

## **DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND TOURISM DESTINATION MARKETING IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates how digital communication technologies contribute to the effective marketing of tourism destinations in Cross River State, Nigeria. Drawing from contemporary literature on information and communication technologies (ICTs) and tourism marketing, the study positions digital communication as a critical strategic resource for enhancing destination awareness, stimulating tourist patronage, and achieving sustainable competitive advantage. Building on insights from relevant empirical and theoretical works, the study proposes a testable framework for ICT-enabled tourism marketing within a developing economy context. A survey research design was adopted, while data were analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. The findings demonstrate that digital communication plays a significant role in promoting tourist attractions in Calabar, leading to improved tourist satisfaction. In addition, the results reveal a strong association between digital communication and the sustainable competitive advantage of tourism destinations in the study area.

**Keywords:** *Digital Communication; Information and Communication Technology; Tourism Marketing; Tourist Patronage; Sustainable Competitive Advantage.*

### **1.1 Introduction**

Tourism is globally recognized as one of the most rapidly expanding service industries, with substantial contributions to employment creation, infrastructural development, and foreign exchange generation (UNWTO, 2020; Buhalis, 2019). As a multifaceted sector, tourism encompasses transportation, accommodation, cultural activities, entertainment services, and information provision. With the emergence of the information society, tourism has increasingly evolved into an information-driven industry, where digital communication technologies have become indispensable to destination marketing and competitive positioning (Gretzel et al., 2016).

The successful marketing of tourism products largely depends on trust, access to accurate information, and effective communication channels. Consequently, tourism marketing requires the development of clearly defined products, extensive distribution networks, and value-adding information chains (Werthner & Klein, 1999). Contemporary market dynamics

further underscore tourism's reliance on ICT, given its capacity to reshape business operations, marketing strategies, and consumer engagement. As such, ICT has become a fundamental driver of performance within the modern tourism industry.

Cross River State, widely regarded as Nigeria's tourism capital, hosts numerous natural and cultural attractions. In recent years, flagship events such as the Calabar Carnival have gained national and international prominence, stimulating increased consumption of tourism products in the State. Modern tourists increasingly seek comprehensive digital information to support informed travel decisions. Given the centrality of ICT in this process, this study critically examines the extent to which digital communication influences the marketing of tourism destinations in Cross River State.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Despite its reputation as a leading tourism destination in Nigeria, Cross River State's tourism sector has not translated its potential into substantial foreign exchange earnings. A major contributing factor is the limited global awareness of the State's tourism assets among prospective tourists (Esu et al., 2011). This challenge appears to stem largely from ineffective information dissemination and inadequate digital marketing strategies. Consequently, insufficient promotion of tourism destinations has constrained tourist inflow.

Furthermore, the existing media environment may not be sufficiently structured to provide tourism operators with timely, credible, and interactive marketing information capable of stimulating engagement. Equally concerning is the apparent inadequacy of ICT infrastructure and digital tools, which are essential for contemporary tourism marketing (Shanker, 2008; Bethapudi, 2013; Petti & Passiante, 2009). This study, therefore, seeks to explore how existing gaps between digital communication practices and tourism destination marketing in Cross River State can be effectively addressed.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of the study include to:

1. assess the relationship between digital communication and marketing of tourist attractions in Cross River State, Nigeria.
2. evaluate the extent digital communication contributes to sustainable competitive advantage of tourism destinations in Cross River State, Nigeria.
3. examine the extent multimedia information enhances awareness of tourist destinations in Cross River State, Nigeria.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

To give direction to the study, the following research questions were posed:

1. Is there a significant relationship between digital communication and marketing of tourist attractions in Cross River State?
2. Do digital communications contribute significantly to sustainable competitive advantage of tourism destinations in Cross River State?
3. To what extent do digital multimedia application enhance awareness/sensitization about tourist destinations in Cross River State?

## **1.4 Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between digital communication and marketing of tourist attraction in Cross River State.

2. Do digital communications do not contribute significantly to sustainable competitive advantage of tourism destinations in Cross River State.
3. Digital multimedia applications do not significantly enhance awareness/sensitization about tourist destinations in Cross River State.

## **1.6 Literature Review**

### **1.6.1 Concept of Tourism**

Tourism is predominantly a service-oriented industry involving the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their usual environment for leisure, business, or other purposes. Unlike manufacturing sectors, tourism does not produce tangible goods but delivers experiential value through coordinated services such as transportation, accommodation, catering, and recreation (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2017). Scholars emphasize that tourism contributes to regional development by stimulating infrastructure expansion and socio-cultural exchange, while generating income without depleting national resources (UNWTO, 2020).

### **1.6.2 Tourism as an Information-Intensive Industry**

Tourism products are largely intangible and cannot be evaluated prior to consumption, creating information asymmetry between destinations and potential tourists. This characteristic positions tourism as a highly information-dependent industry, where decision-making relies heavily on pre-travel information (Xiang, Magnini, & Fesenmaier, 2019). Digital communication platforms reduce uncertainty by providing timely, credible, and interactive destination information, thereby shaping tourist perceptions and choices (Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2017).

### **1.6.3 Digital Communication and Tourism Marketing**

Digital communication encompasses internet technologies, social media platforms, multimedia applications, and online information systems used to create, distribute, and exchange information. In tourism marketing, these tools enhance destination visibility, facilitate engagement, and enable direct interaction between tourists and destination managers (Buhalis, 2019). Empirical studies indicate that social media and multimedia content significantly influence destination image formation and travel intentions, particularly among younger and international tourists (Gretzel et al., 2016).

### **1.6.4 ICT and Competitive Advantage in Tourism**

The adoption of ICT provides tourism destinations with opportunities to achieve sustainable competitive advantage through cost reduction, service quality enhancement, and market differentiation. ICT-enabled marketing allows destinations to target niche markets, personalize experiences, and strengthen consumer trust (Petti & Passiante, 2018). In developing economies, ICT adoption reduces dependence on traditional intermediaries and enhances global market access (UNWTO, 2020).

### **1.6.5 Conceptual Framework and Model Specification**

The study conceptualizes digital communication as a latent construct measured by internet facilities, social media usage, multimedia applications, and online information systems.

Tourism marketing outcomes—awareness, tourist patronage, and sustainable competitive advantage—constitute the dependent variables, while information accessibility, destination image, and consumer trust serve as mediating variables.

### 1.7 Methodology

A cross-sectional survey design is used in the study. The sampling frame targeted tourists and tourism stakeholders across selected destinations in Cross River State. Data collection involved the use of structured questionnaires. The data generated were presented on a five-point Likert scale frequency. Data analytical techniques included descriptive statistics, simple linear regression, and structural equation modeling (SEM).

### 1.8 Data Analysis

The data analysis was on a regression-based and SEM-compatible interpretation of the relationships among the study variables. Based on the conceptual framework, digital communication is treated as a latent independent construct, while tourism marketing outcomes (marketing effectiveness, patronage, awareness, and competitive advantage) are treated as endogenous variables.

#### 1.8.1 Measurement Model

From the response items reflected in the collated data, the following latent constructs empirically supported the independent variables (IV) thus:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Digital Communication (DC) was measured by: Communication technology usage, Online advertising and promotion, Transaction facilitation, Customer relationship management, and Destination identification and development.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Internet Facilities (IF) were measured by: Tourist guidance and information access, Interest stimulation, and Destination goal achievement.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** Multimedia Information (MMI) was measured by: Awareness creation, Enlightenment on destinations, and Participation encouragement.

While the dependent variable (DV): Tourism Marketing Outcomes (TMO) was measured by: Marketing of tourist attractions, Tourist patronage, Sensitization/awareness, and Sustainable competitive advantage.

The results reveal a high level of agreement across items, indicating strong construct validity and justify aggregation into composite indices suitable for regression or SEM analysis.

#### 1.8.2 Simple Linear Regression Results

Model	Predictor Variable	Dependent Variable	$\beta$ (Std.)	R <sup>2</sup>	F-value	p-value	Decision
1	Digital Communication	Marketing of Tourist Attractions	0.528	0.279	37.87	<0.001	Significant
2	Digital Communication	Sustainable Competitive Advantage	0.618	0.382	60.60	<0.001	Significant
3	Internet Facilities	Tourist Patronage	0.957	0.916	1068.57	<0.001	Significant
4	Multimedia Information	Tourism Sensitization	0.227	0.052	5.36	0.023	Not Significant (at 1%)

## Interpretation of Results

### Model 1: Digital Communication and Marketing of Tourist Attractions

The regression analysis shows that digital communication has a positive and statistically significant effect on the marketing of tourist attractions ( $\beta = 0.528$ ,  $R^2 = 0.279$ ,  $F = 37.87$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that approximately 27.9% of the variance in tourism marketing effectiveness is explained by digital communication practices.

### Model 2: Digital Communication and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Results reveal a strong predictive effect of digital communication on sustainable competitive advantage ( $\beta = 0.618$ ,  $R^2 = 0.382$ ,  $F = 60.60$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This implies that digital communication accounts for 38.2% of the variation in the competitive positioning of tourism destinations in Cross River State.

### Model 3: Internet Facilities and Tourist Patronage

Internet facilities demonstrate an extremely strong and significant influence on tourist patronage ( $\beta = 0.957$ ,  $R^2 = 0.916$ ,  $F = 1068.57$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The model explains 91.6% of the variance in tourist patronage, underscoring the central role of internet-enabled access in tourism participation.

### Model 4: Multimedia Information and Tourism Sensitization

Although multimedia information shows a **positive coefficient**, its explanatory power is weak ( $\beta = 0.227$ ,  $R^2 = 0.052$ ,  $F = 5.36$ ,  $p = 0.023$ ). The effect is **not significant at the 1% level**, indicating that multimedia information alone does not substantially predict tourism sensitization.

### 1.8.3 Structural Equation Model Specification

Based on the hypotheses tested, the implied structural equations is expressed as:

#### Model 1: Tourism Marketing Effectiveness

$$TMA = \beta_1 DC + \varepsilon_1$$

#### Model 2: Sustainable Competitive Advantage

$$SCA = \beta_2 DC + \varepsilon_2$$

#### Model 3: Tourist Patronage

$$TP = \beta_3 IF + \varepsilon_3$$

#### Model 4: Tourism Sensitization

$$TS = \beta_4 MMI + \varepsilon_4$$

Where:

DC = Digital Communication

IF = Internet Facilities

MMI = Multimedia Information

$\varepsilon$  = Error term

### 1.8.3 Regression / SEM Path Results Interpretation

#### Test of Hypothesis 1: Digital Communication → Marketing of Tourist Attractions:

The correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.528$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) indicates a moderate and positive standardized effect, suggesting that improvements in digital communication significantly enhance tourism marketing effectiveness. In a regression or SEM context, this implies that

digital communication is a statistically significant predictor of destination marketing performance.

Path supported that the result is Significant.

The null hypothesis is thus rejected, while the alternative hypothesis which states that: “There is a significant relationship between digital communication and marketing of tourist attraction in Cross River State” is accepted.

### **Test of Hypothesis 2: Digital Communication → Sustainable Competitive Advantage**

The result show that the relationship between digital communication and sustainable competitive advantage is strong and statistically significant ( $r = 0.618$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that digital communication capabilities contribute meaningfully to long-term competitiveness through differentiation, visibility, and operational efficiency.

The SEM Path supported that the result is Significant. The null hypothesis is thus rejected, while the alternative hypothesis which states that: “There is significant relationship between digital communication and sustainable competitive advantage of tourism destination” is accepted.

### **Test of Hypothesis 3: Internet Facilities → Tourist Patronage.**

The result reveals an extremely high coefficient ( $r = 0.957$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), which indicates a very strong predictive relationship, implying that access to internet facilities is a dominant driver of tourist patronage. In SEM terms, internet facilities exert a near-direct and substantial effect on patronage behavior.

The SEM Path supported that the result is highly significant. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis which states that: “There is a significant relationship between internet facilities and the increase of patronage of tourism destination” is accepted.

### **Test of Hypothesis 4: Multimedia Information → Tourism Sensitization.**

The result of the analysis indicate that the relationship between multimedia information and sensitization is weak and statistically insignificant at the 1% level ( $r = 0.227$ ,  $p = 0.023$ ). Although marginally significant at 5%, the effect size is small, indicating that multimedia usage alone does not strongly predict sensitization when compared to broader information access mechanisms.

The SEM Path is Weak and not supported. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted, which states that: “There is no significant relationship between media information and sensitization of tourism destination.”

## **1.9 Summary of Findings**

A summary of the findings indicate:

- i. That digital communication functions as a core exogenous driver of tourism marketing effectiveness and competitive advantage.
- ii. That internet facilities act as a critical operational pathway through which digital communication translates into actual tourist patronage.
- iii. That multimedia information plays a supportive but non-dominant role in sensitization, implying that information quality and accessibility may matter more than media integration.

### **1.10 Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the centrality of digital communication in enhancing tourism marketing outcomes and competitiveness in Cross River State. The significant positive relationship between digital communication and marketing of tourist attractions confirms the argument that tourism is an information-intensive industry where effective communication shapes destination visibility, image, and consumer decision-making (Xiang et al., 2019; Buhalis, 2019). By explaining nearly 28% of the variance in tourism marketing effectiveness, digital communication tools such as websites, social media, and online information systems emerge as critical mechanisms for bridging the information gap identified in the problem statement.

Similarly, the strong and significant effect of digital communication on sustainable competitive advantage aligns with contemporary tourism marketing literature, which emphasizes ICT-enabled differentiation, trust-building, and global market access as key drivers of destination competitiveness (Neuhofer et al., 2017; UNWTO, 2022). The result suggests that destinations in Cross River State that strategically deploy digital platforms are better positioned to achieve long-term visibility and relevance in an increasingly competitive tourism market.

The exceptionally high influence of internet facilities on tourist patronage further underscores the pivotal role of connectivity in tourism participation. This finding supports earlier studies which argue that access to reliable internet infrastructure directly influences travel planning, booking behavior, and destination choice, particularly among digitally savvy tourists (Gretzel et al., 2016; Xiang et al., 2019). For Cross River State, this implies that infrastructural ICT investment is not merely supportive but foundational to tourism growth.

Conversely, the weak and statistically insignificant effect of multimedia information on tourism sensitization suggests that multimedia content alone is insufficient to drive awareness without being embedded within broader, interactive, and accessible digital communication ecosystems. This finding resonates with recent scholarship that stresses integration, interactivity, and credibility—rather than content abundance—as determinants of effective digital tourism communication (Petti & Passiante, 2018; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019).

### **Recommendations**

1. The Cross River State tourism authorities should design and implement an integrated digital tourism marketing framework that strategically aligns websites, social media platforms, online advertising, and customer relationship management systems. This will strengthen destination visibility and directly enhance the marketing effectiveness of tourist attractions, as evidenced by the significant influence of digital communication.
2. The Cross River State Government should invest in reliable broadband infrastructure at major tourism sites, hotels, and event locations as essential tools for promoting tourism in the State.
3. Tourism firms in the State should adopt ICT-driven strategies such as online reservation systems, digital branding, and data-enabled decision-making to differentiate Cross River State destinations from competing states. Strategic use of digital communication will enhance long-term competitiveness and position the State more effectively in the global tourism market.
4. Tourism marketers should embed videos, images, and virtual tours within interactive and user-friendly digital platforms. Linking multimedia content with social media

engagement, search optimization, and feedback mechanisms can improve tourism services awareness and sensitization outcomes.

5. Government and relevant agencies should implement continuous training programs and supportive policies to improve digital skills among tourism operators and marketers.

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