



Exploring Diasporic Information Needs for the “Motherland”

Kodjo Elolo Atiso 
University of Kansas, Kansas, USA

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Abstract

Centuries after the infamous slave trade era, there has been an influx of the diaspora to visit the continent of Africa. These nationalities, a lot of whom call the continent the “motherland”, undertake these trips for a variety of reasons, including reconnecting with ancestors. This study explores the information needs of the African American diaspora when travelling to Ghana, and compares their accounts with local Ghanaians. Using qualitative methodology, the findings suggest that for tourists, this lack of information has sometimes led to disappointment as the reality can sometimes be different than expectations. These travelers need accurate information related to food, culture, politics, language, and society. The results of this research are useful to the African American diasporic community, librarians in area studies or at universities where students may embark on trips to Africa, or for public librarians who engage with people interested in diasporic tourism.

Keywords: Information Needs, Libraries, Diasporic tourism, Ghana, Africa

Introduction

Thousands of people visit Africa, especially Ghana, each year to learn more about their ancestors, and over 1,500 have relocated to many African countries, including Ghana, since 2019. This phenomenon, originally called “The Year of Return” and now “Beyond the Return”, has been very successful for Ghana’s economy while also encouraging engagement between Ghana and Africans in the diaspora (Dini-Osman, 2022). In fact, the 2024 Super Bowl XLVIII commercial featured NFL players enjoying the streets of Accra, Ghana, as a strategy to encourage tourism to the motherland (Bantock, 2024). For the diaspora, the motherland, or country of origin, serves as the source for understanding more about identity, heritage and culture. The term diaspora is used to describe populations living outside of their ancestral homelands. Diaspora tourism is the phrase used to describe travelling to visit these homelands. Diaspora Africans seeking to trace their roots, understand their history, or connect with distant relatives undertake

these travels with perceived or imagined ties to a newly discovered motherland (Fehler, 2011).

Ghana is a leading heritage tourism destination for African Americans due to its participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Curtin, 1969; Schramm, 2004). In 2019, the Ghanaian government implemented a campaign (the Year of Return) to encourage the African diaspora to visit or settle in Ghana (Akinwotu, 2023). Within this context, African Studies Librarians are engaged in supporting the information needs of those wishing to visit Ghana to explore heritage sites like the slave dungeons within the Cape Coast Castle or the Assin Manso Slave River park, which was one of the largest slave markets. Previous literature has explored these phenomena through the lens of the tourism domain, particularly areas of diaspora tourism (Li et al, 2020; Mensah, 2015; Reed, 2014) or travel information seeking and behavior (Amuquandoh, 2003; Bormann et al., 2016; Chon, 1990; Osei, 2015; Xu et al., 2023). Research within the information domain has examined diasporic information environments (Ndumu, 2019;

Ndumu, 2020; Pyati, 2010; Srinivasan and Pyati, 2007) and African American genealogy, which includes genetic genealogy (Abel, 2022; David, 2023; Chandler, 2018; Schramm, 2012) and genealogyresearch (Hayes, 2021).

While the literature is strong in addressing diaspora tourism experiences, little research has been done to identify (and codify) the specific information needs and resources required to embark on diaspora tourism (and pilgrimage) in Ghana. Almost all research in this area is outside of the library and information studies field. Furthermore, research within the tourism sector often examines implications for marketing and local economies, often excluding the focus on the tourist who seeks reliable information that shapes the tourist experience before and after the trip. A sociocultural perspective on the information process, as told by the African diaspora themselves, is needed to understand the resources available, deficiencies in resources, and their experiences of seeking information.

This paper seeks to address the deficiencies in the existing research and sources for the African American diaspora traveling to Ghana, in an effort to curate useful resources which are reliable, accurate and informative. The results of this study are helpful to African studies librarians, study abroad organizers and travelers to Ghana and adds to research in African and African American studies.

Context

Ghana as a Tourist Destination

Ghana is a destination for the African diaspora, particularly after it gained independence in 1957 (Otoo et al., 2020). People visit Ghana to see historical sites (such as Elmina Castle, Cape Coast Castle, Kakum National Park, or Hanson's Cottage), engage in recreation, or see natural wonders (such as the highest waterfall in West Africa) (Bormann et al., 2016). While natural and heritage sites are a draw for tourists, Ghana's central location, as well as its natural and heritage sites, make it more expensive than other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, yet affordable for many Americans. The tourism sector is an important part of the Ghanaian economy, providing significant employment, foreign exchange, and government revenue (Imbeah et al., 2020). Visitors to Ghana generally feel safe when visiting its attractions, and Imbeah et al. (2020) found that many tourists visit Ghana's attractions but prepare by taking safety precautions, such as purchasing insurance and assembling medical first-aid kits.

While Ghana is visited by tourists from around

the world, the Ghanaian government launched a specific initiative to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans to Virginia, inviting all displaced ancestors back to see Ghana (Adjei-Barwuah, 2020). Because of this effort, thousands of African Americans have visited Africa, especially Ghana, to learn more about their ancestors, and over 1,500 have relocated to Ghana since 2019 (Kaledzi, 2023). This phenomenon, originally named "The Year of Return" and now "Beyond the Return", has been very successful for the Ghanaian economy, while also encouraging engagement between Ghana and Africans in the diaspora (Dini-Osman, 2022). For one year, the Ghanaian tourism industry organized events and programming aimed at encouraging Africans in the diaspora to return home.

The African Diaspora

The term African Diaspora is the voluntary and involuntary migration of Africans and their descendants to various parts of the world (Center for the Black Diaspora). This term is primarily used to describe the descendants of Africans who were enslaved and taken to Virginia between the 16th and 19th century but can also include Africans who were forcefully relocated to Haiti and Brazil. Cohen (2022) explained that there are several characteristics associated with a diaspora, which make them unique from other social groups. This simple definition includes:

members of a defined group who have been dispersed to many destinations; they construct a shared identity; they still orient themselves to an original 'home'; and they demonstrate an affinity with other members of the group dispersed to other places (Cohen, 2022, 1).

The African diasporic reference to Africa as the Motherland refers to Africa as the ancestral home and source of heritage lost due to displacement, primarily through the transatlantic slave trade. The use of this term has been popularized in the media, as celebrities like Spike Lee encourage African Americans to explore their African ancestry (JoVonn, 2025). Many diaspora members seek reconnection through movements like Ghana's "Year of Return," cultural immersion, and returning to live or invest in African nations like Ghana or Benin, seeking purpose, identity, and to rebuild connections (Dini-Osman, 2022).

Literature Review

Diaspora Tourism

Diaspora tourism is the term used to describe one's desire to travel as a way to reconnect with their past, particularly by migrants traveling back to their homeland (Huang et al. 2018). The term 'diaspora' is applied to dispersed populations of ethnic groups and nationalities, who have a shared identity, a connection with an original 'home' and an affinity with others who have also been dispersed (Cohen, 2022). Other words used to describe diaspora tourism may include home return travel, roots tourism, ethnic tourism, visiting friends and relatives' tourism, or genealogical tourism (Li & McKercher, 2016).

Tourism scholars (and the tourism industry) recognize that there is a large market for diaspora tourism as more than six million people migrated to foreign countries to relocate permanently, and many more visited international countries temporarily (OECD, 2023). Diaspora tourism can be beneficial for local communities which have used tourism revenue to invest in preserving historic sites and generate income for local merchants (Bormann et al., 2016). Other benefits of diaspora tourism include increased awareness of dark periods in history (such as slavery which is relevant to the paper presented here), developing a sense of place and belonging for the tourists, and improving cross-cultural relationships (Otoo et al., 2020).

Diaspora tourists are a heterogeneous group with different motivations for visiting their homelands. For example, Li & McKercher (2016) identified five types of Chinese diaspora tourists, which other scholars have applied to diaspora tourism in general, including: 1) re-affirmative diaspora tourist; 2) quest diaspora tourist; 3) re-connected diaspora tourist; 4) distanced diaspora tourist; and 5) detached diaspora tourist. The motivations of diaspora tourists to travel to their homelands may include achieving a sense of pride and learning, escaping, attending diaspora events or exploring spirituality, seeking connectedness and seeking memorable experiences (Otoo et al., 2020).

Some authors have examined how returning to their homeland affects place attachment and belonging. For example, Li (2015) found that place attachment was associated with the type of diasporic tourist, such as a quest diaspora tourist finding deep connections with the location, while a detached diaspora tourist had minimal attachment after visiting the destination.

Travel Information Seeking

Travel information seeking is the phrase used to describe how someone with the intent to travel will seek information to make decisions about their trip. Travelers' information seeking behavior is often studied by the tourism and marketing industry to understand more about travelers' needs and behaviors (Amuquandoh, 2003; Bormann et al., 2016). The concept of place is often central to travel information seeking behavior as people seek information on their destination, including information about food, language, dress, culture, destinations and transportation (Fardous et al, 2019).

Tourists will engage in information seeking behavior when they are planning a trip. Harrigan et al. (2017) found that travelers seek user generated content, like reviews, recommendations or ratings, which is similar to feedback provided by friends, family or even strangers (such as those who post on social media) who have visited the area. Fardous et al. (2017) also noted that tourists use their mobile phones to validate the information that they receive through social interactions. Tourists also collaborate to find information, such as working with others in or outside of their travel group to make the best decisions for their trip (Fardous et al., 2019).

Fardous et al. (2019) explained that travel information seeking includes behaviors such as seeking and sharing information, synthesizing the gathered travel information, altering the trip using the gathered information, coordinating travel with others, making on-site decisions, solving conflicts during the travel. Srinivasan and Pyati (2007) explained that finding information about a local event can be challenging as sources may differ depending on the context and the community sharing the information. Using the example of the Diwali Indian festival, there will never be one authoritative source as information about the festival may differ based on religion, geographic region or diasporic identity (Srinivasan and Pyati, 2007).

Information-seeking behavior models have been applied to travel decision-making on several occasions. Adel et al. (2021) examined the information behavior of Muslim travelers to understand more about their decision to travel there, including the difference between traveling to an Islamic and non-Islamic destination, the resources they depend on and the most important information Muslim travelers search for while traveling. They found that Muslim travelers rely first on the opinions of peers who have traveled before and will avoid information-seeking if

they are concerned about receiving misinformation, particularly related to the availability of halal-food.

Kambele et al. (2015) found that information seeking behavior was different between travelers from China and travelers from the United States. Results of their survey research established that travelers from the United States relied on the Internet for searching for information, but Chinese travelers relied more on word-of-mouth travel recommendations. This is like how Ghanaian immigrants seek information after immigrating to the United States (Atiso et al., 2018). Amuquandoh (2003) examined the search efforts of tourists from three different countries prior to their visit. They found that tourists from Ghana were more likely to have similar search habits based on their age and gender, rather than other characteristics like country of origin.

People who have immigrated to a new country seek information as travelers but also to establish residency in the new home where they will live. For immigrants, the acculturation period (the period where one learns about the new culture in which they are living) can be overwhelming and stressful, due to challenges with learning about new customs, behaviors and beliefs (Rudmin, 2009). Positive information encounters, including efforts to reduce information overload, are needed to be successful during this period of transition (Ndumu, 2020).

Diasporic Information Environments

The term diasporic information environments are used to describe the boundaries in which diaspora groups seek and use information, particularly digital media (Srinivasan & Pyati, 2007). Because of digital media, diasporic communities interact in technology mediated communities, like social media and discussion groups, in addition to local community spaces. Pyati (2010) explained that most research related to immigrant information seeking is related to local information needs. In contrast, diasporic research on information behavior recognizes that the seeker needs information about transatlantic identity.

Of the minimal research related to diasporic information environments, most is centered around immigrant information behavior and information use of migrant communities. For diasporic travelers, news sites have attempted to curate information resources, such as USA Today's article on 'Africa Diaspora Tourism' (Ruane, 2015). Ruane (2015) lists websites, travel portals and blogs which are oriented towards African diaspora tourism. Some of these

include I'm Black and I Travel (a website and travel agency), Nomadness Travel Tribe (a social community for people from all ethnicities), Travel Noire (a digital travel publishing platform with many contributors), Ugogirl.com (a website showcasing African American travel writing).

Planning a trip involves using a wide range of resources and travel information. Some of these resources include blogs, Facebook pages, websites, images, videos, seeking opinions, and travel itineraries (Fardous et al., 2019). Modern travelers will use mobile phones and video apps to seek travel information. Xu et al. (2022) found that platforms that included features like searching, recommendations, meta-voicing and livestreaming were more positively associated with a more diverse understanding of the country. Sources of information for travelers to Ghana include information in newspapers/magazines, information from travel agencies and tourist guides and brochures. After that, tourists relied on family, friends and relatives, word-of-mouth and websites (Bormann et al., 2016). Bormann et al. (2016) explained that travelers to Ghana generally feel like there are sufficient information sources.

Information and Travel Preconception

Travelers from the West to Ghana and other African countries will likely have been exposed to misrepresentations of the people and culture through the media and other information sources before they take their trip. Some scholarship has indicated that this has been problematic, particularly for youth, who have been portrayed as dangerous, reckless or posing a threat to others in movies, news and videos. Specifically, an analysis of Ghanaian youth representation in the media found that most media portrayal showed youth involved in criminal activities and was highly misleading (Dzisah, 2017). Other stereotypes have been found in the media, including perceptions that Africa is backwards and violent, with warring tribes and poverty (Wall, 2009: 394).

The concept of negative media coverage about Africa is referred to as Afro-pessimism. Pointer (2023) described Afro pessimism in the media as negative coverage of Africa, such as a focus on disease, poverty or conflict. Examples include a focus on HIV/AIDS or Ebola, often suggesting inability to contain these diseases and rarely citing experts or lived experiences. Other coverage focuses on conflict like African civil wars or insurgencies (Pointer, 2023). Njambi and O'Brien (2018) found that these stereotypes can influence American students in developing pre-

conceived notions of what Africa is like.

The media may also present outdated norms, particularly of African women. In one case, Osei (2015) found that this was true related to women politicians in Ghana and Nigeria. She found that women in politics in Ghana often self-censored their media presence due to the patriarchal society and outdated cultural norms when making media appearances, perpetuating the marginalization of women in politics. Naaikuur et al. (2024) also found that women politicians in Ghana were often stereotyped, leading to misrepresentation of Ghanaian women, and their role in leadership. Other research has suggested that there is a general gap in media representation for African countries. Scott (2017) noted that while western citizens feel informed about what is happening in Africa, there is actually a lack of media coverage on Africa and its people. There is not enough research to assume the presence of Afro-pessimism in Western media.

Methodology

This research utilized a qualitative, cross-cultural approach to explore the information needs of those traveling to Ghana to engage in diasporic tourism. Creswell and Creswell (2022) explained that qualitative research is particularly effective at capturing the diversity of lived experiences, varied perspectives, and the sociocultural contexts that influence them. This study's primary objective was not to achieve statistical generalization, but rather to develop a rich understanding of information needs and experiences. This study does not attempt to generalize the lived experience for all of the African diaspora but instead looks at Ghana as a starting point. The methodology employed semi-structured interviews and subsequent thematic analysis to gather and interpret data.

Research Questions

The research questions which guide this study are:

1. What information do African Americans need to survive and thrive in the motherland/Ghana/Africa?
2. What information sources do African Americans rely on to learn about the motherland and why?
3. What are the experiences of African Americans when seeking information for their impending travels?

As a cross-cultural study, this study also seeks to compare the results of these research questions with

local residents (Ghanaian) and their perceptions of how tourists present when they arrive in Ghana to explore the motherland. Therefore a subquestion is also included and woven into each research question: How do local residents perceive diasporic tourists and their preparation to visit the motherland?

Theoretical Framework

This study is framed by Stuart Hall's (2015) conceptualization of diaspora identity which explains that identity is formed through the interaction of being (shared historical experience, memory, and cultural codes) and becoming (interactions and negotiations in new contexts). For immigrants, collective memory and myth of the homeland coexist, with both past and present playing a role in shaping cultural identity (Bhandari, 2021). For the diaspora, Hall's concept of hybridity argues that while there are points of similarity with common ancestry, there are also differences. Diasporic identity is constantly changing and rerouting to live with multiple cultural influences. For example, the African diaspora living in the Caribbean isn't just African but is also shaped by both European and American influences. Hall (2015) uses Derrida's concept of *différance* to explain how the diaspora creates a new hybrid culture in new homelands, constantly shifting identity so that there is no final self, giving those in the diaspora permission to be complex and multilayered. This study uses Hall's framework as a starting point for understanding why a person might embark on diasporic tourism.

This study is also an examination of the information needs of the African diaspora, people who have been traditionally marginalized and who have a history of slavery and colonialism. The information seeking process begins when an individual determines they have a need for information. For those from marginalized communities, they may enter this process facing paradox: they have a need for high quality and culturally relevant sources, yet mainstream and popular sources are often unreliable, inaccurate or incomplete. Therefore, this study is also grounded by Chatman's (1996) Theory of Information Poverty which describes how people from marginalized groups face barriers to accessing useful, important and accurate information because this information is not available from mainstream information channels. Specifically, this concept highlights knowledge gaps and power dynamics that may prevent diasporic tourists from fully connecting with their heritage. In practice, this can look like reliance on informal sources and an

idealized version of the motherland that can lead to culture shock or unrealistic expectations.

Research Design

The study's design focused on in-depth conversations to learn more about intergroup interactions, cultural perspectives, and personal experiences related to diasporic tourism. The research uses a cross-cultural design that compares two cultural groups to investigate the information needed for the African American diaspora when travelling to Ghana. Ember and Ember (2009) explain that cross-cultural research compares cultures while retaining the individual identity of each culture. A cross-cultural research design first associates relevant features and traits between two-cases, within a single time period (synchronic comparison).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the information needed by diasporic tourists and how locals perceived their readiness. Conversations included how they perceive each other, assess behavioral differences, and negotiate identity amid cultural shock and diasporic interactions. The overall qualitative framework was intended to generate subjective experience, cultural nuance, and the interpretive richness of diasporic voices. While acknowledging that the small, non-random sample might not represent wider diasporic experiences, the goal of this study was to provide in-depth, contextual insights..

Participants and Setting

The study included participants from two main groups: 1) Local Ghanaians in the tourist industry and 2) Travelers to Ghana for diasporic tourism. The focus country, Ghana, was selected due to its historical, cultural, and political connections with the African American diasporic communities, including a government of Ghana program aiming to attract African American diaspora to the country. In this regard, it has initiated programs such as the "Year of Return" initiative. The setting of Cape Coast, Ghana, was noted for hosting one of the world's largest slave forts and being regarded as a pilgrimage site for many African Americans. Ethical considerations were addressed through the author completing the CITI training and securing project approval from the Ghanaian government and the researcher's home institutions..

Recruitment and Sampling

The study used a snowball sampling strategy to recruit participants. Thirty (n=30) participants were recruited. Snowball sampling is a method which begins by casting a wide net to find participants, then asks participants to name different individuals who may contribute to the study (Parker et al., 2019). The sample focused on individuals who could provide rich, in-depth insights into lived experiences and cultural understandings relevant to the travel experience. The sample size for the diasporic tourists was guided by the principle of data saturation, defined as the point at which no new themes or insights emerged. To recruit local Ghanaian participants in the tourist industry, the researcher contacted a tourist organization in Ghana who invited other members to participate in the study offering a small incentive to participate. Diasporic tourists were invited to participate in the study by first contacting an African immigrant located in the Midwest who engaged with many tourists to Ghana. This contact, a businessman who engages regularly with both travelers and Ghanaian locals, then invited his contacts to participate in the study. Participants also received an incentive if they agreed to participate. The data collection ceased after 30 participants, confirming that thematic saturation was reached. Saturation was determined between all participant groups, when researchers began to hear the same topics discussed amongst each participant group.

Participants

The total sample size was 30 participants (16 males and 14 females). The sample was divided equally into two groups of 15 participants each (see Table 1).

Participant Group 1: Local Ghanaians in the Travel Industry

This group consisted of eight males (n=8) and seven females (n=7), totaling 15 participants. The inclusion criteria were that they were living in Ghana, 18 years or older, they engaged regularly with travelers from America and willingness to participate in an in-depth, and were willing to participate in a semi-structured interview.

Participant Group 2: African Americans with Travel Experience

This group included eight males (n=8) and seven females (n=7), totaling 15 participants (see Table 1). A key requirement was that participants had traveled to at least one African country, such as Ghana, which

supported the study's aim to examine the sociocultural effects of returning journeys to learn more about their African American identity and diasporic connections. In terms of educational background, approximately half of the total participants held at least a bachelor's degree, while the rest had at least a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Table 1.
Demographics

Participants group	No of participant	Key inclusion criteria	Traits
Local Ghanaians in the Travel Industry	8 males, 7 females	Reside in Ghana; 18 years or older; engages with travelers from America, willingness to be interviewed.	Engages with travellers to Ghana
African Americans with Travel Experience to Africa	8 males, 7 females	Self-identify as African American; 18 years or older; traveled to ≥ 1 African country; willingness to be interviewed.	Travelled to at least one African country
Total Sample	30 in all, 16 males, 14 Females		Data saturation achieved after 30 interviews

Note: Approximately half of the participants had a bachelor's degree or higher, while the remainder had completed high school or its equivalent. Educational diversity enriched perspectives on identity.

Data Collection Instrumentation

The primary instrument for data collection was the semi-structured interview protocol, which used open-ended questions (see Appendix A). The two groups were asked the same set of questions, scoped to their perspectives. For example, the protocol was designed to gather data related to the information needed to prepare to travel to Ghana, the information sources used during their trip, and reflections on the challenges encountered after their trip. Participants who travelled to Ghana were encouraged to consider specific areas of identity and culture shock that they experienced when they did visit Ghana, and where their information needs were not met.

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for a thorough exploration of core themes while giving participants the freedom to direct the conversation toward what was most important to them. Participants were interviewed using narrative techniques to encourage storytelling. Prior to the interview, participants completed a simple demographic questionnaire and were allowed to answer only the questions they felt comfortable with. Interviews lasted an average of one hour. Over 30 hours of interviews were recorded. Interviews were recorded using handheld devices or via Zoom. The researchers transcribed the recordings, and the data were stored securely in institutional cloud storage. To ensure accuracy, member checking was utilized to verify that statements were accurately recorded.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved thematic analysis to examine the data for areas in which participants addressed the following topics: 1.) information sources needed, 2.) information sources used, and 3.) information needs which were not met. The goal of thematic analysis is to identify and interpret patterns and themes in the data. Researchers used Braun Clark (2006) six steps of thematic analysis which includes:

1.) Becoming familiar with the data, 2.) Generating initial codes, 3.) Searching for themes, 4.) Reviewing

possible themes, 5.) Defining and naming themes, and 6.) Writing up the themes. In line with best practices in qualitative research, codes are usually agreed upon by researchers to ensure consistency (Basit, 2003). The statements were then examined for similarities between the multiple participants between both groups to determine the final themes. Within each theme, the perspectives between groups were either 1.) compared (if there were contradictions), or 2.) blended (if there were consistencies).

Findings

The findings were analyzed within the broad framework of Hall's (2015) principles of being, becoming, identity negotiation, hybridity and cultural belonging. Researcher's look at what the participant said, and how they positioned themselves within the structure in which they were speaking, while organizing the content within broad themes to identify the information needed. For example, while the information needs may center around the broad themes in Table 2 (culture, language, food, politics and music), the analytical lens treats their statements as a story which may identify transformations and cultural belonging.

RQ1. What information do African Americans need to survive and thrive in the motherland/Ghana/Africa?

In this study, 15 African American participants described their information needs before, during and after travelling to Ghana, and 15 Ghanaians also described the information that they felt that travelers to Ghana needed. Most of the interviewees confirmed that they lacked the information they needed to fully prepare to experience Ghana. While the information needs varied between participants, there were several themes which emerged: culture, language, food, politics, and music (see Table 2).

Table 2: Information Needed for Survival in Ghana

Theme	African American Respondents (%)	Local Ghanaian Respondents (%)	Key Insights
Culture	90% (n=14)	80% (n=12)	Respect for elders, greetings, dress codes, and communal values
Language	85% (n=13)	75% (n=11)	Local languages aid integration and trust
Food	70% (n=10)	85% (n=13)	Food as an adaptation challenge and cultural bonding
Politics	65% (n=9)	60% (n=8)	Political stability is valued, but discussions are sensitive
Music	90% (n=14)	85% (n=13)	Music as an emotional and cultural bridge

Culture

Culture generally may be defined as the way of life of a people. In this case, culture refers to the Ghanaian shared set of beliefs, values, customs, etc., and the way that tourists described experiencing it when they visited Ghana. In the theme of culture, approximately 90% (n=14) of the tourists stressed that understanding Ghanaian culture is the most vital factor for survival and long-term adaptation. Participants consistently highlighted the need for more information on respect for elders, proper greetings, dress codes, and communal values. One tourist said, "If you want to survive in this community, you need to learn the basics, including how to dress, greet others, show respect to the elderly, and understand the customs of different places"

In addition, many of the tourists described experiencing initial cultural shock, noting that Ghanaian society emphasizes collective identity over individual expression. One stated, "In America, you're raised to be independent and vocal. Here, you must learn patience, humility, and respect for social hierarchy. If you don't,

people will see you as rude, even if that's not your intention." At the same time, some tourists felt very comfortable in Ghana. These participants commented saying such things as, "Everybody I see looks like me," "When I was travelling to Cape Coast to see the slave castle, I saw my aunty 50 times", and "I don't have to look over my shoulders when I am walking around town."

Several respondents also noted gender roles and expectations as areas requiring adjustment, especially in public and family settings. One local resident said, "Traditionally, men and women have played different roles, but that is changing. For example, women in Ghana often handle more domestic tasks, such as cooking, washing, and caring for children, while men usually do the heavier work. It seems this isn't very clear in African American culture." Another said, "Gender roles here are too distinct, which can lead to confusion. It takes time to learn all of them. Additionally, they vary from one culture or community to another. A challenge is that there is no institution responsible for teaching us before we begin our journey to the motherland. We only learn from social media and from each other."

Among the local residents, 80% (n=12) emphasized that cultural understanding influences whether tourists are accepted or kept at arm's length. One of the local residents said, "One way to earn acceptance into a society is to respect its customs and beliefs. Our guests should take the time to honor these norms so they can be fully accepted and integrated into the community." Another also said, "We like to learn, but it is difficult to learn all of them, especially from outside the country." The tourists noticed this as well, with one stating, "Understanding the people, their way of life, or culture brings you closer to them. Once you have this, you become a part of them."

Some local residents expressed frustration when tourists assumed cultural similarity without learning local customs. One local resident said, "Some of them are not ready to learn or willing to put in the effort. They easily get frustrated, and when things don't go their way, they keep asking multiple questions about everything. Every society is different, and you must be prepared to learn." For the tourists, it was challenging to learn about all of the different customs. One said, "There are too many different groups (cultures), and getting to know most of them takes time, and people tend to be somewhat rigid about it."

Language

In this study, language refers to the languages spoken by Ghanaians, which include local languages such as Akan (Twi/Fante), Ewe, Ga, Dagbani, Dangme, Dagaare, Nzema, Kasem, and Gonja, as well as English. With this theme, about 85% (n=13) of tourists indicated that while English makes communication easier, local languages like Twi, Ga, or Ewe are essential for daily survival and deeper integration. Respondents noted that language affects access to markets, transportation, humor, and informal networks and businesses. The researchers were also aware that the people of Ghana, as a former colony of Great Britain, speak English in official circles, but some of the local population may lack confidence to speak English, depending on their level of education. For example, one participant said "Once people realize you don't understand Twi, they might overcharge you or talk around you. But when you learn even small phrases, everything changes." From the Ghanaian perspective, 75% (n=11) of respondents said that tourists trying to learn local languages are treated with more warmth and trust. A local Ghanaian said, "Even if they speak broken Twi, we appreciate the effort. It shows respect and seriousness."

Food

Food in Ghana is generally rich and spicy, and built on starches, like yams, cassava, plantains and corn. It is often served with soups and stews with fish or meat. Participants generally agreed that the food was good, with nice variety. Regarding food, about 70% (n=10) of tourists described Ghanaian cuisine as both exciting and challenging. While many enjoyed staples like jollof rice, waakye, banku, and fufu, they also mentioned difficulties in adjusting to spice levels, oil content, and unfamiliar preparation methods. One participant said, "The food is good, but your body needs time. You can't eat everything immediately and expect no reaction."

Some tourists also highlighted hygiene concerns and the need to learn where and how to eat safely. One said, "Sometimes the location of the food joint isn't ideal, especially at roadside eateries located in public places." Conversely, 85% (n=13) of the local residents described food as a central mechanism for cultural bonding. One participant said, "Food is how we show love. Once they start eating our food, they start understanding us better." Another local said, "If you want to understand a community, learn to eat their food, and you'll be fine. Food and drink bring people together."

Politics

In Ghana, politics is regarded as a flagship of African politics and sometimes loosely referred to as the “eye of Africa”. Ghana has traditionally been able to change governments peacefully. Approximately 65% (n=9) of tourists said that understanding Ghana’s political climate, government system, and citizenship regulations was essential for making informed relocation decisions. Many described Ghana as politically stable compared to other African countries portrayed in the Western media. One participant said, “I needed to know Ghana wasn’t chaotic. Once I understood the political system and elections, I felt safer living here.”

Among the local residents, 60% (n=8) cautioned that American tourists should approach political discussions carefully. One local resident said, “They should first observe and learn. Politics here is peaceful, but it is sensitive.” Another described the complexities of politics in Ghana. They said, “In this country, politics, chieftaincy, and tribalism are sensitive topics; they are interconnected, and I advise foreigners to avoid them.”

Music

Music became one of the key aspects of cultural connection. About 90% (n=14) of tourists felt an immediate emotional bond to Ghanaian music, reggae,

highlife, and gospel. One tourist said, “The roots of music lie in Africa; names like Miriam Makeba, Nana Ampadu, Bella Bellew and Angelique Kidjo always come to mind. The music makes you feel at home.” Another also echoed this sentiment saying, “The drums, the rhythm, it feels ancestral, like something familiar but forgotten.”

Similarly, 85% (n=13) of local residents highlighted music as a link between Africans and African Americans. One local resident said, “When they dance to Afrobeat, we see ourselves in them.” Another local resident said, “Afrobeat is currently trending, and our guests enjoy it. Even if they don’t understand the language, they love the music. It creates emotional connections for them.”

RQ2. What information sources do African Americans rely on and why?

Most of the interviewees described different sources that they used, both formal and informal. These sources were grouped into themes which found that information was gathered from: social media, colleagues and friends, Africans (locals), movies and music (see Table 3). This finding was like previous work which indicated that people feel comfortable engaging with people they know or who are like them when learning about new places.

Table 3

Information Sources Used by African American Immigrants

Information Source	African American Participants (%)	Local Ghanaian	Key Insights
Social media	85% (n=13)	70% (n=10)	Highly influential but often idealized
Colleagues/Friends	80% (n=12)	75% (n=11)	Practical guidance and smoother adjustment
Local Ghanaians	90% (n=14)	85% (n=13)	Most reliable survival information
Movies and Music	60% (n=8)	65% (n=9)	Shapes perceptions but creates stereotypes

Social Media

About 85% (n=13) of tourists reported social media as their main source of information about Ghana before visiting. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook shaped their expectations of Ghana

as a welcoming, culturally rich destination. One participant said, "Before coming, Ghana looked like paradise online." However, 70% later acknowledged that social media often presents an idealized version of life in Ghana. Another participant described it as "Social media didn't show the daily struggles, traffic, heat, or bureaucracy."

Colleagues and Friends

About 80% (n=12) of tourists relied heavily on colleagues, friends, or diaspora networks already living in Ghana. One participant said, "The internet tells you what Ghana looks like. People tell you how Ghana works." Among Ghanaians, 75% (n=11) confirmed that personal relationships significantly shape immigrants' experiences. Another said, "Once you know someone here, life becomes easier."

Africans (Local Ghanaians)

Approximately 90% (n=14) of tourists described local Ghanaians as their most reliable source of survival information. One participant said, "Locals taught me how to bargain, where to live, and how to move safely." Similarly, 85% (n=13) of Ghanaian respondents expressed a strong sense of responsibility toward American tourists. One local resident participant said, "They are family, but sometimes they expect things to work like America." This sentiment was noted by several other local residents as well, for example, another said, "Some people can be difficult, not ready to learn new things, and think that things should work like they always have, but this is a different system."

Media

Many tourists described their perceptions of Africa as learned from the American media. About 60% (n=8) of tourists acknowledged that movies and music influenced their early perceptions of Ghana and Africa. One participant said, "Movies made Africa seem distant, but music made it feel close." Another said, "Fact is fact, Africa is home to some of the best music. I remember my dad loved highlife music a lot, and currently, hiplife is the trending style. Nobody can dismiss African music at any level."

From the Ghanaian perspective, 65% (n=9) felt that Western media contribute to unrealistic expectations. One local resident said, "Some arrive expecting village life or luxury; both are wrong." A local resident added "Ghana, or Africa, is home to ordinary people just like anywhere else. Unfortunately, the Western media's portrayal of the continent hasn't

helped, often casting it in a negative light."

RQ.3 What are the experiences of diasporic tourists when seeking information for their impending travels?

The tourists described their experience traveling in Ghana as generally challenging and even somewhat disappointing. Their experiences revolved around misinformation or misconceptions about what Ghana would be like, often comparing it to what they expect in America, or what they imagined it would be like.

Economic /business environment

Encountering the business culture in Ghana was shocking for many of the tourists. One said, "There is an element of you saying, 'This is how it is,' but there's a tipping point where you cannot take it anymore." The tourists described a lack of empathy within Ghana's business culture. For example, some felt that the locals had poor work ethics, unprofessional customer service, bureaucracy, and that the absence of automated procedures dashed the hopes of many tourists seeking to establish businesses in Ghana. They say the Ghanaian business system lacks enthusiasm, with staff only happy with their salaries and not genuinely committed to their jobs. "Some workers work as if there is nothing at stake, and are only interested in their salaries, and they need constant supervision to get work done."

Other tourists also complained about the attitude and work ethic of local Ghanaian people. These obstacles, along with political, cultural, and other issues, can discourage some members of the diaspora from pursuing their goals. One diaspora member said, "Ghana is not a place where you come to look for a job; you must come with a job opportunity, and even if you have done that, the system can still frustrate your efforts."

The local Ghanaian also had opinions on what they perceived from tourists who stayed in Ghana to become residents or start businesses. Some locals believe that American tourists don't spend enough time studying the business environment before starting a business. "They lack understanding of the Ghanaian business landscape. They arrive expecting things to work the same as in the US, but the systems are completely different." There were deeper business concerns. For example, although it's possible to start a business in the U.S. within 24 hours, it's quite different in Ghana, where you need to be physically present to complete paperwork at designated locations. This can be frustrating for newcomers. "It is difficult to go to

different locations just to get paperwork done for a business when this can be done online elsewhere.”

Cultural

Travelers to Ghana have reported experiencing cultural shock, which has affected them in various ways. This includes a lack of understanding of the local systems and the multiple ones they need to learn to survive here. While some mentioned enjoying researching information before their trip, once they arrived in Ghana, they had to adapt to a more complicated process of obtaining information. One commented, “I love cultures, but culture sometimes puts barriers between people, and in Africa, you experience these barriers wherever you go.”

Political/social inclusion

Adjusting to a new environment takes time due to cultural, structural, functional, attitudinal, and political barriers. Travelers described the business environment in Ghana as complex and bureaucratic. Some tourists mentioned the multiple layers one must navigate in Ghana to get things done. “It seems that having many connections, knowing the right people, or belonging to a social group is often necessary to get certain things to come your way; it can be challenging at times”.

Infrastructure

The infrastructure in Ghana that supports business is improving but may not meet Western standards. This includes roads, internet access, and accommodation, some of which can be costly. This has been a concern for many tourists looking to establish businesses or move to Ghana. One tourist said, “Ghana is wonderful; once you visit, you won’t want to leave, but there are issues with roads, internet access, and other infrastructure concerns.”

Discussion

This study found that the information needed for traveling to Ghana was not necessarily specific information (like maps, hotel information, flights, etc.) but was more related to needing accurate information to more fully set expectations about the people, language and food of Ghana. While the study is framed in Hall’s (2015) concept of diasporic identity, this study did indeed find that the diasporic tourists in this study were seeking to understand more about their heritage and feel belonging, but had challenges reconciling their American culture with a culture

that they didn’t connect with (but expected to). This indicates that the most realistic information needed for travelers to Ghana is to have realistic and authentic accounts of what it is like in modern day Sub-Saharan Africa.

When preparing for their journeys, American tourists rely heavily on social media, peer networks, and eventually, local Ghanaians. This behavior supports Fardous et al.’s (2019) observation that modern travelers heavily utilize user-generated content and collaborate with others to synthesize travel information, as well as the theory of information poverty which describes the practice of reliance on informal, trusted networks for information, rather than more formal or institutional networks (like libraries or published tourist guides). When navigating their journey, diaspora individuals frequently bypass formal institutional archives in favor of localized, peer-to-peer information networks. Viewed through Chatman’s (1999) concept of life in the round (and her subsequent theory of information poverty) this reliance on word-of-mouth from friends and local Ghanaians represents a defensive mechanism within a ‘small world.’ Because formal historical institutions can feel culturally alienated or emotionally risky, tourists prioritize ‘trusted insiders’ who can provide socially validated, empathetic, and highly practical local knowledge. While informal networks offer trust and connection, an exclusive reliance on them can lead to informational insularity, trapping the traveler in an echo chamber of anecdotal advice.

This study also uncovers a profound tension in how the “Motherland” is represented across different media ecosystems, as told by the participants in this study. Participants noted that social media often paints an overly romanticized, idealized picture of Ghana that ignores daily infrastructural and bureaucratic struggles. Conversely, traditional Western media frequently relies on outdated stereotypes that frame Africa through the lens of poverty, conflict, or criminality. Caught between the idealized paradise of social media and the negative biases of Western media, travelers are left with distorted expectations. Consequently, local Ghanaians emerge as the most reliable and essential information source for practical survival, bridging the gap between imagined realities and actual lived experiences.

The third research question in this study sought to increase understanding of the experiences of diasporic tourists when seeking information about their trip to Ghana. Of particular interest is the friction and disappointment travelers experienced

when interacting with the business community in Ghana, a sentiment confirmed by participants from the local tourist industry. For travelers considering staying in the country to find a job or start a business, they noted the lack of information to do so, which they explained is much clearer and more efficient in the United States. In addition, tourists noted challenges with customer service and the work ethic at local businesses. This aligns with Hall's (2015) framework of diasporic identity, which posits that diasporas must often confront their own hybridity, recognizing that their perspectives are heavily shaped by American cultural and business norms.

This study also collected data from two, contrasting groups: tourists, and the people who interacted with the tourists. While sometimes the responses were aligned, they also sometimes conflicted, or expressed irritation with the other group. The findings in this study highlights that bridging the gap between travelers to Ghana and the locals themselves is not automatic; it requires intentional acts of dialogue, education, and cultural exchange. For diasporic tourists to Ghana, learning African American history becomes a tool for negotiating their place in U.S. racial hierarchies. For tourists, direct interaction with Ghanaians challenges stereotypes shaped by media portrayals. Joint practices such as intergroup dialogues, participation in Pan-African student associations, or celebrating heritage festivals emerged in interviews as attempts to create solidarity. These practices reveal that resilience is not just about coping with cultural shock individually, but about crafting shared spaces where cultural identity can be negotiated collectively (Bhandari, 2021; Hall, 2015).

These findings posit that while tensions rooted in stereotypes, language, and differing social norms persist, there is also movement toward healing and connection. Diasporic tourists sometimes feel misunderstood or judged by Africans. Nevertheless, both groups recognize the weight of racism and displacement as shared experiences. As one tourist reflected, "I went looking for home and instead found another journey, but the conversations I had with Ghanaians opened my eyes."

Such moments of recognition point to pathways for solidarity. Real connection, therefore, lies not in romanticized, symbolic Pan-Africanism, but in meaningful engagement and the ongoing negotiation of what it means to be Black across different geographies. Both groups blame the media for this state affair. American tourists think the media portrays a

'negative energy' of each group. They both think their sources of information may be compromised before, during, or after their encounters. In essence, bridging divides between local Ghanaians and tourists to Ghana requires conscious efforts: erasing stereotypes, developing spaces for intercultural dialogue, and situating differences within historical contexts of slavery, colonialism, and migration.

Implications for Practice

Libraries and librarians can address the issues identified in this study through a deliberate, multi-goal approach that includes collection development, digital resources, outreach, and collaboration with library organizations. Developing collections is driven by the need to meet accreditation standards and increase program engagement. Libraries can tailor collection development across various formats to ensure resources align with community needs. This process considers factors such as jurisdiction, geographic region, geopolitics, history, and other influences shaping the community. It must include community-driven information demands that address the needs of both local and diaspora populations.

Area studies librarians, particularly African Studies Librarians, are in a good position for developing information guides, exhibits, and instruction to support the African diaspora. African studies librarians can: Curate LibGuides for travel-related information; Develop library outreach programs to effectively support efforts to educate the diaspora, like exhibitions showcasing African collections; Incorporate digital and information literacy programs (including critically evaluating media and other representations of Africa) into library instruction benefits both librarians and the user community; Develop or collaborate with study-abroad programs, where faculty and students travel to the continent to explore different cultures and work together to enhance knowledge and resource sharing. Because tourists deeply trust the local information they get from people on the ground (like guides at the Cape Coast Castle or Assin Manso), these locals are the ultimate gatekeepers. Local library association in Ghana can form a bridge with the tourism sector to provide information packets for guides and staff to share with tourists. In the United States, two associations focused on African studies will be vital in developing a comprehensive framework for diasporic information needs. First, the African Librarians Council (ALC) advocates for improving library services for the U.S. African American

community. Similarly, the African Studies Association (ASA), which aims to enhance knowledge exchange and information about Africa, will play a key role in this effort. This study also highlighted the importance of travel services within libraries, both in the United States and abroad to support people who are travelling to Ghana. For librarians in America, services for travelers like passport services and printing are very helpful for preparing to travel to Ghana. For librarians in Ghana, similar services would also be useful for printing tickets, boarding passes or hotel reservations. Libraries may also want to consider programming, like storytelling or other creation programming which allows travelers to share their experiences with others. Opportunities for travelers to talk to Ghanaian immigrants, like the Human Library, may also provide insight into the country which can more fully prepare them for what they will encounter.

Limitations

First, this study primarily focuses on the information needs of diasporic tourists living in America traveling to Ghana. The findings may not fully capture the nuances, motivations, or information-seeking behaviors of descendants from other regions, such as the Caribbean or South America, or of those whose families may have more recently migrated to America. In addition, one implication for practice is that travelers may benefit by working with an African Studies Librarian, however not all members of the general public have access to African Studies Librarians, thus highlighting the importance of developing more centralized resources for the general public (and explaining the reliance on social media communities). Lastly, this qualitative study examined the perspectives of 15 participants from two different groups about their experiences with diasporic tourism. As a qualitative study, the results are deep and rich but are not meant to be generalizable to all people who travel to Ghana or to all diasporic tourists.

Conclusion

This study highlights the complex information needs and experiences of tourists engaging in diaspora tourism to Ghana, emphasizing that authentic and realistic information is critical for bridging cultural divides. While diaspora travelers seek a connection to their ancestral homeland (referred to as “the motherland” in this paper), they frequently encounter culture shock and administrative hurdles, which are often exacerbated by idealized portrayals on social

media and negative stereotypes propagated by Western media. The research reveals that tourists primarily need nuanced information regarding Ghanaian culture, local languages, food, and socio-political dynamics to successfully navigate their travels. Concurrently, local Ghanaians expect visitors to respect local customs, pointing to a mutual need for intentional dialogue and the critical unlearning of colonial legacies to foster genuine diasporic solidarity. To support these journeys, information professionals and librarians play a crucial role by curating authentic digital resources, providing language learning tools, and collaborating with travel and study abroad programs. Ultimately, recognizing the fluid, hybrid nature of diasporic identity allows both groups to move beyond romanticized expectations, transforming shared vulnerabilities into meaningful cross-cultural connections and unified networks.

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Corresponding Author

Kodjo Elolo Atiso
katiso@ku.edu
eltiso@yahoo.com

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest was disclosed