

Fake News Simulated Performance: Gazing and Performing to Reinforce Negative Destination Stereotypes

Abstract

Destinations with populations of African descent have continuously experienced negative stereotypes portrayed in traditional Western print media. These narratives have expanded to fake news circulating among individuals online, which calls for new techniques in combatting this issue. As there is limited evidence related to fake news in destinations, this research examines how fake news has emerged as a means of reinforcing negative stereotypes for destinations by examining three cases. It proposes a geographical perspective for understanding the production of fake news in tourism as simulated performances incorporating the setting of the frontstage, gazers and changing identities. These aspects drive the visibility, legitimacy and resistance to fake news, which can affect economic gains and conflicting discourses regarding these destinations. This research moves away from conceptualising fake news as solely narratives, as has been done previously, and draws attention to the spatiality of the phenomenon, which can provide practitioners with insights for developing and implementing destination image repair strategies.

Keywords

Destination image, fake news, gaze, media geographies, performance, post-truth, social media

Introduction

Destinations with populations of African descent suffer extensively in the way they are negatively represented in the media (Avraham, 2020; Okpewho & Nzegwu, 2009). Hammett (2014) argues that Western media is known for producing negative images of African destinations. For example, Sub-Saharan Africa is portrayed as the dark continent – a place of violence, genocide and extreme poverty (Avraham & Ketter, 2017). In addition, Macamo (2021) describes Africa as a simulacrum, since the way in which it is represented usually differs from reality. Furthermore, the Caribbean has been promoted as a region of sex, instability, corruption, crime and poverty (Seraphin et al., 2019). In response, destination marketing organisations create repair strategies, primarily commercials to promote positive images, testimonies and narratives. However, the development of technologies has exacerbated the problem for African and Caribbean destinations, making the narratives more difficult to change (Avraham, 2020). As a result, these destinations need to have a better

understanding of fake news in the digital era to tackle continued negative and out-dated stereotypes (Garbe et al., 2023).

Technologies have fostered a major transition, from negative stereotypes to an increase in fake news about destinations, which are generated and disseminated at a faster rate by online users (Fedeli, 2020). Unlike the print narratives from the past, McLeod (2021) reports that there have been live online stories, voice notes and videos of crime and violence, which have significantly damaged images of these destinations. Online media presents a hybrid media space that includes not only state actors but also everyday consumers, who are engaged in the widespread creation, broadcasting and consumption of fake news using diverse forms of media. This has led to what Compton (2021, p. 12) describes as a 'legitimation crisis of fake news'. Before finding solutions to the issue, representatives from regional organisations such as the European Union have called for scholars to first understand the context of how information is produced, how it is distributed and how people engage with it in the public sphere (Adams, 2018).

Fake News in Tourism

Fedeli (2020) issued a call to examine fake news related to tourism. Research in the area is limited to the antecedents and effects of fake reviews (a type of fake information) within hospitality and tourism organisations (Zhang et al., 2022). The legitimacy of fake narratives is based on cues that are either review-centric, such as linguistic style and content type, or user-centric, such as location, reputation and profile photos. These cues are searched for by online users following a fake post (Fong et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020). A literature review by Vasist and Krishnan (2022) found that over 55% of research in this field was atheoretical. As a result, they called for theory-led research to understand how fake news is created and the characteristics that influence the validity of this news. Prior studies mainly apply interpersonal deception theory. However, these studies narrowly focus on textual content communication strategies, such as the use of positive versus negative words and complex versus simple reviews (Yoo & Gretzel, 2009).

Fake news on online platforms is more than text and instead draws attention to the wider context of there being a performance of social interactions with an audience (Papacharissi, 2011). Warf (2021, pp. 151–160) proposes that 'fake news has become an important geographical phenomenon' and that only 'a few geographers have dipped a toe into these waters'. Adams (2018, p. 13) explained that a triad exists: 'communications are meaningful interactions; geographies are the spaces and places where communications happen; media are systems and structures that facilitate communication and connect, configure or constitute geographies'. Media include films, television, radio, the internet, social media and augmented reality (Mains et al., 2015). Media and geographies research is focused on understanding how communication produces space and how space and related aspects produce communication. This has led to the reinforcement of terms such as 'cyberspace' and 'media landscape'; the latter incorporates discussions of Baudrillard's simulation and simulacrum (Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006). Social media represents a spatial landscape to explore how misrepresentation occurs.

Fake News as Simulated Performances

Marketing and communication scholars have drawn on the work of Baudrillard (1994) to propose that individuals experience simulations. These are a fake reality, whereas fake news represents simulation and simulacra (Berkowitz & Schwartz, 2016). Simulation replaces reality with a representation. It is seen as an array of signs that recreate a particular reality. It is a mimicry of a situation or a process that exists in the real world. Meanwhile, simulacra are copies of representations that have no overlap with reality. This is a hyperreality that has lost its connection to the original. According to Baudrillard (1994), the real and imagined become hard to distinguish. Baudrillard explains that there are four stages of simulation: stage one is based on natural imitations where the image is an accurate representation of reality, stage two is a copy of reality that has been reframed, stage three is when the copy is removed from the original reality, resulting in an image that is distorted (this is usually mass produced) and stage four is pure simulation, which is the stage of hyperreality when the simulacrum has no connection to reality, such as virtual reality or Disneyland (Biscaia & Marques, 2022). Media studies have long argued that what is shown are simulated versions of reality. However, scholars call for an examination through a geographical lens, as they argue that geography, particularly landscape, space and spatialities, play a major role in enhancing the credibility of these simulations (Aitken & Dixon, 2006). There is also a need to unravel how this phenomenon is produced to create solutions to fake news. To further clarify, this study draws on the concepts of gaze and performance, which Larsen and Urry (2011, p. 1111) propose 'should "dance together" rather than stare at each other at a distance' in tourism.

Gaze, as proposed by Foucault (Burchell et al., 1991), is instrumental in producing fake imagery as it has the power to see and construct as well as to be further enhanced by visualising technologies, such as enhancement features and graphics on computers and surveillance systems (as cited in Haraway, 1988). Gaze behaviour, in terms of frequency and duration, is usually greater with fake rather than real news (Ladeira et al., 2022). Foucauldian gazing is not novel in tourism research. Scholars have highlighted the role of the virtual gaze in drawing attention to tourists' online activities as visual experiences. Selfies taken in particular spaces create personalised places and showcase multiple identity dimensions (Koliska & Roberts, 2021). These insights are limited mainly to visualisation of social media photos rather than videos, which are more interactive. Furthermore, as Durkheim (1926, p. 272) stated, 'we do not merely live but act; we compose and play our chosen character'.

Drawing on the work on performance by Goffman (1956), Papacharissi (2011, p. 307) concluded that online users have 'access to a variety of multimedia tools that enable the possibility for more controlled and more imaginative performances of identity online'. According to Goffman, a performance encompasses all the activities that an individual does in front of gazers, and these influence onlookers. The performance includes a setting (backstage and the physical environment and props of the frontstage), personal front (characteristics of the performer) and appearance (the performer's state of being). Fake news performances have manifested in journalism. For instance, Borden and Tew (2007) concluded that individuals will choose to perform different scenarios that may serve as an illustration of real news. Fake news presented as real media is a result of individuals who choose to perform journalism by drawing on different presentation styles and imitating

traditions known to journalism. Similar cases have been found within media geography. These studies conclude that only parts of performances are highlighted as focus is drawn to particular landscapes, spaces and mobilities, which gives rise to speculations (Aitken & Dixon, 2006; Woodward, 2016).

While tourists are usually motivated to travel to simulated attractions (Biscaia & Marques, 2022), this may not be the case of simulacra that are designed to present dishonest representations of destinations with populations of African descent (Macamo, 2021). Titley (2019) suggests that Sweden has a racialised spatial imaginary of 'no-go' zones, which are places to be avoided due to their being 'problem areas' where migrants abide. In Sweden, media is used as a means of producing and sharing news about false events, which have significant consequences for individuals of African descent. Black geographies, referring to spatiality associated with black lives (McKittrick, 2006), have been judged and subjected to alteration since colonialism. The great colonial exhibitions were established to showcase the colonies in media as places that needed to be civilised by European investors (Needham, 2015). There were advertisements of 'savage people' without religion and social institutions who needed to be disciplined. In addition, there were showcases of colonial villages that were altered to illustrate authentic and modern villages. However, these illustrations were marked as false by a few anti-colonial groups (Achac, 2023). Still, there is a lack of studies that explore the production and racialisation of spaces associated with populations of African descent (Hawthorne, 2019).

Method

This study proposes that fake news has emerged as hyperreality performances that serve as a means of reinforcing negative stereotypes for destinations with populations of African descent. This will be illustrated based on three cases. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (2022) cautions practitioners regarding fake news; however, evidence of fake news occurring within destinations is limited.

Case 1 examines fake news stories of 2019 regarding the drying up of Victoria Falls in Zambia and Zimbabwe. Reports were found on a total of 26 media platforms, including media houses, such as Sky News and the BBC. In addition, social media comments tagged to YouTube videos on this topic amounted to 296. However, tourism business executives reported that 'they were exaggerating information' and generating 'fake news'. Media houses, such as Good Morning America, conducted their own investigations and labelled the previous claims as misleading reports.

Case 2 took place in Jamaica. Knuttila et al. (2022) examined patterns of misinformation risk perceptions across different geographic regions and found that fears and concerns were highest in Latin America and the Caribbean (74.2%). A video of a male tourist who was sharing his experience in Jamaica was posted on YouTube on 2 December 2021. The influencer urged tourists not to visit one destination following a report of negative experiences. It received 51,560 views and was linked to a total of 1,361 comments.

Case 3 occurred in February 2021 when a tourist visiting Jamaica posted several Instagram stories suggesting that they were being held hostage in Jamaica (Washington Post, 2021). The story caught the attention of global media outlets, illustrating its extensive reach in comparison with fake reviews and past negative stereotypes of destinations. Content was examined based on the trending hashtag on social media that marked the event. These posts form a part of the media landscape (Fuchs, 2021). Twitter posts (125) and Instagram photos (255) and comments (1010) were downloaded for this study.

At the time of data collection, the posts for all three cases remained publicly accessible. A total of 3,047 posts were uploaded to NVivo. Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and guided by the work of Foucault (Burchell et al., 1991) and Goffman (1956). The author identifies as a person of African descent who has experience and an understanding of the contexts being studied. The following sub-themes emerged: setting – construction of space, interactions with people and other features; gaze – reinforcing actions, resistance and accountability acts; and identity – digital and backstage identities. Each served as a major influence in constructing and driving the visibility and legitimacy of fake news. In light of ethical considerations, identifiers such as the names of individuals and user profile IDs will not be shared when presenting the findings. The terms 'they', 'their' and 'them' will be used for gender neutrality.

Findings: Reinforcing Negative Stereotypes of Destinations

Fake news is perceived to be based on simulated performances. Based on Baudrillard's (1994) steps, all instances conformed to the first three stages. In the first stage, individuals experience reality in its original state by being present at the destination. The second stage is a copy that masks reality. In this stage, individuals present video clips and photos of the destination, but the images are removed from reality as they do not capture the entire scenes, continuous recording of individual experiences or individual engagement with the actual destination experience. Images are void of other tourists and executives from tourism businesses or destinations. Only selected clips are shown, with no view of the entire setting, and captured on zoomed in devices. According to Deleuze (1986), zooming in allows for audiences to concentrate solely on the emotions of the producer and ensures believability of claims. The third stage of simulacra is producing a copy that masks the absence of reality. Individuals edit and incorporate images, enhance recordings with visualisation features and alter the order of events, which make them different from reality but in keeping with the narratives that reinforce negative stereotypes. These might include destinations linked to abduction, low-quality tourist experiences and crisis situations, which are all associated with setting the stage for no-go destinations. These simulations were not designed to motivate travellers to visit these destinations, which is usually the case with simulated experiences in tourism (Biscaia & Marques, 2022).

Setting the Stage for No-Go Destinations

Social media platforms served as the front stage for broadcasting the messages about alleged experiences within the destinations for all three cases. This set the stage for scenes of no-go zones for visitors. A person's representation of a place is based on their constructed experience, some of which is affixed to the body (Adams & Jansson, 2012). In Case 3, the individual claimed that they were being kidnapped, held hostage and being watched and recorded by three cameras. These 'cameras' enabled constant surveillance of them within a specific geographic coverage, like a panopticon (Burchell et al., 1991). The spatial features of the media landscape, such as the comments section, were turned off to suggest that the tourist was prevented from speaking, which further increased the credibility of the claims made. However, no detailed explanation was provided in relation to other expected circumstances. For instance, there was no discussion about aspects of the tourist experience, such as food and staff hospitality or mention of employees' names or the precise timing of events. While many online users believed these claims, they were verified by a few as being misinterpreted. Some users argued that the individual in Case 3 was spending 14 days in a quarantine room, which was equipped with a smoke detector, two motion sensors for cooling and a view of a pool. This resulted in the stage being constructed as a hostage scene, which is a landscape projection that was created to match the feelings of the content creator. The individual used close-up shots, which can decentre place and set emotions; this can attract audiences and change their perspectives (Deleuze, 1986). This is similar to the case of black communities in the United States, where settings have been constructed to support stereotypes of environments of danger and fear.

Efforts were geared towards the racialised production of space, which resulted in the landscapes captured in the videos of the cases being representations of other negative stereotypes. Black landscapes are seen as uncivilised and undeveloped (Moulton & Salo, 2022). In Case 1, the destination was presented as a place in an environmental crisis, based on clips of barren lands, animals being starved, struggling workers, citizens being threatened by diseases and diminishing infrastructure. In Case 2, the roads were described and shown as war zones, which was illustrated using photos and videos of dirt tracks. It was mentioned by the content creator that the United Nations provided individuals with special training on how to drive in this destination. These illustrations are contrary to the Eurocentric architecture and landscape images that were shown in media and used to attract investments to the destinations in the 1800s (Needham, 2015). Many of these landscapes still remain but are never mentioned by the social media content creators. Instead, camera techniques are used to edit and reframe the landscapes:

this is absolute nonsense reporting – that part of the Falls is always dry in low season, nothing new. The camera should have given a full picture of the whole entire 1.7km of the Victoria Falls, not give us half-truths or mistruths. Low season is over now, and the water levels have risen (as they normally do). The Mosi-Oa-Tunya ain't going nowhere (Post 3096)

According to Deleuze (1986), close-up settings eliminate the appeal of landscapes to viewers' emotions. The environment is not a passive tool but relevant for adding credibility to the narratives (Mains et al., 2015). Formatting is used with natural landscapes to articulate the message being created to cause people to accept the simulation as a fact. The destinations are being constructed as sites of nothingness, like the communities of the south in the United States that were once plantations (Purifoy, 2021). This prevailing spatial imagery is an

example of a discourse that is often grounded in a history of discrimination (Jenkins, 2021). It is considered as Western/Euro-centric knowledge and spatial imaginary of Sub-Saharan Africa (Daley & Murrey, 2022).

Gazers of the Media Landscape

The online users (virtual gazers) reiterated what was being said in the three cases with emotional narratives, online campaigns and hashtags such as #SaveKalina. Users linked their narratives to authorities to further validate the claims made by the tourists. For instance, in Case 1, a quote from the president of Zambia was inserted regarding the lack of water due to climate change. Similarly, in Case 3, one user noted ‘An FBI (US) agent says the (Jamaican) government has been infiltrated by Satanists who trafficked children’. The narrative was grounded in a particular context that shaped how it was interpreted by online users. The United States is seen as superior to Jamaica on the matter. Jamaica is perceived to be guilty of the act, which has been the case for other instances of post-truth geographies (Warf, 2021). Unlike previous fake news studies in tourism (Zhang et al., 2022), gazers are active in enhancing and intensifying the sharing of speculative claims about a destination, which help to portray it as a crisis environment: ‘You can see the erosion effects perfectly’ (Post 967), ‘Wow! That’s amazing. And troubling. It reminds me of Lake Mead drying up behind the Hoover Dam. I was there in 1983 when the water was topped off to the rim. Now it’s almost 200 feet lower’ (Post 875) and ‘So sad for nature’ (Post 3526).

Some gazers sought to examine the veracity of the claims made in the videos in real time, which is unlike the case of fake reviews, where this is promoted after the narrative is posted: ‘They made a video saying they don’t know what day or time it is while filming on phone. With a clock. And a calendar’ (Post 46) and ‘Since when do kidnappers snatch you up and put you in a resort and leave you with your phone?’ (Post 90). Gazers started to conduct their own investigations. They did not stop their verification process until after the individuals left the destinations, which illustrates the active but long-standing attention of the gazers of the media landscape.

Local gazers are exhausted with negative stereotypical experiences, which shows that this is not just a problem for destination officials but also for locals: ‘This is the 60th time y’all started scandals out of your embarrassment.’ (Post 58), ‘I was so hurt and angry by this ignorant, biased ranting’ (Post 12) and ‘This person could not seriously be comparing Jamaica to Afghanistan’ (Post 92). These comments have often led to contestations online among gazers as well as creation of alternative realities. Individuals who opposed the fake news compiled photos and videos based on a positive discourse: ‘The Victoria Falls is NOT dry. These pictures, taken by me on the 6th of December 2019, show a very different story to what seems to be doing the rounds in the media – regionally and internationally’ (Post 101) and

Very exaggerated documentary. I live in Zambia, and a YouTuber and I have just made a documentary. The Victoria Falls is back to normal. We know the Victoria Falls better than these reporters, who don’t live here in our motherland. During the dry season, it always goes dry. Today I have just done the video – one of the seven

wonders of the world, the mighty Victoria Falls, which we call Mosi-Oa is at its peak (Post 311)

Gazers are on the rise to resist and debunk stories as is evident with the rise in videos regarding ‘the Africa you never see’. This is reminiscent of the Maroons, who exercised black agency in spatial production (Moulton, 2023). However, in this case, not all individuals were of African descent, as some gazers who resisted were past visitors from places such as Canada, United States and Ukraine: ‘YOU CAN’T CONVINC ME BUDDY, CAN’T WAIT TO GO BACK’ (Post 362). Gazers provided a representation of the destinations as welcoming, inclusive, safe and liveable, which opposed the representations of the content creators as dangerous and suffering.

While the individual may be aiming to portray a particular identity, the gazers are active in trying to authenticate details to the point where the individual’s personal identity (backstage) becomes exposed: ‘@jetblue this is who you want representing your company. This is the type of people you hire. She needs to be FIRED!!!’ (Post 37) and ‘Hey @Jetblue this employee’s action cannot go unpunished’ (Post 85). Image damage is not solely for the visiting destination but also the accommodation and the individual’s workplace: ‘After an investigation, the crewmember in question is no longer with JetBlue’ (Post 138) and ‘You are still up perpetuating lies about the hotel’ (Post 77). The same occurred in Case 2: ‘I’m surprised you still have the balls to keep this post up. It’s an embarrassment to the good people of Canada’ (Post 229).

Individuals may accept simulations as fact as content creators strive to create a deep connection with their audience through performative elements, such as sights and sounds. Fake news performances can be seen as a reproduction of plantation power, where those who are in a position of superiority with access to resources are able to tell stories about black communities, even if they are false. While some individuals agree, few resist the stories that were produced, which is a sign of black agency and allyship as seen in the 1800s when a few groups opposed negative depictions of these destinations in media for the Great Exhibition. Nonetheless, this creates a situation in which there are two prevailing discourses about the destinations, as seen in the case of black geographies studies.

Personal Front: From Unravelling Front to Backstage Identities

The individual in Case 3 portrayed a digital spatial identity as a victim in a hostage situation on the front stage. Fake news is seen in research as an organisational and destination issue, but it also affects individuals who are not involved in the incidents: ‘Human trafficking is a REAL ISSUE. Girls, boys and women face this issue all the time is a slap in the face to actual people facing this issue’ (Post 63). There were other forms of identity that were drawn on by gazers; these were influential aspects for promoting and tackling fake news about the destination. Gazers requested that the tourists’ access be limited due to their negative actions in the media landscape. However, a few believed that the individuals’ identities as tourists outweighed such demands: ‘Got a slap on the wrist and a 5-star hotel stay for something Jamaicans get fined and locked up for without a public apology or anything’ (Post 108), ‘Proof that laws in Jamaica only apply to Jamaicans. Imagine faking a kidnapping and abduction, and then boarding your flight to America like nothing happened’ (Post 96) and

‘The sense of entitlement these people have, perception of above rules’ (Post 87). Race is understood in terms of geography, as individuals are classified according to geographic locations and ranked in hierarchy. Nonetheless, gazers call for individuals to immerse themselves within the contexts so they can have a better understanding of the destinations: ‘They went to the country with their bad attitude and with the intention to have everyone work to the bone for them’ (Post 56) and ‘Spoilt and Pampered, you need to learn how to treat people with respect’ (Post 165).

In one case, not only was the individual a tourist but they were seen as an African American, which is contrary to tourism studies on fake news whereby identity was not noted as important in fake reviews (Fong et al., 2022). This identity provided them with the authority to speak convincingly online, which is not often the case, as noted in studies on black geographies and individual agency online (Davis, 2020): ‘Black Americans have been travelling to exploited countries and making terrible excuses whenever they’ve been called out on it. Spread indecorous lies about being kidnapped when they were put in quarantine. You lot make me sick’ (Post 51) and

A word to those African Americans in those they’ve kidnapped videos why was it oh so easy for you to do to Jamaica/Jamaicans what White folk has done to y’all in America? share lies, perpetuate unfounded stereotypes, label us third world (Post 140)

Agency is possible due to what Du Bois (1903, p. 4) referred to as double consciousness: ‘an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body’. The individual was framed as an American, which gave them the chance to become what users called ‘wild Karen’ and ‘the Karen of the Caribbean’. A ‘Karen’ is defined by the Urban Dictionary as a ‘middle aged woman, typically blonde who makes solutions to others’ problems (particularly blacks) an inconvenience to her although she isn’t even remotely affected’ (Williams, 2020). This extends black geographies’ work on digital media spatiality further afield, which unravels how individuals have agency and influence online given digital spatiality challenges (Davis, 2020). It contributes to that line of research to show that, while the white and black spatial imaginary is overly simplistic, those that are at the intersection of both racial groups can adapt to the white imaginary (Jenkins, 2021). However, as authentication of the individual’s performance continued, users made connections to the tourist as having ties to the destination. This did not yield pity from online users, with one noting that ‘if she were white, people would feel bad, but she is black’. This comment draws attention to the underlying issues of colourism and racism that exist within destinations of African descent populations (Gabriel, 2007).

Slavery is over, and we are tempted to think racial capital production associated with geographies is behind us. However, it can emerge in the media landscape. Similar to the colonial era (Pulido, 2017), online content producers seek attention from black geographies for capitalistic gains. One individual stated that

based on what was said about Jamaica in the video posted on YouTube, it is obvious that the main reason was to direct visitors away from Jamaica to other places where the presenter may have interest in the tourist and rental business

Although the credibility of the content creator becomes weak as the identity is being revealed by gazers, there is still an economic consequence. Posts are made as an attempt to bar wealth creation as tourism executives draw attention to the potential and actual plummet in earnings since the circulation of the videos: 'If you plan on visiting Jamaica on a cruise, staying at a resort for a week or moving there, I recommend that you watch my video first' (Post 12), 'No matter who paid you to discredit Jamaica, you cannot stop us from visiting' (Post 174) and

It's a shame for such a reputable news source to be sharing blatantly false information. The economy in Victoria Falls is so dependent on tourism, and sharing misinformed news like this will directly affect the lives of the people who receive an income via the tourism industry (Post 1103)

The spread of this information had a negative effect on tour operators and hoteliers, who were faced with guest cancellations (Mushawemhuka et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This study examines how fake news has emerged as a means of reinforcing negative stereotypes for destinations with populations of African descent. Research on fake news in tourism is mainly atheoretical and concentrates on fake reviews (text/non-visual) in organisations; hence, there have been calls for further exploration (Fedeli, 2020). Keeping in mind that 'black matters are spatial matters' (McKittrick, 2006, p. xiii), this study applied a geographical perspective to contribute to literature in five ways. First, it contributes to the literature on fake news through a consideration of fake news as simulated performances (media) rather than text by examining destinations with populations of African descent. Fake news within these contexts is crafted to reinforce negative stereotypes. Second, by combining fake news, destination, media and black geographies scholarship, the paper shows how these destinations are produced online to reinforce negative stereotypes. This draws attention to not only social relations as seen in media studies but also spatial imaginaries as having a role in reinforcing negative stereotypes of no-go and uncivilised zones and adding credibility to claims. Third, it shows how black geographies can challenge historical views of black subjection to illustrate agency through contestations of how the space is represented as well as actions for providing alternative views of space. These actions give rise to two destination discourses prevailing in the media landscape.

Fourth, by drawing on media geographies, the paper illustrates that racialised spatial imaginary is being produced by consumers and not solely institutions. Fifth, it illustrates the relationship between space (physical and virtual) and capitalist production, which is developing in black geographies literature. This study responds to calls in geography literature for exploring spatial imaginary and black geographies to illuminate the deep connections between identity, community and place (Williams, 2021). It is based on a timely topic, that is, fake news in destinations with populations of African descent. It explores fake news in destinations, illustrates that negative stereotypes towards these tourist destinations are emerging online and not just print as in previous times, presents a theoretical argument through tourism, media and black geographies as much of the literature on fake news is atheoretical and based on texts, provides examples of gazer agency and connects tourism geography to media and black geographies.

A geographical stance moves away from focusing on different aspects of the text as critical factors in constructing fake news and towards spatial elements being instrumental in constructing and driving the visibility of fake news simulacra performances. Fake news is not just a matter of the communication or people looking on static text but also performances, which people gaze on and at times get involved with. Elements of these include the setting of the front stage, gazers of the media landscape and personal identities. Gazers are passive viewers of simulations in tourism (Baudrillard, 1994), but findings show that they are active in performances for furthering stereotypes or ensuring accountability and integrity. In particular, locals are not muted, invisible or have limited agency as previous studies suggest in further afield black geographies (Davis, 2020). Hence, gazers can be incorporated in the strategies of destinations to combat image stereotypes as a part of a destination's image repair strategy. The findings also shows that debunking is not sufficient as a fake news strategy and that doing so prior to and during performances needs to be considered by practitioners. The front stage of social media is not just the layout of the online platform as noted in past studies (Fong et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020) but it is also the stage for performances that are orchestrated, filled with affect and that incorporate an ongoing process of remaking meaning. The authenticating gaze is not always tied to complete performances (video clips). Therefore, continuous repair is needed by the destination, which increases pressure on what black destinations have been doing for years. As part of destination image repair strategies, destination management organisations can engage with organisations that have security cameras on properties to create videos that can debunk fake news. These videos must provide details on the time and date of their footage.

The tourist experience is not solely about gaze and performance but also spatial identity. While individuals will portray a particular spatial identity for gazers to see (Schwartz & Halegoua, 2015), backstage identities will emerge and can help to further drive or diminish reactions to fake news. In implementing destination image repair strategies, practitioners must know that Western media are not the only influences; individuals of African descent who can navigate across different identities can be influences as well. Practitioners must be aware that fake news highlights the vulnerability not only of destinations but also negatively affected organisations (sites of the incidents and those tied to the individuals) and actual victims of the simulated reality. Therefore, marketing teams need to be constantly active across platforms rather than completely outsourcing services or doing scheduled posts on their platforms.

Researchers of information technology in tourism can draw on insights from this study and other work on media (communication) and black geographies to understand fake news and online stereotypes towards destinations with populations of African descent. Based on the comments, we can see that individuals are now retaliating against some of these negative stereotypes and debunking issues. This calls for future research on the role of the public sphere in (de)legitimising fake news, as well as resistant and community practices in black geographies. Explorations can extend beyond tourism as fake news that reinforces stereotypes towards individuals of African descent is being confronted in international relations and crisis research. Social media is a space where researchers can collect information about anti-blackness and work towards addressing racism online.

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