Research Article

The Role of Social Media in Shaping Undergraduate Tourism and Hospitality Students' Fieldtrip Destination Choice

*1Francis Junior Quaye, 2Ebenezer Tetteh, 3Patience Hagan

About Author

1 Department of Tourism Management, Cape Coast Technical University, Box DL 50, Cape Coast, Ghana

2 The Palms by Eagle Hotel, No. 2 Palms Avenue Beach Road, Takoradi, Ghana

3 Institute of Open and Distance Learning, Cape Coast Technical University, Box DL 50, Cape Coast, Ghana

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of social media on the selection of academic field trip destinations by undergraduate students in tourism and hospitality in Ghana. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, involving 486 students from six Technical Universities, and employed surveys and interviews to examine social media usage patterns, preferred content types, perceived educational value, and influence across various academic levels. Research indicates that Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube were prevalent platforms, with most students spending over four hours daily to social media and regularly accessing travel-related content. Visual content, especially photos or pictures and videos, has proven to be most influential in determining destination preferences. Additionally, students indicated a strong relationship between destinations promoted on social media and their academic learning objectives. The study highlights social media's influence in generating interest in destinations and improving educational significance, indicating its potential for incorporation into tourism education and academic trip planning.

Contact @ Francis Junior Quaye
francis.quaye@cctu.edu.gh

1. INTRODUCTION

The growing integration of social media into everyday life has profoundly impacted multiple sectors, including tourism education. This brings both opportunities and challenges, especially in controlling student expectations and guaranteeing educational value in their selected destinations. Sigala (2022) asserts that the emergence of digital platforms has impacted social media's influence on both leisure travelers and students choosing destinations for educational purposes.

Social media has emerged as a predominant influence in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in travel choices. Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube function as principal sources of travel guidance and information (Leung *et al.*, 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Social media content, encompassing user-generated reviews, influencer endorsements, and destination marketing initiatives, profoundly influences travelers' perceptions and decisions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Furthermore, social media's influence transcends recreational travel, affecting students' decisions about academic tourism, such as field trip destinations (Rahman *et al.*, 2022).

Students in tourism and hospitality predominantly utilize social media for many academic objectives, such as research, networking, and advancement in their careers (Sigala, 2017). The relationship between social media and academic travel choices requires additional investigation to comprehend how these digital interactions influence destination selection.

Field visits are essential in tourism and hospitality management education in Ghana for connecting theoretical knowledge with practical experiences. Gretzel *et al.*, (2020) asserted that field trips are essential to the academic experience, providing experiential learning opportunities that connect theoretical knowledge with practical applications. The influence of social media on tourism behavior has been extensively examined, emphasizing elements such as travel inspiration, destination promotion, and user-generated contents (Xiang *et al.*, 2021). Previous research indicates that social media content, such as influencer endorsements, feedback from peers, and destination marketing initiatives, substantially influences travelers' perceptions and decision-making processes (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020; Leung *et al.*, 2022).

Although research has investigated social media's impact on general tourist destination selection, limited attention has been given to its effect in academic settings. Agyapong and Yuan (2022) examined the influence of social media on tourism destination choices among international students in China, emphasizing the significance of shared information and endorsements. Nevertheless, there exists a paucity of empirical information about the influence of social media on undergraduate students' decisions concerning academic field trips, specifically in relation to perceived educational value and alignment with learning objectives.

Moreover, literature has utilized quantitative tools, including surveys and structured questionnaires, to evaluate the influence of social media on travel decisions. Shu and Scott (2014) employed an experimental design to investigate how social media content influences Chinese students' choices of overseas study destinations. Nonetheless, these methods may fail to take into consideration the numerous motivations and perspectives that inform students' destination selections. Mixed-methods research is necessary to integrate quantitative data with qualitative insights concerning recommendations, so offering a more comprehensive knowledge of the elements that influence students' judgements.

Additionally, investigations pertaining to this subject have been undertaken in Asian and Western contexts, with less study addressing African environments. Davies and Cairncross (2013) examined student tourism and destination selection by analyzing the impact of social media in Australia. Nonetheless, there is a paucity of research investigating the impact of social media on academic field trip selections among students at Ghanaian universities. Considering the distinct educational and technological contexts of Ghana, it is imperative to examine this issue within the local setting to guide pertinent educational and tourism strategies.

Therefore, it is essential to address these methodological, empirical, and geographical deficiencies in order to understand the influence of social media on the field trip destination choices of undergraduate tourism and hospitality students. This study aims to address existing gaps by utilizing a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the prevalence of social media usage among tourism management students in Ghana, identify the types of social media content that significantly impact their field trip destination choices, assess the relationship between social media influence and the perceived educational value of selected destinations, and determine the effect of social media content on destination choices among students at different academic levels as well as recommendation to help improve undergraduate tourism and hospitality students' fieldtrip destination choice using social media. This article will analyze these aspects to provide educational institutions and destination marketers with practical implications for curriculum creation and destination marketing strategies specific to educational travel.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social media usage among tourism and hospitality students for academic activities

Social media has become an essential element of academic life for students in tourism and hospitality educational institutions, specifically technical universities. The incorporation of social media into the everyday lives of students, especially those in tourism and hospitality studies, has profoundly impacted their academic endeavors. Boahene *et al.* (2019) examined the relationship between social media use and academic achievement among higher education students. Their research demonstrated that utilizing social media for educational objectives has a positive relationship with academic performance, underscoring the potential advantages of incorporating these platforms into instructional strategies.

A study by Lee and Song (2023) highlights the effectiveness of incorporating social media activities into hospitality education. The research demonstrates that these activities substantially enhance students, equipping them for various cultural engagements in their professional endeavors. Fatawu *et al.* (2020) examined this issue among Hospitality Management students at Tamale Technical University. The research identified

a significant correlation between regular social media usage and the incorporation of non-standard language forms in academic tasks, such as class assignments, tests, and research projects. Ridhwan *et al.* (2024) undertook a study including hospitality and tourism management students to investigate this phenomenon. The research demonstrated a notable positive relationship between the use of social media for academic objectives and students' total grade point averages. The study revealed that close to half of the variance in academic achievement is attributable to students' perceptions of social media usage and the time they spent on these platforms.

Gani's (2024) research demonstrates that whilst utilizing social media for academic purposes enhances academic performance, the total duration spent on social media fails to demonstrate a statistically significant relationship with academic results. Huda's (2024) study investigated the influence of social media on the academic performance of hospitality and tourism management students, emphasizing that although these platforms can be beneficial for information dissemination and networking, excessive usage may result in distractions that impede academic achievement. This indicates that the essence and objective of social media participation are more significant than the mere duration of online activity. Students who judiciously utilize social media for educational objectives, such as collaborating on tasks or obtaining pertinent information, may attain academic advantages without sacrificing their study time.

2.2. Social media content that most influence students' destination choices for field trips

Social media content, especially images and videos, significantly influences travel preferences. Wang and Park (2022) examined the impact of social media on the travel intentions of university students. Their findings suggest that the inadvertent discovery of information via videos and pictures on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok substantially influences students' travel intentions and destination recommendations. This highlights the significance of compelling visual information in attracting the attention and interest of prospective travelers.

Gretzel (2019) asserts that influencer marketing has become a potent instrument for promoting vacation destinations. Alrefai *et al.* (2024) conducted a study examining the influence of social media influencers on destination selection among Jordanian millennial travelers. The research highlighted five critical factors influencing followers' destination choices: recommendations from influencers, perceived authenticity, credibility and trustworthiness, engagement with followers, and perceived knowledge. Significantly, referrals and perceived honesty had the greatest impact.

Also, electronic word of mouth appears essential in influencing opinions of tourism destinations. Shu and Scott (2014) performed an experimental investigation about the impact of social media on the choice of overseas study destinations by Chinese students. Their research indicates that social media content, especially electronic word of mouth, significantly influences destination appeal. Well-defined content can enhance elaboration and evoke matching favorable or negative perceptions of the study destination among students (Shu & Scott, 2014).

Conversely, Wang and Park (2022) discovered that accidental discovery of information on social media exerts a more significant influence on behavioral intention than intentional searching. This indicates that students are more affected by accidental encounters with captivating content than by intentional information searching.

2.3. Social media influence on perceived educational value of chosen field trip destinations

Social media has emerged as an essential contributor in influencing students' opinions regarding the educational value of field trip destinations. Social media platforms function as key information sources for students evaluating field trip destinations. The content disseminated on those platforms could profoundly affect the perceived educational value of a destinations. Shu and Scott (2014) performed an experimental study investigating the influence of social media on Chinese students' choice of overseas study destinations. Their research further indicates that social media content significantly influences a destination's appeal, potentially eliciting favorable or unfavorable perceptions depending on the information's nature (Shu & Scott, 2014).

Narangajavana *et al.* (2017) examined the impact of social media on shaping expectations for tourist destinations. Their research demonstrates that the degree of social media usage impacts reasons for interacting with social media content, thereby affecting confidence in that content and shaping expectations of the destination. This indicates that students who actively interact with social media content may cultivate elevated expectations concerning the educational advantages of a trip.

The portrayal of a destination on social media can profoundly influence students' motivations and views of its educational significance. Llodra-Riera *et al.* (2015) evaluated the impact of social media on travelers' motivations and the development of destination images. Their research revealed that the motives for visiting a destination are shaped by the information sources utilized, such as social media, and that these motivations subsequently influence the cognitive and emotional perceptions of the destination (Llodra-Riera *et al.*, 2015). This suggests that favorable representations on social media can improve students' evaluations of a destination's educational value.

The content disseminated on social media, whether produced by tour operators or users, influences the construction of a destination's image and its perceived educational significance. Sultan *et al.* (2021) examined the influence of social media content on image formation and the choice of sustainable destinations. The authors determined that both tour-operator-generated content and user-generated content affect the cognitive and affective perceptions of a destination, which are essential in the decision-making process for choosing field trip sites (Sultan *et al.*, 2021).

2.4. Social media influence on destination choices among students at different academic levels

Social media influencers significantly impact travel decisions. Simpson (2021) performed a comparative analysis of students from the University of Malta and Canterbury Christ Church University, indicating that although students engage with

travel influencers, they demonstrate skepticism towards the legitimacy of the content. However, recommendations featuring images and videos were discovered to affect destination choices (Simpson, 2021).

A study by Kwame and Kweku (2019) investigated the impact of social media on students' choice of tertiary institution. The results demonstrated that although students engage actively on platforms such as WhatsApp and LinkedIn, they predominantly depend on university websites for information. This indicates that, notwithstanding significant involvement on social media, official websites continue to be an essential source of information.

Nevertheless, scant research particularly examines how social media's impact on destination selection differs among students at various academic levels. Furthermore, it may be deduced that novices in the university setting may depend more significantly on social media for travel inspiration and knowledge. Conversely, mature learners may use ideas from personal experiences, peer endorsements, and social media information when making vacation plans. Additional empirical study is required to validate these assumptions.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the methodology of the paper, focusing on the study setting, design and approach, data collection instrument, data collection process and procedure, and data analysis.

3.1. Study setting

The research was carried out in Ghana, encompassing six higher educational institutions that provide tourism and hospitality programs: Ho Technical University, Accra Technical University, Takoradi Technical University, Koforidua Technical University, Cape Coast Technical University, and Kumasi Technical University. These institutions were chosen to exemplify varied geographical regions, educational structures, and tourism and hospitality student populations in southern Ghana.

3.2. Research design and approach

The study employed a mixed-methods design integrating quantitative and qualitative approach for data gathering to offer a thorough knowledge of how social media influences students' selections of fieldtrip destinations. This design was appropriate since it for an extensive examination of the research issue, yielding both quantifiable trends and profound insights into participants' suggestions following their first questionnaire responses. The utilisation of questionnaires facilitated the acquisition of standardised data from a diverse sample, guaranteeing consistency, dependability, and simplicity in statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Moreover, by conducting semi-structured interview, the study acquired detailed, context-specific recommendations that would have been challenging to gather through questionnaires alone. Interviews supplemented the survey data by allowing participants to comment on their perspectives, so augmenting the study's depth and validity (Guetterman *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, the integration of questionnaires and interviews enhances the triangulation of data sources, hence augmenting

the credibility and reliability of the findings (Fetters, 2020). Due to the nature of the research issue and objectives, this approach was crucial for both quantifying general patterns and comprehending the intricate reasoning underlying respondents' views. The mixed-methods approach was suitably aligned with the research aims, allowing the study to leverage the advantages of both quantitative breadth and qualitative depth.

3.3. Data collection instruments

A structured questionnaire, created using Google Forms, was distributed using WhatsApp. It encompasses demographic data, social media usage patterns, preferred platforms, frequency of exposure to travel-related information, and the influence of this content on field trip decisions. It also incorporates Likert-scale items (e.g., extent of agreement regarding social media's influence on choices for destinations and perceived educational value). Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of students from the various technical universities that responded to the survey to participate through phone calls to gather their suggestions to enhancing the choice of field trip destinations for undergraduate tourism and hospitality students utilizing social media.

3.4. Data collection process and procedure

Purposive sampling was employed to focus on undergraduate students in tourism and hospitality across every academic level, which were Diploma, Bachelor's (regular), and Bachelor's (Top-up). Questionnaires were distributed through WhatsApp to enhance accessibility. Interviewees were selected based on students' willingness, availability, and diversity across all levels and institutions, after prior contact via WhatsApp. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and anonymity, were maintained throughout the process.

3.5. Data analysis

Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires were processed and analyzed with SPSS version 25, employing descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. Tables were employed to illustrate findings on demographics, social media platform utilization, and impact on destination choice. Evaluating the impact of social media content on destination choices among students across various academic levels. The average proportion of each type of social media post was calculated based on a total of 486 students. Subsequently, there was a multiplication of the frequency of each academic level by these proportions to obtain the expected frequencies. Afterwards, the mean was calculated for each academic level to identify significant disparities. Regarding the qualitative data from interviews, it underwent a manual analysis to extract insights and recurring statements, with responses categorized by institution for relative comparison of perspectives.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This aspect of the paper presents the analysis and discussion of data gathered from students in relation to their demographic characteristics, social media usage, social media and field trip destination choices, and perceived educational value when selecting a field trip destination.

4.1. Demographic characteristics

This section provides an analysis and discussion of the demographic characteristics of students. The data is displayed in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Demographic information

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	165	34
Female	321	66
Total	486	100

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Under 20	97	20
20-25	331	68
26 and above	58	12
Total	486	100

Academic Level	Frequency	Percentage
Year One	122	25
Year Two	238	49
Year Three	63	13
Year Four	63	13
Total	486	100

Programme of study	Frequency	Percentage
Diploma	73	15
Bachelor Degree (Regular)	350	72
Bachelor's Degree (Top-up/ Weekend)	63	13
Total	486	100

The data indicates a pronounced gender disparity among respondents, with females constituting 66% and males 34%, practically a two-to-one ratio. This may indicate a wider trend in the tourism and hospitality student demographic, where female enrolment is frequently elevated, potentially owing to increased interest or perceived appropriateness in the discipline. A significant proportion of the responders (68%) are aged 20–25 years, suggesting that the majority are presumably regular undergraduate students. The comparatively low proportion (12%) of respondents aged 26 and older may relate to mature students, including those enrolled in top-up or weekend programme.

Nearly half of the students (49%) are in Year Two, indicating that the study or survey may have been especially accessible or attractive to second-year students. Students in Year Three and Year Four each comprise 13% of the total, suggesting stable enrolment in the higher years, whilst Year One students account for a quarter of the total.

A significant majority (72%) of participants are engaged in a regular Bachelor's degree programme, indicating that full-time education is the prevalent method of learning. Top-up

or weekend programme constitute 13%, presumably serving working professionals or individuals advancing from diplomas. Diploma students constitute 15%, signifying a fundamental part of the study population.

4.2. Social media usage

This section includes the findings and analysis about students' use of social media platforms. The data is presented below in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Social media platforms used by tourism and hospitality students

Social Media Platforms	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage Rank
Instagram	462	95	1
Facebook	442	91	3
TikTok	447	92	2
Twitter (X)	413	85	5
YouTube	437	90	4
Others (Snapchat, LinkedIn etc.)	408	84	6

Note: This was a multiple response table; therefore, total or percentage will not necessarily add up to 486 or 100%.

According to Table 2, Instagram is the most utilized platform at 95%, followed closely by TikTok at 92% and Facebook at 91%, indicating roughly same utilization levels. YouTube exhibits a high engagement rate of 90%, while Twitter (X) and other platforms follow closely with robust engagement rates of 85% and 84%, respectively. This illustrates that the majority of students utilise various social media platforms concurrently, but high with Instagram and Facebook, demonstrating the student's versatility and receptiveness to diverse content types. Their preference strongly favors visual and interactive formats, particularly image and video content, aligning with the essence of tourism and hospitality.

Table 3. Hours spend on social media per day

Hours of Social media Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	15	3
1-2 hours	39	8
3-4 hours	122	25
More than 4 hours	310	64
Total	**486**	**100**

A notable 64% of students spend over 4 hours daily to social media, signifying profound integration of these platforms into everyday life. Alongside the 25% who engage in social media for 3–4 hours daily, approximately 90% of students utilize these platforms for 3 or more hours each day. Only 3% and 8% of

students utilize social media for less than 1 hour and 1-2 hours daily, respectively, indicating that little interaction is uncommon within the student demographic. This indicates that students are active users of social media, with most dedicating substantial daily hours online, rendering it a viable medium for educational outreach, marketing, and tourism-related communication.

4.3. Social media and field trip destination choices

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected from students about their social media usage and choice of field trip destinations. The specifics are presented in Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7 below:

Table 4. How often tourism and hospitality students come across travel-related content on social media

	Frequency	Percentage
Never	19	4
Rarely	29	6
Occasionally	146	30
Frequently	292	60
Total	**486**	**100**

Table 4 indicates that a notable 60% of students frequently encounter travel-related content on social media, while an additional 30% experience it occasionally, resulting in 90%

of students being regularly exposed to travel content. Only 10% of students, including 4% who never and 6% who rarely report low or no exposure, claiming that travel content is not prevalent and routinely included on their timelines and feeds. This unequivocally demonstrates that tourism and hospitality students are significantly exposed to travel-related content on social media, particularly through both frequent and occasional interactions.

Table 5. Have tourism and hospitality students chosen a field trip destination based on social media content

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	350	72
No	136	28
Total	**486**	**100**

Among the 486 surveyed tourism and hospitality students, 72% indicated that their selection of a field trip destination was impacted by social media content. In contrast, 28% of respondents reported that their decision was unaffected by social media. This indicates that social media significantly influences the location preferences of tourism and hospitality students. This indicates that visual and narrative content disseminated on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook may significantly influence student perceptions and choices.

Table 6. Social media content that influences tourism and hospitality students' destination choice the most

	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage Rank
Photos	447	92	1
Videos	437	90	2
Travel blogs/vlogs	335	69	4
Reviews and recommendations	379	78	3
Influencer endorsements	316	65	5

Note: This was a multiple response table; therefore, total or percentage will not necessarily add up to 486 or 100%.

Table 6 indicates that the majority of students (92%) identified images as the most significant content category, closely followed by videos (90%), demonstrating a pronounced preference for visual media. Furthermore, recommendations and comments (78%) substantially impact students, indicating that peer feedback and user-generated information are regarded as credible. Travel blogs and vlogs (69%) exhibit a moderate degree of impact, perhaps due to their provision of in-depth, narrative-driven insights, whereas influencer endorsements (65%) rank lowest, but remain significant, suggesting a preference for authenticity over perceived promotional content. This indicates that destination featuring appealing visuals are more likely to attract students.

Table 7. Social media content enhances tourism and hospitality students' interest in specific destinations for academic field trips**.**

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	58	12
Disagree	34	7
Neutral	68	14
Agree	253	52
Strongly agree	73	15
Total	**486**	**100**

According to Table 7, a total of 67% of students who responded with Agree (52%) and Strongly Agree (15%) believe that social media information increases their interest in particular destinations for academic field trips. Conversely, 19% of the students, comprising 12% who strongly disagreed and 7% who disagreed, showed dissent over this remark. Only 14% of respondents expressed neutrality, signifying a degree of ambiguity or disinterest. This unequivocally demonstrates that two-thirds of students acknowledge the influence of social media in stimulating interest in academic travel. This confirms the importance of digital media as a crucial motivational instrument in tourist education and experience planning.

4.4. Perceived educational value
This section shows the findings and analysis of data collected from students about their perceived educational value in selecting a field trip destination. The specifics are presented in Tables 8 and 9 below:

Table 8. When selecting a field trip destination, how important is the educational value to tourism and hospitality students?

	Frequency	Percentage
Not important	49	10
Slightly important	49	10
Moderately important	49	10
Very important	112	23
Extremely important	227	47
Total	**486**	**100**

According to Table 8, a considerable proportion of students rated the educational significance of field trip destinations as very important at 23% and extremely important at 47%. a total 30% of the students assessed the educational value as moderate or below (10% evaluated it as moderately important, 10% as slightly important, and 10% as not important). The response is predominantly signifying a unique preference to prioritize educational value in travel decisions. The findings indicate that educational value is an essential factor in choosing field trip destinations for tourism and hospitality students, as the majority prioritize learning opportunities, consistent with the academic purpose of field trips, where learning outcomes are important.

Table 9. Have you found that destinations popular on social media align with tourism and hospitality students' academic learning objectives?

	Frequency	Percentage
Never	5	1
Rarely	5	1
Sometimes	44	9
Often	39	8
Always	393	81
Total	**486**	**100**

A significant majority of students (81%), as illustrated in Table 9, reported that destinations promoted on social media "always" correspond with their academic learning objectives. Furthermore, 17% of students expressed alignment, with 9% reporting it occasionally and 8% often. Merely 2% of students who responded affirmatively (1% for Never and 1% for Rarely) perceive little or no alignment. This indicates a significant similarity between prominent social media platforms and the academic objectives of tourism and hospitality. This may be attributed to numerous trendy destinations providing substantial educational content, including heritage sites, new tourism practices, and sustainable models.

Table 10. Social media content's influence on destination choices among students at different academic levels

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Photos	112.22	218.92	57.95	57.95
Videos	109.70	214.82	56.05	56.05
Travel blogs/vlogs	84.14	164.19	43.45	43.45
Reviews and recommendations	95.11	185.54	49.11	49.11
Influencer endorsements	79.32	154.75	40.96	40.96
Mean	**96.10**	**187.24**	**49.50**	**49.50**

The findings indicate significant differences in the influence of social media content on selecting a destination among students of various academic levels. Year 2 students have the highest effect from social media, with a mean score of (187.24), followed by Year 1 with a mean score of (96.10). Conversely, Year 3 and Year 4 students demonstrate significantly lower influence, each reporting a mean of 49.50. This suggests that academic level influences students' reactions to social media information in selecting travel destinations. Furthermore, visual content (images and videos) significantly influences tourism and hospitality students' destination selection across all academic levels.

4.5. Recommendation from students
This section offers recommendations to enhance undergraduate tourism and hospitality students' selection of field trip destinations through social media. The details are delineated below:
As a student of tourism and hospitality, I increasingly depend on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube for inspiration in selecting field trip destinations. These platforms offer captivating images and genuine experiences that enhance the relevance and excitement of learning beyond the classroom in relation to our academics, therefore we should continue to rely on these platforms. (*Koforidua Technical University*).
I advise that academic field trips should include destinations that are both educationally beneficial and possess significant social media presence and visibility. Destinations providing captivating images, videos, and peer reviews facilitate the

connection between theoretical concepts acquired in class and practical real-world instances. (*Accra Technical University*).

When choosing field trip destinations, I am significantly impacted by visual contents, particularly photos and brief videos, since they assist in envisioning the destination's attractiveness and its pertinence to educational objectives. I regard student-generated content and reviews as more trustworthy than influencer endorsements, as they appear more relatable and credible. (*Takoradi Technical University*).

Collaboration between academic departments of technical universities and content creators should be promoted to encourage students to disseminate field trip experiences on social media, as it would be beneficial. This will not only facilitate experiential learning but also establish a digital repository of sites for future students to investigate. (*Ho Technical University*).

I propose the integration of social media research tasks into field trips. Tasks may encompass the development of educational content or the analysis of online destination marketing techniques. This will enhance our understanding of tourism marketing while rendering the trip more engaging and significant. (*Cape Coast Technical University*).

I contend that popular social media destinations frequently correspond with our educational objectives. They consistently exhibit cultural heritage, sustainable practices, and creative tourist models, all of which are pertinent to our research. I implore educators and planners to recognize this synergy and utilize social media trends in the planning of academic excursions. (*Kumasi Technical University*).

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the impact of social media on the field trip destination choices of undergraduate tourism and hospitality students in Ghana. The findings indicated that social media is intricately integrated into students' academic and personal spheres, with platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube functioning as significant sources of travel inspiration and information. A significant number of students indicated that their selection of field trip destinations was influenced by social media content, particularly visual elements like photos and videos, and they placed greater trust in peer reviews than in influencer endorsements.

Furthermore, the study validated that social media not only affects destination preference but also shapes students' opinions of educational value. A significant majority of students reported that social media popular destinations frequently correspond with academic learning objectives, highlighting a pronounced connection between visual appeal and educational significance. Students acknowledged the influence of social media in enriching their academic experiences by rendering theoretical concepts more concrete through real-world exposure. The mixed-methods approach offered a comprehensive perspective on the phenomena, encompassing both statistical trends and detailed student viewpoints. The participation of students from six varied technical universities enhanced the dataset and yielded broadly applicable findings for tourism education in Ghana as well as worldwide.

Moreover, the study's implications suggest that curriculum

creators and educators should incorporate social media-based tasks and digital storytelling into field trip planning. Activities such as content generation, destination evaluation, and peer interaction can enhance learning and promote critical thinking. Institutions must take into account student preferences for visually stimulating destinations and connect these with educational objectives, guaranteeing that field trips are both intellectually enriching and socially attractive.

Destination marketers must acknowledge the academic tourism sector and develop promotions that emphasize both the leisure and educational attractions of destinations. Collaboration between academic institutions and destination management organizations (DMOs) could generate focused contents that enhances both branding and academic objectives.

Students ought to be motivated to engage in co-creating and disseminating educational travel experiences online to establish a legacy of valuable information for their peers. Student associations can leverage their influence to suggest destinations that harmonize popularity, accessibility, and educational significance.

Future research should investigate the long-term effects of social media-influenced field trips on academic performance, career orientation, and destination loyalty. Comparative analyses between institutions or regions may reveal contextual disparities and enhance comprehension of this digital-academic connection.

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