

Storytelling in heritage tourism: the role of storytellers in shaping diasporic visitor experience and promoting Ghanaian heritage

Emmanuel Nii Ayi Solomon

*Department of Marketing, Accra Technical University, Accra, Ghana, and
Department of Marketing and Entrepreneurship,
University of Ghana Business School, Accra, Ghana, and*

Stephen Mahama Braimah, Raphael Odoom and Kobby Mensah

*Department of Marketing and Entrepreneurship,
University of Ghana Business School, Accra, Ghana*

Abstract

Purpose – The paper aims to explore how storytellers influence Diasporic tourist experiences and promote Ghanaian heritage, with a focus on the Assin Manso Ancestral Slave River Site. Guided by Narrative Transportation Theory (NTT) and Sense of Place Theory (SPT), the study investigates how storytelling techniques, such as delivery style, cultural framing, and symbolic references, shape emotional engagement, identity formation and place attachment. It seeks to uncover the mechanisms by which storytelling fosters cultural reconnection and heritage affirmation, offering theoretical contributions to narrative engagement research and practical guidance for heritage managers seeking to enhance diasporic engagement and preserve cultural narratives in tourism contexts.

Keywords Storytelling, Heritage tourism, Diasporic visitor, Place storytelling, Storytellers, Tourists destination experience

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Heritage tourism is evolving, with storytelling now central to destination marketing (Campos *et al.*, 2025). Contemporary literature underscores the growing importance of authentic, emotionally resonant storytelling in driving tourist revisit intentions (Dai *et al.*, 2025; Moscardo, 2020). Recent research demonstrates that authentic visual narratives significantly enhance trust and travel intention (Haq *et al.*, 2024), while systematic reviews identify storytelling, sustainability, and digital engagement as principal emerging branding strategies in heritage tourism (Roque, 2022). Destinations renowned for cultural and heritage tourism often employ storytelling as a central strategy have grown in prominence. Heritage tourism is now one of the fastest-growing sectors, expanding at a rate of 15% per year (World Travel



and Tourism Council, 2021). To make destinations more appealing and create meaningful experiences, destination marketers are increasingly integrating storytelling into promotional strategies (Campos *et al.*, 2025; Solomon *et al.*, 2022).

Stories are potent instruments for attracting tourist attention, evoking emotion, and fostering a meaningful connection to place (Adu-Boahen and Akansor, 2024; Moscardo, 2020). For diasporic tourists in particular, destination marketers increasingly rely on storytellers to convey narratives that speak to visitors' ancestral roots, cultural identities and the elements that make the destination authentically distinctive to them (Zins and Abbas Adamu, 2024). When delivered by skilled storytellers, whether local residents, tour guides or influencers, such narratives enhance authenticity and emotional resonance, strengthening both the sense of place and the perceived value of the destination (Bassano *et al.*, 2019).

Although storytelling is widely acknowledged as a strategic tool in tourism for enhancing visitor engagement and destination appeal (Moscardo, 2020; Dai *et al.*, 2025), most existing studies focus on generic tourist populations and well-known heritage destinations, with limited attention to the diasporic visitor segment (Chronis, 2012; Merchant and Rose, 2013). Research has examined the role of narratives in conveying cultural heritage and fostering emotional connections (Tussyadiah *et al.*, 2018; Zins and Abbas Adamu, 2024), yet few studies have explored how storytelling functions within postcolonial, trauma-laden heritage contexts such as sites connected to the transatlantic slave trade (Tevely and Papp-Váry, 2025). In particular, the role of storytellers as active agents who adapt narratives to the cultural identities, expectations and emotional needs of diasporic visitors remains underdeveloped in the literature (Garcia and Best, 2020; Moreira *et al.*, 2025). Some recent works have acknowledged storytellers as cultural mediators (Saarinen and Gill, 2021), yet few have critically examined how their narrative techniques, motivations or affective performances influence tourist experiences under emotionally charged contexts, such as sites of memory or trauma (Garcia and Best, 2020; Chronis, 2012; White and Frew, 2013).

Furthermore, while narrative transportation theory (NTT) and sense of place theory (SPT) have been applied to tourism research (Green and Brock, 2000; Tuan, 1977), prior work seldom operationalizes these constructs to explain the mechanisms through which storytellers influence diasporic tourists' emotional immersion, identity affirmation and place attachment. This lack of theoretical integration limits our understanding of how narrative techniques, such as embodied performance, ancestral symbolism, audience-specific framing, shape experiences at heritage sites.

This study addresses this gap by focusing on storytellers within the emotionally layered and historically significant space of the Assin Manso Slave River Site in Ghana. It examines how storytellers, through voice, narrative style and cultural knowledge enhance tourist experiences, promote destination appeal, and evoke emotional responses among visitors, particularly those of African descent seeking ancestral reconnection.

To guide this exploration, the study is structured around three central research questions: how storytellers shape the emotional, cultural and cognitive experiences of tourists at heritage sites in Ghana; what role storytelling techniques and motivations play in influencing diasporic tourists' engagement and sense of place; and how storytelling can be strategically leveraged to promote destination identity and visitor satisfaction in heritage tourism. By analyzing these narrative practices through the lenses of NTT and SPT, the study provides deeper insight into how storytelling fosters identity formation, cultural rediscovery, and place attachment.

The research offers several theoretical contributions. First, it addresses a distinct gap by exploring the role of storytellers, not merely narratives, in the context of African heritage tourism. While existing studies have examined heritage narratives, few have centered the

storytellers themselves as active agents in shaping tourist meaning-making, emotional connection and site interpretation. Second, the study uniquely focuses on the experiences of diasporic tourists, who engage with heritage tourism not solely for leisure or education but as a form of ancestral reconnection and identity negotiation. Unlike local or general heritage tourists, diasporic visitors often experience storytelling as an emotionally charged return to a symbolic homeland, which adds layers of memory, longing, and belonging to their engagement. Third, the study expands existing theoretical frameworks by applying NTT and SPT to explore how immersive storytelling influences emotional and cognitive dimensions of tourist experience, especially in postcolonial, trauma-laden heritage contexts.

Ultimately, this research contributes to theory by developing a more nuanced understanding of storytelling in tourism. It also provides practical guidance for destination managers and tourism stakeholders by identifying storytelling techniques and strategies that can be tailored to different audiences, particularly within heritage and diaspora tourism. The study's findings support efforts to promote cultural sustainability, enhance visitor satisfaction, and differentiate destinations in an increasingly competitive global tourism market.

2. Literature review

2.1 *Concept of heritage tourism*

Heritage tourism has long been defined as travel motivated by the desire to experience places, objects, and traditions that carry the stories of the past (Timothy, 2023). It is about far more than visiting museums or monuments, it is about connecting with the essence of a place through both its *tangible heritage*, such as architecture, landscapes and artifacts, and its *intangible heritage*, including customs, oral traditions, music and performance (UNWTO, 2021). Over the past decade, heritage tourism has become one of the most dynamic sectors of the global tourism industry (OECD, 2020), valued not only for its economic potential but also for its role in cultural preservation, education and community identity (Su *et al.*, 2023).

What makes heritage tourism particularly fascinating is that it is never static. Heritage itself is a living, evolving construct. As Smith (2009) and Graham and Howard (2020) remind us, what we call “heritage” is often shaped by present-day needs, politics, and cultural priorities rather than being a neutral representation of the past. This raises essential questions: Whose history is being told? Who decides which stories are preserved and which are left out? These questions take on added weight in postcolonial contexts, where heritage sites often bear witness to painful histories of displacement, enslavement and cultural survival (Amoamo and Thompson, 2022).

In recent years, researchers have shifted their focus from simply cataloguing and conserving heritage to exploring how visitors *experience* it. Visitors are no longer content to be passive observers; they increasingly seek immersive, participatory encounters that allow them to “step into” history (Christofi *et al.*, 2022; Chen, 2024). This reflects the broader “experience economy” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), where tourism value is co-created through emotional engagement, sensory involvement and personal meaning-making (Richards, 2021). Storytelling, live performance and digital augmentation, such as virtual or augmented reality – are now central to heritage interpretation, enabling tourists to feel the past rather than merely learn about it.

Heritage tourism also carries a deeply personal dimension, especially for members of the diaspora. For many, visiting a heritage site is an act of return, an emotional journey to reconnect with ancestral roots and affirm cultural belonging. Diaspora tourism studies (Coles and Timothy, 2004; Backer and King, 2021) show that these experiences often merge personal identity with collective memory, transforming the visit into both intimate and historic. This is especially evident in African heritage contexts, where sites linked to slavery

and colonialism hold profound emotional and symbolic meaning (Boakye and Dei, 2020; Yankholmes and McKercher, 2021; Catherine *et al.*, 2025).

Still, heritage tourism faces tensions. Commercial pressures can push destinations to “stage” authenticity in ways that dilute cultural meaning (Cohen, 1988; Mkono, 2020), while over-tourism can physically and socially strain heritage sites (Garrod and Fyall, 2000). There is also the matter of interpretation, what gets told, what is omitted and how these decisions affect community representation (Light, 2022). Many scholars now argue for more inclusive and participatory approaches that give space to local voices, ensuring that heritage narratives remain rooted in the communities that live them (Beevor, 2021; Amoamo and Thompson, 2022).

Heritage tourism therefore has evolved from a preservation-driven concept into a rich, experience-focused practice that is as much about meaning as it is about memory. It thrives when it connects the past with the present in ways that resonate emotionally with visitors, particularly those whose heritage is entwined with the site itself. This understanding underscores the importance of interpretive tools, like storytelling, that can bridge authenticity, visitor engagement and cultural significance, especially in contexts of diasporic reconnection.

2.2 *Influence of storytellers on tourist destination experience*

Human experience is deeply intertwined with storytelling, which plays a foundational role in how people make sense of their lives, cultures and places (Gubrium and Holstein, 1998; Escalas, 2007). In the context of tourism, storytelling facilitates identity construction, memory formation and the transmission of cultural values (McCabe and Foster, 2006). Narratives help tourists interpret and connect with destinations by framing their experiences through engaging and coherent storylines (Cronon, 1992; Rickly-Boyd, 2010).

Storytellers therefore shape tourists’ perceptions of authenticity, cultural richness and emotional depth. Their ability to blend historical knowledge with empathetic delivery enhances visitors’ engagement and satisfaction (Boje *et al.*, 1999; McAdams, 1993). This study builds on the idea that storytelling is not a neutral act, but a socially situated performance where narrators selectively present content to evoke emotional reactions and form connections (Denning, 2001; Simmons, 2001).

Tourists respond to narratives that reflect their values or spark curiosity about others’ lived experiences. For diasporic tourists, in particular, stories that echo ancestral pain, pride or resistance can trigger profound emotions and foster a renewed sense of identity and belonging (Coles and Timothy, 2004). Effective storytelling thereby influences tourist behavior, encouraging deeper site exploration, longer visits or return trips (Kim and Jogaratnam, 2015; Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

2.3 *Reframing storytellers in heritage tourism*

Tourism scholars have long recognized storytelling as a vital mechanism for place branding, cultural communication and visitor engagement (Chronis, 2005; Moscardo, 2020; Bassano *et al.*, 2019). Stories are powerful vehicles through which destinations communicate heritage, convey identity and foster emotional connections with tourists (Dawson and Sykes, 2018; Kim and Ritchie, 2014). However, much of the literature centers on storytelling as a narrative product or marketing strategy, with comparatively less attention paid to the role of the storyteller as the narrative agent. Storytellers are not just transmitters of information but active mediators of cultural meaning, affective experiences and identity formation (Garcia and Best, 2020; Saarinen and Gill, 2021).

In heritage tourism, particularly in postcolonial or trauma-laden contexts such as slavery heritage sites, storytellers take on complex roles as interpreters, spiritual intermediaries and

even emotional caretakers (White and Frew, 2013; Cohen, 1985). Their voice, tone and cultural authority significantly shape how visitors, especially diasporic tourists that visit places of trauma or dark sites, interpret the site and experience its emotional weight (White and Frew, 2013; Cohen, 1985). Beevor (2021) and Garcia and Best (2020) emphasize that the affective labor of storytellers is central to meaning making, especially when visitors are invited to engage with histories of pain, loss and resilience. Yet, empirical research remains limited on how these storytellers construct, perform and adapt their narratives to different audiences, particularly those with personal or ancestral ties to the heritage being interpreted (White and Frew, 2013; Pachucki *et al.*, 2022).

This gap becomes particularly salient when viewed through the lens of diasporic tourism. Unlike general or domestic tourists, diasporic visitors often engage with heritage travel as a deeply personal act of symbolic return, ancestral pilgrimage or identity restoration (Palmer, 1999; Teye and Timothy, 2004). For these tourists, encounters with storytellers are not simply educational or entertaining, they are emotionally transformative, offering opportunities for healing, remembrance and belonging (Seaton, 2002; Frost *et al.*, 2020). It is therefore worth noting that literature seldom differentiates how diasporic audiences experience storytelling from other visitor groups, nor does it consider how storytellers tailor their narratives for diasporic publics seeking more profound cultural resonance (Nielsen, 2017; Abma, 2003).

Additionally, storytelling in these contexts often draws from oral traditions, community memory and culturally specific performance styles that contribute to an enriched sense of place (Bec *et al.*, 2019; Mijnheer and Jordan, 2019). The performative and improvisational aspects of storytelling such as gesture, voice modulation, invocation of ancestors and audience interaction, require more scholarly attention (Beevor *et al.*, 2022). These dimensions shape how tourists emotionally connect with place and history and contribute to broader discussions on authenticity, affect and embodied heritage interpretation (Bryon, 2012).

2.4 Theoretical framework

This study draws upon two complementary theoretical frameworks – NTT and SPT to examine how storytelling shapes tourist experiences, particularly at emotionally and culturally significant heritage sites like Assin Manso.

2.4.1 Narrative transportation theory. NTT explains how individuals become mentally and emotionally “transported” into a story world, leading to greater engagement and persuasive impact (Green and Brock, 2000). In tourism research, NTT has been applied to contexts such as destination advertising (Van Laer *et al.*, 2014; Tussyadiah *et al.*, 2018) and museum interpretation (Hyde *et al.*, 2019). These studies demonstrate that vivid, emotionally resonant narratives can enhance recall, influence attitudes and encourage behavioral intentions.

However, prior tourism applications of NTT tend to focus on mediated narratives, digital campaigns, advertisements or audio-visual storytelling, rather than live, in situ performances (Skavronskaya *et al.*, 2020). This emphasis has limited our understanding of how narrative immersion operates when visitors engage directly with storytellers in heritage landscapes. Furthermore, while narrative transportation has been studied across broad tourist demographics, little attention has been paid to diasporic audiences, whose cultural and ancestral ties may fundamentally alter the dynamics of transportation (Tussyadiah *et al.*, 2018). For such audiences, identity relevance may not merely enhance transportation; it may be the primary driver of immersion (Chronis, 2012; Merchant and Rose, 2013).

This study addresses these gaps by applying NTT to embodied, place-based storytelling at the Assin Manso Ancestral Slave River Site (AMASRS), focusing specifically on diasporic visitors of African descent. By operationalizing transportation through mechanisms such as immersive narrative construction, ancestral symbolism and adaptive tailoring, the research

extends NTT beyond cognitive absorption to include cultural resonance and identity affirmation as core elements of transportation in heritage tourism.

2.4.2 Sense of place theory. SPT examines the emotional, cognitive and symbolic bonds individuals form with specific locations (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 2007). In tourism, SPT has been used to explore how visitors develop place attachment, place identity and place meaning, often through repeated visitation or long-term engagement (Williams and Vaske, 2003; Ram et al., 2016). Research has shown that cultural heritage narratives can enhance these bonds by imbuing sites with symbolic value (Lew, 2017; Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2021).

Yet, much of this work assumes that strong place attachment develops gradually over time. This overlooks episodic yet intense forms of place bonding that occur during heritage pilgrimages, where visitors may experience profound emotional connections in a single encounter (Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2021). Moreover, existing studies rarely examine how embodied storytelling practices, such as gestures, ritual and performance, mediate the formation of place meaning. For diasporic visitors to sites of memory, the interplay between narrative immersion (NTT) and embodied spatial engagement (SPT) may produce a sense of place that is both immediate and deeply enduring.

This study extends SPT by examining how storytellers at Assin Manso create place attachment through embodied performance and spatial anchoring of narratives. By integrating SPT with NTT, the research demonstrates that for diasporic visitors, place attachment can be catalyzed not only by physical presence but also by the symbolic and emotional layering of the site through storytelling – transforming a visit into an act of cultural homecoming.

2.4.3 Integrating NTT and SPT. While NTT explains how tourists are transported into narrative experiences, SPT explains how those experiences translate into emotional bonds with place. Together, these theories illuminate how storytelling not only engages visitors cognitively and emotionally but also helps them locate themselves within the cultural and historical fabric of the site. This dual framework is especially powerful for understanding diaspora tourism. In this context of this study, it is worth noting that storytelling functions both as a bridge to the past (NTT) and a foundation for identity and belonging (SPT). It also supports the idea that tourism experiences can be transformative, particularly when designed with narrative depth and cultural sensitivity.

3. Methodology

This study used a qualitative research approach to explore the role of storytelling in tourism, focusing on its impact on destination promotion and the enhancement of tourist experiences within Ghana's heritage tourism context. The choice of qualitative design was guided by the need to capture in-depth perspectives, meanings and subjective experiences related to storytelling practices. It enabled the researchers to generate nuanced insights that would have been difficult to obtain through quantitative methods.

An exploratory, narrative-based research design was adopted to understand the complex and multifaceted role of storytellers. The study was conducted at the AMASRS, elected for its historical significance, emotional resonance and symbolic importance to diasporic visitors. This setting provided a rich context for understanding how storytelling contributes to emotional engagement and identity formation.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring diversity in age, gender, nationality, and storytelling roles. A total of 15 individuals participated: 5 storytellers (comprising three site guides and two community elders) and 10 diasporic tourists. The inclusion of both storytellers and audience members allowed for a dual perspective on narrative construction and reception. Participants were selected based on their direct engagement with storytelling at the site

and their capacity to provide rich, reflective accounts. This purposive sampling strategy followed the guidelines of [Patton \(2002\)](#), emphasizing information-rich cases.

The principle of data saturation was applied separately for each participant group to ensure analytical rigor. For storytellers, saturation was reached when no new insights emerged regarding narrative techniques, motivations, and performance styles. For diasporic tourists, saturation was reached when subsequent interviews produced no new perspectives on emotional responses, identity negotiation and perceptions of authenticity. This approach ensured thematic completeness for both groups.

Data from storytellers and tourists were coded in separate data sets, preserving the distinctiveness of each perspective. Codes were then compared through a triangulation matrix to identify convergences (e.g. shared perceptions of authenticity) and divergences (e.g. differing interpretations of symbolic rituals). This cross-analysis enhanced the depth and reliability of findings.

While 15 participants may appear small, this size is typical in qualitative research focused on depth rather than breadth ([Guest et al., 2006](#)). Some stakeholders, such as policymakers, travel agents, or local authorities, were deliberately excluded from this phase of the study. The rationale was to maintain focus on the lived, interpersonal dynamics of storytelling between guides and tourists, which is central to narrative transportation and sense of place formation. Future studies could expand this scope to include institutional perspectives.

Interviews with diasporic tourists were conducted immediately after they experienced the guided storytelling sessions at the AMASRS. This timing was intentional, allowing participants to describe their emotional and cognitive engagement while the experience was still fresh and vivid ([Patton, 2015](#); [Seidman, 2019](#)). Although some participants had prior familiarity with aspects of the narrative through media, personal networks or educational sources, the interviews were designed to capture their on-site reactions, sensory impressions and interpretations shaped by the live performance. To reduce the influence of prior knowledge, interview prompts began with open-ended experiential questions such as “Tell me about what you experienced here today[...].” encouraging spontaneous, phenomenological descriptions grounded in the visit itself. Follow-up questions asked participants to highlight elements they noticed or felt for the first time during the visit, helping to isolate the distinctive impact of the live, situated storytelling encounter.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews (in-person and virtual), with each session lasting 30–90 min. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed *verbatim* and supplemented by detailed field notes. A narrative approach allowed participants to recount their experiences and perceptions in their own words.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved multiple rounds of reading, coding, and categorizing data into recurring themes aligned with the study’s theoretical framework. Trustworthiness was enhanced through triangulation (across storytellers and tourists), member checking (participant validation of transcripts) and reflexivity (researcher journaling to identify bias).

3.1 Use of digital text analysis tools

To enhance the transparency and credibility of the qualitative analysis, Voyant Tools, an open-access digital text analysis platform, was employed as a supplementary analytic technique. The transcribed interviews were uploaded into Voyant to generate descriptive textual statistics, including word frequencies, term trends and keyword-in-context (KWIC) patterns. This assisted in identifying dominant concepts, examining the co-occurrence of meaningful terms, and visually mapping the thematic patterns that emerged from the manual coding.

The use of Voyant Tools helped strengthen the analytical rigor of the study by (1) confirming the prominence of initial codes identified through thematic analysis, (2) revealing additional linguistic structures and patterns associated with emotional engagement and place attachment, and (3) producing visual outputs, such as frequency charts and theme distributions, that enhance methodological transparency. Voyant has increasingly been recommended for qualitative tourism research due to its suitability for analyzing narrative-rich data (Sinclair and Rockwell, 2016).

3.2 *The tourist site under study*

The AMASRS stands as a significant historical landmark situated in Ghana, West Africa, approximately 40 km along the Cape Coast – Kumasi highway in the Central Region. The selection of the AMASRS as the case study was both strategic and contextually significant. Assin Manso holds a central place in Ghana's cultural memory as one of the most emotionally resonant heritage sites tied to the transatlantic slave trade. It is not only a site of historical significance but also a space for spiritual reflection, identity reconnection, and diasporic pilgrimage, particularly among African-descended visitors from the diaspora. Compared to other heritage sites in Ghana, such as Cape Coast or Elmina castles, Assin Manso uniquely combines natural features (the river) with curated narratives of memory, healing, and reconnection. This makes it an ideal setting to explore the role of storytelling in shaping emotional engagement, destination loyalty and promotion. Moreover, the site's evolving interpretation and use in commemorative events like Emancipation Day celebrations highlight its importance within Ghana's broader tourism development strategy and its alignment with global trends in memory tourism and dark heritage interpretation.

3.2.1 *Entering the field.* Before commencing our fieldwork at the Assin Manso Slave River Site, we adhered to ethical protocols by formally introducing ourselves and explaining our research intentions to the site guides and community members. Although one of the researchers is known as a frequent visitor and freelance tour guide that brings tourists to the site, it was important to clarify our role as researchers. Following Kozinets' (2010) guidelines, we shared our background and objectives with the storytellers (site guides) and were directed to key community members who could further assist in the research. These initial interactions were essential in establishing rapport, fostering trust, and ensuring the community's support in our data collection process. This step not only facilitated smoother interactions but also shaped the subsequent fieldwork by allowing us to observe the dynamics between the site guides and tourists more closely, which became integral to understanding how place storytelling influences the tourist experience.

3.2.2 *Setting the boundaries of the field.* Defining the boundaries of this study was essential for maintaining focus and ensuring clarity for participants. Following Boyd's (2009) notion that boundaries emerge from patterns and observations; we concentrated on the onsite guides at the Slave River Site and community members familiar with the town's history. These individuals play a key role in shaping the storytelling experience for tourists, directly aligning with our research objectives. Reflective field notes from our interactions further refined the scope of the fieldwork, ensuring that our analysis would capture the unique contributions of these informants to the overall tourist experience.

3.2.3 *Taking field notes.* During our fieldwork, we took comprehensive field notes of both textual data (e.g. email, WhatsApp) and non-textual data (e.g. live sessions), documenting our observations, experiences, and reflections. We took handwritten notes in a notebook and later typed them up, elaborating on our observations and experiences at a deeper reflective level. Given that many tourists borrow elements from the storytelling to enhance their own experiences, we joined some of the tours to observe how stories were

shared and how tourists responded. Our reflections and descriptions of these experiences, while learning and interacting with the storytellers, constituted the most important part of our field notes. This provided deeper access to how onsite guides (storytellers) weave powerful narratives to create memorable experiences for tourists, particularly African Americans visiting the site (Kulavuz-Onal and Vasquez, 2013).

3.2.4 Online interviews. We conducted online interviews with two of the storytellers since they were often busy with tourists during our site visits. These interviews were held via Zoom, recorded and later transcribed.

3.2.5 Deciding on the participants. Identifying the participants was quite easy. The site has three tour guides who were all willing to participate in the study; however, the challenge is identifying the right community member who knows the town's history to talk to. The idea of the community member's involvement is to check the authenticity of stories shared by these tour guides at the site. Through the help of some opinion leaders in the community, two educated elderly people expressed interest in the study. These people have lived in the community for a long time and know the town's history as it was passed on to them by their forebearers. We purposefully selected members who had a range of experiences in the community and were active members and visible to others during our fieldwork. We had developed specific criteria for the selection of informants before beginning the study, but the diverse participation patterns compelled us to revisit our initial criteria. Therefore, we selected informants who had a variety of backgrounds and experiences in the community and with whom we had established some type of connection during our engagement in the community. (see Table 1 for relevant information about our informants.)

As shown in Table 1, although knowledge of the destination was a crucial criterion for selecting participants and our ability to identify and reach them, not every contacted

Table 1. Profile of participants (site guides and community storytellers)

No.	Gender	Participant	Age	Level of education	Reason for selection
1	Male	Tour guide	33	University graduate	Works at the site as a storyteller (tour guide)
2	Male	Tour guide	37	University graduate	Works as a tour guide and has a passion for storytelling
3	Female	Community storyteller	60	Secondary school leaver	One of the oldest members of the community and know the history of its existence
4	Male	Tour guide	38	High school leaver	He is one of the site guides and has a strong interest in storytelling
5	Male	Community storyteller	75	Sixth form leaver	He is one of the oldest members of the community. He understands the history and culture of the town

Source(s): Authors Construction

participant was included in the study. Each of the five participants selected had a distinct profile within the community – both for community members and site guides. This enabled us to capture various experiences and histories within the community and learn about the different types of tourists who visit the destination. As recommended by [Androutsopoulos \(2008\)](#) and [Patton \(1990, 2002\)](#), purposeful sampling was essential in choosing interviewees for this ethnographic study and establishing connections during our site visits. This approach enhances the credibility of the study.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, as shown in [Table 2](#), ten tourists were interviewed to triangulate the data by assessing whether they were “moved” by the stories shared by the tour guides (storytellers). This approach allowed for the verification of the tourists’ experiences about the key constructs being tested.

3.2.6 Conducting the interviews. We conducted two of the interviews with the site guides via Zoom and the remaining one in person. The interviews of the two community participants were done in person. The medium used for each interview influenced our interviewing practices in various ways. For example, during the Zoom interviews, only one participant enabled their webcam, allowing us to see each other. This setup encouraged us to forget notetaking and engage in a more natural conversation. In the other Zoom interview, we did not use video, so we were able to take notes while giving more backchannel cues, such as “hmm,” “okay” and “uh-huh,” to indicate active listening.

For the interviews with the two community participants, we visited their homes, conducting the interviews separately. Each session lasted between 30 min to an hour and 30 min. We began with an icebreaker, sharing information about ourselves and our motivation for the study. They asked a few questions before we started the formal interview. To ensure clarity, avoid ambiguity, and create a friendly atmosphere before we begin the main interview. We made sure the participants understood each question before answering. We sought their permission to record our conversations and take notes during the interviews. The tourists were interviewed at the tourist site. The interviews for each of the five participants took between 15 and 25 min. All interviews were recorded and transcribed *verbatim*, resulting in 22 typed pages.

3.2.7 Coding of participants. In research focused on storytelling in tourism, the coding of participants is a critical step in the qualitative data analysis process. This involves systematically categorizing and labeling the responses and narratives shared by participants to identify patterns, themes and insights related to their experiences and perspectives. This approach not only respects participants’ privacy but also adheres to ethical research standards.

Table 2. Profile of participants (tourists)

No.	Gender	Age	Country of origin	Occupation	Reason for selection
1	Female	20	USA	Student	Willingness to participate in the study
2	Female	65	Trinidad and Tobago	Retiree	Willingness to participate in the study
3	Male	45	St. Kith and Neves	Tour operator	Willingness to participate in the study
5	Female	42	USA	Medical doctor	Willingness to participate in the study
6	Female	44	USA	Teacher	Willingness to participate in the study
7	Male	38	Jamaica	Lawyer	Willingness to participate in the study
8	Female	50	USA	Social worker	Willingness to participate in the study
9	Female	45	USA	University lecturer	Willingness to participate in the study
10	Male	70	Barbados	Retiree	Willingness to participate in the study

Source(s): Authors Construction

3.3 Themes identified in the study

Through in-depth interviews with professional storytellers (onsite guides) and community storytellers and leisure tourists visiting AMASRS, we have identified several key themes as depicted in Figure 1, that elucidate the multifaceted role of storytelling in enhancing tourism experiences and influencing visitor behavior.

The analysis of the study is organized around these four central themes, as depicted in Figure 2 with each providing unique insights into the dynamics of place storytelling. These themes include immersive narrative construction, embodied and performative storytelling, adaptive audience tailoring and culturally anchored symbolism. Table 3 outlines four key themes related to the practice and impact of storytelling in tourism. Each theme reflects a critical dimension of how storytelling influences tourist experiences and destination promotion.

3.3.1 Textual analysis. Figure 2 shows the top 20 most frequent words from the interview transcripts as generated by Voyant Tools. Key terms such as *story*, *tourist*, *ancestors*, *tell* and *guide* appear prominently, reflecting the centrality of storytelling, heritage interpretation and guide–visitor interactions in participants’ narratives. Emotion-related words like “feel” further support the theme of affective engagement, consistent with NTT. This indicates that across all four themes, the dominant focus is on: What storytellers *do* (craft scenes, perform, invoke symbols, adjust narratives), how they influence *visitor meaning-making*, and the *mechanisms* through which storytelling shapes heritage experience. Overall, the frequency distribution reinforces the major themes identified through the manual analysis and demonstrates that discussions around storytelling, ancestral memory and visitor experience were dominant across the data set.

Figure 3 presents a word cloud generated through Voyant Tools to visually highlight the most frequently occurring terms in the interview corpus. Prominent words such as

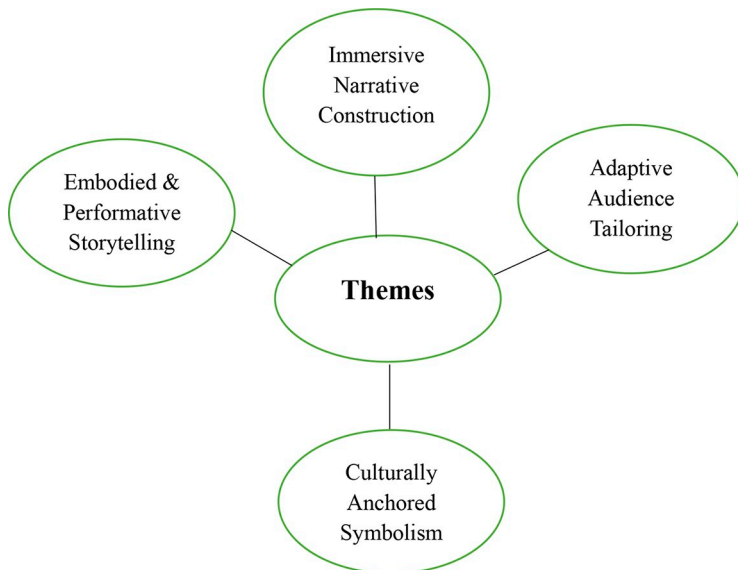


Figure 1. Themes in destination storytelling
Source: Authors Construction

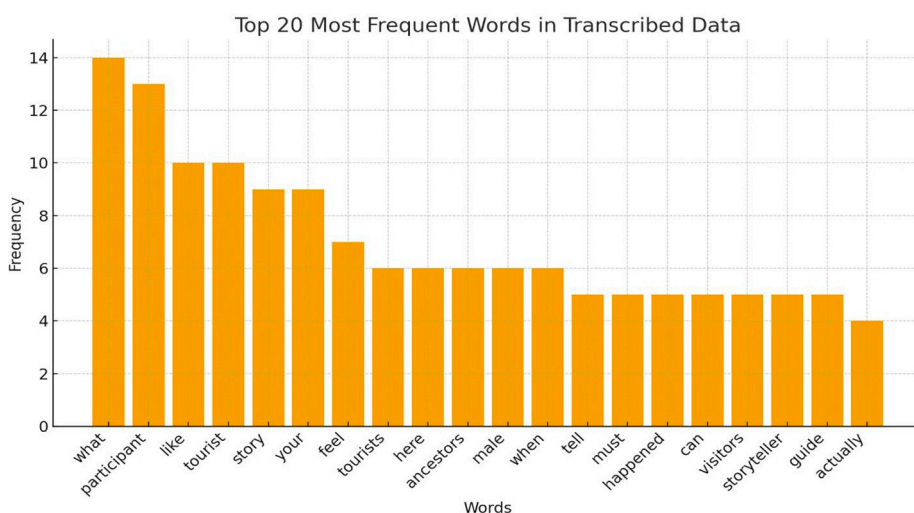


Figure 2. Most frequent words in transcribed data

Table 3. Definition of themes

No.	Themes	Definition
1	Immersive narrative construction	Show how storytellers craft scenes, use pacing, and draw on oral tradition to transport visitors into the past (Green and Brock, 2000)
2	Embodied and performative storytelling	Details how gestures, tone, and ritual acts deepen emotional resonance and create a shared sense of place (Relph, 2007)
3	Culturally anchored symbolism	Explains how storytellers invoke ancestral connections and use symbolic acts to strengthen identity continuity (Palmer, 1999)
4	Adaptive audience tailoring	Reveals how storytellers adjust depth, tone, and symbolism based on whether the audience is diasporic, domestic, or general tourists (Chronis, 2012)

Source(s): Authors Construction

participant, tourist, guide, story, storyteller and *ancestors* reflect the central focus of the interviews on storytelling practices, heritage interpretation and guide–visitor interactions. The visibility of emotion- and engagement-related terms such as *feel, willingness* and *like* further supports the thematic emphasis on affective responses and participant involvement. In essence, the word cloud visually reinforces the key themes identified in the qualitative analysis by illustrating the dominant concepts repeatedly referenced across participants’ narratives.

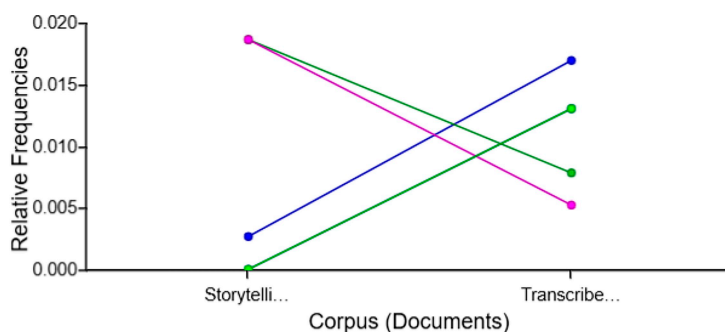


Figure 4. Comparative relative frequencies of key terms in the two corpora

The results demonstrate that storytelling enhances tourist engagement and destination experience through identifiable mechanisms that actively shape emotional connection, contextual understanding and depth of experience. The themes below are therefore framed as mechanisms of influence rather than as storyteller intentions.

The results of the study can be explained through the lens of NTT (Green and Brock, 2000), which posits that individuals who are immersed or transported into a narrative are more likely to form strong emotional bonds and engage with the content. Authentic and well-researched narratives, tailored to diverse tourists and incorporating local voices, resonate deeply with tourists and increase their sense of place and attachment to the destination.

Storytellers create immersive historical worlds by using vivid sensory descriptions, symbolic language, and carefully paced narratives that allow tourists to mentally “enter” the past. This process aligns with NTT (Green and Brock, 2000; Van Laer *et al.*, 2014), as visitors reported feeling “placed” within the events described (Green and Brock, 2000). Participant 2 shared:

We create engaging content through the stories we tell. This makes the tourists actually delve into the story or put themselves in the shoes of what we are telling them.

Such narrative immersion enables tourists, particularly those from the diaspora, to envision ancestral experiences, generating an emotional investment that transforms the visit from passive observation into active engagement (Green and Brock, 2000). Tourist 5 reinforced this by noting:

I actually can visualize it as the narration goes on, and this really made me feel very emotional.

These comments illustrate how storytellers trigger deep engagement, by facilitating transportation into the narrative world, visitors form a more personal and enduring connection to the site (Green and Brock, 2000). Moreover, Participant 1 emphasized the importance of historical context in storytelling:

We like to take people back in history. They must know what happened in the past and this is what Assin Manso stands for. Tourists must know what happened here. What happened to their ancestors.

By linking tourists with a destination’s historical and cultural significance, storytelling fosters a deeper sense of place attachment (Tuan, 1977). This assertion is supported by Relph (2007) who was of the view that embedding history within the narrative enhances emotional engagement, allowing visitors to form meaningful associations with the site.

Beyond verbal narrative, storytellers use embodied performance, gesture, voice modulation, facial expression and ritual acts, that anchor meaning in the physical space of the site (Relph, 2007). This reflects SPT (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 2007), as these performances link the historical content directly to the spatial and sensory environment. Participant 1 explained:

Your body language will speak what you are preaching, and your facial expression to preach what you are saying.

For diasporic visitors, such embodied cues reinforce a felt presence of the past within the landscape, strengthening both place attachment and the authenticity of the encounter (Relph, 2007).

Storytellers embed narratives in local oral traditions, invoking ancestral kinship and spiritual references. This symbolism functions as a mechanism for linking individual visitor identity with collective memory (Palmer, 1999; Valldejuli, 2025). Some scholars are also of the view that this process contributes to a profound understanding of the destination's identity, promoting a sense of belonging and continuity, which are central elements of place attachment (Palmer, 1999). Tourist 2 described the visit as:

[...] like coming here and just being there [...] brought back that feeling of being close to our ancestors [...] I feel like everybody before you pass on in this life [...] should take a journey to the motherland.

This merging of personal and ancestral narratives deepens the *transportation* effect (NTT) while simultaneously reinforcing *place meaning* (SPT) (Valldejuli, 2025). Such layered symbolism resonates especially with diasporic tourists, for whom the site embodies both personal pilgrimage and historical witness.

Moreover, the desire to return to the “motherland” expressed by Tourist 2 echoes *diaspora tourism*, where people of African descent, particularly from the Americas and the Caribbean, seek to reconnect with their cultural and historical roots in Africa. According to Coles and Timothy (2004), diaspora tourists often experience heightened emotional responses when visiting their ancestral homelands, and this type of travel can be seen as a pilgrimage that fosters a sense of belonging and cultural continuity. The call for others to undertake a similar journey reflects the growing trend of African Americans and other members of the African diaspora seeking personal and collective reconnection with Africa.

Rather than viewing storytellers as simply motivated to promote destinations, the findings indicate that they function as active marketing agents by deploying emotionally resonant narratives that raise visibility, stimulate visitation and encourage sustainable dispersal to lesser-known sites (Chronis, 2012). Participant 2 highlighted:

They can be used as an important strategic marketing tool to promote less visited and under-recognized tourist sites or destinations.

This underscores that the mechanism is not only about promotion but about shaping visitor perceptions through lived narrative, which creates memorability, trust, and brand loyalty (Hudson and Ritchie, 2009; Chronis, 2012). The emotional connection as stated by Participant 3 underscores the impact of *experiential marketing* in tourism. Pine and Gilmore (1998) argue that creating memorable experiences is central to tourism marketing, and storytelling plays a key role in crafting these experiences. By fostering emotional relationships with visitors, storytellers can make a destination more appealing, leading to an increase in both visibility and visitor numbers. This assertion is supported by Hudson and Ritchie (2009) as they believe it is essential for brand loyalty, as it builds stronger ties between visitors and the destination, making it more likely for tourists to return or recommend the place to others. Furthermore, the financial implications

highlighted by Participant 3 are also supported in tourism literature. Increased visibility and emotional attachment driven by storytelling translate to economic benefits for the destination. Research by [Tung and Ritchie \(2011\)](#) indicates that emotional storytelling can boost the overall visitor experience, thereby enhance customer satisfaction and leading to higher revenues through repeat visits, word-of-mouth referrals and positive reviews.

The *Storytelling-Driven Heritage Tourism Framework* presented in [Figure 5](#) above reflects these mechanisms, immersion, embodiment, symbolism, and adaptive tailoring, as interlinked processes that both deepen tourist emotions, experience and contribute to destination marketing objectives ([Green and Brock, 2000](#); [Relph, 2007](#); [Palmer, 1999](#); [Chronis, 2012](#); [Valldejuli, 2025](#)). The model integrates NTT and SPT to explain how storytellers' actions (not just their intentions) produce measurable shifts in emotional engagement, place attachment and tourist behavior.

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that storytelling at the AMASRS shapes diasporic tourist experiences through four interlinked themes that operationalize NTT and SPT. These are: (1) Immersive Narrative Construction, vivid sensory detail, symbolic language, and paced delivery transport visitors into the historical world. As one storyteller put it: "We create engaging content through the stories we tell. This makes the tourists actually delve into the story or put themselves in the shoes of what we are telling them." This is supported by the Voyant Tools KWIC output, which showed repeated collocations between story, history and engaging, indicating the embeddedness of narrative interpretation in guided interactions.

Through compelling narratives, storytellers transform destinations into immersive and emotionally engaging experiences. This aligns with the work of [McCabe and Johnson's \(2013\)](#) who indicate that storytelling enhances tourists' satisfaction and subjective well-being, reinforcing the destination's appeal.

The second theme, embodied performance, refers to how gestures, voice modulation and facial expressions anchor meaning in the site's physical space. Participant 1 explained:

Your body language will speak what you are preaching, and your facial expression to preach what you are saying.

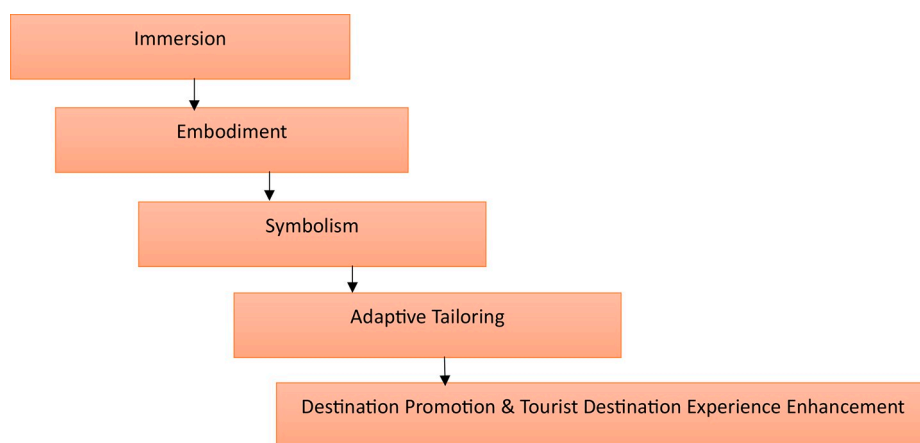


Figure 5. Post study framework – the storytelling-driven heritage tourism framework

This aligns with studies showing that heritage interpretation is not merely verbal but also performed and embodied, with meaning co-created through physical presence and action (Beevor, 2021). Research further indicates that nonverbal cues, including paralanguage and body movement, significantly influence tourists' perceptions and engagement, often more than verbal content (Su *et al.*, 2023; Light, 2022).

The third theme, ancestral symbolism, oral traditions and kinship references link personal identity to collective memory. As Tourist 2 reflected:

[...] like coming here and just being there [...] brought back that feeling of being close to our ancestors [...] I feel like everybody before you pass on in this life [...] should take a journey to the motherland.

This reflects scholarship showing that heritage storytelling often draws on ancestral narratives and collective memory to foster identity affirmation, particularly among diasporic communities (Chronis, 2012). Within both NTT and SPT, symbolic references to ancestry intensify emotional transportation and strengthen place attachment by merging personal and collective histories (Lew, 2017; Tarlow, 2005). The Voyant Tools analysis showed a strong co-occurrence of the terms *ancestors* and *motherland*, further supporting the interpretation that diasporic tourists understood their visit as a journey of identity reclamation and reconnection.

The fourth theme adaptive tailoring refers to audience-specific framing that deepens identification and cultural relevance. Participant 2 noted, "They can be used as an important strategic marketing tool to promote less visited and under-recognized tourist sites or destinations." This reflects findings that heritage interpreters who consciously adapt their narratives to the cultural identity, expectations and emotional needs of specific audience segments enhance relevance, identification and engagement (Moscardo, 2010; Kim and Lee, 2019). In the context of diasporic heritage tourism, such tailoring strengthens the identification processes described in NTT (Green and Brock, 2000) and reinforces place meaning within SPT by connecting the story directly to the visitor's cultural frame of reference (Tuan, 1977; Richards, 2018).

Stories that evoke strong emotions play a crucial role in enriching tourist experiences. When tourists emotionally invest in a narrative, they perceive the destination as more meaningful. This emotional connection also strengthens perceived authenticity and personal relevance, making the travel experience more fulfilling. For marketers, crafting emotionally engaging narratives is essential for building strong attachments to destinations. Such strategies not only enhance tourists' experiences but also encourage positive word-of-mouth recommendations, amplifying the destination's appeal.

For diasporic tourists, these mechanisms do more than inform, they foster emotional immersion and spatial attachment that turn visits into acts of cultural homecoming. NTT explains how identity-relevant stories intensify transportation, while SPT accounts for how embodied and symbolic cues root these transported narratives in the landscape. This combination transforms heritage storytelling from an interpretive act into a restorative and identity-affirming practice.

The study extends prior work on heritage interpretation and diasporic tourism by showing that these mechanisms have heightened effects in trauma-laden contexts. While grounded in a single Ghanaian case, the model is transferable to other heritage sites shaped by displacement, enslavement or colonial histories, provided storytellers adapt narratives to the cultural identities and emotional needs of their audiences. This mechanism-based, theory-grounded account advances NTT by integrating identity-based narrative relevance and

extends SPT by demonstrating how embodied and symbolic acts create enduring bonds between visitor and place.

Again, the inclusion of the Voyant Tools outputs strengthened the thematic analysis by confirming the consistency and prominence of key concepts such as storytelling, emotional engagement, ancestral memory and guide–visitor interaction across the entire data set. These computational patterns directly support the thematic findings discussed above and provide a clear basis for the conclusions presented in the next section.

6. Conclusions

This study set out to examine how storytellers at the Assin Manso Slave River Site shape the experiences of diasporic tourists, with a focus on the mechanisms through which narrative practices influence emotional engagement, place attachment, and destination perception. The findings reveal that storytellers do more than relay historical facts, they construct immersive narrative worlds (narrative immersion, mental imagery), use embodied performance (sensory cues, enactment of meaning), embed ancestral symbolism (cultural resonance, identity linkage), and tailor delivery to audience identity (audience-specific adaptation). These mechanisms, viewed through NTT, demonstrate how tourists become absorbed in the story world through vivid imagery, empathy with historical figures, and suspension of disbelief. SPT explains how such immersion builds enduring place attachment, strengthens place meaning and fosters place identity for diasporic visitors.

In line with prior research on heritage interpretation and diasporic tourism (Chronis, 2005; Teye and Timothy, 2004; Valldejuli, 2025), the results confirm that authenticity, emotional resonance and cultural relevance are central to visitor engagement. However, this study extends earlier work by showing how these effects are intensified for diasporic tourists, for whom heritage storytelling becomes a vehicle for ancestral reconnection, identity affirmation and emotional healing – outcomes less pronounced among general heritage tourists. Such restorative dimensions underscore the distinctiveness of the diasporic audience segment.

Theoretically, the study advances NTT and SPT by operationalizing their constructs within an African slave heritage context, NTT clarifies the psychological processes of immersion (mental imagery, empathy, transportation), while SPT elucidates the affective-spatial bonds (place attachment, place meaning, place identity) that endure beyond the visit. Empirically, it offers one of the first in-depth, mechanism-focused accounts of storytellers as active agents shaping diasporic tourist experiences in a postcolonial, trauma-laden heritage setting.

Although based on a single case, the mechanisms identified, immersive narrative construction, embodied performance, ancestral symbolism and audience-tailored delivery, are transferable to other postcolonial or trauma-associated heritage sites globally, such as Robben Island (South Africa) or Ellis Island (USA). These mechanisms provide a conceptual toolkit for practitioners and researchers seeking to understand or replicate storytelling's role in fostering place attachment and emotional engagement across varied heritage contexts. The integration of manual thematic analysis with digital text-mining outputs further strengthens the reliability of these findings, ensuring that the conclusions reflect consistent patterns across the entire corpus.

In conclusion, storytelling in heritage tourism is not simply about narrating the past, it is a dynamic, visitor-centered practice that transforms heritage sites into spaces of emotional resonance, cultural continuity and place attachment. For diasporic tourists, such experiences transcend conventional sightseeing, becoming acts of personal pilgrimage and cultural

homecoming. Leveraging these mechanisms can enhance destination appeal, foster deeper intercultural understanding and promote sustainable heritage tourism development.

7. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of storytelling in tourism by advancing the application of NTT and SPT within the context of Ghana's heritage tourism. The findings offer several key insights that deepen and expand the theoretical frameworks.

First, it advances NTT by demonstrating how *narrative immersion* is achieved through four interlinked mechanisms, vivid sensory detail, embodied performance, ancestral symbolism and audience-tailored delivery, that enable diasporic visitors to mentally and emotionally enter the historical world being narrated. This extends NTT's focus from cognitive transportation alone (Green and Brock, 2000) to include culturally mediated immersion, where ancestral reconnection becomes a defining outcome. This approach not only enriches existing theories but also provides a fresh perspective on how storytelling can foster identity formation and cultural rediscovery within heritage tourism.

Second, the findings refine SPT by showing that *place attachment* in diasporic contexts emerges not solely from repeated visitation or scenic appreciation, but from the fusion of physical setting with culturally specific symbolic meaning. For diasporic audiences, embodied storytelling situates history in place, producing a layered attachment that is at once emotional, spatial and ancestral (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 2007). This extends the application of SPT by emphasizing the interplay between cultural heritage and emotional resonance, particularly in destinations with complex historical narratives such as Ghana's heritage sites.

Third, by centering the *agency of storytellers* as mediators between place and visitor, the study adds an actor-oriented dimension to both theories. While prior applications of NTT and SPT often treat narrative and place as static constructs, this research demonstrates that the storyteller's performance choices actively shape transportation and attachment outcomes (Cohen, 1988; McCabe and Foster, 2006). This highlights the importance of the storyteller's agency in shaping the narrative experience, a dimension not thoroughly explored in prior applications of NTT and SPT.

Finally, the study's single-case focus provides a *transferable conceptual model*, the Storytelling-Driven Heritage Tourism Framework, that can be adapted to other trauma-laden or identity-relevant heritage contexts globally. The mechanisms identified here are not site-bound; rather, they offer a replicable structure for understanding how immersive, culturally grounded storytelling can deepen visitor engagement, particularly among heritage-linked diasporas.

By situating the research within the unique context of Ghana's heritage sites, the study provides novel insights into how storytelling can address the challenges of promoting destinations with complex cultural and historical legacies. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on destination marketing and cultural tourism, providing practical applications of NTT and SPT in designing effective storytelling strategies (Hahm *et al.*, 2018; Chronis, 2012).

By integrating these contributions, the study reframes NTT and SPT as complementary, dynamic processes shaped by storyteller agency, visitor identity and cultural context, thereby broadening their theoretical scope in tourism research.

8. Practical implications

The findings of this study provide actionable insights for stakeholders within the tourism sector, particularly destination managers, marketers, tour guides and local communities,

emphasizing how storytelling can be effectively leveraged to enhance tourist experiences and promote destinations.

First, destination managers should prioritize storyteller-led interpretation as a central element of the visitor experience. The data show that immersive, sensory-rich narratives and culturally anchored symbolism foster emotional transportation and place attachment, particularly among diasporic visitors seeking ancestral reconnection. Marketing campaigns can leverage excerpts from these narratives, delivered in the storytellers' own voices, to differentiate the destination as both historically significant and emotionally resonant.

Second, storyteller training programs should focus on developing the four mechanisms identified in this study: immersive historical reconstruction, embodied performance, ancestral symbolism and audience-specific tailoring. For example, guides can be trained to adapt their delivery for diasporic audiences by emphasizing identity affirmation and ancestral pride, while still maintaining factual accuracy for general heritage visitors.

Third, community co-creation is vital for authenticity and sustainability. Incorporating local elders, oral historians and diaspora representatives into the design of narrative content ensures that stories remain culturally grounded and emotionally compelling. This process not only safeguards intangible heritage but also shares economic benefits with the communities whose histories are being interpreted. Stakeholders should facilitate collaborative initiatives where local voices are central to storytelling, thereby promoting sustainable tourism practices.

Finally, the study's findings are transferable to other postcolonial or trauma-laden heritage contexts, such as Robben Island (South Africa) or Elmina or Cape Coast Castles (Ghana), where storytelling can serve both commemorative and educational functions. Applying the identified mechanisms in these settings can help craft visitor experiences that balance historical truth with emotional engagement, deepening intercultural understanding while enhancing destination appeal.

The visual and frequency-based patterns identified through Voyant Tools provide further support for these practical implications, as they demonstrate that visitors continually emphasize emotional resonance, ancestral connection, and narrative immersion. These consistent patterns highlight the need for heritage practitioners to prioritize emotionally engaging storytelling and visitor-centered interpretation strategies.

The study therefore advances the conversation around experiential marketing and heritage tourism by illustrating how storytelling shapes destination branding, emotional engagement and tourist loyalty. The recommendations for marketers are firmly rooted in established theoretical frameworks, ensuring a balance between academic inquiry and real-world application.

9. Limitations

Like any other study, the current study was conducted under certain limitations. First, the study focuses on Ghana's heritage tourism, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other contexts. While the insights are valuable for similar cultural heritage destinations, the specific cultural and historical nuances of Ghana might not be applicable to regions with different sociocultural and historical dynamics. Second, the study's participant sample may not fully represent all stakeholders in the tourism ecosystem. For instance, perspectives from local government authorities, or international travel agents might provide additional insights but were potentially underrepresented in the data. Third, the reliance on qualitative methods, while providing rich, in-depth data, may limit the ability to generalize findings broadly. Quantitative approaches could complement this study by offering statistical validation of the observed patterns and relationships. Finally, the study primarily highlights the benefits of storytelling

without extensively addressing potential drawbacks, such as the commercialization of cultural narratives or the risk of cultural misrepresentation. These limitations provide avenues for future research, such as expanding the geographic scope, incorporating diverse stakeholder perspectives, using mixed methods and exploring long-term trends in storytelling and tourism.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the research participants for their time and insights.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- Abma, T.A. (2003), "Learning by telling", *Management Learning*, Vol. 34 No. 2, pp. 221-240, doi: [10.1177/1350507603034002004](https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507603034002004).
- Adu-Boahen, A.O. and Akansor, J. (2024), "Learning difficult histories: the role of monuments and museums", *History Education in Africa: Research, Perspectives and Practices*, Springer Nature Switzerland, Cham, pp. 143-171.
- Amoamo, M. and Thompson, A. (2022), "Indigenous heritage tourism: critical perspectives on representation and participation", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 89, p. 104449, doi: [10.1016/j.tourman.2021.104449](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2021.104449).
- Androutsopoulos, J. (2008), "Potentials and limitations of discourse-centered online ethnography", *Language@Internet*, Vol. 5, pp. 1-20, available at: www.languageatinternet.org/articles/2008/1610
- Bassano, C., Barile, S., Piciocchi, P., Spohrer, J.C., Iandolo, F. and Fisk, R. (2019), "Storytelling about places: tourism marketing in the digital age", *Cities*, Vol. 87, pp. 10-20, doi: [10.1016/j.cities.2018.12.025](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2018.12.025).
- Bec, A., Brent, M., Ken, T., Vikki, S., Liubov, S. and Chris, L. (2019), "Management of immersive heritage tourism experiences: a conceptual model", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 72, pp. 117-120, doi: [10.1016/j.tourman.2018.10.033](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.10.033).
- Beevor, M.C. (2021), "Storytelling in heritage tourism: an exploration of co-creative experiences from a tourist perspective", (Master's thesis, Universidade do Algarve, Portugal).
- Beevor, M.C., Campos, A.C. and Maria, M.G. (2022), "Storytelling and experience design in heritage tourism", in Campos, A.C. and Almeida, S. (Eds), *Global Perspectives on Strategic Storytelling in Destination Marketing*, IGI Global, Hershey, PA, pp. 1-21.
- Boakye, K.A. and Dei, L.A. (2020), "Heritage tourism and the African diaspora: an analysis of motivations at Ghana's slave castles", *Tourism Management Perspectives*, Vol. 34, p. 100667.
- Boje, D.M., Luhmann, J.T. and Baack, D.E. (1999), "Hegemonic stories and encounters between storytelling organizations", *Journal of Management Inquiry*, Vol. 8 No. 4, pp. 340-350.
- Boyd, D. (2009), "A response To Christine Hine: defining project boundaries", in Markham, A.N. and Baym, N.K. (Eds), *Internet Inquiry: Conversations about Method*, SAGE, pp. 26-32, doi: [10.4135/9781483329086.n3](https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483329086.n3).
- Bryon, J. (2012), "Tour guides as storytellers – from selling to sharing", *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 27-43, doi: [10.1080/15022250.2012.656922](https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250.2012.656922).
- Campos, A.C., Guerreiro, M.M. and Beevor, M.C. (2025), "Storytelling in heritage tourism: an exploration of co-creative experiences from a tourist perspective", *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. 40 No. 2, pp. 225-250.

- Catherine, S., Ramasundaram, G., Nimmagadda, M.R. and Suresh, N.V. (2025), "Roots, routes, and identity: how culture shapes heritage travel", *Multiple-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) Techniques and Statistics in Marketing*, IGI Global Scientific Publishing, pp. 343-352.
- Chen, Y.C. (2024), "Perceptions of AI-facilitated creativity in language education: a study on digital storytelling", *JALT CALL Journal*, Vol. 20 No. 3, p. 2089.
- Christofi, M., Hadjipanayi, C. and Michael-Grigoriou, D. (2022), "The use of storytelling in virtual reality for studying empathy: a review", In *2022 International Conference on Interactive Media, Smart Systems and Emerging Technologies (IMET)*, IEEE, pp. 1-8.
- Chronis, A. (2005), "Heritage of the senses: collective remembering as an embodied praxis", *Tourist Studies*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 267-288, doi: [10.1177/1468797605058279](https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797605058279).
- Chronis, A. (2012), "Tourists as story-builders: narrative construction at a heritage museum", *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 29 No. 5, pp. 444-459.
- Cohen, E. (1985), "The tourist experience: a symbolic interactionist approach", Routledge, London.
- Cohen, E. (1988), "Authenticity and commoditization in tourism", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 371-386, doi: [10.1016/0160-7383\(88\)90028-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(88)90028-X).
- Coles, T. and Timothy, D.J. (2004), *Tourism, Diasporas, and Space*, Routledge.
- Cronon, W. (1992), "A place for stories: nature, history, and narrative", *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 78 No. 4, pp. 1347-1376.
- Dai, F., Wang, D. and Kirillova, K. (2025), "Planting the seed: how travel inspiration shapes dreams", *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 42 No. 6, pp. 1-14, doi: [10.1080/10548408.2025.2514544](https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2025.2514544).
- Dawson, P. and Sykes, C. (2018), "Concepts of time and temporality in the storytelling and sensemaking literatures: a review and critique", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, pp. 1-18, doi: [10.1111/ijmr.12194](https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12194).
- Denning, S. (2001), *The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations*, Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Escalas, J.E. (2007), "Self-referencing and persuasion: narrative transportation versus analytical elaboration", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 421-439.
- Frost, W., Jennifer, F., Paul, S. and Jennifer, S.M. (2020), "Seeking a competitive advantage in wine tourism: heritage and storytelling at the cellar-door", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 87, p. 102460, doi: [10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102460](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102460).
- Garcia, M. and Best, G. (2020), "Emotion and performance in heritage storytelling: the storyteller's perspective", *Tourism Management Perspectives*, Vol. 33, p. 100614.
- Garrod, B. and Fyall, A. (2000), "Managing heritage tourism", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 682-708, doi: [10.1016/S0160-7383\(99\)00094-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(99)00094-8)
- Green, M.C. and Brock, T.C. (2000), "The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 79 No. 5, pp. 701-717.
- Graham, B. and Howard, P. (2020), "The Ashgate research companion to heritage and identity", Routledge.
- Gubrium, J.F. and Holstein, J.A. (1998), "Narrative practice and the coherence of personal stories", *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 39 No. 1, pp. 163-187.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A. and Johnson, L. (2006), "How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability", *Field Methods*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 59-82, doi: [10.1177/1525822X05279903](https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903).
- Hahm, J., Tasci, A.D.A. and Terry, D.B. (2018), "The effectiveness of destination marketing campaigns: a meta-analytic review", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, Vol. 42 No. 1, pp. 86-108.
- Haq, M.D., Tseng, T.H., Cheng, H.L., Chiu, C.M. and Kuo, Y.H. (2024), "This country is loveable: a model of destination brand love considering consumption authenticity and social experience",

- Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, Vol. 32, p. 100878, doi: [10.1016/j.jdmm.2024.100878](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2024.100878).
- Hudson, S. and Ritchie, J.B. (2009), "Branding a memorable destination experience: the case of 'Brand Canada'", *International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 11 No. 2, pp. 217-228.
- Hyde, K.F., Ryan, C. and Woodside, A.G. (2019), "Narrative transportation in tourism: conceptual and empirical developments", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 58 No. 6, pp. 1147-1164, doi: [10.1177/0047287518807576](https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287518807576).
- Kim, H. and Jogaratnam, G. (2015), "The influence of storytelling on destination image and visit intention: a case of Korea", *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 32 No. 5, pp. 496-510, doi: [10.1080/10548408.2014.892380](https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2014.892380).
- Kim, H. and Ritchie, J.B. (2014), "Cross-cultural differences in tourism destination image: a global survey", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 40, pp. 26-36.
- Kim, Y. and Lee, J. (2019), "The effect of storytelling on destination image and behavioral intention in tourism marketing", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 58 No. 7, pp. 1105-1118.
- Kozinets, R.V. (2010), *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*, SAGE.
- Kulavuz-Onal, D. and Vasquez, C. (2013), "Reconceptualizing fieldwork in a netnography of an online community of English language teachers", *Ethnography and Education*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 224-238, doi: [10.1080/17457823.2013.792511](https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2013.792511).
- Lew, A.A. (2017), "Tourism planning and place making: place-making or placemaking?", *Tourism Geographies*, Vol. 19 No. 3, pp. 448-466, doi: [10.1080/14616688.2017.1282007](https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2017.1282007).
- Light, D. (2022), "The politics of heritage interpretation", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 28 No. 5, pp. 527-543.
- McAdams, D.P. (1993), *The Stories we Live by: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, Guilford Press.
- McCabe, S. and Foster, C. (2006), "The role and function of narrative in tourist interaction", *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 194-215, doi: [10.2167/jtcc071.0](https://doi.org/10.2167/jtcc071.0).
- McCabe, S. and Johnson, S. (2013), "The happiness factor in tourism: subjective well-being and social tourism", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 41, pp. 42-65, doi: [10.1016/j.annals.2012.12.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2012.12.003).
- Manzo, L. C. and Devine-Wright, P. (Eds) (2021), *Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods and Research*, 2nd ed., Routledge, New York, NY.
- Merchant, A. and Rose, G.M. (2013), "Effects of advertising-evoked vicarious nostalgia on brand heritage", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 66 No. 12, pp. 2619-2625.
- Mijnheer, C.L. and Jordan, R.G. (2019), "Value co-creation at heritage visitor attractions: a case study of Gladstone's land", *Tourism Management Perspectives*, Vol. 32, p. 100567, doi: [10.1016/j.tmp.2019.100567](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2019.100567).
- Mkono, M. (2020), "Authenticity in tourism: an African perspective", *Tourism Recreation Research*, Vol. 45 No. 3, pp. 267-278.
- Moreira, M., Alves, J., Frazão, L., Gouveia, A.C. and Freitas, H. (2025), "A systematic review of nature's contributions to people: impacts on science, policy, and sustainability", *Sustainability Science*, pp. 1-15.
- Moscardo, G. (2010), "The shaping of tourist experience: the importance of stories and themes", in Morgan, M., Lugosi, P. and Ritchie, J.R.B. (Eds), *The Tourism and Leisure Experience: Consumer and Management Perspectives*, Channel View Publications, pp. 3-26.
- Moscardo, G. (2020), "Stories and design in tourism", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 83, p. 102950, doi: [10.1016/j.annals.2020.102950](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2020.102950).
- Nielsen, J.K. (2017), "Museum communication and storytelling: articulating understandings within the museum structure", *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. 32 No. 5, pp. 440-455, doi: [10.1080/09647775.2017.1284019](https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2017.1284019).

- OECD (2020), *OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2020*, OECD Publishing, doi: [10.1787/6b47b985-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/6b47b985-en).
- Pachucki, C., Grohs, R. and Scholl-Grissemann, U. (2022), "No story without a storyteller: the impact of the storyteller as a narrative element in online destination marketing", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 61 No. 8, pp. 1703-1718.
- Palmer, C. (1999), "Tourism and the symbols of identity", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 313-321, doi: [10.1016/S0261-5177\(98\)00120-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(98)00120-4).
- Patton, M.Q. (1990), *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, SAGE.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002), *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed., SAGE.
- Patton, M.Q. (2015), *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 4th ed., Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Pine, B.J. and Gilmore, J.H. (1998), "Welcome to the experience economy", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 76 No. 4, pp. 97-105.
- Pine, J.B. and Gilmore, J.H. (1999), "The experience economy: work is theatre and every business a stage", Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA.
- Ram, Y., Björk, P. and Weidenfeld, A. (2016), "Authenticity and place attachment of major visitor attractions", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 52, pp. 110-122, doi: [10.1016/j.tourman.2015.06.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.06.010).
- Relph, E. (2007), On the identity of places [1976], in Carmona, M. and Tiesdell, S. (Eds), *Urban Design Reader*, Architectural Press, pp. 103-107.
- Richards, G. (2018), "Cultural tourism: a review of recent research and trends", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, Vol. 36, pp. 12-21.
- Richards, G. (2021), *Rethinking Cultural Tourism*, Edward Elgar.
- Rickly-Boyd, J. (2010), "The tourist narrative", *Tourist Studies*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 259-276.
- Roque, M.I. (2022), "Storytelling in cultural heritage: Tourism and community engagement", *Global Perspectives on Strategic Storytelling in Destination Marketing*, IGI Global Scientific Publishing, pp. 22-37.
- Saarinen, J. and Gill, A.M. (2021), "Sustainable tourism governance and resilience strategies", in Hyde, K., Ali-Knight, C., McCabe, A. and Robinson, P. (Eds.), *Resilient Destinations and Tourism: Governance Strategies in the Transition towards Sustainability*, Routledge, pp. 123-140.
- Seaton, A.V. (2002), "Thanatourism's final frontiers? Visits to cemeteries, churchyards and funerary sites as sacred and secular pilgrimage", *Tourism Recreation Research*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 73-82.
- Seidman, I. (2019), *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences (Expanded 5th ed.)*, Teachers College Press, New York, NY.
- Simmons, A. (2001), *The Story Factor: Inspiration, Influence, and Persuasion through the Art of Storytelling*, Basic Books.
- Sinclair, S. and Rockwell, G. (2016), "Voyant tools", available at: <https://voyant-tools.org/>
- Skavronskaya, L., Moyle, B. and Scott, N. (2020), "The experience of novelty and the novelty of experience", *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 11, p. 322, doi: [10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00322](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00322).
- Smith, M.K. (2009), *Issues in Global Cultural Tourism*, (2nd ed.), Routledge.
- Solomon, E.N.A., Adu-Debrah, L.K. and Braimah, S.M. (2022), "Promoting tourism destinations through storytelling", *Global Perspectives on Strategic Storytelling in Destination Marketing*, IGI Global, pp. 117-135.
- Su, Y., Cong, L. and Wall, G. (2023), "Tourism knowledge domains of Chinese and international research", *Sustainability*, Vol. 15 No. 12, p. 9151, doi: [10.3390/su15129151](https://doi.org/10.3390/su15129151).
- Tarlow, P.E. (2005), "Dark tourism: the appealing 'dark' side of tourism and more", in Novelli, M. (Ed.), *Niche Tourism: Contemporary Issues, Trends and Cases*, Elsevier, pp. 47-58.

- Tevely, T.V. and Papp-Váry, Á. (2025), "The power of storytelling in dark literary tourism: a mixed-methods study of visitor engagement and marketing strategies", *Turizmus Bulletin*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 4-12.
- Teye, V.B. and Timothy, D.J. (2004), "The heritage tourism of African Americans", *Tourism Review International*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 47-62.
- Tuan, Y.-F. (1977), *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, University of MN Press.
- Timothy, D.J. (2023), *Cultural Heritage and Tourism in Africa*, Routledge.
- Tung, V.S. and Ritchie, J.B. (2011), "Investigating the memorable experiences of the senior travel market: an examination of the reminiscence bump", *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 331-343, doi: [10.1080/10548408.2011.563168](https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2011.563168).
- Tussyadiah, I., Wang, D., Jung, T. and Tom Dieck, M.C. (2018), "Virtual reality, presence, and attitude change: empirical evidence from tourism", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 66, pp. 140-154.
- Valldejuli, K. (2025), "The ancestral journey narrative: a pilot study using art-based research to explore migration, trauma and resilience", *Journal of Applied Arts and Health*.
- Van Laer, T., de Ruyter, K., Visconti, L.M. and Wetzels, M. (2014), "The extended transportation-imagery model: a meta-analysis of the antecedents and consequences of consumers' narrative transportation", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 40 No. 5, pp. 797-817.
- White, L. and Frew, E. (2013), "Dark tourism and place identity: Managing and interpreting dark places", in White, L. and Frew, E. (Eds.), *Dark Tourism and Place Identity*, Routledge, pp. 1-13.
- Williams, D.R. and Vaske, J.J. (2003), "The measurement of place attachment: validity and generalizability of a psychometric approach", *Forest Science*, Vol. 49 No. 6, pp. 830-840.
- World Travel and Tourism Council (2021), "Travel and tourism economic impact 2021 world", available at: <https://wtcc.org/Research/Economic-Impact>
- Yankholmes, A. and McKercher, B. (2021), "African diaspora tourism in Ghana: a heritage tourism analysis", *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, Vol. 16 No. 5, pp. 481-499.
- Yin, R.K. (2018), *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Zins, A.H. and Abbas Adamu, A. (2024), "Heritage storytelling in destination marketing: cases from Malaysian states", *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, Vol. 19 No. 5, pp. 669-681.

Further reading

- Aman, E.E., Omer, A. and Papp-Váry, Á. (2024), "Tourism marketing and economic sustainability of tourist destinations: perspectives of bale mountains national park", *Gazdaság és Társadalom*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 40-70.
- Campelo, A., Aitken, R., Thyne, M. and Gnoth, J. (2014), "Sense of place: the importance for destination branding", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 53 No. 2, pp. 154-166.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006), "Five misunderstandings about case-study research", *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 219-245. doi: [10.1177/1077800405284363](https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363).
- Huang, T. and Zhang, Y. (2024), "Roots' tourists' personal heritage experience: an extended cognitive-affective-conative model", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, Vol. 61, pp. 212-223.
- Leong, A.M.W., Yeh, S.S., Zhou, Y., Hung, C.W. and Huan, T.C. (2024), "Exploring the influence of historical storytelling on cultural heritage tourists' value co-creation using tour guide interaction and authentic place as mediators", *Tourism Management Perspectives*, Vol. 50, p. 101198.
- Light, D. and Chapman, A. (2022), "The neglected heritage of the English seaside holiday", *Coastal Studies and Society*, Vol. 1 No. 1, doi: [10.1177/26349817211070456](https://doi.org/10.1177/26349817211070456).
- Magano, J., Fraiz-Brea, J.A. and Leite, Â. (2023), "Dark tourism, the holocaust, and well-being: a systematic review", *Heliyon*, Vol. 9 No. 1, doi: [10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e13064](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e13064).
- Roberts, C. and Stone, P.R. (2014), "Dark tourism and dark heritage: emergent themes, issues and consequences", *Displaced heritage: responses to disaster, trauma and loss*, pp. 9-18.

- Rodríguez-Vázquez, C., Castellanos-García, P. and Martínez-Fernández, V.A. (2023), “Cultural tourism in a post-COVID-19 scenario: the French way of Saint James in Spain from the perspective of promotional communication”, *Societies*, Vol. 13 No. 1, p. 16.
- Semwal, R. (2024), “Enhancing cultural sensitivity and safeguarding heritage sites”, *Sustainable Tourism, Part A: Balancing Conservation and Progress in a Dynamic Industry*, Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 223-251.
- Timothy, D.J. and Boyd, S.W. (2006), “Heritage tourism in the 21st century: valued traditions and new perspectives”, *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 1-16, doi: [10.1080/17438730608668462](https://doi.org/10.1080/17438730608668462).
- Yankholmes, A. (2023), “The transatlantic slave trade: Africa’s epitomous heritage tourism”, *Cultural Heritage and Tourism in Africa*, Routledge, pp. 170-183.
- Zhang, S., Liang, J., Su, X., Chen, Y. and Wei, Q. (2023), “Research on global cultural heritage tourism based on bibliometric analysis”, *Heritage Science*, Vol. 11 No. 1, p. 139.

Corresponding author

Emmanuel Nii Ayi Solomon can be contacted at: niisolomon@gmail.com