

Review

# The Role of Social Media in the Luxury Tourism Business: A Research Review and Trajectory Assessment

K Thirumaran \*, Haejin Jang, Zahra Pourabedin  and Jacob Wood

JCU Singapore Business School, James Cook University, Singapore 387380, Singapore; haejin.jang@jcu.edu.au (H.J.); zahra.pourabedin@jcu.edu.au (Z.P.); jacob.wood@jcu.edu.au (J.W.)  
\* Correspondence: k.thirumaran@jcu.edu.au

**Abstract:** The luxury tourism industry immediately conjures up thoughts of exclusivity, with access to it confined to a small and elite group of travelers often located within their own social bubble. Our systematic literature review seeks to understand how tourism scholarship has addressed the issue of luxury travel based on social media pronouncements and the areas of concentration in which earlier studies have been conducted. Literature was sourced using the following key terms “luxury tourism”, “elite travel”, “social media”, and “sustainability” in various combinations using the OneSearch online platform, the Proquest Database, and Google Scholar. Only peer-reviewed journals were used for the critical analysis. Three main thematic areas were identified and reviewed: (1) the role of social media in luxury tourism; (2) the behavioral attributes of luxury travelers’ when using social media; and (3) the methodologies employed in the extant literature, given the limitations of accessing specific data for the luxury tourism market. The selected period for the journals and articles reviewed was the last ten years, from March 2010 to March 2020. NVivo version 12 was used to decipher the themes and focus areas as well as quantify the significance of social media to luxury tourism. Drawing from these literature review outcomes, the study explores future research areas and issues that require new theoretical and methodological frameworks to further our understanding of the intersection between social media and the luxury tourism business.

**Keywords:** luxury tourism; social media; integrative literature review; sustainability; competitiveness



**Citation:** Thirumaran, K.; Jang, H.; Pourabedin, Z.; Wood, J. The Role of Social Media in the Luxury Tourism Business: A Research Review and Trajectory Assessment. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 1216. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13031216>

Academic Editor: Jose Ramon Saura  
Received: 2 January 2021  
Accepted: 17 January 2021  
Published: 25 January 2021

**Publisher’s Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2021 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

Sustainability is an emerging concept within tourism marketing. According to Andriate and Fink [1], economic progress, social equity, natural resources, and environmental conservation are the three main dimensions of sustainability. The sustainable management of resources creates an environment that facilitates the economic, social, and aesthetic needs of society [2,3]. Sustainability is also an important vehicle from which higher levels of business competitiveness can be generated [4]. Previous research revealed the influence of sustainability factors on tourism business performance and tourist decision making in different tourism sectors such as hotels [5], cruises [6], and restaurants [7]. Moreover, due to the considerable impact of the tourism industry on the environment, as well as the significant growth in the number of environmentally conscious tourists, tourism providers have seen such opportunities as a critical source of competitive advantage moving forward [8,9]. According to Han et al. [10], green practices have provided an important marketing tool for the hotel sector. Moreover, from a luxury lodging perspective, research by Price et al. [5] has highlighted the importance of marketing sustainability.

To effectively market themselves as being green and sustainable, many businesses have actively embraced the use of online and social media technologies [11]. For many tourism businesses, online visibility is seen as a crucial source of capitalizing on the types of competitive advantage that drive business performance [12,13]. Social media platforms provide an important means from which consumers share their opinions and seek travel

information [14–16]. Traditionally, marketers have used social media as a highly effective and affordable promotional tool from which they can distribute important information about their brands, products, and services [11,16–18]. In the tourism industry, social media has been an increasingly popular tool for both businesses and consumers alike, while it has also become a hot research area in the hospitality and tourism academic community [13]. Social media tools have been instrumental in changing the communication landscape for businesses [19], with social media networks (SMNs) playing an important role in the tourism industry. According to Minazzi [20] these SMNs are defined as “websites that allow subscribers to connect and interact with other people . . . [which] creates a group of people who share information and content”. Now, as a well-adopted communication channel, social media has played an integral role in raising awareness around the need for the tourism industry to embrace higher levels of environmental performance.

Luxury tourism has grown significantly in recent times, with the sector now worth some US\$ 891 billion in 2019, a figure that is expected to grow to US\$ 1.6 trillion by 2026 [21]. While the economic size of the sector has grown enormously, so have efforts by the industry to utilize social media as a means of engaging with its consumer base. From a luxury tourism perspective, social media adoption and the big data analysis that stems from this use has become an increasingly important component to the strategic management of a luxury tourism brand. To understand consumer perceptions, scholars have accessed comments from guests who have stayed at luxury hotels through social media interactions [15,16] and online rating and sentiment analysis [22]. Our study differs from these empirical works, as we adopt an integrative literature approach. Through a systematic assessment of the literature, we are able to determine the types and scale of studies conducted on the intersection of social media and luxury tourism. The nature of these works are now assessed.

The current article is organized as follows: the literature review section provides an overview of the key concepts, “luxury tourism”, “elite travel”, “social media”, and “sustainability” in various combinations using the OneSearch online platform, the Proquest Database, and Google Scholar. In attempting to unpack sustainability from the triple bottom line context, Kuhlman and Farrington [23] highlight the importance of “profit” for business (economic) and “happiness” (social) for people, which are often mediated by technology and at all times have to incorporate environmental aspects. From the outset, we clarify that when these words intersect, the literature tends to focus on the economic viability of the luxury travelers using the social media and of the businesses to reach out to this high-end market segment. Hence, as we review further, there is a realization that the sustainability aspect prefaced in this paper is very much about learning how luxury businesses can sustain their reach to the luxury market through social media.

We describe the methodological approach by explaining the article selection process, including the search criteria used for the literature review, where the different social platforms are identified and the types of respondent or text data are examined. The findings on the luxury travelers’ purpose and the types of interface on social media are further synthesized from the selected articles. This is followed by a section on the theoretical and practical implications of the research. Finally, we note the limitations of the study and areas for future research, before providing some concluding remarks.

## 2. Study Approach

An integrative literature review is a unique form of methodological approach that allows for the establishment of new forms by understanding through a systematic assessment of relevant literature [24,25]. This integrative literature review effectively summarizes and analyzes a specific genre of extant literature [26–28]. Such an approach can unveil new perspectives on areas of research that may have drawn a range of contradictory findings [24,25]. Following earlier guidelines established by Torraco [24,25], our integrative literature review begins by searching for and choosing relevant articles from the current empirical literature. To do this effectively, we have embraced Callahan’s [29] six important criteria for carrying out an integrative literature review. (1) Where were the articles

obtained from (i.e., databases)? (2) When was the database search done? (3) Who was responsible for conducting the search? (4) How were the articles located? (5) How many articles were identified, and what was the final number of articles chosen for the research? (6) Why were the selected articles chosen [27–29]?

When the initial article search was conducted between July and August 2020, the OneSearch online library platform, and in particular the ProQuest and JSTOR databases, were used. A final search on Google Scholar was also conducted to expand the collection given that luxury tourism is a niche area and combining it with sustainability and social media appeared to be an underexplored topic. The keywords “luxury tourism”, “elite travel”, “social media”, and “sustainability” were searched using various combinations. These words were chosen because they are contextually identifiable with the topic and in the tourism literature; these terms are synonymous with industry practice as well. Additionally, to ensure that the articles examined the relevant key words, only studies in which the search terms appeared either in the titles, abstracts, or keywords were included. Following our detailed database search, a total of 4769 journal articles were collected.

Of these articles selected, we limited the time period to March 2010 to March 2020. This was premised on a preliminary search of the keywords to underscore sufficient availability of studies in our topic. Furthermore, a 10-year period starting from 2010 provided a clear direction in the world economy recovering from the global financial crisis of 2007–2008. Similar to luxury products, luxury tourism faced the conundrum of whether to jump into the online business of engaging customers where the market segment emphasized personalized services, in-house retail, and an exclusive experiences. As each of the top tier luxury businesses, such as Hermes, Louis Vuitton, and the likes, digitalized their services and products, it became very clear that the transformation of the luxury sector was already taking place even for top-end luxury travel businesses as home webpages became the norm for private jets, luxury yachts, and signature high-end resorts [30,31].

We were able to further narrow our search with the function of selecting scholarly and peer-reviewed English language journal articles. This yielded 524 articles. Of these, the disciplines varied primarily in economics (128), business (100), geography (74), environmental sciences (61), and sociology and social history (51). The One Search aggregate function allowed us to select studies according to specific subject categories. The following categories were used, with the number in brackets indicating the total number of relevant studies in this area. The subject areas were: the hospitality industry (16), hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism (44), hotels (14), hotels & motels (25), the internet (18), communication (16), sports, gambling, restaurants, recreation, and tourism (27). Upon selecting these subject terms, a total of 171 articles were selected and reviewed to further decipher if they were relevant to our topic on the role of social media in luxury tourism and business sustainability. A final total of 16 articles were found that connected luxury tourism, social media, and sustainability.

### 3. Findings and Analysis

In the luxury tourism industry, the sustainability of social media strategies that effectively interact with the client are very important. In this section, we provide an overview of the key thematic areas that are relevant to the use of social media in the luxury tourism industry. In particular, we discuss the significant results that have been obtained from empirical studies on this topic. Furthermore, we included a theoretical lens that explains the challenges of using social media from a luxury tourism point of view, as well as an assessment of the key methodological approaches that have been used in the field.

NVivo software was used for the data analysis. In comparison with other qualitative data analysis tools, such as Leximancer, Nvivo is more efficient for small sample sizes [32] and has the function to produce a word cloud and word count for each theme or frequency of the words used. Hence, the use of NVivo software allowed us to present a table of frequency and the number of words that highlight the significant areas of studies where the benefits of social media platforms can be further leveraged in the future. A summary figure is drawn from the literature to determine the actual underpinnings of sustainability

in the relationships between luxury tourism and social media. The findings are revealed regarding both the type of information that luxury travelers seek and what businesses in this segment can leverage from the type of presentation in their media omni-channels.

Social media has played an increasingly important role in promoting the luxury tourism sector in recent years. Given its significance, many researchers have sought to better understand its role. An assessment of the extant literature showed the various ways in which social media has been used as an important communication tool for luxury tourism businesses. In particular, electronic word of mouth through social media posts has become a key revenue and sales source, with research showing the role that hotel reviews and ratings play in this regard. To assess the importance of these reviews, Blal and Sturman [33] evaluated various market segments using a review system that was parsed into the volume (the number of reviews about a hotel) and the valence (the ratings in those reviews). From their research, they found that not only do these reviews drive revenue, they also showed that the valence of those reviews has a greater effect on luxury hotel revenue, while the volume of reviews has a greater effect on lower-tier hotels.

In other studies on social media effectiveness, Leung et al. [34] compared message strategies across hotel-scale levels (luxury, upper upscale, upscale, upper midscale, midscale, and economy) and explored the effectiveness of different message strategies. From their analysis, they were able to show that the typology of a Facebook message strategy consisted of two dimensions, dealing with both “what to say” and “how to say it”. Moreover, their results showed that hotels at different scale levels use Facebook in different ways as a marketing tool. In the case of luxury hotels, Facebook was predominantly used as a tool for brand building. More recently, Rizika and Syarif [35] provided an analysis of the effect of Instagram engagement on purchase intention and the luxury value perception in the restaurants of high-end hotels. The results of their study showed that the use of social media in this way had a significant impact on both a consumer’s intention to dine at the restaurant as well their luxury value perception. Such impacts provide further evidence of social media’s ability to enhance operational performance.

In terms of the luxury tourism sector, social media adoption and the big data analysis that stems from this use has become an increasingly important mechanism from which luxury tourism brands are strategically managed. To better understand consumer perceptions, scholars have accessed the social media interactions of luxury hotels. In this regard, Giglio et al. [16] systematically monitored the social media use of six luxury hotels in central London (UK). Using Wolfram Mathematica software, their results highlight the extent to which big data analytics and machine learning algorithms support luxury hotel managers as they systematically monitor social media. Another identified study by Xiang et al. [36] utilized the social media analytics procedure identified in earlier studies by Abrahams et al. [37] and Fan and Gordon [38] to assess whether any differences exist between the TripAdvisor, Expedia, and Yelp platforms in terms of customers ratings, and review the relationship between a wide range of features such as linguistic and semantic features, sentiment, and helpfulness. Using a text analytics approach and subsequent regression analyses, Xiang et al. [36] showed that the online review data obtained from these platforms can be considerably different in both content and structure. More importantly, their work makes an important contribution to the epistemology of social media analytics by suggesting that studies directly drawing data from online websites must consider the characteristics and potential biases that may exist within social media data.

Table 1 provides a summarized list of the articles reviewed with an indication of the social media used to further trend spot luxury travelers’ attributes when they access platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TripAdvisor, Yelp, Expedia, Twitter, travel supplier websites, and other social network media sites. In these collections of media networks, we can single out the travel supplier websites as a touch point for businesses to create their own direct communication with luxury travelers. In the case of the destination Turkey [39], interactions with hoteliers appear to yield higher engagement, as do websites with multimedia content. Where there are story narratives, as in the case of cruise liners, the appeal to luxury travelers tends to be greater too [40].

**Table 1.** Summary of research studies identified in literature 2010–2020.

Authors by Year of Publication	Findings Summary	Social Media Platforms	Study Location
Cervellon & Galipienzo (2015)	Young adults using Facebook prefer information rather than emotional appeal. However, the intention to stay at the luxury hotel is not influenced by Facebook.	Facebook	Sydney, Australia
Blal & Sturman (2014)	Reviews related to emotional aspects have a greater impact on luxury hotel's revenue per available room(RevPAR). However, sales RevPAR for the room declines when there is an increase in the volume of reviews.	Chain hotel reviews and ratings posted on travel websites	Worldwide
Park, Ok & Chae (2016)	Analytics from Twitter on cruise travel reveals postings from celebrities, web bloggers, and the supplier itself.	Twitter	Bulgaria
Ryschka et al. (2016)	Speedy response in social media is essential for affecting positive perception of cruise liners.	Social media (Broadly)	The United States and Germany
Leung, Bai & Erdem (2017)	Picture messages have an appeal. Involving the prospect in the website and highlights on products and brands tend to be more effective compared to promotional material.	Facebook and Twitter	North America
Xiang et al. (2017)	Discrepancies in the representation of luxury hotels in reviews posted.	TripAdvisor, Expedia, and Yelp	Manhattan, New York City
Tom et al. (2017)	Luxury hotel guests though they enjoy using social media networks do not necessarily have the intention to continue using the medium.	General	General
Flávio et al. (2018)	Multimedia content that is both engaging and embeds storytelling can be more appealing.	Website, Facebook, Twitter	Cruise Liners' Website, Facebook, and Twitter
Huang, Ha & Kim (2018)	Language and image fluency are important appealing factors in the narrative delivery.	Social media (broadly)	Online
Liu, Wu & Li (2019)	Millennials are trigger motivated to travel to similar luxury destinations because of sharing on social networks.	Social networking sites	Online
Giglio et al. (2019)	Photos shared by travelers suggest a higher impact on their luxury hotel brands experience.	TripAdvisor	UK
Kucukusta, Perelygina & Lam (2019)	Corporate social responsibility (CSR) traction is high in communication and engagement through social media.	Facebook	Hong Kong
Dolan, R., Seo, Y., & Kemper, J. (2019)	Responses to complaints is an act of value co-creation or a prevention of co-destruction.	Customer reviews and feedback social media broadly	Australian Airlines website
Vo, Chovancová & Tri (2019)	Women are more sensitive to website functionality compared to men.	Customer experience on hotel websites	Vietnam
Rizika & Syarif (2020)	The luxury Skylounge Restaurant appealed to the Instagram users by their intention driven by functional and social values.	Instagram	Indonesia
Aydin (2020)	Higher engagement was observed in the website interactions of 5 star hotels in Turkey on a site where the hoteliers were responsive and the content was filled with pictures.	Website user interactions	Turkey

In terms of social media's ability to influence decisions on the selection of a hospitality service provider, Cervellon and Galipienzo [41] examined the response of Facebook posts made by a luxury hotel to ascertain whether they held an informational or an emotional appeal. From their research, they showed that an informational appeal is more effective than an emotional appeal in improving the attitude that consumers have towards the hotel and in improving the perception of quality. However, social media had no influence on the intention of a consumer to stay at the hotel and follow the hotel on Facebook. More recently, Liu et al. [42] utilized social comparison theory to reveal why and under what conditions a tourist's positive experience sharing may trigger millennial consumers' destination visit intention. They showed that for consumers with low levels of self-esteem, the luxury travel experiences that had been shared through social media helped to stimulate their intentions to visit the same destination. Moreover, the study found that destination visit intention is often caused by a benign envy that one has of the experience sharer.

Social media is also widely used to achieve customer retention goals. Tom et al. [43] showed that five external dimensions (social influence, enjoyment, accessibility, perceived benefits, and trust) influence luxury hotel guests' acceptance of social media networks. They also found that enjoyment, although qualitatively proposed, does not influence luxury hotel guests' continued social media usage intention. A key part of retention is developing a sense of consumer loyalty. For luxury cruise operators, Heinze et al. [44] showed that social media tools are critical in both enabling and enhancing customer loyalty. Moreover, they showed that cruise operators must ensure that their social media messaging is authentic, personalized, open, honest, and transparent in order to achieve their long-term social media strategies. Brand perception is another important facet of customer loyalty and retention. Ryschka et al. [45] provide an interesting take on this issue by examining how social media can be used to manage brand reputation in the event of a crisis. Their study found that the speed of social media response, brand familiarity, and the cultural values of the respondent impacted the perceptions of a luxury cruise line's reputation following a crisis.

Other studies highlighted how social media is also used to achieve corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals as well. An analysis of Facebook posts by Kucukusta et al. [46] showed that although marketing-orientated posts are more prevalent than CSR-related posts, they nonetheless achieve a similar level of popularity and engagement. Moreover, posts that seek to encourage CSR practices recorded the highest level of customer engagement of the CSR-related posts. An assessment of social media engagement was also conducted by Tiago et al. [40] in their analysis of luxury cruise ships. From their analysis, they showed that to achieve a content-oriented business strategy, these businesses need to adopt a social media approach that shares rich multimedia content across multiple platforms.

Despite the growing popularity of social media use across the luxury tourism industry, some tourism providers are still in the early stages of social media adoption. From a luxury tourism perspective, Yoo and Loo [47] investigated the role of social media in marketing heritage tourism businesses. By focusing on the Facebook posts from heritage-listed hotels in the US, they showed that most of these hotels focus on providing textual content about their historical background rather than developing a diverse array of engaging content for Facebook users. In other works, Ponte et al. [48] showed that luxury Spanish hotels, which use Facebook as a communication channel, mainly focus on their customers, ignoring their other key stakeholders in the hotel industry. In other words, the hotels see social media as a channel to publish only marketing related information. Another challenge is the need to develop different social media strategies for different target markets, especially when considering the diverse needs of children and female customers [40]. A social media presence can create sustainable competitive advantages for luxury tourism providers by driving customers' purchase decisions and enhancing customer relationships [47,49]. Given these influences, a key challenge for tourism providers is to improve the quality of their social media content to better engage with potential customers.

An assessment of the extant literature shows that the methodological approaches used in the luxury tourism field fall into three categories: quantitative, content analysis, and a mixed-method approach. From a quantitative perspective, many examples exist. For example, Rizika and Syarif [35] investigated the relationship between Instagram engagement, luxury value perception, and purchase intention within the context of luxury dining. Tom et al. [44] used interviews and online questionnaires to test an extended technology acceptance model (TAM) model by incorporating satisfaction and continued user intention to the model.

Finally, content analysis is the other popular research method used among social media studies. In this regard, researchers have analyzed text data by examining the social media posts of travelers, through platforms such as Facebook [41,47]. In other works, visual data has been used. For example, Giglio et al. [16] evaluated 7395 pictures from TripAdvisor to highlight the importance of big data analytics in developing brand management strategies within the context of luxury tourism. To supplement this finding, in a recent survey from a range of young to elderly adults, Shin and Back [50] found that the meaning of luxury can be inferred from photos of holidaymakers posing idly, where the element of timelessness is an indicator of a lifestyle of the rich. These images were taken from a sample of social media as part of an investigation to identify the perception of luxury.

While Facebook postings are surfed for information, emotional postings are generally unappealing to luxury travelers and have little influence on one's intention to travel to a particular destination [41]. Promotional material is often imbued with emotional attributes that can reduce the appeal of an attraction to luxury travelers [34]. The number of reviews on the hotel site itself may have an impact if the quantity is small, however, its influence subsides as the number of reviews grow larger [33].

Based on Figure 1, there are three types of social media posts that have different roles in luxury travelers' acceptance of social media and the subsequent success of the social media posts. Social media posts by suppliers (e.g., hotel posts on Facebook) lead to high levels of user engagement. Hence, they are perceived as providing highly informative content. However, these types of posts do not contribute to any form of emotional response. Among the social media posts by travelers, visual data such as photos are well-received by travelers and may influence a consumers' perception of luxury brands and potentially encourage a favorable message response. Finally, while storytelling posts are often successful, promotion and reviews show lower levels of acceptance [34,51].

In many of the studies surveyed here thus far, the industry assumption that luxury travelers do not really depend on social media appears to be true. From our analysis, and as shown in Figure 1, social media has two key attributes that are essential in the understanding of luxury travelers. Firstly, social media is primarily used for information by luxury travelers [41]. Secondly, though not revealed in this survey of studies, it can be inferred that luxury travelers continue to have their own network beyond regular social media networks. An interesting finding in this regard suggests that in tweets about cruise liners, the major participants providing information, or the dissemination of appealing destination postings, are celebrities, bloggers, and cruise liners or agents; and not the clients themselves [18]. Another important principle of sustainable business to consider when it comes to luxury travelers is that they do not necessarily have the intention to continue to use the social media applications [43]. Luxury travelers are known to rely widely on personal relationships with agents and travel consultants for their travel arrangements [52]. As part of our assessment of the literature, we also sought to determine meaningful themes and useful trends for businesses in the luxury travel segment. The most repeated words in the abstracts are presented in the word frequency list in Table 2.

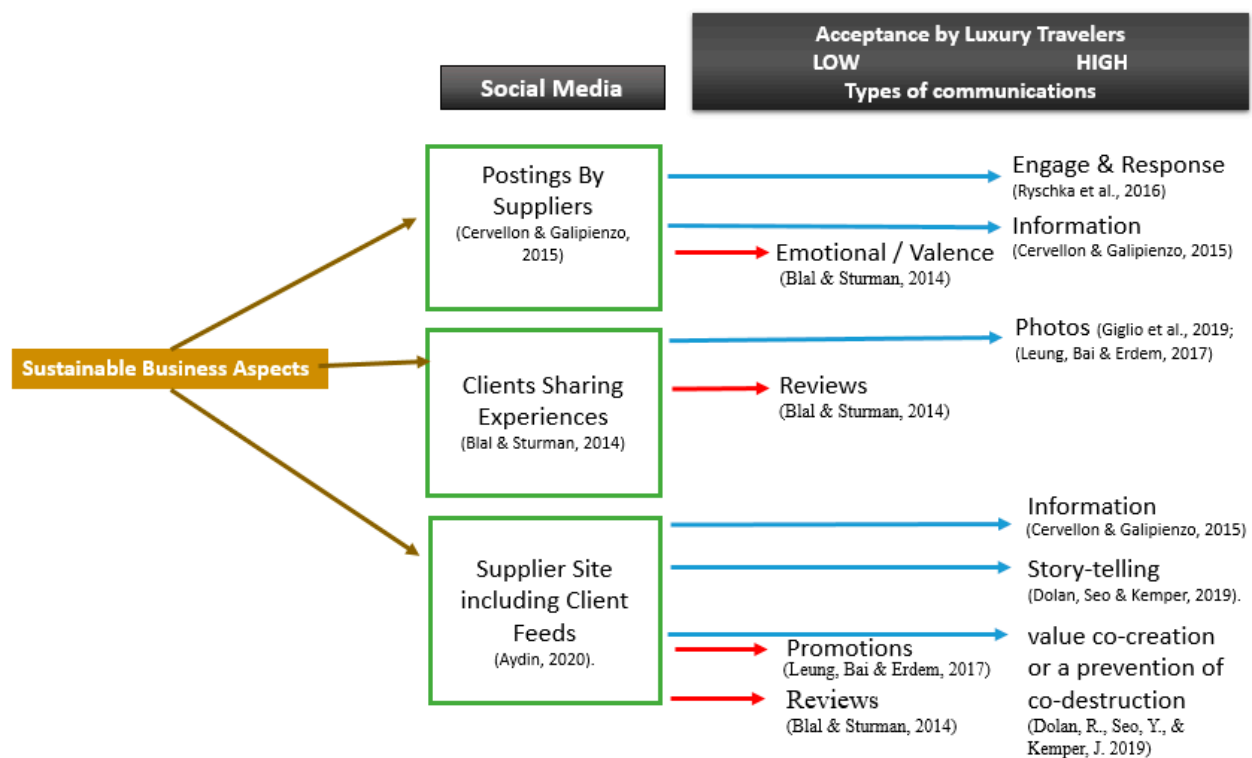


Figure 1. Sustainable business aspects: luxury travelers response to social media types.

Table 2. Frequency of words from the abstracts.

Significant Words	Frequency (N)	Frequency (%)
hotel	37	7.9%
social	32	6.9%
media	25	5.4%
effects	20	4.3%
luxury	19	4.1%
intention	16	3.4%
message	14	3.0%
value	14	3.0%
Affect	13	2.8%
brand	13	2.8%
content	12	2.6%
cruise	11	2.4%
experience	11	2.4%
perception	10	2.1%
influence	9	1.9%
lines	9	1.9%
Facebook	8	1.7%
online	8	1.7%
positive	8	1.7%
travel	8	1.7%
attitude	7	1.5%
information	7	1.5%
post	7	1.5%
sharing	7	1.5%
strategies	7	1.5%
marketing	6	1.3%



Table 2. Cont.

Significant Words	Frequency (N)	Frequency (%)
restaurant	6	1.3%
purchase	6	1.3%
responses	6	1.3%
tourism	6	1.3%
transportation	6	1.3%
visit	6	1.3%
website	6	1.3%
activity	5	1.1%
communication	5	1.1%
context	5	1.1%
destination	5	1.1%
engagement	5	1.1%
facilities	5	1.1%
fluency	5	1.1%
interactive	5	1.1%
management	5	1.1%
narrative	5	1.1%
networking	5	1.1%
acceptance	4	0.9%
Instagram	4	0.9%
followers	4	0.9%
impact	4	0.9%
quality	4	0.9%
rating	4	0.9%
Twitter	4	0.9%
specific	4	0.9%
sum total	467	100

Based on the text search and word count on a weighted index of key terms, we found that social and media combined together had a word-use frequency of 57. This reflects a high relationship between luxury travelers and social media, which we later discover that it is based on information seeking more than networking. Based on the abstracts, the studies used Facebook (8), Instagram (4), and Twitter (4) as social media platforms to investigate the luxury travelers access and preference characteristics. Clearly, luxury hotels (37) and cruises (11) received more attention in the studies compared to restaurants (6) and transportation (6). The frequency of analysis from Twitter (6) and Instagram (4) suggests that these were less important platforms for luxury travellers. Indeed, there are private networks and other mobile applications that are limited by exclusive membership and restricted accessibility [18] which might partly account for the challenge of obtaining research data. Some examples not highlighted in any of these literature are private social networks such as aSmallWorld, Diamond Lounge, and Squa.re [53].

Readings from the relevant literature and the emphasis of key words demonstrates that “media”, and “luxury” and “tourism” are mostly interlinked with hotels and cruises. It is also clear that social media studies in the luxury tourism industry have so far focused on Facebook, and beyond that, word of mouth. Hence, in the decade chosen for this review, there remains a gap in the literature as there has only been one study on airlines [39] and not much exploration in terms of attractions and luxury yachts or trains. Tweets appear to be important for businesses and consumers operating in the sector but not as significant as Facebook [18,34]. Issues related to sustainability are secondary as far as information sought by luxury travelers is concerned.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks and Future Research Opportunities

Our research has examined the associations between luxury tourism, social media, and sustainability. To date, very little research has addressed the implications of social media from a luxury tourism perspective. Given this gap, our work makes several important research contributions to the sustainability of the luxury tourism sector. Several key findings have emerged from this systematic literature review. The reviewed studies were divided to three major categories: (1) the role of social media in luxury tourism; (2) the behavioral attributes of luxury travelers when interfacing with social media; and (3) the methodologies employed in the extant literature. Most of the articles fall into the first category.

Overall, our study showed that the sustainability for the luxury tourism business is essentially defined by the way in which the social media is presented. Social media posts are considered by travelers to provide a good source of information. Moreover, luxury travelers appear to favor content that is informative rather than emotional. Therefore, not all luxury tourism providers have been successful in terms of creating successful emotional value for travelers via social media posts. The results from our word cloud showed that social media platforms are subscribed to by luxury travelers, but the link to sustainability aspects may be less of a reason than the information these platforms provide, or the expectation of quick response to a query [45,46].

The advantages of conducting studies based on mainstream social media are that we can assess the extent to which such a platform appears to inform the luxury travelers, and see that they have minimal interaction with the social network beyond seeking information. This is important information as it provides a direction for practitioners who wish to penetrate the luxury market and sustain a business in this high-end market, showing them that they may need to look at more specific social networking sites. This study also clearly adds value to the study of sustainability in tourism, indicating that promotion related to sustainability is more efficient if it is informative rather than as a promotional item. As a disadvantage, studies based on mainstream social media may be a limitation to understanding the intersection between luxury travelers and the aspects of sustainability pertaining to a market that is more exclusive and often operating in a community that is less accessible to researchers.

Nevertheless, an analytical assessment of the literature provides clear terms of engagement for industry practitioners. Speedy response to queries, information driven presentations, and vivid photos are ideal elements for sustaining interest in their travel products or services. In the other words, social media posts, by increasing customer engagement, may influence customer purchase intention [16,34]. However, luxury tourism providers should develop strategies that fully utilize the benefits of other rich forms of content such as videos etc. From a luxury tourism perspective, our study showed that the role of social media is largely relegated to one of information provider rather than a channel for developing social networks of sharing information and engaging in discussions. Luxury travelers are unique and as such, the way in which they engage with social media platforms is different to that of other market segments in the tourism industry. Luxury tourism agents need to be mindful of this and be prepared to adjust the way in which they communicate through these channels. These practical implications mean that service providers must also be ever present in the popular social media network to respond to discrepancies or misinformation quickly [36]. Another finding is the emergence of using social media as a platform to communicate the CSR activities of luxury tourism providers, allowing organizations to engage with all stakeholders [46]. Finally, due to the low acceptance of promotional content by travelers, our study suggests that social media should not be used as a promotional platform in the luxury tourism market [39].

This review found that luxury travelers surf popular social media sites for information and engagements primarily which come in the form of questions and responses. By synthesizing the various findings from the literature in the last ten years, our analysis was able to raise three pertinent questions that future researchers may explore. Firstly,

given the industry assumption that luxury travelers continue to seek assistance from travel consultants and private networks for their travel arrangements, does popular social media provide an ample avenue to aid in their decision making? Secondly, will researchers be able to break the barriers of private social media networks to gain better insights to the behavioral and appealing attributes of these sites for luxury travelers? Thirdly, the global agenda of sustainability and the discipline of tourism may perhaps benefit from such penetrating studies to achieve a deeper understanding of luxury travelers' attitudes to environmental issues connected with travel.

Our study highlighted the important need to further assess the relationship between social media and the luxury tourism business. However, while social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have a very large and wide audience appeal; supplier websites for businesses such as hotels, cruise liners, and airlines provide a space for comments and publicly viewable reviews; and agents of travel service providers, such as TripAdvisor, host reviews and ratings. There has been a lack of research focus that compares the directness or types of sentiments expressed across all three types of communication channels. Such a comparative study can be meaningful for luxury businesses wanting to improve how they communicate across these channels. Another area for future exploration relates to the following questions: why are luxury travelers not very keen on using social media applications? Why are they overly reliant on cognitive types of media? Given the limited role that social media has had on the luxury tourism market, what technological innovations can be used to disrupt the so-called "old boysetwork" which occupies parts of the luxury tourism sector? This may require extensive research that goes behind the world of luxury travelers to understand their travel and online network community behaviors.

**Author Contributions:** KT. designed the study, collected and analyzed the data and wrote the paper, H.J., Z.P., and J.W. analyzed the data and wrote the paper. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Data available in a publicly accessible repository.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

1. Andriate, G.S.; Fink, A.A. Managing the Change to a Sustainable Enterprise. In *When It All Comes Together: The Enterprise Sustainability Action Team*; Wirtenberg, J., Russell, W., Lipsky, D., Eds.; Greenleaf Publishing Limited: London, UK, 2009; Volume 4, pp. 118–140.
2. Jenkins, I.; Schröder, R. Sustainability in tourism: A multidisciplinary approach. In *Sustainability in Tourism: A Multidisciplinary Approach*; Springer Gabler: Wiesbaden, Germany, 2013; pp. 9–31.
3. Gilmore, A.; Simmons, G. Integrating sustainable tourism and marketing management: Can National Parks provide the framework for strategic change? *Strateg. Change* **2007**, *16*, 191–200. [[CrossRef](#)]
4. Cantele, S.; Cassia, F. Sustainability implementation in restaurants: A comprehensive model of drivers, barriers, and competitiveness-mediated effects on firm performance. *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.* **2020**, *87*, 1–10. [[CrossRef](#)]
5. Rishi, M.; Jauhari, V.; Joshi, G. Marketing Sustainability in the Luxury Lodging Industry: A Thematic Analysis of Preferences Amongst the Indian Transition Generation. *J. Consum. Mark.* **2015**, *32*, 376–391. [[CrossRef](#)]
6. Han, H.; Eom, T.; Chung, H.; Lee, S. Passenger repurchase behaviours in the green cruise line context: Exploring the role of quality, image, and physical environment. *Sustainability* **2019**, *11*, 1985. [[CrossRef](#)]
7. Gao, Y.; Mattila, A.S.; Lee, S. A meta-analysis of behavioral intentions for environment-friendly initiatives in hospitality research. *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.* **2016**, *54*, 107–115. [[CrossRef](#)]
8. Hedlund, T. The impact of values, environmental concern, and willingness to accept economic sacrifices to protect the environment on tourists' intentions to buy ecologically sustainable tourism alternatives. *Tour. Hosp. Res.* **2011**, *11*, 278–288. [[CrossRef](#)]
9. Modica, P.; Altinay, L.; Farmaki, A.; Gursoy, D.; Zenga, M. Consumer perceptions towards sustainable supply chain practices in the hospitality industry. *Curr. Issues Tour.* **2018**, *23*, 358–375. [[CrossRef](#)]

10. Han, H.; Hsu, L.-T.J.; Lee, J.-S.; Sheu, C. Are lodging customers ready to go green? An examination of attitudes, demographics, and eco-friendly intentions. *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.* **2011**, *30*, 345–355. [CrossRef]
11. Wood, J.; Khan, G. Social Business Adoption: An Empirical Analysis. *Bus. Inf. Rev.* **2016**, *33*, 28–39. [CrossRef]
12. Vorhies, D.W.; Morgan, N.A. Benchmarking Marketing Capabilities for Sustainable Competitive Advantage. *J. Mark.* **2005**, *69*, 80–94. [CrossRef]
13. Smithson, S.; Devece, C.A.; Lapiedra, R. Online visibility as a source of competitive advantage for small- and medium-sized tourism accommodation enterprises. *Serv. Ind. J.* **2011**, *31*, 1573–1587. [CrossRef]
14. Culnan, M.J.; McHugh, P.J.; Zubillaga, J.I. How large US companies can use Twitter and other social media to gain business value. *MIS Q. Exec.* **2010**, *9*, 243–259.
15. Kim, J.; Lee, K.-H. Influence of integration on interactivity in social media luxury brand communities. *J. Bus. Res.* **2019**, *99*, 422–429. [CrossRef]
16. Giglio, S.; Pantano, E.; Bilotta, E.; Melewar, T.C. Branding luxury hotels: Evidence from the analysis of consumers' "big" visual data on TripAdvisor. *J. Bus. Res.* **2020**, *119*, 495–501. [CrossRef]
17. Stieglitz, S.; Dang-Xuan, L. Emotions and Information Diffusion in Social Media—Sentiment of Microblogs and Sharing Behavior. *J. Manag. Inf. Syst.* **2013**, *29*, 217–248. [CrossRef]
18. Park, S.B.; Ok, C.M.; Chae, B. "Kevin" Using Twitter Data for Cruise Tourism Marketing and Research. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2016**, *33*, 885–898. [CrossRef]
19. O'Brien, C. The emergence of the social media empowered consumer. *Ir. Mark. Rev.* **2011**, *21*, 32–40.
20. Minazzi, R. *Social Media Marketing in Tourism and Hospitality*; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2015.
21. Allied Market Research. *Global Luxury Travel Market: Opportunities and Forecasts, 2019–2026*; Allied Market Research: Portland, OR, USA, 2019.
22. Boo, S.; Busser, J. Meeting planners' online reviews of destination hotels: A twofold content analysis approach. *Tour. Manag.* **2018**, *66*, 287–301. [CrossRef]
23. Kuhlman, T.; Farrington, J. What is Sustainability? *Sustainability* **2010**, *2*, 3436–3448. [CrossRef]
24. Torraco, R.J. Writing integrative literature reviews: Guidelines and examples. *Hum. Resour. Dev. Rev.* **2005**, *4*, 356–367. [CrossRef]
25. Torraco, R.J. Writing integrative literature reviews: Using the past and present to explore the future. *Hum. Resour. Dev. Rev.* **2016**, *15*, 404–428. [CrossRef]
26. Chermack, T.J.; Passmore, D.L. Using journals and databases in research. In *Research in Organizations: Foundations and Methods of Inquiry*; Swanson, A., Holton, E.F., Eds.; Berrett-Koehler: San Francisco, CA, USA, 2005; pp. 401–418.
27. Wood, J.; Oh, J.; Park, J.; Kim, W. The Relationship between Work Engagement and Work–Life Balance in Organizations: A Review of the Empirical Research. *Hum. Resour. Dev. Rev.* **2020**, *19*, 1–23. [CrossRef]
28. Wood, J.; Paturi, S.; Puri, P.; Jakobsen, E.S.; Shankar, S.; Zejden, P.; Azzali, S. Plastic Marine Waste and its Potential for Indonesian Indigenous Communities. *eTropic Electron. J. Stud. Trop.* **2020**, *19*, 167–184.
29. Callahan, J.L. Constructing a manuscript: Distinguishing integrative literature reviews and conceptual and theory articles. *Hum. Resour. Dev. Rev.* **2010**, *9*, 300–304. [CrossRef]
30. Rigby, D.K. The Future of Shopping. *Harvard Business Review*. Available online: <https://hbr.org/2011/12/the-future-of-shopping> (accessed on 18 January 2021).
31. Company, McKinsey & McKinsey.com. Available online: <https://www.mckinsey.com/~{} /media/mckinsey/industries/retail/our%20insights/luxury%20in%20the%20age%20of%20digital%20darwinism/the-age-of-digital-darwinism.ashx> (accessed on 18 December 2020).
32. Sotiriadou, P.; Brouwers, J.; Le, T.-A. Choosing a qualitative data analysis tool: A comparison of NVivo and Leximancer. *Ann. Leis. Res.* **2014**, *17*, 218–234. [CrossRef]
33. Blal, I.; Sturman, M.C. The Differential Effects of the Quality and Quantity of Online Reviews on Hotel Room Sales. *Cornell Hosp. Q.* **2014**, *55*, 365–375. [CrossRef]
34. Leung, X.Y.; Bai, B.; Erdem, M. Hotel social media marketing: A study on message strategy and its effectiveness. *J. Hosp. Tour. Technol.* **2017**, *8*, 239–255. [CrossRef]
35. Rizika, A.; Syarif, H. The Effect of Instagram Engagement to Purchase Intention and Consumers' Luxury Value Perception as the mediator in the Skylounge Restaurant. *Int. J. Innov. Sci. Res. Technol.* **2020**, *5*, 958–966.
36. Xiang, Z.; Du, Q.; Ma, Y.; Fan, W. A comparative analysis of major online review platforms: Implications for social media analytics in hospitality and tourism. *Tour. Manag.* **2017**, *58*, 51–65. [CrossRef]
37. Abrahams, A.S.; Fan, W.; Wang, G.A.; Zhang, Z.; Jiao, J. An integrated text analytic framework for product defect discovery. *Prod. Oper. Manag.* **2015**, *24*, 975–990. [CrossRef]
38. Fan, W.; Gordon, M.D. The power of social media analytics. *Commun. ACM* **2014**, *57*, 74–81. [CrossRef]
39. Aydin, G. Social media engagement and organic post effectiveness: A roadmap for increasing the effectiveness of social media use in hospitality industry. *J. Hosp. Mark. Manag.* **2020**, *29*, 1–21. [CrossRef]
40. Tiago, F.; Couto, J.; Faria, S.; Borges-Tiago, T. Cruise tourism: Social media content and network structures. *Tour. Rev.* **2018**, *73*, 433–447. [CrossRef]
41. Cervellon, M.; Galipienzo, D. Facebook pages content, does it really matter? Consumers' responses to luxury hotel posts with emotional and informational content. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2015**, *32*, 428–437. [CrossRef]

42. Liu, H.; Wu, L.; Li, X. Social media envy: How experience sharing on social networking sites drives millennials' aspirational tourism consumption. *J. Travel Res.* **2019**, *58*, 355–369. [[CrossRef](#)]
43. Tom Dieck, M.C.; Jung, T.H.; Kim, W.G.; Moon, Y. Hotel guests' social media acceptance in luxury hotels. *Int. J. Contemp. Hosp. Manag.* **2017**, *29*, 530–550. [[CrossRef](#)]
44. Heinze, I.; Guhr, N.; Breitner, M.H. Cruise Customer Loyalty Improvement with Social Media. In *Cruise Business Development*; Papathanassis, A., Ed.; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2016; pp. 157–174.
45. Ryschka, A.M.; Domke-Damonte, D.J.; Keels, J.K.; Nagel, R. The Effect of Social Media on Reputation During a Crisis Event in the Cruise Line Industry. *Int. J. Hosp. Tour. Adm.* **2016**, *17*, 198–221. [[CrossRef](#)]
46. Kucukusta, D.; Perelygina, M.; Lam, W.S. CSR communication strategies and stakeholder engagement of upscale hotels in social media. *Int. J. Contemp. Hosp. Manag.* **2019**, *31*, 2129–2148. [[CrossRef](#)]
47. Yoo, K.-H.; Lee, W. Use of Facebook in the US heritage accommodations sector: An exploratory study. *J. Heritage Tour.* **2015**, *10*, 1–11. [[CrossRef](#)]
48. Bonsón, P.E.; Carvajal-Trujillo, E.; Escobar-Rodríguez, T. Corporate facebook and stakeholder engagement. *Kybernetes* **2015**, *44*, 771–787. [[CrossRef](#)]
49. Feroz, G.; Wood, J. Internet Presence, Website Analytics, and E-Retailor Financial Performance. *Int. J. Econ. Manag.* **2017**, *11*, 85–106.
50. Shin, M.; Back, K.-J. The luxury of doing nothing: Inferring luxury from idleness display in travel setting. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2020**, *37*, 409–417. [[CrossRef](#)]
51. Dolan, R.; Seo, Y.; Kemper, J. Complaining practices on social media in tourism: A value co-creation and co-destruction perspective. *Tour. Manag.* **2019**, *73*, 35–45. [[CrossRef](#)]
52. Rosenfeld, K. Looking Forward to Luxury. *Travel Weekly.* **2020**, *79*, 3.
53. Thirumaran, K.; Raghav, M. Luxury Tourism, Developing Destinations: Research Review and Trajectories. *Asian J. Tour. Res.* **2017**, *2*, 137–158. [[CrossRef](#)]