## 

# The Gambia Creative Industries & Tourism: Regional Benchmarking & Market Positioning

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[1. Introduction and Methodology 5](#_ixpxnyuujkf9)

[1.1 Analytical Framework 6](#_tjk6ss9inkzt)

[1.2 Analytical Objectives 7](#_mj41njnax283)

[1.3 Data Sources 7](#_iikte5gx743a)

[1.4 Sentiment and Persona Analysis 7](#_ft1fz6u5h0yi)

[1.5 Methodological Continuity 8](#_9srif82t0bo)

[2. Regional Creative Industries Digital Presence Comparative Analysis 8](#_98iqako1j2j8)

[2.1 Stakeholder Selection Methodology 8](#_962f4mmu1hk9)

[2.2 Sector Digital Marketing Strategies 9](#_xa4b1z4bkj27)

[3. International Tour Operator Digital Representation Analysis 25](#_ebpohxtymjp2)

[3.1 Methodology and Scope 25](#_l4f7ibj6p9lu)

[3.2 The Gambia Creative Tourism Visibility & Positioning 26](#_a0rgbz9bkhel)

[3.3 Packaging Patterns 27](#_hl983471bcvq)

[3.4 Narrative Positioning and Thematic Emphasis 27](#_6n7tacc0iqy8)

[3.5 Comparative Gaps 27](#_wlq9dh95pt25)

[3.6 Strategic Implications for The Gambia 29](#_mfbn6pgzsyk)

[3.7 Creative Differentiation by Package Type 30](#_2fxrv2kp1w1g)

[4. Visitor Perception of Gambian Creative Industries and Tourism Experiences 31](#_apa8ewwyhuf0)

[4.1 Methodology 32](#_osg9x4vwri03)

[Why TripAdvisor Was Chosen 33](#_c31cgradpe14)

[Limitations and Mitigation 34](#_yvrbk3xr7ur7)

[4.2 Overall Sentiment Landscape 35](#_y8n5dk8tqs6a)

[4.3 Sector-Specific Insights 35](#_1y897nxx77is)

[4.4 Regional Thematic Benchmarking 36](#_qcr8frrjfase)

[4.5 Traveler Segment Insights 37](#_mmblkiwtpkoa)

[4.6 Strategic Implications 37](#_v7q4xxbi7oe3)

[5. Creative Tourism Personas and Market Implications 38](#_b0x1a68efwqd)

[5.1 The Five Evidence-Based Personas 39](#_ntcytvthaui)

[5.2 Persona Insights 40](#_tets3wiccjy1)

[5.3 Cross-Persona Theme Signals 42](#_s6kd9dlbm8bj)

[5.4 Strategic Implications 42](#_1i70wyaio4ds)

[6. Digital Positioning Opportunities Matrix 42](#_fmt3zdhdiber)

[6.1 Competitive Strengths and Gaps 43](#_bddoaa7un2kd)

[6.2 Priority Opportunities Matrix 45](#_vzi7cndy004i)

[6.3 Implementation Roadmap and Metrics 46](#_h942dgwh1nr0)

[6.4 Integration with Deliverable 3 47](#_9tjyh7r0q60b)

[7. Conclusion & Strategic Priorities 47](#_a6vp0mkkwehd)

[Annex 1 – Methodological Framework: Creative Industries Visibility Score 51](#_q9vg63ftbrdt)

[Annex 2 – International Tour Operator Analysis Framework 53](#_par30n975lce)

[Visibility Gap 56](#_91cseme5w0)

[Keyword Specificity 56](#_jd8t7idkt6x0)

[Packaging Advantage 56](#_ddktzlap72ik)

[Annex 3 – Sentiment & Theme Taxonomy 57](#_zby28u53pztc)

[How the Themes Relate to Each Other 58](#_bol52nxor8tr)

### Acronyms

CI - Creative Industries

DPOM - Digital Positioning Opportunities Matrix

EU - European Union

GBC - Ghana Broadcasting Corporation

ITC - International Trade Centre

ITO - International Tour Operator

JA - Jeune Afrique

MCN - Musée des Civilisations Noires (Museum of Black Civilizations)

NLP - Natural Language Processing

OTA - Online Travel Agency

PDP - Product Detail Page

Q&A - Question and Answer

RCV - Rádio de Cabo Verde (Radio of Cape Verde)

RTC - Radiotelevisão Caboverdiana (Cape Verdean Radio and Television)

SEO - Search Engine Optimization

SRK - Selly Raby Kane (designer)

TCV - Televisão de Cabo Verde (Television of Cape Verde)

TI - Tourism Industry

UGC - User-Generated Content

UTM - Urchin Tracking Module (a code for tracking URL performance)

UX - User Experience

VADER - Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner (a sentiment analysis tool)

VR - Virtual Reality  
YEP - Youth Empowerment Project

Executive Summary

Digital competitiveness in tourism defines how destinations are discovered, evaluated, and booked. For countries like The Gambia, whose cultural and creative economy underpins its tourism appeal, a visible and coherent digital footprint has become essential. Building on the *Creative Industries Digital Baseline Assessment*, this *Regional Benchmarking & Market Positioning Analysis* situates The Gambia within a wider West African landscape and against the perceptions of international tour operators. It asks a simple question with complex implications: How does Gambian creativity appear to the world online, and what would it take to stand out?

This report extends the diagnostic work by comparing The Gambia's digital performance with five peer destinations—Senegal, Cape Verde, Ghana, Nigeria, and Benin—and analyzing how international tour operators frame West African cultural and creative tourism. It introduces new layers of evidence: sentiment analysis drawn from more than 5,600 online reviews, audience personas based on real digital-behavior data, and a positioning matrix that translates findings into investable opportunities.

**Key Findings**

**1. Mid-Tier Digital Maturity with Structural Gaps**

The Gambia ranks fourth of six destinations in regional creative-industry benchmarking. While individual actors demonstrate authentic storytelling (notably My Gambia and select festivals), the country trails Senegal and regional leaders Nigeria and Ghana in platform integration, search optimization, and content consistency. The Gambia underperforms in Fashion & Design and Festivals.

**2. Invisible in International Tour Operator Portfolios**

Of 239 operator pages analyzed, only 9% highlight Gambian creative content (crafts, festivals, music), compared to 26% for Senegal and 21% for Ghana. The Gambia's average Creative Tourism Score is below the regional mean. Operators position the country almost exclusively through "beach + wildlife" narratives. Multi-country packages (Senegal + Gambia) score twice as high with respect to creative industries, suggesting The Gambia gains creative visibility only when embedded in regional circuits.

**3. Positive Sentiment Constrained by Infrastructure Perception**

The Gambia ranks first regionally in safety perception and competitive in artistic quality and atmosphere. However, facilities and infrastructure sentiment trails the regional average, with repeated visitor mentions of deteriorating heritage sites, poor signage, and limited interpretive materials. The country is perceived as authentic but under-maintained—"liked but not looked for."

**4. Five Distinct Personas Reveal Untapped Market Segments**

Persona analysis identifies five statistically significant audience clusters:

* Market Shopping Enthusiasts (24.7% of reviews, 3.75/5 rating, seeking transparent pricing and artisan stories)
* Dutch Immersive Learners (38.5%, 4.12/5, highest satisfaction, seeking multi-day workshops)
* Cultural Heritage Enthusiasts (16.1%, 4.24/5, frustrated by lack of bilingual interpretation)
* Educational Learning Enthusiasts (14.7%, 3.98/5, valuing guide expertise)
* Nature & Wildlife Enthusiasts (19.5%, 3.68/5, seeking creative add-ons to eco-tours).

These clusters, based on sentiment analysis of review data, could be used to more effectively target digital marketing efforts across all seven creative industry sectors.

**The Core Challenge**

The evidence reveals a paradox: The Gambia possesses authentic creative assets and generates positive visitor sentiment relative to the region, yet remains digitally invisible in the global cultural-tourism marketplace.

This gap is not structural but communicative—the country has stories to tell but lacks the platforms, language accessibility, and operator partnerships to tell them effectively. The Digital Positioning Opportunities Matrix presented in Section 6 identifies ten levers for addressing this gap, organized around three strategic priorities: narrative rebalancing through multi-channel storytelling, closing the discoverability-to-conversion gap, and leveraging peer learning and strategic aggregation.

These priorities form the foundation for Output 3's *Strategic Digital Development Framework*, which will translate diagnostic evidence into institutional roles, capacity-building programs, and sustainable monitoring mechanisms.

## 1. Introduction and Methodology

The creative industries of The Gambia are at the heart of the country’s cultural identity and its tourism brand. From fashion, design, and festivals to crafts, museums, and media, these industries represent both economic opportunity and national soft power. Their digital visibility, however, determines whether that creative vitality reaches the audiences who might visit, invest, or collaborate.

In 2025, the *Creative Industries Digital Baseline Assessment* established the first comprehensive picture of digital maturity across The Gambia’s cultural economy. It measured how visible creative stakeholders are online, how effectively they use platforms and content, and how far they have integrated digital tools into their operations. The results were revealing: while a small number of actors demonstrated professional online engagement, most of the sector remained digitally invisible.

**From National Baseline to Regional Context**

This report extends that foundation outward. It situates Gambian creative industries within a wider regional and market ecosystem, comparing their digital presence with that of peer destinations in **Senegal, Cape Verde, Ghana, Nigeria, and Benin**, and assessing how **international tour operators** portray West African creative and cultural experiences. The exercise shifts perspective from *how ready we are* to *how we appear*, placing The Gambia’s progress in relative rather than absolute terms.

By analysing the competitive positioning of neighbouring destinations and international perceptions, this deliverable explores questions central to tourism competitiveness:

* What digital strategies have allowed regional peers to reach their audiences more effectively?
* How is The Gambia currently represented in the international tourism marketplace?
* Which audience segments respond most strongly to creative experiences, and how can Gambian stakeholders reach them?

### 1.1 Analytical Framework

The regional benchmarking retains the external assessment component of Deliverable 1’s 100-point framework—the 70-point observable digital-presence audit—but omits the 30-point self-reported survey, which cannot be collected consistently across borders.

This ensures methodological continuity (same categories, scoring logic, and weighting) while keeping the exercise comparable and evidence-based.

**Assessment dimensions:**

1. Social Media Business Presence
2. Website Presence & Functionality
3. Visual Content Quality
4. Online Discoverability & Reputation
5. Digital Sales / Booking Capability
6. Platform Integration

Scores for Senegal, Cape Verde, Ghana, Benin, and Nigeria were derived from publicly available digital assets—websites, OTA listings, and social-media channels—assessed between September and October 2025. Each country’s sample of 35 stakeholders covers parallel sub-sectors (festivals, crafts, music, heritage, fashion/design, audiovisual media, and tour operators). This phase expands the scope from national assessment to regional comparison and international market perception. The result is a multidimensional analysis combining quantitative benchmarking, qualitative sentiment mapping, and digital-audience segmentation.

### 1.2 Analytical Objectives

Three complementary objectives guided the design of this assessment.

1. To benchmark The Gambia’s creative-industry digital maturity against comparable West African destinations, thereby revealing competitive gaps and opportunities.
2. To evaluate how international tour operators (ITOs) portray West African creative and cultural experiences online, identifying where The Gambia’s products appear and where they do not.
3. To translate audience behavior into actionable insights through sentiment analysis and persona development, showing how prospective visitors perceive and engage with creative-tourism content in the region.

Together, these dimensions align with ITC’s mandate to transform diagnostic data into practical intelligence for export-competitiveness strategies.

### 1.3 Data Sources

The analysis drew from a combination of primary and secondary data:

* **Creative-Industry Benchmarks** – Comparative dataset of 175 stakeholders across five West African regional competitors (Senegal, Cape Verde, Ghana, Nigeria, Benin).
* **International Tour-Operator Dataset** – Review of 239 tour pages from 32 operators across 13 source markets (UK, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, USA, Canada, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, Nordic markets, South Africa, and Nigeria).
* **Sentiment Analysis** – 5,682 individual reviews collected from TripAdvisor between 2021 and 2025, representing both Gambian and regional creative-tourism products.
* **Supplementary Validation** – ITC/YEP stakeholder consultations and the digital-assessment spreadsheet (provided by YEP team, October 2025) to confirm scoring consistency and weighting accuracy.

### 1.4 Sentiment and Persona Analysis

To complement quantitative scores, qualitative perception was captured through a VADER-based natural-language-processing model calibrated for tourism vocabulary. Each review or post was parsed for positive/negative polarity, yielding aggregate sentiment averages by country and theme (heritage, community, creativity, hospitality, safety, value).

These behavioral data then informed five composite visitor personas, each defined by country of origin, travel motivation, digital behavior patterns, and expected online touchpoints. Personas were validated against engagement trends from the tour-operator and platform datasets.

### 1.5 Methodological Continuity

By maintaining the same scoring logic to Deliverable 1, the results in this report remain directly comparable to the national baseline. This continuity allows ITC and partners to monitor progress over time and to assess future improvements quantitatively when Deliverable 3’s strategic interventions are implemented.

## 2. Regional Creative Industries Digital Presence Comparative Analysis

This section benchmarks The Gambia’s creative industries against regional peers to understand how visibly and effectively they present themselves online. It compares more than 170 stakeholders across Senegal, Cape Verde, Ghana, Nigeria, and Benin. The analysis spans six dimensions across creative sub-sectors from crafts and design to heritage, performing arts, and media. The results highlight where The Gambia stands out for authenticity and storytelling strength, where visibility and integration lag behind regional leaders, and which near-market examples offer practical models for improvement.

### 2.1 Stakeholder Selection Methodology

Stakeholders in the Regional Assessment were selected to represent each of the above broad sectors across the target countries. Approximately five key stakeholders per category in each country, ensuring a balance across festivals/events, heritage sites, crafts markets, performing arts institutions, audiovisual media, fashion/design platforms, and media/publishing outlets. This selection was guided by desk research and significance in the cultural landscape. For example, major cultural events with wide reach were included such as Nigeria’s Kano Durbar festival, a centuries-old celebration that attracts massive crowds (estimated in the hundreds of thousands during each parade).

Likewise, cornerstone national institutions and groups were chosen in the performing arts (e.g. Senegal’s Ballet National “La Linguère”, a state-founded troupe known for blending diverse ethnic dance traditions). In the crafts sector, the focus was on artisan hubs like Bonwire village in Ghana, famous nationally for its kente cloth weaving heritage. Prominent creative organizations in other domains were similarly picked – from leading fashion weeks (such as ARISE in Lagos, a prominent African fashion event) to influential media/publishing agencies.

By selecting well-known festivals, flagship cultural institutions, top artists/creators, and key industry events, the assessment captures a broad cross-section of the region’s cultural ecosystem. Each chosen stakeholder was validated for active presence in its sector (often via online search and local validation), with the aim of creating a list that reflects those most representative and impactful in their respective domains. This approach, grounded in both research and sector frameworks, aimed to cover “who’s who” in each cultural category, thereby faithfully representing the diversity of creative industry stakeholders in the region

**Table 1 - Regional Creative Industries Overview**

| **Country** | **Crafts** | **Audiovisual** | **Performing & Visual Arts** | **Marketing / Publishing** | **Fashion & Design** | **Cultural Heritage** | **Festivals & Events** | **Average /70 (%)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Ghana | **23.2** | 27.6 | 17.6 | 23.2 | **33.6** | 22 | 19.6 | 23.8 |
| Nigeria | 27 | **29.2** | **32.6** | 27 | 26.8 | 21.2 | 15.2 | 25.6 |
| Senegal | 18.8 | 14.2 | 19.2 | 22.4 | 29 | **26.8** | 13.6 | 20.6 |
| Cape Verde | 19.4 | 25.8 | 7.2 | 26.4 | 16.6 | 19.4 | 19 | 19.1 |
| The Gambia | 19 | 15.8 | 17.4 | **38** | 14 | 18.6 | 16.2 | 19.9 |
| Benin | 15.8 | 12.6 | 18.4 | 18.2 | 17.2 | 22.8 | **24.4** | 18.5 |
| Regional Mean | 20.5 | 20.7 | 18.7 | 25.9 | 22.9 | 21.8 | 18 | 21.2 |

Regional benchmarking confirms a clear stratification of digital maturity across West Africa’s creative industries. Nigeria leads, followed by Ghana and Senegal, while Cape Verde and Benin occupy mid-range positions defined by specialization rather than scale. The determining factor is not infrastructure but the degree of strategic coordination between cultural production, digital communication, and tourism marketing.

Nigeria’s advantage lies in its integrated creator economy: film, music, and fashion actors apply platform-native practices that translate directly into global reach. Senegal demonstrates high institutional capability but uneven diffusion: major festivals and museums achieve professional visibility, yet smaller enterprises remain sporadic online. Cape Verde performs best where storytelling is centralized; a limited number of editorial platforms sustain continuous international visibility for its music and cultural identity. Benin’s digital presence is concentrated in heritage institutions and national festivals, offering cultural depth but weak private-sector participation.

Across cases, three patterns emerge. First, consistency of content production—rather than funding level—correlates most strongly with visibility. Second, editorial coherence and language accessibility determine how well creative outputs connect to international audiences. Third, transaction capacity remains uniformly low, with few countries offering direct booking or payment systems for cultural experiences.

For The Gambia, these findings outline a composite path forward: emulate Nigeria’s content discipline, Ghana’s diaspora engagement, and Cape Verde’s editorial focus, while addressing the same structural weakness that constrains the entire region, the conversion of visibility into bookable, revenue-generating experiences.

### 2.2 Sector Digital Marketing Strategies

Here we take the top 3 creative industry participants from across the five regional competitors

#### Crafts & Artisan Products

Across the region, top performers in crafts pair rich, process-led storytelling with clean, credible web UX and clear paths to purchase or book. What stands out: professional, consistent visuals; sites that blend content and commerce; and smart platform integration (TripAdvisor, Google Maps, fair-trade directories) that lifts discoverability. Where many still lag is conversion: real-time booking for workshops, unified e-commerce, and multilingual UX that turns curiosity into action. The three examples below illustrate repeatable plays The Gambia’s artisans can adopt now without losing authenticity: show the making, simplify the buying, and meet audiences where they already search.

**Global Mamas — Ghana**

Global Mamas combines fair-trade credibility with vibrant, process-first storytelling across web and social. Their site is clear, mobile-ready, and merchandised for both products and cultural workshops; social feeds spotlight the artisans and techniques behind batik and Krobo glass, reinforcing mission and provenance. Discoverability is strengthened through TripAdvisor listings, Google Maps entries, and consistent blogging that targets craft and workshop keywords. The result is a brand that feels both deeply Ghanaian and globally shoppable, while keeping community impact front-and-center.

**Takeaway 1 — Story That Shows The Making**

Global Mamas leads with process: short videos and photo sequences of stamping wax, dye baths, and bead firing make the craft legible and emotionally resonant. Profiles of “the Mamas” humanize quality and impact, while a bright, coherent visual style travels cleanly from Instagram to product pages. For Gambian peers: plan a “process ladder” (30-sec Reel → 6-image carousel → 300-word blog) for each product line; pair every listing with a making detail and artisan name; and keep color, angles, and backdrops consistent for brand recall. Authenticity is protected; comprehension—and willingness to pay—goes up.

**Takeaway 2 — Blend Content and Commerce**

Their site stitches together learning and buying: workshop descriptions with durations/prices sit one click from the shop; categories and impact notes support confident checkout. One gap to copy and improve: workshops still book by email/phone. Gambian teams can surpass this by adding a lightweight booking flow (date picker + deposit via WhatsApp Pay/Stripe) and clear “what’s included” checklists. Preserve mission cues (fair-trade badges, artisan bios) on every PDP, and add low-lift trust builders (customer photos, micro-reviews). The aim: reduce friction for both “I want to learn” and “I want to buy” visitors without splitting the brand.

**Takeaway 3 — Be Easy to Find (and To Vouch For)**

Global Mamas stacks channels that matter: TripAdvisor (workshops), Google Maps (shops), fair-trade directories, and an SEO’d blog (“batik workshop Ghana,” “Krobo beads”). They close the loop by asking visitors to review and by cross-linking maps, listings, and site pages. For The Gambia: claim/clean Google Business profiles, seed top keywords via two blog posts per month, and list workshops on at least one experience marketplace. Add UTM-tagged buttons (“Review on TripAdvisor”) to workshop follow-ups to compound proof. Small, compounding moves make you findable to travelers and tour operators alike.

**Nike Art Foundation — Nigeria**

Nike Art Foundation operates at gallery scale with a premium digital surface: high-resolution visuals, a well-organized site, and an online catalog (with inquiry for higher-value works) that extends sales beyond Lagos and Abuja. Social channels leverage the founder’s iconic presence to anchor trust and reach, while events, residencies, and workshops keep community energy visible year-round. The proposition lands as both a cultural destination and serious marketplace, placing heritage and contemporary art under one brand.

**Takeaway 1 — Lead with a premium visual identity**

Every touchpoint looks curated: crisp imagery, white space, and clear art metadata signal authority and care. Founder-led storytelling (Mama Nike) humanizes the institution without diluting its polish. For Gambian galleries/collectives: standardize image specs (light, angle, color), use a neutral template that lets the work breathe, and write tighter captions (artist, medium, size, year) to elevate perceived value. A consistent visual system makes even smartphone content feel “museum grade,” which supports pricing power and press pickup.

**Takeaway 2 — Catalog today, convert tomorrow**

Nike’s “shop + inquire” model recognizes the realities of high-value art: publish breadth online to widen interest, then route serious buyers to personal handling. Keep smaller ticket items (textiles/prints) fully shoppable to train checkout behavior. For Gambia: publish a lean online catalog (20–50 works) with filters; enable “save” and “request details,” then automate polite follow-ups. Add one page to book tours/classes inside the same flow. This hybrid path grows leads now and informs what to stock, shoot, and feature later.

**Takeaway 3 — Expand access: formats and languages**

Nike’s footprint spans web, social, press, and on-site events. Next gains come from access enablers: bilingual content, short exhibit walkthroughs, and occasional 360/VR snippets for remote audiences. For Gambian peers, low-lift improvements include a bilingual “Visit” page, 60–90-second room tours, and a quarterly “What’s On” PDF for operators/media. If capacity allows, pilot one virtual tour per year for a signature show. Each step increases inclusion (diaspora, Francophone travelers) and creates assets editors and tour operators can reliably embed.

**Village des Arts de Dakar — Senegal**

Village des Arts is an artist-run complex with dozens of studios and a gallery. Its digital presence favors authenticity over polish: candid workshop photos, active Facebook updates, and strong coverage on local portals, maps, and travel sites. Sales are primarily in-person; the online role is to spark visits, connect buyers to artists, and document the community’s daily creative life. The result is a welcoming, living arts ecosystem that travelers can drop into.

**Takeaway 1 — Let the community be the content**

Candid, in-studio imagery and visitor UGC communicate immediacy and variety better than glossy campaigns. The Village showcases making, people, and place—pulling audiences into the culture of the site itself. For Gambian collectives: appoint a rotating “studio correspondent” to post weekly behind-the-scenes reels, create a shared hashtag, and feature one resident’s practice each week. Authentic volume beats occasional perfection; a predictable cadence becomes the brand.

**Takeaway 2 — Be discoverable without a heavy website**

Village des Arts relies on high-traffic portals (Au-Sénégal), Facebook, maps, and TripAdvisor entries to answer the basics: what it is, how to visit, and why to care. For resource-light Gambian hubs, a one-page site (or a well-maintained portal listing) plus a claimed Google profile and an events-first Facebook page can outperform a dormant “official site.” Keep hours, map pins, phone/WhatsApp, and current shows updated; add a simple “planning your visit” note to set expectations.

**Takeaway 3 — Create a light bridge to sales**

While centralized e-commerce isn’t realistic for a multi-artist village, a simple “Who’s Here” directory with two images, price bands, and direct contacts per artist helps buyers follow up after a visit. Promote mobile payments on-site, and post periodic “Artist of the Week” albums to channel inquiries. For The Gambia: start with a shared Google Sheet embedded on Facebook (names, mediums, contacts), then graduate to a minimal directory page once momentum builds.

#### Fashion & Design

The leading fashion designers are transforming digital platforms into global stages for creativity, commerce, and cultural storytelling. Their success stems from clarity of vision, each brand articulates African identity through modern aesthetics and disciplined online presentation. Adama Paris demonstrates how professionalism and purpose can elevate an independent label to international recognition, while Selly Raby Kane shows how bold experimentation and creative technology redefine what African fashion can be. Together, they exemplify how design, storytelling, and innovation converge to build brands that resonate far beyond their home markets.

**Christie Brown**

Christie Brown exemplifies how to build a premium African fashion brand with international reach. From its sleek, mobile-optimized website and editorial-grade visuals to its multi-platform storytelling and size-inclusive collections, the label blends heritage and innovation throughout.

**Takeaway 1 – Heritage Framed Through Modern Luxury**

Christie Brown’s clean visuals, curated e-commerce, and bilingual content all reflect a high-fashion identity rooted in Ghanaian craftsmanship. By pairing traditional fabrics with structured silhouettes and premium UX, the brand redefines what African luxury looks and feels like.

**Takeaway 2 – Integrated Storytelling Across Channels**

Every collection launch is supported by blog posts, customer campaigns, and immersive social content that center the CB woman’s confidence and cultural pride. This narrative depth turns passive followers into emotionally invested ambassadors.

**Takeaway 3 – Innovation that Serves Identity**

From iDigit pattern-cutting to Instagram Shop and multi-currency checkout, Christie Brown uses technology to extend access without compromising artistry. The result is a label that’s globally competitive, yet unmistakably African in voice, vision, and detail.

**Adama Paris – Senegal**

Adama Paris bridges African heritage and cosmopolitan fashion with a clean, functional digital ecosystem. Her e-commerce website, bilingual content, and vibrant visuals make the brand accessible worldwide. Social channels reflect the founder’s dual role as designer and cultural advocate, uniting fashion lovers and the African diaspora under a shared message of pride and empowerment.

**Takeaway 1 – Consistent, High-Impact Visual Identity**

Professional imagery and storytelling—such as the signature “African soul in a modern world” aesthetic—create cohesion across platforms. This consistency positions the label as both authentic and globally stylish.

**Takeaway 2 – E-Commerce as Cultural Access**

By integrating global shipping, bilingual navigation, and clear policies, Adama Paris turns its website into both shop and showroom. Seamless purchasing reinforces trust and extends the brand’s reach.

**Takeaway 3 – Storytelling that Builds Movement**

Messages of women’s empowerment and African excellence transform followers into a community. The founder’s visible leadership humanizes the brand, proving that purpose-driven storytelling can sustain long-term engagement.

**Selly Raby Kane – Senegal**

Selly Raby Kane projects a visionary, Afrofuturist identity that blends art, fashion, and technology. Her surreal visual narratives, VR films, and cross-disciplinary collaborations have made her an icon of experimental African design. While less commercially focused online, her creative boldness has cultivated a loyal global community drawn to her imagination and cultural authenticity.

**Takeaway 1 – Artistry as Differentiation**

SRK’s cinematic lookbooks and avant-garde visuals position fashion as cultural commentary. Turning collections into stories demonstrates how creative direction itself can become a brand signature.

**Takeaway 2 – Cross-Disciplinary Reach**

By integrating into art, tech, and design ecosystems—from Google Arts & Culture to VR exhibitions—SRK expands her audience beyond fashion consumers. Strategic overlap multiplies exposure and influence.

**Takeaway 3 – Innovation as Identity**

Adoption of emerging media, from virtual reality to experimental materials, keeps the brand culturally and technologically relevant. Embracing innovation as narrative, not novelty, ensures enduring distinctiveness.

#### Cultural Heritage Sites/Museums

Museums and heritage institutions across West Africa are increasingly using digital platforms to preserve identity, educate audiences, and reach global visitors. The leading examples combine professional presentation with cultural storytelling, balancing accessibility, aesthetics, and authenticity. Institutions such as Benin’s Fondation Zinsou Museum, Senegal’s Musée des Civilisations Noires, and the National Museum of Ghana illustrate how digital platforms can turn heritage into living, participatory experiences. Their success rests not on scale, but on integration, linking websites, social media, and visitor services into cohesive ecosystems that connect communities at home and abroad.

**Musée de la Fondation Zinsou – Benin**

The Fondation Zinsou Museum delivers a consistent and visually rich digital experience, from its curated website to active, educational social media. Its use of professional imagery and virtual exhibit highlights builds an engaging, contemporary brand while celebrating African creativity. Though discoverability and digital monetization remain underdeveloped, the institution’s polished presentation makes it a regional model for online museum storytelling.

**Takeaway 1 – Visual Storytelling as Engagement**

Zinsou’s high-quality exhibition photos and occasional virtual experiences turn static collections into dynamic narratives. This approach demonstrates how compelling visuals can bridge art appreciation and public accessibility.

**Takeaway 2 – Community Through Education**

Interactive campaigns and educational posts on social media foster participation, showing that museums can extend learning well beyond their walls by curating conversations, not just exhibitions.

**Takeaway 3 – Foundation for Growth**

A professional digital foundation—responsive site, cohesive tone, and loyal audience—positions the museum to expand into e-commerce or global heritage platforms when ready. Strong fundamentals create room for sustainable innovation.

**Musée des Civilisations Noires – Senegal**

Senegal’s Musée des Civilisations Noires (MCN) blends cultural authority with forward-thinking digital practice. Its website anchors the institution’s digital ecosystem with accessible design, detailed content, and online ticketing or shop features that drive direct revenue. MCN’s active use of multiple channels—from social media to tourism apps—extends its reach while reinforcing its role as a showcase for African and diaspora heritage.

**Takeaway 1 – Integration of Culture and Commerce**

By pairing educational storytelling with online ticketing and product sales, MCN proves that cultural institutions can monetize ethically without compromising mission or tone.

**Takeaway 2 – Multi-Platform Accessibility**

The museum’s presence across tourism portals, travel apps, and social media ensures that both locals and international visitors encounter consistent, credible information. Accessibility multiplies engagement.

**Takeaway 3 – Storytelling with Momentum**

Posts and visuals celebrating Black civilizations turn heritage into living culture. The combination of informative tone and strong imagery sustains connection and global curiosity long after visits end.

**National Museum of Ghana – Ghana**

The National Museum of Ghana exemplifies platform integration at its best, uniting a comprehensive website, active social channels, and partnerships across travel and cultural platforms. Its digital presence reflects a balance between education, promotion, and innovation, offering virtual exhibits, event updates, and early-stage digital revenue features such as online ticketing and donations.

**Takeaway 1 – Integration as Visibility**

By ensuring the museum’s content is consistent across all major digital spaces—from Google and tourism sites to social platforms—the institution guarantees that every online search leads to an authoritative source.

**Takeaway 2 – Cross-Channel Storytelling**

Unified branding and tone across platforms present Ghanaian heritage as both national pride and shared experience. This cohesive storytelling transforms followers into cultural ambassadors.

**Takeaway 3 – Innovation Through Practical Tools**

Early adoption of digital ticketing and potential app-based experiences reflects a visitor-first mindset. Simple, useful tools enhance convenience and position the museum as a modern gateway to cultural learning.

#### Festivals and Cultural Events

Festivals across West Africa have become powerful digital storytellers, turning live celebration into year-round brand engagement. The best examples show that visibility now depends on design quality, social rhythm, and the ability to carry energy from the stage to the screen. AfroFuture in Ghana, Vodun Days in Benin, and Felabration in Nigeria each reveal how festivals can combine strong visuals, functional websites, and consistent communication to build community and attract visitors. Together they illustrate how cultural events can balance authenticity with accessibility, showing that success lies not in scale, but in clarity, coherence, and connection.

**AfroFuture (formerly Afrochella) – Ghana**

AfroFuture translates the vibrancy of contemporary African creativity into a striking digital identity. Following its seamless rebrand from Afrochella, the festival sustained community trust and expanded its international appeal. A cohesive aesthetic, lively social channels, and an intuitive website reinforce a unified experience that mirrors the energy of its live event.

**Takeaway 1 – Visual Branding as Experience**

AfroFuture’s vivid, high-quality imagery and video capture festival energy and Afrocentric design in equal measure. The visual language itself becomes a destination, proof that strong creative direction can communicate emotion and modern identity better than volume of content.

**Takeaway 2 – Clarity Converts**

Its website functions as both guide and gallery, clear schedules, easy navigation, and seamless ticket access. This kind of user-friendly design ensures that excitement turns directly into participation, setting a standard for cultural events online.

**Takeaway 3 – Sustained Community Momentum**

AfroFuture’s year-round content—artist announcements, behind-the-scenes posts, and influencer collaborations—keeps the brand alive between editions. Consistency turns one annual festival into an ongoing conversation that sustains engagement and global relevance.

**Vodun Days Festival – Benin**

Vodun Days brings Benin’s spiritual and artistic heritage online with balanced storytelling and dependable communication. Its digital platforms highlight both the ritual depth and the celebratory tone of the festival, creating an accessible window into Vodun culture. The brand refresh has positioned it for greater international attention while preserving authenticity.

**Takeaway 1 – Cultural Storytelling Through Visuals**

High-quality photos and videos showcase ceremonies and performances with respect and context. By presenting traditions as living art, Vodun Days demonstrates how visual documentation can educate and inspire simultaneously.

**Takeaway 2 – Informative, User-Friendly Web Presence**

A well-organized website provides practical visitor details alongside cultural background, showing that transparency and education build credibility. Information becomes part of the storytelling, inviting deeper understanding.

**Takeaway 3 – Consistency Builds Trust**

Regular updates and an even tone across platforms sustain community interest year-round. This steady, low-noise approach proves that reliability—rather than spectacle—is what maintains engagement over time.

**Felabration – Nigeria**

Felabration bridges legacy and modernity through a digital presence that celebrates Afrobeat culture while evolving with current trends. Its online identity fuses performance footage, bright Afrocentric design, and the enduring charisma of Fela Kuti’s story. The festival’s site functions as both a live event guide and cultural archive.

**Takeaway 1 – Heritage as Digital Currency**

Felabration’s use of archival imagery, music clips, and storytelling shows how heritage can fuel fresh relevance online. Cultural memory becomes the foundation for new engagement.

**Takeaway 2 – Substance Paired with Simplicity**

The website blends essential logistics with context about Afrobeat’s origins, offering visitors both inspiration and orientation. It models how cultural content can be informative without overwhelming.

**Takeaway 3 – Visual Energy with Room to Grow**

Vivid color, bold graphics, and concert footage sustain a dynamic tone across platforms. Expanding this energy into more interactive formats—streams or fan-led moments—could amplify reach while keeping authenticity intact.

#### Audiovisual (film, photography, TV, videography)

Across West Africa, public broadcasters have been at the front line of the region’s digital transition, adapting legacy radio and television models to a multi-platform, audience-driven landscape. Their digital maturity is shaped less by budgets than by vision: how well they merge content, technology, and public mission into a coherent online presence. Cape Verde’s RTC and RCV, alongside Ghana’s GBC, illustrate three complementary pathways to modernization, each integrating radio, television, and digital news, engaging diaspora communities, and testing new revenue and engagement strategies. For The Gambia, these examples highlight achievable steps: cross-platform consistency, live digital broadcasting, and a clearer data-driven approach to audience engagement.

**Radiotelevisão Caboverdiana (RTC) – Cape Verde**

Cape Verde’s national broadcaster demonstrates how a small-island media house can use digital transformation to extend its public mission. RTC unites television and radio under one digital hub (rtc.cv), offering daily news updates, livestreams, and an expanding archive of on-demand content.

**Takeaway 1 – Visual Content and Cultural Identity**

RTC integrates high-volume, culturally rich video output—news, festivals, sports, and community events—across web and social channels. The deliberate focus on Cape Verdean visuals (Carnaval, music, island life) builds national pride while sustaining diaspora connection. Continued investment in subtitled clips and infographics could widen youth and mobile reach.

**Takeaway 2 – Unified Digital Experience**

The rtc.cv portal merges TCV and RCV content through intuitive navigation and live “Direto” streams. User registration and interest-based newsletters personalize updates.

**Takeaway 3 – Public Mission in the Digital Era**

RTC’s renewed 15-year service contract explicitly ties public-service delivery to digital obligations: education, culture, citizenship, and on-demand access. This clarity of mission—“património do povo das ilhas e da diáspora”—anchors trust while legitimizing modernization.

**Rádio de Cabo Verde (RCV) – Cape Verde**

RCV’s evolution from traditional radio to a multimedia voice mirrors radio’s broader global reinvention. Integrated under RTC, it now operates as a cross-platform audio-visual service with live streaming, filmed talk shows, and strong social interactivity.

**Takeaway 1 – Visualized Radio**

By filming talk shows and debates for Facebook and YouTube, RCV “visualizes” radio, reaching audiences who consume content as video first. This shift transforms sound into shareable experiences, a model relevant to Gambian community radios and cultural programs.

**Takeaway 2 – Audience Interaction and Community Trust**

Facebook Live comments and WhatsApp call-ins are woven into broadcasts, creating two-way dialogue. RCV’s bilingual tone (Portuguese + Creole) enhances authenticity. The takeaway: community trust grows when listeners can see and speak back to the broadcaster.

**Takeaway 3 – Integration and Innovation**

RCV’s content is archived, searchable, and often simulcast with TV. Youth-focused RCV+ shows the brand’s adaptability, while podcast potential remains untapped. Gambian stations could mirror this layered integration—radio, social, streaming—to sustain relevance across generations.

**Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) – Ghana**

GBC, one of Africa’s oldest broadcasters, is undertaking a major digital transformation. Its online platform (gbcghanaonline.com) functions as a real-time news portal, live streaming hub, and convergence point for TV, radio, and social engagement.

**Takeaway 1 – Multi-Platform Professionalism**

GBC’s cross-channel production—short-form videos, infographics, livestreams—delivers consistent quality. Its unified newsroom model allows one story to flow seamlessly across radio, TV, web, and social, a structure smaller broadcasters can emulate for efficiency.

**Takeaway 2 – Audience and Youth Engagement**

Rebranding campaigns (#gbcBtoB) and WhatsApp news channels reposition GBC as modern and participatory. Youth-led social initiatives, Twitter Spaces, and Instagram campaigns have rebuilt loyalty among younger viewers, proof that legacy media can adapt without losing gravitas.

**Takeaway 3 – Revenue and Innovation**

Online ad revenue now surpasses traditional broadcast income, supported by YouTube monetization and integrated sponsorship. GBC’s move to data analytics and app-based delivery reflects a business-minded shift other public broadcasters can adopt: sustainability through audience-centric innovation.

#### Performing and visual arts

Leading performing arts institutions are building digital bridges between cultural heritage and contemporary creative economies. For venues like Lagos’ MUSON Centre and National Theatre, and Accra’s National Theatre of Ghana, online presence is no longer a supplement but the stage itself where audiences discover, engage, and participate.

High-quality visuals, functional websites, and steady social communication define success. Yet even top performers face similar frontiers: discoverability, online monetization, and cross-platform consistency. The following examples highlight how established theatres and arts centers are using digital tools to sustain audience relationships and demonstrate what practical next steps Gambian performing arts spaces can adopt.

**MUSON Centre – Nigeria**

MUSON Centre stands out for its exceptional visual presentation and social vitality. As Nigeria’s leading venue for music and performing arts, it pairs professional-grade photography and video with an active digital community across platforms. Its website effectively promotes concerts, education programs, and cultural events, but monetization and search visibility remain untapped opportunities.

**Takeaway 1 – Visual Consistency as Identity**

High-quality, cohesive imagery reinforces recognition and trust. Posts and videos align with MUSON’s tone, showing how visual standards can define an institution’s reputation as much as its performances.

**Takeaway 2 – Social Rhythm Builds Community**

Regular, well-planned posting schedules sustain engagement. By sharing concert moments, educational programs, and audience reactions, MUSON cultivates a digital following that mirrors the loyalty of its in-person patrons.

**Takeaway 3 – The Website as Central Stage**

A clean, regularly updated website unifies activity across channels. It works not just as an archive but as an accessible point of entry, offering visitors clarity on events, courses, and the broader artistic vision.

**National Theatre – Lagos (Nigeria)**

The National Theatre of Nigeria balances heritage and modernity through a solid web foundation and connected online ecosystem. Its well-organized website provides program schedules, venue history, and news updates, complemented by regular social activity. The strength lies in platform integration, each channel reinforces the next, creating a coherent audience journey.

**Takeaway 1 – Integration Strengthens Trust**

Linking website, social, and sales platforms gives audiences confidence that information is current and official, an important factor for national institutions managing large event calendars.

**Takeaway 2 – Information as a Cultural Service**

Detailed program schedules, news, and historical context transform the theatre’s website into a reliable cultural reference point. This open accessibility strengthens institutional transparency and long-term engagement.

**Takeaway 3 – Sustained Engagement Over Scale**

The theatre maintains steady updates and cross-platform promotion. This consistency ensures visibility while conserving resources, an approach any venue can adapt.

**National Theatre of Ghana – Ghana**

Ghana’s National Theatre exemplifies strong online discoverability and content breadth. Its information-rich website ranks well on search engines and aggregates essential visitor details, performance calendars, and educational programs. Social channels and event visuals sustain community engagement, positioning the theatre as both a creative hub and cultural reference point.

**Takeaway 1 – Visibility as a Form of Outreach**

Strong SEO, accurate map listings, and external cultural links broaden reach beyond local audiences. Simple structural work on visibility delivers sustained digital returns.

**Takeaway 2 – Content Depth Builds Authority**

Regularly updated features, artist profiles, and educational material demonstrate the theatre’s role as a cultural educator as well as an entertainment venue. Substance becomes its marketing.

**Takeaway 3 – Unified Tone and Presentation**

Across channels, the theatre maintains a professional yet approachable voice. The combination of clarity, warmth, and design coherence reinforces public confidence in its creative leadership.

#### Marketing/advertising/publishing

West Africa’s media leaders are translating editorial authority into digital reach through cleaner UX, disciplined social publishing, and smarter monetization. In Cape Verde, *Expresso das Ilhas* shows how a lean newsroom can build a credible hub with strong photo-led reporting and community features; *Modern Ghana* demonstrates the power (and trade-offs) of high-velocity, multi-format publishing; and *Jeune Afrique* illustrates a mature transition to reader revenue and cross-platform brand leadership. For peers across the region, the throughline is clear: combine content excellence with findability, platform integration, and a business model tuned to your scale and audience.

**Expresso das Ilhas – Cape Verde**

A weekly print title turned digital hub, *Expresso das Ilhas* pairs clean design with strong photojournalism and a growing use of multimedia (including podcasts with Rádio Morabeza). The site is well structured (high Website score), with logical sections and social login that lowers barriers to participation (“Ligue-se… é fácil, é grátis”), fostering a tight-knit reader community. Discoverability and cross-platform integration remain limited—much content is Portuguese-only, SEO is underutilized, and distribution sits mostly in-site plus Facebook/Twitter—yet the outlet still commands sizable local and diaspora attention thanks to timely posts and trusted reporting. Monetization is pragmatic, leaning on display ads, “Conteúdo Patrocinado,” and a print/digital edition.

**Takeaway 1 – “Do the fundamentals flawlessly.”**

A fast, tidy site with clear taxonomy, strong headline imagery, and friction-light commenting can be a competitive advantage on its own, especially in small markets where audiences prize reliability over flash. Focus on clean presentation, disciplined sectioning, and reader accounts to compound loyalty.

**Takeaway 2 – Meet audiences where they already are**

Prioritizing Facebook (plus some X/Twitter) and syndication via trusted partners keeps *Expresso* top-of-mind among locals and diaspora. For many contexts, consistent, shareable headline updates outperform heavier app builds, so long as profiles are verified, active, and well moderated.

**Takeaway 3 – Monetize with fit-for-market tools**

In the absence of a full paywall, *Expresso* maximizes advertising, sponsored content, and digital replicas of its print edition. Transparent labeling and a dedicated “Conteúdo Patrocinado” area protect editorial trust while opening revenue streams, an approach suited to outlets building scale and brand before subscriptions.

**Modern Ghana – Ghana**

A pioneer of Ghana’s digital news, *Modern Ghana* operates as an always-on, multi-format platform rather than a traditional site. It marries a dense, fast-loading portal (news, sport, business, radio, TV, photos, forums) with vigorous social distribution—Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, even WhatsApp Channels—capturing both domestic and diaspora attention. The model is unapologetically volume-driven: image-rich stories, “Hot Stories” recirculation, and contributor blogs that expand output and reach. Strong SEO, extensive archives (dating to 2005), and constant updates elevate ranking and discoverability. Revenue is ad-centric (display, sponsored posts), reinforced by audience scale and engagement rather than paywalls.

**Takeaway 1 – Build a true hub-and-spoke machine**

A central portal feeding multiple channels—radio, video, forums, social—keeps audiences inside your ecosystem. Even without a native app, tight integration (e.g., embedded streams, member areas) can deliver a “super-site” feel that drives repeat visits.

**Takeaway 2 – Win on speed and shareability**

Headline-driven, multimedia stories published at high frequency meet the expectations of mobile-first audiences. Clear, SEO-tuned titling and strong visuals help content travel across feeds and search, compounding visibility with each update.

**Takeaway 3 – Treat community as both source and growth engine**

“Have Your Say,” open comments, and reader submissions bring new voices (and their networks) into the product, strengthening loyalty and throughput. Lean into UGC responsibly—curation + moderation—so the community helps scale content and relevance.

**Jeune Afrique – Senegal**

A flagship of Francophone journalism, *Jeune Afrique* has parlayed its six-decade editorial authority into a premium digital product. A 2023 redesign delivered a polished, multilingual experience aligned with its “reference” brand; a dynamic paywall and modern subscription stack (e.g., Chargebee, personalized offers) underpin a decisive pivot to reader revenue. While tight paywalls trade some organic search visibility for value capture, *JA* sustains reach via a vast social footprint (10M+ followers across platforms), savvy community management (live Q&As, tailored content by channel), and an expanding events and data business (Africa CEO Forum, Africa Business+).

**Takeaway 1 – Own a clear editorial territory**

Positioning as the region’s reference voice on politics and business creates gravitational pull for professionals, policymakers, and media who amplify coverage. Depth and exclusivity can be a strategy, not just volume.

**Takeaway 2 – Make “premium” tangible online**

A modern, consistent UX; well-crafted visuals; and a seamless subscriber journey turn journalism into a product audiences will pay for. Even modest paywall experiments, if well-executed, can lift conversion and perceived value.

**Takeaway 3 – Extend the brand beyond articles**

Events, newsletters, and business intelligence products diversify revenue and deepen relationships. Curated social engagement—especially on LinkedIn and Facebook—keeps the brand in daily conversation and channels audiences back to owned platforms.

## 

## 3. International Tour Operator Digital Representation Analysis

### 3.1 Methodology and Scope

To complement the regional benchmarking of domestic creative-industry capacity, this section assesses how international tour operators (ITOs) portray The Gambia’s cultural and creative offerings in their digital marketing. The analysis examines not what Gambian stakeholders publish, but how they are represented within the global distribution system that shapes international perception and demand.

A total of 32 tour operators were analyzed, covering Europe (21), North America (5), and Africa + regional specialists (6). These include mass-market operators (e.g., TUI Nordic, Neckermann), niche responsible-travel companies (e.g., Responsible Travel, Naturetrek), and multi-country regional operators featuring Senegal–Gambia itineraries. Collectively they represent the primary international gateways through which West African cultural tourism is promoted to global audiences. The process was to first find ITOs selling The Gambia, then to see how this same group packaged The Gambia in comparison with its regional competitors (Senegal, Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, Cape Verde).

Each operator’s web content was extracted and evaluated using the **Creative Industries Visibility Score** framework (see Annex TBD). The scoring model quantifies the relative visibility of creative-industry domains—heritage, crafts, performing arts, festivals, audiovisual, fashion & design, and publishing—within tour descriptions, highlights, and itineraries. The model employs a **0–10 scale per sector**, weighted by content prominence, term diversity, and depth of description. Weighted aggregation produces an overall creative-tourism score, allowing comparison of destinations across operators.

The content-analysis pipeline applied a combination of extraction (Google Cloud Natural Language API and custom NLP dictionary of 150 keywords). The analysis covered **239 individual web pages** published in English, French, German, and Dutch between September and October 2025, with a distinction made between a destination page (a company’s overview of the country) and a tour page (a page with a specific itinerary for sale).

The resulting dataset enables three levels of interpretation:

1. **Destination visibility** – how prominently The Gambia appears relative to regional peers (Senegal, Ghana, Benin, Cape Verde).
2. **Sectoral representation** – which creative industries are most or least featured across operator portfolios.
3. **Narrative positioning** – how international marketing language frames The Gambia (heritage, nature, community, beach, or creative experience).

While the previous deliverable (Deliverable 1) focused on domestic creative-industry capacity—limited to sectors with measurable enterprise presence—this section examines how international tour operators (ITOs) portray those same industries within global marketing narratives.

### 3.2 The Gambia Creative Tourism Visibility & Positioning

Analysis of 239 tour pages from 32 international tour operators across 13 source markets reveals that The Gambia remains significantly under-represented in global cultural-tourism portfolios. While operators maintain positive sentiment toward the destination, Gambia’s creative and cultural products seldom appear as core selling points.

The average Creative Tourism Score for Gambia-related packages is 16.9 / 100, compared to a regional mean of 30.9, ranking The Gambia fifth of six West African destinations. In most catalogues, the country is still framed through a “beach + nature” narrative rather than a creative or heritage-led positioning. The data thus indicate a strong reliance on natural assets to attract visitors, with limited cultural differentiation.

**Table 2 - Comparative Performance**

| **Country** | **Average Creative Tourism Score (/100)** | **Top Represented Sectors** | **Primary Narrative Frame** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Benin | 52 | Heritage, Crafts, Festivals | Heritage and ritual culture as identity tourism |
| Ghana | 40 | Heritage, Crafts, Fashion | Diaspora and cultural return journeys |
| Nigeria | 38 | Heritage, Crafts, Fashion | Contemporary culture and creative industries |
| Senegal | 29 | Heritage, Crafts, Music | Francophone heritage and festival tourism |
| The Gambia | 17 | Heritage, Crafts, Performing Arts | Beach / wildlife with limited cultural elements |
| Cape Verde | 10 | Heritage, Music, Crafts | Resort-based island culture experiences |

These results demonstrate that destinations with structured cultural narratives (Benin, Ghana) achieve higher creative-tourism visibility, whereas smaller Anglophone markets (Gambia, Cape Verde) remain perceived as peripheral leisure destinations.

### 3.3 Packaging Patterns

Among all Gambia-linked products, 67 percent are single-country “Pure Gambia” tours, while 33 percent appear as multi-country packages, most commonly paired with Senegal (11 operators), and occasionally Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, and others.

Paired itineraries generate markedly stronger cultural representation: Senegal + Gambia packages average 33.9 points, almost double the 16.9 average of Gambia-only tours.

Multi-country products typically leverage regional heritage circuits and diaspora narratives, implying that Gambia’s creative assets gain visibility primarily when embedded in broader West African contexts.

### 3.4 Narrative Positioning and Thematic Emphasis

Textual analysis of operator marketing language shows that “Beach/Resort” (95 percent of tours) and “Wildlife/Nature” (91 percent) dominate thematic framing, followed by “Cultural Heritage” (74 percent). Mentions of creative sub-sectors such as music, festivals, or fashion remain lower (< 30 percent).

Sentiment analysis registers a positive mean tone (+0.24)—an encouraging baseline for repositioning—but indicates that enthusiasm centers on hospitality and scenery, not creative content.

Operators with higher creative scores, such as Responsible Travel (Benin multi-country, 77.5 / 100) and Palace Travel (Ghana pure, 77.5 / 100), explicitly integrate artisan workshops, museum visits, and live-performance components, elements largely absent from pure Gambian itineraries.

### 3.5 Comparative Gaps

The **largest competitive gaps** for Gambia lie in:

* **Heritage interpretation (+12 points vs. Senegal)** – sites like Kunta Kinteh Island are referenced but lack narrative depth
* **Craft integration (+23 points vs. Ghana)** – markets appear as shopping stops rather than structured cultural encounters
* **Festival representation (+35 points vs. Benin)** – few operators promote calendar-based cultural events.

These disparities underscore the opportunity to embed creative content more deliberately into tourism packaging and operator communications.

Overall, The Gambia’s low creative-tourism visibility is less a reflection of limited assets than of limited narrative integration within the international distribution chain. Operators perceive the country as a nature-leisure complement, not a cultural destination in its own right.

To close the gap, Gambia’s strategy should prioritize curated storytelling partnerships with operators already active in the region, develop bookable creative-industry products (crafts, festivals, workshops), and provide ready-to-use bilingual marketing materials that translate community-based creativity into itineraries recognizable to global buyers.

Analysis of 239 tour pages shows pronounced sectoral imbalances in how creative and cultural content from West Africa is presented. Across all destinations, heritage and crafts dominate, while performing arts, audiovisual, and fashion remain marginal.

**Table 3 - Visibility of Creative Content from West African Competitors**

| **Sector** | **Average Visibility Across All Destinations** | **Gambia Score (0–10)** | **Regional Leader** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Heritage Sites & Museums** | Strong | 4.4 | 🇳🇬 Nigeria (9.7) |
| **Crafts & Artisan Products** | Moderate | 2.9 | 🇳🇬 Nigeria (7.6) |
| **Performing & Visual Arts** | Weak | 1.4 | 🇬🇭 Ghana (6.3) |
| **Festivals & Cultural Events** | Weak | 0.4 | 🇧🇯 Benin (6.8) |
| **Audiovisual (Film, Photography, Media)** | Weak | 1.3 | 🇳🇬 Nigeria (8.9) |
| **Fashion & Design** | Weak | 1.2 | 🇬🇭 Ghana (4.5) |
| **Publishing / Storytelling** | Absent | 0.7 | 🇸🇳 Senegal (2.2) |

**Gambia Total Creative Score: 16.9 / 100**  **Regional Average: 30.9 / 100**

The data show that international operators associate The Gambia almost exclusively with **heritage** and **crafts**, which together account for over 70 percent of all cultural references in tour descriptions. Mentions of **music**—though modest—signal growing recognition of the country’s musical identity, especially in multi-country Senegal–Gambia packages that highlight drumming workshops or local performances. However, these inclusions are typically generic (“listen to local music”) rather than structured experiences (concerts, lessons, or curated encounters).

Other creative sectors remain underdeveloped in international narratives. Performing and visual arts are mentioned sporadically, mostly as photographic subjects, while festivals, audiovisual, and fashion appear only in passing. This narrow framing reinforces a perception of The Gambia as a static heritage destination rather than a living creative ecosystem.

### 3.6 Strategic Implications for The Gambia

For The Gambia, sectoral imbalance represents both a weakness and an opportunity. The strong baseline in heritage provides credibility, but sustained growth requires expanding into music and performing arts, areas that can deliver experiential depth with minimal infrastructure investment. Integrating live music, artist encounters, or performance workshops into existing itineraries would diversify offerings and align Gambia’s cultural image with regional trends.

In short, international operators already recognize The Gambia’s historic heritage; the next step is to ensure they also recognize its living culture.

International packaging patterns reveal how The Gambia’s tourism identity is constructed in the global market.

Among the 57 Gambia-related tour products analyzed (drawn from 32 international operators), two-thirds (≈ 67 %) are single-country “Pure Gambia” tours, while the remaining one-third (≈ 33 %) appear as multi-country packages, most often paired with Senegal.

This structure has significant implications: while single-country tours deliver the majority of total volume, multi-country tours achieve more than double the creative-tourism score, confirming that cultural depth increases when The Gambia is contextualized within a wider regional narrative.

**Table 4 - Comparative Positioning of Package Types**

| **Package Type** | **Share of Gambia Offerings** | **Average Creative Score (/100)** | **Typical Positioning Frame** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Pure Gambia Tours** | 67 % (21 tours) | 16.9 | Beach–wildlife focus with heritage as secondary interest. |
| **Senegal + Gambia Tours** | 27 tours | 33.9 | Balanced nature–culture itineraries centered on shared heritage and riverine ecosystems. |
| **Broader Multi-Country Tours** | 9 tours | 22.7 | Overland West Africa circuits; Gambia appears as a short cultural stop or rest point. |

Multi-destination products therefore generate stronger cultural representation, but at the cost of reduced local capture: travelers encounter Gambian heritage within a regional storyline rather than as an independent cultural destination. This reinforces The Gambia’s role as a supporting node, valuable for diversification but rarely marketed as the principal attraction.

### 3.7 Creative Differentiation by Package Type

**Table 5 - Top 10 Creative Tourism Tours**

| **Rank** | **Operator** | **Tour (Link)** | **Primary Destination(s)** | **Creative Tourism Score /100** | **Distinctive Creative Elements** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | Palace Travel | [Best of Ghana (12 Days)](https://www.palacetravel.com/africa-destinations/best-of-ghana-12-days-6/) | Ghana | 77.5 | Workshops in Kumasi (kente weaving), Cape Coast heritage interpretation, live music evening, contemporary fashion segments |
| 2 | Responsible Travel | [Ghana–Togo–Benin Cultural Circuit](https://www.responsibletravel.com/holiday/3438/ghana-togo-and-benin-cultural-holiday) | Ghana / Togo / Benin | 77.5 | Multi-country artisan markets, Vodun ritual festivals, local design workshops |
| 3 | Palace Travel | [Discover Senegal & Ghana](https://www.palacetravel.com/africa-destinations/discover-senegal-ghana/) | Ghana / Senegal | 77.5 | Diaspora heritage sites, Francophone festival participation, artisan co-ops |
| 4 | Responsible Travel | [Cultural History Holiday in Ghana](https://www.responsibletravel.com/holiday/4003/cultural-history-holiday-in-ghana) | Ghana | 76.2 | Cape Coast Castle interpretation, community storytelling sessions, craft demonstrations |
| 5 | Responsible Travel | [West Africa Explorer Tour, Marrakech to Cotonou](https://www.responsibletravel.com/holiday/32574/west-africa-explorer-tour-marrakech-to-cotonou) | Ghana / Benin / Guinea-Bissau | 75.0 | Cross-border craft villages, festival attendance, traditional music events |
| 6 | Responsible Travel | [Best of Ghana Holidays](https://www.responsibletravel.com/holiday/33319/best-of-ghana-holidays) | Ghana | 75.0 | Batik and weaving workshops, designer studio visits, storytelling on symbolism |
| 7 | Responsible Travel | [West Africa Tour](https://www.responsibletravel.com/holiday/4636/west-africa-tour) | Togo / Benin / Senegal | 75.0 | Music and dance performances, Vodun Days festival, regional markets |
| 8 | Responsible Travel | [West Africa Tour, Bissau to Cotonou](https://www.responsibletravel.com/holiday/15250/west-africa-tour-bissau-to-cotonou) | Benin | 72.5 | Festival-based immersion with craft production and ritual heritage |
| 9 | Explore! | [Best of Ghana](https://www.explore.co.uk/holidays/best-of-ghana) | Ghana | 71.2 | Balanced heritage–craft programming, festival integration, community encounters |
| 10 | Naturetrek | [Tailormade Holidays in Ghana](https://www.naturetrek.co.uk/tours/tailormade-ghana) | Ghana | 71.2 | Nature–culture hybrid linking performing arts and audiovisual storytelling |

High-scoring itineraries (70–78 points) share three structural traits:

* They incorporate at least three creative-industry sub-sectors, typically heritage, crafts, and performing arts.
* They frame activities through story-driven participation (workshops, performances, dialogues with artists) rather than passive sightseeing.
* They maintain language and accessibility parity (English + French interpretation), broadening international reach.

In contrast, single-country Gambian products rarely exceed 20 points, typically emphasizing beaches, birdwatching, and river safaris with minimal cultural framing, reflecting limited integration of bookable creative experiences. These findings validate the scoring framework and highlight how narrative depth, multilingual access, and experiential design directly raise digital visibility. Higher-scoring itineraries integrate heritage interpretation and community engagement, features largely absent from single-country packages.

Content analysis indicates that beach and wildlife keywords account for more than 80 % of total term frequency in single-country packages, compared with 45 % in Senegal + Gambia itineraries, where cultural vocabulary (heritage, crafts, local community, tradition) rises

Packaging data confirm that creative tourism positioning depends not on the number of tours offered but on how the destination narrative is structured. The Gambia’s challenge is to transform from a logistical stop within regional circuits to a thematic anchor for West African cultural exploration.

## 4. Visitor Perception of Gambian Creative Industries and Tourism Experiences

### 4.1 Methodology

Understanding how travelers perceive The Gambia’s creative and cultural offerings requires more than measuring visibility, it requires reading sentiment. This section examines how visitors describe their experiences online, drawing from 5,682 TripAdvisor reviews covering 72 tourism and creative-industry stakeholders across The Gambia and five regional peers.

A VADER-based natural-language-processing model was applied to analyze tone and extract nine key themes

**Table 6 - Unified Theme Taxonomy (Applied to All Stakeholders)**

| **#** | **Theme** | **Keywords Detected (Sample)** | **Description** | **Primary Focus** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | Cultural & Heritage Value | culture, heritage, history, historical, traditional, authentic, colonial, slave trade | Historical significance, cultural authenticity, preservation quality | Creative sites, museums |
| 2 | Service & Staff Quality | staff, guide, friendly, helpful, knowledgeable, professional, hospitality, welcoming | Quality of guides, staff friendliness, professionalism | Tour operators, all sites |
| 3 | Facilities & Infrastructure | building, facility, clean, maintained, restoration, preserved, structure, condition | Physical infrastructure, maintenance, cleanliness | All stakeholder types |
| 4 | Accessibility & Transport | access, location, transport, parking, ferry, signage, easy to find, difficult | Ease of reaching site, transportation logistics, wayfinding | Island sites, remote venues |
| 5 | Value for Money | price, value, expensive, cheap, worth it, cost, fee, ticket, affordable, overpriced | Pricing perception, value received vs cost paid | All stakeholder types |
| 6 | Safety & Security | safety, secure, comfortable, concerns, dangerous, protected, safe environment | Visitor safety perceptions, security presence | Nature reserves, urban sites |
| 7 | Educational & Informational Value | learn, educational, informative, guide explanation, knowledge, interesting, fascinating | Learning opportunities, information quality, interpretation | Museums, heritage sites |
| 8 | Artistic & Creative Quality | art, creative, talent, beautiful, craftsmanship, artisan, handmade, exhibition | Artistic expression, creative quality, craftsmanship | Craft markets, galleries |
| 9 | Atmosphere & Overall Experience | atmosphere, experience, ambiance, feeling, vibe, stunning, wonderful, memorable | Overall visitor experience, emotional resonance | All stakeholder types |

Scores were aggregated at stakeholder, sector, and country levels to benchmark The Gambia’s performance against Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, and Cape Verde. Reviews span 2019–2025, ensuring comparability between pre- and post-pandemic visitor perceptions.

The perception study combined automated sentiment analysis with thematic text mining and manual validation:

1. **Sentiment Scoring Engine** – Reviews were processed through the *Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner (VADER)* model, an established natural-language-processing tool optimized for social and review text.
   1. *Scale:* −1 (very negative) to +1 (very positive).
   2. *Accuracy:* Manual coding of 200 samples confirmed ≈ 87 % alignment between machine and human scoring.
2. **Theme Extraction** – Each review was scanned for a controlled vocabulary of 100 + keywords grouped into **nine cross-sector themes** (e.g., heritage value, service quality, artistic creativity). Context filters removed false positives, and a relevance score (0–1) was assigned according to keyword density and proximity.
3. **Data Quality Controls** – Duplicate, spam, or purely promotional posts were removed (n = 42). Non-English reviews were retained when sentiment could be reliably inferred; others were excluded to maintain accuracy.
4. **Aggregation and Benchmarking** – Theme scores were averaged by stakeholder, sector, and country, enabling comparison across six destinations. This produced both *numeric sentiment indexes* and *qualitative theme summaries* for each creative-industry domain.

Together these steps provide a replicable, data-driven map of how visitors emotionally evaluate Gambian creativity, from museum storytelling and market authenticity to service quality and safety.

##### Why TripAdvisor Was Chosen

Coverage across the main review platforms was verified using data from the Creative-Industries (CI) and Tourism-Industry (TI) assessments. Results show that **TripAdvisor remains the only platform with both meaningful adoption and structured, comparable reviews**, while Facebook and Google Business are too limited or inconsistent for analysis.

**Table 7 - Stakeholder Activity on Platforms with Reviews**

| **Platform** | **Creative-Industry Stakeholders (61 total)** | **Tour-Operator Stakeholders (21 total)** | **Comment** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| TripAdvisor | 15 listed (≈ 25 %) | 17 listed (≈ 81 %), 9 pages accepting reviews | Only platform with consistent review volume and structure suitable for sentiment analysis. |
| Google Business | 8 listed (≈ 13 %) | 2 listed (≈ 10 %) | Coverage too low for quantitative comparison. |
| Facebook Reviews | 23 pages enabled (≈ 38 %), but only 9 active (≈ 15 %) | – | Pages exist but few collect reviews; content largely unstructured. |

Regional benchmarking confirmed a similar pattern across peer destinations: TripAdvisor coverage averaged roughly one-third of all assessed stakeholders, still far exceeding Google or Facebook review availability. This consistency enables credible cross-country sentiment analysis.

TripAdvisor was therefore selected as the **primary data source** because it:

1. Provides the only structured and comparable body of international traveler reviews across Gambian and regional stakeholders
2. Reflects the same international audience analyzed in the tour-operator visibility study (Section 3)
3. Offers standardized star ratings and timestamps compatible with the VADER sentiment-analysis pipeline.

Other platforms remain useful for monitoring domestic engagement but currently lack the review depth and uniformity required for regional benchmarking.

##### Limitations and Mitigation

While the dataset provides a robust baseline, several caveats apply:

* **Event coverage:** festivals like the Janjanbureh Kankurang or Roots Festival seldom appear because TripAdvisor privileges static “places.” Future work should supplement with Instagram hashtag and Facebook-event sentiment, once stakeholders become more present and active on these platforms.
* **Informal sector bias:** small artisan workshops and street performers remain under-represented. Results therefore skew toward formal venues.
* **Recency:** post-COVID recovery years (2023–25) show improving tone but limited sample growth. Results will improve as travel continues to return to pre-pandemic levels.

Despite these limitations, TripAdvisor offers the most comparable, statistically viable baseline for gauging how international audiences perceive The Gambia’s creative and cultural offerings. The results that follow (Sections 4.2–4.6) translate these numerical patterns into insight, highlighting what travelers praise, where frustrations cluster, and how sentiment diverges across sectors and source markets.

### 4.2 Overall Sentiment Landscape

Across all Gambian stakeholders, average sentiment stands at +0.24, equivalent to a 4.06 / 5 average rating, a solid mid-tier performance within the West African region.

* Tour Operators achieve stronger results (+0.28 sentiment; 4.23 / 5 rating) driven by service quality and guide expertise.
* Creative Sites (museums, markets, galleries) average +0.19 sentiment; 3.89 / 5 rating, reflecting high appreciation for artistry but frustration with infrastructure.

Regional comparison places The Gambia near the middle of the field: Ghana and Benin lead in heritage and education sentiment; Nigeria excels in creative vitality; Senegal shows balanced performance but benefits from stronger infrastructure investment.

### 4.3 Sector-Specific Insights

#### Museums & Heritage Sites

**Sentiment +0.16 | Rating 3.8 / 5 | 5 stakeholders, 427 reviews**

Museums and heritage attractions generate strong emotional connection through authenticity and historical resonance—particularly around the trans-Atlantic slave-trade narrative—but consistently score low on infrastructure and interpretive depth. Visitors praise guides’ passion but note deteriorating facilities and limited signage.

*“Standing on Kunta Kinteh Island, you can almost feel the weight of history… just wish the facilities were better maintained.”* — UK traveler, 5 / 5

Heritage preservation and site maintenance are not simply physical concerns—they shape the credibility of national storytelling. Modest upgrades in ferry reliability, signage, and guide training could yield disproportionate sentiment gains.

#### Craft Markets & Artisan Spaces

**Sentiment +0.22 | Rating 4.1 / 5 | 4 stakeholders, 602 reviews**

Visitors consistently praise Gambian craftsmanship and the authenticity of market interactions. The atmosphere is described as “vibrant” and “authentically African,” though some travelers perceive prices as high or negotiation pressure excessive.

*“Very friendly people selling their wares… wood carvings, fabrics, bags—too many to mention.”* — Bakau Craft Market, 4 / 5

Artistic quality is an evident strength (+0.24 sentiment). The opportunity lies in communicating value—linking pricing to artisan livelihoods and fair-trade production—to convert appreciation into perceived worth.

#### Tour Operators

**Sentiment +0.32 | Rating 4.7 / 5 | 15 operators, 1,270 reviews**

Tour operators are The Gambia’s best digital ambassadors. Reviews highlight exceptional guide professionalism and storytelling, with repeated praise for hospitality and organization. Negative feedback focuses on transport conditions rather than service delivery.

*“Very beautifully organized tours at fair prices. My guides were extremely well-trained and friendly.”* — Bushwhacker Tours, 5 / 5

Operator excellence demonstrates that service quality standards are achievable across the sector. Transferring this know-how to museums and craft markets—through shared training or co-guided experiences—would lift overall visitor satisfaction.

### 4.4 Regional Thematic Benchmarking

Sentiment mapping across nine themes positions The Gambia as strong in **hospitality,** authenticity, and artistic quality, but weaker in infrastructure, accessibility, and interpretive content.

| **Theme** | **Gambia** | **Regional Average** | **Relative Position** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cultural Heritage Value | +0.23 | +0.26 | Comparable (mid-tier) |
| Service & Staff Quality | +0.24 | +0.27 | Slightly below leaders |
| Facilities & Infrastructure | +0.09 | +0.22 | Significant gap |
| Accessibility & Transport | +0.21 | +0.24 | Moderate gap |
| Value for Money | +0.21 | +0.24 | Slightly below average |
| Safety & Security | +0.20 | +0.16 | **Regional advantage** |
| Educational Value | +0.19 | +0.23 | Improvement area |
| Artistic & Creative Quality | +0.23 | +0.25 | On par |
| Atmosphere & Experience | +0.28 | +0.29 | Competitive |

The Gambia performs above average in safety and artistic authenticity—two narrative anchors that resonate strongly with target markets—but lags in the physical and informational dimensions that sustain repeat visitation.

### 4.5 Traveler Segment Insights

Analysis of 3,750 reviews with identifiable origin data reveals five consistent traveler clusters whose expectations differ markedly:

| **Origin Region** | **Share of Reviews** | **Avg Rating** | **Top Priority** | **Key Driver** | **Main Pain Point** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| UK & Anglophone Africa | 45 % | 4.32 | Educational value (31 %) | Knowledgeable guides | Infrastructure deficits |
| Netherlands / Belgium | 34 % | 4.56 | In-depth learning (38 %) | Expert guides, community benefit | Lack of interpretive detail |
| France / Francophone Africa | 15 % | 4.06 | Cultural heritage (21 %) | Authenticity, preservation | No French interpretation |
| Germany / Austria / Switzerland | 3 % | 4.15 | Organization (27 %) | Professionalism | Transport and facility issues |
| Spain / Italy / Portugal | 3 % | 4.01 | Artistic quality (25 %) | Visual appeal | Crowding and commercialization |

The UK and Dutch markets dominate by volume and satisfaction, while the Francophone segment—though smaller—shows the greatest growth potential if language accessibility improves.

### 4.6 Strategic Implications

1. **Elevate Infrastructure as Experience.** Reframing infrastructure improvements as part of cultural preservation (“heritage in progress”) can turn a weakness into an authenticity narrative.
2. **Transfer Service Excellence.** Build a cross-sector guide and hospitality certification linking tour-operator standards to museums, crafts, and festivals.
3. **Localize for Language Markets.** Introduce French and Dutch content across official channels to reach 49 % of reviewers in their own languages.
4. **Highlight Safety as a Differentiator.** Leverage The Gambia’s top regional ranking in safety sentiment within brand messaging.
5. **Invest in Interpretation and Education.** Develop interpretive signage and storytelling materials to meet the educational expectations of key segments.

Traveler sentiment confirms The Gambia’s core appeal—authenticity, friendliness, and artistic depth—but underscores a persistent “quality-of-experience” gap linked to physical and interpretive infrastructure.

Addressing these tangible barriers would not only raise review scores but also strengthen the country’s credibility as a creative-culture destination.

## 5. Creative Tourism Personas and Market Implications

To convert sentiment into market action, this section translates review data into practical audience segments, personas that reveal who current visitors are, what they value, and how they experience The Gambia’s creative industries.

Drawing from our base of verified TripAdvisor reviews and a refined subset of ~1,000 reviews with consistent thematic content, five personas were developed using a theme-based segmentation model. Each persona is statistically validated (n ≥ 100) and supported by authentic traveler quotes, offering both quantitative and qualitative insight.

In this analysis, a 'theme cluster' refers to a group of reviews sharing a dominant emotional or topical focus—such as heritage, markets, nature, or learning—identified through sentiment scoring.

Each cluster represents travelers with high positive sentiment toward specific experiences or motivations. For example, a cluster of reviews expressing enthusiasm about markets and crafts reflects a ‘Market Shopping Enthusiast’ persona. These clusters provide a structured way to interpret how audiences connect emotionally to different dimensions of Gambian creativity.

Language was another factor in segmentation. Four personas emerged from English-language theme clusters representing the primary market, while one distinct Dutch-speaking persona represents a secondary but high-value audience segment.

### 5.1 The Five Evidence-Based Personas

The five personas derived from this analysis represent statistically significant traveler types who together account for all major audience groups engaging with Gambian creative industries. Each persona is defined by key behavioral characteristics, satisfaction levels, and improvement opportunities. This overview table summarizes their relative market weight, satisfaction, and strategic focus.

**Table 8 - Five Creative Industry Personas**

| **Persona** | **Share of Total Reviews** | **Avg Rating** | **Core Motivation** | **Key Strengths / Frustrations** | **Strategic Focus** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Market Shopping Enthusiasts | 24.7 % (176 reviews) | 3.75 / 5 | Craft markets, artisan retail | Value the vibrancy and authenticity of Gambian markets but often note price confusion and layout issues | Reorganize markets into story-rich, fair-trade-oriented spaces; use signage + QR codes for transparency |
| Nature & Wildlife Enthusiasts | 19.5 % (139 reviews) | 3.68 / 5 | Wildlife encounters, photography | Praise guides and biodiversity; cite transport comfort and rest-area upkeep as weak points | Upgrade vehicles and facilities; link eco-tours with creative components such as crafts or photo workshops |
| Cultural Heritage Enthusiasts | 16.1 % (115 reviews) | 4.24 / 5 | Historical and emotional connection | Value authenticity and storytelling; limited interpretive materials | Invest in bilingual signage, guide training, and a “Heritage in Progress” narrative |
| Educational Learning Enthusiasts | 14.7 % (105 reviews) | 3.98 / 5 | Depth, explanation, family learning | Appreciate knowledgeable guides; want more structured learning | Develop a Creative Guide Certification and educational content for families/schools |
| Dutch Immersive Learners | 38.5 % (447 reviews) | 4.12 / 5 | Community immersion, impact learning | Highly satisfied but limited Dutch-language information | Publish Dutch-language content; package multi-day workshops with visible community benefits |

These personas are theme-verified, with at least 82% consistency between the dominant theme and review sentiment. They illustrate clear pathways for market segmentation and provide a solid foundation for audience-specific marketing and experience design.

### 5.2 Persona Insights

The following pages provide detailed insights for each persona, combining statistical evidence with representative review excerpts. Each subsection outlines who the traveler is, what they appreciate most, what challenges they face, and what strategic actions can address their needs. These insights ensure that improvements are driven by authentic visitor perspectives rather than assumptions.

#### Market Shopping Enthusiasts

Largest English-language segment oriented to markets and crafts, often describing vibrant colors, friendly interactions, and handmade quality.

Key Evidence:

* 176 reviews (24.7%), Avg Rating 3.75/5
* **Top themes**: Market experience 89%, craft quality 76%, pricing value 67%, vendor interaction 54%
* Primary origins: UK (45%), Nigeria (23%), Ghana (18%)

Representative Quote: “Beautiful handmade work and friendly sellers.”

**Strategic Implications**: Reorganize markets into cultural showcases through better layout, posted prices, and artisan storytelling. Introduce QR codes for reorders and highlight fair-trade credentials.

#### Nature & Wildlife Enthusiasts

Travelers are motivated by birdwatching, river safaris, and wildlife photography. They value expert guides and safe, comfortable transport.

Key Evidence:

* 139 reviews (19.5%), Avg Rating 3.68/5
* Themes: Wildlife encounters 82%, guide knowledge 71%, natural beauty 68%, transport comfort 45%
* Origins: UK (52%), Germany (18%), Netherlands (15%)

Representative Quote: “The chimpanzees were incredible, but the car was very old and the rest areas needed care.”

**Strategic Implications**: Upgrade transportation and comfort standards. Combine eco-tours with cultural components such as eco-crafts or photography workshops to merge conservation with creativity.

#### Cultural Heritage Enthusiasts

Visitors drawn to The Gambia’s history, particularly heritage sites and museums. They seek authenticity and emotional connection through storytelling.

Key Evidence:

* 115 reviews (16.1%), Avg Rating 4.24/5
* Themes: Historical significance 91%, authenticity 84%, educational value 79%, preservation quality 62%
* Origins: UK (38%), France (22%), USA (18%)

Representative Quote: “A moving experience that connects you to history.”

**Strategic Implications**: Invest in interpretive signage, bilingual materials, and 'Heritage in Progress' communication that invites visitors to support preservation efforts.

#### Educational Learning Enthusiasts

Curiosity-driven travelers who value depth, explanation, and personal engagement with guides. Often families or independent learners.

Key Evidence:

* 105 reviews (14.7%), Avg Rating 3.98/5
* Themes: Guide expertise 87%, learning value 79%, educational content 73%
* Origins: UK (41%), USA (28%), Canada (18%)

**Representative Quote**: “Our guide transformed the visit into a real lesson.”

**Strategic Implications**: Create a national 'Creative Guide Certification' program. Standardize storytelling quality and develop educational content that appeals to school and family audiences.

#### Dutch Immersive Learner

Distinct cohort from the Netherlands and Belgium seeking deep cultural learning and meaningful community connection through small-group formats.

Key Evidence:

* 447 reviews (38.5%), Avg Rating 4.12/5
* Themes: Cultural immersion 94%, learning depth 89%, community connection 76%, authenticity 82%
* Origins: Netherlands (78%), Belgium (22%)

Representative Quote: “We joined a three-day pottery workshop and learned each step from clay to firing.”

**Strategic Implications**: Publish Dutch-language content, package multi-day learning experiences, and communicate measurable community benefits for transparency and trust.

### 5.3 Cross-Persona Theme Signals

By aggregating sentiment across personas, clear performance trends emerge. These trends reveal which qualities define The Gambia’s appeal and which aspects consistently reduce visitor satisfaction.

The strongest sentiment clusters include atmosphere (0.28 average) and service quality (0.24), confirming that hospitality and authenticity are The Gambia’s hallmarks. Conversely, infrastructure (0.20) and accessibility (0.21) remain relatively limiting factors, cutting across all personas. Value-for-money sentiment (0.21) also reflects the need for clearer communication of pricing and inclusions.

Improving these foundational aspects—without losing the sense of authenticity that visitors prize—offers the greatest potential to increase both satisfaction and spending.

### 5.4 Strategic Implications

The persona analysis provides a data-backed roadmap for action. Each recommendation directly links to the motivations and frustrations surfaced within the five persona clusters.

1. **Language Localization**: Prioritize Dutch-language pages for immersive products and French-language interpretation at heritage sites to improve accessibility and trust.
2. **Market Experience Reform**: Transform craft markets into organized, story-rich environments with posted prices, signage, and artisan visibility.
3. **Nature–Creativity Bundling**: Combine eco-experiences with creative components, such as photography or craft workshops, to extend engagement.
4. **Guide Development**: Launch a Creative Guide Certification program that reinforces interpretive and educational standards.
5. **Heritage Narrative**: Use transparent storytelling ('Heritage in Progress') to reframe infrastructure limitations as part of an ongoing preservation effort.

Together, these actions turn qualitative sentiment into measurable strategy, linking audience insight with product design and digital storytelling. They establish The Gambia not only as an authentic destination but as an evolving, participatory creative tourism hub.

## 6. Digital Positioning Opportunities Matrix

The five personas outlined above provide not only audience clarity but a practical lens through which to prioritize digital investment. Each represents a distinct combination of **motivation, satisfaction driver, and communication need** and together, they define where The Gambia’s creative tourism ecosystem can generate the greatest impact.

Building on these behavioral insights, the next section—the **Digital Positioning Opportunities Matrix**—translates persona evidence and sentiment data into ten actionable levers for market growth.

The Digital Positioning Opportunities Matrix (DPOM) converts diagnostic evidence into direction. It translates benchmarking results, sentiment trends, and persona insights into ten concrete levers that can elevate The Gambia’s digital visibility, perception, and conversion performance.

The analysis responds to five guiding questions:

1. Where does The Gambia already hold a digital advantage?
2. Where are the most significant visibility and conversion gaps compared with regional peers?
3. Which actions will deliver the greatest impact within twelve months?
4. Which visitor personas stand to benefit from each action?
5. How will progress be measured over time?

By answering these questions, the matrix bridges evidence and implementation, offering an operational blueprint for the tourism and creative-industry ecosystem to move from scattered initiatives to coordinated digital competitiveness.

### 6.1 Competitive Strengths and Gaps

The Gambia’s digital competitiveness is anchored in authentic creative quality, English-language accessibility, and strong perceptions of safety and hospitality. These are assets already validated by traveler sentiment but under-represented in formal marketing.

**Table 9 – Current Competitive Advantages**

| **Competitive Advantage** | **Evidence** | **Current Digital Leverage** | **Opportunity** | **Priority** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Authentic Creative Quality | Sentiment +0.21 vs regional +0.19 | Limited e-commerce; minimal photo assets | Develop cohesive visual storytelling and online craft sales links | 🔴 High |
| English-Language Hospitality | 45 % of reviews, 4.32 / 5 rating | Moderate SEO optimization | Strengthen Anglophone search content and family-learning narratives | 🟡 Medium |
| Cultural Authenticity | “Authentic” mentioned 2× regional average | Rarely used in official branding | Reframe as central brand narrative across platforms | 🔴 High |
| Safety & Comfort | Sentiment +0.20 (top regional score) | Not highlighted in marketing | Position The Gambia as “Safe Gateway to West Africa” | 🟡 Medium |
| Community Engagement | Frequent “friendly, welcoming” mentions | Few digital stories of local impact | Showcase community projects and people-centered narratives | 🔴 High |

These strengths confirm that The Gambia’s competitive advantage lies not in scale but in *trust and authenticity*. The opportunity is to professionalize the digital expression of these qualities through stronger imagery, consistent tone, and clear narrative ownership. Leveraging what visitors already love will yield rapid reputational returns at minimal cost.

**Critical Market Gaps**

Conversely, several gaps continue to depress digital visibility and limit market diversification. They are not structural weaknesses but unaddressed communication and product issues that can be targeted through focused digital interventions.

**Table 10 – Key Visibility and Conversion Gaps**

| **Market Gap** | **Evidence** | **Digital Implication** | **Persona Impact** | **Urgency** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Infrastructure & Access Narrative | Facilities sentiment +0.09 vs regional +0.22 | Perceived neglect reduces trust and shareability | Cultural Heritage & Educational personas | 🔴 High |
| Francophone Visibility | Only 15 % Francophone travelers, 4.06 / 5 rating | Absence of French content limits reach | Heritage Seeker | 🔴 High |
| Creative-Industry Integration | 52 % of ITO tours feature creative content (vs 83 % wildlife) | Weak creative positioning in trade portfolios | All personas | 🔴 High |
| E-commerce & Post-Visit Sales | 23 reviews mention inability to buy online | Lost revenue for artisans | Market Shopping Enthusiasts | 🟠 Medium |
| Music & Contemporary Culture | < 5 % ITO mentions | Sector remains invisible digitally | Discovery Traveler | 🟠 Medium |

These gaps collectively explain why The Gambia performs mid-tier despite positive sentiment. They highlight a pattern of under-communication rather than product weakness. Addressing them requires improved digital structure—translation, content integration, and e-commerce—not large-scale investment.

### 6.2 Priority Opportunities Matrix

Building on the above, ten priority digital opportunities have been identified and ranked by expected market impact and implementation effort. Each lever corresponds to one or more visitor personas and directly addresses specific sentiment or visibility gaps.

**Table 11 – High-Impact Digital Levers (12-Month Horizon)**

| **#** | **Opportunity** | **Impact** | **Effort** | **Timeframe** | **Key Personas** | **Expected Outcome** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | Francophone Translation & Co-Marketing | 🔴 High | Medium | 0–6 mo | Heritage Seeker | +15 % Francophone traffic; +0.15 sentiment boost |
| 2 | Creative-Tourism ITO Content Kit | 🔴 High | 🟢 Low | 0–3 mo | Immersive Learner / Cultural Heritage | +25 % creative itinerary integration |
| 3 | “Authentic Gambia” Visual Brand Campaign | 🔴 High | 🟢 Low | 0–3 mo | All English personas | Improved search ranking and brand recognition |
| 4 | Craft E-Commerce Pilot | 🟠 Medium | 🟡 Medium | 3–6 mo | Market Shopping Enthusiasts | Online sales for 30 artisans |
| 5 | Music Tourism Digital Launch | 🟠 Medium | 🟠 High | 6–12 mo | Discovery Traveler | New market segment + festival visibility |
| 6 | Guide Training & Certification Program | 🟡 Medium | 🟠 High | 6–12 mo | Educational / Heritage personas | +0.05 sentiment in service themes |
| 7 | Professional Photo Library + SEO Assets | 🟡 Medium | 🟢 Low | 0–3 mo | All personas | 50 operator downloads + media coverage |
| 8 | Safety & Trust Messaging Campaign | 🟡 Medium | 🟢 Low | 0–3 mo | Experience Collector / Families | Improved brand differentiation |
| 9 | Dutch Premium Immersion Tier | 🟡 Medium | 🟡 Medium | 6–12 mo | Dutch Immersive Learner | +10 % average spend per capita |
| 10 | Heritage Preservation Storyline | 🟢 Low | 🟢 Low | 0–6 mo | Cultural Heritage / Educational | Reframe infrastructure as “living heritage” |

The mix of quick wins and strategic programs ensures balanced progress. Actions 1–3 (translation, operator kit, and visual campaign) require minimal resources yet address the widest visibility gaps.

Mid-range initiatives (e-commerce, music, guide training) build capacity and diversification, while longer-term measures—such as the Dutch premium tier—position The Gambia in higher-value segments. The guiding principle: visible results early, sustained transformation later.

### 6.3 Implementation Roadmap and Metrics

A 12-month implementation horizon allows the Tourism Board and partners to stage investments by complexity while tracking measurable improvements in visibility and sentiment.

**Table 12 – Indicative Implementation Timeline**

| Phase | Period | Focus | Key Deliverables | Expected Outcome |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Quick Wins | 0–3 months | Visibility & content readiness | Translation of core pages; Authentic Gambia campaign; ITO content kit; Safety messaging | Immediate uplift in search visibility and review positivity |
| Growth Initiatives | 3–6 months | Market activation | Craft e-commerce pilot; heritage storytelling; Francophone outreach | Expanded reach and artisan income generation |
| Strategic Programs | 6–12 months | Capacity & product depth | Guide certification; music tourism launch; Dutch premium tier | Structural strengthening of creative-tourism offering |

**Table 13 – Key Performance Indicators**

| **Indicator** | **Baseline (2025)** | **Target (2026)** | **Measurement Source** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Creative-tourism visibility in ITO itineraries | 52 % | 70 % | Operator content audit |
| Average online sentiment score | +0.24 | +0.30 | Quarterly review analysis |
| Francophone visitor share | 15 % | 25 % | TripAdvisor language analytics |
| Artisan e-commerce participants | 0 | 30 active sellers | Platform dashboard |
| Music-tourism bookings | 0 | 200 | Tour operator reports |

The chosen indicators align directly with previously identified gaps: sentiment, linguistic diversification, trade integration, and creative-sector monetization. Tracking these quarterly will allow the Tourism Board to demonstrate tangible progress and recalibrate resources in real time.

### 6.4 Integration with Deliverable 3

The Digital Positioning Opportunities Matrix completes the diagnostic arc of Deliverable 2. It consolidates what the data show and who the audiences are into where to act first.

Deliverable 3 will build on this foundation through a Strategic Digital Development Framework that assigns institutional roles, establishes funding mechanisms, and designs capacity-building programs around these ten levers.

Together, these steps will enable The Gambia to move from a reputation of authenticity to a position of digital excellence where creativity is not only experienced but discoverable, bookable, and celebrated globally.

## 7. Conclusion & Strategic Priorities

The evidence across regional stakeholders, international tour operator pages, and thousands of visitor reviews reveals a paradox: The Gambia possesses authentic creative assets and generates positive visitor sentiment, yet remains digitally invisible in the global cultural-tourism marketplace. This gap is not structural but communicative: the country has stories to tell but lacks the platforms, language accessibility, and operator partnerships to tell them effectively.

The data confirm what stakeholders have long sensed: The Gambia is well-liked but not looked for. Visitors who arrive express genuine appreciation for craftsmanship, hospitality, and cultural authenticity. The country achieves regional leadership in safety perception and competitive scores in artistic quality and atmosphere.

Yet these strengths remain confined to post-visit reviews rather than shaping pre-trip discovery. Only 9% of international tour operator pages position Gambian creative content as a selling point, compared to 26% for Senegal and 21% for Ghana. The Gambia's Creative Tourism Score of 16.9/100 sits 45% below the regional mean, with 81% of pure-Gambia tours scoring below 20 points, a threshold indicating minimal cultural differentiation.

This invisibility has cascading consequences. Francophone travelers represent only 15% of current reviews, constrained by the near-total absence of French-language content. The Dutch Immersive Learner persona—achieving the highest satisfaction scores and representing more than 1/3 of reviews—explicitly seeks multi-day creative workshops, yet fewer than 5% of Gambian stakeholders offer bookable experiences online. Market Shopping Enthusiasts consistently praise craftsmanship but have no ability to purchase online or reconnect with artisans. The pattern repeats across personas: demand exists, satisfaction is high when experienced, but digital interfaces to enable discovery and conversion are missing.

The regional benchmarking clarifies that this is not a resource problem. Individual actors like My Gambia already meet international digital standards. The challenge is not talent or authenticity but coordination, platform integration, and targeted language access. When Senegal + Gambia multi-country packages score higher than pure Gambia tours, it confirms that the storytelling infrastructure exists regionally, it’s just that operators lack Gambian-specific content modules to populate it.

Three interconnected priorities emerge from this evidence, each addressing a specific competitive weakness while building on demonstrated strengths. Together they form a reinforcing system: better operator content integration raises international visibility, which increases platform search traffic, which justifies investment in booking systems and guide training, which improves satisfaction and reviews, which strengthens positioning in subsequent operator catalogues.

#### **Priority 1: Narrative Rebalancing Through Multi-Channel Storytelling**

Regional leaders like Senegal and Ghana succeed not through superior creative products but through coordinated narrative presence across multiple touchpoints. The Gambia's current "beach + nature" positioning in 81% of tour operator pages reflects not reality but the absence of alternative narratives. The country's strong sentiment for artistic quality demonstrates domestic capacity to produce compelling content, it just isn't reaching international distribution channels.

The solution lies in creating turnkey content packages for the operators who already sell Gambia. When Senegal + Gambia multi-country packages score 33.9/100 compared to 16.9 for pure-Gambia tours, it signals that operators already possess cultural-tourism storytelling infrastructure—they simply lack Gambian-specific content to populate it. A bilingual content kit containing ready-to-use itinerary modules (craft workshop descriptions, festival calendar integration, music venue listings with booking contacts) would enable operators to expand cultural programming without additional research costs.

This intervention directly serves three personas representing 79% of cultural-tourism reviews: UK Cultural Explorers and Educational Learning Enthusiasts (40.8% combined) seek structured learning experiences with expert interpretation; Dutch Immersive Learners (38.5%) explicitly seek multi-day workshops with visible community benefit; and French Heritage Seekers (16.1%) currently represent only 15% of visitors despite 22% regional share, constrained by language barriers. Providing operators with differentiated content for each market segment transforms The Gambia from a logistical stopover into a thematic anchor.

#### **Priority 2: Closing the Discoverability-to-Conversion Gap**

The Gambia's +0.24 sentiment score proves visitors enjoy their experiences once they arrive. The challenge is being found in the first place. While Nigeria leads in platform integration and Ghana excels in diaspora digital engagement, The Gambia's creative stakeholders remain largely absent from the platforms where international travelers actually search: Google Business profiles, TripAdvisor Experiences, and aggregator sites like My Gambia.

This invisibility has measurable economic consequences. Market Shopping Enthusiasts (24.7% of reviews, 3.75/5 satisfaction) consistently praise Gambian craftsmanship (+0.23 artistic quality sentiment) but cite inability to purchase online or reconnect with artisans post-visit. Dutch Immersive Learners achieve the highest satisfaction scores (4.12/5) but explicitly seek multi-day creative workshops, yet fewer than 5% of Gambian stakeholders offer bookable experiences online. Cultural Heritage Enthusiasts and Educational Learning Enthusiasts (30.8% combined) score facilities and infrastructure lowest (+0.09, 59% below regional average) and consistently request better interpretive materials and guide depth.

The pattern is consistent across personas: infrastructure for conversion largely exists (workshops happen, guides are knowledgeable, artisans are accessible), but digital interfaces are missing. Small investments in platform presence, booking functionality, and e-commerce pilot programs would unlock disproportionate returns by connecting proven products to proven demand.

#### **Priority 3: Leveraging Peer Learning and Strategic Aggregation**

The regional assessment reveals that digitally mature stakeholders exist within each country—they're simply isolated. Nigeria's Nike Art Foundation demonstrates gallery-scale e-commerce, Senegal's Adama Paris shows fashion export integration, Cape Verde's RTC models public broadcaster digitization, and Ghana's Global Mamas proves fair-trade craft storytelling scales internationally. Within Gambia, My Gambia (38/70) and select tour operators (+0.28 sentiment) already meet international digital standards.

Rather than duplicating these capabilities across dozens of small stakeholders—an approach that fails in every peer country—The Gambia can create shared digital infrastructure. A centralized creative-tourism booking platform, multilingual content repository, and professional photo library would allow individual artisans, musicians, and heritage sites to maintain authentic presences while benefiting from aggregated visibility and technical support. Cape Verde's success in editorial aggregation through limited platforms demonstrates this model's viability for small markets.

This approach directly addresses the quality gaps identified in visitor sentiment. A shared Creative Guide Certification program—transferring tour operator service excellence (+0.32 sentiment) to museums and craft sites—would systematically lift the visitor experience quality that Educational Learning and Cultural Heritage personas prioritize, while distributing training costs across the sector.

Regional peer learning networks offer similar efficiency gains: when Benin's Vodun Days Festival and Ghana's AfroFuture achieve 60+ creative tourism scores through professional visual branding and year-round social engagement, these practices become replicable templates. Gambian festivals averaging 16.2/70 can adopt proven digital marketing protocols without reinventing strategies—the knowledge already exists regionally and simply needs structured transfer.

**Expected Outcomes and Path Forward**

These three strategies form a reinforcing system rather than isolated interventions. Most critically, these interventions position creative-industry digitization as export-readiness infrastructure rather than tourism marketing alone. When artisans gain e-commerce capability, music tourism becomes bookable, and guide certification creates recognized professional standards, The Gambia's creative economy develops the digital interfaces necessary for broader trade integration—the foundation for sustainable competitiveness.

## Annex 1 – Methodological Framework: Creative Industries Visibility Score

#### Creative Tourism Score Methodology

The Creative Tourism Score (0-100 points) quantifies how extensively International Tour Operators position destinations as cultural and creative tourism experiences. The system analyzes tour descriptions across **8 creative sectors**, with each sector scored 0-10 points based on content depth and keyword diversity.

Sector Scoring Scale:

| **Score** | **Classification** | **Keyword Mentions** | **Description** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 0 | Not mentioned | 0 | Sector completely absent from tour description |
| 1-3 | Brief mention | 1-5 mentions, 1-2 terms | Passing reference, minimal detail |
| 4-6 | Described | 6-15 mentions, 2-4 terms | Clear description with some detail |
| 7-9 | Featured | 16-30 mentions, 4-6 terms | Prominent in itinerary and marketing |
| 10 | Heavily featured | 30+ mentions, 6+ diverse terms | Core selling point with rich detail and variety |

#### Keyword Detection System

The analysis employs 101 specific keywords across 8 creative sectors, including both Gambia-specific terms (e.g., 'kunta kinteh', 'wassu stone circles', 'kankurang') and industry-standard creative tourism vocabulary. The system uses automated keyword detection with context filtering to prevent false positives.

* **Heritage Sites & Museums (16 keywords)**: heritage • heritage site • unesco • historical • history • museum • fort • colonial • roots • kunta kinteh • james island • wassu • stone circles • slave trade • slavery • historic
* **Crafts & Artisan Products (15 keywords)**: craft • crafts • artisan • handmade • woodcarving • woodcarver • batik • tie-dye • tie dye • weaving • pottery • basket • market • souvenir • handicraft
* **Music (12 keywords)**: music • kora • drum • drummer • drumming • live music • musician • concert • balafon • griot • djembe • performance music
* **Performing Arts (11 keywords)**: dance • dancer • dancing • theater • theatre • drama • performance • performing • kankurang • mask dance • cultural performance
* **Festivals & Cultural Events (9 keywords)**: festival • ceremony • celebration • carnival • feast • cultural event • fanado • difuntu • roots homecoming
* **Audiovisual (11 keywords)**: film • cinema • photo • photograph • photography • photographer • tv • television • documentary • video production • videography
* **Fashion & Design (12 keywords)**: fashion • design • textile • fabric • tailor • tailoring • dress • clothing • attire • garment • style • outfit
* **Publishing & Storytelling (11 keywords)**: author • writer • poet • literature • story • storytelling • publication • print • magazine • journal • writing

Unlike sentiment analysis keywords (which focus on visitor experience terms like 'friendly', 'clean', 'expensive'), the Creative Tourism Score excludes general experience keywords and uses content-focused detection to identify how operators describe creative activities and cultural sites.

Excluded False Positive Terms:

* Publishing: 'book now', 'book by', 'booking', 'reserve', 'book early'
* Audiovisual: 'video player', 'video call', 'video conference', 'watch video'

#### Score Calculation

The total Creative Tourism Score is calculated using weighted sector scores:

**Total Score** = [(Heritage × 1.3) + (Crafts × 1.2) + (Performing Arts × 1.2) + Music + Festivals + Audiovisual + Fashion + Publishing] × 1.25

**Sector Weight Multipliers:**

* Heritage Sites & Museums: 1.3× (highest weight - foundational for destination credibility)
* Crafts & Artisan Products: 1.2×
* Performing Arts: 1.2×
* All other sectors: 1.0×

Maximum possible score: 100 points

#### Keyword Detection Examples

The following examples illustrate how different levels of keyword presence and diversity result in different sector scores:

**High Score Example**: Heritage (Score 10/10)

* **Operator**: Palace Travel
* **Tour**: Best of Ghana (12 Days)
* **Detected**: 87 keyword mentions across 9 unique terms
* **System Classification**: 'Heavily featured' (+1 bonus for diversity)
* **Keywords** Found: colonial, fort, heritage, heritage site, historic, historical, history, museum, unesco

Example Tour Description Excerpt:

"Visit the historic Cape Coast Castle, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that tells the story of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Explore colonial-era forts and museums that preserve Ghana's rich cultural heritage. The tour includes extensive time at historical sites including Elmina Castle, with expert guides providing deep context about this important heritage."

**Analysis**: High frequency (87 mentions), exceptional keyword diversity (9 different terms), and heritage positioned as a core selling point throughout the itinerary justifies the maximum 10-point score.

**Medium Score Example**: Crafts (Score 7/10)

* **Operator**: Naturetrek
* **Tour**: The Gambia Wildlife Holiday
* **Detected**: 11 keyword mentions of 1 term
* **System Classification**: 'Featured'
* **Keywords Found**: craft (11×)

Example Tour Description Excerpt:

"Free time to explore local craft markets and observe traditional craft production. Several afternoons include optional visits to craft workshops where you can watch artisans at work and purchase authentic Gambian crafts."

**Analysis**: Moderate frequency (11 mentions) but limited keyword diversity (only 1 term). Crafts are featured as optional activities rather than core experiences, resulting in a 7-point score.

**Low Score Example: Music (Score 3/10)**

* **Operator**: TransAfrica
* **Tour**: West Africa Expedition
* **Detected**: 3 keyword mentions of 2 terms
* **System Classification**: 'Brief mention'
* **Keywords Found**: drumming (2×), music (1×)

Example Tour Description Excerpt:

"Evening entertainment may include traditional drumming and music performances at the lodge."

**Analysis**: Minimal mentions (3×) with limited diversity (2 terms). Music appears only as incidental evening entertainment rather than a planned cultural experience, resulting in a 3-point score.

## Annex 2 – International Tour Operator Analysis Framework

This annex documents the complete methodology for analyzing how International Tour Operators (ITOs) represent The Gambia's creative industries and cultural offerings in their digital marketing materials. The analysis examined 239 tour pages from 32 tour operators across 13 source markets between September and October 2025.

The Creative Tourism Score framework provides a quantitative measure (0-100 points) of how extensively operators position destinations as cultural and creative tourism experiences, enabling direct comparison across West African countries and identification of market positioning gaps.

#### Tour Operators Analyzed by Country of Origin

The 32 operators analyzed represent the primary international gateways through which West African cultural tourism is promoted to global audiences. Operators were selected based on their active promotion of at least one West African destination, with particular focus on those offering Gambian tours.

**Table 14 - United Kingdom Operators (14 operators, 137 tours analyzed)**

| **Operator** | **Gambia Tours** | **Avg. Creative Score** | **Specialization** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Responsible Travel | 13 | 46.5 | Cultural immersion, responsible tourism |
| Naturetrek | 3 | 44.6 | Wildlife with cultural components |
| The Gambia Experience | 2 | 16.3 | Beach-focused with limited cultural |
| Intrepid Travel UK | 2 | 16.9 | Adventure with heritage stops |
| Wildlife Worldwide | 2 | 14.4 | Wildlife-centric |
| Explore! | 2 | 22.5 | Small group cultural tours |
| Other UK operators (8) | 8 | 18.3 | Various: wildlife, beach, cultural |

**Table 15 - United States Operators (4 operators, 8 tours analyzed)**

| **Operator** | **Gambia Tours** | **Avg. Creative Score** | **Specialization** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Palace Travel | 2 | 26.9 | African diaspora cultural heritage |
| Spector Travel Boston | 3 | 12.5 | Beach and birdwatching |
| Birding Ecotours | 2 | 8.8 | Wildlife/birdwatching specialist |
| Overseas Adventure Travel | 1 | 42.5 | Multi-country cultural tours |

**Table 16 - West African Regional Operators (1 operator, 19 tours analyzed)**

| **Operator** | **Gambia Tours** | **Avg. Creative Score** | **Specialization** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| TransAfrica | 19 | 46.2 | Overland cultural expeditions across West Africa |

Other European Operators (13 operators, 75 tours analyzed)

The remaining 13 operators include tour companies from Germany (3), Sweden (2), Netherlands (1), Finland (1), Denmark (1), Spain (1), and operators serving multiple European markets. These operators typically offer mass-market beach packages (TUI, Apollo, Corendon) or specialized birdwatching tours (Overlanding West Africa) with limited cultural content integration. Average Creative Score: 18.7

#### Comparative Sector Performance: Gambia vs. Regional Peers

Average sector scores reveal how International Tour Operators position each destination's creative industries. Scores are averages across all analyzed tours for each destination.

**Table 17 - Gambia vs Regional Peers**

| **Destination** | **Tours** | **Heritage** | **Crafts** | **Music** | **Perf. Arts** | **Festivals** | **A/V** | **Fashion** | **Publ.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Nigeria | 7 | 9.7 | 7.6 | 2.7 | 1.7 | 3.0 | 0.9 | 3.4 | 1.1 |
| Benin | 42 | 8.9 | 8.0 | 3.6 | 6.3 | 6.8 | 1.8 | 4.5 | 1.6 |
| Senegal | 53 | 8.3 | 3.7 | 2.3 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 1.5 | 1.9 | 2.2 |
| Ghana | 75 | 8.2 | 6.1 | 2.4 | 3.3 | 3.5 | 1.7 | 4.5 | 2.0 |
| Gambia | 36 | 4.4 | 2.9 | 1.2 | 1.4 | 0.4 | 1.3 | 1.2 | 0.7 |
| Cape Verde | 26 | 3.4 | 1.0 | 1.8 | 0.4 | 0.7 | 0.5 | 0.4 | 0.1 |

Key Findings:

* **Heritage**: The Gambia (4.4) significantly trails regional leaders Nigeria (9.7), Benin (8.9), Senegal (8.3), and Ghana (8.2). The gap of 3.8-5.3 points represents missed opportunities in promoting historical sites like Kunta Kinteh Island and Wassu Stone Circles.
* **Crafts**: The Gambia (2.9) underperforms compared to Benin (8.0), Nigeria (7.6), and Ghana (6.1). This gap suggests markets and artisan workshops are either under-promoted or not packaged as structured experiences.
* **Festivals**: The Gambia's score of 0.4 is the second-lowest regionally, with Benin leading at 6.8. This indicates calendar-based cultural events like Roots Festival or Kankurang ceremonies remain largely invisible to tour operators.
* **Performing Arts**: At 1.4, Gambia matches Cape Verde but trails Benin (6.3) and Ghana (3.3). Music and dance, though culturally significant, are rarely positioned as bookable experiences.

#### Creative Tourism Score Distribution

Analysis of all 239 tours across six West African destinations reveals the overall distribution of creative tourism positioning:

**Table 18 - Creative Tourism Score Distribution**

| **Score Range** | **Tours** | **Percentage** | **Typical Positioning** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 0-20 points | 79 | 33% | Beach/wildlife with minimal cultural content |
| 21-40 points | 70 | 29% | Mixed nature-culture with heritage emphasis |
| 41-60 points | 61 | 26% | Culture-led tours with diverse sectors |
| 61-80 points | 29 | 12% | Creative tourism as core selling point |
| 81-100 points | 0 | 0% | No tours achieved this threshold |

Statistical Summary (all destinations):

* Mean Score: 32.7 points
* Median Score: 31.2 points
* Standard Deviation: 21.7 points
* Range: 0 - 77.5 points (no tour achieved 80+)

Gambia-Specific Distribution:

* Pure Gambia tours: Average 16.9 points (below regional mean)
* Multi-country tours including Gambia: Average 33.9 points
* 81% of pure Gambia tours score below 20 points (minimal creative content)

#### Strategic Implications for The Gambia

The keyword analysis reveals three critical positioning challenges:

##### Visibility Gap

The Gambia's creative industries are significantly under-represented in tour operator marketing compared to regional peers. With average sector scores consistently 3-5 points below competitors, the country is positioned primarily as a beach and wildlife destination rather than a creative-culture hub. This framing limits market diversification and average visitor spend.

##### Keyword Specificity

Tours achieving high scores (60+ points) employ specific, evocative language: 'kente weaving workshop', 'Vodun ceremony', 'griot storytelling evening'. Generic terms like 'cultural experience' or 'local market' generate lower scores and weaker audience engagement. Gambian stakeholders should develop similarly specific, bookable creative-industry products.

##### Packaging Advantage

Multi-country packages featuring Gambia score twice as high (33.9) as pure Gambia tours (16.9), suggesting that regional tour operators already have the creative-tourism storytelling infrastructure. Partnering with these operators (TransAfrica, Responsible Travel) to strengthen Gambian content within existing itineraries offers a faster route to visibility than building pure-Gambia creative packages from scratch.

The Creative Tourism Score methodology provides a replicable, evidence-based framework for measuring destination positioning in international tourism markets. The Gambia's average score of 16.9 points (compared to a regional mean of 30.9) confirms that the country's creative assets remain under-leveraged in global distribution channels.

However, the analysis also identifies clear pathways forward. High-performing operators like Responsible Travel and TransAfrica demonstrate that creative content can be integrated profitably. The keyword database reveals which specific terms and experiences resonate with international markets. And the scoring framework provides ongoing measurement capability to track improvement over time.

## Annex 3 – Sentiment & Theme Taxonomy

This annex documents the complete methodology for theme detection in The Gambia Tourism Digital Assessment sentiment analysis. It provides full transparency on how 4,412 visitor reviews were systematically analyzed using a unified taxonomy of 9 core themes and over 200 keywords.

**Table 19 - Theme Taxonomy**

| **Specification** | **Value** |
| --- | --- |
| Total Themes | 9 unified themes |
| Total Keywords | 200+ keywords and phrases |
| Detection Method | Keyword matching with context filtering |
| Validation | Cross-stakeholder consistency testing |
| Coverage | 100% of reviews analyzed for all themes |
| Accuracy Rate | 94.2% (validated against manual coding) |

The 9 themes were designed to capture every essential dimension of visitor experience across:

* **All Stakeholder Types:** Museums, craft markets, nature reserves, cultural sites, tour operators
* **All Countries:** Gambia, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Benin, Cape Verde
* **All Visitor Segments:** Individual travelers, groups, families, educational tours
* **All Experience Types:** Cultural, nature, adventure, educational, shopping

### How the Themes Relate to Each Other

The themes are organized into four natural groupings:

VISITOR EXPERIENCE DIMENSIONS

Content & Value Themes

├─ Cultural & Heritage Value (authenticity, significance)

├─ Educational & Informational Value (learning, interpretation)

└─ Artistic & Creative Quality (aesthetics, craftsmanship)

Service & Operations Themes

├─ Service & Staff Quality (guides, hospitality)

├─ Facilities & Infrastructure (physical condition, maintenance)

└─ Accessibility & Transport (location, wayfinding, travel)

Economic & Safety Themes

├─ Value for Money (pricing, perceived value)

└─ Safety & Security (safety concerns, risk perception)

Holistic Experience Theme

└─ Atmosphere & Overall Experience (emotional resonance, memorable moments)

Each theme below includes:

* **What it measures** (conceptual definition)
* **Complete keyword list** (all detection terms)
* **Detection examples** (what triggers or doesn't
* **Application scope** (which stakeholder types)

#### Theme 1: Cultural & Heritage Value

**Theme ID:** cultural\_heritage

**What It Measures:** Visitor perceptions of authenticity, historical significance, cultural depth, and heritage preservation quality

**Weight:** 1.0 (standard)  
**Applies To:** All stakeholder types

**Complete Keyword List (29 keywords)**

culture, cultural, heritage, history, historical, authentic, authenticity, traditional, significance, preservation, legacy, ancestor, ancestral, origin, custom, ritual, tribe, tribal, slavery, monument, historic, slave, colonial, ancient, sacred, spiritual, religion, religious

#### Theme 2: Service & Staff Quality

**Theme ID:** service\_staff

**What It Measures:** Staff friendliness, guide expertise, hospitality quality, and customer service professionalism

**Weight:** 1.0 (standard)  
**Applies To:** All stakeholder types

**Complete Keyword List (22 keywords)**

staff, guide, service, friendly, helpful, knowledgeable, hospitable, welcoming, professional, courteous, attentive, tour guide, host, hostess, informative, passionate, enthusiastic, crew, employee, worker, receptionist, manager

#### Theme 3: Facilities & Infrastructure

**Theme ID:** facilities\_infrastructure

**What It Measures:** Physical site condition, maintenance quality, cleanliness, and availability of modern amenities

**Weight:** 1.0 (standard)  
**Applies To:** All stakeholder types

**Complete Keyword List (27 keywords)**

facilities, facility, infrastructure, building, maintenance, clean, cleanliness, condition, restroom, bathroom, toilet, amenities, upkeep, repair, modern, renovate, renovation, deteriorate, decay, neglect, dirty, filthy, old, structure, construction, air condition, lighting

#### Theme 4: Accessibility & Transport

**Theme ID:** accessibility\_transport

**What It Measures:** Ease of reaching the site, quality of transport options, parking availability, wayfinding, and location logistics

**Weight:** 1.0 (standard)  
**Applies To:** All stakeholder types

**Complete Keyword List (34 keywords)**

access, accessible, transport, transportation, location, parking, directions, signage, sign, signpost, ferry, boat, bus, taxi, drive, driving, walk, walking, reach, reaching, find, finding, navigate, navigation, wayfinding, entrance, approach, arrive, arrival, distance, far, close, nearby, remote, isolated

#### Theme 5: Value for Money

**Theme ID:** value\_money

**What It Measures:** Visitor perceptions of pricing fairness, value received relative to cost, and cost-benefit satisfaction

**Weight:** 1.0 (standard)  
**Applies To:** All stakeholder types

**Complete Keyword List (25 keywords)**

price, pricing, value, expensive, cheap, worth, worthwhile, money, cost, fee, charge, admission, ticket, affordable, overpriced, reasonable, bargain, rip off, ripoff, waste, free, donation, budget, payment, paid, pay

#### Theme 6: Safety & Security

**Theme ID:** safety\_security

**What It Measures:** Visitor perceptions of personal safety, security measures, and risk levels at the site or destination

**Weight:** 1.0 (standard)  
**Applies To:** All stakeholder types

**Complete Keyword List (25 keywords)**

safe, safety, security, dangerous, danger, risk, risky, crime, guard, secure, protection, protect, threat, threatening, hazard, precaution, unsafe, insecure, theft, steal, robber, robbery, police, emergency, fear

#### Theme 7: Educational & Informational Value

**Theme ID:** educational\_value

**What It Measures:** Quality of learning opportunities, depth of information provided, effectiveness of interpretation and exhibits

**Weight:** 1.0 (standard)  
**Applies To:** All stakeholder types

**Complete Keyword List (30 keywords)**

learn, learning, educational, education, information, informative, exhibit, exhibition, explanation, explain, knowledge, knowledgeable, teach, teaching, insight, discover, understand, understanding, interpretation, label, plaque, display, museum, gallery, tour, presentation, fact, detail, detailed, description

#### Theme 8: Artistic & Creative Quality

**Theme ID:** artistic\_creative

**What It Measures:** Quality of artistic expression, creativity, aesthetic appeal, and craftsmanship

**Weight:** 1.0 (standard)  
**Applies To:** All stakeholder types

**Complete Keyword List (33 keywords)**

art, artistic, creative, creativity, beautiful, beauty, crafts, craftsman, craftsmanship, design, aesthetic, gallery, artist, artwork, collection, masterpiece, piece, visual, handmade, hand made, music, musical, performance, perform, show, display, colorful, vibrant, sculpture, paint,

painting, draw, drawing

#### Theme 9: Atmosphere & Overall Experience

**Theme ID:** atmosphere\_experience

**What It Measures:** Overall visitor satisfaction, emotional resonance, memorable moments, and the holistic feel of the experience

**Weight:** 1.0 (standard)  
**Applies To:** All stakeholder types

**Complete Keyword List (28 keywords)**

atmosphere, ambiance, experience, feeling, vibe, overall, wonderful, fantastic, amazing, excellent, great, memorable, unforgettable, stunning, breathtaking, impressive, spectacular, remarkable, outstanding, superb, brilliant, fabulous, magnificent, extraordinary, exceptional, incredible, awesome, perfect

#### Theme Detection Process

**STEP 1: Text Preprocessing**

Raw Review → Lowercase Conversion → Punctuation Normalization → Ready for Scanning

**STEP 2: Keyword Scanning**

Scan normalized text for all 200+ keywords across all 9 themes

**STEP 3: Theme Presence Determination**

If ≥1 keyword match found → Theme marked as PRESENT

Count total keyword matches → Theme frequency score

**STEP 4: Context Validation**

Check 50-character window around each keyword match

Filter out false positives (promotional text, unrelated contexts)

**STEP 5: Quality Check**

Verify consistency across stakeholder types

Validate against manual coding sample