

Sustainable Tourism Reflected in the Media

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis reported on sustainable tourism in the media by analyzing articles from several news sources and travel blogs from January 1, 1980- August 1, 2022, that cover the topic. 88 articles were evaluated in this study, from news sources and travel blogs that featured topics on or related to sustainable tourism. The history of sustainability and tourism, as well as the rise of technology is uncovered via this thesis that plays into the image of sustainable tourism today. The academic findings on sustainable tourism appear to be very slight in the time period of this study which makes this thesis an important and interesting starting point for future studies. Two research questions were examined while doing this: how is sustainable tourism framed via the articles analyzed and which sources were used on this topic? To find out how sustainable tourism is framed as well as the sources used on the topic, this study used textual analysis to uncover these questions.

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## Introduction

It is beyond question that COVID-19 has had tremendous negative effects on society (Farzan, 2020). However, in the midst of this historical event, something amazing and unaccounted for happened. In the course of the initial weeks of quarantine, people globally were trying to figure out how to spend their time in lockdown with their new remote lifestyle and nonexistent travel plans. In the meantime, nature and wildlife began to make an appearance as if reclaiming their rightful spot after hiding for years (Taylor, 2020). Sightings of deer roaming around on city streets and the murky water in the canals of Venice once again running clear, contribute to the numerous examples of natural changes that took place during lockdown (Taylor, 2020; “Why are the Venice canals so dirty?”, 2022). The lack of inhabitants traveling has had a profound effect on nature and is telling to what the effects of human activity can do to limit this Earth. While the pandemic was catastrophic to our society, it was at least eye-opening to how easily our ecosystem can change.

Just a few years later, airports are once more buzzing with eager travelers (“Travel Trends 2022”, 2022). Tourism is reverting back into a chaotic overcrowded state, and canals in Venice are dirty again. This study will look at how the media frames sustainable tourism from news stories and travel blogs and articles. Framing, which describes the main idea or story line that provides context to certain events, will be integral to this thesis (Cruikshank, 2018). To examine this, news sources such as *New York Times* and *USA Today* will be used. Along with

these sources, travel blogs and articles will be used as secondary sources to fully examine how sustainable tourism is framed.

## **History of Travel**

For centuries, people have been traveling for various reasons. Tourism began with the ancient Roman and Greek Empires with their quest of cultural exploration, though it was more out of necessity than leisure. The exploits of these empires helped shape the image of travel and tourism that is ubiquitous today (Estayo, 2014). Over the centuries, there have been varying attitudes towards travelling depending on status and culture. In the modern United States, vacations that were meant for leisure were originally enjoyed solely by the wealthy.

The modern idea of tourism can be traced back to 1841 Great Britain, to the famous tourism mogul Thomas Cook. One can see a shift from traveling out of necessity to traveling for leisure during this period. This shift was easily facilitated by the burgeoning modes of travel beginning with the steamboat and passenger trains. Cook acted as a travel agent and created the first trip around the world, and soon after more efficient types of transportation came to fruition (Estayo, 2014).

During the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, wealthier families enjoyed the perks of vacations, while it was not in the routine of the middle- or lower-class Americans. Travel was quite elite at this time and the impoverished majority did not partake. For example, if you wanted to travel to the Rockies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, you had to buy a train ticket that was generally afforded only by an elite group of people, and find accommodation in which there were very few affordable options; “that was the whole point, that it was exclusive” (Hartman, 2016).

At the turn of the next century, more hotels were being built and airplanes entered the scene, making travel much faster, but even more elite. The travel market at this time was steadily enjoyed by the wealthy, with no cheaper alternatives or innovations until after the Great Depression (Estayo, 2014). However, by the mid-1990s, the travel scene began to shift. Automobile sales boomed in the mid-1990s making travel easier than ever, employers were ceremoniously encouraging their employees to take paid vacations, and marketing for industries related to tourism were at the forefront of advertising (Hartman, 2016). In addition, commercial air transportation was increasing and becoming cheaper so the middle class could finally travel by air. Aircrafts continued to get bigger and more reliable over the next few decades which drew in larger groups of travelers (Estayo, 2014). Mass media tourism promotion mainly funded by the big money-making companies of that time, including car and oil companies, motel chains, local chambers of commerce. Publicly funded tourism boards also became ubiquitous in the United States as everyone wanted to cash in on exploding the tourism sector. These well-funded promotion tactics made traveling magnetic to the middle class in America” (Hartman, 2016). Since traveling in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century depended chiefly on fossil fuels, the focus on sustainable tourism did not appear until later when the effects became more pronounced (See Figure 1). Today, tourism is so substantial a market that it contains niche markets such as historical tourism or ecotourism (“Textbook Travel”, n.d.).

The spark of awareness for the earth and sustainability begins in the 1960s, and accelerated through the 1970s when many acts were created to protect the environment (Stofleth, 2015; “History of Sustainability”, 2018) (See Figure 1). In 1987, the Brundtland Commission of the United Nations defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

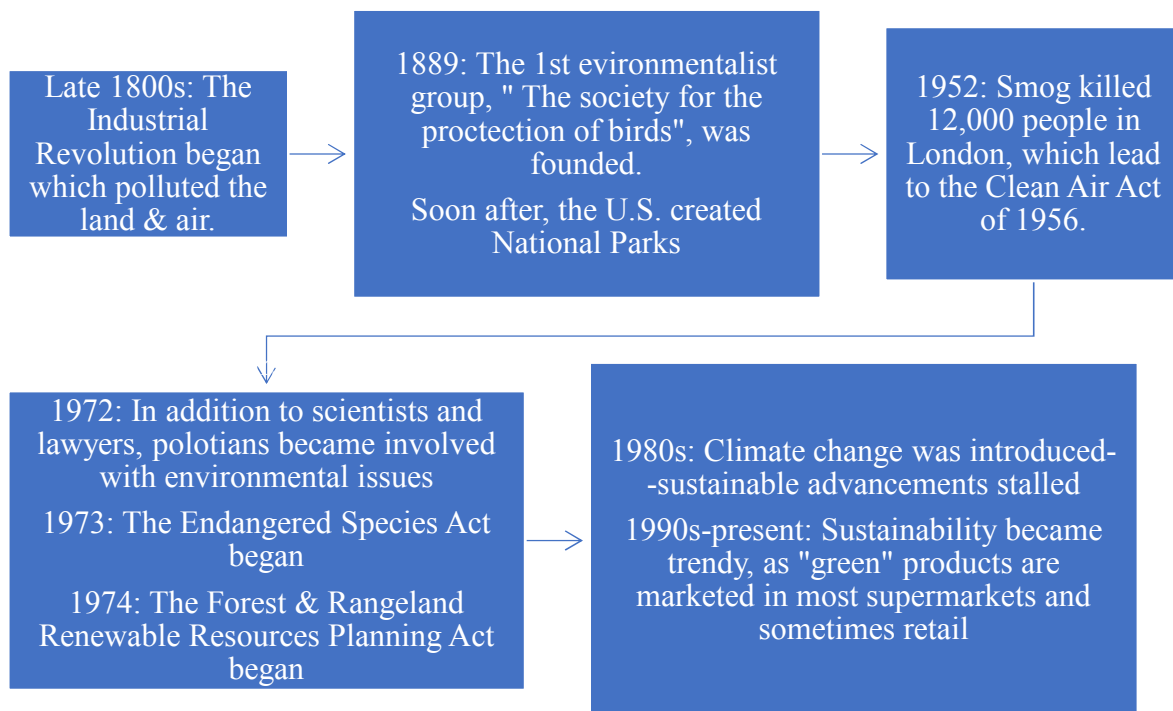
(“Worldenergy”, 2014). From the 1970s until the late 1980s, the sustainability developments stayed loyal to the targets specified by the Brundtland Commission and seemed to be on an uphill trajectory, until the efforts plateaued when climate change became eminent (“History of Sustainability”, 2018).

In 2007-2008 articles started to pop up that were in favor of sustainable tourism by showcasing green travel tips and wider awareness on the topic (Howard, 2008; “Next destination: Sustainable tourism”, 2007). Articles like these are continually being published more than a decade later. Topics like, differentiating between green and greenwashed, incorporating paper straws in roadside restaurants, hotels changing their menu to reduce fossil fuels, how to sustainably travel on a budget, and even narrowing down the greenest colleges are examples of topics that have been seen in new articles in the past decade (Klink, 2010; Laban, 2021; Zlati, 2018; Kanter, 2008; McClanahan, 2021; Peterson, 2017).



**Figure 1**

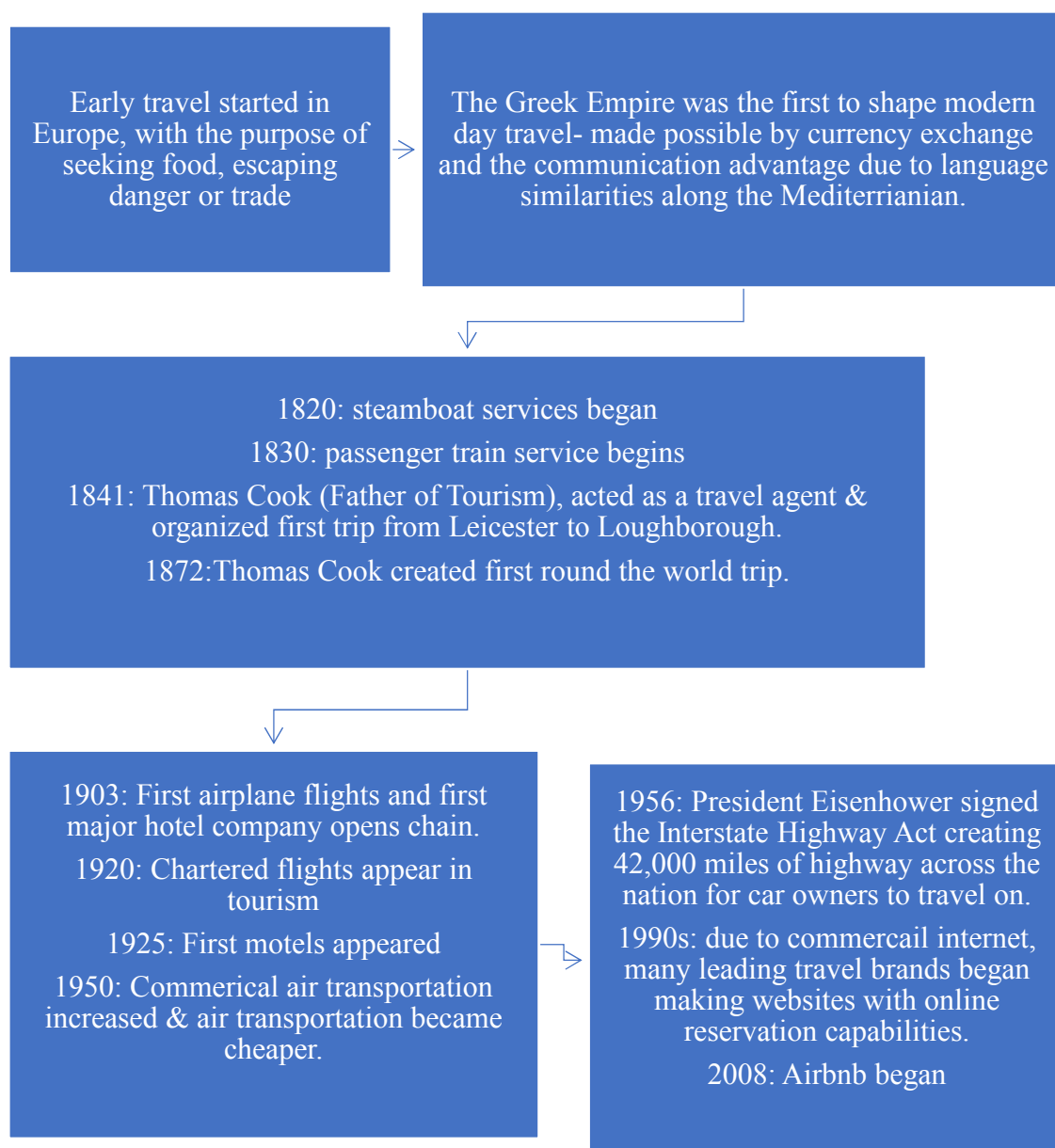
### Timeline of Sustainability



Below is a more concise timeline of tourism. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

## Timeline of Tourism



## **Rise of Technology**

During the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840), the railway systems and mass transportation were in full swing, these developments were somewhat like a catalyst for the extra innovations that would come along with the Industrial Revolution (Mcfadden, 2020). Along with this revolution, many things such as: entertainment, convenience, and communications technologies first appeared, all of which helped to set a canvas for tourism (Michael et al, n.d.).

This thesis is concerned with sustainable tourism, in which technology plays a huge role (Michael et al, 2020; “Electric Transportation”, 2017; King, 2014; Haupt, 2019). The invention of telephones, for example, filled the communication gap amongst families who were separated by travel (Borth, n.d.). This invention facilitated comfort for the duration of the travels. Before communication innovations arose, certain tourists simply did not take part in travels due to the uncertainty that it would bring. However, telephones fixed this problem by making contact accessible to anyone despite geographic location. There was a rapid spike with overseas travel and coincidentally with transatlantic calls in the mid-1900s, resulting in telephone traffic increasing heavily from 1.7 million calls in 1955 to 3.7 million in 1960 (Borth, n.d.).

Tourism would not be as successful a market if transportation did not play a part in the process. Due to the transportation innovations over the years, tourism has blossomed and made it easier for non-elite populations to enjoy traveling. Before it was common for the middle class to own automobiles, mass transportation, such as trains were widely used. After the phenomena of mass transportation came about, middle and working class could travel more easily, making it a common occurrence.

In the 1920s, automobiles became fundamental in the tourism industry. Those with the funds and time available utilized motels, service stations and roadside restaurants that came as perks created for owners of automobiles. The popularity of buying automobiles grew substantially in the mid-1900s, mainly due to the bulk tourism promotions and marketing done by car and oil companies (Hartman, 2016). Since automobiles were a new invention, engineers were continually looking for possible improvements. For example, the mechanics and engineers had to worry about safety, emission of pollutants, energy consumption, and competition among other countries automobile brands (Automobile History, 2018).

### ***Travel in the Digital Era***

A good portion of technological advancements can be correlated to matters of sustainable tourism (King, 2014; Haupt, 2019). For instance, within the vein of communication and travel, airports have taken an electronic turn by increasing their mobile phone-oriented services (Haupt, 2019). Today, airports have adopted mobile boarding passes as part of their check in process, as well as biometric recognition in certain airports eliminating the need for documents and drastically decreasing paper usage (Haupt, 2019). This has helped airport processes create less waste. Airlines additionally have created apps that store check-in information, and keep passengers in the loop about cancellations, delays, early arrivals etc.

There are many ways that smartphone-oriented services can help when traveling. For example, if the vacation destination includes an amusement park that has long wait times, certain apps can inform one on long wait times. More importantly, the GPS on a cell phone is extremely helpful when traveling anywhere, but especially in a new place. An old-fashioned map still works, but a GPS takes the unneeded stress out of navigation and can also give updates on traffic jams and wrecks that may be encountered on the way (Haupt, 2019). Social media apps such as

Twitter, can make the gap between people and big companies feel smaller by allowing the ability to direct message anyone. If a travel woe is occurring with a specific airline, for example, chances are you can contact that airline via Twitter and get their attention much faster than waiting for a customer service representative to answer the phone (“When Is the Right Time to Call Out a Company on Social Media?”, 2015).

Currently, innovations such as autonomous vehicles, alternative fuels, and keyless cars are helping ecological initiatives. Electric cars are becoming increasingly popular. Charging electric vehicles is cheaper than filling up gas, and these vehicles that “run on clean energy are essential to reducing the use of fossil fuels” (“Sources of Greenhouse Gas Emissions” n.d.). There are currently 5.6 million electric vehicles being used worldwide, and that number seems to be going up (Kopestinsky, 2021).

New forms of travel are continually emerging with the help of technology in the digital era. The travel scene from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century up until the 2010s had the same standard look. Maybe a beach vacation, for instance, in which families would book stays at a motel, hotel or stay with family; no deviation from accommodation of that nature (Haupt, 2019). For decades, travel seemed to be at a steady standstill with no innovation, until a breakthrough happened. New and cost-effective ways of booking vacation rentals took storm. Technology and tourism worked together to facilitate a world of travel information online so while beach vacations are still popular, more remote and unknown vacation destinations are being sought out. As traditional travel habits became less popular and the exploration of new untraveled destinations began, an important step in sustainable tourism emerged (Haupt, 2019).

### ***Online Travel Marketplaces***

Online travel marketplaces such as Airbnb are renowned and thriving today. When these marketplaces were being proposed, however, they caused quite a quandary. The idea of strangers staying in other people's homes was a strange concept to many people and investors at the time. Within the first year of operation, the most stays per week was 80, but soon after it dropped down below 10 again (Sinusoid, 2021). However, this development is the most sustainable choice in comparison to hotels or motels, and shown to be the more affordable choice allowing more people to travel ("8 Reasons Airbnb is More Sustainable than Hotels", n.d.)

Airbnb is the pioneer of online travel marketplaces and the first of many similar entities that have appeared on the scene (Aydin, 2019). The concept of Airbnb began in 2007 when Joe Gebbia and Brian Chesky needed money for rent in San Francisco, CA. Gebbia, the Airbnb founder, and Chesky, the CEO and co-founder, met in college at the Rhode Island School of Design. When they found out there was a design conference in the area, the idea of hosting some of the attendees arose.

To make their initiative attractive to the intended target group they set out to make it a designer's bed and breakfast, complete with Wi-Fi, air mattresses, desk space, fair pricing, and breakfast each morning. Soon after, they launched the website [airbedandbreakfast.com](http://airbedandbreakfast.com), and with the vision of how successful this website could be, they added Nathan Blecharczyk, who became another co-founder, to help make it into a business ("Nathan Blecharczyk", 2015).

Airbnb displays a victory born from many failures and years of rejection. The company started with three men and three air mattresses and has now acquired world recognition. The company's journey from modest beginnings to final success was long. They launched

airbedandbreakfast.com in 2008 at South by Southwest (SXSW), a technology conference, with very little recognition. They relaunched a few more times throughout the years, but to no avail. In their attempt to gain investors, they were left with eight rejections and seven investors did not even bother to respond to them. The determination to see the company succeed was not dimmed, and their urgency to come up with marketing strategies to spread awareness of the business increased. They sold creative cereal boxes called Obama O's with a comedic caricature of Barack Obama on it, which contained information about the business within (Schafer, 2019).

Venture capitalist Paul Graham came into the picture and offered them a spot at the Y Combinator, which is a startup accelerator that gives cash and training in exchange for a small part of the company. A venture capital (VC) investment was a risky option for them because while VCs can offer entrepreneurial guidance and funding for companies, they also require giving up equity and can lead to a loss of company control. It is also a leap of faith for Paul Graham to take an interest in their company because 90% of startups fail, so a big growth potential must be predicted (Goodshore, 2019). After spending three months at this startup accelerator the rejections continued. While staying optimistic, the Airbnb originators decided to visit their hosts in NYC and stay with them, write reviews and professionally photograph their places. In March 2009, they changed the name airbedandbreakfast to Airbnb, making the nod to air bed's a little less aggressive. These improvements gained them an investor from Sequoia Capital, in April 2009 (Aydin, 2019).

From 2009-2011, Airbnb was on the uphill trajectory, with its presence in 89 countries and 1 million nights booked. They even won break out mobile app award at South-by-South West (SXSW), an annual conglomeration of parallel film, interactive media, and music festivals and conferences, which is a full circle triumph compared to the meek launch at SXSW in 2008

(“South by Southwest”, n.d.). Airbnb was nicknamed unicorn in Silicon Valley due to its success and unique story. The company was in a comfortable place, but along with this came another set of issues. There were problems with guests trashing the hosts homes, and many regulation battles due to eviction and other issues. Airbnb had room for a \$1 million coverage policy for hosts who endured damages from guests. The regulation battles continued, and many cities wanted to stop short term renting (Goodshore, 2019).

Certain launches that have occurred since 2016 have elevated the travel experience for people specific to what their preference is when on vacation. Some people love to explore new destinations like a local, which is why the 2016 launch of unique activities hosted by locals would suit that group. Alternatively, the group of people that value relaxation and comfort as their top priority were probably delighted to hear about the 2018 launch of Airbnb Plus, which includes homes that have been personally verified for quality and comfort (Jet, 2018).

Airbnb also took the reins on other travel platforms when they acquired control of Luxury Retreats in 2017, which is a luxury vacation rental company, and HotelTonight in 2019, which is an app and website that helps people book last minute hotel reservations (“HotelTonight vs Airbnb”, 2019).

New innovations such as Airbnb could not be done without technology. Technology plays a huge part in tourism while also making it sustainable. First, access to the internet, whether it is through a smartphone application or on the desktop format, is a necessity when booking a vacation. If local experiences and/or off the grid locations are what you search for, the internet facilitates these actions. With the help of technology, we are open to a whole world of travel information at our fingertips (Haupt, 2019).



## Rise of Sustainability

The journey of tourism known today from the inception of travel to now, has seen vast improvements and transformation (Haupt, 2019). For example, booking trips online, as well as options to research and look at reviews about the trip/destination are easily accessible. The improvements are also apparent when looking at ease of transportation, communication, the efficiency of time, and the compassion seen from leaders on these issues (“Why the Automotive Future is Electric”, n.d.; “Sustainable Tourism”, 2016; Borth, n.d.). The Hawaii Tourism Authority’s (2020) mission hits on a compassionate side of tourism that aligns with evolving sustainable practices which strives to manage Hawaiian tourism in a manner consistent with economic goals, cultural values, preservation of natural resources, community desires and visitor industry needs. The key purpose of this goal is to improve the quality of life for residents and communities across the state, instead of solely looking at tourism as a cash grab. This notion started to shift when Covid-19 started to calm down and naturally, visitors started traveling again. The tourism leaders of Hawaii Tourism Authority plan to implement teaching moments for visitors to be sustainably responsible. They state that the strategizing of a regenerative economy that values cultural sustainability is currently undertow with a “more mature, post-pandemic tourism based on native Hawaiian values [such as malama (caring) and kuleana (responsibility)] (Hawaii Tourism Authority, 2020).”

The compassion may be there, but creating a sustainable environment does not come without its challenges. Technology and communication practices have indeed evolved since the inception of sustainable touristic implementations, but damaging effects continue to ensue. Coal that was formerly used to power trains still has a negative impact on the environment. Additionally, the gas used to power cars has similar damaging effects (Michael et al, n.d.). Those

examples are just a few among a pool of fossil fuels, pollutants, and other factors that are impacting our planet negatively and (Nuwer, 2012).

These problems initially arose at the start of the Industrial Revolution in the late 1800s, with factory outputs polluting the land and air. Around this time, the first environmentalist groups appeared. These groups were a “far cry from the global environmental movement we know today, but they were the beginning of what would become something bigger, a desire to protect the planet we love” (History of Sustainability, 2018). This idea evolved into the 1970s environmentalism which is mainly about protecting wild land, “romanticizing the wilderness, and making the average person want to protect these spaces” (History of Sustainability, 2018). Having said that, when studies came out about the harmful effects of pollutants many people began turning their gaze outward, from preservation to protection (History of Sustainability, 2018).

The Clean Air Act of 1956 was made in reaction to the air pollution, but to no avail. The pollution continued along with pesticides and other factors that were starting to impact the globe. The 1970s showed great societal care towards sustainability, and many notable benchmarks were created, including: Earth Day, NRDC (a group of hundreds of lawyers and scientists with a passion for sustainability) was formed, and the UN Environment Summit got the attention of politicians to narrow in on this global issue. Unfortunately, the developments stalled after the 1970s when climate change was added to the list (History of Sustainability, 2018).

In the 1990s, the environment was a main concern for society. In response, more media content turned to information about the eminent harm that will be done to the planet if nothing is changed (“1990 IPCC Report Successfully Predicted Warming, New Study Shows,” 2012; Landsberg, 1989; Manjoo, 2021). For example, *The Baltimore Sun Company* cited eco-worries in

a news article about the reefs in Belize dying, in hopes for a change (Howard, 1992). More recently, businesses began going “green” as it is an increasingly trendy thing to do as customers are willing to pay more for green products and hotels. For example, some hotels are ramping up sustainable efforts by incorporating “smart showers” that limit one’s shower to 7 minutes (Suri, 2019). However, beyond being a trend, the environment continues to be something that people have compassion for. Some recent pop culture news surfaced when makeup mogul, Kylie Jenner’s plane usage leaked, with many news headlines and onlookers angered by her 3-minute flights that are contributing to the carbon footprint. Many other celebrities are also being blamed for similar behavior (Yu, 2022).

### ***Pandemic’s Impact***

Marketing adapts and evolves constantly, not only with each generation, but also with the changing of time regarding the current ethical and environmental climate. For this reason, it is necessary to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on this topic and how tourism has changed and will be restored after COVID-19, as this pandemic was/is a means for global adaptation. One instance marketing has changed due to the pandemic is the acceleration of communication towards a fully digital realm (De et al., 2020). During the beginning few months of the pandemic, many people were daydreaming of the day when they can travel freely again after quarantining for many weeks. This period of isolation when travel was at an all-time low was a time in which many sustainable tourism messages were pushed (Martin-Rios, 2020). Throughout the next couple years, full travel freedom was unpredictable due to borders opening and closing in accordance with the CDC’s advancing guidelines (Rasbach, 2022). Despite the unpredictable travel climate over the last couple years, the influx of sustainable tourism media messages results

in many people wanting to travel again with “mindfulness and respect for the Earth [as] part of the journey” (Marcus et al., 2022).

In Summer 2022, tourists were excited to travel again after travel unpredictability and bans due to COVID-19 were lifting. Destinations like Hawaii, for example, noticed this with full gusto as tourists were abundant and the small islands began to reach capacity. In a post pandemic world, these old tourism methods that put competition at the forefront and highlight income as the biggest source of happiness have already begun to change (Sheldon, 2021).

## **Literature Review**

### ***Digital Impact on Sustainable Tourism***

Literature on the topic of sustainable tourism is very slight before the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The existing studies done on the connection between media and its impact on sustainable tourism are very limited (Popesku, 2014; Vecchio, 2018; Sharmin, 2021). For example, Sharmin (2021) states that many of these studies claim that the patterns of travel have been seen for a long time but remain understudied, with social media being the biggest and growing source. For that reason, it is of interest to look at how media currently represents sustainable tourism. Currently research has tended towards adopting the role of digital media platforms as the prime promoter and media source of tourism destinations (Yamagishi et al, 2021). Because sustainable tourism is more of a modern phenomenon, most of the studies in this section are in tandem with social media or rather modern digital media as the main sources of information (Yamagishi et al., 2021; Linnes et al., 2021; Marti-Parreno et al, 2020).

The sustainable side of tourism was not in the forefront of people’s mind before the digital era, but has now become a bigger point of discussion (Azeez, 2021). There was simply not

enough widespread information on the topic. Prior to the internet being the main source of travel information, the most utilized way to discover tourism and the boundaries of what one can get out of a vacation was through brick-and-mortar travel agencies. Due to tourism-related information on the internet, customers are becoming more knowledgeable about vacation offers and request higher quality services and promotional packages from travel companies. Yang, Chiang, Cheng, and Huang (2014) state that, “because of customer autonomy [due to digital information platforms] and the high frequency of customer-to-customer interaction, service firms are losing control of consumer activities” (p. 412-413).

An additional consequence of tourism promotion methods is a higher degree of concern about matters of sustainable tourism. In this respect, digital media plays a key role, as it holds the power to influence societal behaviors through text and image. This can be positive or negative for tourists depending on whether the message from the media source contains adequate information. For example, “in the case of creating awareness of tourism destinations this in turn may have adverse effects on the environment and sustainable tourism” (Swarbrooke, 1999, p. 135). Media messages that promote certain destinations may not take into consideration all the factors that help those destinations thrive. For example, excess development of tourism can cause noise pollution in places that can disrupt wildlife and/or hibernating animals. Related worries involve congestion, possibly resulting in disruption of healthy natural habitats and affecting the food chain, greenhouse gas emission, soil, and vegetable degradation (Park, Lee, Lee, & Reisinger, 2022). On the other hand, creating awareness of sustainability and tourism via television shows, documentaries, or emotionally visual advertisements, can influence viewers to have a stronger level of concern for the environment when it comes to travel. The media shown will most likely get their point across with more potency if the content is captivating as well as informational,

which can lead to a stimulating viewing experience that contributes to education about environmental matters (Dunn, 2007).

Both travel media and non-travel media can deliver insight into the problems that populations are experiencing with sustainable tourism. For instance, the travel media sources deal with topics such as: overlooking host communities, overcrowding of tourists, and conflict of interest due to trips paid for by companies. Similarly, non-travel media has their share of relevant topics such as: reports on civil unrest resulting in loss of money and jobs for the host community as well as increasing demand for destinations with fragile ecosystems (Dunn, 2007). Both information sources work in tandem to explain a destination's climate, culture and overall presence in society.

### ***Marketing***

Digital media (such as social media) brings forth a plethora of data from tourists, documenting their travel experiences, which allows innovators to assess the sustainable success in certain destinations (Vecchio et al., 2018). New information about sustainable tourism at a large variety of destinations can be gleaned from social media posts generated by tourists. Tourism marketing in the media is portrayed mostly by travel writer's blogs, social media posts and advertisements. As an alternate information source some tourists turn to travel influencers, as a reliable source for travel inquires. Due to the high numbers of followers that these influencers have, their travel advice or suggestions can be viewed as more credible (Nadlifatin, 2022). Since there are not as many known portrayals beyond those categories, the timeliness and high level of current interest in sustainable tourism makes this an interesting and important topic of study (Sharmin, 2021).

As Vecchio (2018) states “The competitiveness of tourism destinations is based on the destination’s capacity to continuously attract tourists by offering a high quality and unique experiences, ensuring benefits for stakeholders, local community and the territory and in doing so enabling sustainable development” (p. 2). The tourism industry, like other industries, is constantly evolving to find the next unique competitive advantage that will benefit themselves and others involved.

Technological improvements are a contributor to continuing tourism growth. They do not only increase the number of tourists, but also enable access to more vulnerable and remote destinations (Sharpley, 2000). Digital sources are an integral part of touristic advertising, which has enabled travelers to become aware of less visited destinations. Azeez (2021) states that social media is the best tool that has seriously changed the tourism industry and, in addition, it is “the ease of use that social media platforms offer along with the decline of the technology barriers, that have made it possible for average travelers to contribute to the information being shared in the internet” (p. 912). This has drastically influenced how tourists get their travel information and who they trust or find credible in this digital realm (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013).

The reason sources such as social media can be influential to many is because it is universally accessible and has the ability to reach people from all different types of cultures and backgrounds (Sharmin et al., 2021). As Renjith, Sreekumara and Jathavedan (2020) state, many industries including travel and tourism, have evolved and attracted a wider audience which is in part due to online promotion. Technology of this sort is key especially because the necessary information would have difficulty reaching the target group or any specific group, if online promotion were not put into place (Renjith, 2020). People are the necessary ingredient needed to keep the message of sustainable actions and tourism alive, so it is important to get the right

information to the correct target group, willing to engage in promotional efforts. This information and how it is presented looks different for each generation.

Digital media platforms are the most recent form of technology created to connect audiences with knowledge on important matters, such as civic engagement, political participation, and global activism, to name a few (Robertson, 2018). In addition, the rate at which digital media content can go viral is higher than other media, which in turn can potentially influence viewers on a global scale (Sharmin et al., 2021). For example, viewers in Japan and Canada can watch an advertisement on Instagram simultaneously. Virality is a fairly new concept and one that can be influential and highly beneficial to the mission of advancing sustainability (Bielski, 2018). If content goes viral, it is more likely to be unanimously known among peers. Previously, messages created to engage and get the attention of a wide audience would yield no immediate reaction from the public, but now people can respond in real time. These advancements towards a digitalized world over the past couple decades have shaped communication and given a voice to social media users who have now more direct access to issues than ever before (Bruer, 2011).

If one looks up sustainable tourism on a social media platform, chances are that there will be a slew of travel advertisements depicting scenes of nature or secluded and minimalistic accommodation. Another source of sustainable tourism recommendations can be followers pictorially reviewing their vacation experiences in a certain destination, which can be a form of indirect marketing (Bruer, 2011). Tourists may look at information from social media posted by like-minded people in their social circle such as friends, family, coworkers, classmates etc. to aid in their decision making for the whole duration of their travels, from start to finish (Azeez, 2021).



Yamagishi et. al. (2021) noted the importance of social media marketing by saying, “This work builds upon the argument that sustainable tourism (ST) agenda and initiatives can be integrated alongside the traditional competitive mission of social media marketing as a communications strategy of tourism stakeholders” (p. 2). So far, it is known that social media must be seen as a global phenomenon in which most of the world partakes in. However, the amount of social media use in different age groups varies. While some generations heavily rely on social media the usage of these media declines with age, as borne out by recent studies (Hysa et al., 2021).

### **Framing Theory**

Entman (1993) defines framing analysis as, “a method commonly employed by researchers to demonstrate how media texts are constructed by ‘... selecting and highlighting some features of reality while omitting others’ “(p.53). In framing, audiences’ attention can also be swayed and additionally skewed depending on how media delivers its message. Framing can be presented as two ways of viewing the same thing, or talking or thinking about it (Chen, 2022; Bhatti, 2022; Aldalala’a, 2022). These “different presentations of essentially identical decision-making scenarios influence people’s choices” (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2020, p.11). In addition, this theory comprises a set of concepts and theoretical perspectives on how individuals, groups, and societies organize, perceive, and communicate about reality.

Framing can be separated into two forms: media and audience frames. Media frames will be the form used in this thesis and can be defined as the central story line that provides context to a certain event (Cruikshank, 2018, p. 222). Audience frames require information on viewers preconceived notions on certain topics which will determine how they interpret the meaning of

the stories. These particular frames are outside the scope of this study. This thesis will look at different examples of frames using an inductive approach. Based on the methodology, the relevant frames will emerge during the analysis.

### ***Framing of the Mining Boom***

Following framing theory, people get their sense of which interpretive frame applies to a message from framing cues embedded in the message. Starting with a specific example, a prominent issue that Australia has faced in the last decade is the conflict between the mining boom and the tourism industry, both of which are substantial industries on the continent (McLennan et al, 2014). This conflict has been portrayed in the media with two frames. One highlights the consequences of the mining industry's infringement of tourism. The other frame combats this notion by prioritizing the necessity of mining (McLennan, Becken & Moyle, 2014). The two affect Australia's industrial competitiveness and leads to a two-speed economy. The tourism industry is experiencing unevenly distributed rates of growth due to the resurgence in mining. In addition to economic issues, the effects of the mining boom have, "often been in places of iconic tourism status intertwined with national identity (e.g., the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu National Park), protected areas and indigenous communities (Haalboom, 2012); and has at times been at the expense of the environment, communities and other sectors" (McLennan et al, 2014, p. 962).

Out of a pool of 265 online newspaper articles that incorporated mining and tourism in their headline or body of text, 183 articles were pro tourism while only 84 were pro mining. The consensus is that news stories have more consideration for a sustainable tourism industry than the mining industry. In this case, the readers of the articles will most likely discover tourism in a

more favorable light because of the framing of the articles which is more sympathetic towards the tourism industry stating mining as the “prominent issue” (McLennan et al., 2017). However, due to both industries being essential to Australia, public statements that suggest the co-existence of mining and tourism in Australia might be beneficial. (McLennan et al., 2017)

### ***Framing Tourists' Perceptions***

In an article depicting the representation of Maya culture through the lens of travel and tourism, a couple of frames take shape. There is a discrepancy between two tropes of touristic promotional media within Maya's culture, specifically in Quetzaltenaga, Guatemala. The first frame deals with imagery that is homogenous to that of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and draw tourists in by highlighting the historical and indigenous attractions. The second frame deems that the commercial framings of Maya culture are disrupting the authenticity of the local actors in Quetzaltenaga and native Mayans are trying to uphold a more sincere view in the global tourism market. Tourism promotion of Maya culture tends to reiterate the commercial portrayal of the Maya culture (Tegelberg, 2013). Local actors are remedying this by using online media to promote themselves to tourists and illuminate the differences in “how tourism marketers and local actors package Maya culture for global consumption” (Tegelberg, 2013, p. 81).

Other studies also highlight how tourists' perceptions can be skewed in a different way. Hansen (2020) investigated how tourism is framed differently in Copenhagen from 2017-2019 by looking at 225 Danish newspaper stories. The frames focused on in this study deals with things like: responsibility, social conflict, social enrichment, environment/climate, human interest factors, commercial economic, and destination branding within Copenhagen. Subsequently, the implications that followed were: spreading of tourists, tourist education,

restriction on number of tourists, ways to attract more tourists, behavioral restrictions, and fewer tourist activities. These themes and implications are mainly negative in 2017-2018 with news stories highlighting overcrowding, but a framing shift is seen in 2019. The travel guide publisher Lonely Planet appointed Copenhagen as the top city to travel to in 2019, which attracted wide attention from Danish media. This appointment reduced demand for restrictions on tourist numbers. The proudness and greatness that Copenhagen had to offer via the coverage from Lonely Planet curbed many civilians' views towards a pro-tourism attitude (Hansen, 2020).

### ***Too Many Tourists***

Tanford, Kim, and Kim, (2020) studied framing in the context of a hotel campaign used to promote green practices and attract people with like environmental intentions. The frames found in this scenario were by social media advertisements which depicted the hotel promoting environmental practices or preventing harmful effects done to the environment. The advertisements incorporated cause related marketing (CRM) in hopes to pull the emotional strings of the customers they would like to attract (Tanford, Kim & Kim, 2020). However, this could become an issue if the advertisements attract too many people, even if they have the best environmental intentions.

Ongoing tourist visitation to destinations can be applauded in certain situations. The tourists can help with the economic sustainability of that destination, and also create pride for the inhabitants due to the popularity of the destination (Park, Lee, Lee & Reisinger, 2022; Linnes, Itoga, Agrusa, & Lema, 2021). However, not all destinations have the capacity to accommodate a large influx of tourists, or tolerate tourists that are not culturally aligned with the destination. Some news stories frame booming tourist towns as negative due to an uproar from the host

inhabitants. An instance where this happens often occurs when movie fans desire to visit the place where a popular cinematic feature was established. For example, in the aftermath of the film creation of *Mama Mia!* (2008), the tiny airport in the Northern Sporades Island complex, Greece, was and remains to be packed with tourists from all over the world with hopes to visit specific locations from the film. However, over time the stones from the Grecian beaches began to dwindle as tourists would bring them home as souvenirs, and consequently, would compromise the environment of that destination (Tzanelli, 2020). Public complaints from the inhabitants on the beaches led to news stories, such as this one created and a negative frame that led to inhospitable attitudes and further complaints of cinematic tourist incivility. This reaction also led to more attention pertaining to the hosts' ecoaesthetic needs. Similar disruptions happened with the destinations inspired by the films/television shows *Game of Thrones* (2011-19), and *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-03).

In this scenario, cinema induced tourism is framed in order to get the message across that tourism can disrupt certain environments and violate hosts indigenous habitats. Cinematic tourists are even reduced to "parasites invading local ecologies...without consideration of the ways local or indigenous material life broadcasts its own cultures" (Tzanelli, 2020, p. 1266). Tzanelli states that situations like these created an *ecoaesthetic partition* that supports anti-cinematic-tourist activism by hosts who view tourist activity as (uncivil political) disruptive? behavior. However, in sociological terms, cinema induced tourism is a form of social action that can take the shape of aesthetic damage when in reality it is only perceived damage that tourism inflicts upon human and natural environments. There are some outlier situations in which visitors cause damage onto hosts and their environments, but the social action of cinema induced tourism is not as harrowing as it is framed and thus perceived (Tzanelli, 2020).

## Research Questions

This thesis will examine materials from the news sources: *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post* as well as travel articles and blogs to determine how sustainable tourism is framed in the media. By doing this, this thesis aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How is sustainable tourism framed in the media?

RQ2: What sources are used in sustainable tourism?

## Methodology

This study used a qualitative textual analysis in order to determine how sustainable tourism is framed in the media, as well as which sources are primarily used to talk about this topic. According to Fisher (2022), a textual analysis “involves examining the content, structure, and functions of messages contained in texts (i.e., unstructured data) based on linguistic theory” (p. 141-142). Researchers use a textual analysis to understand how people make meaning of texts (Rholetter, 2021). In this study, however, only media frames were considered with the aid of reoccurring themes found throughout new articles and travel blogs pertaining to sustainable tourism. The dates chosen for this study were from January 1, 1980 - August 1, 2022. This time period was chosen because tourism and sustainability have seen historically exponential advancements during this period, including environmental and social conciseness, digitalization, and unforeseen global issues such as COVID-19 (“The History of Sustainability”. 2018; Haupt, 2019; Brock, 2020).

This study includes various sources to hone in on the research questions provided by analyzing key words and recurring themes. In total, 88 sources have been found to be analyzed

for this thesis. This study utilized articles from *The New York Times* and *USA Today*, most frequently as they all contain travel sections and have the most salient headlines pertaining to the topic. Additional newspapers as well as travel blog will also be used for this study (*The Baltimore Sun Company, CNN Travel, HuffPost, LA Times, Washington Post, National Geographic, Medium, Marketplace, Tourism Review News, Government Technology, Environment America, McKinsey & Company, Policy Advice, EPA, Slideshare, Textbook Travel, Britannica, History, Interesting Engineering, Business.org, msn, Hawaii Tourism Authority, Honey Copy, MIC, Cheapism, Stonemaier Games, SXSW, and Forbes*). From the initial pool of 98 sources, 10 sources were discarded due to lack of relevant information or topics that were not specific enough to add value to this study. Each article displayed different aspects showcasing historical events pertaining to sustainable tourism beginning with the ancient empires pioneering travel, and spanning to current ecotourist and present-day sustainable agendas (Estayo, 2014). For example, the article “Family vacations can travel the road of sustainability”, by Julie Bielenberg (2021) highlights tips for practicing sustainable travel (such as shopping local), which is standard content for present day sustainable tourism articles (McClanahan, 2021; Peterson, 2017; Suri, 2019; Kanter, 2008; Zlati, 2018).

The data found showed that contemporary digital media, such as social media, is the main source of information on topics of sustainable tourism, and is a more beneficial mode of information than traditional media such as newspapers (Azeez, 2021; Popsku, 2014; Dunn, 2007; Vecchio, 2018; Sharmin, 2021; Yamagishi et al., 2021; Linnes et al, 2021; Roberston, 2018; Bielski, 2018; Renjith et al., 2020; Marti-Parreno et al., 2020). This study examines how using sources brought on by the digitalization of society leads to more autonomy, more communication and more control on the tourist’s end (Ming, 2014; Sharpley, 2000; Bruer, 2011). Certain age

groups are less likely to get their information from digital methods, so it is necessary to briefly look at non digital sources to test their salience or lack thereof (Hysa et al., 2021). Taking this into consideration, this study additionally examined how reliance on social media to get important messages across can be hazardous since not all social groups use them to the same extent, and the potentially harmful spreading of misinformation (Swarbrooke, 1999; Park et al., 2022; Chan-Olmsted, 2013). The focus was on a more detailed understanding of this digital route of communication showing the benefits and disadvantages of the sources used to talk about sustainable tourism.

A relevant study for the methodology employed for this thesis utilized news media to establish which frames were used. Specifically, the news media examined how the southern Sudan conflict was framed and what themes were conjured up via the coverage (Cruikshank, 2018). This study will do the same with examining which frames surround sustainable tourism. The article “Next destination: Sustainable tourism” (2007) is an earlier example of efforts to raise awareness of sustainable tourism, with many similar articles to follow (“Next destination”, 2007; Suri, 2019). Besides articles portraying sustainability, some other articles used keywords like overcrowding and greenwashed (Kanter, 2008; McClanahan, 2021; Manjoo 2021). Using these articles as a foundation, this thesis will seek to find out how sustainable tourism is framed, and which sources are used primarily to talk about sustainable tourism.

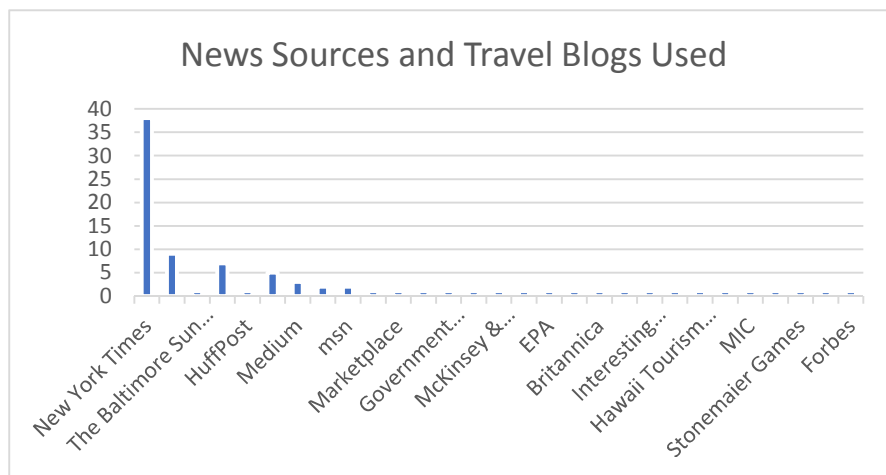
## **Results**

The findings for the results of this thesis were from the news sources: *New York Times*, *LA Times*, *USA Today*, *the Washington Post*, *The Baltimore Sun Company*, *Huff Post*, and *CNN*. Additionally, the following sources from travel blogs and articles were used: *National*



*Geographic, Medium, Marketplace, Tourism Review News, Government Technology, Environment America, McKinsey & Company, Policy Advice, EPA, Slideshare, Textbook Travel, Britannica, History, Interesting Engineering, Business.org, msn, Hawaii Tourism Authority, Honey Copy, MIC, Cheapism, Stonemaier Games, SXSW, and Forbes.* 38 articles were used from *The New York Times*, followed by *USA Today* (9), *CNN Travel* (7), *Washington Post* (5), *Medium* (3), *Textbook Travel* (2), and *msn* (2). The remaining sources each contained one article. These sources depicted information about or connected to sustainable tourism between January 1, 1980, and August 1, 2022. (See Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

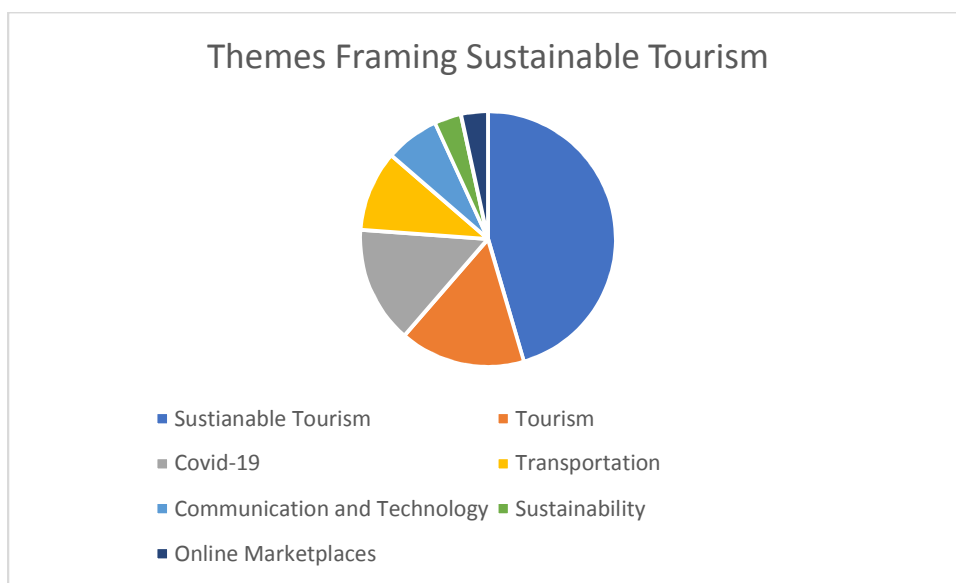


### ***Framing Sustainable Tourism***

Out of the 88 articles examined, 40 articles reported on the subject of sustainable tourism, 15 articles solely focused on tourism, 13 articles included topics pertaining to COVID-19 and 9 articles reported on transportation. Additionally, a few smaller themes arose within the topics of communication and technology (6), sustainability (3) and online marketplaces (3). However, 8 articles included more than one theme. For example, 3 articles overlapped with

information on tourism and COVID-19, 2 with online marketplaces and sustainability, 1 one with communication and technology in conjunction with tourism, 1 one with sustainability and transportation, and one with the combined themes of communication and technology along with sustainable tourism. Nonetheless, the most significant themes encompass sustainable tourism, tourism, COVID-19, and transportation. (See Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

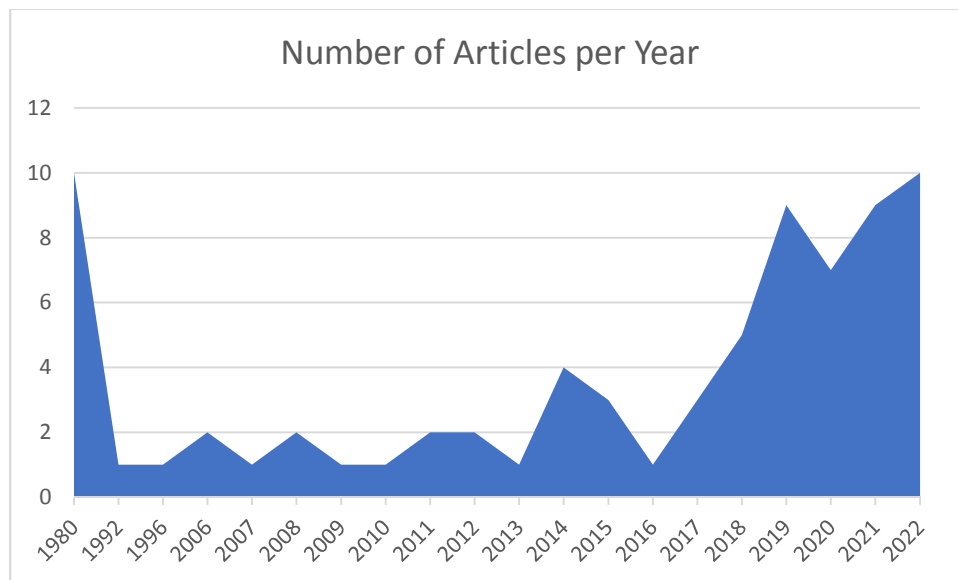


Starting with the less frequent themes, online travel marketplaces, such as Airbnb, came up a few times in this study. These options, once seen as an unfavorable accommodation choice, are now popular and ubiquitous among many tourists. Forbes states that, “[Airbnb] has morphed into one of the largest travel brands ever and has transformed the hotel industry in the process” (Jet, 2018). Sustainability was a less frequent theme that occurred three times in the findings. *Medium* and *HuffPost* both mention the impact of climate change. “Climate change was introduced to the growing list of problems the environment faced” (“In Kind, 2018).

The themes of communication and technology were seen 6 times and also contribute to sustainable tourism by means of innovation. Two articles mentioned the Industrial Revolution, two articles focused on telecommunications, one reported on SXSW (a conference that brings ideas to a larger group), and one article mentioned eco-friendly inventions. For example, the *New York Times* states, “most exciting to me is evidence that innovation...can make a big difference” (Revkin, 2013).

There were 40 articles of this sample that reported on sustainable tourism. Based on a textual analysis of 88 articles, patterns can be seen via the quantity of articles pertaining to sustainable tourism, in relation to the year they were published (See Figure 5).

**Figure 5**



There were 17 articles from 1980s-late 2000s that make up the findings of the first three decades of this study. Ten articles from 1980 focus on matters of tourism apart from sustainability. The remaining 7 articles come from the 1990s-late 2000s and describe sustainable tourism as a budding idea in which some decision leaders in the tourism industry saw as a lesser

priority. *The New York Times* states that, “The United States is of two minds on tourism and public policy: citizens embrace the subject, the government rejects it” (Becker, 2009). While there was not a significant number of articles to draw from in this time period, most of them point out how big an industry tourism is and seemingly ever growing. An article from *The New York Times* states that, “by 2010, tourism will eclipse oil as the largest industry on the planet” (“Next Destination”, 2007). These articles also stress the importance of the tourism industry for the developing countries that rely on it financially. For example, “Promoting more sustainable forms of tourism is going to be particularly important in the developing world.... tourism often was the important source of income for developing countries” (Kanter, 2008).

The findings within the 2010s are conveyed through 20 articles. However, the number of articles stayed steady and low, with only 1-5 published yearly. While sustainable tourism has its roots in environmental conservation, during this time period, an alternate definition of sustainable tourism, inclusive of local values and compassion towards the residents of tourism destinations, was recognized. An article from *The New York Times* states, “There’s a lot of people who think ‘eco-tourism’ when they hear ‘sustainable tourism,’ but that’s a piece of the puzzle” (Glusac, 2018).

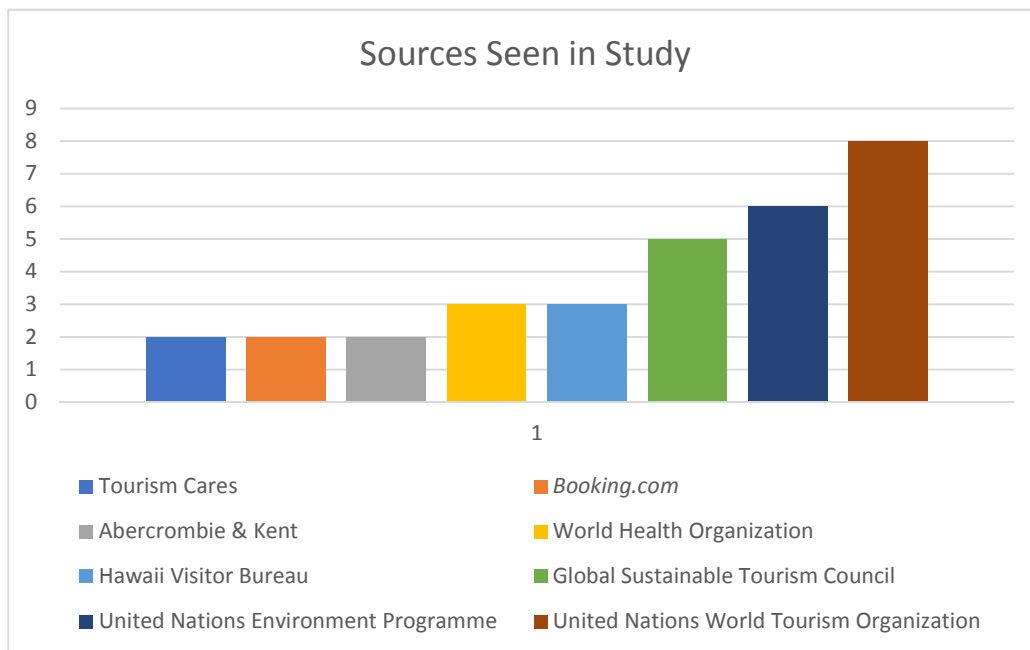
From 2019- 2022 articles pertaining to sustainable tourism saw a spike, specifically in relation to COVID-19. Thirty-eight articles were published during this time with 34% being Covid-19 related. At the beginning of COVID-19 articles made a nod to nature's resurgence due to a reduction of human impact. However, the majority of articles during this time period report on travel advisories, post-Covid travel predictions, and how travel is changing under the circumstances. For example, *USA Today* predicated that, “The past two pandemic summers saw

a spike in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and death, but this season may be different” (Rodriguez, 2022).

From the group of findings, another topic that stood out in relation to sustainable tourism was transportation. Out of the 9 articles on this topic, 6 reported on electric vehicles, 2 on aviation, and 1 on the history of the automobile. In Fact, “2018 saw the total number of [electric vehicles] rise from 3.4 million to 5.6 million” (Kopenstinsky, 2022). Automobiles play a big part in tourism, and many companies are pushing more sustainable cars. For example, *govtech.com* states, “we’re going to lead the way in the fight against climate change by putting a million [electric vehicles] on the roads, which means making them affordable to all drivers, not just the wealthy” (King, 2014).

### ***Sources Used***

Through this study’s findings, 84 out of 88 articles contain information on sustainable tourism through direct quotes from various people of notability. These people include bloggers, professors, tour operators, journalists, scientists, CEO’s, executives, hotel managers/owners, chairmen, spokespeople, book authors, researchers, company owners, the Prime Minister of Aruba, and the Prince of Wales. Additionally, certain websites, non-profits, organizations etc. make up the sources found on sustainable tourism via this study. (See Figure 6).

**Figure 6**

The findings were dispersed in this study, but the sources seen above were noticeable due to the fact that they were seen in at least more than one article. Tourism Cares, a travel and tourism non-profit, and *Booking.com*, a travel booking website both were seen in 2 articles. Abercrombie & Kent, a pioneer company in luxury travel, also presented itself in 2 articles. The private non-profit, Hawaii Visitor Bureau, showed up in 3 articles along with the World Health Organization (WHO), which is responsible for international public health. Next, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), which establishes and manages global standards for sustainable travel and tourism, appeared in 5 articles. Following this, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) which is responsible for coordinating responses to environmental issues within the United Nations, was used in 6 articles. Lastly, with an appearance in 8 articles, was the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). This

organization is the agency of the United Nations that is entrusted with promoting sustainable tourism.

## **Discussion**

A textual analysis was used to look at how sustainable tourism is covered in the media, and which sources were consulted for information on the topic. Via the results, frames were found on topics about or surrounding sustainable tourism that invite further thought. For example, questions arise on sustainable tourism's presence in the media and why there are increasing and decreasing trends in numbers of articles on this topic throughout the years. Additionally, conclusions can be drawn from connecting topics such as COVID-19, transportation, communication and technology, and online marketplaces to sustainable tourism. It is also interesting to discuss the reoccurring sources that have appeared in this study. Revealing the sources utilized and for what purpose, can show deeper insight into this study.

### ***Transportation***

Transportation, a salient theme, is an integral and unavoidable part of tourism. The main reason that transportation appears in this study is the damage it can inflict on the environment. Whether it is transportation by air, land or sea, environmentally damaging pollutants go along with it. Traditional transportation also yields the highest percentage of greenhouse gas emissions. Consequently, the findings on this topic lead to question the significance of electric vehicles (EVs) for sustainable tourism.

Electric cars are more environmentally friendly than traditional cars that use fossil-fuels, and are becoming more popular. An obstacle, however, occurs when the price is factored in as EVs can be expensive, with the cheapest priced at around \$29,200 (Kopenstinsky, 2022). While

easily affordable for some people, this mode of travel excludes a large segment of our population. Regardless of this, it is predicted that “by 2030, there will be around 4 million EVs in California alone” (Kopenstinsky, 2022). Through the findings on this topic, EV’s seem to be featured as a crucial next step in sustainable travel, though not without its complications. McKinsey & Company states that the, “current opportunity to transform the way we move fundamentally results from changes in three main areas: regulation, consumer behavior, and technology” (“Why the Automotive Future is Electric”, 2021).

### ***COVID-19***

From 2019-2022, the increase in articles pertaining to sustainable tourism increased substantially, and it seems to be on an uphill trajectory. This is most likely due to COVID-19, at least in part. As the *New York Times* states, “The pandemic has brought the concept of sustainable tourism forward by five to 10 years” (McClanahan, 2021). The tourism industry was one of the industries hit hardest by Covid-19, but the silver lining presents itself through consumers doubling down on sustainability (Brock, 2020).

There was an abundance of sustainable tourism messages being pushed at the beginning of lockdown, when tourism had halted. Nature and wildlife were also thriving due to decreased human interference. Another way that COVID-19 disrupted the normal climate of day-to-day life, was the increase of digital communication. With more people turning towards these modes of communication, paired with sustainable tourism messages being pushed via digital media, it makes sense that the concept of ST increase in visibility and consideration. However, with tourism increasing again, nature is reverting back to pre-pandemic days (such as the Venice canals becoming dirty once again). Since the relevance of sustainable tourism has only appeared



in the last few decades, there is not enough evidence to predict if this concept will continue to progress or lose its momentum when COVID-19 disappears.

### ***Sustainability, Tourism & Sustainable Tourism***

The findings on sustainable tourism from January 1, 1980 - August 1, 2022, ebb and flow in frequency as well portray differences in topic matters. The year 1980 produced 10 articles that reported solely on tourism. Literature on sustainable tourism was very slight before the 21<sup>st</sup> century, making the topic a modern issue. It wasn't until the 1990s - late 2000s, that the topic of sustainable tourism was added into travel articles. Even though there was prior knowledge on global warming and many other environmental issues, sustainable tourism was not prioritized or seen frequently in the media and remained understudied. The limited findings that do occur from this time period are consistent with environmental matters of sustainable tourism (French, 1992; "Tourism's Ravages", 1996; Higgins, 2006; Kanter, 2008; Howard, 2008; Becker, 2009).

In the 2010s, however, tourism was booming and relayed messages about the topic in terms of not only environmental aspects, but also social and economic standards that all encompass sustainable tourism. Despite tourism thriving, the prioritization of a more sustainable mode of tourism did not significantly improve, hence the lack of articles during this decade. There was talk, for example, about the possibility of big hotel chains making small sustainable changes to transform the touristic space. On the other hand, some government officials decided not to back some of the sustainable tourism initiatives which impeded its progress.

### ***Communication and Technology***

Communication and technology, specifically in the realm of telecommunications has ties to sustainable tourism. The invention of the telephone, for example, helped in the course of

tourism as it bridged the communication gap between tourists and their friends and family. As technology and communication have advanced immensely in the past centuries, the part it plays in tourism has also expanded especially regarding efficiency. *Stonemaier Games* states that they utilized Twitter, “to inspire immediate action when you’ve exhausted your other options” (“When is the Right Time”, 2015). The immediacy of information from the internet is helpful when dealing with different aspects of tourism. Smart phone usage reduces waste in airports by using mobile boarding passes, and updates travelers on delays or early arrivals as a bonus. Furthermore, current communication and technology allows tourists to find more secluded vacations that may be more sustainable. These types of technology are conducive to more organized travel. *Tourism Review News* states:

We are faster and we move more often, we live in a less polluted world and often we can also save or live experiences that, only a few years ago, we would never have imagined. Above all, we all move with more confidence in ourselves. All this is thanks to an increasingly integrated relationship between tourism and technology, which has changed this sector in a thousand different ways.... things have changed, and people have begun to choose how to travel, as well as where. They save paper by showing the boarding document on their smartphones, listen to their podcasts anywhere with blue-tooth headphones, find the most hidden coves thanks to the GPS and, surely, they are more satisfied as a whole. (Haupt, 2019)

Additionally, the existing literature on how sustainable tourism is viewed in the media point to social media having the biggest representation. With this revelation, it is surprising that communication and technology only have 6 articles in this study. Had this study used social

media to get information on sustainable tourism instead of travel blogs and news articles, the sample would likely be bigger.

### ***Online Marketplaces***

Online marketplaces have emphasized sustainability in the last few years. These marketplaces, such as Airbnb, VRBO, etc., accommodate different tourist profiles by making flexible offers that vary with respect to the number of guests, the price range, or the destination type (inclusive of remote and ecofriendly homes), among other parameters. However, the findings for this study only had a limited number of articles about online travel marketplaces. This is likely due to the fact that there are more pressing topics surrounding sustainable tourism, or that online marketplaces side more with compassion for the locals and the social part of ST instead of the dominant environmental part of the definition. By staying in a local's home, *CNN Travel* describes the experience as, "embracing the adventure" -- an experience that's about understanding different cultures" (CNN Staff, 2015). Through online travel marketplaces, the locality of a destination can be made sustainable, but maybe only takes up a small part of sustainable tourism.

### ***Sources***

A variety of personnel weighed in on information about sustainable tourism via the sample media analyzed. Interestingly, the direct quotes from various personnel were most frequent among journalists, hotel managers, and tour operators. This is likely due to ease of communication, while other sources, such as CEOs, may have been less accessible. On the other hand, the 3 sources that were referenced most frequently have the capacity to witness aspects of sustainable tourism in real time more than a CEO might. For example, a well-seasoned tour

operator may observe changes in a destination over time in terms of the environment, economic standing, or locals' attitudes. This information can be very vital in order to get an accurate representation on how sustainable a tourist destination is.

When hard evidence or statistics appeared in the articles; the findings to point to the United Nations (UN) having a heavy hand in the information dispersed on sustainable tourism. Out of these findings, the main sources were: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), and the World Health Organization (WHO). These sources point to sustainable tourism as being an intergovernmental issue since the UN belongs under this category as well. The UN is a trusted source, so the usage of information backed by any of these organizations shows expertise and credibility. Likewise, with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), which was referenced numerous times throughout the sample, stood in as a reliable source that would validate the article. The articles that contain both direct quotes from people who may have first-hand experience with sustainable tourism, paired with information from official sources, make for well-rounded presentations of the topic. The combination of these elements creates a suitable canvas for compelling discourse that should continue.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis analyzed articles from several news sources and travel blogs from January 1, 1980 - August 1, 2022. 88 articles were evaluated in this study, from news sources and travel blogs that featured topics on or related to sustainable tourism. Two research questions were examined while doing this: how is sustainable tourism framed via the articles analyzed and

which sources were used on this topic? This study used textual analysis to uncover these questions.

While looking for frames, the most salient topics suggested in this study are as follows: sustainable tourism, tourism in general, COVID-19, and transportation. Out of the pool of findings found on sustainable tourism from 1980-2022, the articles did not touch on sustainable tourism until 1900s-late 2000s. When the topic started showing up, it was slow to make waves in popularity for about a decade (2010-2018), but has seen an increase in news articles from 2019-2022 during the time of COVID-19. Future studies on sustainable tourism can weigh in on whether or not the pandemic has sustained interest on the topic, or alternatively, fizzled out.

Due to sustainable tourism being a relatively recent phenomenon, the topic is mainly covered by modern digital outlets. Adding to this notion via qualitative research, limited studies were found on sustainable tourism, but its digital representation in media took precedence. The sources primarily used in this study include direct quotes from hotel managers, tour operators, and journalists, as well as results from UN affiliates.

The sources and frames from this study reveal how sustainable tourism is viewed in the media. However, the sample used only encompassed a textual analysis with no other factors, such as audience frames, to enrich the findings. While this somewhat limits the findings of this thesis, it can set the groundwork for future studies.

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