



IMPACT OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION ON TOURISM PATRONAGE: A CASE STUDY OF IGBOUKWU IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *With special reference to Igboukwu, a town of cultural significance in Anambra State, Nigeria, this study examines the impact of marketing communication on tourism patronage. The study aimed to identify the communication techniques used to promote tourism, assess their effectiveness, and highlight the challenges hindering their utilization. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and structured questionnaires were administered to required sample size of 95 respondents, including government officials, hotel employees, and business owners but 85 participants were retrieved and the data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Science. Findings revealed that the major communication tools used to promote tourism in Igboukwu include social media, radio and television commercials, posters, billboards, and word-of-mouth communication. Among these, social media and interpersonal interaction were identified as the most effective channels for attracting tourists. The study further showed that regular and well-planned marketing campaigns significantly increase tourists' awareness and visitation levels. However, inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and limited digital exposure remain key challenges. The study concludes that effective marketing communication strategies are essential for promoting tourism in heritage destinations. It recommends greater social-media engagement, community-based promotion, collaboration with media organizations, and increased government support to sustain tourism development and foster regional economic growth.*

KEYWORDS: Igboukwu, Marketing Communication, Tourism Patronage, Heritage Tourism, Social Media, Promotion.



INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's fastest-growing sectors and a major force behind employment generation, economic expansion, and cultural preservation. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2023), tourism sustains millions of livelihoods across different regions and contributes nearly 9 percent of global GDP. Beyond dependence on oil, the sector provides a viable path to economic diversification in emerging economies such as Nigeria. Nevertheless, weak marketing frameworks, inadequate promotional strategies, and low destination visibility continue to hinder tourism growth.

Effective marketing communication remains essential for promoting tourist destinations by raising awareness, shaping perceptions, and influencing travel decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2016). It integrates several tools—advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling, and digital media—to inform and persuade target audiences. Acting as a bridge between tourism suppliers and prospective visitors, marketing communication ensures that relevant and appealing messages reach the right audiences at the right time. Advances in information and communication technology (ICT) have further transformed destination promotion and tourist engagement worldwide (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

In the present digital era, the tourism industry has shifted from conventional promotional methods to technology-driven marketing strategies. Social media, online campaigns, and integrated communication platforms now allow real-time interaction between destinations and travelers (Morrison, 2013). Yet, several Nigerian cultural sites—including Igboukwu in Anambra State remain under-marketed because of limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and the absence of coordinated marketing systems.

Igboukwu is celebrated for its archaeological significance and the discovery of ninth-century bronze artifacts that testify to Nigeria's rich cultural heritage. Despite this heritage value, the region's tourism potential remains under-developed due to fragmented promotional efforts and limited digital exposure. The Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC, 2021) affirms that strategic marketing communication is critical to achieving the objectives of the National Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (NERGP), which identifies tourism as a key instrument for national economic transformation.

To address these challenges, this study adopts the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) framework within the context of rural heritage tourism. The IMC approach emphasizes coherence and synergy in messaging across multiple media platforms, combining digital and interpersonal communication to enhance visitor engagement and strengthen destination brand identity (Schultz & Kitchen, 2021). Accordingly, this paper examines how marketing communication influences tourism patronage in Igboukwu by identifying the communication tools employed, assessing their effectiveness in attracting visitors, and analyzing the barriers that constrain their optimal use. It further proposes sustainable and technology-driven communication strategies capable of improving the visibility, competitiveness, and long-term development of Nigeria's heritage-based tourism destinations.



LITERATURE REVIEW

The Marketing Communication Theory

Marketing communication is an organized and strategic process through which businesses and tourism destinations deliver persuasive messages that raise awareness, stimulate interest, and influence purchasing decisions. It comprises tools such as advertising, public relations, direct marketing, digital platforms, and personal selling all aimed at shaping consumer attitudes and behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2016). These communication instruments connect destinations with potential tourists, helping to create favorable perceptions and promote travel (Fill & Turnbull, 2019).

Buhalis and Law (2008) observed that advances in information technology have revolutionized tourism communication by enabling real-time interaction between travelers and destinations. Similarly, Morrison (2013) emphasized that destinations employing Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies experience greater customer satisfaction and loyalty. IMC enhances brand identity by ensuring message consistency and synergy across multiple media platforms (Schultz & Kitchen, 2021).

Patronage of Tourism

Tourism patronage refers to the extent to which visitors engage with, recommend, and revisit a destination based on their overall satisfaction and experience. It represents a vital indicator of destination performance and sustainability. Patronage is influenced by several interrelated factors, including awareness, accessibility, perceived quality, and the effectiveness of promotional strategies (Adewale & Olatokun, 2020).

In developing countries such as Nigeria, tourism patronage remains relatively low despite the abundance of rich cultural and natural resources. This shortfall has been attributed to inadequate marketing frameworks, infrastructural limitations, and poor destination visibility (UNWTO, 2021). Regular promotional activities such as consistent advertising on radio, social media campaigns, and festival events have been shown to increase public awareness and significantly boost visitor turnout (Ekechukwu et al., 2023).

Thus, the patronage of tourism is not merely a product of destination attractiveness but a function of continuous and strategic marketing communication that sustains visitor interest and fosters repeat visitation.

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and Tourism

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is the coordinated use of various promotional channels to deliver a unified, consistent, and persuasive message to target audiences. It ensures that all marketing activities across both traditional and digital platforms work together to reinforce a clear and cohesive brand identity. According to Schultz and Kitchen (2021), IMC represents a comprehensive paradigm that harmonizes advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling, and digital media to strengthen brand engagement and build long-term relationships with consumers.

In the context of tourism, IMC plays a critical role in creating synergy among multiple communication platforms and stakeholders. By integrating online campaigns, cultural festivals,



public relations efforts, and community storytelling, destinations can present an authentic and appealing image that resonates with both local and international audiences. Kavoura and Stavrianea (2020) affirmed that social-media-driven IMC strategies significantly influence millennials' travel behavior by enhancing destination visibility, promoting emotional connection, and encouraging repeat visitation.

Thus, IMC serves as an effective framework for promoting heritage destinations like Igboukwu. By merging digital engagement with cultural narratives, it enhances brand recall, visitor loyalty, and competitiveness in the increasingly digital global tourism market.

Marketing Communication Tools in Tourism

Tourism destinations employ a variety of marketing communication tools to attract, inform, and persuade potential visitors. Each tool performs a distinct yet complementary role in shaping travelers' awareness, perception, and decision-making.

Advertising uses mass-media channels such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards, and digital displays to create widespread destination awareness. It communicates visual and emotional appeals that stimulate curiosity, promote attraction, and reinforce brand identity among both domestic and international markets.

Public relations centers on building and sustaining a positive image for the destination through strategic communication with the public and stakeholders. Press releases, media partnerships, sponsorships, and community events are used to enhance credibility, strengthen relationships, and maintain visitor trust.

Sales promotion involves short-term incentives such as discounts, festival packages, and loyalty programs intended to encourage immediate travel decisions. These activities improve competitiveness during off-peak periods and foster repeat patronage.

Personal selling relies on face-to-face communication through travel agents, trade exhibitions, and tourism fairs. It allows marketers to provide personalized information, respond directly to visitor needs, and establish lasting relationships.

Digital media has become one of the most dynamic and interactive tools in modern tourism marketing. Social-media engagement, influencer collaborations, and online campaigns create two-way communication platforms where destinations can share experiences and engage with audiences in real time (Harrigan et al., 2022).

In Nigeria, digital platforms are increasingly dominant because of their affordability, speed, and global reach, making them an essential medium for tourism marketing and visitor engagement (Ojo, 2019).

Hospitality, Tourism and Economic Development

Tourism and hospitality jointly contribute to national development by generating employment, improving infrastructure, and increasing Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Walker (2021) emphasized that the hospitality industry enhances living standards by creating jobs and supporting small and medium-scale enterprises. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022) and the World Bank (2023), inclusive economic growth relies heavily on private-sector innovation, skill development, and human-capital investment.



Local enterprises that supply food, crafts, transport, and related services to hotels and resorts benefit from the multiplier effect, which stimulates regional economic activity (Jones & Lockwood, 2019). However, Nigeria's hospitality and tourism sectors continue to face major challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient staff training, and limited access to finance (NBS, 2021; ILO, 2020). Addressing these constraints through targeted policy interventions, capacity building, and sustainable investment will enhance productivity and promote long-term economic growth.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Endogenous Growth Theory proposed by Romer (1986) and Lucas (1988), which posits that long-term economic development is driven primarily by internal factors such as human capital, innovation, and knowledge creation. The theory emphasizes that sustainable growth originates from within an economy rather than through external influences.

Applied to this study, the theory suggests that investment in tourism promotion, hospitality education, and marketing innovation enhances productivity, generates employment, and improves service quality all of which contribute to local economic expansion. It also supports the notion that destinations like Igboukwu can achieve self-sustaining development through capacity building, skill enhancement, and strategic marketing communication.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the positive relationship between tourism, hospitality, and economic development in Nigeria. Adebayo and Iweka (2019) observed that the tourism and hospitality industries contribute significantly to the nation's GDP and employment generation. Similarly, Uche and Okonkwo (2020) found that hotel operations stimulate local enterprise development, especially in Southeast Nigeria, through the creation of backward linkages with small businesses.

However, several scholars have highlighted persistent challenges limiting the sector's performance. Olaniyi and Hassan (2018) reported that tourism growth remains under-exploited due to infrastructural deficits, while Eze and Chukwuemeka (2021) identified inadequate staff training and multiple taxation as major constraints to hotel productivity. Furthermore, Onyedika and Okafor (2021) emphasized the urgent need to improve the digital visibility of Anambra State's tourism destinations to enhance competitiveness and attract global audiences.

Collectively, these studies underscore that while tourism and hospitality significantly contribute to Nigeria's socio-economic development, the full potential of the sector can only be realized through improved infrastructure, workforce training, and digital integration.

Overview of the Review of Literature

The reviewed literature underscores the critical role of marketing communication in the growth and competitiveness of the tourism industry. Within the framework of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), the integration of digital platforms, traditional media, and community-based promotional strategies enhances destination awareness, visitor engagement, and participation.



Although Nigeria's tourism and hospitality industries exhibit substantial potential, their progress is constrained by inadequate infrastructure, limited skilled manpower, and policy inconsistency. Addressing these limitations through strategic marketing communication initiatives and capacity development will enable the sector to realize its full potential.

This identified gap forms the foundation for the present study, which investigates the influence of marketing communication on tourist behavior and patronage in Igboekwu, Anambra State.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study examined the impact of marketing communication on tourism patronage in Igboekwu, Anambra State, using a descriptive survey research design. The design was appropriate because it enabled the collection of factual data that described existing conditions, perceptions, and relationships among individuals involved in the tourism sector.

Study Area

The study was carried out in Igboekwu, a historic town located in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. Igboekwu is internationally recognized for its ninth-century bronze artifacts, which represent the earliest evidence of metal casting in West Africa. Despite its rich cultural and archaeological significance, the town's tourism potential remains underutilized due to weak marketing communication strategies, inadequate publicity, and limited infrastructure supporting tourism development.

Population of the study

The study population consisted of business owners, tourism officials, and hotel employees within Igboekwu. These groups were selected because they are directly involved in tourism activities and marketing communication within the study area.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The Yamane (1967) formula was applied at a 5 % level of precision to determine the appropriate sample size:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where

n = required sample size

N = population size

e = margin of error (0.05)

Assuming a population of 125 individuals:



$$n = \frac{125}{1 + 125(0.05)^2} = 95$$

Thus, the computed sample size was 95 respondents. However, 80 valid questionnaires were retrieved and analyzed, representing an effective response rate of 84.2 %. This distinction reflects the actual participation rate obtained during fieldwork.

Data Collection Instrument

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers. The instrument consisted of two sections.

Section A captured respondents' demographic characteristics such as gender, age, marital status, occupation, and educational attainment.

Section B contained statements relating to marketing communication techniques and their perceived impact on tourism patronage, measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1).

Validity and reliability of instrument

The questionnaire's content validity was established through expert review by professionals in marketing communication and tourism studies. To ensure reliability, a pilot test was conducted with ten (10) respondents in a neighbouring community. The test produced a Cronbach's Alpha (α) of 0.84, indicating high internal consistency and measurement reliability.

Method of Data Collection

The questionnaires were personally administered by the researchers with assistance from trained field officers. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality before participating. Adequate time was given for completion, and all 80 copies distributed were successfully retrieved and used for analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage distributions to summarise responses. In addition, the Chi-square (χ^2) test was employed to determine whether a statistically significant relationship existed between marketing communication and tourism patronage. The results are presented in tables and followed by interpretation and discussion in subsequent sections.

Ethical Considerations

All participants voluntarily took part in the study after providing informed consent. They were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. Strict confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process, and all information collected was used solely for academic purposes. The study adhered to the general ethical principles of social science research, ensuring respect for the rights, privacy, and dignity of respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the analyzed data obtained from field investigation on marketing communication and tourism patronage in Igboukwu, Anambra State. A total of 80 valid questionnaires were analyzed. Tables 1–7 and Figures 1–7 summarize the results, showing respondents' characteristics, awareness levels, communication effectiveness, and the influence of marketing communication on tourism patronage.

Presentation of Results

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	30	43
Female	50	57
Total	80	100

Table 2: Age of Distribution of Respondents

Age (Years)	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
18-20	20	25
26-35	25	31
36-45	20	25
46 and above	15	19
Total	80	100

Table 3: Marital Status of Respondents

Marital status	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Single	30	37
Married	50	65
Total	80	100

Table 4: Employment Category of Respondents

Employment Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Hotel Staff	25	31
Local business owners	35	44
Public sector (Govt staff)	20	25
Total	80	100

**Table 5: Awareness of Tourism Marketing In Igboukwu**

s/n	Research item	Response option	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Are you aware of tourism marketing activities in Igboukwu?	Yes	50	57
		No	30	43
		Total	80	100
2.	Have you seen promotional materials for Igboukwu tourism?	Yes	53	64
		No	27	36
		Total	80	100
3.	Have you attended events or festivals in Igboukwu?	Yes	41	60
		No	39	40
		Total	80	100

Table 6: Effectiveness of Marketing Communication Channel

S/N	Communication Channel	Effectiveness Level	No Of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Social Media	Very Effective	25	31
2.	Radio/ TV Adverts	Very Effective	20	25
3.	Posters / Billboards	Very Effective	20	25
4.	Word Of Mouth	Very Effective	15	19
Total			80	100

Table 7: Influence of Marketing Communication on Patronage Statement

S/N	Research Item	Response Option	No. Of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Marketing Communication Has Increased Awareness Of Igboukwu Tourism	Yes	50	63
		No	30	37
		Total	80	100
2.	Promotional Activities Of Igboukwu Tourism	Yes	45	56
		No	35	44
		Total	80	100
3.	Improved Marketing Will Boost Tourism Patronage In Igboukwu	Yes	55	69
		No	25	31
		Total	80	100

Figure 1. Gender distribution of respondents.

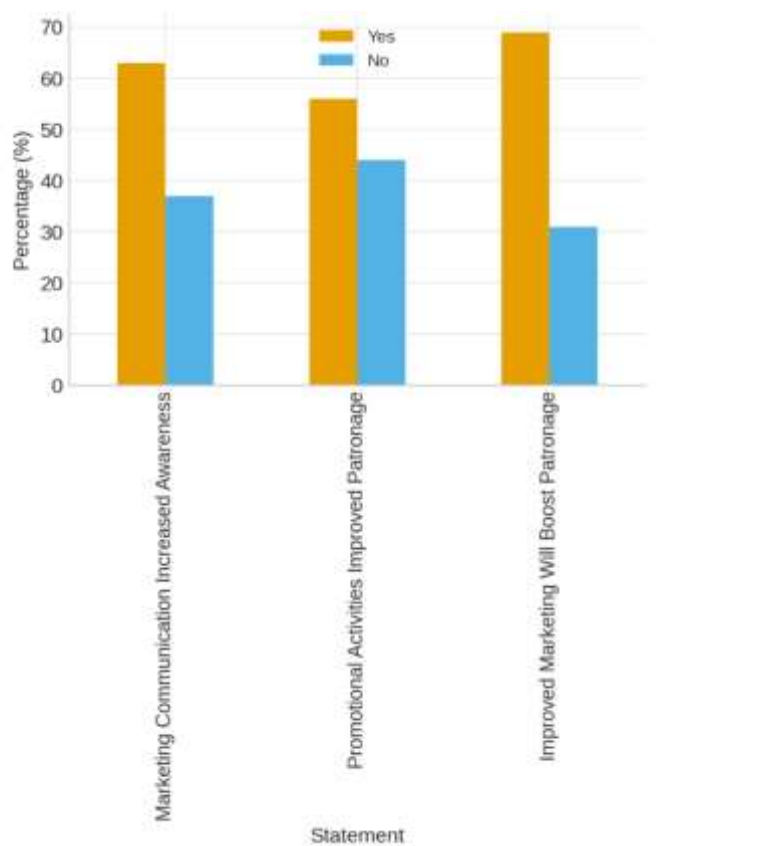


Figure 2. Age distribution of respondents (18–25, 26–35, 36–45, 46 and above).

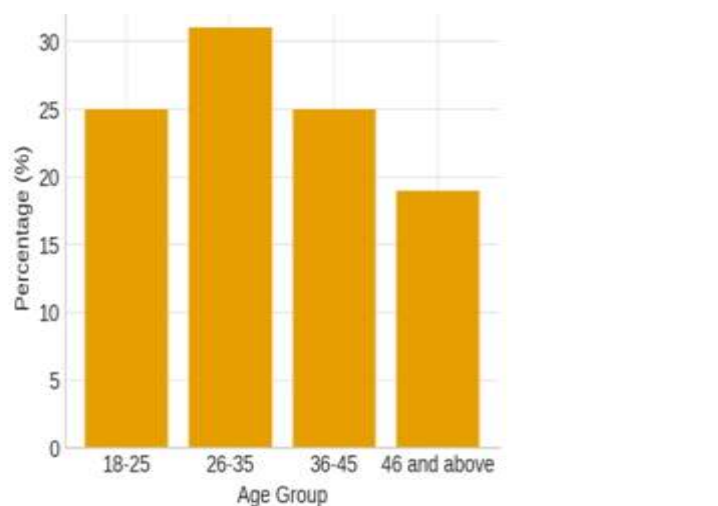


Figure 3: Marital status of respondents.

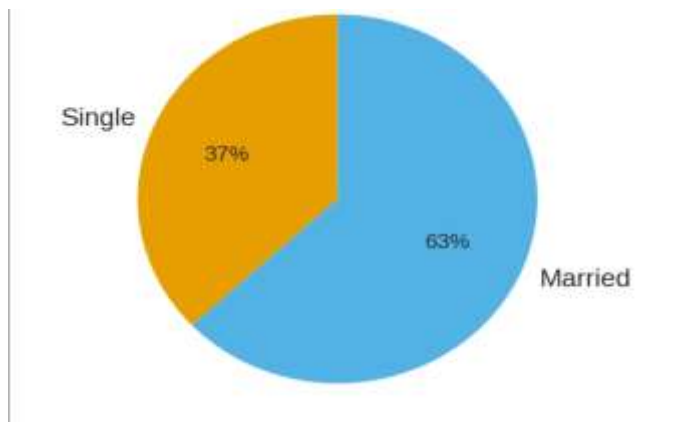


Figure 4. Employment category of respondents.

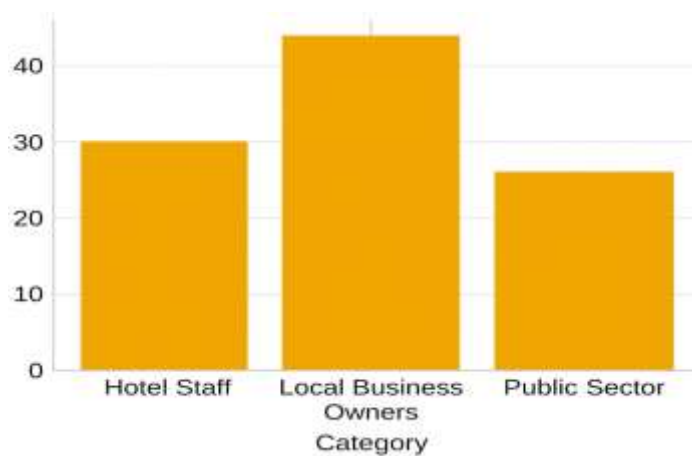


Figure 5. Awareness of tourism marketing in Igboukwu.

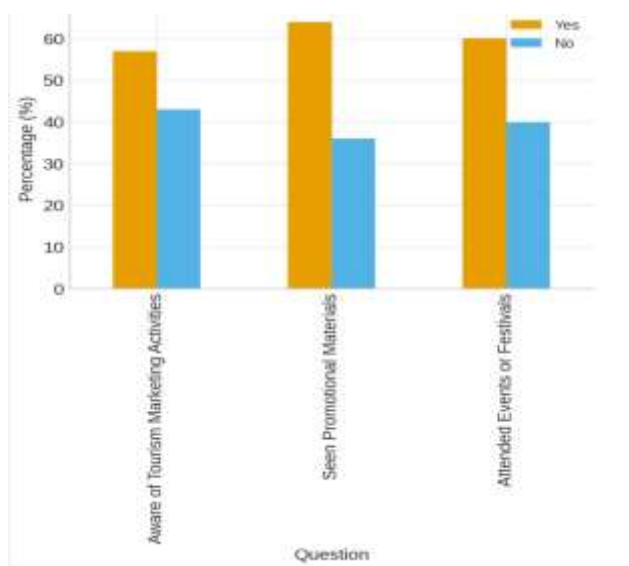


Figure 6. Effectiveness of marketing communication channels.

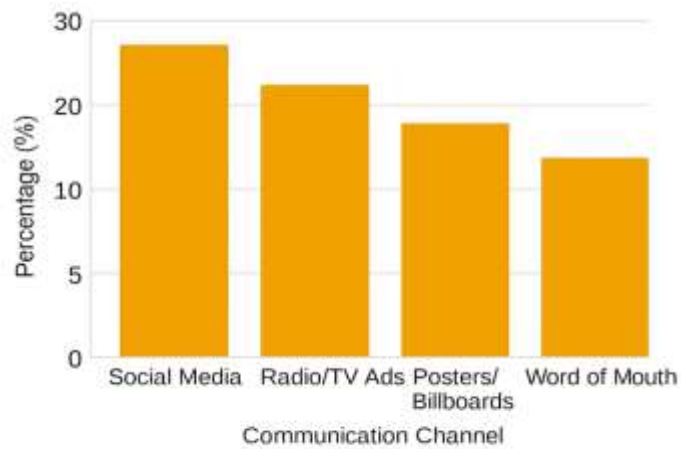
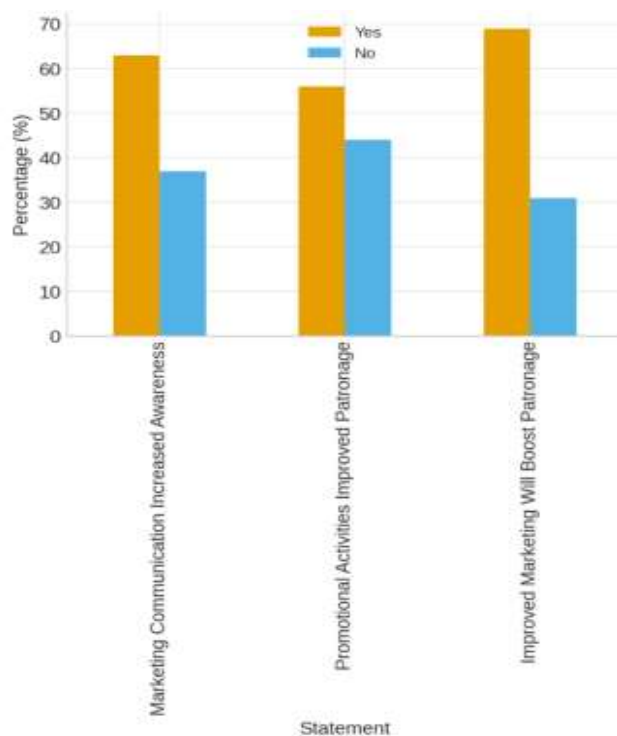


Figure 7. Influence of marketing communication on tourism patronage.





DISCUSSION

The study reveals that marketing communication plays a vital role in promoting tourism in Igboekwu, Anambra State. The results show higher female participation (57%) than male (43%), indicating greater female involvement in tourism-related activities. Most respondents (56%) were between 18 and 35 years, suggesting that youth are the most responsive group to tourism promotion efforts.

Local business owners (44%) and hotel staff (31%) formed the majority of respondents, confirming the dominance of private-sector participation in tourism development. Awareness of tourism marketing was fairly high, as 57% of respondents were aware of promotional activities, and 64% had seen related materials.

Among the communication tools, social media (31%) was rated most effective, followed by radio/TV adverts (25%), posters/billboards (25%), and word-of-mouth (19%). This confirms that digital media remains the strongest tool for destination visibility and visitor engagement. Furthermore, 63% of respondents agreed that marketing communication increased awareness, and 69% believed improved promotion would boost patronage.

Overall, the findings confirm that applying an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach enhances awareness, strengthens destination competitiveness, and supports sustainable tourism growth in Igboekwu.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

The study concludes that maintaining destination growth and expanding tourism largely depend on effective marketing communication. Within the framework of Integrated Marketing Communication, the combination of digital and traditional media enhances visibility, strengthens destination reputation, and increases visitor engagement. Consistent and well-coordinated communication strategies can transform Igboekwu's rich cultural heritage into a competitive attraction, stimulate regional economic development, and promote active local participation in tourism activities.

Recommendation

It is recommended that tourism stakeholders intensify the use of digital platforms, particularly social media, to promote Igboekwu's historical and cultural attractions to a wider audience. Community-based initiatives should be encouraged to foster local participation and preserve indigenous heritage. Close collaboration among government agencies, private investors, and media organizations is essential to ensure adequate funding and well-coordinated marketing programs. Continuous training of tourism personnel and the improvement of supporting infrastructure—such as access roads, power supply, and communication systems—are also vital to enhance visitor experience and attract greater patronage.



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