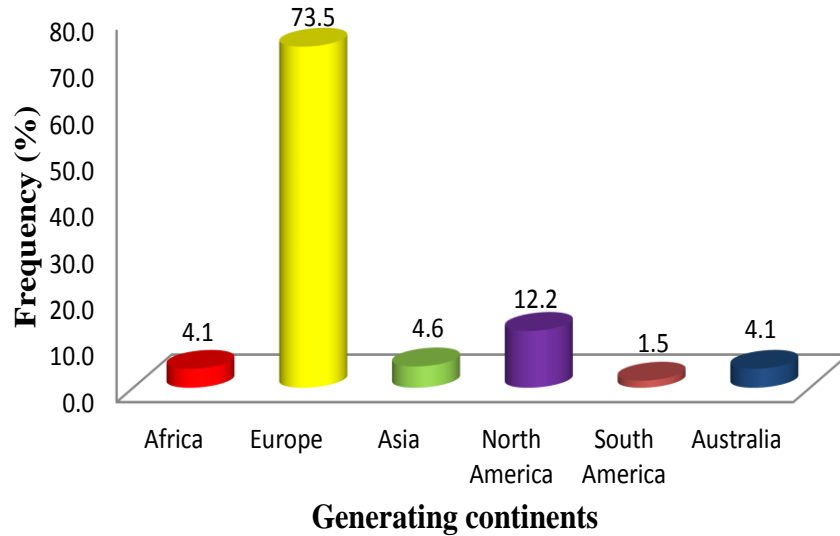


Figure 6: Generating Continents of Tourists

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Travel Characteristics of Tourists

A number of studies have also shown that travel characteristics play a significant role in the use of social media (Ayeh et al., 2013; Fotis et al., 2012). In relation to background characteristics, the study also identified the travel characteristics of international tourists to Ghana.

Travel characteristics are key constituents of tourists' behaviour (Cooper et al., 2008) and vary in terms of length-of-stay, travel party size, among many other characteristics. Table 4 shows that based on the number of visits, majority of the respondents (77.6%) were first time visitors while 22.4% were repeat visitors who might have been in the country more than once.

Table 4: Travel Characteristics of Tourists

Travel characteristics	Frequency	Percent (%)
Number of visits		
First time	152	77.6
Repeat visits	44	22.4
<i>Total</i>	196	100.0
Length of stay		
1 week	19	10.4
2 weeks	34	18.6
3 weeks	21	11.5
1 month	32	17.5
More than one month	77	42.1
<i>Total</i>	183	100.0
Nature of trip		
Individually organized trip	48	24.5
Group trip	148	75.5
<i>Total</i>	196	100.0
Travel party size		
< 5	110	74.3
6-10	28	18.9
11-15	3	2.0
16-20	4	2.7
>20	3	2.0
<i>Total</i>	148	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

In terms of length of stay, 42.1% of the respondents did say they intended to stay for more than one month whereas 10.4% planned to stay for a week. This finding supports claims by Dayour (2013) that most international tourists (backpackers) stay for more than a month at their chosen destinations. The number of tourists who stayed in the country for more than six months

were probably volunteer tourists, who also accounted for 13.3% of tourists that arrived in Ghana (Table 3).

Majority (75.5%) of the international tourists who were surveyed came in groups whereas 24.5% planned and organised their own trip to Ghana. Again, it was observed from the study that majority (74.3%) of the respondents travelled to Ghana in groups of less than five tourists whereas only 2.0% travelled within a group size of 11-15 tourists.

Tourists' Purpose of Visit

The international tourists came for different purposes. These purposes or reasons of visit included education (study/research), visiting historic and cultural attractions, visits to leisure and recreation sites, undertaking business activities and visiting friends and relatives (VFR). From Figure 7, 23.2% came to Ghana for volunteering purposes. This could be attributed to the growing number of volunteer tourists visiting Ghana to undertake various activities such as teaching, medical assistance, social work and conservation among others (Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014). Tourists who visited the country for relaxation and leisure purposes accounted for 20.9% of the total respondents. This could be due to the fact that relaxation has been noted as one of the activities undertaken by most tourists (Akyeampong & Asiedu, 2008; Dayour, 2013).

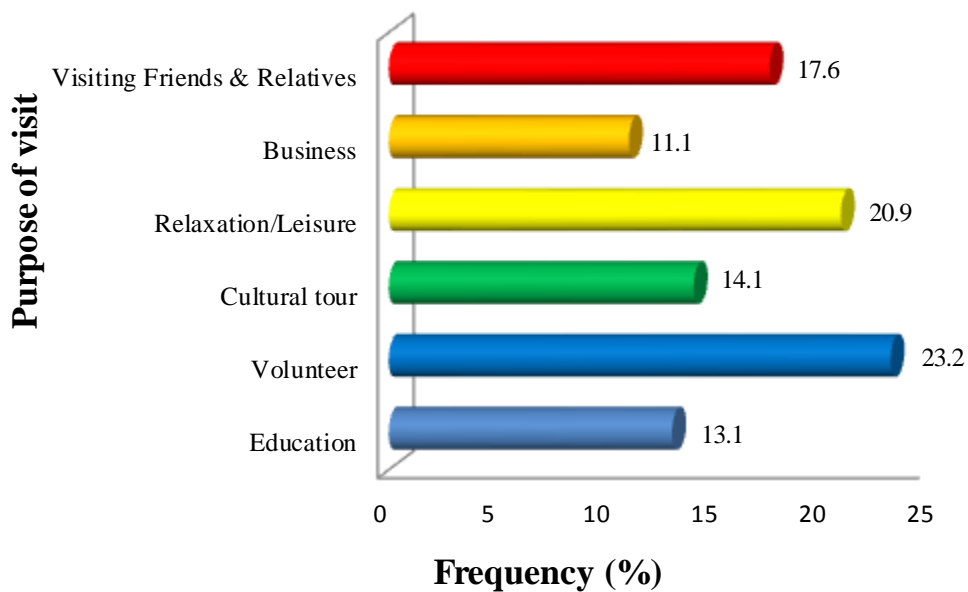


Figure 7: Tourists' purpose of visit

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Tourists visiting friends and relatives also accounted for 17.6% of the total respondents. Another 14.1% of the tourists visited cultural and historic attractions, such as Cape Coast Castle, Elmina Castle, Fort St. Jago, Centre for National Culture, among others. Tourists visiting educational facilities (that is students on exchange programmes and those who also visit to undertake purely research activities) also accounted for 13.1% of the total respondents. Tourists who visited for business purposes recorded 11.1%.

Tourists' Sources of Travel Information

Tourists make decisions to visit a particular destination based on the kind of information they have at hand prior to their visit to that destination. Fotis et al. (2012) and Rathonyi's (2013) have observed that friends and relatives as well as destination websites influence tourists' decision to travel. From Figure 8, 38% of the tourists had their travel information from friends

and relatives. Also, 24.5% sought their travel information from travel guides and magazines. This result validates Rathonyi (2013) findings that tourists rely on information from friends and relatives as well as travel guides.

Furthermore, tourists obtain information for their travel to Ghana through social media platforms (15.3%). This is in disagreement to Fotis et al. (2012) and Rathonyi (2013) findings. For instance, Rathonyi (2013) in his study found that social media sites were the least used (12.3%) among the information sources used by tourists. This proves the assertion by Gretzel et al. (2008) that social media sites are being considered as a reliable source of travel information. Again 11.7% of tourists agreed that they obtained their travel information from Ghana's destination website (www.touringghana.com). The least used source of travel information for tourists were travel agents and the print and electronic media recording 5.6% and 5.1% respectively.

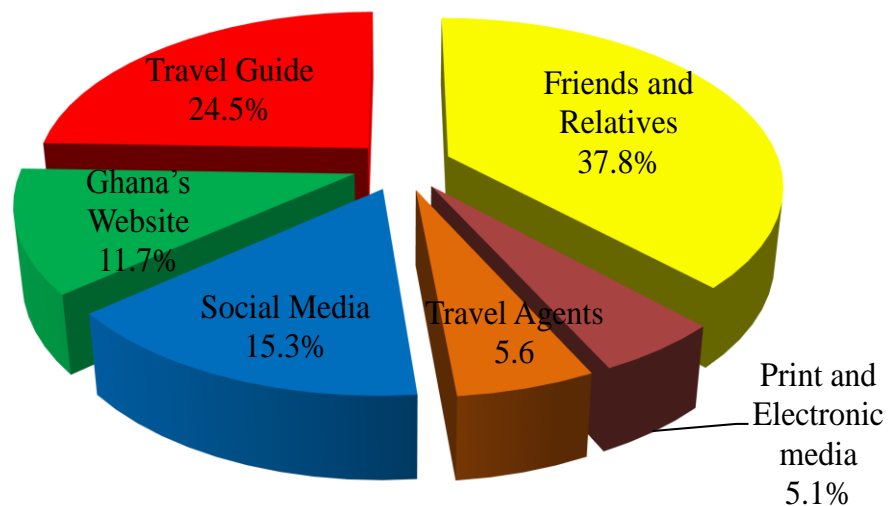


Figure 8: Sources of Travel Information

Fieldwork, 2015

Types of Social Media Used by Tourists

This section of the analysis investigated the types of social media that international tourists in Ghana use. Studies have shown that social media has become the *modus operandi* of this generation and its use is not spatially bound (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012). Hence, tourists use social media everywhere they are, given that there is internet at their destination.

From Table 5, almost a fifth (19.0%) of the responses indicated that the most used social media type was Facebook, with 17.1% using content aggregators, notably Google maps. Also, media sharing sites (16.3%) such as Youtube and Flickr followed as the next used social media by respondents. Another interesting finding emerging is the use of collaborative projects such as Wikipedia. It accounted for (16.1%) of the responses.

Table 5: Social Media Types Used by Tourists

Social Media Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	181	19.0
Blogs	108	11.4
TripAdvisor	128	13.5
Collaborative Projects	153	16.1
Twitter	63	6.6
Media Sharing Sites(e.g. Youtube, Flickr)	155	16.3
Content aggregators (e.g. Google maps)	163	17.1
Total	951*	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

*Multiple responses

Furthermore, 13.5% of the responses also indicated that they used TripAdvisor, whereas 11.4% also used blogs. The least among the types of social media used is Twitter which accounted for just 6.6% of the responses. Even though twitter has been recognised as one of the fastest growing social networking sites after Facebook, this results shows that it is not a preferred choice of social media used by tourists.

Frequency of Use

Tourists were also asked to indicate their frequency of use of the different types of social media. On the whole Facebook was the frequently used social media type and the least used social media type was TripAdvisor. Specifically, majority of Facebook users (85.7%) use it daily, whereas 4.4% of the respondents use it rarely. Again, media sharing sites such as Youtube, Flickr and SnapChat were the most frequently used social media sites after Facebook. Over half (60%) of the users of media sharing sites use those sites daily whereas 40% use them rarely. This could be attributed to the fact that social networking sites and media sharing sites are fun sites where users interact through messaging and sharing of images and videos (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Content aggregators such as Google maps, were the next most frequently used social media type with 42.9% of its users using it every day. This proves that most tourists use content aggregators such as Google maps to find their routes and locations at the destinations they visit.

Table 6: Frequency of Use

Social Media Type	Several Times Daily	Once a day	Once a Week	Rare	Total
Facebook	48.1	37.6	9.9	4.4	100.0
Blogs	4.6	21.3	37.0	37.0	100.0
TripAdvisor	4.7	6.3	19.5	69.5	100.0
Collaborative Projects	8.5	28.1	43.8	19.6	100.0
Twitter	11.1	28.6	19.0	41.3	100.0
Media Sharing Sites(e.g. Youtube, Flickr)	22.6	37.4	29.7	10.3	100.0
Content aggregators (e.g. Google maps)	10.4	32.5	32.5	24.5	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Respondents rarely used blogs, with once a week and rare being at par, recording 37.0%. About a quarter of blog users (25.9%) use it daily. Majority of Collaborative projects users (63.4%) use it rarely, whereas 36.6% use it every day. TripAdvisor is the least used social media by tourists with 89% of its users using it rarely. This could be attributed to the fact that TripAdvisor is mainly for tourists/travellers and hence, they visit the site only when they need travel information from the site.

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 7. 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 7, 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 30-39 years, 19.3% of them used Facebook and 17.9% also used content aggregators.

Table 7: 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	Content aggregators		
Sex									
Male	18.8	10.2	13.4	17.0	6.5	15.9	18.2	100.0	13.29
Female	19.6	11.7	13.3	15.5	6.5	15.9	18.2	100.0	(0.07)
Age (years)									
< 20	20.1*	11.6	10.4	16.5	6.4	17.7*	17.3	100.0	
21-29	19.0	11.5	13.2	15.2	7.2	17.2	16.7	100.0	49.40
30-39	19.3	9.7	14.5	16.6	6.9	15.2	17.9	100.0	(0.00)*
> 40	18.6	11.0	17.2	17.2	4.1	13.8	17.9	100.0	
Income (US \$)									
< 300	21.5	13.5	11.7*	15.3*	5.5	16.6	16.0	100.0	
300-599	17.6	13.7	8.4	18.3	6.1	17.6	18.3	100.0	49.67
600-899	22.7	12.1	16.7	10.6	4.5	16.7	16.7	100.0	(0.00)*

Table 7 continued.

> 900	18.0	10.5	14.9	17.1	6.2	15.6	17.6	100.0	
Education									
High school	19.5	12.8	10.1	16.3	6.2	17.5	17.5	100.0	
Tertiary	19.5	10.0	14.6	15.8	5.8	17.0	17.3	100.0	15.05
Post Graduate	18.9	11.0	14.4	16.1	7.3	15.3	16.9	100.0	(0.38)
Generating continents									
Africa	21.2	9.1	12.1	15.2*	12.1	15.2	15.2*	100.0	
Europe	18.8	11.0	13.4	16.8	5.6	16.4	17.9	100.0	
North America	18.5	12.1	12.9	16.1	8.9	16.9	14.5	100.0	54.77
South America	30.0	10.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	20.0	100.0	(0.02)*
Asia	23.5	14.7	11.8	8.8	11.8	14.7	14.7	100.0	
Australia	22.6	9.7	12.9	12.9	6.5	19.4	16.1	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Significance level ≤ 0.05 *Cells that produced the statistically significant difference (using critical value of ± 1.96)

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.

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) 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.

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\$600-899 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 8 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. This finding could be buttressed by the fact that social media use as a global phenomenon varies by culture (Gretzel et al., 2008; Cox et al. 2009; Fotis et al. 2012; Ráthonyi 2013).

Social Media Usage by Travel Characteristics

Again, the various social media types were explored across the travel characteristics of the tourists. The results presented in Table 8 indicated that 19.4% of first time visitors used Facebook whereas 17.3% used content aggregators. However, for tourists on repeat visits 18.9% used Facebook and

17.5% used media sharing sites. The results further show that nearly a fifth (19.3%) of those who stayed for one week used Facebook whereas 17.0% used TripAdvisor. There was a decrease in percentage for those who used media sharing sites (13.6%), content aggregators (13.6%), blogs (10.2%) and twitter (10.2).

On the other hand, 19.7% of the tourists who stayed for more than one month used Facebook and 17.8% used media sharing sites. Again, the chi-square test of independent post-hoc test revealed a significant relationship between length of stay of tourists and social media types. The test revealed a significant relationship for those who use blogs and collaborative projects.

This could be attributed to the fact that the rate at which those who stay longer in the country use social media will be different from those who stayed for a short time. Those who stayed longer used collaborative projects such as Wikipedia and blogs often to keep themselves abreast with information and what others are saying about Ghana.

With respect to the nature of the trips, those who came alone were found to have used media sharing sites (18.6%) and 18.6% of them used Facebook. Of those who came in a groups, 19.5% used Facebook and 17.1% used content aggregators. There also existed a significant relationship ($p=0.03$) between the nature of the tourists' trip and the use of social media.

Table 8: Social Media Usage by Travel Characteristics

Travel characteristics	Social Media Types							Total	χ^2 Statistic (p-value)
	Facebook	Blogs	TripAdvisor	Collaborative Projects	Twitter	Media Sharing sites	Content aggregators		
Number of visits									
First time	19.4	11.4	13.2	16.2	6.3	16.2	17.3	100.0	2.31
Repeat visit	18.9	10.4	13.7	15.6	7.1	17.5	17.0	100.0	(0.94)
Length of stay									
1 week	19.3	10.2*	17.0	15.9*	10.2	13.6	13.6	100.0	
2 weeks	18.4	7.4	14.1	19.0	7.4	15.3	18.4	100.0	55.48
3 weeks	16.8	14.2	13.3	16.8	5.3	15.9	17.7	100.0	(0.00)*
1 month	20.3	9.2	13.7	12.4	9.2	17.0	18.3	100.0	
More than 1 month	19.7	12.8	11.9	16.4	4.4	17.8	16.9	100.0	
Nature of trip									
Individually	18.6	9.5	13.0	15.2	7.4	18.6*	17.7	100.0	8.88
organized Trip									
Group Trip	19.5	11.7	13.4	16.4	6.2	15.8	17.1	100.0	(0.03)*
Travel party size									
< 5	19.4	11.8	13.6	16.4	6.4	15.7	16.6	100.0	
6-10	19.3	9.6	13.3	17.0	5.2	17.0	18.5	100.0	36.14
11-15	20.0	20.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	20.0	100.0	(0.14)
16-20	22.2	16.7	11.1	16.7	0.0	16.7	16.7	100.0	
>20	18.2	18.2	9.1	9.1	18.2	9.1	18.2	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

The chi-square test revealed that the significance occurred among those who used media sharing sites. Those who travelled to Ghana individually used media sharing sites such as Youtube and Flickr the more in order to upload pictures and videos of their experiences in Ghana online.

Furthermore, it could be deduced from the analysis above that for those who travelled in groups less than five, 19.4% used Facebook while 6.4% used Twitter. Also, for those who stayed beyond twenty days, users of Facebook, blogs, Twitter and content aggregators were at par (18.2%) and users of TripAdvisor, Collaborative projects and media sharing sites were also at par (9.1%).

Influence of Social media on Tourists' Travel Decision on Ghana

Tourists were asked to indicate how the social media they used influenced their travel decision on Ghana. Nearly 40% of the tourists who used TripAdvisor indicated that it influenced their decision to travel to Ghana. Also, 36.1% of blogs users mainly indicated that they were influenced by the blogs in their travel decision to Ghana.

Using a four-point likert scale (not influential at all, not influential, influential and very influential), on the whole, respondents indicated that social media did not influence their decision to travel to Ghana (mean = 1.82). However, the results showed that some particular types of social media used were influential while others were not. Specifically, respondents indicated that TripAdvisor was influential (mean = 2.05) in their decision to travel to Ghana.

Table 9: Influence of Social media on Tourists' Travel Decision on Ghana

Social Media Type	N	Influential	Not Influential	M	SD
Facebook	181	21.0	79.0	1.68	0.87
Blogs	108	36.1	63.9	2.00	1.00
TripAdvisor	128	39.9	60.1	2.05	1.05
Collaborative Projects	153	34.0	66.0	1.97	0.96
Twitter	63	12.7	87.3	1.54	0.84
Media Sharing Sites(e.g Youtube, Flickr)	155	21.9	78.1	1.75	0.93
Content aggregators (e.g. Google maps)	163	23.9	76.1	1.74	0.91
<i>Overall score</i>	<i>136</i>	<i>27.1</i>	<i>72.9</i>	<i>1.82</i>	<i>0.94</i>

Scale: 1-1.49 = Not Influential at all; 1.5-1.99 = Not Influential; 2-2.49 = Influential; 2.5-3 = Very Influential

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

This finding confirms Ayeh et al.'s (2013) claim that most users of TripAdvisor consider reviews from the site as credible, hence, it being influential in their travel planning. This could be attributed to the fact that reviewers on TripAdvisor are seen as fellow tourists/travellers who share common interests with the tourists and will not in any way mislead them.

Also, it is worth noting that tourists who used blogs indicated that blogs were influential (mean = 2.00) in their decision to travel to Ghana. This shows that people's personal blogs or organisational blogs are considered as a reliable source of information for tourists and it has a high potential of influencing their travel decision to a particular destination.

On the contrary, tourists indicated that the other social media types which included Facebook, Collaborative projects, Twitter, media sharing sites, and content aggregators were not influential in their travel decision to Ghana. This supports Brake and Safko's (2009) assertion that social networking sites (Facebook and Twitter) and media sharing sites are predominantly used for connecting with friends, sharing posts, images and videos.

Usefulness of Social Media to Tourists

Table 10 presents the basic issues taken into consideration in measuring usefulness of social media to tourists using frequency distribution of responses to each statement, percentage in agreement and standard deviations. The Table indicates that on the whole, tourists strongly agreed (mean = 2.88) to issues pertaining to usefulness of social media concerning its use for travel decision-making.

Specifically, tourists strongly agreed (mean = 2.82) that the use of social media improves their travel planning. This finding confirms Cox et al.'s (2009) and Fotis et al.'s (2012), assertions that social media contributes to the travel planning of tourists. Furthermore, tourists strongly agreed (mean = 2.89) that social media helps them plan their trips more efficiently. The reason could be that some social media platforms act as places of adequate information. For instance, Wikipedia, serves as a 'home' for in-depth information on places,

attractions and restaurants. Thus, it enables tourists to efficiently plan their trips with the availability of rich and adequate information.

Table 10: Usefulness of Social Media to Tourists

Social Media	N	% that agree	M	SD
Improve my travel planning	196	71.9	2.82	0.76
Help me plan trips more efficiently	196	73.0	2.89	0.78
Make travel planning easier	196	75.6	2.94	0.77
Make travel related decision easier	196	74.0	2.87	0.75
<i>Overall score</i>	<i>196</i>	<i>73.6</i>	<i>2.88</i>	<i>0.77</i>

Scale: 1-1.49 = Strongly Disagree; 1.5-1.99 = Disagree; 2-2.49 = Agree; 2.5-3 = Strongly Agree

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Likewise, some social media platforms like TripAdvisor, Facebook and blogs allow tourists to see and read the reviews of other tourists who have actually experienced tourist products and services at the destination in which the tourists want to go. This could account for the strong agreement (mean = 2.94) by tourists that the use of social media makes tourists' travel planning easier. This supports Ayeh et al.'s (2013) claim that for prospective tourists, the usefulness of CGM is related to the extent to which CGM helps them in their travel planning.

In terms of arriving at a travel decision, respondents strongly agreed (mean = 2.87) that social media is useful in making travel-related decisions easier. This can be supported by the fact that most tourism facilities and

services have pages on social media platforms. These pages also have links to their various websites. For instance, TripAdvisor has lists of various hotels and airlines around the world. This assists tourists to arrive at travel-related decisions in terms of their accommodation and transportation.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics by Perceived Usefulness of Social Media

This section explores the variations of perceived usefulness across background characteristics of international tourists in Ghana. The background characteristics considered include sex, age, income and educational qualification. The preference and usefulness of social media by tourists are determined by some socio-demographic characteristics of tourists such as sex, age and educational qualification (Cox et al., 2009; Fotis et al., 2012). It is therefore imperative for a study of this nature to examine the variations that exist in terms of the perceived usefulness and tourists' background characteristics.

A combination of two statistical tests was used in determining the variations that existed across the background characteristics in terms of their perceived usefulness of social media. Specifically, the T-test and the one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted. The T-test was used where the background characteristics which served as the independent variable were in only two categories (in this case sex). On the other hand, the one way ANOVA was used where the background characteristics were in more than two categories. The Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) method, one of the common post hoc procedures, was used to identify which comparisons among various background characteristics had significant differences. The results of

the tests are presented in Table 11.

With respect to sex, the T-test analysis revealed that there were significant differences in tourists' perceived usefulness of social media sites ($p = 0.00$). It was established that both males and females strongly agreed that social media was useful to them for travel planning. However, there were significant variations in their responses. From Table 11, it is evident that females agreed more that social media was useful (mean = 2.93) in terms of their travel planning than males (mean = 2.65). This finding confirms Nunkoo et al.'s (2013) assertion that females consider social media more useful than males. Several studies have also proven that females use social media than males (Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Gretzel et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2010).

Also, the one way ANOVA detected that there were no significant differences between tourists' age and their perceived usefulness of social media ($p = 0.33$). However, all the age groups strongly agreed that social media was useful to them; less than 20 (mean = 2.75), 20-29 (mean = 2.92), 30-39 (mean = 2.77) and more than 40 (mean = 2.73).

Further analysis proved that, there were no significant differences in the role played by tourists' income ($p = 0.95$) in determining social media usefulness to tourists. However, all income earners from the range of less than US\$300 to more than US\$900.00 a month strongly agreed that social media was useful for travel planning (means = 2.86; 2.86; 2.76; 2.83) respectively.

Again, the one way ANOVA showed that there were no significant differences between tourists' educational background and their perceived usefulness of social media ($p = 0.88$). Nonetheless, tourists with high school certificates strongly agreed (mean = 2.81) that social media was useful for

travel planning. Similarly, tourists with first degree (mean = 2.79) and postgraduates (mean = 2.85) also strongly agreed.

Table 11: Socio-Demographic Characteristics by Perceived Usefulness of Social Media

Sex	N	Mean	p-value
Male	77	2.65*	0.00*
Female	119	2.93*	
		t= 2.95	
Age			
<20	52	2.75	0.33
20-29	78	2.92	
30-39	31	2.77	
>40	35	2.73	
		F= 1.14	
Income (US\$)			
< 300	36	2.86	0.95
300-599	26	2.86	
600-899	16	2.76	
> 900	91	2.83	
		F= 0.11	
Educational			
High School	55	2.81	0.88
Tertiary	68	2.79	
Post-graduate	73	2.85	
		F= 0.12	

Scale: 1-1.49 = Strongly Disagree; 1.5-1.99 = Disagree; 2-2.49 = Agree; 2.5-3 = Strongly Agree

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

*p = 0.00

Trustworthiness of Social Media as a Source of Travel Information

Tourists were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with seven statements in the form of ‘I trust information about holidays provided by...’ followed by the information source. As can be seen in Table 12, friends and relatives were the most trustworthy source of information. This is in agreement with Fotis et al.’s (2012) and Rathonyi’s (2013) findings. On the contrary, travel guide followed as the next trustworthy source of information. This is in disagreement with Cox et al. (2009) who found that travel guides were the third trustworthy source of information.

Ghana’s website, TripAdvisor and travel agents followed in that regard as trustworthy sources of information. Social media preceded electronic and print media as a trustworthy source of information. Generally, 69.9 % and 58.6% of tourists agreed that they considered TripAdvisor and other social media sites respectively, as a trustworthy sources of travel information.

Table 12: Trustworthiness of Social Media as a Source of Travel Information

Source	N	M	SD
Friends and Relatives	196	3.77	0.59
Travel guide	196	3.08	0.65
Ghana’s website	196	2.98	0.66
TripAdvisor	196	2.74	0.74
Travel agents	196	2.62	0.72
Social Media	196	2.60	0.72
Electronic & Print media	196	2.60	0.68

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

This is in disagreement with Rathonyi (2013) who found that social media was the least trusted source of information. The increase in the trustworthiness of reviews from TripAdvisor and social media can be associated with the findings earlier that social media sites are now gradually becoming a reliable source of travel information.

Trustworthiness of Providers of Contents on Social Media

Literature on social media influence on travel behaviour has it that providers of information on social media sites are more trustworthy because they do not have the motive of misleading the public or making any financial gains from sharing their experiences and views on these sites (Ayeh et al., 2013; Cox et al., 2009; Fotis et al., 2012; Senecal & Nantel, 2004). The study sought to examine the trustworthiness of providers of contents in social media sites. Table 13 presents basic issues taken into consideration in measuring the trustworthiness of providers of CGM using frequency distribution of responses to each statement, percentage in agreement and standard deviations.

Table 13: Trustworthiness of Providers of Contents on Social Media

Providers of contents on social media are	N	% that agree	M	SD
Dependable	193	58.5	2.54	0.68
Honest	194	37.6	2.30	0.64
Reliable	193	43.0	2.37	0.63
Sincere	193	42.5	2.39	0.64
Trustworthy	192	43.7	2.36	0.65
<i>Overall</i>	<i>193</i>	<i>45.1</i>	<i>2.39</i>	<i>0.65</i>

Scale: 1-1.49 = Strongly Disagree; 1.5-1.99 = Disagree; 2-2.49 = Agree; 2.5-3 = Strongly Agree

Fieldwork, 2015

The Table indicates that, on the whole, tourists agreed (mean = 2.39) to issues pertaining to trustworthiness of providers of CGM on social media sites. Specifically, 58.5% of the tourists agreed that providers of contents on social media were dependable. Also, tourists agreed (mean = 2.30) that providers of contents on social media were honest. Furthermore, 43% of the tourists agreed that providers of contents on social media were reliable. Again, tourists agreed (mean = 2.39) that providers of content on social media were sincere/truthful. Tourists also agreed (mean = 2.36) that providers of contents on social media sites were trustworthy.

The general agreement to issues pertaining to trustworthiness of providers of contents on social media might be due to the fact that tourists consider the reviews and comments from other tourists as trustworthy because they do not have any self-seeking agenda of misleading them or extorting them financially. Hence, tourists consider information provided by other tourists, friends or relatives on social media as trustworthy and dependable.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics by Perceived Trustworthiness of Social Media

Similar to what was done for perceived usefulness of social media, this section also explores the variations of perceived trustworthiness of social media across background characteristics of international tourists in Ghana. The background characteristics considered include gender, age, income and educational qualification. Literature has it that tourists' trust for social media is influenced by their background characteristics (e.g. gender, age and educational qualification (Ayeh et al., 2013; Nunkoo et al., 2013; Rathonyi, 2013). It is therefore imperative for a study of this nature to examine the

variations that exist in terms of the perceived trustworthiness of social media and tourists' background characteristics.

Again, a combination of two statistical tests was used in determining the variations that existed across the background characteristics in terms of their perceived trustworthiness of social media. Specifically, the T-test and the one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted. The T-test was used where the background characteristics which serve as the independent variables were in only two categories (in this case gender). On the other hand, the one way ANOVA was used where the background characteristics were in more than two categories. The Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) method, one of the common post hoc procedures, was used to identify which comparisons among various background characteristics have significant differences. The results of the tests are presented in Table 14.

The T-test analysis revealed that there were no significant differences with gender and tourists perceived trustworthiness of social media sites ($p = 0.11$). It was established that both males (mean = 2.33) and females (mean = 2.45) agreed that providers of contents in social media and its source were trustworthy. With respect to age, the one way ANOVA detected that there were significant differences with tourists' ages and their perceived trustworthiness of social media ($p = 0.00$). It was established from the Table that those below twenty years and those within the range of 20-29 agreed (means = 2.21 and 2.47 respectively) that social media is a trustworthy source of travel information.

On the contrary, tourists who fell within the age group of 30-39 strongly agreed (mean = 2.58) that social media is trustworthy. The significant

difference existed between these three age groups. However, the rate of increase among this age group decreased for those above 40 years even though they agreed (mean = 2.37) that social media is a trustworthy source of information. The notion that the youth within the ages of 20-39 consider social media as a trustworthy source of information can be supported by the claim of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) that social media is mostly preferred and used by the youth and not the aged.

Furthermore, there were no significant differences in the role played by tourists' income ($p = 0.30$) in determining their trustworthiness of social media for travel planning. However, all income earners from the range of less than US\$300 to more than US\$900.00 a month agreed that social media was trustworthy for their travel planning (means = 2.32; 2.34; 2.45; 2.49 respectively). Again, the one way ANOVA showed that there were no significant differences with tourists' educational background and their perceived trustworthiness of social media ($p = 0.19$). Tourists with high school certificates agreed (mean = 2.30) that social media was a trusted source of information likewise tertiary students (mean = 2.42) and postgraduates (mean = 2.46).

Table 14: Socio-Demographic Characteristics by Perceived Trustworthiness of Social Media

Background characteristics	N	Mean	p-value
Gender			
Male	77	2.33	0.11
Female	119	2.45	
		t= 1.56	
Age			
<20	52	2.21*	0.00*
20-29	78	2.47*	
30-39	31	2.58*	
>40	35	2.37	
		F= 4.34	
Income (US\$)			
<300	36	2.32	0.30
300-599	26	2.34	
600-899	16	2.45	
>900	91	2.49	
		F= 1.22	
Educational			
High School	55	2.30	0.19
Tertiary	68	2.42	
Post-graduate	73	2.46	
		F= 1.650	

Scale: 1-1.49 = Strongly Disagree; 1.5-1.99 = Disagree; 2-2.49 = Agree; 2.5-3 = Strongly Agree

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

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 15). 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 15 indicates that on the whole, tourists strongly agreed (mean = 2.79) to issues pertaining to social media usage 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.

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).

This finding 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.

Table 15: Social Media Usage Across the Stages of the Decision-Making**Process**

	N	% that agree	M	SD
Need Awareness				
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
<i>Overall score</i>	<i>195.5</i>	<i>71.22</i>	<i>2.79</i>	<i>0.78</i>
Information Search				
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
<i>Overall score</i>	<i>195.5</i>	<i>69.33</i>	<i>2.74</i>	<i>0.78</i>
Evaluation of tourism related services				
Help me to evaluate other destinations	195	66.2	2.66	0.74

Table 15 continued.

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
<i>Overall score</i>	<i>195.75</i>	<i>57.65</i>	<i>2.56</i>	<i>0.72</i>
Purchase				
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
<i>Overall score</i>	<i>195.5</i>	<i>39.43</i>	<i>2.25</i>	<i>0.83</i>

Scale: 1-1.49 = Strongly Disagree; 1.5-1.99 = Disagree; 2-2.49 = Agree; 2.5-3 = Strongly Agree

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

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.

This can be attributed to the fact that now, a lot of organisations place advertisements and also have a hyper link connecting their websites to social media sites such as Facebook, TripAdvisor, etc. 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 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.

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. These results 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.

On the whole, 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.

Social Media Influence Across the Decision-Making Stages for Travel Decision to Ghana

The multiple regression analysis was undertaken to explore the influence of social media across the various travel decision-making processes. This analysis was used in determining the phase(s) of the decision-making processes that place more influence on tourists' use of social media 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 (VIF= 2.27). The result of the test is presented in Table 16.

Generally, the linear regression model was able to explain 24% (Adjusted R²) 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 the use of social media to recognise a need in relation to its influence on travel decision, there was no significant relationship between the two variables ($p = 0.06$). Nonetheless, tourists who used social media to identify their need to visit Ghana had a positive influence on their travel decision to Ghana ($\beta = 0.15$). This means that, the more social media was used by tourists to identify the need to visit Ghana,

the more influential social media was on their travel decision to Ghana.

Table 16: Social Media Influence at the Decision-Making Stages for Travel Decision to Ghana

Independent variables	Dependent variable					
	Social media influence on tourists' decision making					
	B	SEB	B	P-value	Tolerance	VIF
Need awareness	0.17	0.08	0.15	0.06	0.55	1.81
Information search	0.01	0.10	0.01	0.91	0.37	2.67
Evaluation of tourism related services	0.34	0.13	0.28	0.01*	0.32	3.08
Purchase	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

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Also, tourists' use of social media for the search of information on Ghana had a positive influence on its influence on their travel decision to Ghana. However, their relationship was not significant ($\beta = 0.01$, $p = 0.91$). This denotes that the more tourists use social media for the purpose of generating information; the more it influences tourist decision-making to Ghana.

On the contrary, there were significant relationships between the independent variables (evaluation of tourism related services and purchase) and the dependent variable. Specifically, tourists' use of social media for evaluating tourism related services in Ghana had a positive effect on its influence on tourists travel decision to Ghana ($\beta = 0.28$, $p = 0.01$). This means

that the more tourists use social media for the purpose of evaluating tourism related services in Ghana, the more it influenced their travel decision-making to Ghana.

Again, tourists who used social media for the purpose of purchasing travel-related products had a positive influence on their travel decision to Ghana ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.05$). This denotes that the more tourists use social media to purchase tourism related services, the more it influenced their travel decision-making to Ghana.

It is interesting to note that, although social media was used immensely by tourists for identifying their travel need and also to search for travel information on Ghana (Table 15), none of them had a significant effect on travel decision-making. Even though very few tourists used social media for the purpose of evaluation and making travel purchases, there were significant relationships with the use of social media for evaluation and purchasing of travel related services 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 Valck, Van Bruggen & Wierenga, 2009; Rathonyi, 2013).

However, social media being influential for the purpose of evaluating travel related services 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 travel destinations

and their related services through reviews posted by other tourists to enable them narrow down choices and arrive at a decision.

On the other hand, social media being influential on tourists travel decision for the purpose of making travel purchases 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 15 where tourists agreed that they used social media in making reservations with airlines and hotels.

International Tourists' Willingness to Share Experiences in Ghana on Social Media

International tourists were asked whether they would share their experiences in Ghana on social media platforms after their stay in Ghana (Figure 9). Apparently, it is not surprising to note that out of the total of 196 international tourists, the majority (71%) indicated their willingness to share their experiences in Ghana on social media platforms.

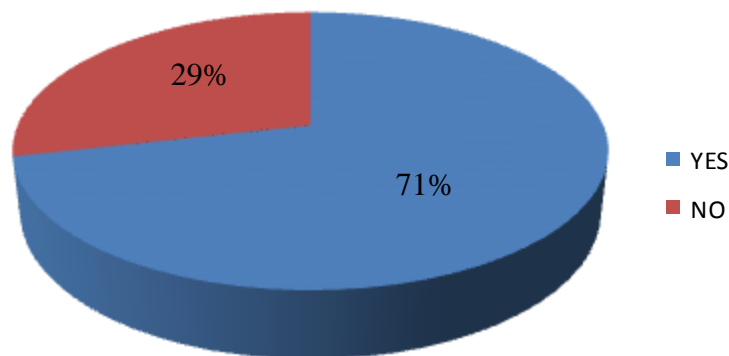


Figure 9: International Tourists' Willingness to Share Experiences on Social Media

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Figure 9 ultimately suggests the dominance and the high use of social media sites in this generation. Since majority of the tourists used Facebook and media sharing sites (e.g Youtube and Flickr), it portrays that most of these tourists will share their experiences through texts, pictures and videos on these sites. Other tourists who used blogs will update them with stories and pictures of their experiences in Ghana.

Summary

Majority of the international tourists who visited Ghana mostly used Facebook, content aggregators, media sharing sites and collaborative projects. Most of them used it several times daily or every day. However, tourists agreed that TripAdvisor and blogs were influential in their travel decision on Ghana. Furthermore, tourists generally considered social media as useful for travel planning. Again, tourists agreed that social media was a trusted source of travel information and providers of UGC on social media were also considered trustworthy. Generally tourists used social media at all the stages of the decision-making process, however, social media was predominantly used at the need awareness and information search stages. On the contrary, the use of social media at the evaluation and purchase stages had a significant relationship with tourists' travel decision to Ghana. Tourists also agreed to share their experiences in Ghana on social media sites.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study. It summarises the major findings of the study, draws conclusions based on the findings and makes recommendations towards improving the use of social media for travel decision-making. It also suggests areas for further research into social media and travel decision-making.

Summary

The main objective of the study was to assess the role of social media in travel decision-making of international tourists to Ghana. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Identify the types of social media used by international tourists visiting Ghana;
2. Examine the usefulness of social media to international tourists;
3. Examine the trustworthiness of social media to international tourists; and
4. Explore the influence of social media across the various travel decision-making processes.

The conceptual framework which guided the study was adapted from Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989) and Engel et al.'s (1978) model of consumer decision-making. This model explains that tourists' use of social media for travel decision-making depends on its usefulness and trustworthiness to tourists. The conceptual framework also explored social

media use and influence on travel decision-making across the various stages of the consumer decision-making process (i.e. need awareness, information search, evaluation and purchase stages).

The study adopted a non-experimental (cross-sectional) research design and a quantitative approach to data collection and analysis. A total of 196 respondents were sampled and questionnaires were administered through the use of convenience sampling procedure.

The quantitative data gathered was edited, coded and analysed with the help of SPSS version 21. Descriptive statistics were mainly employed in analysing the quantitative data including; frequency tables, pie and bar charts, cross tabulations. Also, t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to test the differences between the perceived usefulness and trustworthiness against background characteristics. Multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the influence of social media on the various stages of the decision-making process.

Main Findings

The study revealed that, 19.0% of tourists used Facebook as their preferred social media type. In the same vein, there were some who also preferred Content Aggregators (Google maps) to help them locate the places they are going to. In addition, TripAdvisor and blogs were identified to be the types of social media that greatly influenced international tourists' travel decision on Ghana. Furthermore, there was a significant relationship between social media use and the background characteristics (age, income and generating continents) of respondents. However, there was no significant relationship between social media use and education. Again, the study also

identified a significant relationship between social media use and travel characteristics (length of stay and nature of trip).

There are varied reasons why tourists use social media in their travel decision-making. The study sought to examine the influence of the two most common determinants, i.e. perceived usefulness and trustworthiness of social media and their influence on travel decision-making. The study found out that, the international tourists agreed that social media is useful and also trustworthy. Also, the study found a significant relationship between perceived usefulness of social media and gender as well as perceived trustworthiness and age. In addition, the multiple regression analysis further produced results which indicated that perceived usefulness and perceived trustworthiness of social media positively influenced travel decision-making.

In general tourist agreed (mean = 2.79) to issues pertaining to social media usage at the need awareness stage (mean = 2.74) and to issues relating to social media usage at the information search. With respect to the social media usage at the evaluation stage, tourists strongly agreed (mean = 2.56), while at the purchase stage, tourists agreed (mean = 2.25) to the use of social media. This finding means that most of the tourists used social media at all the stages of the decision-making process. However, it was predominantly used at the need awareness stage. Moreover, the multiple regression analysis identified that the use of social media at the evaluation and purchase stages influenced social media use for travel decision to Ghana. Tourists also agreed that they will share their experiences in Ghana on social media sites.

Conclusions

In line with the specific objectives set and the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn.

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 the tourists was Facebook with Content Aggregators (Google maps) also being frequently used for locating places. 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. Moreover, most tourists used social media daily. It can be concluded that, TripAdvisor and blogs were the main social media types that influenced tourists' travel decision to Ghana. This reemphasises Ayeh et al.'s (2013) assertion that most users of TripAdvisor consider reviews from the site as credible, hence it being influential in their travel planning.

Furthermore, tourists generally agreed that social media is useful to them for travel planning. The study showed significant difference between perceived usefulness and gender of respondents. Again, tourists agreed that social media is trustworthy for travel decision-making. The ANOVA also showed a significant difference with perceived trustworthiness with regard to tourists' age. Hence, it can be concluded that perceived usefulness and perceived trustworthiness positively influence tourists' use of social media for travel decision-making. This affirms the assumption by researchers that, perceived

usefulness and perceived trustworthiness of social media influence its use for travel decision-making (Ayeh et al., 2013; Nunkoo et al., 2013).

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.

Recommendations

This study has revealed that Facebook and content aggregators (Google maps) are 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.

In the same vein, these stakeholders should ensure that their businesses are easily traceable and accessible using the content aggregators such as Google maps, Google Now, etc. These websites make use of Real Simple Syndication which allows the user to show and share its location with other users. Hence tourism businesses should ensure that their businesses are identified on these platforms for them to reach international tourists who make use of content aggregators in Ghana.

Again, it was evident in the study that TripAdvisor and blogs are the most influential social media types on tourists' decision-making to Ghana. GTA and tourism businesses should then focus attention on ensuring that their

businesses and attractions in Ghana are visible on TripAdvisor. Also, these stakeholders should also pay attention to reviews and posts about their facilities on TripAdvisor and blogs. They should track these posts and react to any negative reviews about their businesses while recommending their facility for potential tourists via the positive reviews.

Again, the study revealed that tourists consider social media as useful and trustworthy. Hence, tourism business should accept this fact and incorporate social media into their business activities to ensure their visibility to tourists. Likewise, from the study, social media were seen to have been 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.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Further studies could take into consideration social media influence during the travel and after the trip. A comparative study can also consider the pre-trip, during trip and the post trip stages. Again, a qualitative study could be done to unearth the specific uses and information tourists search for on social media.

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APPENDIX
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST
DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT
INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TRAVEL DECISION-MAKING
BY INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS ON GHANA

Questionnaire for international tourists

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. The aim of this study is to assess the role of social media on travel decision-making by international tourists on Ghana. This forms part of a Master of Philosophy research. You are assured that all the responses will be kept strictly confidential and your anonymity is also guaranteed. Please try to answer every question on the instrument. If you have any questions or reservations, please feel free to contact the researcher on 0240810028 or oseibenjaminappiah@gmail.com

Benjamin Appiah Osei

Please **Tick** (✓) the appropriate responses

Module 1: Respondents' usage of social media

1. Do you use the Internet? 1. Yes [] 2. No []
2. If Yes, How often do you use the Internet?
 - a. Several times a day [] b. Almost every day []
 - c. Once a week [] d. Very rare []
3. Have you visited any social media site? 1. Yes [] 2. No []

4. If Yes, What form/type of social media have you used? (*Tick as many as applicable*)

- a. Facebook
- b. Blogs
- c. Travel Communities (e.g TripAdvisor)
- d. Media Sharing sites (e.g. Youtube, Flickr, Instagram)
- e. Twitter
- Collaborative Projects (e.g. Wikipedia, Delicious)
- f. Content aggregators (e.g. Google maps)
- g. Other (specify).....

5. Please indicate how often you use the social media selected in Q4.

	Several times a day	Once a day	Once a week	Rare
a. Facebook				
b. Blogs				
c. TripAdvisor				
d. Collaborative Projects (e.g. Wikipedia)				
e. Twitter				
f. Media Sharing sites (e.g. Youtube, Instagram)				
g. Content aggregators (e.g. Google maps)				

6. What extent did the social media used influence your decision to travel to Ghana?

	Not Influential at all	Not Influential	Influential	Very Influential
a. Facebook				
b. Blogs				
c. TripAdvisor				
d. Collaborative Projects (e.g. Wikipedia)				
e. Twitter				
f. Media Sharing sites (e.g. Youtube, Instagram)				
g. Content aggregators (e.g. Google maps)				

Module 2: Usefulness of Social Media

7. Please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with these statements on usefulness of social media on travel decision.

	I use Social Media because, they	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a	Improve my travel planning				
b	Help me plan trips more efficiently				
c	Make my travel planning easier				
d	Make it easier for me to reach travel-related decisions				

Module 3: Trustworthiness of Social Media

8. Please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with these statements on your trustworthiness of sources of travel information.

I trust information about holidays from	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Friends and relatives				
Official websites of destination				
Travel agents				
Travel guidebook / magazine				
TripAdvisor				
TV/Radio/ Newspaper				
Social media site (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, etc.)				

9. Please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with these statements on your trust of providers of social media content (UGC).

	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a	Providers of contents on social media are dependable				
b	Providers of contents on social media are honest				
c	Providers of contents on social media are reliable				
d	Providers of contents on social media are sincere/truthful				
e	Providers of contents on social media are trustworthy				

Module 4: Influence of Social Media on Travel Decision Making Process

10. Please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with these statements on social media usage at the stages of the decision making process

	Social Media	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a	Enhance my desire to go for a holiday				
b	Help me to find places to go for holidays				
c	Help me to know where to go for holidays				
d	Reviews of other travellers compel me to travel				
e	Help me to get travel information on Ghana				
f	Help me to get information on attractions in Ghana				
g	Help me to get information on hotels in Ghana				
h	Help me to know what other travellers are saying about Ghana				
i	Help me to evaluate other destinations				
j	Help me to evaluate various attractions in Ghana				
k	Help me to evaluate various hotels in Ghana				
l	Help me to assess the services in Ghana's tourism sector				
m	Help me to make reservations of my flight to Ghana				
n	Help me to make reservations of				

	my transportation in Ghana				
o	Help me to make reservations of my hotel				
p	Help me to make reservations of the attractions I visited				

Module 5: Travel characteristics

11. Are you visiting Ghana for the first time?

- a. Yes b. No

12. How long do you intend to stay in Ghana?

.....

13. Are you travelling alone? a. Yes b. No

14. If No, how many people are you travelling with in your group?

- a. Less than 5 b. Between 15-20
c. Between 5-10 d. Between 10-15
e. More than 20

15. What is your main purpose of travel to Ghana? (*Tick as many as applicable*)

- a. Education b. Volunteer activities
c. Cultural tour d. Relaxation/ Leisure
e. Business f. Visiting friends and relatives

16. What were your key sources of information about Ghana? (*Tick as many as applicable*)

- a. Friends and relatives b. TV/Radio/Newspaper
c. Travel agents d. Social media
e. Official website of Ghana f. Travel Guide/Magazine

g. Others (Specify)

17. Please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with these statements

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I find social media useful in planning this trip to Ghana.				
I consider social media as a trusted source of information in planning this trip.				
I used social media frequently to search for travel information about Ghana.				
Social media have been influential in my travel decision to Ghana.				
I will also share my experiences in Ghana on social media platforms.				

Module 6: Socio-demographic information

18. Country of origin:

19. Sex: a. Male [] b. Female []

20. Age: (yrs)

21. Marital status:

a. Married [] b. Single[] c. Divorced/Separated[]

d. Widowed []

22. Religious affiliation

- a. Islam [] b. Christianity [] c. Buddhism [] d. Judaism []
e. Atheist [] f. Hinduism []
h. Others (specify).....

23. Educational qualification

- a. Basic [] b. High school [] c. Tertiary []
d. Post Graduate [] h. Others (specify).....

24. Occupation.....

25. Monthly income (US\$)

- a. Less than 300 [] b. Between 300-600 []
c. Between 600-900 [] d. Above 900 []

THANK YOU