

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A CATALYST FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN CALABAR METROPOLIS, NIGERIA

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Abstract: This study investigates the role of social media in tourism development in Calabar, Nigeria, emphasizing its influence on image building, destination promotion, and information dissemination. A quantitative research design was adopted, utilizing structured questionnaires to collect data from tourism industry operators and local residents in key tourism zones. Findings reveal that social media significantly shapes public perception, attracts tourists, and fosters engagement between stakeholders and visitors. The study identifies educational campaigns and stakeholder collaboration as crucial strategies for maximizing social media effectiveness in tourism promotion. However, several challenges hinder its full potential, including budget constraints, intense competition for audience attention, and risks of misinformation or misrepresentation of tourism

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destinations. Hypothesis testing indicates a strong positive correlation between social media's role in tourism development and the challenges it encounters in Calabar. The study underscores the importance of strategic investment in digital marketing to enhance tourism growth. Strengthening public-private partnerships and adopting emerging social media trends are recommended for improving promotional efforts. To mitigate challenges, the study suggests implementing effective social media management practices, ensuring content accuracy, and optimizing engagement strategies. Additionally, increased funding for digital tourism initiatives and stakeholder training can support the sustainable use of social media. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on digital marketing in tourism and offers valuable insights for policymakers, tourism boards, and industry stakeholders.

Keywords: Calabar metropolis, destination, social media, tourism development, sustainable tourism

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, social media has become an essential component of tourism development worldwide, and West Africa is no exception. The region's rich cultural heritage, natural attractions, and burgeoning tourism sector have greatly benefited from social media platforms, which are instrumental in marketing, engaging tourists, and promoting sustainable tourism practices (Candia, 2024; Rocha, 2020). Studies conducted in West Africa demonstrate that social media networks have transformed many tourism destinations into thriving hubs, thereby facilitating tourism development (Mensah et al., 2023; Afrifah & Mensah, 2023). Tourism boards and operators across West Africa are increasingly adopting social media marketing strategies to enhance the visibility of attractions and cultural sites (Ajibade et al., 2023).

For example, Nigeria's Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) has effectively utilized social media to promote the country's cultural festivals and natural landmarks (Adeola et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2022). In countries like Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa, social media plays a critical role in destination branding, enabling tourism boards to create strong brand images that resonate with potential tourists (Wang & Yan, 2022). Furthermore, campaigns on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube have significantly increased awareness and interest in Nigerian tourism, contributing to a rise in both domestic and international travel (Arasli et al., 2021).

Similarly, social media campaigns have proven effective in promoting events like the Chale Wote Street Art Festival, which attracts both local and international visitors (Dassah, 2023). Platforms like Facebook and Instagram are popular among young West Africans for exploring new travel destinations and activities (Odoom et al., 2021). Furthermore, social media enables destinations to offer personalized experiences by promptly responding to tourists' inquiries and requests. Hotels and tour operators in West Africa, for example, leverage social media to provide customized recommendations and address customer concerns efficiently (Raji et al., 2024). This level of interaction enhances customer satisfaction and fosters positive perceptions of the destination. By facilitating direct communication between tourists and tourism service providers, social media significantly boosts customer engagement (Sigala, 2019). Tourists frequently use platforms like Trip Advisor and Facebook to share their experiences, post reviews, and offer feedback. This user-generated content becomes a valuable resource for other potential tourists, who often rely on these reviews to make informed travel decisions (Cheung et al., 2022). Additionally, the real-time capabilities of social media allow tourism businesses to interact with their customers immediately, addressing concerns, answering questions, and creating a sense of community. This level of engagement is crucial for increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty, both of which are vital for the sustainable development of the tourism industry in West Africa (Chaulagain et al., 2024; Adam, et al., 2022; Raji et al., 2024). A strategic approach is essential for aligning social media efforts with the broader marketing objectives of a destination or tourism organization (Sano et al., 2024). Collaborating with social media influencers, who command large audiences, can significantly enhance a destination's visibility (Bastrygina et al., 2024).

Accordingly, by monitoring and analyzing social media metrics, tourism organizations can refine their strategies to strengthen their online presence (Sakas et al., 2022). Authentic engagement with audiences is crucial for building a loyal community of followers, who are more likely to become advocates for the destination (Singha, 2024). Social media has transformed global communication and business practices, presenting unparalleled opportunities for businesses, governments, and individuals to engage with their audiences (Alghamdi et al., 2023; Akpuokwe et al., 2024).

In Ghana and Nigeria, the social media landscape is particularly vibrant, with platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp being widely used for a range of activities, including marketing, political campaigns, education, and social interactions (Arueyingho et al., 2023; Ampofo, 2023). In the digital era, social media has revolutionized how people make travel decisions, playing a pivotal role in influencing tourist arrivals worldwide. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have become indispensable for travelers, offering inspiration, information, and reviews (Saleh, 2020; Irgashev, 2023). Research shows that influencer marketing on social media can significantly boost tourist arrivals at highlighted destinations (Venkatesh et al., 2024).

Influencers share their travel experiences with vast audiences, creating a sense of authenticity and trust that traditional advertising often lacks. Travelers use social media not only for inspiration but also for practical information, such as accommodation options, local attractions, and travel itineraries (Joseph et al., 2022).

Furthermore, social media enables real-time updates and interactions, allowing travelers to receive instant feedback and recommendations from their social networks (Kaur et al., 2024). Tourists are more inclined to trust information shared by fellow travelers rather than content from official tourism websites or advertisements (Lyu et al., 2023). User-generated

content (UGC), including photos, videos, and testimonials, provides an authentic perspective on destinations, aiding potential tourists in making informed decisions. Historically, West Africa has often been portrayed negatively in international media, which has affected its appeal as a tourist destination. Social media has significantly shifted the narrative around West Africa, allowing local voices and travelers to share authentic experiences and positive stories. Social media platforms have been instrumental in changing the global perception of West Africa by showcasing its rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and vibrant festivals (Engmann, 2022). User-generated content, such as travel blogs, Instagram posts, and YouTube videos, provides potential tourists with a more nuanced and appealing view of the region, challenging stereotypes and encouraging travel. Research indicates that social media marketing has significantly raised awareness of cultural events like Ghana's Chale Wote Street Art Festival and Nigeria's Calabar Carnival, leading to increased tourist arrivals during these festivals (Dassah, 2023; Obijuru, 2023). Additionally, the integration of social media with online booking platforms has streamlined the trip-planning process for tourists, contributing to a steady rise in visitor numbers (Hoang & Trang, 2023). Furthermore, positive reviews and active social media engagement have encouraged repeat visits and recommendations, further boosting tourist arrivals in the region (So et al., 2021).

Several challenges impact the global effectiveness of social media. A primary issue is the digital divide, which highlights the disparity between those with access to digital technologies and those without. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) reports that, despite a global increase in internet penetration, significant gaps persist between developed and developing countries, as well as between urban and rural areas within nations (Bala, 2024). This digital divide restricts certain populations from fully engaging with and benefiting from social media. In Nigeria, social media penetration is substantial, with over 33 million active users (IseOlorunkanmi et al., 2023). This trend is similarly observed in Ghana, where social media is becoming an essential tool for business and political communication. The growth is fueled by widespread mobile phone use and increased internet access (Biney & Kumi Asamoah, 2023). In Nigeria, efforts by both government and non-governmental organizations to enhance digital literacy through community-based training programs are underway (Onyekwere, 2024; IseOlorunkanmi et al., 2023).

Additionally, South Africa's National Broadband Policy aims to provide universal internet access, which is expected to significantly improve the effectiveness of social media (Mhlanga & Ndhlovu, 2023). In South Africa, addressing the digital divide necessitates integrating digital literacy programs into the education system to equip young people with essential skills for navigating the digital landscape (Le Hanie, 2021). Similarly, in Cameroon, there is a critical need for widespread digital literacy initiatives that extend beyond urban areas to rural populations. These programs should emphasize responsible and effective use of social media (Suvannadabha et al., 2022). South Africa has launched campaigns such as "Think Before You Click" to promote responsible social media usage among youth (Le Hanie, 2021). In Cameroon, similar initiatives are needed, especially to encourage responsible social media use in political communication contexts (Suvannadabha et al., 2022; Tatchou, 2022).

In Nigeria, a significant barrier to leveraging social media for tourism development is the inadequate digital infrastructure (Eze, 2019; Folayan & Obun-Andy, 2020; Abdullahi, 2021). Unreliable internet connectivity and frequent power outages severely hinder effective social media use (Adenuga & Montowska, 2023). Additionally, note that many tourism-related social media accounts in Nigeria suffer from poor content quality, limiting their effectiveness (Idem, 2022). Many Nigerian tourism organizations struggle with maintaining consistent and meaningful engagement with their audience (Araşli et al., 2021; Andem et al., 2024). Furthermore, proposed regulations, such as the Social Media Bill, have raised concerns about potential censorship and content restrictions, which could deter tourism operators from fully embracing social media due to fear of legal repercussions (Adae et al., 2023). The prevalence of fake news and misleading information online has led to a general mistrust of online content among potential tourists, complicating efforts to promote tourism via social media (Kanashina, 2024). Although numerous studies have been conducted globally and regionally on the role of social media in sustainable tourism development, few have specifically focused on the Calabar metropolis, Nigeria (Ghaderi et al., 2023; Mkumbo & Mbise, 2022; Amadi et al., 2024; Uyang et al., 2024; Uzodinma, 2021; Balogun, 2023). None of these studies have thoroughly explored the role of social media as a catalyst for sustainable tourism development within this context. This research aims to address this gap by assessing the role of social media as a catalyst for sustainable tourism development in Calabar, with specific reference to role of social media in tourism development, measures to ensure effectiveness of social media, Influence of Social media on tourist arrivals, challenges of social media for effective tourism development and Socio-economic characteristics of the sample population.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: CAUSAL-CHAIN FRAMEWORK

The research findings were operationalized using the casual-chain framework to illustrate the inter-relationships among different dimensions and results of user behavior in social media adoption. This framework is grounded in the input-moderator-mediator-output model proposed by (Oyinbo et al., 2024). Within this framework, various research constructs are categorized into antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes. For example, the variable "social influence" is positioned as an antecedent in some studies while serving as a mediator in others (Hoang et al., 2022). In the causal-chain framework, an antecedent is a factor that precedes a behavioral outcome and is placed on the input side. Social media research typically considers antecedents in three dimensions: social factors, user attributes, and organizational attributes.

Regarding social factors, numerous studies have utilized social influence and social capital as antecedents to explain users' socio-psychological motives. The social influence model, which includes subjective norms, group norms, and social identity, is frequently applied to explore users' or customers' motivations for engaging in specific behaviors or

changes, as seen in the works of (Hoang et al., 2022; Ruangkanjanases et al., 2020; Hsu & Lin, 2020; Kwon et al., 2021; Lee & Kim, 2020). Similarly, the social capital model, encompassing social ties, social interaction, trust, and reciprocity, has been used as an antecedent in various social media studies. The causal-chain framework is a conceptual tool designed to trace the sequence of actions or events that lead to specific outcomes. When applied to sustainable tourism development, this framework helps to examine how social media contributes to the promotion and adoption of sustainable practices in a tourism destination. It operates on a set of assumptions regarding social media's impact on awareness, behavior, and policy, which collectively drive sustainable tourism development.

Assumption 1: Social Media as a Primary Tool for Awareness Creation

The initial assumption of the causal-chain framework is that social media functions as a key instrument for raising awareness about sustainable tourism practices. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are considered highly effective in reaching broad and varied audiences with sustainability-related information. This belief is based on the idea that the extensive reach and interactive features of social media make it an ideal medium for quickly and widely disseminating messages. It is assumed that tourism boards, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and influencers utilize social media to advocate for sustainable tourism principles, including environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and responsible travel. Through the creation of visually engaging and compelling content, these entities aim to shape public perceptions and enhance awareness of sustainability in tourism. This effectiveness in raising awareness is viewed as crucial for prompting subsequent changes in behavior.

Assumption 2: Social Media Influences Tourist Behavior

The second key assumption of the causal-chain framework posits that social media has a substantial impact on tourist behavior. Once awareness has been raised, it is believed that social media can directly influence how tourists plan and undertake their trips. This influence manifests through various mechanisms, such as influencer marketing, user-generated content (UGC), and peer-to-peer interactions. Influencers who advocate for sustainable travel are thought to set trends and establish norms that their followers are likely to adopt. This assumption is grounded in the idea that individuals are inclined to mimic behaviors demonstrated by those they admire or consider credible. Similarly, UGC such as images, reviews, and travel narratives shared on social media is presumed to offer social proof, enhancing the attractiveness and practicality of sustainable tourism practices. This content plays a role in shaping tourists' decisions, motivating them to make more environmentally and socially responsible choices. The assumption here is that social media not only raises awareness but also drives tangible behavior changes by increasing the visibility and appeal of sustainable practices. Such changes are expected to boost demand for sustainable tourism options, thereby affecting the supply dynamics within the tourism industry.

Assumption 3: Social Media Facilitates Policy Implementation and Destination Management

The third assumption is that social media plays a pivotal role in supporting the implementation of sustainable tourism policies and managing tourism destinations. This assumption is based on the belief that social media platforms serve as a forum for public discussion, advocacy, and stakeholder engagement. Through these platforms, various stakeholders including tourists, local communities, and NGOs can express their concerns, share best practices, and push for sustainable policies. It is assumed that social media campaigns, particularly those that gain widespread attention, can pressure policymakers and destination managers to focus on sustainability in tourism planning. This influence may arise from viral campaigns initiated by NGOs, grassroots movements, or broad public support for sustainability issues. Social media is thought to facilitate a bottom-up approach to policy development, where public demands and input are integral to shaping effective sustainable tourism policies. Additionally, the assumption is that social media fosters the collaborative creation of sustainable tourism solutions by enabling idea exchange and cooperation among different stakeholders. This collaborative approach is expected to result in more inclusive and effective policies, which are crucial for achieving long-term sustainability in tourism destinations.

Assumption 4: The Cumulative Effect of Social Media on Sustainable Tourism Development

The final assumption of the causal-chain framework is that the cumulative impact of social media activities such as raising awareness, driving behavior change, and facilitating policy development ultimately contributes to sustainable tourism development. This assumption rests on the belief that effective use of social media to boost awareness, shape behavior, and influence policy will result in a more sustainable tourism destination across economic, environmental, and social dimensions. It is assumed that these interconnected processes create a positive feedback loop, where increased sustainability in tourism practices further enhances social media's role in promoting these practices. For instance, as more destinations adopt sustainable policies and tourists increasingly engage in sustainable behaviors, social media content related to sustainability is expected to proliferate, thereby reinforcing the entire causal chain. Within this framework, social media is considered a crucial driver of sustainable tourism development, influencing various stages of the causal chain and accelerating the adoption of sustainable tourism practices. Without social media's impact, the spread and adoption of sustainable tourism practices would likely be slower and less extensive (Figure 1). However, the causal-chain framework concerning social media's role as a catalyst for sustainable tourism development is based on several fundamental assumptions. These assumptions include the capability of social media to effectively raise awareness, its impact on shaping tourist behavior, its contribution to policy implementation, and its overall influence on advancing sustainable tourism development.

By understanding and applying these principles in this research, the data reveal several ways social media contributes to sustainable tourism development, influences tourist behavior, and increases tourist arrivals. Furthermore, the data indicate various measures to ensure the effective use of social media in tourism development within the study area. These research findings are framed within the causal-chain framework, which underscores how stakeholders in the tourism industry can more effectively leverage social media to foster positive change and advance sustainable tourism development in the study area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs a survey research design to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, aiming to establish relationships among variables (SyJr & Gempes, 2023).

Methods of data collection: This study was conducted in the Calabar metropolis, focusing on the role of social media in sustainable tourism development. A questionnaire served as the primary data collection instrument, with a total of 230 copies distributed randomly to residents within tourism development areas. Population of the study: The study population consists of operators from various sectors within the tourism industry in the study area. Additionally, residents living around the tourism developments also constitute the study population. Sampling technique: The study used a random sampling technique to ensure that every individual in the study area had an equal chance of selection. This approach was chosen to provide an unbiased representation of the population. Sample size: A sample size of 230 respondents was used for the study, drawn from both operators in the tourism industry and residents within tourism development areas.

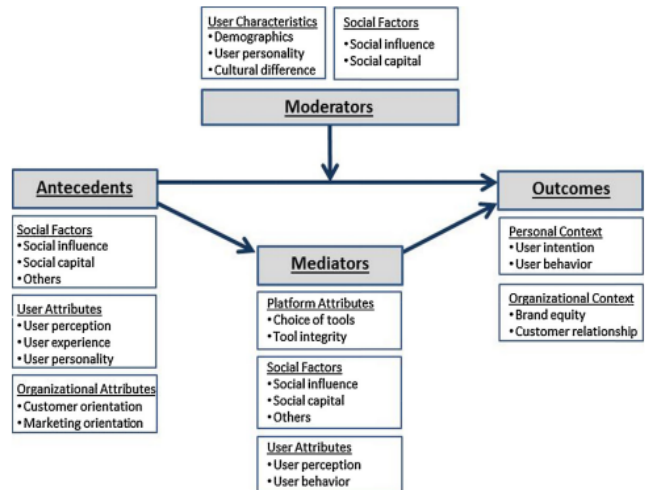


Figure 1. Causal-chain framework

Hypothesis

One hypothesis was stated in this research work thus: There is no significant relationship between the role of social media in tourism development and challenges of social media for effective tourism development in Calabar

Techniques for data analysis: This hypothesis can be tested using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation formula, as outlined by Pearson (1896), which is mathematically expressed as follows:

$$r = \frac{N\sum xy - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[(N\sum x^2) - (\sum x)^2][(N\sum Y^2) - (\sum Y)^2]}}$$

Where: r = Correlation Coefficient; X = Role of social media; Y² = Challenges of social media; N = Number of variables; Σ = Summation; Σx = Sum of X (independent variable); Σy = Sum of Y (dependent variable).

Table 1. Role of social media in tourism development in Calabar (Source: Authors fieldwork, 2024)

	Impact of media	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Destination promotion	53	23.04
2.	Image building	90	39.13
3.	Information dissemination	22	9.60
4.	Cultural exchange	8	3.4
5.	Social media engagement	6	2.6
6.	Influencer marketing	3	1.3
7.	Crises management	7	3.0
8.	Online booking and reservations	6	2.6
9.	Environmental conservation	7	3.0
10.	Economic impact	5	2.1
11.	Event promotion	23	10.0
	Total	230	100

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Role of social media in tourism development

The analysis of social media's impact on tourism development showed that image building, driven by media efforts, had the greatest influence, accounting for 39.13 percent, followed by destination promotion at 23.04 percent. Additionally, information dissemination and cultural exchange were identified as significant impacts, with values of 9.60 percent and 3.4 percent, respectively. The findings also highlighted that social media engagement, 2.6 percent, and crisis management, 3 percent, played roles in tourism development. However, influencer marketing within the destination had a minimal impact, with only 1.3 percent among the eleven factors examined (Table 1) (Figure 2).

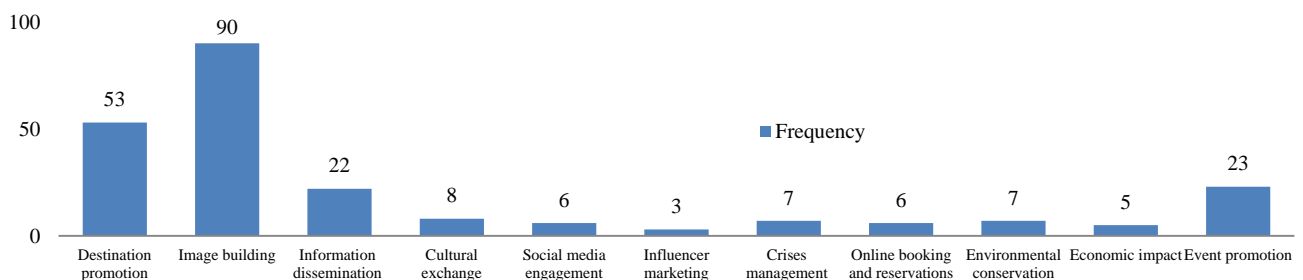


Figure 2. Role of social media in tourism development in Calabar (Source: Authors fieldwork, 2024)

Measures to ensure effectiveness of social media

The study identified key measures for enhancing the effectiveness of social media in tourism development. Education campaigns and community engagement emerged as the most significant measures, with 36.5 percent and 33.91 percent, respectively. Additionally, 18.70 percent, 13.03 percent, and 8.6 percent of respondents highlighted collaboration with tourism stakeholders, strategic destination marketing, and collaboration with influencers as important strategies.

Table 2. Measure to ensure effectiveness of social media (Source: Authors fieldwork, 2024)

S/N	Measures to enhance media effectiveness	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Education campaigns	84	36.50
2.	Data analysis for targeting	13	5.6
3.	Collaboration with tourism stakeholders	43	18.70
4.	Crises communication	10	4.3
5.	Community engagement	78	33.91
6.	Virtual tours and experiences	6	2.6
7.	Interaction campaigns	7	3.0
8.	Collaboration with influencers	20	8.6
9.	Digital presence and online platforms	5	2.1
10.	Visual Storytelling	6	2.6
11.	Strategic destination marketing	30	13.04
	Total	230	100

Other measures included interaction campaigns 5.6 percent, virtual tours and experiences 4.3 percent, and visual storytelling 3 percent. Furthermore, 3 percent of respondents agreed that interaction campaigns are also crucial, while 2.6 percent emphasized the importance of virtual tours, experiences, and visual storytelling (Table 2) (Figure 3).

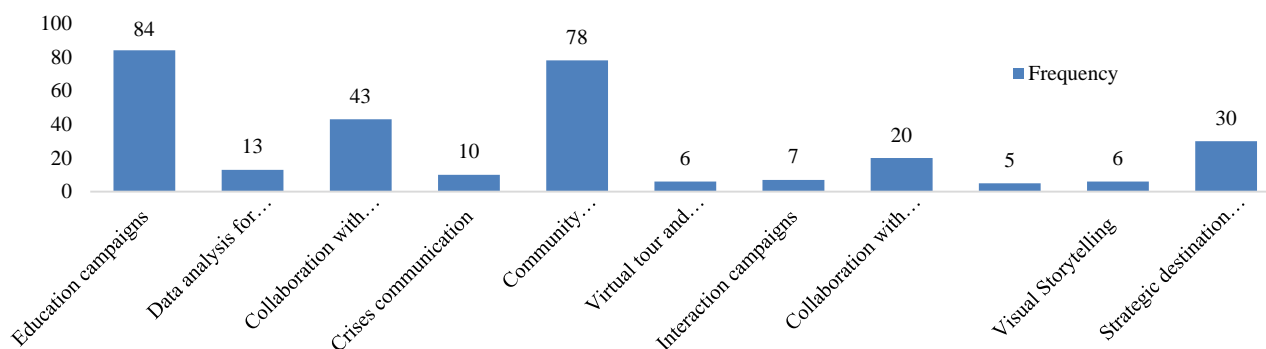


Figure 3. Measure to ensure effectiveness of social media (Source: Authors fieldwork, 2024)

Influence of Social media on tourist arrivals

The analysis of social media's influence on tourist arrivals revealed that social media presence and advertising campaigns were the most significant factors, with values of 34.80 percent and 20 percent, respectively. Similarly, 20 percent and 10 percent of respondents confirmed that event coverage and digital marketing also played a crucial role in influencing tourist arrivals in the study area. Additionally, peer recommendations and crisis management, each with a value of 3 percent, further contributed to social media's impact on tourist arrivals. The data also showed that online reviews and testimonials, collaboration campaigns, and influencer partnerships, each with a value of 2.6 percent, were notable social media influences on tourist arrivals in the study area (Table 3).

Table 3. Influence of Social media on tourist arrivals (Source: Authors fieldwork, 2024)

S/N	Media influence in visitors arrivals	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Advertising campaigns	46	20.00
2.	Travelplanning and research	8	3.4
3.	Social media present	80	34.80
4.	Influencer partnership	6	2.6
5.	Video content	5	2.1
6.	Peer Recommendations	7	3.0
7.	Online reviews and testimonials	6	2.6
8.	Event coverage	36	15.70
9.	Collaboration campaign	6	2.6
10.	Crises management	7	3.0
11.	Digital marketing event	23	10.00
	Total	230	100

Challenges of social media for effective tourism development

The challenges of social media for effective tourism development in the study area are highlighted by several key

issues. Over 29.13 percent of the respondents identified budget constraints as a significant obstacle to the effectiveness of social media. Additionally, competition for attention, 17.8 percent, and misrepresentation, 14.7 percent, were noted as challenges. Another 14.7 percent of respondents pointed to language and cultural barriers as impediments to effective social media use for tourism development. Furthermore, 10.86 percent of respondents cited the perception of overpopulation as a challenge. The impact of global events and sustainability concerns, with values of 3.91 percent and 3.00 percent respectively, also posed challenges. Negative publicity, 2.6 percent, and privacy concerns were identified as the least significant challenges to social media's role in tourism development in the study area (Table 4).

The findings from Hypothesis, which posited no significant relationship between the role of social media in tourism development and the challenges of social media for effective tourism development in Calabar, warrant closer examination. The data presented reveal a positive correlation between these variables, as demonstrated by a coefficient of ($R=0.686$; $P<0.001$). This indicates a clear alignment and a linear relationship between social media's role in tourism development and the challenges faced in ensuring its effectiveness in Calabar. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis, leading to the conclusion that a substantial relationship exists between social media in tourism development and the challenges it encounters in achieving effective tourism development in Calabar (Table 5).

Table 4. Challenges of social media for effective tourism development (Source Authors fieldwork, 2024)

S/N	Challenges of media	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Impact of global event	9	3.91
2.	Rapid technological changes	6	2.6
3.	Sustainability concern	7	3.0
4.	Language and cultural barriers	18	7.80
5.	Budget constraint	67	29.13
6.	Lack of diversity in representation	9	3.9
7.	Competition for attention	41	17.8
8.	Privacy Concerns	6	2.60
9.	Misrepresentation	34	14.7
10.	Over- tourism perception	25	10.86
11.	Negative publicity	6	2.6
	Total	230	100

Table 5. Correlation analysis of the relationship between social media in tourism development in Calabar and challenges of social media for effective tourism development (Source: Data analysis, 2024)

Parameter	N	R	p-value
Socio-media	10		
		0.686**	0.001
Challenges	10		

Socio-economic characteristics of the sample population

The socio-economic characteristics of the sample population reveal that 66.96 percent of the respondents were male, while 33.04 percent were female. Additionally, 32.60 percent of the respondents were single, 22.60 percent were married, followed by 18.26 percent who were divorced, 13.47 percent who were widows, and 13.04 percent who were widowers. Furthermore, 22.17 percent and 32.17 percent of the respondents fell within the age brackets of 26 to 45 years, while 12.17 percent and 11.17 percent were between 46 to 65 years. Moreover, 9 percent of the respondents were aged 66 years and above. The data also indicates that only 13.91 percent of respondents were within the age bracket of 15 to 25 years (Table 6).

Table 6. Socio-economic characteristics of the sample population (Source: Authors fieldwork, 2024)

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	154	66.96
Female	76	33.04
Total	230	100
Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	75	32.60
Married	52	22.60
Divorce	42	18.26
Widow	31	13.47
Widowers	30	13.04
Total	230	100
Age	Frequency	Percentage
15 – 25	32	13.91
26 – 35	51	22.17
36 – 45	74	32.17
46 – 55	28	12.17
56 – 65	25	11.00
66 and above	20	9.00
Total	230	100

DISCUSSION

The Role of social media in tourism development as observed in result findings, revealed that image building propagated by the media followed by destination promotion were the major role of social media in tourism development (Chaulagain et al., 2024; Adam et al., 2022). The findings align with the empirical works of social media, which constitutes a major factor that enhances tourism development at any given destination (Cheung et al., 2022; Raji et al., 2024; Balogun, 2023; Omotomilola et al., 2024). Moreover, cultural exchange and event promotion also form a significant role of social media in tourism development, which aligns with the research findings (Dassah, 2023; Mzembe & Idemudia, 2022). Furthermore, it was noticed in the research findings that social media has a smaller role to play in influencer marketing in the destination (Arasli et al., 2021). This assertion agreed with the works of (Sigala, 2019). Although social media plays a vital role in destination image and promotion (Candia, 2024; Rocha, 2020). Accordingly, the research findings further indicate that several measures are required to ensure effectiveness of social media for tourism development in the study area (Bastrygina et al., 2024). However, the research findings show that education campaigns and community engagement were the major measures to ensure the effectiveness of social media in tourism development (Arueyingho et al., 2023; Ampofo, 2023). This is also supported by the empirical works of (Alghamdi et al., 2023; Akpuokwe et al., 2024) and further align with (Sakas et al., 2022). Similarly, it was observed from the research findings that several factors of social media had influence on tourist arrivals in the study area (Venkatesh et al., (2024). This evidence from the research findings showing that social media presence and advertising campaigns were the major influence of social media on tourist arrivals (So et al., 2021; Dassah, 2023). Notably, the research finding shows several challenges of social media for effective tourism development in the study area (Onyekwere, 2024; IseOlorunkanmi et al., 2023; Le Hanie, 2021). Similarly, these challenges such as budget constraints and misrepresentation were observed to constitute a major threat to tourism development in the study area (Suvannadabha et al., 2022; Tatchou, 2022). These findings further collaborate with the works of (IseOlorunkanmi et al., 2023; Mkumbo & Mbise, 2022) and also align with the empirical findings of (Mhlanga & Ndhlovu, 2023; Bala, 2024). Again, the findings indicate that competition for attention, the impact of global events and lacks of diversity in representation were also challenges of social media in tourism development (Biney et al., 2023; Ghaderi et al., 2023). This finding further agrees with the empirical findings of (Andem et al., 2024) that show several challenges associated with social media for tourism development in the study area (Eze, 2019; Folayan & Obun-Andy, 2020; Abdullahi, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Evaluating the role of media as a catalyst for sustainable tourism development of Calabar as a tourism destination highlights the vital connection between media influence and the growth of the tourism industry. Media, spanning platforms such as television, radio, social media, and print, is essential in shaping perceptions, sharing information, and promoting destinations. For Calabar, a city celebrated for its rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and historical significance effective social media use is crucial for tourism development. Social Media acts as a bridge, showcasing Calabar's unique attractions and experiences to both local and international audiences. With captivating visuals, compelling narratives, and persuasive messaging, social media platforms can spark the interest of potential tourists and inspire them to visit Calabar. The impact of social media on tourism development in Calabar is undeniably substantial. By leveraging social media's potential to highlight its distinctive features, Calabar can attract more tourists, drive sustainable growth, and contribute to the region's socio-economic development. It is therefore imperative that stakeholders prioritize the strategic use of social media as a driving force in enhancing tourism growth and realizing Calabar's potential as a top travel destination in Africa.

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