

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

**LEGON CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND DIPLOMACY
(LECIAD)**



**LEVERAGING DIGITAL DIPLOMACY IN PROMOTING
TOURISM IN GHANA'S POST-COVID ECONOMY**

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**THIS DISSERTATION IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of original research conducted by me under the supervision of Dr Innocent Badasu and that, apart from other works, which are duly acknowledged, no part of it has been submitted anywhere else for any purpose.



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DATE: 20/12/2025

DATE: 20/12/2025



DEDICATION

*I dedicate this work to my parents, Mr Laud Ofori Affrifah and
Mrs. Nana Adwoa Agyeman Affrifah.*



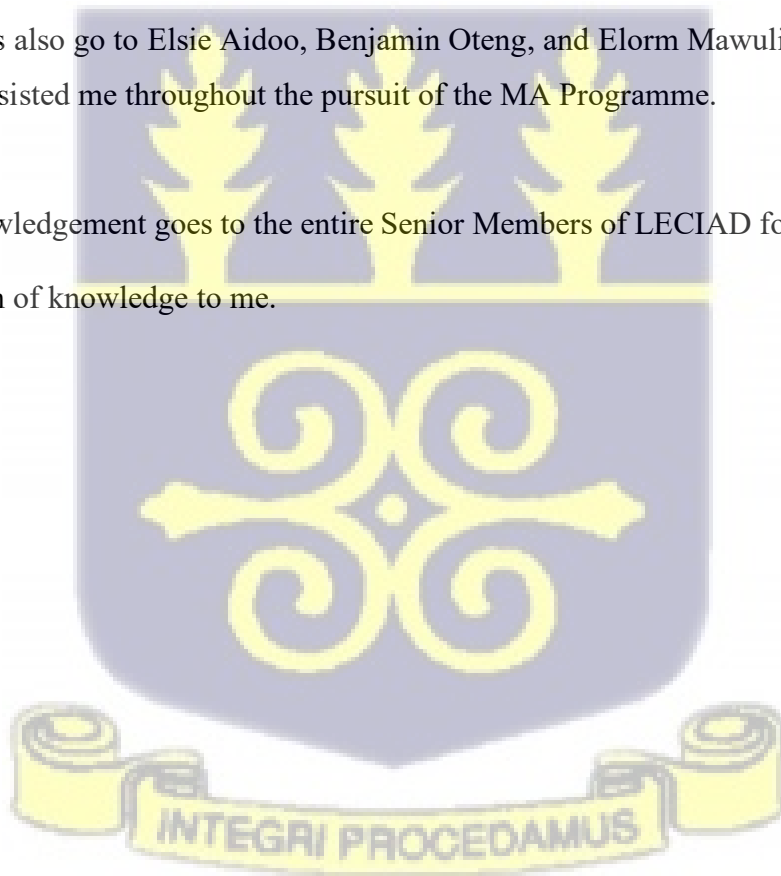
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	-	Artificial Intelligence
CFD	-	Computational Fluid Dynamics
eTA	-	Electronic Travel Authorisation
GTA	-	Ghana Tourism Authority
ICT	-	Information and Communication Technology
KPIs	-	Key Performance Indicators
LECIAD	-	Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy
MOFARI	-	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration
SMS	-	Short Message Service
UGC	-	User Generated Content
VR	-	Virtual Reality
WTO	-	World Tourism Organisation



TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vii
CHAPTER ONE	8
INTRODUCTION	8
1.0 Background of Study	8
1.1 Statement of Research Problem	9
1.2 Research Objectives	10
1.3 Research Questions	11
1.4 Scope	11
1.5 Rationale	11
1.6 Conceptual Framework	12
1.7 Literature Review	15
1.7.1 <i>Digital Diplomacy as a driver of tourism</i>	15
1.7.2 <i>Tourism Development in Ghana</i>	17
1.7.3 <i>Digital Diplomacy Strategies</i>	19
1.7.4 <i>The impact of COVID-19 on visitor numbers and revenue</i>	21
1.7.5 <i>Gaps in the Literature</i>	23
1.8 Methodology	24
1.8.1 <i>Study Population</i>	24
1.8.2 <i>Sample Size</i>	25
1.9 Sources of Data	25
1.9.1 <i>Primary Data</i>	25
1.9.2 <i>Secondary Data</i>	25
1.9.3 <i>Data Analysis</i>	26
1.9.4 <i>Ethical Consideration</i>	26
1.10 Arrangement of Chapters	26
CHAPTER TWO	27
GLOBAL SUCCESS STORIES IN DIGITAL DIPLOMACY FOR TOURISM PROMOTION	27
2.1 Overview	27
2.1.1 <i>Traditional Diplomacy and Tourism</i>	27
2.1.2 <i>Digital Diplomacy In The Tourism Sector</i>	29
2.2 Case Studies	31

2.2.1	<i>Malaysia</i>	31
2.2.2	<i>New Zealand</i>	32
2.2.3	<i>South Korea</i>	33
2.2.4	<i>Greece</i>	33
2.3	Key Digital Diplomacy Tools in Tourism Promotion	36
2.3.1	<i>Social Media Platforms</i>	36
2.3.2	<i>Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR)</i>	37
2.3.3	<i>Influencer and Content Creator Collaborations</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.3.4	<i>Data Analytics and AI</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.4	Conclusion	39
CHAPTER THREE		40
DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AND TOURISM PROMOTION IN GHANA		40
3.0	Introduction.....	40
3.1	Evaluate the Implications of COVID-19 on Ghana's Tourism and the Role of Digital Diplomacy in Recovery	40
3.1.1	<i>Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism Revenues</i>	40
3.1.2	<i>Challenges Faced by Tourism Sector due to COVID-19</i>	43
3.1.3	<i>Transition to Digital Tourism</i>	46
3.2	Analyse Global Digital Diplomacy Strategies for Adaptation in Ghana	49
3.2.1	<i>Importance of Digital Diplomacy in Tourism Recovery</i>	49
3.2.2	<i>Effective Channels for Promoting Tourism Post-COVID</i>	51
3.2.3	<i>Adaptations of Successful Examples</i>	53
3.2.4	<i>Aspects of Ghana's Culture that Appeal to International Audiences</i>	57
3.3	Challenges and Opportunities for Digital Diplomacy in Ghana's Tourism Promotion	60
3.3.1	<i>Infrastructural and Financial Challenges in Digital Diplomacy</i>	60
3.4	Digital Diplomacy Strategy for Ghana's Tourism Engagement.....	62
3.4.1	<i>Strategic Components</i>	62
3.4.2	<i>Role of Partnerships in Digital Tourism</i>	65
3.4.3	<i>Evaluation and Monitoring of Digital Diplomacy</i>	67
3.5	Conclusion	70
CHAPTER FOUR.....		71
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS		71
4.0	Introduction.....	71
4.1	Summary of Findings.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.2	Conclusions.....	72
5.3	Recommendations	73
References.....		75

ABSTRACT

This study explored the significance of digital diplomacy in rejuvenating Ghana's tourism industry following the COVID-19 pandemic. Informed by Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, the study examined how Ghana's cultural resources could be effectively enhanced through digital platforms to engage international audiences and foster post-pandemic recovery. The concept of soft power offered a framework for examining how cultural diplomacy, enhanced by digital resources, might anchor perceptions of Ghana as an attractive tourism destination. The research adopted a qualitative methodology, employing a case study design. The data gathering involved interviews with key stakeholders from the Ghana Tourism Authority, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and academic experts, as well as a comprehensive study of secondary materials, including tourist reports, policy documents, and scholarly articles. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and insights that aligned with the study's objectives, facilitating an understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with Ghana's digital tourism initiatives. The findings indicated that the pandemic had a substantial impact on Ghana's tourism sector, revealing weaknesses such as inadequate digital infrastructure and a firm reliance on conventional marketing strategies. Nonetheless, the study also recognised prospects for adopting digital diplomacy as a recovery strategy. Case studies from countries such as New Zealand, Malaysia, and Rwanda demonstrate the effectiveness of social media campaigns, influencer marketing, and virtual tourism experiences in garnering worldwide interest and cultivating significant connections with prospective visitors. The study determined that Ghana's tourism recovery initiatives necessitated strategic investments in digital platforms. The study recommended that new strategies include the development of immersive virtual tours, collaboration with local and global influencers, and the application of data analytics to identify specific markets (s3.3 —). It emphasised the importance of aligning these initiatives with sustainable tourism principles to attract eco-conscious travellers and ensure long-term benefits for local communities. This study provided some critical insights. It argued the necessity of amalgamating digital diplomacy with current cultural and tourism initiatives to develop a unified national strategy. Secondly, it emphasised the capacity of digital engagement to cultivate trust and brand loyalty across global audiences. The analysis ultimately revealed that a digitally empowered tourism strategy might enhance the sector's resilience to future crises. This study emphasised the necessity for cooperation among government entities, private sector participants, and local communities to develop significant tourism experiences that have global relevance.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of Study

Over the past decade, the emergence of digital technologies has had a profound impact on how nations interact with one another, pursue their national interests, and communicate with global audiences. One of the most apparent changes in this digital age is the emergence of digital diplomacy, where governments and diplomatic missions utilise digital technologies such as social media, government websites, virtual communication systems, and online cultural interactions to engage foreign populations and achieve national objectives (Muftah et al., 2016). Digital diplomacy has emerged as a natural extension of traditional diplomacy, serving as a method to amplify one's voice on the international stage and establish meaningful connections with various stakeholders through real-time communication, interactive multimedia, and virtual engagement spaces (Amoah, 2024).

Tourism plays a significant role in Ghana's socio-economic development. The nation is recognised for its rich historical background, cultural diversity, festivals, and natural attractions, all of which contribute to making it a competitive destination in the West African sub-region (Alhashimi et al., 2021). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism industry played an essential role in national income, employment, and foreign exchange earnings. Nevertheless, the outbreak of COVID-19 disrupted world travel patterns in a manner that had never been seen before. In 2020, the number of international tourists to Ghana saw a drastic decrease of approximately 60% due to border closures, travel restrictions, and health-related fears that halted mobility and diminished demand (WTO, 2021). The shocks exposed the vulnerabilities within Ghana's tourism ecosystem and heightened the need for innovative strategies to reduce dependence on physical travel.

The accelerated pace of digitalisation during and following the pandemic presents new opportunities for the revitalisation of tourism in Ghana. Digital platforms now enable countries to maintain international visibility through virtual tours, livestreaming, cultural experiences, online promotional campaigns, and interactive experiences with global audiences. Digital diplomacy can help Ghana showcase its cultural image, heritage, and tourism services to a broader international audience, sustaining interest in the country even when travel is not feasible, provided this form of digital diplomacy is employed strategically (Happ & Ivancso-Horvath, 2018).

Furthermore, online tools such as data analytics, personalised online marketing, and user-generated content enable tourism officials to understand audience preferences better and tailor their marketing strategies accordingly (Eshun, 2020; Kayumovich, 2020). These online capabilities align with the new global tourism strategies, where customers increasingly rely on online information and experiences when selecting their destination. In this context, utilising digital diplomacy presents a timely and advantageous path towards resilience, competitiveness, and global access in the post-COVID economy, while also enhancing tourism in Ghana.

1.1 Statement of Research Problem

Although tourism is vital to Ghana's economy, the country's recovery has been hindered by an over-reliance on international tourists, a lack of digital infrastructure, and a poorly conceived digital strategy for attracting new visitors (Geoffrey et al., 2021; Alhashimi et al., 2021).

A potential strategy for revitalising tourism in other areas is digital diplomacy, which leverages social media, internet platforms, and data-driven marketing to engage with audiences worldwide (Muftah et al., 2016; Amoah, 2024). However, there is a dearth of scholarly work on the effectiveness of digital diplomacy in promoting tourism in Ghana, particularly in economies with limited resources and infrastructure (Krönke, 2020; Eshun & Tichaawa, 2020).

Influencer marketing, virtual tours, and interactive online experiences are examples of digital diplomacy strategies that have proven effective in countries with ample resources (Mohd-Sanip et al., 2021; Vidadi, 2023; Anthopoulos, 2024). However, only a handful extensively focus on Ghana's distinct socioeconomic and technological environment.

Additionally, there is a critical knowledge gap regarding how Ghana's government and private tourism industry can collaborate to utilise digital diplomacy to address safety concerns, enhance international appeal, and attract eco-aware tourists who support sustainable development goals (Eshun & Tichaawa, 2020; Geoffrey et al., 2021). To create a resilient, inclusive, and competitive tourism industry, this study aims to explore the possibilities, difficulties, and workable frameworks for incorporating digital diplomacy into Ghana's post-COVID tourism development strategy.

1.2 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to assess the effectiveness of leveraging digital diplomacy in promoting tourism in Ghana's post-COVID economy. Specifically, the research aims to:

- Analyse the current state of Ghana's tourism industry and the implications of COVID-19 on visitor numbers and revenue.
- Investigate the successful digital diplomacy strategies employed by other countries to promote their tourism sectors.

- Examine the potential challenges and opportunities in implementing digital diplomacy for Ghana's tourism promotion.
- Propose a strategy for utilising digital diplomacy to showcase Ghana's tourist attractions and engage with global audiences.

1.3 Research Questions

- How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the tourism industry in Ghana, specifically in terms of visitor numbers and revenue?
- What digital diplomacy strategies have other countries successfully implemented to promote their tourism sectors?
- What are the potential challenges and opportunities associated with implementing digital diplomacy for tourism promotion in Ghana?
- How can a comprehensive strategy for utilising digital diplomacy be developed to showcase Ghana's tourist attractions?

1.4 Scope

The work covers the pre- and post-pandemic period from 2020 to 2024. The work explores Ghana's tourism development strategies and how adopting digital diplomacy could enhance visitor numbers and revenue.

1.5 Rationale

The importance of this study goes beyond academic inquiry, as the results offer practical suggestions for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and digital and place branding experts in

Ghana. The research findings offer valuable insights for enhancing economic growth and promoting sustainable tourism development in the post-COVID recovery phase, highlighting the untapped potential of digital diplomacy in tourism promotion.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The study employs Nye's (1990) concept of soft power, as it is deemed suitable for examining cultural interactions among states. The pursuit of power as a means of exerting influence or control is a prevalent global phenomenon in contemporary times, serving as a strategy for states to sustain their significance in international politics. Turcsányi (2018) notes that power can be defined as the ability to establish, accomplish, and maintain a specific objective effectively. It also includes the ability to exert influence on others to attain a desired result. It involves the application of specific capabilities or assets, both tangible and intangible, that states depend on when striving to achieve a goal. Nye (2009) categorises these talents into two distinct classifications: hard power and soft power. Jain (2018) defines hard power as the act of compelling an entity to behave in a way that aligns with one's desires. The quantification of a state's hard power is commonly based on various factors, including its population size, territorial expanse, geographical features, natural resources, military capabilities, and economic prowess (Nye, 1990). The demonstration of hard power is evident through the implementation of sanctions against both North Korea and Iran. Jain (2018) states that the restrictions imposed on North Korea were designed to halt the country's nuclear advancement. The European Union and the United Nations placed sanctions on Iran as a means to halt the country's nuclear advancement.

The concept of soft power, as defined by Joseph Nye, refers to the ability to influence individuals to align their desires with one's own, employing persuasion rather than coercion (Nye, 1990). Nye's argument presents a persuasive alternative perspective to the prevailing notion of power as

solely encompassing military influence and the unwavering capacity to exert it (Hard power). A state possessing soft power can accomplish its goals in global politics if other states hold its ideas in high regard and aspire to imitate them. In recent decades, there has been a reduction in the reliance on hard power as a means of demonstrating state authority. Instead, the emphasis has shifted towards education, technology, and economic growth as crucial indicators of strength.

The study conducted by Tella (2018) places significant emphasis on the role played by admiration and acceptance in the manifestation of soft power. To successfully employ a state's soft power, government officials and the general public must perceive it as both appealing and indispensable. Tella (2018) further argues that a country's cultural, foreign policy and political values may not be attractive to other nations if they perceive them as arrogant or authoritarian. According to some perspectives, the use of hard power is diminishing, making soft power a viable alternative. Despite the ongoing prevalence of military engagements, as seen by the recent conflict between Russia and Ukraine, scholars like Nye argue that the deployment of armed forces for economic purposes is excessively burdensome and perilous for major global powers in contemporary times (Nye, 1990). In addition, Nye (2004) highlights that an abundance of hard power often diminishes a country's attractiveness and can lead to the loss of support from other states, as well as from its friends. The hard power approach will ultimately prove ineffective due to the ever-changing nature of the contemporary world, in contrast to the soft power strategy, which relies on perseverance and long-term viability (Wagner, 2014).

Despite Nye's argument in favour of soft power, some scholars have identified notable constraints associated with this concept. Wilson (2008) observes that the justifications for soft power often lack precision, institutional strength, and political acumen. Further, proponents of soft power have failed to incorporate their perspectives into a framework that promotes national interest.

While the author presents a contrasting viewpoint to Nye's notion of soft power, they do endorse his concept of smart power and argue that augmenting smart power has become imperative for national security.

Ferguson (2009) asserts that the United States of America is widely seen as a dominant power in the global system due to its formidable military capabilities and substantial investment in defence, which has been allocated towards political institutions and economic growth. The author argues that soft power is an unsuitable instrument for promoting national objectives. Although there are criticisms of the concept of soft power, it remains significant in this research since it effectively describes interstate cultural links. This study concurs with Joseph Nye's claim that culture is a key and essential component of soft power, analysing how Ghana can leverage digital diplomacy for tourism development.

The Soft Power Theory by Nye offers a valuable perspective within the context of current research on the influence of digital diplomacy on international attitudes and its potential to boost tourist attraction to Ghana's post-COVID economy. Digital diplomacy serves as a contemporary expression of soft power, enabling states to showcase appealing cultural representations, historical narratives, and national values via digital platforms. These include social media, virtual tours, online campaigns, and livestreamed cultural events. Ghana can nurture attraction through these channels by showcasing its festivals, creative arts, historic sites, and cultural identity in a way that resonates with the world.

This attraction is central to soft power, enhancing the destination image of Ghana, fostering familiarity, and establishing emotional attachments, all of which are key factors in tourism. The theory helps to clarify how online cultural interaction can be utilised to create soft power influence, enabling the Ghanaian online culture to enhance tourism, increase brand popularity,

and improve competitiveness in the international tourism arena. Therefore, the Soft Power Theory is not only conceptually relevant but also analytically relevant for interpreting the potential of digital engagement in addressing the post-COVID tourism recovery and growth.

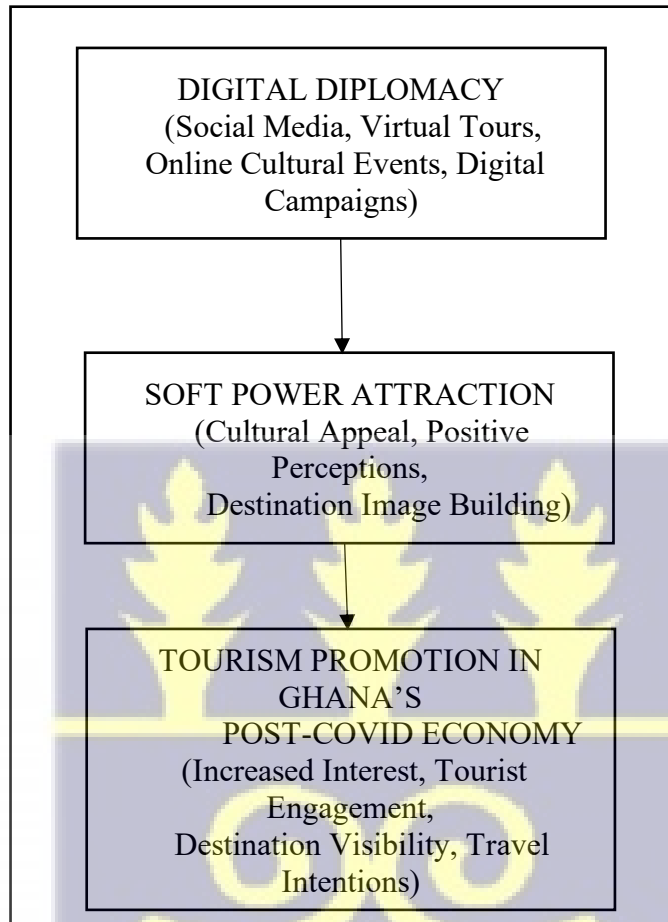


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author's Construct (2024)

1.7 Literature Review

1.7.1 Digital Diplomacy as a driver of tourism

Digital diplomacy would enable Ghana to collect significant data and knowledge that can be used to enhance its tourist marketing strategies and decision-making procedures (Abdullahi et al.,

2021; Vidadi, 2023; Anthopoulos, 2024). Ghana can enhance its comprehension of visitor behaviour, preferences, and demographics by employing web analytics, social media monitoring, and online surveys (Abdullahi et al., 2021; Vidadi, 2023; Anthopoulos, 2024). This would enable Ghana to customise its promotional programmes, focus on specific audience segments, and correctly assess the impact of its marketing efforts using a data-driven strategy (Abdullahi et al., 2021; Vidadi, 2023; Anthopoulos, 2024).

Nevertheless, the use of digital diplomacy to promote tourism in Ghana presents multiple challenges that must be addressed (Eshun & Tichaawa, 2020; Geoffrey et al., 2021). A digital divide exists in the country, characterised by inequalities in internet access, digital literacy, and technological infrastructure between urban and rural areas (Krönke, 2020). The inequitable allocation of digital resources in Ghana may hinder the effectiveness and impact of the country's digital diplomacy initiatives, particularly in remote or underserved areas. To tackle this difficulty, Ghana needs to allocate resources towards enhancing internet connectivity, improving digital literacy skills, and ensuring affordable access to devices. This would enable a larger population to engage in online tourism promotion efforts.

Ghana faces competition from other locations that possess better, more developed digital diplomacy capabilities and superior resources for promoting tourism (Mohd-Sanip et al., 2021; Vidadi, 2023; Anthopoulos, 2024). Countries possessing greater financial resources, highly developed technological systems, and refined promotional strategies are likely to have a significant advantage in attracting foreign tourists and investments. Digital diplomacy activities give rise to privacy and security problems, encompassing potential data breaches, identity theft, and online scams (Bryant, 2020). If travellers perceive a potential threat to their privacy or security, they may be reluctant to interact with Ghana's digital platforms or disclose personal

information (Bryant, 2020). To foster trust and confidence among travellers and stakeholders, Ghana could give top priority to implementing cybersecurity safeguards and data protection policies that ensure openness in its digital diplomacy initiatives.

1.7.2 Tourism Development in Ghana

The promotion of tourism in Ghana has become necessary for achieving economic diversification and sustainable growth, capitalising on the country's abundant cultural heritage, varied natural landscapes, and heritage (Geoffrey et al., 2021). The tourism industry in Ghana has experienced consistent growth in recent years, driven by a rise in international tourist arrivals, who are drawn to popular sites such as Cape Coast Castle, Kakum National Park, and vibrant cultural festivals (Imbeah & Bujdoso, 2018; Agyeman et al., 2019). The Ghanaian government has recognised the potential of tourism to stimulate socio-economic development and has implemented policies and measures to grow the sector and attract investment (Imbeah & Bujdoso, 2018; Geoffrey et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, Ghana's tourism sector encounters numerous obstacles that impede its full potential (Geoffrey et al., 2021). These challenges include limitations in infrastructure, such as inadequate transportation networks, insufficient accommodation choices, and restricted access to amenities, which have been identified as barriers to the country's tourism growth. Ghana's competitiveness as a tourist destination has been impacted by factors such as inconsistent marketing strategies, bureaucratic obstacles, and perceived safety risks. To tackle these problems, the government, business sector, and local communities must collaborate to strengthen infrastructure, optimise marketing techniques, and establish a conducive climate for tourism growth (Eshun & Tichaawa, 2020). Notwithstanding these difficulties, Ghana's tourism sector offers substantial prospects for expansion and diversification (Adu-Ampong, 2018). The country's wide range of cultures,

welcoming nature, and growing efforts in ecotourism make it an appealing choice for travellers in search of genuine experiences and immersive encounters. The increasing worldwide attention towards sustainable tourism practices provides Ghana with an opportunity to distinguish itself by advocating for responsible travel and conservation initiatives (Rasdi et al., 2019).

Ghana is increasingly embracing sustainable tourism development, acknowledging the significance of harmonising economic progress with environmental preservation and social equity (Geoffrey et al., 2021). Ghana boasts a diverse range of natural landscapes, a wealth of cultural resources, and numerous significant historical landmarks, all of which provide a solid foundation for implementing sustainable tourism projects. Stakeholders in the tourism industry, such as government agencies, local communities, and private sector operators, are progressively adopting practices to guarantee the sector's long-term sustainability while safeguarding the country's natural and cultural resources for future generations (Mathew, 2022)

There are considerations for integrating sustainability principles to promote responsible tourism, which is crucial for preserving resources and key economic sectors. The principles of the SDG could foster partnerships between the public and private sectors to boost sustainable tourism (Agyeman et al., 2019). Efforts are underway to incorporate local content into tourism operations and ensure they receive tangible benefits from tourism revenues. These efforts include community-based tourism, eco-lodges, and animal conservation programmes (Kojo, 2024). Additionally, ongoing initiatives aim to educate tourists about the importance of ethical travel practices, including waste reduction, water and energy conservation, and the promotion of local businesses (Kojo, 2024).

The advancement of sustainable tourism in Ghana requires the establishment of alliances and

cooperative efforts among various parties to address shared challenges and capitalise on opportunities for innovation and growth. It is fundamental to encourage education and enhance the skills of individuals involved in the tourism industry to cultivate a mindset of sustainability. (Geoffrey et al., 2021).

Sustainable tourism is an ethical and conscientious approach to travel and leisure activities that aims to minimise adverse environmental impacts, preserve cultural heritage, and support local communities (Mathew, 2022). Sustainable tourism seeks to strike a harmonious balance between meeting the needs of tourists and host communities, while also conserving natural resources and fostering socio-economic development. This notion acknowledges that tourism, when carefully and ethically managed, can serve as a powerful tool for preserving nature, facilitating cultural exchange, and reducing poverty (Rasdi et al., 2019).

1.7.3 Digital Diplomacy Strategies

Many states have effectively deployed digital diplomacy strategies to enhance their tourism sectors, capitalising on the capabilities of digital platforms and communication technologies to engage with a worldwide audience of prospective travellers (Adeola & Evans, 2019). Happ and Ivancsó-Horváth (2018) state that tourism has transitioned into a new phase known as digital tourism, and several governments have already established strategies for this form of tourism. The study also indicated that people's inclination towards digital techniques and their use has seen significant transformations in recent decades, and it is imperative to adapt to these changes in the tourism industry as well. The author further emphasised that digitisation is crucial for the competitiveness of tourism.

Successful digital diplomacy strategies often involve collaborating with influencers, bloggers, and content creators who possess substantial social media followings, as well as creating compelling online content (Mohd-Sanip, 2021). Countries could enhance their tourism messaging and expand their audience by collaborating with reputable individuals and leveraging their influence. Malaysia has partnered with travel influencers and bloggers to showcase its diverse range of cultural attractions, culinary delights, and thrilling adventures to a global audience (Mohd-Sanip et al., 2021). These partnerships not only create a positive and enthusiastic response but also contribute to establishing reliability and confidence among potential tourists, ultimately leading to an increase in tourism.

Data analytics and targeted advertising are essential in enhancing tourism marketing strategies and maximising the return on investment in digital diplomacy. Nigeria, Greece, and Azerbaijan utilise data-driven analysis to identify key market segments, understand traveller preferences, and tailor marketing messaging accordingly (Abdullahi et al., 2021; Vidadi, 2023; Anthopoulos, 2024). Through digital advertising platforms and social media analytics technologies, these countries are targeting particular demographics and geographic locations with tailored content and promotional incentives. This focused strategy guarantees the efficient and effective allocation of resources to attract the appropriate tourists and achieve favourable results for the tourism sector.

Effective digital diplomacy strategies often involve cultivating interaction and discourse with travellers and stakeholders through social media platforms, blogs, and online forums (Ming'ala, 2019; Palash, 2021; Mohd-Sanip et al., 2021). Countries can enhance their reputation as friendly and hospitable destinations, attracting more visitors and promoting return visits by providing real-time information, promptly responding to inquiries, and actively seeking feedback. The

inclusion of interactive features, such as live-streaming events, virtual tours, and online content, provides travellers with opportunities to engage with destinations and share their experiences with others. (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Battour et al., 2023).

1.7.4 The impact of COVID-19 on visitor numbers and revenue

The COVID-19 pandemic had a debilitating impact on Ghana's tourism sector, causing extensive disruptions to travel patterns, visitor numbers, and revenue sources. Before the pandemic, Ghana's tourism industry was seeing consistent expansion, driven by a growing global fascination with the country's cultural heritage, historical sites, and natural attractions (Yeboah, 2023; Quansah et al., 2023; Deri et al., 2023). The Ghanaian government has implemented a range of measures to boost tourism, including infrastructure improvements, marketing campaigns, and policy changes aimed at making the sector more competitive and sustainable (Adu-Ampong, 2018; Adu-Ampong, 2020; Preko, 2020; Amoah et al., 2023). Records available to the Ghana Statistical Service (2017) indicate a significant rise in the number of tourists from various regions of the world, resulting in a corresponding increase in revenue for the tourism industry. From 2005 to 2014, the tourism sector experienced a significant increase in visitor arrivals, growing from 392,500 to 1,093,000. This expansion was accompanied by a corresponding increase in total receipts, which rose from US\$627.1 million to US\$2.06 billion. The number of visits to important tourism sites rose from 381,600 to 592,300, resulting in a slight increase in revenue from GH¢490,000 to GH¢492,000. This represents an annual average growth rate of 10.7% for visits and 6.1% for revenue (Ghana Statistical Service, 2017).

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 significantly derailed tourism in Ghana. This was attributed to travel restrictions, border closures, and safety concerns, resulting in a substantial decrease in the number of visitors (Quansah et al., 2023). There was a substantial decrease in

international visitor arrivals to Ghana in 2020 compared to the previous year. This decline led to a significant loss of revenue for the tourism sector (Issahaku & Abu, 2020). The shutdown of airports, hotels, and tourist attractions, along with the cancellation of cultural events and festivals, had a significant impact on enterprises in the tourism industry, including tour operators, hotels, and souvenir sellers (Deri et al., 2023).

Ghana's tourism industry has suffered significantly due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has exacerbated pre-existing issues, including inadequate infrastructure, limited marketing resources, and a reliance on seasonal tourism. A significant number of firms that rely on tourism have been compelled to permanently shut down or reduce their operations, leading to extensive job cuts and financial difficulties for employees and their families (Yeboah, 2023). Furthermore, the decline in tourism earnings has had a cascading impact on various sectors of the economy, including transportation, retail, and agriculture. These sectors heavily depend on expenditures linked to tourism for their income and employment (Yeboah, 2023)

Dawda & File (2023) employed qualitative research methods to demonstrate that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on tourism in northern Ghana. The study observed a substantial decline in the daily and monthly influx of tourists/visitors, a decrease in revenues, sluggish local economic growth, and limited activities during the pandemic across all sites and host towns. The study determined that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant negative impact on the tourism industry in northern Ghana. Furthermore, it found that the recovery process for both the tourism sector and local economic growth was still progressing at a sluggish pace.

1.7.5 Gaps in the Literature

Research on the specific application of digital diplomacy in Ghana, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, is still lacking, despite the literature's emphasis on the potential of this strategy to boost international travel. Although digital diplomacy, which utilises social media, influencers, and targeted advertising, has been effective in places with robust digital infrastructure (Adeola & Evans, 2019; Mohd-Sanip et al., 2021), Ghana faces particular challenges in implementing these strategies due to its limited infrastructure and financial resources. This disparity emphasises the necessity of investigating ways to adapt digital diplomacy to developing countries with limited resources, like Ghana.

Due to vulnerabilities such as reliance on foreign travel and inadequate digital crisis management, the COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on Ghana's tourism industry (Yeboah, 2023; Quansah et al., 2023). Although there is literature on these effects, there are few studies examining the contribution of digital diplomacy to recovery, particularly in terms of enhancing Ghana's international attractiveness and promoting domestic travel. Understanding the relevance of strategies such as influencer collaborations and data-driven marketing in Ghana could highlight cost-effective recovery measures for a resource-constrained context, especially in light of the trend toward virtual interaction in the tourism industry.

Moreover, current research is deficient in understanding how Ghana's government and private tourist organisations should collaborate to employ digital diplomacy to project a cohesive, secure, and culturally diverse image, catering to the changing desires of post-COVID travellers (Geoffrey et al., 2021). This cooperative strategy could solidify Ghana's competitive position in the global tourism market. Furthermore, the literature ignores how digital diplomacy could help Ghana align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, particularly by

encouraging local participation, encouraging environmental stewardship, and attracting eco-aware tourists (Eshun & Tichaawa, 2020).

Research is necessary to assess the adaptability, viability, and effectiveness of digital diplomacy in this context. New knowledge about how digital diplomacy can support sustainable tourism, enhance Ghana's reputation, and increase economic resilience would help emerging economies strengthen their digital tourism strategies in the wake of the pandemic. This is the gap the study filled.

1.8 Methodology

The study adopts the qualitative methodology. The primary objective of qualitative research is to analyse and evaluate occurrences within their authentic contexts, and to comprehend the significance attributed to these contexts by individuals (Creswell, 2017).

The qualitative design employed in this study is a case study design. A case study is a comprehensive examination of a particular individual, collective occurrence, or region. According to Yin (1994), this particular study design is characterised by its focus on examining a current phenomenon within its authentic context, especially when the demarcation between the phenomenon and its surroundings is ambiguous and relies on diverse sources of information. The study employed a case study design to examine how digital diplomacy can be leveraged to promote tourism development in Ghana.

1.8.1 Study Population

According to Bryman et al. (2003), the study population refers to the complete set of individuals that the research is specifically targeting. The researcher selected a sample population of four

respondents, following the recommendation of Smith et al. (2009). According to Smith et al. (2009), a range of three (3) to sixteen (16) participants is considered sufficient for research anchored on expert perspectives. Based on the findings of Robinson and Smith (2010), a sample size of four was selected due to its capacity to facilitate cross-case generalisations while mitigating the risk of researcher data saturation.

1.8.2 Sample Size

The research employed the purposive sampling method, primarily due to its ability to enable the researcher to select participants based on their subjective assessment. The researcher picked participants for this study based on their ability to provide high-quality and reliable data, as well as their familiarity with the concepts of international relations, tourism, cultural diplomacy, and soft power. Additional factors considered in the selection of participants were the respondents' level of experience and knowledge of digital diplomacy and tourism.

1.9 Sources of Data

1.9.1 Primary Data

The study incorporated primary data obtained through firsthand interviews conducted with individuals who possessed important information pertinent to the subject matter. Interview participants were drawn from the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration (MOFARI), and academics from the University of Ghana. The participants were interviewed under the condition of anonymity.

1.9.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data were accessed from various sources, including books, journal articles, book chapters, online sources, and reports.

1.9.3 Data Analysis

The data was analysed thematically. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis is a methodical process that involves identifying, organising, and elucidating patterns of significance within a given dataset. Thematic analysis enables researchers to understand collective or shared connotations and experiences by examining the meaning within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The initial phase of secondary data analysis involved doing a comprehensive review of existing literature to identify relevant information about the research questions, objectives, and issues at hand. Subsequently, the collected data were examined for resemblance to categorise them into themes for convenient reporting. The collected data were thereafter categorised into thematic groups that aligned with the study objectives.

1.9.4 Ethical Consideration

Ensuring the absence of any conflict of interest between the researcher and the study participants followed ethical precepts. The researcher obtained an introductory letter from LECIAD for this study. The individuals who participated in the research were not subjected to any form of coercion or undue influence. It was explicitly stated that the research was specifically intended for academic purposes.

1.10 Arrangement of Chapters

Chapter One – Introduction

Chapter Two – Success Stories In Digital Diplomacy For Tourism Promotion

Chapter Three – Leveraging Digital Diplomacy for Sustainable Tourism in Ghana

Chapter Four – Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

GLOBAL SUCCESS STORIES IN DIGITAL DIPLOMACY FOR TOURISM PROMOTION

2.1 Overview

This chapter examines the progression of diplomacy from traditional, state-focused methods to contemporary digital diplomacy, emphasising its transformative impact on the tourism industry. It analyses how technological innovations have transformed diplomacy into a more public, accessible, and interactive model. The chapter examines case studies from Malaysia, New Zealand, South Korea, Greece, Rwanda, South Africa and Kenya, emphasising essential digital diplomacy strategies, including social media engagement, influencer partnerships, and the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Virtual Reality (VR) to augment tourism promotion.

2.1.1 Traditional Diplomacy and Tourism

Diplomacy is an art of persuasion that must adapt to changing eras and prerogatives (Odok & Nabiebu, 2024). Historically, diplomats were known as "the eyes and ears of the king," and their job was to deliver both good and bad news. The primary objective of diplomats was to collect intelligence on military mobilisations and the direction of army attacks and to transmit this information back to their homeland. In the face of rapid technological advancements and increasingly complex interactions between actors, diplomacy must address emerging issues and perspectives on global concerns. Public diplomacy fosters open diplomatic communication between governments and their domestic and foreign publics (Huijgh, 2019). Consequently, the emergence of digital diplomacy represents the rise of an open diplomacy model, extending diplomacy beyond the secret and exclusive interaction of elites to include the public sphere (Manor, 2019).

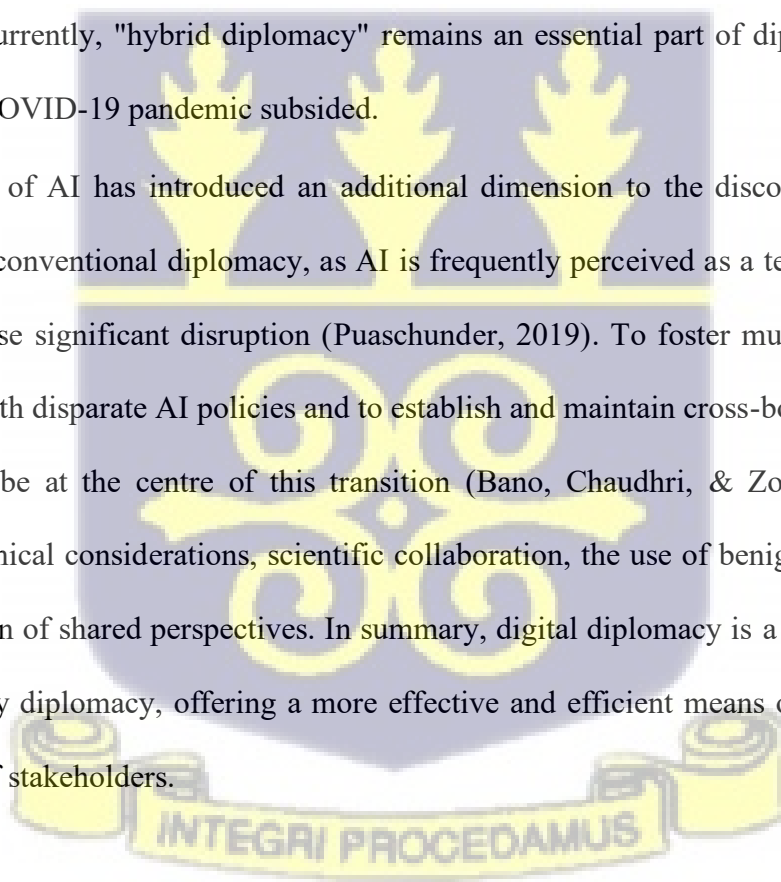
The perceptions of diplomacy are distinct between traditionalist and contemporary perspectives. According to traditionalist viewpoints, diplomacy is a strategy with clearly defined roles and obligations for international relations actors (Ayhan, 2019). However, this domain does not align with the more complex world of postmodern transnational relations. Current foreign service personnel interact with a broad spectrum of actors, not just their counterparts but also others participating in diplomatic activities or affected by international affairs (Bjola & Manor, 2022). Foreign Affairs Ministries view their roles as public diplomacy or propaganda (Krasnyak, 2020), which includes providing embassies with promotional materials, training officers in public affairs and the press, engaging with foreign correspondents located in the capital, putting out propaganda in a direct manner, particularly through multilingual websites in recent years, and possibly funding related institutions whose audiences are mainly the future generation of leaders and influencers.

Diplomacy has undergone a substantial transformation over time, adjusting to evolving circumstances and requirements. The role and essence of diplomats have undergone a significant transformation since the introduction of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations in 1961 and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations in 1963 (Kıçmari, 2024). It is anticipated that future diplomats will continue to evolve in response to new challenges and developments, as today's diplomats are significantly different from those of the past. Singh (2015) emphasises the importance of immersing new diplomats in existing cultural practices and emerging phenomena rather than studying exotic ones. Digital diplomacy tools can help understand potential but unknown trends and provide direct responses to foreign policy issues. Pelling (2015) highlights that digital diplomacy serves as a bridge between traditional frameworks and emerging ones, facilitating connections among diverse stakeholders and generating innovative solutions for

change. Martin & MacDonald (2020) suggest that direct interpersonal communication is the most effective approach, but its impact can be enhanced through the complementary use of the Internet. Moreover, Bjola and Manor (2022) also argue that diplomacy is on the brink of embarking on a fresh era of digital transformation, known as "hybrid diplomacy," where both physical and virtual interactions are anticipated to merge, complement, and reinforce each other.

The shift from merely adapting to digital tools to fully embracing them is hardly linear, and many diplomats are likely to position themselves somewhere in between these two scenarios (Bjola & Manor, 2022). The pandemic has hastened the shift towards digital alternatives, and hybrid diplomacy will blend traditional offline methods with new virtual interactions among stakeholders. Currently, "hybrid diplomacy" remains an essential part of diplomatic practices, even after the COVID-19 pandemic subsided.

The emergence of AI has introduced an additional dimension to the discourse regarding the significance of conventional diplomacy, as AI is frequently perceived as a technology with the potential to cause significant disruption (Puaschunder, 2019). To foster mutual understanding among states with disparate AI policies and to establish and maintain cross-border relationships, diplomats will be at the centre of this transition (Bano, Chaudhri, & Zowghi, 2023). This encompasses ethical considerations, scientific collaboration, the use of benign technology, and the consideration of shared perspectives. In summary, digital diplomacy is a crucial component of contemporary diplomacy, offering a more effective and efficient means of engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders.



2.1.2 Digital Diplomacy in the Tourism Sector

Digital diplomacy outlines modern techniques and approaches for carrying out diplomacy through ICTs and the Internet, as well as their influence on current diplomatic procedures. Wang

(2021) described digital diplomacy as the exchange of tweets for broadcasting, the use of open-ended Short Message Service (SMS), posting on Facebook, and utilising Google and YouTube to explore online communication platforms. He opined that digital diplomacy is akin to a new marriage, for example, a union between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Silicon Valley giants, who are charged with the responsibility of promoting technology in global trade and relations.

Digital diplomacy has emerged as a relevant diplomatic strategy in the era of modern globalisation, which offers countries a way to promote their tourism sectors. Manora and Pamment (2019) define the significant impact of employing digital diplomacy to enhance the economy. Economic progress cannot solely be evaluated based on the capacity to import and export goods, but can also be assessed through the development of the tourism sector. This builds a significant correlation between digital diplomacy and the tourism sector. Conceptually, digital diplomacy harnesses advancements in information and communication technology to advance a country's national interests (Rashica, 2018).

Digital tools have profoundly altered the tourism sector, enhancing efficiency, personalisation, and client satisfaction. Online booking platforms, smartphone applications, and customer relationship management systems have optimised operations and personalised services, hence augmenting consumer happiness and loyalty (Pencarelli, 2020). Mobile applications and AI-powered chatbots have improved customer service by offering immediate assistance and promptly resolving passenger enquiries.

Digital marketing is crucial in tourism, enabling firms to reach a global audience and engage with potential customers across multiple platforms (Gupta, 2019). Social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and TripAdvisor enable tourists to share their experiences, reviews, and

endorsements, thereby influencing the decisions of other travellers. User-generated content (UGC) serves as a digital word-of-mouth, offering valuable insights to prospective clients and enhancing the online visibility of tourism enterprises (de Almeida Vasconcelos, 2023).

Digital tools consistently facilitate data collection and analysis, enabling tourism businesses to make informed decisions (Kalvet et al., 2020). For instance, big data analytics help companies understand consumer behaviour, preferences, and emerging travel trends, optimising offerings, managing demand, and implementing dynamic pricing strategies (Stylos, Zwiegelaar, & Buhalis, 2021). Innovative technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR), have enhanced the tourism experience by providing immersive, virtual previews of destinations and interactive overlays on physical environments (Fan, Jiang, & Deng, 2022). From an operational perspective, digital tools have streamlined communication and collaboration among tourism stakeholders, facilitating partnerships between airlines, hotels, tour operators, and travel agencies (Labanauskaitė et al., 2020). Also, automation through artificial intelligence, blockchain for secure payments, and innovative technologies have contributed to more sustainable tourism practices, reducing the need for paper-based transactions and optimising resource use.

2.2 Case Studies

2.2.1 Malaysia

Malaysia has successfully harnessed influencer marketing and cultural campaigns as part of its digital strategy to promote tourism (Everett, 2021). This has been achieved by collaborating with travel influencers, bloggers, and content creators. Malaysia has used social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube to showcase Malaysia's unique cultural experiences, vibrant festivals, rich heritage, and diverse culinary offerings. These influencers create visually engaging content that not only highlights the beauty of the country but also provides an authentic look into the local lifestyle, attracting a wide range of travellers. The success of this strategy can be attributed to the ability to leverage the storytelling power of influencers who resonate with various

demographics. The combination of influencer-driven marketing and cultural campaigns has enhanced the country's reputation as a vibrant and diverse destination, contributing to a rise in tourism and elevating Malaysia's profile on the international stage.

Malaysia has achieved success with its tourism branding, raising societal values that determine whether Malaysia is accepted as "Truly Asia" (Hamzah, 2021).

2.2.2 New Zealand

New Zealand, a geographically disadvantaged destination, is focusing on building a strong brand proposition around its natural environment. The country's tourism industry, the largest employer, attracts 1.7 million annual visitors and generates NZ\$4.2 billion in foreign exchange earnings (Carran-Fletcher, 2020). The oldest tourism board in the world, TNZ, was established in 1901 and underwent a redevelopment in 1999. The first global marketing campaign in 1999 was a unique and compelling message: "100% Pure New Zealand." (Thomas & Philbin, 2020). The previous strategy focused on converting consumer interest into short-term visits. However, the world changed dramatically, leading to a shift in emphasis towards destination brands. The New Zealand Tourism Board needed to evaluate its strategy to remain competitive on the world stage. It recognises the need to develop a single, concise brand across all markets, consistent, clear, and single-minded about New Zealand's uniqueness and emotional benefits. A new vision and mission were required to position New Zealand as the ultimate destination and persuade the world to 'Come Now, Do More and Come Back' (Patil, 2019). New Zealand's primary challenge in international marketing is establishing a strong New Zealand brand with a limited share of voice. Factors such as integration across all marketing activities, consistent positioning of New Zealand, and influencing mass New Zealand messages in the marketplace are crucial.

2.2.3 South Korea

South Korea, known for its "most connected" status, has invested in fostering new technological fields for collective purposes and societal benefits (Massaro & Kim, 2022). This has been implemented through the use of internet networks, including social media, to promote the tourism sector. The first traces of using digital media in South Korea tourism promotion began in 2009 with the inauguration of the 'Visit Korea Year 2010-2012' campaign. Social media involvement evolved with the establishment of YouTube (Imagine Your Korea) in 2005 and Instagram (@visitkorea_travel) in 2010 (Palash, 2021). Each social media platform presents unique characteristics in promoting South Korean tourism. Facebook initially focused on promoting community activities by sharing stories of foreign tourists' experiences, while Instagram emphasised developing an aesthetic image by displaying South Korea's beautiful scenery. YouTube, on the other hand, primarily focuses on tourism promotion through commercial advertising videos and campaign content featuring various aspects of South Korean tourism and trivia (Huang et al., 2021).

One notable example is the collaborative video between the 'This is My Korea' campaign and soccer athlete Son Heung Min, titled 'This is my Korea. What is yours?', which features audio narration by Son Heung Min explaining South Korea's unique charms and showcases the beauty of various locations and tourist activities available in South Korea (Samosir & Wee, 2024).

2.2.4 Greece

The "Up Greek Tourism" initiative in Greece is inspired by the economic crisis and austerity measures that Greece has faced (Tsikizas, 2013). The initiative began with a billboard promoting Greek tourism in Times Square in New York, which gained attention after its initial success. The "Up Greek Tourism" initiative serves as an example of how nation branding and social media

can be combined to create positive change and help a country's reputation (Koqani, Kyriazi & Wolff, 2016). This approach focused on the concept of nation branding and new public diplomacy in contemporary Greece, incorporating public-to-public communication, NGO involvement, and absolute participation (Gerard, Imbert, and Orkin 2020).

Rwanda's Digital Engagement:

Rwanda has successfully implemented digital diplomacy to enhance its tourism industry. The Rwanda Development Board (RDB) engages audiences through social media platforms, promoting events such as the annual Kwita Izina gorilla naming ceremony and showcasing the country's attractions (Ronald, Callixte, Emmy, & Pascal, 2020). The global awareness of Rwanda's tourism offerings has been substantially enhanced as a result of this digital strategy. To attract new tourists and diversify its destinations, Rwanda emphasises product diversification and innovations (Malunda & Musana, 2012). To attract new customers, the country has implemented numerous initiatives, including the Kwita Izina ceremony, a canopy walk, a diplomats' country tour, and the Tour du Rwanda. In 2017, the government announced a £30 million sponsorship agreement with Arsenal Football Club, which resulted in a 20% increase in the number of British travellers heading to Rwanda within a year (Ronald, Callixte, Emmy & Pascal, 2020). Additionally, the Rwandan government entered into a marketing agreement with the Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) football club in 2019 to promote Rwanda as a destination for French travellers and PSG supporters.

Furthermore, Rwanda is utilising innovative strategies, such as investing and enhancing hospitality facilities, to diversify its natural, cultural, religious, and other attractions (Njenji, 2020). In 2018, Akagera National Park generated approximately \$2 million (1.8 billion Rwandan francs) in revenue from the administration of over 44,000 visitors. The country is augmenting its tourist revenue through the conference tourism industry, which attracts global travellers for

meetings, incentives, conferences, and events. Since its inception in 2014, MICE tourism has emerged as a significant economic stream for Rwanda, attracting thousands of MICE travellers globally (Daly & Guinn, 2016). In addition to drawing tens of thousands of tourists, Rwanda held more than 169 international gatherings between 2016 and 2018, thereby assisting service companies such as Rwanda Air, hotels, lodges, and restaurants. MICE tourism generated \$56 million for Rwanda in 2018 and hopes to elevate this figure to \$88 million by 2030 (Ronald, Callixte, Emmy, & Pascal, 2020).

South Africa's 'Meet South Africa' Campaign:

The 'Meet South Africa' campaign used digital platforms to highlight the many attractions of the country, as executed by South Africa's tourism authorities. The campaign successfully enhanced South Africa's appeal as a vacation destination by distributing engaging content and engaging with potential tourists online (Hudson, 2017). South Africa utilises channels such as social media, the internet, and virtual exhibits to showcase its rich cultural heritage. (King, Stark & Cooke, 2016). The National Arts Festival is one of the most significant events in South Africa. The event begins at the end of June and lasts for 10 days in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape (Saayman & Rossouw, 2011). The program encompasses drama, dance, physical theatre, comedy, opera, music, jazz, visual art exhibits, cinema, student theatre, street theatre, lectures, artisan fairs, seminars, historical tours, and a children's arts festival (Bosch, 2017).

Kenya's Social Media Diplomacy:

Kenya has effectively utilised digital diplomacy to enhance its tourism sector, with the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife leveraging social media to disseminate information on national parks, wildlife, and cultural events (Maina, 2021). The country has emerged as a frontrunner in innovation and technology within Africa, with 67.9% of the population possessing feature phones and 53.4% owning smartphones. Furthermore, 32.7% of the overall population, or 17.86 million

individuals, had internet connections, resulting in an internet penetration rate of 85.2% (Koss, 2024).

To attract remote workers, President William Ruto announced in October 2024 the launch of a Digital Nomad Work Permit, which would enable them to live and work in Kenya while utilising its distinctive features. According to Wausi (2016), this program is a component of a larger plan to increase tourism and establish Kenya as a top destination for digital workers. Kenya has also established a visa-free policy for tourists from some countries and developed a Transit and Long Connection Travellers Electronic Travel Authorisation (eTA) for transit passengers at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. These initiatives aim to incentivise travellers to explore Kenya's attractions during layovers, thereby enhancing tourism. (Ndirangu, 2024).

2.3 Key Digital Diplomacy Tools in Tourism Promotion

2.3.1 Social Media Platforms

As of April 2020, about 4.57 billion people were using the Internet, with more than half of that number on social media platforms (Zdonek & Król, 2021). This has led to the concept of digital diplomacy, also known as e-diplomacy, which has become increasingly influential in international relations. A transition from state-to-state diplomatic interaction to state-to-private individuals has occurred as a result of governments' utilisation of the Internet to transmit diplomatic messages and incite public discourse on electronic platforms (Onyango, 2022). Despite this, digital diplomacy has both advantages and disadvantages. Governments can reach a wider audience thanks to technology, but it also makes it harder for them to regulate information that is in the public domain (Onyango, 2022).

Furthermore, once information is shared on social media platforms, it is nearly impossible to expunge it and maintain the illusion that it never occurred. The digital gap between developing and developed countries has been steadily narrowing as more people in developing countries gain

access to smartphones, which in turn increases their online access (Kruse et al., 2019). Between 2013 and 2015, the number of smartphone users in developing countries increased by approximately 24% (Kruse et al., 2019). The use of social media as a tool for digital diplomacy presents both positive and negative traits. Bjola (2019) describes the strategic use of social media to spread propaganda or disinformation as "the dark side of digital diplomacy," highlighting its potential consequences for the global order.

Yazdi (2021) argues that states can use social media to display their power but also to spread disinformation about other states, putting their security and sovereignty at risk. Therefore, states are required to be vigilant and aware of these risks and implement measures to mitigate the harmful effects of disinformation, misinformation, and other negative consequences of using social media as a tool for digital diplomacy. Remedies to counter these dangers include debunking misinformation, discrediting it, or even ignoring false information.

2.3.2 Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR)

Virtual reality (VR) offers a unique advantage over traditional monitors, allowing users to view their visibility in specific postures or positions (Meißner, 2019). VR can also perform actions that are impossible in the real world, such as loading results of computational fluid dynamics (CFD) calculations into a virtual world, which can help optimise outlet placement and aesthetic aspects. Using VR for design purposes offers several benefits, including the ability to modify any aspect of a product's features, functionality, or aesthetics, and to study how these changes affect the user and their reactions (Berni & Borgianni, 2020). It also allows for testing the product, evaluating different options, and validating these options before making a physical prototype. This saves both money and time in development projects.

When designing an interface, VR is crucial for evaluating the user's viewpoint and understanding how they move or change their posture to reach or manoeuvre a specific component.

2.3.3 Influencer Collaborations and Data-Driven Digital Strategies

Influencers and content creators have formed partnerships that have become a crucial aspect of digital diplomacy in the tourism industry. These collaborations enable countries to showcase their culture and tourist attractions through the insights of well-known and trusted digital influencers (Zhou, Blazquez, McCormick, and Barnes, 2021). Influencers often connect with niche markets, including adventure travellers, cultural travellers, and luxury travellers, providing a unique type of exposure that traditional marketing methods may overlook (Afren, 2024; Bastrygina, Lim, Jopp & Weissmann, 2024). Their authenticity enhances their credibility, as individuals tend to trust personal and experiential narratives more than conventional advertising messages.

In addition to the strategies employed by influencers, data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) contribute to improving the effectiveness of digital diplomacy by enabling accurate targeting and personalised content delivery. Data analytics helps governments and tourism organisations understand visitor behaviour, identify trending areas, and determine which cultural or tourism experiences are most popular among visitors (Nag & Mishra, 2024). The lessons learnt will lead to more tailored influencer relationships and align the content more closely with the needs of a specific group of travellers (Rane, 2023).

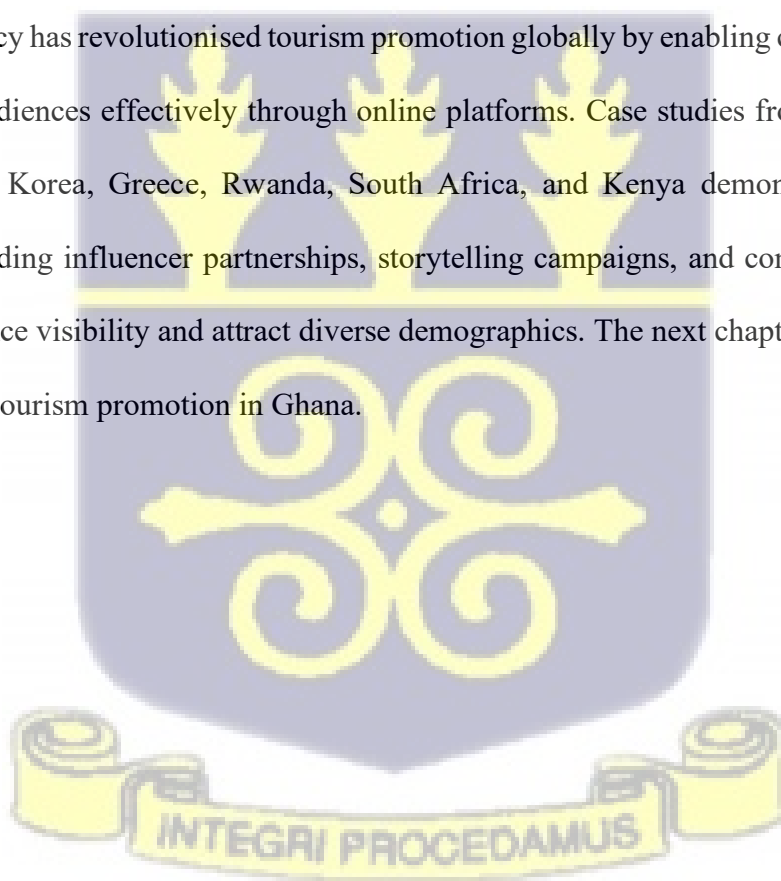
AI is integral to this process, enhancing user interaction through chatbots, personalised recommendation systems, and predictive tools (Semaani, 2023). The technologies improve rapid responsiveness and provide travellers with personalised information that increases engagement and commitment to the diplomatic goal of fostering meaningful cultural relationships.

Governments can utilise data-driven strategies to assess the outcomes of their digital diplomacy initiatives and monitor campaigns, along with their impacts on the situation, in real-time (Park, Chung, and Park, 2019; Filieri et al., 2021).

In today's world, influencer partnerships and data-driven digital technologies form a cohesive system of tourism diplomacy. The combination of both enhances destination exposure, facilitates the delivery of specific cultural messages, and enables more efficient and measurable outreach to international audiences. This integrated approach enables countries such as Ghana to enhance their tourism appeal and cultural influence in a highly competitive digital landscape.

2.4 Conclusion

Digital diplomacy has revolutionised tourism promotion globally by enabling countries to engage international audiences effectively through online platforms. Case studies from Malaysia, New Zealand, South Korea, Greece, Rwanda, South Africa, and Kenya demonstrate how digital strategies, including influencer partnerships, storytelling campaigns, and content-driven nation branding, enhance visibility and attract diverse demographics. The next chapter discusses digital diplomacy and tourism promotion in Ghana.



CHAPTER THREE

DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AND TOURISM PROMOTION IN GHANA

3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed evaluation of the impact of COVID-19 on Ghana's tourism and the role of digital diplomacy in its recovery. The chapter analyses global digital diplomacy strategies for adaptation in Ghana, identifies challenges and opportunities for digital diplomacy in Ghana's tourism promotion, and makes suggestions for Ghana's tourism development. The chapter addresses the objectives outlined in the study.

3.1 Evaluate the Implications of COVID-19 on Ghana's Tourism and the Role of Digital Diplomacy in Recovery

3.1.1 Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism Revenues

The COVID-19 pandemic had profound implications on Ghana's tourism sector, exposing the industry's vulnerabilities to global disruptions. Previously, Ghana's tourism sector was on a growth trajectory, supported by steady increases in international arrivals and contributions to the national economy. However, as international travel restrictions, lockdowns, and health concerns took effect, this momentum was abruptly halted. *Respondent One* highlighted the crisis's intensity, noting:

The COVID-19 pandemic dealt a significant blow to Ghana's tourism industry.

This response aligns with the findings of Kubio et al. (2021), which indicate that the eco-tourism sector in Ghana's Savannah region has experienced a substantial decrease in the number of international and domestic visitor arrivals. This decline led to a significant decrease in revenue for local businesses and service providers that rely on tourism, as well as for national and regional economies.

A second respondent added that:

International travel restrictions, lockdowns, and health concerns led to a sharp decline in tourist arrivals, which directly impacted the sector's revenue and employment.

This finding is consistent with the results of Mai's (2023) research, which highlights the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism employees and the sector as a whole. The study details disruptions in employment and revenue resulting from travel restrictions and lockdowns. This underscores the widespread disruption to travel, accommodation, and various tourism-related services that collectively fuel the sector's economy. The financial implications were stark. As tourist arrivals plummeted, so too did the revenue streams vital for sustaining the industry. Ghana's tourism businesses, from large hotel chains to small local attractions, experienced an unprecedented decline in visitors, resulting in sharp reductions in income and operational challenges. The revenue shortfall forced many businesses to significantly downscale their operations, leading to layoffs and, in some cases, permanent closures. This loss of revenue also highlighted the sector's high dependency on international tourism, as domestic tourism alone could not offset the dramatic fall in foreign visitors. The sector's reliance on spending by international tourists, who typically contribute substantially to accommodation, food services, and excursions, made the impact even more acute.

In addition to the immediate impact on revenues, the pandemic also had a significant impact on employment in the tourism sector. Businesses reduced their workforces to weather the recession, resulting in the loss of thousands of employees (Roy, 2020). The socioeconomic impact of the pandemic on local communities was further exacerbated by the job insecurity and unemployment that workers in various positions, including hospitality, transportation, and tour guiding,

experienced. The financial hardship experienced by numerous families who depended on the tourism industry for income had a ripple effect on the broader community, as spending power decreased and local economic circulation was weakened.

Furthermore, the economic impact extended beyond direct tourism businesses to ancillary industries that support the sector. Local artisans, food suppliers, and transport operators all experienced reduced demand as the tourism industry weakened, revealing the sector's interdependence with other areas of the economy (Aduhene & Osei-Assibey, 2021). Suppliers of goods and services that cater to tourists, such as craft vendors, restaurant suppliers, and souvenir producers, found their customer base diminished, which in turn affected their livelihoods. This ripple effect demonstrated the tourism industry's integral role in Ghana's broader economic fabric, connecting a wide range of businesses and individuals whose livelihoods are indirectly tied to tourism's success.

These severe financial losses and widespread job impacts underscore the urgent need for a resilient and diversified approach to tourism. The pandemic highlighted that relying solely on physical tourist arrivals leaves the sector vulnerable to similar disruptions in the future (Arbulú, Razumova, Rey-Maqueira, & Sastre, 2021). As Ghana rebuilds its tourism sector, digital diplomacy presents a promising avenue to remotely foster engagement with potential tourists, sustaining interest even when physical travel is impossible. Virtual tourism experiences, interactive online cultural showcases, and digital content marketing can help maintain Ghana's presence on the global tourism map (Preko, Amoako, Dzogbenuku & Kosiba, 2023).

The pandemic significantly impacted tourism revenues globally, with Ghana experiencing similar challenges as travel restrictions and lockdowns reduced international arrivals and tourism

spending. This finding aligns with Deb et al. (2020), who found that the widespread cancellation of bookings in Bangladesh results in significant revenue losses for the tourism sector. Additionally, Kumar (2020) found that India's economic downturn in tourism highlighted the magnitude of revenue reductions and the challenges of long-term recovery. Papanikos (2020) found that Greece's tourism GDP contribution experienced a drastic decrease due to the pandemic, illustrating the extensive economic impact on national revenue.

3.1.2 Challenges Faced by the Tourism Sector due to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic not only impacted direct tourism revenue but also disrupted the intricate supply chains that support Ghana's tourism industry, affecting the availability of essential goods and services. Respondent Three notes:

The industry faced numerous challenges, including job losses, business closures, and a decline in revenue from tourism-related activities. Additionally, the pandemic disrupted supply chains, affecting the availability of essential goods and services for the tourism sector.

The response agrees with the research conducted by Aduhene and Osei-Assibey (2021), which emphasises the extensive disruptions to supply chains in various sectors, including tourism, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings indicate that COVID-19 had an impact beyond economic growth, it created fiscal deficit and monetary burden, increased the risks of macroeconomic instability, decreased migration and remittances, reduced income from travel and tourism, and resulted in a decline in micro-small and medium-sized industries and informal businesses. This has the potential to exacerbate destitution, increase unemployment, and increase the likelihood of food insecurity and hunger. This exacerbated preexisting inequalities and disrupted social harmony. This observation highlights how the decline in tourist activity

range resulted in reduced demand for a wide array of goods and services essential to the tourism sector's functionality (Sharma et al. 2021).

For instance, suppliers of food, beverages, and artisanal products, who relied on steady orders from hotels, restaurants, and souvenir shops, faced sudden order cancellations and a sharp decline in sales. This disruption was particularly challenging for local artisans and farmers, who found themselves without alternative markets when demand from the tourism sector vanished. Artisans who depend on the purchases of handcrafted items by international visitors saw their primary customer base disappear, causing financial instability and an uncertain future for their businesses. Farmers who supplied fresh produce to tourism-related businesses also faced reduced orders, which affected their incomes and, by extension, the local agricultural economy (Adom et al., 2021).

The pandemic's impact on these suppliers highlights the interconnectedness of Ghana's tourism industry with various other sectors of the economy. Local supply chains, developed over time to meet the growing tourism industry's needs, were suddenly rendered redundant or incapable of sustaining regular business activities. Transport providers, for example, who would normally deliver goods to hotels and resorts, were also impacted as fewer orders meant fewer trips and ultimately fewer earnings. This cascading effect shows how disruptions in tourism rippled across different parts of the economy, affecting livelihoods and regional economic health (Kilu et al., 2023). The availability of services also suffered. Maintenance services for tourism facilities, which rely on a regular flow of revenue to operate, were restricted due to cost-cutting measures. As businesses struggled to stay afloat, many postponed or cancelled routine maintenance, which impacted the overall quality of their infrastructure. Restaurants and hotels faced challenges in maintaining their standards, particularly when access to essential goods was inconsistent. Service

providers such as tour operators and guides, who depend on the reliability of transport and other essential services, were left unable to cater to even local or virtual tourists, further weakening the sector's resilience.

Moreover, the reduction in the demand for tourism-related goods affected community livelihoods, as income derived from tourism often supports families and local economies. Communities that rely heavily on tourists' demand for local goods, including artisanal crafts and farm produce, saw a sharp decrease in earnings. In this sense, the disruption of the tourism supply chain had a direct social and economic impact on small-scale producers, who form the backbone of many rural economies (Deri et al., 2023). This loss of income, compounded by broader economic instability, amplified social challenges and underscored the sector's dependence on a stable flow of visitors to maintain economic stability in these communities.

This disruption to the tourism supply chain underscores the importance of developing a more resilient sector that can maintain service levels during crises. Adopting a digital diplomacy approach offers a viable pathway to sustaining visibility and engagement with potential tourists even when physical travel is limited. Virtual experiences, such as targeted online campaigns and social media engagement, can help Ghana keep its destinations in the international spotlight, promoting its offerings while maintaining a vital connection to its target markets (Mensah & Boakye, 2023). This digital connection can serve as a foundation for a more adaptable tourism model, ensuring the continuity of income for suppliers and service providers and helping to mitigate the effects of future supply chain disruptions.

The tourism sector in Ghana, like in other regions, encountered unprecedented challenges, including job losses, business closures, and reduced operational capacities due to safety protocols

and decreased demand. This is consistent with the findings of Qiu et al. (2020), who noted that social challenges, including health concerns for residents in tourism-heavy urban areas, complicated reopening efforts. Additionally, Kumar (2020) provides a comprehensive global overview of tourism sector challenges, highlighting job losses, economic strains on supporting sectors, and the need for adaptive strategies. Abbas et al. (2021) found that the pandemic brought severe economic stress to global tourism industries, with reduced workforce and business sustainability challenges.

3.1.3 Transition to Digital Tourism

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally altered the landscape of global tourism, forcing rapid adaptations and ushering in a shift towards digital tourism. As physical travel became restricted, with borders closing and health risks increasing, the demand for alternative ways to experience destinations surged. This transition saw an immediate pivot to digital and virtual tourism experiences as travellers turned to online platforms to engage with global destinations remotely.

As Respondent One notes,

The pandemic accelerated the demand for digital and virtual tourism experiences.

This assertion is consistent with the research conducted by Godovykh, Baker, and Fyall (2022), which emphasises the increased demand for virtual tourism experiences due to the pandemic. The study emphasises the potential of VR to sustain tourism engagement in the absence of physical travel. Based on the literature review, the virtual experience in tourism is significantly influenced by factors such as information, quality, technology acceptance, and affective involvement, which in turn affect the attitudes and behavioural intentions of visitors.

Respondent Two also agreed with *Respondent One*, declaring that...

As physical travel became restricted, people turned to online platforms to explore destinations virtually, such as through virtual tours and online cultural experiences.

This illustrates the tourism industry's accelerated adoption of virtual experiences, which were initially viewed as a supplement but have since become a necessity. Consequently, this aligns with Spriestersbach's (2024) research. Virtual platforms enabled users to experience Ghana's renowned attractions, such as the Cape Coast Castle, Kakum National Park, and vibrant cultural festivals, through interactive online content that offered a glimpse into the country's rich heritage. Virtual tours enabled tourists to explore historical sites, museums, and landscapes in real-time or through recorded experiences, keeping Ghana's tourism assets in the minds of potential travellers and maintaining a level of connectivity that was otherwise unattainable (Preko et al., 2023).

The demand for online cultural experiences also increased, with many people seeking to learn about and engage with Ghanaian culture remotely. Through digital experiences, Ghana showcased its traditional dances, local music, artisanal crafts, and culinary heritage to an international audience. For example, virtual cooking classes and music workshops have become popular online tourism offerings, allowing tourists to interact with local culture from afar. This shift towards digital platforms not only enabled Ghana to preserve its cultural visibility during travel restrictions but also expanded its reach, attracting interest from global audiences who might not have previously considered Ghana as a travel destination (Haligah, 2021).

Additionally, social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook have become essential tools for promoting digital tourism content, enabling real-time engagement with global

audiences. Through live-streamed events, interactive videos, and curated virtual experiences, these platforms made Ghana's offerings more accessible and visually engaging. Ghanaian tourism agencies and businesses leveraged these digital channels to showcase not only popular tourist spots but also lesser-known cultural and natural treasures. This content-driven approach not only sustained visibility for Ghana's tourism sector but also diversified the types of experiences available to potential travellers, introducing them to Ghana's vibrant culture, festivals, and landscapes without the need for physical travel (Asimah et al., 2022).

This transition to digital tourism also opened new opportunities for engagement and inclusivity, allowing individuals with mobility restrictions, time constraints, or budget limitations to explore Ghana's cultural and natural offerings. Digital tourism provided a more flexible way to engage with potential tourists, making Ghana's destinations more inclusive and accessible. This approach helps broaden Ghana's tourism base, creating lasting connections with diverse groups of people who may choose to visit in person once travel restrictions ease (Asimah et al, 2022).

In the broader context of Ghana's post-COVID tourism strategy, the shift towards digital tourism has demonstrated the potential of digital diplomacy to drive sustainable growth. This digital approach not only supports immediate engagement with potential tourists but also provides a long-term strategy for maintaining global visibility. Through establishing a strong online presence and offering innovative digital experiences, Ghana positions itself as a leader in digital tourism, using digital diplomacy to create lasting impressions and cultivate a future pipeline of in-person visitors. This aligns with Abbas et al. (2021), who found that the rapid adoption of digital platforms in tourism emphasises the role of virtual tours in maintaining connections between destinations and international audiences amid travel restrictions. Similarly, Wang et al. (2021) noted that Chinese visitor attractions utilised digital offerings, including virtual experiences, to maintain tourism interest despite physical travel limitations. Sultana et al. (2021)

examine how tourism sectors worldwide have adapted to digital demand, highlighting the importance of virtual content in supporting industry resilience during the pandemic.

3.2 Analyse Global Digital Diplomacy Strategies for Adaptation in Ghana

3.2.1 Importance of Digital Diplomacy in Tourism Recovery

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, digital diplomacy emerged as an essential tool for revitalising Ghana's tourism sector. With traditional marketing avenues constrained and physical travel restricted, digital diplomacy presents a flexible and scalable solution for maintaining global engagement with Ghana's tourism offerings. As *Respondent One* emphasised,

Digital diplomacy can play a pivotal role in recovering Ghana's tourism sector by leveraging technology to connect with international audiences, promote the country's unique cultural heritage, and facilitate virtual tourism experiences.

This claim is supported by Negassa's (2024) research, which emphasises how digital diplomacy can successfully propel the tourism industry's recovery by utilising online platforms to create engaging, easily accessible, and culturally rich experiences for audiences worldwide. Through digital diplomacy, Ghana can leverage social media channels, video platforms, and other digital tools to reach international audiences with precision and creativity. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook enable Ghana to visually communicate its cultural heritage, natural beauty, and hospitality to a global audience, fostering a sense of connection and intrigue even when physical travel may not be possible.

Digital diplomacy enables a more inclusive approach to tourism promotion, enabling Ghana to connect with diverse audiences beyond its traditional target groups. Through digital platforms, Ghana can engage a broader demographic, including younger travellers who increasingly rely on

digital content when selecting destinations (Kruse et al., 2019). Additionally, digital diplomacy offers a cost-effective means to reach diaspora communities, who often have a natural connection to Ghana and a high likelihood of visiting. Engaging the diaspora digitally rekindles interest and encourages return visits, benefiting the local economy and enriching Ghana's tourism narrative (Yazdi, 2021).

Moreover, digital diplomacy significantly strengthens Ghana's global brand by showcasing the country's unique selling points. Through carefully crafted digital campaigns, Ghana can effectively highlight its cultural assets, including heritage sites, festivals, music, dance, and art, thereby distinguishing itself from other destinations (Pencarelli, 2020). This strategy enables Ghana to position itself as a culturally vibrant destination offering both traditional and modern experiences. By promoting these elements online, Ghana creates an enticing narrative that appeals to travellers seeking authentic cultural encounters, driving tourism recovery. Strategic storytelling through digital content not only reinforces Ghana's identity on the global stage but also fosters a positive perception that enhances its appeal as a destination (Zhou et al., 2021).

In addition to driving immediate engagement, digital diplomacy supports the long-term resilience of Ghana's tourism sector. By establishing a robust digital presence, Ghana can remain adaptable to future challenges, sustaining visibility and engagement with international audiences regardless of physical travel limitations. This adaptability is particularly valuable in a post-pandemic context, as it allows Ghana to diversify its tourism approach and mitigate the impact of future disruptions. Moreover, digital diplomacy enables continuous audience engagement, providing real-time feedback and allowing tourism authorities to refine their strategies in response to changing interests and trends.

Abbas et al. (2021) agree that digital diplomacy has become crucial for tourism survival, emphasising the need for adaptive, technology-driven strategies to engage potential tourists during recovery phases. Additionally, Sultana et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of digital channels in maintaining destination visibility and rebuilding traveller confidence post-COVID.

3.2.2 Effective Channels for Promoting Tourism Post-COVID

In the post-COVID era, digital channels have become indispensable for promoting tourism, offering a powerful medium for Ghana to engage with a global audience and restore its presence on the international tourism stage. As *Respondent Three* observed,

Social media platforms, including Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, as well as video platforms such as YouTube, are highly effective in promoting Ghana's tourism in the post-COVID context.

This view is similar to that held by Alhassan and Alkadash (2024), who discuss the significance of platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok in reviving tourism sectors worldwide. To promote attractions and encourage participation, they emphasise how countries use digital platforms to speak directly to audiences worldwide. This is crucial for tourism to recover from the pandemic.

To buttress this, point *Respondent Two* added that:

These platforms allow us to reach a broad audience, engage with potential tourists in real-time, and showcase Ghana's unique selling points.

This insight highlights the crucial role of these platforms in connecting with potential tourists in real-time, showcasing Ghana's cultural heritage, and crafting compelling narratives that appeal to diverse audiences (Abdullahi, 2021).

Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok are particularly effective for visually rich content that highlights Ghana's vibrant culture, scenic landscapes, and unique tourist attractions. Instagram, renowned for its visually driven format, enables tourism stakeholders to share curated images and videos of Ghana's iconic sites, including the Cape Coast Castle, Mole National Park, and Kakum Canopy Walk (Gupta, 2019). Through posts, stories, and reels, tourism agencies and businesses can offer potential visitors a digital window into Ghana's beauty and cultural richness, appealing to travellers seeking immersive, authentic experiences (de Almeida Vasconcelos, 2023). TikTok, with its short-form, engaging videos, reaches a broad demographic, especially younger travellers, creating the viral potential for Ghanaian content that resonates with modern travel interests (Manora & Pamment, 2019).

Platforms like Twitter serve as an interactive hub where Ghana can engage potential tourists in real time. Tourism marketers can cultivate direct dialogues with audiences, address enquiries, and establish a community centred on Ghanaian locations by disseminating live updates, event details, and travel advice (Huang et al., 2021). This real-time interaction not only boosts engagement but also personalises the traveller experience, positioning Ghana as a responsive and welcoming destination. Twitter also enables Ghana to join trending conversations, tapping into global travel discussions and reaching audiences beyond typical tourism channels (Antwi-Boateng & Al Mazrouei, 2021).

Video platforms such as YouTube provide an extended format for storytelling, allowing Ghana to showcase in-depth travel experiences, historical narratives, and cultural features. Through YouTube, Ghanaian tourism agencies and content creators can produce longer, more immersive content that provides viewers with a comprehensive look at the country's offerings (Patil, 2019).

For example, virtual tours, cultural showcases, and traveller testimonials can capture the essence of Ghana's unique attractions. YouTube attracts individuals seeking a deeper understanding of Ghana before their arrival by offering comprehensive travel itineraries, guides, and cultural insights, positioning Ghana as an important destination with profound historical and cultural significance (Kalvet et al., 2020). These digital platforms collectively expand Ghana's reach to international audiences who may be unfamiliar with its offerings. The diverse functionalities of these channels allow Ghana to simultaneously reach a broad audience while tailoring content for specific segments, enhancing the effectiveness of its tourism promotion. The combined visual appeal (Instagram, TikTok), real-time interaction (Twitter), and in-depth content (YouTube) enable Ghana to communicate its unique selling points effectively. This multifaceted approach showcases Ghana's diverse attractions—from eco-tourism and heritage sites to urban life and cultural festivals—offering potential tourists multiple entry points to connect with the destination (Labanauskaitė et al., 2020).

Social media and video platforms are key channels for promoting tourism in the post-COVID-19 context, enabling destinations to reach and engage global audiences in real-time. This finding aligns with Kumar (2020), who found that social media platforms became instrumental in India's tourism promotion, enabling constant engagement with audiences even when physical travel was limited. Additionally, Wang et al. (2021) found the effectiveness of visual platforms, such as YouTube and Instagram, for promoting Chinese attractions, highlighting the global relevance of these channels in sustaining interest.

3.2.3 Adaptations of Successful Examples

In the realm of tourism diplomacy, countries around the world have successfully employed digital strategies to attract visitors, leveraging social media and content marketing to build compelling online narratives that resonate with global audiences. As Respondent One highlighted,

Countries like Iceland and New Zealand have effectively utilised social media and content marketing to create a strong online presence and attract visitors.

In consonance with Albrecht and Raymond (2023), the response consistently aligns with the study of how Iceland, New Zealand, and Palau have effectively employed social marketing and social media as visitor management tools to promote behavioural commitments through digital platforms, thereby fostering responsible tourism and attracting visitors.

Respondent Two indicated that:

These strategies can be adapted to highlight Ghana's unique cultural heritage and natural attractions by showcasing our rich history, diverse cultures, stunning landscapes, and vibrant festivals through visually appealing content and interactive experiences.

This observation underlines the effectiveness of targeted digital strategies in tourism promotion, demonstrating how countries with unique cultural and natural assets have used online platforms to engage and captivate potential travellers. Ghana can draw valuable insights from these examples, adapting similar approaches to showcase its distinctive heritage and attractions (Engmann, 2021).

Iceland's "Inspired by Iceland" campaign is a notable example of how a well-crafted digital strategy can significantly enhance tourism. The campaign utilised social media, videos, and influencer partnerships to showcase Iceland's natural beauty, including its volcanic landscapes, hot springs, and the Northern Lights. Through captivating visuals and interactive online experiences, the campaign created an emotional connection with potential tourists, inviting them

to explore Iceland's landscapes from afar and inspiring them to visit in person. Ghana can adopt similar strategies to emphasise its natural wonders, such as the lush Kakum National Park, the Volta Region's Mountain ranges, and the pristine beaches along the coast. By using high-quality visuals, immersive virtual tours, and engaging narratives, Ghana can position itself as an equally alluring destination for nature enthusiasts and adventure seekers worldwide.

New Zealand's "100% Pure New Zealand" campaign also offers a compelling model of tourism diplomacy that Ghana can emulate. This campaign used a combination of social media, interactive videos, and authentic storytelling to highlight New Zealand's unique ecosystems, cultural heritage, and adventure opportunities. New Zealand effectively marketed itself as a destination for scenic beauty and cultural riches by emphasising its landscapes and the cultural heritage of the indigenous Māori people. Ghana, with its rich history, vibrant festivals, and welcoming communities, can similarly blend cultural and natural tourism potential to appeal to diverse interests. For instance, Ghana can highlight its role in the transatlantic slave trade through digital tours of heritage sites, such as the Cape Coast and Elmina Castles, while also promoting events like the annual Panafest, which celebrates African heritage and culture. Through a well-rounded digital campaign, Ghana can attract visitors interested in history, culture, and immersive experiences.

Studying these successful tourism diplomacy models, Ghana can also appreciate the value of integrating influencers and social media personalities into its strategy. Both Iceland and New Zealand collaborated with travel influencers, photographers, and digital storytellers to broaden their reach and add authenticity to their campaigns. Influencers offer a unique perspective, often creating personal and relatable content that resonates strongly with audiences and enhances the visibility of the destination. Ghana can leverage this approach by partnering with international

and local influencers who can showcase Ghana's hidden gems, traditional festivals, and vibrant urban life, sharing their experiences through blog posts, YouTube videos, and social media stories. This type of content not only reaches broader audiences but also creates a sense of personal connection with potential tourists, encouraging them to consider Ghana as their next destination. These global examples reveal the importance of interactivity in digital campaigns, which fosters engagement and sustains interest. For instance, New Zealand's campaign incorporated user-generated content, where tourists shared their experiences and stories online, amplifying the country's appeal through authentic voices. Ghana can adopt a similar approach by encouraging visitors to share their travel experiences and memories on social media, using campaign-specific hashtags to build an interactive community of Ghana enthusiasts. User-generated content creates a continuous flow of fresh material, allowing Ghana to maintain a dynamic online presence that is constantly renewed by travellers' perspectives and stories. This approach also enhances the destination's credibility, as prospective tourists see real experiences shared by other travellers, which often feel more trustworthy and relatable than formal marketing content.

Countries like Iceland and New Zealand have successfully employed digital tourism diplomacy, creating compelling content and forging partnerships to attract international audiences. This finding is consistent with Deb et al. (2020), who found that countries adapted tourism diplomacy strategies to maintain interest, explicitly citing the success of Iceland and New Zealand in using social media campaigns to build a strong digital presence. Additionally, Abbas et al. (2021) found that effective digital campaigns by global destinations can serve as examples for countries seeking to enhance tourism diplomacy.

3.2.4 Aspects of Ghana's Culture that Appeal to International Audiences

Ghana's vibrant culture, steeped in history and tradition yet embracing modernity, holds immense appeal for international audiences. As noted by Respondent Three,

International audiences are particularly drawn to Ghana's rich history, diverse cultures, beautiful beaches, and wildlife.

The response is consistent with the research conducted by Abraham, Ayesu, and Kwabena (2021), which examines Ghana's popularity among both domestic and international tourists due to its distinctive cultural and natural attractions, such as vibrant heritage sites and wildlife. This study underscores Ghana's significant potential to attract a diverse international audience. To buttress this, point another Respondent Two indicated that:

Our unique blend of traditional and modern culture, along with our warm hospitality, is a major attraction that can be effectively promoted through digital channels.

This insight underscores the multifaceted appeal of Ghana's tourist attractions, which encompass its rich heritage sites, stunning natural landscapes, and vibrant, contemporary culture (Dzitse & Amoah, 2024). Leveraging digital diplomacy to promote these unique cultural aspects can effectively attract diverse groups of travellers by showcasing both the traditional and modern elements that define Ghana's identity.

One of the central aspects of Ghana's cultural appeal lies in its historical significance, particularly in relation to the transatlantic slave trade. Sites like the Cape Coast Castle and Elmina Castle are potent symbols of Ghana's history and resilience, offering a profound experience for visitors interested in connecting with the past (Qiu et al., 2020). These heritage sites hold special meaning for members of the African diaspora seeking to reconnect with their roots, and digital platforms

provide an effective medium for sharing this heritage globally. Through virtual tours, documentaries, and interactive content, Ghana can reach audiences worldwide, enabling them to explore these historic landmarks from afar and fostering a sense of connection that may inspire future visits (Sultana et al., 2021).

Ghana's rich tapestry of traditional festivals is another significant cultural attraction. Events like Panafest, the Chale Wote Street Art Festival, and the Homowo Festival showcase Ghana's traditions, art, and music, attracting audiences interested in African culture and the arts (Huang et al., 2021). Digital diplomacy enables Ghana to expand the reach of these festivals by sharing live streams, highlights, and behind-the-scenes footage on social media platforms, allowing international audiences to experience the vibrancy of Ghanaian festivals in real-time. (Labanauskaitė et al., 2020).

Additionally, Ghana's blend of traditional and modern culture provides a unique appeal that can attract a broad range of tourists. Urban centres like Accra and Kumasi boast vibrant arts, music, and fashion scenes that coexist with traditional crafts, dances, and practices. This fusion of old and new highlights Ghana's dynamic culture, appealing to travellers interested in both heritage and contemporary experiences. Digital channels allow Ghana to showcase its urban culture, presenting the work of local artists, musicians, and designers. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok are particularly suited for sharing snapshots of Ghanaian fashion, contemporary art, and music, engaging younger audiences who seek trendy destinations that also honour cultural roots (Patil, 2019).

Ghana's natural beauty—its beaches, wildlife, and ecological diversity—is another major draw for international audiences. Coastal areas like Ada and Cape Coast beaches are popular for both

relaxation and adventure, while Kakum National Park and Mole National Park offer opportunities to experience Ghana's biodiversity. Leveraging digital platforms to share high-quality visuals, nature documentaries, and eco-tourism experiences captivates audiences interested in sustainable tourism and wildlife. Virtual tours of national parks or live streams from popular eco-sites provide engaging, immersive content that fosters a deeper appreciation of Ghana's ecological richness (Kalvet et al., 2020).

Ghana's reputation for warm hospitality further enhances its cultural appeal. The friendly nature of Ghanaians is a key aspect of the travel experience, enriching visitors' perception of the country as a welcoming destination. Digital diplomacy can highlight this attribute by sharing testimonials from tourists, user-generated content that captures genuine interactions, and stories of local hospitality. Emphasising these personal experiences can build an inviting image that appeals to travellers seeking destinations where they feel embraced and valued. Social media provides a platform for authentic stories that emphasise Ghana's warmth and hospitality, creating an emotional appeal that reinforces its reputation as a friendly, inclusive destination (Manora & Pamment, 2019).

Ghana's rich cultural heritage, including festivals, historic sites, and natural landscapes, appeals strongly to international audiences. This finding aligns with Qiu et al. (2020), who found that cultural elements, such as traditional events and heritage sites, serve as major attractions that enhance a destination's appeal to global audiences. Additionally, Sultana et al. (2021) emphasised the importance of promoting unique cultural attributes to differentiate destinations in a competitive tourism landscape.

3.3 Challenges and Opportunities for Digital Diplomacy in Ghana's Tourism Promotion

3.3.1 Infrastructural and Financial Challenges in Digital Diplomacy

In implementing digital diplomacy as a strategy for promoting tourism in Ghana's post-COVID economy, a range of infrastructural and financial challenges have emerged, impacting the overall effectiveness and reach of these efforts. As Respondent Three argued,

The primary challenges in implementing digital diplomacy for Ghana's tourism promotion include limited digital infrastructure, lack of digital literacy, and inadequate funding.

This quote encapsulates the key obstacles that Ghana faces in establishing a cohesive digital tourism strategy, underscoring the need for additional support and investment to overcome these barriers. While some tourism stakeholders are embracing digital transformation, others may require more training and resources to fully leverage digital technologies effectively (Busulwa, 2020).

Respondent Two indicated:

While some tourism stakeholders are embracing digital transformation, others may require additional support and training to fully leverage digital technologies.

This aligns with a study conducted by Martínez-Peláez et al. (2023), which suggests that the limited digital infrastructure in some areas of Ghana is a significant infrastructural obstacle to the advancement of digital diplomacy. Although urban areas like Accra have relatively robust internet connectivity, many rural and remote areas in Ghana still lack reliable broadband access, limiting the ability of tourism operators in those regions to connect with digital platforms and

reach international audiences (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020). This connectivity gap hinders small and medium-sized tourism enterprises, especially those near rural attractions or heritage sites, from fully participating in digital diplomacy efforts. Consequently, Ghana's online tourism narrative may become disproportionately focused on urban destinations, leaving out cultural and natural attractions in less connected areas that are crucial to the country's tourism appeal (Yazdi, 2021).

Another significant challenge is the lack of digital literacy among some tourism stakeholders, particularly small business owners who may lack the training to navigate digital platforms effectively. For these stakeholders, utilising social media, content marketing, and digital tools to attract international visitors can be complex and requires skills in content creation and online engagement. This knowledge gap creates disparities in how different tourism providers leverage digital diplomacy, benefiting those with digital literacy while leaving others behind (Kruse et al., 2019). Addressing this gap requires targeted training programs to build digital skills among tourism operators, ensuring all stakeholders can contribute to and benefit from Ghana's digital tourism strategy (Pencarelli, 2020).

Financial constraints also compound these challenges, as many tourism SMEs lack the resources to invest in digital transformation. Limited funding restricts their ability to adopt necessary technologies, enhance their digital presence, or conduct content marketing campaigns that require professional services. For example, creating high-quality visual content or maintaining a consistent social media presence requires an investment that smaller businesses may struggle to afford. Additionally, while larger tourism organisations might budget for digital advertising, smaller enterprises rely on organic reach, which can be challenging in a competitive online environment (Sultana et al., 2021).

To address these financial limitations, increased government or institutional support is crucial, including grants, subsidies, or access to affordable digital tools and services. Financial aid programs for tourism SMEs could help bridge the gap, enabling these businesses to invest in digital marketing and enhance their online presence. Public-private partnerships also offer a solution where larger corporations, tech firms, or telecommunications providers could assist tourism operators with technology resources, digital marketing expertise, and reduced-cost services. Ghana's tourist industry can create a more inclusive digital ecosystem that serves businesses of all sizes by encouraging these kinds of partnerships, which will help the country's tourism plan come together (Labanauskaitė et al., 2020).

3.4 Digital Diplomacy Strategy for Ghana's Tourism Engagement

3.4.1 Strategic Components

A robust strategy for digital tourism diplomacy is essential to ensure Ghana's tourism sector remains competitive and resilient in the post-COVID landscape. The primary objective of such a strategy is to position Ghana as an attractive destination by effectively utilising digital channels to reach and engage a global audience. As Respondent One emphasised,

A comprehensive digital diplomacy framework should include the following components: A strong online presence on various social media platforms.

In addition, Respondent Two added that:

Development of high-quality virtual experiences and partnerships with international influencers and travel bloggers.

This is consistent with Sultana et al. (2021), who outline strategic components for digital tourism, emphasising the need for cohesive digital strategies and influencer partnerships. Additionally, Wang et al. (2021) describe similar frameworks used in China, highlighting the effectiveness of

virtual experiences and influencer marketing in enhancing destination engagement. This insight underscores the need for a cohesive, multi-channel approach to digital tourism that goes beyond social media, encompassing virtual experiences, influencer partnerships, and high-quality content to create a compelling digital identity for Ghana.

A strong online presence across social media platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, is the backbone of a successful digital tourism strategy. These platforms offer immediate, visually engaging ways to showcase Ghana's tourism attractions and maintain ongoing engagement with international audiences. Through social media, Ghana can present real-time updates, promote events, share cultural stories, and post captivating images and videos that highlight its unique landscapes, historical landmarks, and vibrant cultural life. Consistent, strategically curated content on these channels builds a steady flow of visibility for Ghana, helping it stand out in the highly competitive tourism market.

Beyond social media, the development of high-quality virtual experiences is a crucial component of the digital tourism diplomacy framework. Virtual experiences, such as interactive 360-degree tours of iconic sites like Cape Coast Castle or Kakum National Park, allow potential tourists to explore Ghana's attractions from anywhere in the world. These experiences provide an immersive glimpse into what Ghana has to offer, catering to travellers who may be researching their next destination or are unable to visit in person. Still, they are interested in learning about Ghanaian culture and landscapes. Elevate its virtual content to effectively engage audiences, making them feel connected to the destination and encouraging them to plan future visits.

The inclusion of partnerships with international influencers and travel bloggers further strengthens Ghana's digital tourism strategy. Influencers with substantial followings in travel,

culture, and lifestyle niches can amplify Ghana's reach by creating organic, relatable content that appeals to diverse audiences (Zhou et al., 2021). Travel bloggers and influencers often maintain dedicated audiences who trust their recommendations, making them valuable partners in positioning Ghana as a must-visit destination. Collaborations with these digital personalities can include sponsored trips where influencers share their experiences of Ghana through blog posts, social media stories, and vlogs. This content offers a unique, personal view of Ghana, showcasing local attractions, accommodations, and cultural highlights while building a sense of authenticity that appeals to potential travellers (Bastrygina et al., 2024).

Moreover, influencers can help Ghana reach specific niche segments, such as adventure tourists, eco-travellers, and cultural enthusiasts, creating targeted awareness that complements broader digital campaigns (Afren, 2024). Additionally, user-generated content (UGC) can be integrated into this strategy, enhancing the community and authenticity around Ghana's tourism brand. Encouraging visitors to share their experiences using specific hashtags or tags allows Ghana's tourism boards and businesses to feature authentic traveller stories on their official channels. This UGC builds credibility and provides prospective visitors with genuine insights into the country's attractions, supporting Ghana's tourism objectives by making the destination feel accessible and relatable (de Almeida Vasconcelos, 2023).

Incorporating analytics and feedback mechanisms into the strategy is another essential component, as these tools provide insights into the effectiveness of various campaigns and initiatives. Analytics enable Ghana's tourism agencies to track key metrics, including engagement rates, reach, and conversions, which inform data-driven decisions about content types, partnerships, and digital strategies.

3.4.2 Role of Partnerships in Digital Tourism

Partnerships between the public and private sectors are crucial to developing a sustainable and impactful digital tourism strategy for Ghana, particularly in the context of post-COVID recovery. These collaborations enhance digital diplomacy efforts by pooling resources, sharing expertise, and securing funding to support long-term tourism promotion. As Respondent Three noted,

Public-private partnerships can play a crucial role in supporting the framework by sharing resources, expertise, and funding.

The finding is consistent with that of Deb et al. (2020), who found that partnerships between governments and private enterprises foster resource sharing and support sustainable tourism initiatives. Additionally, Gamage and Tharanga (2020) emphasised the importance of public-private collaboration in funding and scaling tourism recovery, with shared investments in digital platforms and content creation.

To buttress the point, another Respondent Two added:

These collaborations are crucial for scaling digital diplomacy initiatives and ensuring the sustained promotion of tourism efforts.

This insight underscores the transformative potential of partnerships, highlighting how collaboration across sectors can enable Ghana to scale its digital tourism initiatives effectively and ensure sustained promotion efforts that remain competitive in the global tourism landscape. Public-private partnerships bring together complementary strengths from government agencies and private enterprises, creating a support system for digital tourism. For instance, government agencies provide legitimacy, regulatory support, and strategic oversight, helping to align tourism promotion with national objectives and cultural values. On the other hand, private sector players

such as tech companies, media organisations, and travel agencies offer innovation, technical expertise, and market reach. By working together, these entities can produce high-quality, culturally resonant digital content that effectively showcases Ghana's attractions, heritage sites, and events to international audiences. The synergy created by these partnerships fosters an environment where resources are maximised, and innovative strategies can thrive, ultimately strengthening Ghana's digital tourism strategy.

Funding, often a challenge in implementing digital strategies, is another key area where partnerships can make a significant difference. Public financing may be limited, particularly as governments allocate resources across various sectors in the wake of the pandemic. Involving private enterprises, especially those with a vested interest in the tourism industry, such as airlines, hotels, and tour operators, Ghana can secure additional financial resources to support digital diplomacy initiatives. These funds can be directed towards developing high-quality virtual experiences, digital marketing campaigns, and the technology infrastructure needed to expand the country's online presence. This collaborative funding approach not only ensures that digital tourism efforts are well-resourced but also helps distribute costs, making these initiatives more financially sustainable in the long term.

Expertise and technical knowledge are also essential contributions from private partners, particularly in areas such as digital marketing, data analytics, and content creation. Many private sector entities have the digital skills and experience necessary to create engaging, high-impact campaigns, from developing virtual tours to executing social media strategies that reach target audiences. Private sector partners can also offer training to local tourism operators, helping them enhance their digital literacy and manage their digital presence more effectively, which is crucial for scaling digital tourism initiatives across the country.

These partnerships are essential for enabling Ghana to expand its reach and engage with a broader, more diverse audience. Collaborations with international travel platforms, such as TripAdvisor, Booking.com, and Airbnb, can significantly increase Ghana's visibility and simplify travel planning for potential tourists. Additionally, partnerships with global social media platforms and influencers allow Ghana to amplify its tourism content, bringing it to the attention of millions of prospective visitors worldwide.

Furthermore, public-private partnerships provide valuable data and insights through access to digital analytics, consumer trends, and feedback from marketing campaigns. Companies specialising in data analytics or customer relationship management can offer tools to assess the impact of digital campaigns, measure engagement, and track conversions. These insights enable Ghana's tourism stakeholders to make data-driven decisions, refining their digital diplomacy strategy based on real-time feedback and evolving audience preferences (Kalvet et al., 2020). This feedback loop is vital for maintaining a responsive and adaptive digital tourism framework that meets the needs of global travellers. Public-private partnerships are crucial for scaling digital tourism by providing shared resources, expertise, and funding, contributing to sustainable, long-term success (Filieri et al., 2021).

3.4.3 Evaluation and Monitoring of Digital Diplomacy

Practical evaluation and monitoring are crucial to the success of digital diplomacy efforts, as they offer valuable insights into how effectively these initiatives engage audiences and drive tourism. Monitoring the impact of digital tourism diplomacy allows Ghana to adjust strategies based on real-time data, ensuring that the country's online presence aligns with the interests and expectations of international audiences. As *Respondent One* explained,

To monitor and evaluate the impact of digital diplomacy initiatives, one can use website analytics, social media metrics, and surveys to track visitor engagement, conversions, and overall satisfaction.

The finding aligns with Abbas et al. (2021), who found that continuous monitoring of digital tourism efforts is necessary, utilising analytics and visitor feedback to refine strategies. Additionally, Wang et al. (2021) found that Chinese visitor attractions utilised data analysis to measure the impact of digital initiatives and adapt to audience preferences.

Additionally, *Respondent One* added that:

Regular feedback collection and metric analysis help assess the effectiveness and reach of these initiatives.

This approach highlights the importance of utilising data-driven tools and feedback mechanisms to refine and enhance Ghana's digital tourism strategy continually. One of the primary tools for assessing digital diplomacy initiatives is website analytics. Ghana's tourism agencies can learn a great deal about audience participation by analysing website traffic. This includes determining the demographics of visitors, the geographic distribution of their audience, and popular pages (Park et al., 2019). Metrics such as page views, average time on site, and bounce rates provide a clearer picture of which aspects of Ghana's tourism diversities attract the most interest. Additionally, conversion metrics—like booking rates for tours or downloads of travel guides—serve as direct indicators of how digital content translates into visitor actions, reflecting the effectiveness of promotional campaigns in driving real-world engagement (Filiari et al., 2021). Consistent tracking of these metrics allows tourism stakeholders to identify high-performing content, shaping future investments in digital content and promotional strategies.

Social media metrics are also instrumental in evaluating digital tourism diplomacy efforts. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter offer detailed engagement insights, including likes, shares, comments, and video views, which reflect how well Ghana's content resonates with audiences. These metrics enable tourism stakeholders to gauge the popularity of specific posts, recognise audience preference trends, and adjust content strategies accordingly. Social media also enables tourism agencies to track follower growth and reach, allowing them to assess the expansion of Ghana's digital tourism network over time. By regularly analysing social media metrics, Ghana can refine its approach, focusing on content types and themes that generate the highest engagement, thereby extending its reach to potential visitors worldwide (de Almeida Vasconcelos, 2023).

Surveys add another layer to the evaluation process by capturing qualitative insights directly from potential and past visitors. Surveys can be used to assess visitor satisfaction with digital content, measure interest in specific attractions, and gather feedback on what potential tourists are looking for in a destination. For example, post-engagement surveys can be sent to individuals who participated in virtual tours or interacted with digital content, asking about their perceptions of Ghana and their likelihood of visiting the country. This feedback provides valuable insights into visitor expectations, satisfaction levels, and areas where digital content may need improvement. Combining quantitative metrics from analytics and social media with qualitative survey data could enable Ghana to develop a well-rounded understanding of its digital tourism impact and refine its strategy to meet audience needs better.

Regular feedback collection and metric analysis are essential to assessing the effectiveness and reach of digital diplomacy initiatives, as they create a continuous feedback loop that enables Ghana's tourism sector to remain agile and responsive. By setting clear benchmarks and key

performance indicators (KPIs), tourism agencies can systematically track progress toward specific goals, such as increasing online engagement, boosting conversion rates, or expanding the international audience base. For example, tracking the number of virtual tour participants over time or measuring the increase in social media followers after a campaign can provide concrete evidence of growth. This approach ensures that digital tourism strategies remain relevant, data-informed, and adaptable to emerging trends and audience preferences.

Data-driven insights also help tourism stakeholders justify investments in digital diplomacy, demonstrating the tangible benefits of these efforts for Ghana's economy and international visibility. In the long term, regular evaluation and monitoring lay the foundation for sustained growth, enabling Ghana's digital tourism framework to evolve in response to changing market demands and positioning the country as an innovative, adaptive destination. Regular feedback collection, website analytics, social media metrics, and surveys are essential for assessing the reach and effectiveness of digital diplomacy initiatives.

3.5 Conclusion

The chapter discussed the research findings analysed from data collected through interviews conducted with respondents from the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration (MOFARI), and the Ghana Hoteliers Association. The study's findings were discussed in relation to the four research objectives outlined in the first chapter. In total, eleven (11) themes emerged from the analysis. For the first objective, three (3) sub-themes emerged: the impact of COVID-19 on tourism revenues, challenges faced by the tourism sector due to COVID-19, and the shift to digital tourism demand. For the second objective, three (3) sub-themes emerged: the importance of digital diplomacy in tourism recovery, effective channels for promoting tourism post-COVID, and global examples of successful tourism diplomacy. For

the third objective, two (2) sub-themes emerged: infrastructural and financial challenges in digital diplomacy and potential growth opportunities in Ghana's digital tourism. For the final objective, three (3) sub-themes emerged: strategic components for digital tourism diplomacy, the role of partnerships in digital tourism and evaluation and monitoring of digital diplomacy impact.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the key findings discussed in Chapter Three, offers conclusions based on the analysis, and presents recommendations for leveraging digital diplomacy in promoting Ghana's tourism in the post-COVID-19 era.

4.1 Summary of Findings

Objective 1: Assess the impact of COVID-19 on Ghana's tourism sector

The results showed that COVID-19 resulted in severe economic losses throughout the tourism value chain. In addition to the decline in the number of tourists and tourism income, the sector has recorded job losses, operational disruptions, and poor performance in ancillary industries. These results highlight the structural weakness of the Ghanaian tourism economy in responding to exogenous shocks.

Objective 2: Examine the digital transformations emerging in response to the pandemic

The research reported a significant trend of virtual tourism and online interaction as physical travel limits increased. Online festivals, virtual tours, and digital storytelling were essential in maintaining the international presence. This change is a sign that digital tourism is not an auxiliary task, but a strategic necessity for resilience during the next crisis.

Objective 3: Explore the role of digital diplomacy in promoting Ghana's post-COVID tourism recovery

Digital diplomacy has turned out to be a vital tool for preserving global interaction, promoting Ghanaian culture, and reaching a wider range of the audience. As the most effective mediums of destination marketing, social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube, provide an opportunity to communicate in real-time, promote the culture, and engage the target audience. Iceland and New Zealand have demonstrated globally how well-organised digital diplomacy campaigns can enhance the attractiveness of destinations during and after crises.

Objective 4: Identify opportunities and constraints in leveraging digital diplomacy for tourism development

Despite these great potentials, the findings indicate that digital diplomacy is limited by constraints such as a lack of internet connectivity, insufficient funding, and digital illiteracy. These obstacles limit Ghana's ability to utilise digital tools to their maximum potential. Nevertheless, there are opportunities in the growth of digital infrastructure, skills development, and the establishment of stronger public-private partnerships, as well as the integration of data analytics in target marketing and campaign evaluation. Analytics and feedback mechanisms can be used to improve decision-making, content strategies, and the overall effectiveness of digital tourism activities in Ghana.

On the whole, the results indicate that, on the one hand, COVID-19 has revealed weaknesses in Ghana's tourism industry; on the other hand, it has increased the rate of digital diplomacy as a marketing instrument in destination marketing.

5.2 Conclusions

The findings underscore that digital diplomacy offers Ghana a viable path to revitalising its tourism sector post-COVID-19. Through the implementation of a systematic digital diplomacy

framework, Ghana may augment its international visibility, showcase its cultural resources, and draw varied audiences within a competitive tourism landscape. This study reveals that successful digital tourism strategies require robust digital infrastructure, ongoing training for stakeholders, and targeted funding to overcome financial limitations. Public-private partnerships and careful evaluation of digital campaigns are also critical to achieving sustained engagement and growth in Ghana's tourism industry. Digital diplomacy not only facilitates Ghana's immediate tourism recovery but also fosters a flexible, adaptable approach that is consistent with global tourism trends, thereby contributing to long-term resilience. Ghana can guarantee the sector's longevity in a global landscape that is constantly changing by establishing a cohesive digital strategy that maintains its prominent position on the global tourism map.

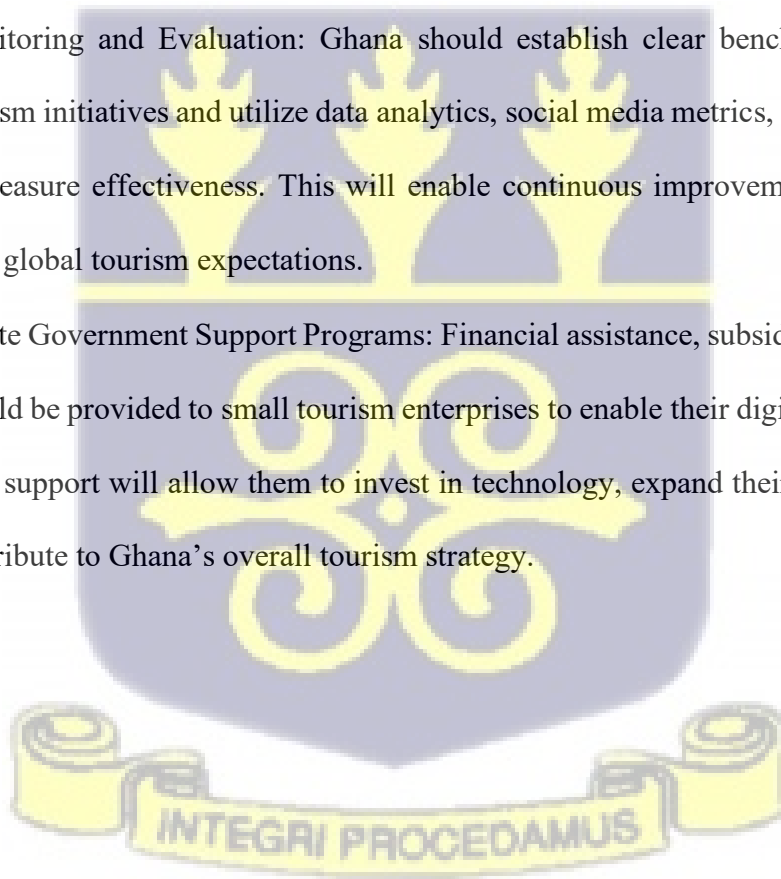
5.3 Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the study proposes the following recommendations to guide Ghana in leveraging digital diplomacy for tourism promotion:

- **Invest in Digital Infrastructure and Literacy:** The government should prioritize improving internet connectivity, especially in rural areas, to enable wider participation in digital tourism. Additionally, digital literacy training for tourism stakeholders is essential for the effective use of social media and digital platforms.
- **Strengthen Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborations between government agencies, tech companies, and tourism-related enterprises are essential for resource sharing, capacity building, and co-financing digital tourism projects. These partnerships can support the creation of high-quality content and digital marketing campaigns.
- **Develop Engaging Virtual Experiences:** To maintain global engagement, Ghana should invest in high-quality virtual tours, live-streamed events, and interactive online

content. This will help showcase the country's natural beauty and cultural richness to potential visitors.

- **Leverage Social Media and Influencers:** Ghana's tourism authorities should utilize social media platforms strategically and partner with international influencers to broaden the country's reach, particularly to younger demographics interested in cultural and eco-tourism.
- **Establish a Comprehensive Digital Diplomacy Strategy:** A robust strategy incorporating virtual experiences, social media, influencer marketing, and analytics is recommended to ensure a consistent, effective digital tourism strategy. This framework should be adaptable to changing trends and audience preferences.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Ghana should establish clear benchmarks for digital tourism initiatives and utilize data analytics, social media metrics, and visitor surveys to measure effectiveness. This will enable continuous improvement and alignment with global tourism expectations.
- **Create Government Support Programs:** Financial assistance, subsidies, and incentives should be provided to small tourism enterprises to enable their digital transformation. This support will allow them to invest in technology, expand their digital reach, and contribute to Ghana's overall tourism strategy.



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