



**LEVERAGING PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE
DOMESTIC TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF TOURIST SITES IN THE
GREATER ACCRA REGION.**

BY

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DECLARATION BY STUDENT –DISSERTATION

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original research and that, no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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This Dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of Dissertation laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication, UniMAC.

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ABSTRACT

Tourism plays a vital role in national development, yet domestic tourism in Ghana remains underdeveloped despite its potential to foster cultural appreciation, national unity, and economic inclusion. This study explores how public relations (PR) strategies can be leveraged to promote domestic tourism within the Greater Accra Region, focusing on selected tourist sites such as the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, Jamestown, and Shai Hills. Guided by Destination Image Theory (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991) and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), the research examines how communication strategies shape public perceptions and influence local participation in tourism.

A qualitative research design was adopted, employing semi-structured interviews conducted via phone with four PR officers and eight tour guides or site managers. Data were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. The findings reveal that while PR is recognized as a key promotional tool, its current application in Ghana's tourism sector remains largely one-directional, focusing on international audiences rather than local engagement. Domestic tourists often perceive heritage sites as elitist or foreign-oriented, reflecting weak affective connections and limited community involvement.

The study concludes that effective domestic tourism promotion requires a shift toward two-way symmetrical communication and culturally resonant storytelling that reflects local experiences and values. It recommends sustained, participatory PR strategies that integrate digital platforms, community dialogue, and localized narratives to reshape destination image and stimulate domestic participation.

By bridging theory and practice, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how strategic communication can transform domestic tourism into a catalyst for national pride, identity, and socio-economic development in Ghana.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty, whose grace and providence have been my foundation throughout this journey. I also dedicate this effort to my beloved Husband, **Joseph Selorm Coffie Ahiabenu**, for his steadfast support, and to my daughter, **Jonelle Dzidula Ahiabenu**, who will one day grow to become the great scholar she is meant to be.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

Abbreviation	Meaning
GTA	Ghana Tourism Authority
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
PR	Public Relations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
MESTI	Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology, and Innovation
MoTAC	Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

Tourism is globally acknowledged as one of the largest and fastest-growing sectors, contributing significantly to socio-economic development, cultural preservation, and national identity (UNWTO, 2020). Beyond international arrivals, domestic tourism has increasingly been recognized as a resilient and sustainable form of tourism that can buffer economies from external shocks such as political instability, pandemics, and fluctuating foreign arrivals (Rogerson & Letsie, 2013; Giddy & Webb, 2016). Domestic tourism encourages citizens to engage with their heritage, strengthens cultural pride, redistributes tourism revenues more equitably across regions, and fosters social cohesion. According to the UNWTO (2020), in many countries, domestic tourism accounts for the majority of travel activity, with over 75% of tourism spending generated internally. This makes domestic tourism not just an alternative to international markets but a central pillar for sustainable development.

In the African context, domestic tourism has long been overshadowed by international tourism, with national policies and campaigns typically targeting foreign visitors (Akama & Kieti, 2007). However, recent scholarship highlights the growing importance of cultivating local markets in response to global uncertainties such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted international mobility (Rogerson & Baum, 2020). In South

Africa, for example, the *Sho't Left* campaign repositioned domestic tourism by promoting affordability and accessibility, significantly increasing participation among lower- and middle-income groups (Rogerson, 2018). Similarly, in Kenya, domestic tourism initiatives tied to cultural festivals and school trips helped foster stronger emotional and cultural connections to heritage sites (Akama & Kieti, 2007). Despite these examples, challenges such as affordability, weak marketing, and limited awareness continue to constrain domestic tourism across much of the continent (Giddy & Webb, 2016).

Ghana shares many of these continental challenges while also presenting unique opportunities. The country is endowed with diverse cultural, historical, and natural attractions ranging from the UNESCO-listed forts and castles of the coast to wildlife sanctuaries such as Shai Hills and Mole National Park. The Greater Accra Region, in particular, hosts some of the nation's most iconic heritage sites, including the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, National Museum of Ghana, and Chinkanda Falls. These sites embody critical aspects of Ghana's political history, cultural identity, and urban vibrancy. However, despite this rich portfolio, domestic tourism remains underdeveloped, with relatively low patronage among Ghanaian residents (Asiedu, 2016; Ankomah & Dwamena, 2018). The Ghana Tourism Authority (2022) has repeatedly emphasized domestic tourism's potential as a growth driver, yet reports reveal limited local participation and weak integration of domestic-focused strategies.

A central issue lies in how tourism is communicated and promoted within Ghana. Major campaigns such as *See Ghana, Eat Ghana, Wear Ghana, Feel Ghana* and the internationally acclaimed *Year of Return 2019* have successfully raised global visibility

and attracted international audiences (Adu-Ampong & Teye, 2020). However, these initiatives were primarily designed with foreign audiences in mind, often neglecting the motivations, cultural values, and perceptions of local residents. Recent studies have found that communication strategies in Ghana's tourism promotion remain highly top-down and externally oriented, failing to emotionally connect with domestic audiences (Boakyee & Mintah, 2023; Appiah & Mensah, 2022). As a result, many residents continue to perceive local attractions as "for foreigners" or irrelevant to their lived experiences (Ankomah & Dwamena, 2018). This disconnect weakens domestic tourism uptake despite favorable accessibility.

Public relations (PR) provides a promising framework for addressing this gap. Unlike advertising, PR emphasizes strategic storytelling, reputation management, and relationship-building with stakeholders (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). PR in tourism involves more than disseminating promotional messages; it is about co-creating narratives with communities, shaping affective connections to destinations, and fostering trust through engagement (Avraham & Ketter, 2017). Globally, PR has been applied to reposition destinations, manage crises, and reshape public perceptions (Mihalič, 2000). In South Africa, the integration of community voices into domestic tourism campaigns helped transform tourism into a relatable, everyday activity (Rogerson, 2018). Yet in Ghana, PR strategies have been disproportionately outward-looking, with campaigns largely focused on branding the country to attract international visitors, particularly diasporan audiences (Adu-Ampong & Teye, 2020; Boakyee & Mintah, 2023).

This externally oriented communication overlooks the importance of destination image for domestic audiences. Destination Image Theory (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) suggests that individuals' perceptions of destinations are shaped by both cognitive elements (knowledge, beliefs) and affective elements (emotions, feelings). If Ghanaians perceive heritage sites as elitist, commercialized, or irrelevant, they are unlikely to visit, regardless of physical accessibility. Conversely, if sites are framed as symbols of national pride, joy, and belonging, domestic tourism participation is likely to increase. Recent empirical work by Darko and Boateng (2022) emphasizes that tourism communication in Ghana must move beyond surface-level promotion to foster deeper emotional resonance among residents.

Alongside destination image, the Excellence Theory of Public Relations (Grunig et al., 2002) provides insights into how communication processes should be managed. The theory stresses two-way symmetrical communication, where organizations not only transmit messages but also engage in dialogue with stakeholders, incorporating feedback into strategy. In the Ghanaian tourism context, this means involving residents in shaping tourism narratives, listening to their concerns, and co-creating campaigns that reflect their identities and values. However, current PR strategies in Ghana often adopt one-way or asymmetrical approaches, limiting their effectiveness in building sustainable domestic tourism engagement (Appiah & Mensah, 2022; Boakye & Mintah, 2023).

The underdevelopment of domestic tourism in Ghana is thus not merely an infrastructural or economic problem but a communication challenge. Ineffective messaging, one-dimensional branding, and the neglect of domestic audiences in PR strategies significantly

shape public perceptions and behaviors (Boakye & Mintah, 2023; Adu-Ampong & Teye, 2020). Theoretically, few studies in Ghana have applied communication frameworks such as Destination Image Theory or Excellence Theory to analyze domestic tourism promotion. Practically, campaigns remain short-lived, externally focused, and lacking in localization or participatory design.

Given these challenges, this study seeks to explore how PR strategies can be leveraged to promote domestic tourism in the Greater Accra Region. By situating the inquiry within the frameworks of Destination Image Theory and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations, the study aims to uncover both the perceptual barriers that prevent residents from engaging with nearby sites and the communication processes that can address these barriers. Through a qualitative case study approach, it will capture the perspectives of local residents and tourism communication practitioners, offering insights into how PR can be reoriented to serve domestic markets. Ultimately, this research contributes to national conversations on tourism development by highlighting how inclusive, culturally resonant, and participatory communication strategies can enhance domestic tourism, thereby advancing Ghana's socio-economic and cultural development goals.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Tourism is widely regarded as a strategic driver of socio-economic development, particularly in countries across the Global South where it contributes to employment creation, cultural preservation, and national income (UNWTO, 2020). Yet, while

international arrivals have long dominated tourism policy in Ghana, domestic tourism remains underdeveloped. Even in the Greater Accra Region, home to iconic sites such as the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, the National Museum of Ghana, and Chinku Falls, local participation remains strikingly low (Asiedu, 2016; Ankomah & Dwamena, 2018). This paradox reflects a deeper structural and communicative problem: tourism promotion in Ghana has historically emphasized international markets at the expense of domestic engagement (Adu-Ampong & Teye, 2020).

Globally, domestic tourism has proven to be more resilient than international markets, particularly during times of crisis. For instance, in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis and during the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic tourism played a critical role in sustaining economies where international travel collapsed (Rogerson & Baum, 2020; Gössling et al., 2021). Countries that strategically invested in domestic tourism through targeted communication campaigns, such as South Africa's *Sho't Left* or Kenya's community-based initiatives, were better positioned to mitigate external shocks and stimulate local travel demand (Rogerson, 2018; Akama & Kieti, 2007). Ghana, however, has not maximized this potential. Despite launching campaigns such as *See Ghana, Eat Ghana, Wear Ghana, Feel Ghana* and *The Year of Return 2019*, participation by Ghanaian residents has remained modest, particularly beyond event-driven spikes (Appiah & Mensah, 2022).

A growing body of research highlights that this underutilization cannot be explained solely by infrastructural constraints or affordability concerns. While cost and accessibility play roles, ineffective communication and weak destination branding exert significant influence

on public perceptions (Boakye & Mintah, 2023; Adu-Ampong & Teye, 2020). Many Ghanaians perceive heritage and cultural sites as elitist, irrelevant, or designed for foreigners (Ankomah & Dwamena, 2018). The persistence of these perceptions reflects shortcomings in the way tourism is framed and promoted domestically. PR strategies in Ghana have predominantly been one-directional, prioritizing external audiences and failing to foster emotional resonance among local populations (Appiah & Mensah, 2022; Boakye & Mintah, 2023).

A review of the literature reveals four critical gaps that shape this problem.

The **issue gap** lies in the overemphasis on international tourism markets within Ghanaian PR strategies. Campaigns such as *The Year of Return* were celebrated internationally for attracting diasporan audiences, but they did little to cultivate domestic participation. Adu-Ampong and Teye (2020) contend that this externally oriented focus sidelines Ghanaians in their own tourism narrative, reinforcing perceptions that attractions are “for others.” Consequently, domestic tourism remains a missed opportunity for economic inclusion and cultural pride.

The **contextual gap** concerns the limited scholarly attention to domestic tourism in the Greater Accra Region, despite its prominence as Ghana’s tourism hub. Most research and policy discussions focus on international arrivals or nationwide statistics, leaving the lived experiences and perceptions of Accra residents underexplored (Asiedu, 2016). Ankomah and Dwamena (2018) observe that residents often view local sites with indifference, but few qualitative studies have examined why these perceptions persist. This gap constrains the development of communication strategies tailored to urban domestic audiences.

The **methodological gap** arises from the predominance of quantitative or policy-driven research approaches in Ghanaian tourism studies. While these provide valuable macro-level insights, they often overlook the complex social and emotional factors shaping domestic tourism behavior. Few studies employ qualitative methods to capture the voices, perceptions, and motivations of local residents in relation to PR and tourism communication (Darko & Boateng, 2022). This methodological gap limits understanding of how communication practices can be restructured to resonate with domestic audiences.

The **theoretical gap** reflects the underuse of communication or PR theories such as Destination Image Theory (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991) and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations (Grunig et al., 2002) in Ghanaian tourism scholarship. The absence of theoretical grounding weakens researchers' ability to explain how perceptions of destinations are formed and how communication processes influence them. By overlooking these frameworks, past research has tended to treat domestic tourism challenges as logistical or economic, neglecting the strategic communicative dimensions that shape behavior (Appiah & Mensah, 2022).

These interconnected gaps reveal that Ghana's domestic tourism challenge is not only infrastructural but also communicative. Campaigns frequently fail to localize narratives, foster two-way engagement, or embed cultural values that resonate with domestic audiences. In the Greater Accra Region, where accessibility is less of a constraint, the persistence of low participation underscores the need to rethink PR strategies.

Accordingly, this study investigates how public relations can be leveraged to reshape domestic tourism narratives in Greater Accra. By exploring residents' perceptions and

assessing current PR practices, it identifies strategies for constructing culturally relevant, participatory, and sustainable communication approaches. In doing so, the study addresses practical gaps in tourism promotion while contributing to theoretical and methodological advances in tourism communication research in Ghana.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to explore how public relations strategies can be leveraged to enhance the destination image of tourist sites and promote domestic tourism among residents of the Greater Accra Region.

The specific objectives are:

- To examine how local residents perceive selected tourist sites in the Greater Accra Region.
- To investigate the role of public relations strategies in shaping destination image and influencing domestic tourism behavior.
- To explore the extent to which current PR strategies incorporate culturally relevant messaging that resonates with domestic audiences.

1.4 Research Questions

- How do residents in the Greater Accra Region perceive the image and appeal of nearby tourist sites?

- What role do public relations strategies play in shaping destination image and influencing domestic tourism decisions?
- To what extent do current PR campaigns reflect the cultural values and motivational factors important to domestic tourists?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant both theoretically and practically. From a theoretical standpoint, it contributes to scholarship on tourism communication by applying Destination Image Theory and the Excellence Theory of PR to the underexplored area of domestic tourism in Ghana. By bridging tourism studies with communication theories, it expands the analytical frameworks used to understand how perceptions and messaging influence tourism behavior.

Practically, the study provides insights for policymakers, tourism boards, PR practitioners, and site managers. It offers recommendations on how PR strategies can be localized, participatory, and culturally resonant, thereby enhancing domestic tourism uptake. Strengthening domestic tourism supports Ghana's broader goals of inclusive economic growth, cultural preservation, and national unity (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2022).

1.6 Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This study focuses on selected tourist sites in the Greater Accra Region, specifically the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, Chinku waterfalls and the National Museum of Ghana. It examines PR strategies employed to promote these sites and evaluates their impact on domestic audiences. The study adopts a qualitative case study approach, using interviews to gather perspectives from local residents and tourism communication practitioners.

The study is delimited to domestic tourism; international tourist behaviour and externally oriented campaigns fall outside its scope, except where they intersect with local perceptions. While the qualitative design allows for depth of analysis, findings may not be statistically generalizable across all of Ghana. Nonetheless, this approach captures nuanced insights that are often overlooked in survey-based research.

1.7 Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the research through its background, statement of the problem, research objectives and questions, significance, scope, and delimitations. Chapter Two presents a comprehensive review of relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. Chapter Three details the research methodology, including design, data collection, and ethical considerations. Chapter Four presents and discusses the findings in relation to existing literature and theory. Chapter Five concludes with a summary of findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the study by situating domestic tourism within Ghana's development agenda and emphasizing the critical role of PR in bridging communication gaps. It outlined the statement of the problem using four gaps, issue, contextual, methodological, and theoretical, that justify the need for this research. The chapter also presented the study's objectives, research questions, significance, scope, and organization. Collectively, these elements provide the foundation for examining how PR strategies can be used to enhance destination image and promote domestic tourism in Greater Accra.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The literature review serves as the intellectual backbone of any research by positioning the study within broader academic and professional discourse. It provides the opportunity to synthesize what has been written, identify conceptual and empirical gaps, and justify the theoretical lens chosen for analysis. In tourism research, and particularly within the Ghanaian context, the role of communication and public relations in shaping domestic tourism participation remains underexplored. While global scholarship on tourism emphasizes international arrivals as a key economic driver, there has been a growing shift toward recognizing the importance of domestic tourism as a resilient and sustainable strategy (UNWTO, 2020; Rogerson & Letsie, 2013; Giddy & Webb, 2016).

This chapter begins by defining key terms relevant to the study, including public relations, tourism, domestic tourism, destination image, and tourism promotion. It then reviews related literature that provides global, continental, and Ghanaian perspectives on the role of public relations in promoting domestic tourism. The discussion integrates theoretical frameworks namely the Destination Image Theory (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig et al., 2002) to establish the conceptual foundation of the study. Finally, the chapter highlights the relevance of these theories to the Ghanaian tourism context, demonstrating

how they illuminate the role of communication in shaping perceptions of tourist sites in the Greater Accra Region.

By organizing the review in this way, the chapter situates the current research within existing knowledge while underscoring the necessity of a communication-centered approach to domestic tourism development in Ghana.

2.1 Definition of Key Terms

2.1.1 Public Relations

Public relations (PR) is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). It involves planned, sustained efforts to establish goodwill and mutual understanding through storytelling, media relations, stakeholder engagement, and reputation management (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006). In the tourism sector, PR differs from advertising because it focuses on building long-term relationships rather than short-term promotional gains. Scholars note that PR in tourism is central to destination branding and reputation management, as it shapes narratives that influence both domestic and international visitors (Avraham & Ketter, 2017; Pike & Page, 2014).

In Ghana, PR strategies in tourism have traditionally targeted international markets through high-profile campaigns such as *The Year of Return 2019* (Adu-Ampong & Teye, 2020). However, PR also holds the potential to reshape domestic tourism by crafting culturally

resonant narratives, engaging communities, and aligning communication with national identity and pride (Appiah & Mensah, 2022).

2.1.2 Tourism

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020) defines tourism as the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, or other purposes. Pike and Page (2014) emphasize that tourism functions not only as an economic sector but also as a socio-cultural phenomenon contributing to national identity, heritage preservation, and community development.

Within Ghana, tourism is recognized as a key pillar of socio-economic transformation, as reflected in the *Ghana Tourism Development Plan* and annual reports of the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA, 2022). These policies highlight tourism's role in employment creation, cultural preservation, and foreign exchange earnings. Yet, despite its policy importance, Ghana's tourism discourse remains heavily oriented toward international arrivals, with domestic tourism receiving comparatively limited attention (Adu-Ampong & Teye, 2020).

2.1.3 Domestic Tourism

Domestic tourism refers to residents traveling within their own country for leisure, cultural, or business purposes (UNWTO, 2020). It has been widely acknowledged as more sustainable and resilient than international tourism because it is less vulnerable to external shocks such as pandemics and global recessions (Rogerson & Letsie, 2013; Rogerson &

Baum, 2020). Across Africa, domestic tourism is gaining recognition for its ability to stimulate local economies, create jobs, and strengthen cultural pride (Giddy & Webb, 2016; Rogerson, 2018).

In Ghana, Asiedu (2016) and Ankomah and Dwamena (2018) highlight that while domestic tourism has been prioritized in policy frameworks, implementation remains weak. Barriers include low awareness of attractions, perceptions of elitism around certain sites, and weak communication that excludes local voices. Effective PR strategies that emphasize cultural pride and national belonging are therefore essential for strengthening domestic tourism engagement (Boakye & Mintah, 2023).

2.1.4 Destination Image

Destination image refers to the perceptions, beliefs, and emotions individuals associate with a place (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Baloglu and McCleary (1999) describe it as comprising both cognitive components (knowledge and beliefs) and affective components (feelings and emotional evaluations). Tasci and Gartner (2007) later expanded this conceptualization, noting that destination image is socially constructed through media exposure, marketing communication, and personal experiences.

In the Ghanaian context, domestic destination images of sites such as the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum and Jamestown are often underdeveloped or misaligned with residents' lived experiences (Ankomah & Dwamena, 2018). Public relations, through storytelling and community engagement, can strategically influence these perceptions by aligning tourism

narratives with national identity and emotional resonance (Avraham & Ketter, 2017; Darko & Boateng, 2022).

2.1.5 Tourism Promotion

Tourism promotion encompasses all communication activities designed to create awareness, interest, and visitation for destinations (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2017). It integrates public relations, advertising, media partnerships, event sponsorships, and digital marketing. Kotler et al. (2017) emphasize that effective tourism promotion aligns with the motivations, values, and cultural context of its target audiences.

In Ghana, however, promotional campaigns such as *See Ghana, Eat Ghana, Wear Ghana, Feel Ghana* have been critiqued for their limited emotional depth and overreliance on external validation (Adu-Ampong & Teye, 2020; Appiah & Mensah, 2022). PR-driven approaches that integrate cultural storytelling and community involvement can therefore enhance authenticity and foster greater domestic tourism participation (Boakye & Mintah, 2023).

2.2 Review of Related Literature

2.2.1 Global Perspectives on Domestic Tourism and Public Relations

Over the last two decades, domestic tourism has become a major focus in tourism scholarship and policy due to its economic resilience and role in sustaining local industries during periods of global uncertainty. The COVID-19 pandemic particularly exposed the vulnerability of destinations dependent on international arrivals and underscored the

stabilizing influence of domestic travel (UNWTO, 2020; Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2021). Even before the pandemic, countries such as China, Australia, and the United States derived most of their tourism revenue from domestic markets (OECD, 2020).

Pike and Page (2014) emphasize that tourism must be understood not merely as an international exchange but as a multidimensional social and economic process rooted in local mobility and cultural participation. Similarly, Hall and Page (2019) maintain that domestic tourism fosters national identity and social cohesion by encouraging citizens to engage with their heritage.

From a communication standpoint, public relations (PR) and destination branding play central roles in shaping domestic tourism behavior. Avraham and Ketter (2017) argue that storytelling, image repair, and culturally sensitive narratives are essential tools in influencing perceptions of tourism sites. Cultural branding initiatives such as Japan's *Cool Japan* and South Korea's *Hallyu (Korean Wave)* have demonstrated how PR and media strategies can stimulate both international and domestic engagement (Jin, 2018). These global cases illustrate that when PR aligns with cultural identity and emotion, domestic tourism becomes a catalyst for both economic growth and national pride.

2.2.2 Domestic Tourism in Africa

In the African context, domestic tourism has gained increasing attention as a pathway for economic diversification and inclusive growth (Rogerson & Letsie, 2013). Historically, African nations prioritized foreign arrivals, but recent crises have redirected attention toward the domestic market (Rogerson & Baum, 2020).

In South Africa, the *Sho't Left* campaign one of the continent's most studied PR initiatives successfully repositioned domestic tourism as affordable and accessible to all. Rogerson (2018) observes that by using relatable storytelling and community engagement, the campaign redefined tourism as an activity for everyday citizens rather than an elite pursuit. Similarly, Kenya's tourism board used PR-driven communication tied to cultural festivals and school trips to encourage national participation and strengthen emotional bonds with local destinations (Akama & Kieti, 2007).

In contrast, Nigeria's domestic tourism sector remains constrained by inadequate marketing and weak communication frameworks. Adebayo and Iweka (2014) note that ineffective destination branding and inconsistent narratives have limited citizens' perceptions of safety and cultural relevance. Across these African examples, a consistent pattern emerges: domestic tourism success depends on culturally grounded, participatory PR strategies that build emotional connection and trust within local markets.

2.2.3 Public Relations and Destination Branding

The intersection between public relations and destination branding is foundational to tourism communication. Echtner and Ritchie (1991) conceptualize destination image as a combination of functional attributes and psychological meanings that together influence travel behavior. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) extend this model by identifying cognitive (beliefs and knowledge) and affective (feelings and emotions) components of image formation.

Avraham and Ketter (2017) highlight PR's critical role in this process through strategic storytelling and stakeholder engagement, which build trust and credibility beyond traditional advertising. PR thus becomes instrumental in shaping both the tangible and symbolic dimensions of destination branding.

Empirical evidence supports this position. Avraham (2015) demonstrates how Israel strategically used PR to shift global and domestic perceptions by emphasizing cultural identity and heritage despite political constraints. Similarly, García, Gómez, and Molina (2012) found that regional PR campaigns in Spain successfully increased domestic visitation by framing local gastronomy and heritage as expressions of community pride. These studies confirm that authentic, narrative-driven communication enhances destination competitiveness and citizen engagement.

2.2.4 Domestic Tourism in Ghana

Ghana's tourism development has historically emphasized international and diaspora markets, often at the expense of domestic participation. The *Year of Return 2019* exemplified this international focus, generating global visibility and economic gains but failing to stimulate sustained domestic tourism (Adu-Ampong & Teye, 2020).

Asiedu (2016) observes that despite policy recognition of domestic tourism's potential, implementation remains inconsistent. Likewise, Ankomah and Dwamena (2018) report that many Ghanaians perceive heritage attractions as "for foreigners," revealing a communication gap in how tourism narratives are localized. More recent studies emphasize

that accessibility alone does not guarantee participation; effective message framing and cultural resonance are crucial for motivating local travelers (Boakye & Mintah, 2023).

The Greater Accra Region illustrates this paradox: it houses key attractions such as the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, Jamestown Lighthouse, and Shai Hills Resource Reserve, yet domestic visitation remains low. Scholars argue that this stems from top-down PR approaches that fail to engage communities or reflect local identity in promotional messaging (Appiah & Mensah, 2022).

2.2.5 Public Relations Campaigns in Ghana and Their Shortcomings

Ghana's major tourism campaigns *See Ghana, Eat Ghana, Wear Ghana, Feel Ghana* and *December in GH* have achieved significant publicity but limited sustainability. Appiah and Mensah (2022) contend that these initiatives were largely event-driven, producing temporary spikes in interest rather than long-term behavior change. Amoako and Asante (2020) further note that campaigns seldom include participatory communication processes that allow feedback or community input.

Digital communication, now central to tourism branding worldwide, also remains underutilized. Darko and Boateng (2022) find that Ghana's tourism authorities inconsistently use social media, leading to fragmented messaging and limited reach among youth audiences. This contrasts sharply with trends in other regions, where digital PR fosters interactive engagement and user-generated storytelling.

According to the Excellence Theory of Public Relations (Grunig et al., 2002), effective PR requires two-way symmetrical communication, where organizations actively listen to stakeholders and adapt strategies based on feedback. In Ghana, however, PR practice remains predominantly one-directional, reflecting institutional hierarchies rather than participatory collaboration (Appiah & Mensah, 2022). Such asymmetry weakens message authenticity and the potential for domestic tourism to thrive as a shared cultural experience.

2.2.6 Identified Gaps

The review of existing literature reveals several interrelated gaps that justify this study.

First, Ghana's tourism communication strategies remain heavily oriented toward international markets, sidelining domestic audiences and reinforcing perceptions that local sites are "for outsiders" (Adu-Ampong & Teye, 2020).

Second, there is a deficiency in localized storytelling. Campaign narratives often fail to integrate Ghanaian cultural symbols, idioms, and community values, reducing emotional connection with residents (Appiah & Mensah, 2022).

Third, most PR efforts lack long-term strategic direction. Initiatives like the *Year of Return* achieved visibility but were not sustained through continuous engagement or follow-up programs (Adu-Ampong & Teye, 2020).

Fourth, digital media integration in tourism promotion remains limited, even though digital communication is vital for reaching younger demographics and facilitating two-way engagement (Darko & Boateng, 2022).

Finally, there is insufficient community participation in the design and delivery of PR campaigns. Few initiatives involve residents or local stakeholders in message creation, undermining authenticity and inclusivity (Ankomah & Dwamena, 2018).

Together, these gaps demonstrate that Ghana's domestic tourism challenge is not merely economic or infrastructural but fundamentally communicative. This study therefore investigates how PR can be leveraged to promote domestic tourism in the Greater Accra Region through culturally resonant, participatory, and sustainable strategies.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The selection of theories is crucial in anchoring a study within established academic paradigms, as theories provide the conceptual foundation that enables systematic interpretation of data while ensuring analytical rigor. For this research, two theoretical lenses are employed: Destination Image Theory (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, et. al., 2002). These frameworks are particularly well-suited for investigating the dynamics of communication strategies and their influence on the perceptions and behaviors of domestic tourists in Ghana's Greater Accra Region. Taken together, the theories offer

complementary insights into both the content and process of public relations in the promotion of tourism.

2.3.1 Destination Image Theory

Destination Image Theory has been widely adopted in tourism research as a framework for understanding how individuals form perceptions of destinations and how these perceptions, in turn, shape travel decisions. Echtner and Ritchie (1991) conceptualized destination image as a multidimensional construct encompassing both functional or cognitive components, such as knowledge and beliefs about attractions, and psychological or affective components, such as emotions and feelings associated with a destination. Building on this, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) proposed that image formation results from the interaction between external stimuli, such as promotional campaigns, media coverage, and word-of-mouth communication, and internal factors, including personal values, motivations, and prior experiences.

A central insight from Destination Image Theory is that image is not merely a neutral reflection of reality but a socially constructed perception. Tasci and Gartner (2007) emphasize that destination image evolves through ongoing interaction between individuals and symbolic representations of a place, which are disseminated through advertisements, stories, cultural narratives, and media portrayals. This underscores the strategic role of public relations in shaping, maintaining, and reconstructing perceptions of tourist sites.

Empirical applications of the theory across the globe demonstrate its relevance. Beerli and Martín (2004), for example, showed that Spanish domestic tourists were highly influenced

by affective associations linked to heritage, identity, and gastronomy. Similarly, Prayag and Ryan (2012) found in New Zealand that domestic tourists were motivated by pride and belonging, cultivated through destination branding efforts. These findings illustrate the importance of emotional storytelling in influencing residents' travel choices.

Within Ghana, the application of Destination Image Theory is particularly significant given evidence that domestic audiences often perceive local attractions as elitist, foreign-oriented, or irrelevant to their everyday lives (Ankomah & Dwamena, 2018). Such perceptions contribute to low levels of domestic tourism participation. Public relations strategies that emphasize affective connections, for instance, framing sites like the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum or Jamestown not simply as tourist attractions but as symbols of national pride and cultural identity, may help reshape local perceptions and foster greater domestic engagement.

2.3.2 Excellence Theory of Public Relations

While Destination Image Theory helps to explain how perceptions are formed and influence behavior, the Excellence Theory of Public Relations provides a framework for understanding how organizations can most effectively manage communication processes to influence such perceptions. Developed initially by Grunig and Hunt (1984) and later refined by Grunig, et. al (2002), the Excellence Theory emphasizes the importance of two-way symmetrical communication, a model in which organizations and their publics engage in genuine dialogue, with mutual listening, feedback, and adaptation.

In contrast to one-way communication models that focus on dissemination or persuasion, the symmetrical approach advocates for balance between organizational goals and stakeholder interests. Within the broader framework, four models of public relations are identified: press agency or publicity, which prioritizes promotion; public information, which emphasizes one-way factual dissemination; two-way asymmetrical communication, where feedback is collected but mainly used to persuade publics without organizational adaptation; and two-way symmetrical communication, which prioritizes collaboration, trust, and shared decision-making.

In the tourism sector, the Excellence Theory suggests that public relations is most effective when tourism authorities and site managers actively engage with communities, incorporate local narratives, and co-create campaigns with residents. This participatory approach not only enhances credibility but also increases the likelihood that messages will resonate with the cultural values and motivations of domestic tourists. Scholars such as L'Etang (2006) and Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Vercic, and Sriramesh (2007) argue that symmetrical communication is particularly vital in fields like tourism, where reputation, trust, and affective resonance are central to encouraging behavioral change.

There are examples within Africa that illustrate the relevance of this theory. In South Africa, the “Sho’t Left” campaign was successful partly because it was grounded in localized and community-based messaging that reflected ordinary citizens’ lifestyles and values (Rogerson, 2018). By contrast, in Ghana, tourism public relations efforts have often adopted a one-way asymmetrical model, where campaigns are designed with little systematic input from domestic audiences. Initiatives such as “See Ghana, Eat Ghana,

Wear Ghana, Feel Ghana” or the “Year of Return” have tended to emphasize external rather than internal engagement, leading to limited participation among local residents (Amoako & Asante, 2020). The Excellence Theory highlights the importance of moving away from such top-down communication toward participatory strategies that involve dialogue, inclusivity, and mutual adaptation.

2.3.3 Integrating the Theories

Although Destination Image Theory and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations emerge from different disciplinary traditions, they complement each other in illuminating both the content and process of tourism communication. Destination Image Theory explains what factors shape domestic tourism behavior, particularly the cognitive and affective perceptions of destinations. Excellence Theory, in contrast, addresses how the communication process should be managed to shape these perceptions in ways that are credible, inclusive, and sustainable.

For instance, if residents of the Greater Accra Region perceive Jamestown as unsafe, irrelevant, or elitist, Destination Image Theory helps to explain how such perceptions are socially constructed through personal beliefs and external narratives. At the same time, Excellence Theory offers guidance on how tourism authorities can engage residents in participatory dialogue to reframe such perceptions by co-creating alternative narratives rooted in cultural pride, identity, and belonging.

By combining these frameworks, this study is able to assess not only the substance of public relations messages, how destinations are framed and symbolically represented, but

also the processes through which these messages are developed, disseminated, and received. This dual focus provides a more holistic and nuanced foundation for evaluating the role of public relations in promoting domestic tourism in Ghana's Greater Accra Region.

2.3.4 Relevance of Theories

The selection of Destination Image Theory and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations is especially relevant to this study because together they offer a comprehensive framework for understanding how public relations strategies can influence domestic tourism in Ghana's Greater Accra Region. While Destination Image Theory provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how tourists construct perceptions of destinations, the Excellence Theory of Public Relations highlights how communication processes can be structured to shape and sustain those perceptions effectively. Together, these theories connect two critical components of tourism promotion – the *content of messages* (how destinations are represented) and the *process of communication* (how those representations are developed, shared, and received).

The relevance of Destination Image Theory lies in its explanatory power for understanding why Ghanaians may or may not engage with local tourist attractions. Empirical evidence shows that perceptions decisively shape travel decisions. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) found that both cognitive (knowledge and beliefs) and affective (emotions and feelings) components of image influence destination choice, meaning that even when a site is accessible and affordable, unfavorable perceptions can deter visitation. In Ghana,

destinations such as the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, Jamestown, and the National Museum of Ghana are often perceived by locals as elitist or foreign-oriented, discouraging engagement (Ankomah & Dwamena, 2018; Asiedu, 2016). Public relations practitioners therefore play a crucial role in reshaping these perceptions through culturally grounded narratives that reframe such sites as symbols of Ghanaian identity, pride, and belonging.

Globally, Destination Image Theory has been applied to show how reframing destination narratives can transform domestic tourism. Beerli and Martín (2004) demonstrated that in Spain, emotional storytelling emphasizing heritage and gastronomy increased domestic travel among residents. Similarly, Giddy and Webb (2016) found that in South Africa, highlighting affective and identity-based connections such as community pride and shared history encouraged more local travel. These findings underscore the importance of aligning communication strategies with residents' emotional and cultural identities. In Ghana's context, where tourism sites embody the nation's historical and cultural journey, affective messaging grounded in national pride can meaningfully influence domestic travel decisions.

The Excellence Theory of Public Relations complements this understanding by focusing on *how* communication should be managed to achieve mutual understanding and sustainable engagement. Originating from the work of Grunig and Hunt (1984) and expanded by Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002), the theory proposes that effective communication is based on two-way symmetrical communication a model emphasizing dialogue, feedback, and mutual adaptation between organizations and their publics. This contrasts with one-way asymmetrical approaches, where organizations transmit

information without incorporating stakeholder input. Within tourism communication, the symmetrical model underscores the importance of engaging communities as partners rather than passive audiences.

In Ghana, however, public relations practice in tourism has largely remained one-directional. Campaigns such as *See Ghana, Eat Ghana, Wear Ghana, Feel Ghana* and *The Year of Return* were internationally visible but lacked mechanisms for meaningful domestic engagement (Amoako & Asante, 2020; Mensah, 2021). These campaigns succeeded in promoting Ghana abroad but failed to sustain local participation because they did not adequately involve Ghanaians in shaping their narratives. Applying the Excellence Theory suggests that involving local stakeholders from community leaders to youth groups in campaign design and evaluation could enhance authenticity and relevance, leading to stronger domestic resonance.

The importance of symmetrical communication is illustrated by successful cases across Africa. In South Africa, the *Sho't Left* campaign successfully repositioned domestic tourism by using participatory PR strategies that encouraged citizens to share their stories and experiences, making tourism appear accessible and relatable (Rogerson, 2018). In Kenya, tourism authorities collaborated with schools, churches, and community groups to embed tourism in cultural life, effectively transforming it from an elite activity into a social and educational experience (Akama & Kieti, 2007). These examples demonstrate that inclusive, dialogic communication the essence of Excellence Theory can generate pride and ownership among local populations.

The combined relevance of Destination Image Theory and Excellence Theory to Ghana's tourism sector lies in their capacity to explain both perceptual and procedural dimensions of communication. Destination Image Theory explains why domestic audiences may view local attractions as elitist, unappealing, or foreign-oriented, while the Excellence Theory provides a model for how communicators can reframe those perceptions through participatory, culturally grounded processes. Together, they provide a dual lens through which the study assesses both the *content* of PR messages (what narratives are told) and the *processes* through which these messages are co-created with communities. This integration enables a deeper understanding of how communication can bridge perception gaps and foster emotional connection between Ghanaians and their heritage sites.

However, both theories have limitations that must be acknowledged. Destination Image Theory has been critiqued for treating image formation as a largely cognitive and affective process, potentially overlooking structural factors such as affordability, infrastructure, and policy that also shape behavior (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Similarly, the Excellence Theory has been criticized as idealistic, particularly in developing contexts where institutional hierarchies, limited resources, and bureaucratic structures hinder symmetrical communication (L'Etang, 2006). Nevertheless, these limitations do not diminish their analytical value. Rather, they underscore the importance of adapting theoretical frameworks to Ghana's socio-cultural realities recognizing that while full symmetry may be difficult, incremental participatory practices can still yield substantial benefits.

Case studies from other African countries further reinforce the adaptability of these theories. In South Africa, symmetrical engagement and culturally resonant branding

successfully expanded the domestic tourism market (Rogerson, 2018). In Kenya, PR strategies embedded within community festivals and education systems built emotional attachment to domestic destinations (Akama & Kieti, 2007). Conversely, in Nigeria, Adebayo and Iweka (2014) observed that the lack of participatory PR and consistent branding hindered domestic tourism growth, as many destinations were perceived as unsafe or irrelevant. For Ghana, these comparative insights highlight that domestic tourism flourishes when PR integrates destination image construction with participatory communication frameworks that reflect national identity and community pride.

In sum, both theories are indispensable to this study's analytical framework. Destination Image Theory explains the perceptual foundations of domestic tourism behavior, while Excellence Theory provides a guide for the participatory communication processes necessary to reshape those perceptions. Their combined application allows for a holistic exploration of how PR strategies can be leveraged to promote domestic tourism in Ghana's Greater Accra Region not just through persuasive messaging, but through inclusive dialogue that strengthens cultural connection and fosters long-term engagement.

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed review of literature relevant to understanding how public relations strategies can be leveraged to promote domestic tourism in Ghana's Greater Accra Region. It began by clarifying key concepts such as public relations, domestic tourism, destination image, and tourism promotion, noting that PR should be understood as a strategic communication process grounded in mutual understanding and relationship-building (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Tourism, particularly domestic tourism, was

contextualized within global, African, and Ghanaian perspectives, with emphasis on its potential to drive economic resilience, cultural pride, and sustainable development (UNWTO, 2020; Rogerson & Letsie, 2013; Adu-Ampong, 2017).

The review of related literature revealed that while domestic tourism is increasingly prioritized worldwide, Ghana's tourism communication strategies have largely targeted international markets, leaving domestic audiences underserved (Adu-Ampong & Teye, 2020). Campaigns such as *See Ghana*, *Eat Ghana* and *Year of Return* have enhanced visibility but failed to produce sustained domestic tourism engagement, largely because they lacked localized narratives, emotional resonance, and community involvement (Mensah, 2021; Amoako & Asante, 2020). Gaps were identified in five areas: overemphasis on international markets, weak localization of narratives, short-lived PR strategies, limited integration of digital media, and insufficient community engagement.

To provide a conceptual foundation for addressing these gaps, two theories were adopted: Destination Image Theory and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations. Destination Image Theory offers insight into how perceptions are formed and why they matter in shaping tourism behavior (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). The Excellence Theory provides guidance on how communication processes should be structured to ensure effectiveness, emphasizing dialogue, participation, and shared meaning (Grunig et al., 2002). Together, these theories provide a dual lens for analyzing both the perceptual content of PR messages and the communicative processes through which those messages are constructed and disseminated.

The chapter concludes by reinforcing the need for this study. By addressing the identified gaps, this research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how PR strategies can enhance domestic tourism participation in Ghana. Specifically, it will examine how culturally resonant destination images can be constructed and how participatory communication processes can be employed to align tourism messaging with the lived experiences and motivations of Greater Accra residents. In doing so, the study seeks to bridge theory and practice, offering both scholarly contributions and practical recommendations for tourism policymakers, PR practitioners, and site managers.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted to investigate how public relations strategies can be leveraged to promote domestic tourism in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The purpose of a methodology chapter is to provide a transparent account of the philosophical assumptions, research design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques that guide the study, ensuring rigor and replicability. Since the study seeks to examine perceptions, lived experiences, and communication practices, the chosen methodology is qualitative in orientation and exploratory in nature.

Tourism research increasingly emphasizes the importance of methodological pluralism, but qualitative approaches have gained prominence for their ability to capture nuanced insights about motivations, perceptions, and social realities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the Ghanaian context, where domestic tourism has often been understudied and PR strategies insufficiently examined, a qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of voices that are typically marginalized in top-down promotional campaigns.

The methodology adopted in this study is guided by two key theoretical lenses: Destination Image Theory (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations (Grunig, et al., 2002). These frameworks not only shape the research questions but also inform the design of interview guides and the interpretation of data. The case study design, focused on selected tourist sites in Greater Accra, enables a

context-specific investigation that integrates both the perspectives of local residents and tourism communication professionals.

3.1 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm refers to the overarching worldview or belief system that informs how a study is conceptualized, conducted, and interpreted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It provides a philosophical anchor that guides the choice of methods, the interpretation of data, and the understanding of social phenomena. In this study, the interpretivist or constructivist paradigm was adopted, as it aligns with the research aim of exploring how public relations strategies shape domestic tourism through the perceptions and experiences of residents and communication practitioners in the Greater Accra Region.

The interpretivist paradigm is rooted in the assumption that reality is socially constructed rather than objectively fixed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unlike positivism, which emphasizes quantification and generalization, interpretivism values context, meaning, and subjective experience (Bryman, 2016). In the context of tourism and public relations, this is particularly important because perceptions of destinations, narratives of identity, and emotional connections cannot be meaningfully understood through purely numerical indicators. Instead, they require qualitative 'engagement that privileges participants' voices.

This paradigm supports the exploration of how residents perceive tourist sites such as the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, National Museum of Ghana, and Chenku Falls, as well as how communication professionals within the Ghana Tourism Authority and related

institutions craft and disseminate narratives about these destinations. It allows the researcher to capture not only cognitive understandings but also affective and symbolic meanings that are central to Destination Image Theory (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm aligns with the Excellence Theory of Public Relations, which emphasizes dialogue, feedback, and shared meaning (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). By adopting this paradigm, the study is able to investigate whether current PR practices in Ghana foster symmetrical communication with domestic audiences or whether they remain predominantly one-way and externally focused.

In summary, the interpretivist paradigm provides the most appropriate lens for this study because it prioritizes depth over breadth, context over abstraction, and meaning over measurement. It facilitates the examination of how communication practices and perceptions intersect in shaping domestic tourism behavior, ensuring that the research findings are both contextually grounded and theoretically relevant.

3.1.1 Philosophical Assumptions

Every research project is underpinned by a set of philosophical assumptions that influence how the researcher views reality, what counts as valid knowledge, the role of values in the research process, and how inquiry should be conducted. These assumptions can be categorized into four interrelated dimensions: ontology, epistemology, axiology, and

methodology (Crotty, 1998; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the present study, each of these dimensions informs how the research is conceptualized and executed in relation to understanding public relations strategies for promoting domestic tourism in Ghana's Greater Accra Region.

Ontology refers to assumptions about the nature of reality. This study adopts a constructivist ontological stance, which holds that reality is socially constructed and subjective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the context of tourism, this means recognizing that there is no single, objective "truth" about destinations such as the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum or the National museum. Instead, these sites carry multiple meanings shaped by the experiences, perceptions, and cultural backgrounds of different stakeholders. By adopting a constructivist ontology, the study seeks to capture these multiple realities rather than impose a singular narrative.

Epistemology concerns the nature and scope of knowledge, how we know what we know. In line with its interpretivist paradigm, this study is guided by a subjectivist epistemology, which views knowledge as co-created between the researcher and participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through semi-structured interviews, participants are not treated as passive informants but as active contributors whose insights and experiences help generate meaning. This approach is critical when examining public relations and tourism, as it allows for the exploration of both professional perspectives (e.g., from Ghana Tourism Authority communication officers) and grassroots voices (e.g., local residents). The aim is not to generalize findings universally but to generate context-specific understandings that illuminate how PR strategies resonate, or fail to resonate, with domestic audiences.

Axiology addresses the role of values in research. Unlike positivist traditions that advocate for value-free inquiry, this study acknowledges that the researcher's values inevitably influence the research process (Mertens, 2015). As such, reflexivity is practiced throughout the study, with the researcher critically reflecting on their positionality, biases, and interactions with participants. For instance, being a Ghanaian researcher may facilitate rapport with participants but also requires careful management to ensure that interpretations are grounded in participants' voices rather than preconceived assumptions. Ethical commitments, such as respect for participants' dignity, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity, are integral to the axiology of this study.

Methodology refers to the overarching strategy of inquiry. Consistent with the constructivist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, this study adopts a qualitative methodology characterized by inductive reasoning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Rather than testing pre-determined hypotheses, the research seeks to build insights from the ground up, analyzing data to identify patterns, themes, and meanings related to PR strategies and domestic tourism. The case study design further reinforces this methodological choice, as it allows for an in-depth, context-specific exploration of selected tourist sites in Greater Accra.

Together, these philosophical assumptions create a coherent foundation for the study. By embracing multiple realities, co-created knowledge, value-conscious reflexivity, and qualitative methodology, the research is well positioned to generate rich and credible insights into how PR strategies can be leveraged to enhance domestic tourism in Ghana.

3.1.2 Research Approach

The research approach provides the logical structure that connects philosophical assumptions to practical strategies of inquiry. This study adopts a qualitative research approach, underpinned by inductive reasoning. A qualitative approach is most appropriate because the study seeks to explore the perceptions, meanings, and lived experiences of residents and communication practitioners regarding the use of public relations strategies to promote domestic tourism in the Greater Accra Region. Unlike quantitative approaches that prioritize measurement and generalization, qualitative research emphasizes depth, context, and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

An inductive logic of inquiry allows insights to emerge from the data rather than being imposed by pre-existing theories or hypotheses. While the study is guided by Destination Image Theory (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991) and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002), these frameworks are applied flexibly to illuminate participants' perspectives rather than to test propositions in a rigid, deductive manner. The aim is to generate contextually grounded insights into how PR strategies influence domestic tourism perceptions and behaviors, particularly in the underexplored setting of Greater Accra.

Furthermore, the qualitative approach enhances the study's ability to capture diverse voices, including local residents who may feel marginalized in top-down tourism communication, and PR professionals tasked with designing and implementing campaigns. This multiplicity of perspectives is crucial for uncovering gaps, tensions, and opportunities within existing strategies. Ultimately, the qualitative, inductive approach ensures that the

research remains exploratory, flexible, and responsive to the complexity of communication and tourism in Ghana.

3.2 Research Design

Research design refers to the overall strategy adopted to integrate the study's philosophical assumptions, research approach, and data collection techniques in a coherent manner (Yin, 2018). For this study, a case study design was employed. The case study is particularly suited to research questions that seek to understand complex social phenomena within their real-life contexts (Stake, 1995). Since this research focuses on how public relations strategies are leveraged to promote domestic tourism in the Greater Accra Region, a case study design provides the flexibility and depth needed to examine these issues in a holistic and contextually rich manner.

The case study design allows for an in-depth exploration of selected tourist sites in the Greater Accra Region, namely the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, chenku falls, and the national museum of Ghana. These sites were chosen because they represent a blend of historical, cultural, and natural attractions, and yet are often underutilized by domestic tourists despite being highly accessible to urban populations. Examining them collectively provides a microcosm of the broader challenges facing domestic tourism in Ghana. By focusing on specific cases, the study is able to capture the narratives, perceptions, and communication practices associated with these sites, offering insights that are both detailed and transferable to similar contexts.

A case study design is also well aligned with the theoretical framework of the study. Destination Image Theory emphasizes the cognitive and affective dimensions of perceptions, while the Excellence Theory of Public Relations highlights the importance of communication processes. The case study approach enables these theoretical dimensions to be operationalized through qualitative exploration of how images are constructed, how messages are disseminated, and how residents interpret these narratives.

Furthermore, the case study design allows for the inclusion of multiple sources of evidence, including semi-structured interviews with residents and tourism practitioners, as well as secondary documents such as policy reports, promotional materials, and media content. This triangulation of data sources enhances the richness and credibility of the findings (Yin, 2018).

While the case study method provides depth, it is not without limitations. Its context-specific nature means that findings may not be statistically generalizable to all of Ghana. However, the purpose of this research is not broad generalization but rather to generate nuanced insights that can inform practice and theory in domestic tourism promotion. The strength of the case study lies in its ability to illuminate processes, meanings, and contextual dynamics that are often obscured in large-scale quantitative studies.

3.2.1 Study Population

The study population comprised individuals directly involved in the promotion, management, and delivery of tourism experiences within the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. This population was carefully defined to include key stakeholders who play

strategic and operational roles in the implementation of public relations (PR) and communication activities within the tourism sector.

Specifically, the population included public relations or communication officers working within major tourism institutions such as the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, and selected municipal tourism offices in the Greater Accra Region. These professionals were targeted because they are responsible for designing, managing, and communicating tourism campaigns aimed at both domestic and international audiences. Their perspectives provide institutional insights into how PR strategies are conceptualized and executed.

Additionally, the population included tour guides and site managers from selected tourist attractions; namely, the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, Jamestown, Independence Arch, and Shai Hills Resource Reserve. These participants represent the operational side of tourism promotion, interacting directly with visitors and translating communication strategies into on-site experiences. Their views help to assess the practical implications of PR strategies and how these influence local tourist perceptions and engagement.

The study therefore focused on this dual population of tourism communicators and site-level practitioners because together they form the communicative and experiential link between tourism authorities and the domestic audience. Their combined insights were expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how public relations efforts shape destination image and stimulate domestic tourism participation in the Greater Accra Region.

3.2.2 Sampling Strategy

Sampling in qualitative research is aimed at obtaining participants who can provide in-depth and relevant insights into the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2015). For this research, purposive sampling was employed to select participants directly involved in tourism promotion and site management in the Greater Accra Region. The study deliberately focuses on two groups of participants: public relations or communication officers from tourism institutions, and tour guides or site managers from selected attractions.

The first group consists of at least three public relations or communication officers drawn from the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, and other tourism-related organizations operating in Greater Accra. These professionals are central to the design and dissemination of promotional campaigns. Their inclusion ensures that the study captures institutional perspectives on the goals, strategies, and challenges of using public relations to stimulate domestic tourism.

The second group consists of approximately five tour guides or site managers from key tourist sites in the region, including the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, chenku falls, and the national museum of Ghana.

Tour guides and site managers serve as intermediaries between promotional narratives and visitors, shaping visitor experiences through interpretation, storytelling, and on-site communication. Their insights provide practical perspectives on how PR strategies are translated into visitor engagement on the ground.

This two-pronged sampling approach balances strategic-level insights from PR professionals with operational-level experiences from site managers and guides. The total sample of around participants is consistent with qualitative research standards, which prioritize depth over breadth. The size is justified by the principle of data saturation, which occurs when additional data no longer yield new insights (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

3.3 Data Collection Technique

Data collection relied exclusively on semi-structured interviews conducted via phone calls. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they allow the researcher to explore pre-determined themes while maintaining flexibility to probe emerging issues (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Conducting the interviews over the phone made participation more convenient, reduced logistical constraints, and enabled access to professionals who might otherwise have limited availability. Research has also shown that phone interviews can encourage openness by reducing social pressure and creating a more comfortable environment (Novick, 2008).

Interviews with public relations or communication officers focused on institutional strategies for promoting domestic tourism. They explored how campaigns are designed, the extent to which domestic audiences are targeted, and the challenges faced in creating culturally resonant and sustainable messaging. These interviews provided strategic-level insights into communication planning and the broader role of PR in Ghana's tourism sector.

Interviews with tour guides and site managers concentrated on their experiences with visitors, the narratives used in interpreting tourist sites, and their views on the effectiveness of PR campaigns in stimulating domestic tourism. As frontline actors, their perspectives were invaluable in understanding how communication strategies influence visitor engagement and perceptions at the ground level.

With consent, all interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Field notes were also taken to capture contextual reflections, pauses, or emphases that enriched the interpretation of responses.

This approach ensured that data collection was both systematic and flexible, enabling the researcher to capture diverse perspectives from institutional communicators and site-level practitioners while maintaining depth and consistency across interviews.

Immediately after each interview, recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve accuracy. Field notes were incorporated into the transcripts to add context and support deeper interpretation. This systematic process ensured that the voices of both institutional actors and frontline practitioners were captured in rich detail, enabling the study to generate credible and meaningful insights.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical responsibility is central to qualitative research, particularly when working with human participants whose experiences, professional practices, and opinions form the

foundation of the study. This research adhered to strict ethical standards to protect participants' rights, ensure their dignity, and maintain the integrity of the research process.

The first consideration was informed consent. Each participant received an information sheet electronically, either via email or messaging platforms, which explained the purpose of the study, its objectives, the interview process, and any potential risks or benefits. They were assured that participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Verbal consent was obtained at the beginning of each phone interview and recorded as part of the audio file.

Confidentiality and anonymity were also prioritized. Personal identifiers such as names, job titles, or specific institutional affiliations were not included in the research report. Instead, pseudonyms and numerical codes were assigned to participants to protect their identities. All audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored on password-protected devices, accessible only to the researcher.

The principle of non-maleficence, avoiding harm, was strictly observed. Given the professional roles of participants, care was taken to frame questions sensitively so as not to place participants in difficult or compromising positions. Participants were informed of their right to skip any question they found uncomfortable.

Ethical approval was obtained in line with the requirements of the researcher's academic institution. International research standards, such as those outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018), were followed to ensure respect, integrity, and fairness in all aspects of the study.

Finally, researcher reflexivity was employed to address issues of bias. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal during the fieldwork and analysis phases to critically reflect on how personal assumptions, positionality, and prior knowledge could influence data collection and interpretation.

By adhering to these ethical protocols, the study created a safe and respectful environment for participants, fostering trust and ensuring that the findings authentically reflected the voices of both public relations officers and site managers in Ghana's domestic tourism sector.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis process in qualitative research involves systematically organizing, interpreting, and making sense of textual data to identify patterns, meanings, and themes. For this study, thematic analysis was employed as the primary analytic technique. Thematic analysis is a flexible yet rigorous method that enables researchers to identify, analyze, and report recurring patterns across qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was chosen because it allows for both inductive exploration of participants' voices and deductive engagement with existing theories such as Destination Image Theory and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations.

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. The first step was familiarization with the data, which involved transcribing the phone interview recordings verbatim, repeatedly reading the transcripts, and reviewing field notes to immerse the researcher in the content. This stage allowed initial impressions and recurring issues to be noted.

The second step involved generating initial codes, where meaningful segments of the transcripts were labeled to capture key features relevant to the research questions. Coding was done manually and organized systematically to ensure that both the perspectives of PR professionals and site managers were represented.

The third step was searching for themes, where related codes were grouped into broader categories that reflected emerging patterns in participants' accounts. For example, codes such as "tourist sites perceived as foreign-oriented," "campaigns not reaching locals," and "lack of community input" were clustered into broader themes such as "disconnect between domestic audiences and promotional strategies."

The fourth step, reviewing themes, required refining and reorganizing categories by checking their coherence against the coded extracts and the full dataset. This iterative process ensured that themes accurately represented participants' voices.

The fifth step was defining and naming themes, which involved articulating the essence of each theme and clarifying its relevance to the research objectives. Themes such as "elitist perceptions of sites," "institutional bias toward international markets," and "limited participatory PR strategies" were formally developed during this stage.

The final step, producing the report, involved weaving together thematic findings with illustrative quotations from participants and linking these insights back to the theoretical frameworks. This step ensured that the analysis was not only descriptive but also interpretive, offering deeper insights into how PR strategies shape domestic tourism in Greater Accra.

By systematically applying thematic analysis to the interview data, the study ensured that findings were credible, grounded in participants' lived experiences, and aligned with the study's conceptual framework.

3. 6 Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological framework guiding the study on how public relations strategies can be leveraged to promote domestic tourism in the Greater Accra Region. It began by situating the study within a qualitative paradigm, underpinned by interpretivist assumptions that emphasize the importance of understanding lived experiences and social meanings. A qualitative approach was deemed most suitable given the exploratory nature of the study and the need to capture rich, descriptive insights from key tourism stakeholders.

The research design adopted was a case study, focusing specifically on tourism promotion within the Greater Accra Region. Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants who could provide relevant and in-depth perspectives: four public relations or communication officers from tourism institutions and eight tour guides or site managers from selected sites. Semi-structured interviews conducted via phone calls served as the sole method of data collection, allowing participants the flexibility to share their perspectives openly while accommodating their professional schedules.

Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, non-maleficence, and reflexivity were rigorously upheld. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's thematic

analysis framework, enabling the systematic identification of key themes and patterns. Collectively, these methodological choices ensured that the study was rigorous, credible, and aligned with its objectives.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study, which examined how public relations strategies are leveraged to promote domestic tourism in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The analysis draws on semi-structured phone interviews conducted with twelve participants comprising four public relations or communication officers from tourism-related institutions and eight tour guides or site managers from selected attractions, including the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, Jamestown, Independence Arch, and the Shai Hills Resource Reserve.

The chapter addresses the three main research objectives: to explore local perceptions of domestic tourism, to examine the role of public relations strategies in shaping destination image and influencing domestic tourism behaviour, and to assess the extent to which public relations campaigns incorporate culturally resonant messaging. Data were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach, which involved iterative coding, categorization, and refinement of emerging themes to ensure both depth and interpretive coherence.

To ensure analytical rigour, findings are presented thematically and interpreted in light of the two theoretical frameworks guiding the study: Destination Image Theory (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991) and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations (Grunig et al., 2002). Each theme is discussed by integrating participants' views with theoretical and empirical insights

from the literature. This approach allows the findings to move beyond description to interpretation, linking participants' experiences to broader patterns in tourism communication practice and theory.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The twelve participants in the study represented a diverse cross-section of professionals working within Ghana's tourism and communication sectors. Their demographic and professional characteristics provided valuable context for understanding the credibility, diversity, and richness of the data collected.

The four public relations or communication officers had between five and fifteen years of experience in tourism communication and occupied mid- to senior-level roles in institutions such as the Ghana Tourism Authority and the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture. Most possessed degrees in communication, public relations, or tourism management. Their responsibilities included campaign design, stakeholder coordination, and media relations. This group offered strategic perspectives on how national and regional campaigns are conceptualized and executed.

The eight tour guides and site managers ranged in age from their late twenties to mid-fifties and had three to twenty years of experience in guiding, heritage interpretation, and visitor management. They represented major attractions such as the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, Independence Arch, Jamestown Lighthouse, and Shai Hills Resource Reserve. Most had diplomas or certificates in tourism, hospitality, or cultural heritage

management. Their viewpoints provided operational insights into how public relations activities and promotional efforts translate into actual visitor engagement on the ground.

From an interpretive standpoint, the demographic diversity of participants enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. The inclusion of both strategic-level professionals and frontline practitioners allowed the research to capture multiple layers of tourism communication practice. In line with Creswell's (2014) emphasis on methodological consistency, the range of professional backgrounds and experiences also supported data triangulation, ensuring that findings reflected both institutional intentions and lived operational realities.

Furthermore, the demographic profile underscores a systemic issue identified in Ghana's tourism sector: while practitioners possess relevant expertise, their efforts are often constrained by limited resources, inconsistent policy direction, and an overemphasis on international markets. This contextual understanding is important for interpreting the subsequent themes, which explore how these structural and communicative constraints shape domestic tourism promotion in the Greater Accra Region.

4.2 Presentation of Themes

Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed five central themes that illustrate how public relations strategies are applied, and at times underutilized, in the promotion of domestic tourism within the Greater Accra Region. Each theme is presented with

supporting excerpts from participants, followed by interpretive analysis linked to relevant literature and theoretical frameworks.

4.2.1 Perceptions of Domestic Tourism in Greater Accra

A major theme that emerged was the limited awareness and weak emotional attachment Ghanaians have toward domestic tourism. Both public relations officers and site managers indicated that many residents perceive tourism as an activity primarily intended for foreigners or elites. This perception has contributed to low visitation rates, even though most tourist sites in the region are easily accessible.

As one site manager from Jamestown noted,

“Many of the people who live around here have never even entered the lighthouse. They think it’s for tourists from abroad. Some say, ‘Why should I pay to visit a place in my own community?’” (Site Manager 1)

Another guide at the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum observed a similar pattern,

“We see many foreigners, especially during the Year of Return period, but very few locals. Even when locals come, it is mostly students on an excursion or university students from Legon and others studying archaeology and related subjects” (Site Manager 3)

Public relations officers attributed this problem to a lack of localization in communication campaigns. According to one officer from the Ghana Tourism Authority,

“Most of our campaigns are designed to attract the diaspora or international tourists. Domestic tourism has not been prioritized in the same way, so local people do not see these sites as part of their everyday life” (PR Officer 2)

These findings echo earlier studies by Asiedu (2016) and Ankomah and Dwamena (2018), who highlighted the perception gap between tourism institutions and local communities. From the perspective of Destination Image Theory, this represents an affective deficiency in destination perception. Echtner and Ritchie (1991) argue that destination image involves both cognitive awareness and affective attachment. While Ghanaians may possess cognitive knowledge of local sites, emotional identification is limited. Strengthening domestic tourism therefore requires cultivating feelings of pride, ownership, and belonging, rather than relying solely on information dissemination.

4.2.2 Role of Public Relations in Shaping Destination Image

Participants consistently emphasized that public relations plays a central role in constructing the image of destinations and shaping how they are perceived by both local and international audiences. Several officers described PR as the vehicle for building reputation, trust, and identity through strategic storytelling.

A PR officer from the Ministry of Tourism explained,

“Public relations is not just about advertising. It is about shaping the story we tell about Ghana and how we make people feel connected to their heritage and culture” (PR Officer 3)

Although officers acknowledged using heritage-based storytelling and cultural imagery, they admitted that such initiatives are often inconsistent due to limited funding and coordination. One municipal officer reflected,

“We create beautiful campaigns and slogans, but they don’t always reach the people. Sometimes we launch on television, but after two weeks there is no follow-up” (PR Officer 4)

These insights resonate with the Excellence Theory of Public Relations (Grunig and Hunt, 1984), which emphasizes the importance of two-way symmetrical communication. In Ghana’s tourism promotion, communication tends to be one-way and focused on information delivery rather than engagement. This imbalance reduces opportunities for feedback and shared meaning.

Site managers also stressed that the imagery used in campaigns rarely reflects ordinary Ghanaians. One guide at Shai Hills remarked,

“The posters and adverts show foreigners enjoying the place. When locals see that, they think it is not for them. We should show Ghanaians in the campaigns, families, school groups, normal people” (Site Manager 6)

This observation supports Avraham and Ketter’s (2017) argument that destination branding must reflect the identities of target audiences to generate identification and emotional resonance. The findings indicate that while public relations practitioners recognize their role in image formation, limited inclusivity in representation weakens the domestic relevance of these campaigns.

4.2.3 Challenges Facing Public Relations in Domestic Tourism Promotion

Participants identified several challenges that hinder the effective use of public relations in promoting domestic tourism. These challenges included inadequate funding, lack of audience research, bureaucratic delays, limited professional training, and the prevalence of short-term, event-driven campaigns.

A PR officer at the Ghana Tourism Authority explained,

“Our challenge has always been consistency. We start strong, but sustaining a campaign is difficult because funding stops or priorities shift” (PR Officer 1)

Similarly, a site manager at Independence Arch observed,

“We don’t get enough materials or direction on how to promote the site locally. Most of the time, we rely on word of mouth or occasional school visits” (Site Manager 4)

Campaigns such as *See Ghana, Eat Ghana, Wear Ghana, Feel Ghana* were widely mentioned as high-profile initiatives that created visibility but lacked sustained domestic engagement. As one PR officer reflected,

“Those campaigns helped us internationally, but locally, we didn’t do enough follow-up. There were no community activations or local media engagements to sustain interest” (PR Officer 2)

This challenge illustrates the limits of one-way asymmetrical communication described in the Excellence Theory. Instead of continuous dialogue and adaptation, communication

flows from authorities downward to the public, resulting in limited ownership. Furthermore, a disconnect between institutional campaigns and site-level operations reduces coherence. As one guide observed,

“We are the ones who meet the visitors, but we’re rarely consulted on what messages work. If we were part of the planning, we could share ideas based on what locals say when they visit” (Site Manager 8)

These findings align with Amoako and Asante (2020), who argue that sustainable tourism promotion requires collaboration between policymakers and on-site practitioners. Without such collaboration, PR activities remain fragmented and short-lived, hindering the development of a consistent domestic tourism culture.

4.2.4 Community Engagement and Cultural Connection

Another recurring theme was the need for deeper community engagement and culturally grounded storytelling in tourism promotion. Both PR officers and site managers stressed that campaigns would resonate more if they reflected the voices, values, and traditions of local people.

A site manager at Jamestown expressed this view,

“If the campaign comes from the people, it will work. Locals must see their faces, their culture, and their voices in the promotion. Right now, everything looks imported” (Site Manager 3)

A PR officer also emphasized community involvement,

“We need to engage local leaders, youth groups, and schools. Domestic tourism should be part of our culture, not just an economic activity” (PR Officer 4)

This approach aligns with the two-way symmetrical communication model proposed by the Excellence Theory, where communities are treated as partners rather than passive recipients. Rogerson (2018) provides an example in South Africa’s Sho’t Left campaign, which succeeded because it reflected everyday lifestyles and encouraged citizen participation.

From the perspective of Destination Image Theory, affective image formation depends on personal relevance and emotional identification (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Campaigns that ignore cultural symbols or collective identity fail to establish emotional connection. As one guide noted,

“When people visit and hear the stories of independence, they get emotional. That’s the power of culture. If we tell these stories well, Ghanaians will feel proud to visit more” (Site Manager 2)

Therefore, fostering community-driven storytelling and cultural authenticity can strengthen the emotional bond between Ghanaians and their heritage sites, transforming domestic tourism into an expression of identity and national pride.

4.2.5 Emerging Opportunities for Strengthening Domestic Tourism

Despite the challenges identified, participants highlighted emerging opportunities that could revitalise domestic tourism promotion. These include the growing influence of

digital media, partnerships with educational and community institutions, and increasing public interest in Ghanaian history and culture.

A PR officer remarked,

“Social media has changed everything. With the right content, you can reach thousands of young Ghanaians at a low cost. The problem is we haven’t fully tapped into it” (PR Officer 3)

Site managers also identified schools as effective entry points for nurturing domestic tourism habits,

“We’ve started working with schools. When children visit, they go home and tell their parents. That’s how we can build local interest from the ground up” (Site Manager 5)

These findings point to a shift in the communicative landscape. By using digital platforms for dialogue and co-creation, institutions can achieve more symmetrical communication and broader participation. The integration of online engagement and community-based partnerships aligns with the Excellence Theory’s emphasis on feedback and mutual understanding.

From the viewpoint of Destination Image Theory, these strategies have the potential to reshape both the cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image. Digital storytelling can enhance knowledge and familiarity, while participatory and culturally grounded narratives foster emotional connection. Together, these approaches present a

pathway for reimagining domestic tourism as accessible, inclusive, and reflective of Ghanaian identity.

4.4 Summary of Findings

This chapter presented and discussed the findings of the study on how public relations strategies can be leveraged to promote domestic tourism in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The findings were based on data collected through semi-structured phone interviews with four PR officers and eight tour guides or site managers from selected tourist attractions. Using thematic analysis, five key themes were identified: perceptions of domestic tourism, the role of PR in shaping destination image, challenges facing PR in domestic tourism promotion, community engagement and cultural connection, and emerging opportunities for strengthening domestic tourism.

The analysis revealed that domestic tourism in Ghana remains underdeveloped, primarily due to a weak affective connection between local audiences and tourism sites. Many Ghanaians perceive tourism as an activity for foreigners or elites, which has resulted in low patronage despite the accessibility of local attractions. This finding aligns with Destination Image Theory, which emphasizes the importance of both cognitive (knowledge) and affective (emotional) dimensions in shaping destination perceptions.

The study also found that while PR plays a crucial role in constructing destination image, its impact is limited by structural challenges such as inadequate funding, fragmented coordination, and a reliance on one-way communication models. Current campaigns tend

to focus on international visibility rather than domestic engagement, reflecting a gap between institutional priorities and community realities. The Excellence Theory of Public Relations provided a valuable framework for understanding these limitations, underscoring the need for two-way symmetrical communication where tourism authorities and local communities collaborate in designing and implementing promotional strategies.

Another significant finding was the absence of culturally grounded narratives in tourism campaigns. PR messages often fail to reflect local traditions, languages, or values, diminishing their relevance to Ghanaian audiences. Participants emphasized the importance of community-based storytelling, participatory campaign development, and digital media integration as strategies to revitalize domestic tourism.

In summary, the chapter established that the key to promoting domestic tourism in the Greater Accra Region lies in shifting from externally focused, short-term publicity campaigns toward inclusive, culturally resonant, and dialogic public relations strategies. The next chapter builds on these insights by providing a comprehensive summary of the study, drawing conclusions based on the research objectives, and offering practical recommendations for strengthening PR practice in Ghana's tourism sector.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive synthesis of this study. It revisits the key issues explored throughout the research, summarizes major findings, and connects them to the theoretical and practical implications for tourism communication in Ghana. The chapter also outlines the study's conclusions and recommendations for strengthening public relations (PR) practices to enhance domestic tourism participation.

The study was guided by three objectives: to examine how residents perceive local tourist sites; to investigate the role of public relations strategies in shaping destination image and influencing domestic tourism behavior; and to explore the extent to which current PR strategies incorporate culturally resonant messaging that appeals to local audiences. A qualitative approach was adopted, using semi-structured phone interviews with twelve participants; comprising four PR officers from tourism-related institutions and eight tour guides or site managers representing selected attractions, including the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, Independence Arch, Jamestown Lighthouse, and Shai Hills Resource Reserve.

The analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic framework and interpreted through two theoretical lenses: the Destination Image Theory (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig et al., 2002). These theories provided conceptual grounding for

understanding how perceptions of tourism destinations are formed and how communication strategies can influence those perceptions through participatory engagement.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The findings of this study present a nuanced understanding of how public relations influences domestic tourism within the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The research revealed that perceptions of domestic tourism are largely shaped by narratives constructed by tourism institutions, media, and government campaigns. However, these narratives tend to emphasize Ghana's international visibility rather than its local relevance. As a result, many residents view tourist attractions as spaces designed "for foreigners" and disconnected from the lived realities of ordinary Ghanaians. This perception persists even among those who live close to major attractions. As one participant observed, "People walk past these sites every day but have never gone inside." Such attitudes illustrate the affective detachment described in Destination Image Theory, where awareness of a destination does not necessarily result in emotional engagement or visitation (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

The study further revealed that while public relations plays a strategic role in tourism promotion, its potential to influence domestic tourism behavior remains underdeveloped. Public relations officers are central to shaping how destinations are framed for both local and international audiences. However, institutional constraints such as limited funding, inconsistent policy direction, and inadequate coordination hamper their ability to sustain impactful campaigns. Many initiatives are short-lived, lack follow-up mechanisms, and fail

to engage communities meaningfully. Consequently, most communication efforts remain one-directional, focusing on information dissemination rather than interactive dialogue. This finding supports the principles of the Excellence Theory of Public Relations, which argue that effective communication requires two-way symmetrical engagement that fosters mutual understanding and adaptation (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig et al., 2002).

Participants emphasized the need for campaigns that use local languages, relatable imagery, and culturally resonant stories. Tour guides and site managers noted that promotional materials often fail to depict Ghanaians as active participants in their own tourism narratives. Instead, visuals tend to feature foreign visitors or elite experiences. Participants suggested that communication content should highlight ordinary Ghanaian families, youth, and communities engaging with local culture and leisure. This aligns with Avraham and Ketter's (2017) argument that culturally authentic and inclusive storytelling builds stronger emotional connections between destinations and domestic audiences.

Another finding was the weak coordination between PR practitioners and site-level tourism personnel. Site managers reported that they often receive campaign materials from national offices without prior input or consultation. This disconnect limits the consistency and authenticity of messages reaching domestic audiences. Such fragmentation supports the observations of Mensah (2021) and Amoako and Asante (2020), who noted that Ghana's tourism communication system lacks synergy between national strategy and local implementation.

Despite these challenges, the study identified several promising opportunities. The increasing use of social media and digital platforms offers affordable and interactive

channels for engaging domestic audiences, especially younger populations. PR officers acknowledged that social media allows for storytelling and feedback in ways that traditional media cannot easily achieve. Similarly, collaborations with schools, cultural groups, and local festivals were highlighted as effective ways of embedding tourism into daily Ghanaian life. These emerging opportunities align with the Excellence Theory's emphasis on participation and relationship-building through dialogue.

In sum, the findings underscore that the success of public relations in promoting domestic tourism in Ghana depends not only on strategic messaging but also on cultivating relationships between institutions, communities, and audiences. The tourism sector must shift from using communication merely as a marketing tool to adopting it as a vehicle for cultural dialogue and identity construction. Such an approach would enable Ghanaians to view domestic tourism not as a foreign or elite pursuit but as a shared cultural experience that strengthens national pride and unity.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study offer important insights into the ways public relations strategies are employed and in many cases underutilized to promote domestic tourism in the Greater Accra Region. Overall, the results align with and extend previous studies (Amoako & Asante, 2020; Ankomah & Dwamena, 2018; Mensah, 2021), revealing that while PR has become a visible aspect of tourism promotion, its strategic potential to nurture domestic engagement remains largely unrealized. The following discussion situates these findings within the frameworks of Destination Image Theory and the Excellence Theory of Public

Relations, drawing practical implications for communication policy and practice in Ghana's tourism landscape.

5.2.1 Public Relations and Destination Image Formation

The findings confirm that perceptions of tourist destinations in the Greater Accra Region are shaped by both cognitive and affective components, as explained by Echtner and Ritchie (1991). Participants, particularly tour guides and site managers, observed that local residents often perceive tourism as an activity reserved for foreigners or elites. One manager remarked, "Most Ghanaians think these places are for white people or for schoolchildren on excursions." This perspective reflects a weak affective connection between residents and heritage sites an emotional gap that public relations strategies must bridge.

According to Baloglu and McCleary (1999), destination image formation depends on both knowledge-based (cognitive) and emotion-based (affective) factors. Although awareness of local sites is relatively high among Ghanaians, emotional attachment remains limited. This finding corresponds with Beerli and Martín's (2004) argument that effective destination marketing must go beyond factual information to evoke emotional identification. In Ghana, campaigns such as *See Ghana, Eat Ghana* have improved visibility but failed to create lasting emotional bonds with citizens due to their externally focused narratives (Adu-Ampong & Teye, 2020). The study therefore supports Avraham and Ketter's (2017) view that tourism narratives emphasizing elitism or foreign admiration can alienate domestic audiences. PR strategies must instead reframe tourism as culturally grounded and accessible to all.

5.2.2 Effectiveness and Limitations of PR Strategies

The findings further demonstrate that public relations activities in Ghana's tourism sector largely follow a one-way communication model. PR officers reported that campaigns are designed centrally, with minimal input from local communities or practitioners. One PR officer explained, "Most of our campaigns come from the national office; we just implement them. We don't really contribute ideas." This approach aligns with the two-way asymmetrical model identified by Grunig and Hunt (1984), where feedback is gathered but not meaningfully integrated into decision-making.

Frontline workers such as tour guides and site managers expressed frustration at being excluded from the communication design process. Their exclusion diminishes message consistency and weakens the authenticity of promotional efforts. This pattern echoes L'Etang's (2006) argument that genuine public relations in tourism requires dialogue, trust, and co-creation among all stakeholders. The absence of symmetrical communication reduces opportunities for shared understanding and limits the long-term impact of campaigns.

The study also found that, although PR officers recognize the importance of social media, institutional support for digital engagement is weak. Some officers admitted using personal social media accounts to promote sites, citing the absence of formal digital frameworks. This underutilization stands in contrast to best practices observed in South Africa and Kenya, where community-based digital storytelling has enhanced domestic tourism (Rogerson, 2018; Akama & Kieti, 2007). These findings align with Kotler et al. (2017),

who contend that in the contemporary tourism environment, interactive and consistent online communication is vital for destination branding and stakeholder engagement.

5.2.3 Community Engagement and Participatory Communication

The study revealed a pressing need for deeper community engagement in tourism promotion. Many participants argued that residents living near heritage sites are often excluded from campaign design and implementation. One site manager stated, “The people who live around the site should be our first promoters, but they are not involved.” This insight underscores the relevance of the two-way symmetrical model proposed by Grunig et al. (2002), which emphasizes dialogue, feedback, and mutual adaptation between institutions and publics.

According to Hallahan et al. (2007), participatory communication enhances authenticity, credibility, and community ownership factors that are essential for sustainable tourism promotion. When communities are involved in narrative creation, they become active agents in tourism development, fostering a sense of pride and stewardship. The success of South Africa’s *Sho’t Left* campaign (Rogerson, 2018) illustrates the transformative power of participatory approaches, which reframed tourism as an everyday cultural experience. In contrast, Ghana’s top-down communication structure limits community involvement and diminishes emotional connection between citizens and destinations.

5.2.4 Cultural Resonance and Narrative Framing

The research also revealed that most tourism campaigns in Ghana lack cultural resonance and emotional depth. PR officers admitted that messages often focus on historical

monuments and elite cultural icons while neglecting contemporary lifestyle experiences that appeal to younger audiences. One officer noted, “We talk a lot about history, but the youth want fun and something that feels modern.” This observation supports Mensah’s (2021) conclusion that Ghana’s tourism communication needs to evolve toward youth-centered, culturally dynamic storytelling.

From the perspective of Destination Image Theory, this gap indicates a failure to integrate affective appeal into tourism communication. Affect-driven narratives that celebrate joy, community, and belonging can strengthen emotional ties and encourage repeat visitation (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). The study also found that misconceptions about cost, safety, and accessibility persist among residents, discouraging participation. As Giddy and Webb (2016) argue, inclusive communication that portrays affordability and safety can reshape perceptions and make domestic tourism more appealing.

5.2.5 Theoretical Integration and Reflection

The integration of the Destination Image Theory and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding domestic tourism communication in Ghana. Destination Image Theory explains how perceptions of elitism, irrelevance, or foreign orientation develop among local audiences. In contrast, Excellence Theory offers strategies for transforming those perceptions through symmetrical communication and participatory engagement. Together, these frameworks suggest that effective tourism promotion requires both message reform focusing on emotional and cultural relevance and process reform emphasizing dialogue and inclusivity.

This dual-theoretical approach is particularly suited to Ghana's sociocultural context, where national identity, pride, and community relationships are central to behavior formation. When public relations strategies combine affective storytelling with participatory communication, tourism shifts from being viewed as a commercial enterprise to becoming a shared cultural experience. The findings therefore demonstrate the applicability of both theories to African tourism contexts and contribute to bridging the communication–tourism research gap identified in earlier studies (Adu-Ampong & Teye, 2020; Mensah, 2021).

5.2.6 Summary of Discussion

In conclusion, the discussion highlights three interrelated challenges facing domestic tourism promotion in Ghana: weak emotional connection between citizens and heritage sites, predominantly one-way communication practices, and limited localization of narratives. These issues collectively undermine the impact of public relations strategies aimed at engaging domestic audiences. Nonetheless, they also present valuable opportunities for innovation. By embracing culturally resonant storytelling, participatory communication, and strategic use of digital media, tourism institutions can reconstruct destination images that evoke pride, inclusion, and sustained participation.

Ultimately, the findings reaffirm that the success of tourism promotion depends less on infrastructure or budget size and more on the meanings, emotions, and identities shaped through communication. When public relations practitioners act not only as promoters but as storytellers and cultural mediators, domestic tourism can evolve into a dynamic expression of shared heritage and national belonging.

5.3 Conclusions

The study concludes that although Ghana's tourism sector has achieved commendable international recognition, the domestic market remains underdeveloped, largely due to weak communication strategies and limited emotional engagement among local audiences. Public relations (PR) holds significant potential to redefine how Ghanaians perceive and participate in domestic tourism by reshaping narratives and fostering stronger cultural identification.

The research found that Ghanaian perceptions of tourism are influenced less by infrastructure or cost and more by how destinations are communicated and represented. Many citizens still associate tourism with foreigners and exceptional occasions rather than as part of everyday leisure or cultural expression. Campaigns that prioritize external audiences have failed to cultivate the affective attachment required for domestic participation. Drawing on Destination Image Theory (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), this gap reflects an imbalance between cognitive awareness and emotional connection. PR strategies emphasizing storytelling, inclusivity, and national identity can bridge this divide and reframe tourism as a collective cultural experience.

A second conclusion relates to the communication process. The research showed that most promotional activities rely on one-way, asymmetrical communication that informs but does not involve. This restricts community engagement and diminishes authenticity. The Excellence Theory of Public Relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig et al., 2002) offers a corrective through two-way symmetrical communication, where audiences and institutions exchange ideas and co-create narratives. Applying this model within tourism

would allow communities to act as active partners and ambassadors rather than passive recipients of information.

Furthermore, the lack of localized and culturally embedded narratives weakens campaign effectiveness. Promotional content often presents Ghana through generalized historical or scenic imagery without reflecting local voices, dialects, or everyday realities. Incorporating community-based storytelling and culturally resonant imagery would help domestic audiences see themselves within tourism narratives, strengthening ownership and pride.

Finally, the research notes that despite institutional constraints such as limited funding and fragmented coordination new opportunities are emerging. Digital platforms, youth engagement, and renewed cultural interest create possibilities for transforming domestic tourism communication. If Ghana's tourism institutions adopt PR strategies grounded in cultural authenticity and participation, domestic tourism can evolve into a sustainable avenue for national unity and inclusive growth.

5.4 Implications of the Study

The implications extend across policy, managerial, and academic domains, emphasizing the strategic positioning of PR in advancing domestic tourism.

5.5.1 Policy Implications

At the policy level, findings highlight the need for a coherent national communication framework dedicated to domestic tourism. The Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA) and the

Ministry of Tourism must treat communication as a core developmental function rather than a peripheral activity. Policies should mandate periodic audience research, allocate stable funding for domestic campaigns, and establish long-term communication strategies.

Decentralization is also crucial. Regional and municipal tourism offices should be empowered to design context-specific communication programs that use local languages, cultural idioms, and traditions. Such localization ensures inclusivity across Ghana's diverse communities. Integrating PR principles into tourism policymaking will strengthen collaboration between state institutions, private operators, and community groups, aligning efforts toward a shared national vision.

5.5.2 Managerial Implications

For tourism managers and PR practitioners, institutional coordination and capacity development are essential. National and local teams must synchronize their messaging to ensure authenticity and relevance. Continuous training in strategic communication, social-media management, and community relations will enhance professional competence.

Managers should implement feedback mechanisms post-campaign surveys, visitor comment platforms, and community forums to evaluate communication effectiveness. These participatory approaches align with the Excellence Theory's emphasis on dialogue and iterative learning. Furthermore, PR strategies should shift from event-based promotion to relationship-based engagement. Sustained initiatives such as heritage storytelling, school partnerships, and digital cultural campaigns can foster continuous interaction and emotional connection with domestic audiences.

5.5.3 Academic and Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this study advances scholarship by demonstrating the synergy between Destination Image Theory and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations. It establishes that effective tourism communication depends on both perceptual (image) and relational (interaction) dimensions. The research contributes to limited African literature that integrates PR and tourism communication, offering a model adaptable to other developing contexts.

Future academic work should further explore how PR influences domestic tourism in Africa, employing comparative or longitudinal designs. Such research can reveal how socio-cultural and institutional factors mediate communication outcomes. By linking what is communicated (image formation) to how it is communicated (process), this study bridges tourism marketing and PR theory fields often treated separately in Ghanaian scholarship.

5.6 Recommendations

Based on the study's conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed for policymakers, managers, and practitioners seeking to enhance domestic tourism through communication.

First, PR must be repositioned as a central pillar of tourism development. Institutions should create well-resourced PR units responsible for research, strategy, and creative content tailored to domestic audiences.

Second, participatory and community-driven communication should be institutionalized. Tourism campaigns should be co-developed with local leaders, youth groups, and cultural organizations to ensure authenticity. Such collaboration will align with the symmetrical communication principle, strengthening trust and local ownership.

Third, digital media should be leveraged extensively. Social platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok offer cost-effective channels for storytelling that features ordinary Ghanaians engaging in local travel. Highlighting accessibility, affordability, and enjoyment will counter elitist perceptions.

Fourth, campaigns must transition from sporadic, event-driven initiatives to sustained, narrative-based engagement. Programs such as *See Ghana, Eat Ghana* should evolve into permanent platforms supported by continuous messaging and school-based heritage education.

Fifth, inter-agency collaboration and capacity building are essential. Cross-sectoral workshops can align messaging and avoid duplication. Training in digital storytelling, stakeholder management, and evaluation should be embedded in professional development plans.

Finally, communication strategies should integrate robust monitoring and evaluation. Audience research and post-campaign assessments will provide evidence for refining strategies and ensuring measurable outcomes.

5.7 Suggestions for Further Research

This research provides a qualitative foundation but also opens new areas for exploration. Future studies could employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches to measure the effectiveness of PR campaigns nationwide. Comparative analyses among regions such as Ashanti, Central, and Volta would reveal contextual variations in communication practices.

Further research should also capture the perspectives of domestic tourists themselves to understand how they interpret PR messages and what factors influence their decision to visit local attractions. Audience-based inquiry would provide critical feedback for designing more targeted and inclusive campaigns.

5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter synthesized the key findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations of the study. It reaffirmed that Ghana's domestic tourism challenges stem primarily from communication deficiencies rather than infrastructural gaps. Through the dual lenses of Destination Image Theory and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations, the study demonstrated that tourism promotion must evolve from one-way publicity to two-way, participatory engagement.

The implications underscored the need for policy frameworks, capacity development, and community collaboration to reposition PR as a transformative tool in tourism development. The recommendations outlined practical steps for policymakers and practitioners to foster cultural resonance, inclusivity, and sustained local participation.

Overall, this research contributes to both theory and practice by illustrating that communication is central to shaping the emotional and cultural dimensions of tourism. When public relations is grounded in authenticity, dialogue, and cultural pride, it can transform domestic tourism into a catalyst for national identity, social cohesion, and sustainable economic growth in Ghana.

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APPENDICES

SEMI-STRUCTURED PHONE INTERVIEWS

My name is **Akua Karle Okyere**, and I am a postgraduate researcher at the **University of Media, Arts and Communication**. Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study titled “*Leveraging Public Relations Strategies to Promote Domestic Tourism: A Case Study of Tourist Sites in the Greater Accra Region.*”

The purpose of this study is to explore how public relations strategies are used to promote domestic tourism in the Greater Accra Region, with a particular focus on the roles of PR officers, communication practitioners, tour guides, and site managers.

Before we begin, I would like to inform you of the following:

- Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw at any point without giving a reason.
- The interview will take about 40–60 minutes.
- With your permission, I would like to record the interview to ensure accuracy.
The recordings and transcripts will be kept secure and confidential.
- Your name, institution, and personal identifiers will not appear in the final report.
Instead, pseudonyms or codes will be used.
- There are no foreseeable risks to your participation, and your responses will only be used for academic purposes.

Do you consent to participate in this study?

Do you consent to having this interview recorded for transcription purposes?

Thank you. We may now begin the interview.

Interview Guide for Public Relations/Communication Officers

Section A: Introduction and Background

1. Can you briefly describe your role in your institution and how it relates to tourism promotion?
2. How long have you been working in this role?

Section B: Current PR Practices

3. What strategies does your institution currently use to promote tourism in the Greater Accra Region?
4. To what extent are these strategies targeted at domestic versus international tourists?
5. What role do you see public relations playing in shaping how Ghanaians perceive local tourist sites?

Section C: Destination Image and Communication

6. How do you think local residents perceive attractions such as the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, Jamestown, or Shai Hills?
7. What communication tools or messages have been most effective in promoting these sites to local audiences?

8. Can you share an example of a campaign that worked well;or did not work well;for domestic audiences? Why?

Section D: Challenges and Opportunities

9. What challenges do you face in promoting domestic tourism through PR?

10. How do you measure the effectiveness of campaigns targeted at domestic audiences?

11. In your view, what could be done differently to improve domestic engagement with local tourist sites?

Section E: Closing

12. What recommendations would you give policymakers or site managers to strengthen PR for domestic tourism?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not discussed?

Interview Guide for Tour Guides and Site Managers

Section A: Introduction and Background

1. Can you tell me about your role and responsibilities at this site?

2. How long have you been working as a tour guide or site manager?

Section B: Visitor Experiences

3. From your experience, how do local residents respond when they visit this site?

4. Do you think Ghanaians see this site as part of their own cultural identity or heritage?

Why or why not?

5. How do domestic tourists' expectations differ from international visitors?

Section C: Communication and Promotion

6. What role do you play in promoting the site to domestic tourists?

7. Are there specific stories, narratives, or interpretations you use to connect with

Ghanaian visitors?

8. Have you noticed whether current promotional campaigns influence the number of

local visitors?

Section D: Challenges and Opportunities

9. What challenges do you face in engaging domestic tourists?

10. In your view, what barriers discourage Ghanaians from visiting this site?

11. What could be done to make this site more attractive and relatable to local audiences?

Section E: Closing

12. What recommendations would you make to tourism authorities to improve domestic tourism in Greater Accra?

13. Is there anything you would like to share that I have not asked about?