Sustainable Travel on YouTube: Discussion and Perception

How do YouTube travel vlogs discuss sustainable travel? How are they perceived?
**Abstract**

The objective of this study is to explore how YouTube travel vlogs discuss sustainable travel and how they are perceived. By using framing analysis, the research codes are based on the three pillars of sustainability; economic, environmental and social. Specifically, in the tourism contexts this research seeks to identify narratives referring to local accommodations, restaurants and shops, cultural, historical and interactions with local communities and finally, nature appreciation, use of environmental materials and transportation. To understand perception 20 interviews are completed with an even split of female and male millennials. This paper concludes YouTube travel vlogs discuss sustainable travel indirectly and minimally. Economic and environmental codes were relatively easiest to identify in comparison to social codes. The varying definitions of social sustainability prove challenging to pinpoint in the coding process. Although there is a growing awareness of sustainable travel, ‘popular’ YouTube influencers are slow to adapt and add elements of sustainability to their messaging, yet perception levels were higher than expected. It proves important to increase sustainable travel messages among ‘popular’ social media influencers.

**Key words**

Sustainable travel, social media influencer, YouTube, sustainability, vlogs, perception, millennials, economic, environmental, social

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1 List of abbreviations

DMO ---- Destination marketing organization
e-WOM ---- Electronic word of mouth
ICT ---- Information and communication strategy
ROI ---- Return on investment
SMI ---- Social media influencer
ST ---- Smart technologies
TPB ---- Theory of planned behavior
Vlogs ---- Video blogs
WOM ---- Word of mouth

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3 Introduction

3.1 Motivation and outline
Tourism is a multitrillion-dollar industry which caters to human behavior (Buckley, 2011). It accounts for a tenth of the global human economy but also impacts the environment similarly to a medium-sized country (Buckley, 2011). It also employs one out of 11 people worldwide (Ivanov, Dillingham, Parker et al., 2018). Tourism is unquestionably important across the globe for many reasons, but also impacts the globe collectively. Little is previously explored regarding environmental impacts within tourism (Buckley, 2011). Similarly, to these impacts, social media knows no borders just as the effects of tourism know no borders. Consumers use internet technologies, like social media, for a wide spectrum of tourism contexts (Shen, Sotiriadis & Zhou, 2020). Tourism and mass communication go hand in hand, as they are both global players. Growth of technology like the growth in tourism has revolutionized the way consumers find information (Ivanov, Dillingham, Parker et al., 2018). Social media allows access to more information and more dissemination. Social media reaches a global audience with limited resources (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2012). Perhaps using social media, tourism can have positive contributions to conservation of social, economic and environmental institutions (Buckley, 2011). Yet it is important to understand that tourism research differs from environmental science (Buckley, 2011). Tourism can encompass much more than the environmental side, but include economic and social aspects of a destination.

People are significantly less influence by top-down marketing communication approaches, instead they have turned to social media platforms (Ivanov, Dillingham, Parker et al., 2018). In the last two decades interactive communication has increased (Soler-Adillon, 2017). Approximately 54% of the total population aged 16-74 use the internet, and in countries like Great Britain, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland and Belgium the percentage increases to more than 70%. Of the world’s population, 42% is active on social networks (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). Social media and social networking sites have dramatically shifted how people receive information and news (Lou & Yuan, 2018). People are not only connected to the internet but it is also accessible at the tip of their fingers with the emergence of smartphones. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are only some of the
social media platforms which the global population can receive information. One report revealed that the majority of American adults heavily rely on social media for news, and their numbers are consistently growing (Lou & Yuan, 2018). There are more people researching destinations for traveling online using the internet and their smartphones, and therefore there are higher numbers of people being exposed to online tourism marketing. It is vital for the tourism industry, and more specifically the sustainable tourism industry, to expand and adapt into the social media marketplace to grow and benefit from the social media influencer movement. For the purpose of this research sustainable tourism is generally defined as the preservation of the environment, social equity, and local prosperity (Beckendorff, Sheldon, & Fesenmaier, 2014; as cited in Gössling, 2017).

Social media influencers are defined as a third-party actor with a significant number of relevant relationships, with a specific quality to influence stakeholders (Enke & Borchers, 2019). Social media influencers are people who have been shown to have significant influence on public decisions (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). In the context of this research, social media influencers could be the key for mass change in tourism towards sustainability. They influence what we buy, the services we use and the initiatives we support (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). Travelers can vote and show their influence with their dollar, meaning where and with whom they choose to spend their money. The benefit of social media influencers, is that they can achieve both public relations and marketing goals (Borchers, 2019). This can help create, shape and preserve a destinations image as well as promote it.

Specifically, social media influencers can promote sustainable travel. Therefore, strategic influencer communication has become a hot topic (Enke, & Borchers, 2019).

Sustainable tourism used to be considered a niche market but recent research has shown that it is quickly shifting to become the new focus of mass tourism (Bramwell, Higham, Lane & Miller, 2017). The very use of social media influencers is one way the digital space has transformed marketing practices as they provide greater reach than ever before (Fritsch & Fastenau, 2009; as cited in Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). They are able to reach larger audiences than any other cable
network (Levine, 2017). Social media influencers potentially influence hard-to-reach stakeholders like young adults and special interest groups (Enke, & Borchers, 2019). Travel related influencers are highly popular and continue to grow. YouTube travel influencers are some of the most well-known and continued research needs to be completed to demonstrate their significance (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020). Additionally, influencers are present in many industries and research has been done in sectors like fashion and beauty, health and fitness, food and beverage and even high-tech softwares (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). Yet, social media influencers are scarcely studied within the travel and tourism industry, especially when considering sustainable tourism.

Among many media channels YouTube is consistently accessed for product and destination research because YouTube has one of the fastest growing content pools. Every minute 48 hours of video are uploaded (Biel & Gatica – Pérez, 2013). YouTube accounts of 59% of the influencer marketing investment. Influencer marketing campaigns obtain 11 times more ROI (return on investment) than a traditional advertising method (Gretzel, 2018). Influencers also allow tourism marketers to directly and personally connect with customers (Gretzel, 2018). Unlike other online platforms, YouTube allows audiences to see, hear and experience a destination rather than peruse through images. In this regard, social media influencers on YouTube have an opportunity to share detailed information alongside their personal story and experiences of a destination. In these ways, YouTube influencers are able to significantly influence potential future travelers.

Although social media channels are influencers of public opinion and product information prove their increasing importance, relatively little research on the use of social media has been completed (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020). Social media research revolves around purchase intentions of products. The rise of the influencer marketing potential combined with scant scholarly research makes YouTube an ideal media platform to promote sustainable travel messages (Xiao, Wang, & Chan-Olmsted, 2018). YouTube influencers can be highly influential but potentially highly sponsored. Demonstrating the investment in influencer marketing, one report showed YouTube travel influencers’ can be paid up to $31,000 AUD per post (Wallace, 2018; as cited in Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020). Companies along
with tourism boards and governments are heavily investing in this new method of marketing and public relations. Yet not every content creator proves to be successful or sponsored. Influencer marketing is also heavily invested by companies as millennials are the next generation with the biggest buying power (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Millennials especially are avid users of social media platforms. Referring to the halo effect, they accept information from social media influencers who are similar to themselves (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Scholars attribute the success of YouTube influencer marketing to its high consumer perception of information credibility (Xiao, Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2018). Their high levels of credibility are attributed to a YouTube influencers trustworthiness, expertise, likability, interactivity, knowledge and involvement (Xia, Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2018). This reveals the importance to assess YouTube as an information dissemination tool. YouTube is also believed to have the potential to create a 'new model of cosmopolitan cultural citizenship' by utilizing its space for engagement and creating communities (Tolson, 2010). The community of sustainability on social media platforms is a small yet growing culture. By employing YouTube travel influencers, perhaps the sustainability culture can expand. Benefits from social media influencers includes accessibility, ranges in content providers, personalities and a wide variety of opinions and ideas (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). Part of the phenomena studied is the democratization of who can provide content (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). It is important for businesses and destinations marketing teams to understand this phenomenon when we consider a live and/or pre-recorded social media entertainment phenomenon like YouTube. YouTube is a platform which disburses information in a unique way because it allows content to be created by anyone, in any way, and accessed by anyone, anywhere in the world.

Due to increased free access to online content, traditional forms of advertising are now faced with more challenges (Luoma et al., 2019). Traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) advertising and information sources has migrated to online platforms, becoming electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). Destinations and the tourism industry are finding it increasingly difficult to keep ahead of the Tourism 2.0 environment, referring to the Web 2.0 movement (Ivanov, Dillingham, Parker et al., 2018). Influencer marketing in travel and tourism
emphasizes the importance of word-of-mouth (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008; as cited in Gretzel, 2018). Consumers perceive sources of e-WOM as more reliable and influential for planning and purchase decisions (Ivanov, Dillingham, Parker et al., 2018). This particular study focuses on protecting a destinations image from negative e-WOM messages, which further reiterates how quickly and impactfully information spreads on social media (Ivanov, Dillingham, Parker et al., 2018). The urgency to understand travel influencers is accentuated with the expenditure on influencer marketing as this has grown exponentially over the past few years (Lou & Yuan, 2018). A whopping 75% of surveyed American companies report that they cooperated with social media influencers in 2018 (Borchers, 2019). Businesses also report their intention to increase budgets within the next twelve months (Borchers, 2019). Utilizing influencers to promote products and brands on social media has become an important strategy for marketers and advertisers (Shan, Chen & Lin, 2019). These promotions are easily transferable to the tourism industry and their destinations.

Digital and social media continues to grow aggressively. Studies show the billion-dollar influencer marketing industry is uncharted territory (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2018). Gretzel (2018) specifically states there is a lack of research regarding travel and tourism influencer marketing phenomenon. This research bridges insights about sustainable travel within social media influencers, specifically YouTube video blogs (vlogs) and the perception of sustainable travel among a sample of millennials. The need for this study is because the topic is untouched and there is an evident lack of interchange among the disciplines.

Today’s current technology keeps the general population virtually connected. We are a single click away from a world of information, images and videos. A greater amount of time per day is spent online on smartphones, sometimes up to a quarter of a day (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). Smartphones have increasingly become part of everyday life for a massive amount of people (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). Reports show that people have a strong disposition to trust the web (Jones, Leonard & Riemenschneider, 2009). Yet as content is constantly being created and uploaded to the web, it is becoming ever challenging for marketers and content providers to keep up. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are
a few of the main online social media platforms which people frequent on a daily basis. People from around the world can produce content and contribute to conversations about a specific attraction, city or country. Video content, uploaded to YouTube channels, is often an initial starting point to performing research on a destination and attractions to visit. Public relations and marketing are a growing challenge for destinations as well as all companies, including within the tourism industry.

Tourism along with many other industries have turned to the internet and social media networks for public relations and marketing. The travel industry, like the social media industry, is expanding and many countries’ economies are heavily dependent on tourism for long term economic growth (Schubert, Brida & Risso, 2011). Tourism contributes to the growth of a country in many ways. It helps with importing capital goods, infrastructure investments, and it helps to stimulate other economic industries and generates employment (Schubert, Brida & Risso, 2011). Tourism is a major factor in the welfare of countries around the globe. Increased foreign income growth leads to a tourism boom, and can lead over-tourism issues such as polluted beaches, lack of infrastructure for waste management expatriate owned business and much more. Sustainable travel is complicated but on the rise. As millennials are the next greatest buying power and account for most adults online, influencer marketing could be an initiator to change, shift and demand a new type of tourism. Influencers have the ability to impact audience attitudes and behaviors (Enke & Borchers, 2019). This influential power is beneficial to companies, activism and even movements towards sustainable travel. This research is needed in hopes to gain new insights on how sustainable travel is discussed and how its perceived. Due to the lack of scholarly articles regarding existing frames of sustainable travel and the perception of this hot topic, it is a starting point for this thesis and for future research to help understand and shift behaviors.

Sustainable tourism has been on the rise in recent years as consumers are seeking sustainable options for travel. Additionally, more influencers and media coverage expose the damages caused by over-tourism. Sustainable options are growing and marketing them as options in different countries and destinations is becoming more
pressing, due to climate change, the new issue of COVID-19 and the limited resources of the globe, natural and economic resources will need to be managed.

The academic significance of this thesis topic is in understanding the how digital platforms disseminate information for better utilization to the advantage of sustainability. The practical implications of this research are to increase knowledge for sustainable companies and destination marketing companies to grow and contribute to the sustainable tourism community. Marketing companies and destination tourism boards can promote their sustainable options through virtual platforms. Understanding influencers and video content can help targeted promotions for marketing and potentially help sustainable communities, hotels or eco-friendly options to gain traction. In tracking how this virtual information is received, perhaps it can lead to behaviour changes in sustainable tourism.

Previous research defines social media influencers, their success factors; authenticity, credibility, reach and interactivity, and their impact; meaning purchase intentions and brand awareness. The majority of research concerns itself with the business and marketing benefits of social media influencers/influencer marketing. The aim of this thesis is to explore and identify the sustainability cues in popular YouTube travel vlogs. This research will go further to see if these sustainable tourism cues are noticed and processed by a small sample of viewers. Sustainable travel is hardly researched, therefore there are two parts to this research in hopes to expanding the academic knowledge. The research first focuses on how do popular YouTube travel vlogs discuss sustainable travel, through the analysis of 15 YouTube travel videos. The second part of the research will examine if and how sustainable travel aspects are perceived through 20 interviews of millennials.

The term ‘social media influencer’ has become widespread (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). It describes a digital celebrity who informs and encourages a particular consumers choice or behavior (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). Social media influencers are defined as third party actors who have a significant number of relevant relationships, with an ability to influence through content production, distribution and interaction on the social web (Enke & Borchers, 2019). Social media influencers differ from traditional celebrities as they have achieved fame...
based on their personal brand (Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020). Social media influencers cannot exist without influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is essentially a broader term for social media influencers, as it refers to all online presence. It is important to note there are three types of influencer; corporate, mainstream celebrities and ordinary internet users (Borchers, 2019). This research focuses only on ordinary internet user influencers. Social media influencers are often on multiple online platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Little research revolves around the video blogs posted on YouTube and there for vlogs, another term for video blogs are the focus. Vlogs are unique pieces of data as they are rich in details and can be created by anyone in any way and accessed by anyone, anywhere in the world. Social networking platforms have enabled the creation of user-generated content. This new type of content has reshaped the landscape, social media enables a dialogue, and created second screen media to be our main context for stories and information dissemination (Soler-Adillon, 2017). User-generated content is any photo, text, audio or even video that can be created by the user or viewer themselves. This content can also include blog posts, vlog entries, and other posts on social media (Luoma, et al., 2019). User-generated content refers to content not professionally created and produced by major media companies. To clearly answer the research question of sustainable travel, sustainable travel refers to the three pillars of sustainability referred to in the United Nations sustainable development. (Sustainable Development | UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC and SOCIAL COUNCIL, 2020) Sustainable travel encompasses the three pillars but is adapted to relate to travel and tourism. The three pillars are economic sustainability, social sustainability and environmental sustainability.

3.2  Sustainability, tourism and video influencer content
Environmental publications typically cover topics such as global contributions to climate change and ocean pollution, endangered animals and plant species (Buckley, 2011). Sustainability and environmental management tend to be little studied (Buckley, 2011). Although still important, sustainability within tourism should be studied as it is also a global contributor to the issues aforementioned. Sustainable tourism has evolved since 1993 and will need to continue to evolve (Bramwell,
Higham, Lane & Miller, 2017). Tourism is able to help developing nations with political and financial support (Buckley, 2011). The strategic aim of a destination is to create efficient, responsible and sustainable use of tourism resources (Shen, Sotiriadis & Zhou, 2020). Therefore, sustainable tourism goals are seen as adaptable across the different contexts social, cultural, economic, political and environmental issues (Bramwell, Higham, Lane & Miller, 2017). The growing acceptance also means there will be different interpretations to what sustainable tourism entails (Bramwell, Higham, Lane & Miller, 2017). This demonstrates the need for sustainable tourism/travel research. In this instance, tourism merges hospitality sectors with the information and communication technologies (ICT) and marketing world (Pourfakhimi, Duncan, Ould et al., 2020). There is a need and aim to motivate tourists to minimize their negative environmental impacts, and perhaps social media can aid in accomplishing this change (Shen, Sotiriadis & Zhou, 2020).

This paper is structured as follows. Section three presents the literature review related to social media influencers, their success factors, user-generated content and social media within the tourism industry. Section four presents the theories used and the research model within this work. Section five describes the methodology used in this research: the identification and analysis of the narratives along with the semi-structured interviews to understand the perception. Section six highlights the results of the framing analysis within the vlogs and the interviews. Section seven proposes a discussion of the results and outlines the theoretical and practical implications of this work. Section seven concludes the article and outlines limitations and also future avenues to which this study opens the paths.

4 Literature review
4.1 What is a social media influencer (SMI)?
Recent research shows that the average person can spend up to a quarter of their day on their smartphones (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). Information and communications technologies have rapidly increased leading to social media, and user-generated content (Shen, Sotiriadis & Zhou, 2020). There is a growing body of literature on social media, social media influencers and influencer marketing. Although there is a growing amount of research being done in recent years, the topic
continues to remain relatively new and unexplored. The research seeks to define what social media influencers are, what influencer marketing is, the new generation of user-generated content and what makes influencers so effective and special. Previous literature minimally links travel content to the power of social media. Within social media there is a significant amount of content revolving around travel and tourism, yet it is hardly explored in terms of social media’s influence in tourism and specifically sustainable travel.

Social media influencers, (SMI) are defined in a number of ways. Borchers, (2019) expresses the difficulty to pigeonhole what social media influencers truly are. SMIs cross traditional boundaries in many ways and straddle the lines between intimacy and publicity, authenticity and commercialization, and finally ingratiations and critical distance. Due to their online presence SMIs know no boundaries. They are online personalities which have a large number of followers, usually across one or multiple social media platforms; such as YouTube and Instagram (Agrawal, 2016; Varsamis, 2018, as cited in Lou & Yuan, 2018). Similarly, Enke and Borchers (2019) define social media influencers as third-party actors with a significant number of relevant relationships and have a specific quality to influence stakeholders. Their success relies heavily on their followers or subscribers, but they also rely on the number of hits/views and number of shares. This determines their success and credibility (Freberg, Graham, McLaughney & Freberg, 2010). There are four ‘I’s of social media influencers which aid in determining their success. They are integrating, individualize, involve and initiate (Kaplan, 2012; as cited in Beckendorf, Sheldon, & Fesenmaier, 2014). Integrate refers to adhering into a user’s life, YouTube has become quite ubiquitous with online users. Individualize accounts for a user’s interests and preferences. Involve, encouraging and prompting conversation or feedback. Finally, initiate where the user creates user-generated content. SMIs inform, influence and persuade. They work at being informative and entertaining. Additionally, social media influencers have persuasive powers, whether it refers to political opinions, reviewing a product or even promoting a destination.

Social media influencers are extremely exposed to the digital world of social networks. These people are seen as having a significant influence on the public
decisions. They can influence what products to buy, which services to use and what initiatives to support (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). This influential power can translate to marketing physical products. It can shift the experience economy and sway politics. This point demonstrates how social media influencers can impact future travelers of sustainable tourism options. Comparatively, social media influencers are third-party endorsers who shape attitudes (Daniel Jr., Crawford Jackson & Westerman, 2018). If social media influencers have the power to shape attitudes, the question arises whether they can shape sustainable travel attitudes too. Beauty products, fitness videos and travel content are common topics in the social media field (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). SMIs fill specific needs for their followers and therefore become a credible source for specific topics (Daniel Jr., Crawford Jackson & Westerman, 2018). These specific needs shift and change with demand, yet the awareness of demand of sustainable travel content seems low. Particularly niche-based SMIs are seen as more credible, influential and reliable yet they need to be recognizable (Daniel Jr., Crawford Jackson & Westerman, 2018). Reiteratively, a niche-based influencer regarding sustainability and tourism could aid the shift for change within the tourism industry. Their reputation and power demonstrate how social media influencers could also be classified as micro-celebrities, market mavens or even opinion leaders (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020).

Social media influencers depend on social networks. These social networks are regarded as new up and coming concepts within social media. Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar (2018) define social networking as the act of maintaining or increasing an existing circle of friends. That is to say, social networks introduce new friends through existing networks and promotes the formation of communities (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). Social networks like Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube as well as many other social platforms, allow people to meet and share ideas and promote products (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). Social media influencers are different than traditional celebrities (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020). Social media influencers must develop a personal brand through their work, a sense of uniqueness. SMIs work to develop self-brand and extend their potential fame. They work to create close and consistent relationships with fans by sharing parts of their lives online (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020). These online relationships are also
known as interactions (Daniel, Crawford Jackson & Westernman, 2018). Further justified and named para-social interactions (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Moulard, 2018). Also defined as one-sided ‘relationships’ with the possibility of interactions (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Moulard, 2018). As mentioned earlier social media influencers also depend on the halo effect (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016). The halo effect refers to the concept where the perception of an individual can create a positive or negative ‘halo’ around themselves (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016). This helps blur individual characteristics and help create a positive or negative impression of a person, or in this instance SMI. The halo effect coincides well with Sokolova & Kefi’s (2019) concept of homophily. Homophily refers to the idea which people tend to choose or prefer individuals who are similar to themselves (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). Sokolova & Kefi (2019) also found that homophily affects para-social interactions. This is the idea that value sharing is a strong aspect of persuasion. Further in this research it might be important to consider this, as influencers must or should share similar values to convey messages effectively. Followers need to develop an impression of friendship and relatability to the social media influencer. Product placement can be particularly persuasive in influencer messaging due to these online relationships. These para-social interactions are important to gain trust, as viewers are more likely to replicate the behaviours and adopt the same choices in product/experience purchases (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Moulard, 2018). Social media influencers with a high number of followers are known as microcelebrities (Jorge, Maropo & Nunes, 2018). As a matter of fact, microcelebrity is a new type of influential celebrity. Microcelebrity deploy a communicative practice, by creating a public persona which strategically interacts with the viewers intimately (Jorge, Maropo & Nunes, 2018). Except these microcelebrities/SMIs are within an environment which allows for greater proximity, authenticity and immediacy (Marwick & Boyd, 2010; as cited in Jorge, Maropo & Nunes, 2018).

Social media influencers are considered as everyday consumers whom seek more information, to share ideas, information and recommendations (Gretzel, 2018). Social media influencers hold a great deal of influence as they achieve both marketing and public relations goals (Borchers, 2019). In light of this, practitioners
increasingly note the importance that influencers impact marketing activities (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020). Tourists are more active, independent, informed and skilled. They plan, interact evaluate, share and recommend like never before (Shen, Sotiriadis & Zhou, 2020). The reason why it is important to consider destination marketing organizations (DMO) can also utilize social media influencers to impact traveler activities. Social media offers DMOs with a tool that can reach globally, with limited resources (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2012). DMOs have begun to take advantage of the Web 2.0 social media marketing applications, shifting from their traditional marketing methods to online marketing (Elliot, 2016). As more attractions and accommodations move online, budgets to publicize a destination seems to dwindle. Social media is one method which is cost effective with substantial reach. In terms of tourism, social media is the ultimate weapon for publicity and awareness. Yet these SMI's must balance authenticity, sponsorships, culture and engagement levels (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). Therefore, quality and successful social media influencers must be invested in carefully for the greatest impact on future travel.

As discussed earlier, social media influencers are defined as a third-party actor with substantial online presence and influence, understanding influencer marketing is also critical. Influencer marketing has grown exponentially (Lou & Yuan, 2018). In 2018, a report showed that 39% of marketers planned to increase their budget for influencer marketing, and 19% plan to spend more than $100,000 per campaign (Lou & Yuan, 2018). Influencer marketing is defined by the number of friends or followers which support the influencer (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). It connects online personas to brands and services and viewers. These companies aim to gain audiences’ trust by regularly engaging them (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2018). Together with influencer marketing, marketers and brands identify and invest in certain influencers which align and promote their brand to target consumers (Lou & Yuan, 2018). Marketers generally categorize influencers into 4 categories; 1. celebrities 2. industry experts or thought leaders 3. bloggers and content creators 4. micro-influencers (Gretzel, 2018). SMI's that create content resonating with personal passions could be sidetracked by commercial opportunities (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Guidry Moulard, 2018). The promotions of brands and products they
might not normally be interested in could harm their authenticity. Authenticity will
be further explored in the following text. Investors in influencer marketing must
consider the more authentic influencers prove to be the most convincing influencers,
therefore the most persuasive.

4.2 Social media and sustainable travel

_Social Media in Tourism_

Sustainable tourism is a relatively new term within academic research. Social media
and the internet have previously been underutilized for the promotion of
sustainability. The use of the internet for travel-related information search has
earned a significant amount of attention from researchers and scholars (Sun, Law &
Luk, 2018). The rise of social media creates new opportunities, within the tourism
industry and sustainable travel. Opportunities for travel-related information like,
online bookings, evaluations of destinations are much needed travel advice
(Gössling, 2015). Perhaps the internet and more specifically social media have not
fused together due to the ambiguity of sustainable tourism. Previous articles state
that sustainable tourism is quite confusing, the meaning and practical applications
are blurred and unclear (Koutsouris, 2009). Yet social media has shifted the way
tavel is discussed (Gössling, 2015). Along with sustainable development,
sustainable travel is widely used in international documents and agreements
(Koutsouris, 2009). Therefore, increased research should be invested for current
academia. The reason sustainable travel or sustainable tourism is so complicated is
it is often contested and highly diverse, dynamic and each defending their own
discourse of sustainability (Koutsouris, 2009). Even the discussion of sustainable
travel online refers to the research – before the trip, during trip, and reviewing after.
Functions like researching and planning, booking reservations and online
feedback/reviews are constantly changing how the tourism industry and tourist must
develop. The internet has enabled global access to information, meaning global
resources. How people travel, plan those trips, and encourage other travelers, is
understudied. Tourists now find information about hours of operation, weather in a
destination and even attraction fees (Gössling, 2015). More people are turning to the
internet to complete their research of a destination before they travel and during
their travels with a smartphone in hand. Previous literature also covers how destination marketing organization (DMOs) use social media (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2012). Destinations and its stakeholders are increasingly reliant on the internet and social media to manage, market tourism and share favourable consumer opinions (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2012; Mauri & Minazzi; as cited in Gössling, 2015). Tourism destinations should manage their resources sustainably using smart technologies (Shen, Sotiriadis & Zhou, 2020). Smart technologies specifically refer to the use of websites, apps, and other digital media for multiple reasons and purposes (Shen, Sotiriadis & Zhou, 2020). This research sought to understand if social media sites make a contribution to sustainable tourism within the smart tourism paradigm (Shen, Sotiriadis & Zhou, 2020). They explored the perceptions and attitudes of Chinese tourist consumers using smart tourism framework. Social media appears to have an effect on pre-consumption – meaning the pre-trip planning and educating, as well as the consumption – meaning while at the destination (Shen, Sotiriadis & Zhou, 2020). The term smart tourism (ST) is the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to develop innovations and tools to improve tourism (Shen, Sotiriadis & Zhou, 2020). When it comes to sustainability, awareness and options are generally fewer. Sustainable tourism needs constant education, monitoring and collaboration, which can be achieved through IT, including social media (Beckendorff, Sheldon, & Fesenmaier, 2014). Although the literature suggests there is an increase for awareness of the environment (Shen, Sotiriadis & Zhou, 2020).

*Sustainable travel*

Sustainability and sustainable travel topics are growing as a special issue. A tourist who is mindful of the environment and supportive of environmental causes is considered a ‘sustainable’ or ‘responsible’ traveler. Environmental or sustainable attitudes and behaviors must be learned. Learning is the critical key to creating a more sustainable future (Koutsouris, 2009). Previous research specifies that social learning should be used to involve human beings and cultural considerations, to create a lasting and effective sustainable future (Koutsouris, 2009). The literature focuses on specific case studies in the development of sustainable tourism within the destination and its key stakeholders. There is little covered regarding the bridge
between social media influencers and sustainable travel. Sustainable travel has become a major concern which has fueled research on how to make people change to more sustainable travel (Gehlert, Dziekan & Gärling, 2013). Therefore, re-iterating the need to understand how sustainable travel is being discussed on social media.

Although this research does not seek to understand travel behaviors, due to some limitations, some literature does pursue travel behavior specifically regarding sustainable transportation (Gehlert, Dziekan & Gärling, 2013). Travel behavior ties in with the psychology of sustainable travel, which is significantly different than understanding how it is being discussed (Gehlert, Dziekan & Gärling, 2013). Using behavioral economics, the research seeks to understand how to shift behaviors towards sustainable travel (Gehlert, Dziekan & Gärling, 2013). The research exposes how motives are exclusively instrumental in shifting travel behavior (Gehlert, Dziekan & Gärling, 2013). Demonstrating how motivations and morals are key in the actions and behaviors of travelers. It might also be important to note that travel behavior is jointly determined by multiple factors such as; social influence, individual factors and transport environment (Gehlert, Dziekan & Gärling, 2013). Previous literature also shows that eco-labelling could be helpful to develop sustainable tourism, to contribute to green tourist choices (Gössling, 2015). Eco-labelling provides some identification of sustainability for travelers upon their research process. Some online platforms acknowledge the shift towards sustainable tourism. For example, booking sites like TripAdvisor pledge to promote sustainable tourism, which is tied to social and cultural issues (Gössling, 2015).

The link between sustainability and tourism is complicated (Walker & Moscardo, 2014). There is minimal literature relating social media influencers with tourism or sustainability, despite research on social media influencers and sustainable tourism in on the internet separately. As previously mentioned, the majority of the literature found revolves around the marketing perspective in business to encourage purchase intention and a handful of articles on influencing behavior for food and beverage, activism and politics. One study regarding tourism, highlights the need for rural businesses to pursue millennial visitors through social media influencers (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). It is discussed that millennials tend to be the most drawn to
rural tourism due to the authentic and low-impact travel style. Rural tourism is one method of travel that is considered more sustainable. It is claimed that millennials are the new force in the tourism market and should be approached through social media. Millennials are the next major buying power. They should be the intended target and focus for further research to understand the potential. As social media is often about the interactivity and para-social interactions, personal messaging could be an important branch to understand.

Social media offers the opportunity for tourists/visitors to contribute decision-making through interactivity and engagement (Gössling, 2015). One study demonstrates how online communications allows tourism marketers to directly connect and personally tailor message to customers (Gretzel, 2018). This same study emphasizes how a destinations image can be significantly influenced through SMIs and other endorsers (Gretzel, 2018). As the tourism industry grows, more travelers rely on e-WOM, electronic word-of-mouth (Gretzel, 2018). Electronic word of mouth is widely used by consumers on online platforms (Reyes-Menendez, Saura & Martinez-Navalon, 2019). It is defined as communication on the internet which can be diffused by other online applications; such as YouTube (Reyes-Menendez, Saura & Martinez-Navalon, 2019). Research shows the growing importance of e-WOM in the decision-making process of a consumer (Reyes-Menendez, Saura & Martinez-Navalon, 2019).

Credibility is incredibly important in terms of the online community, like with social media influencers, which will be further explored in the following sections. Consumer involvement or interactions, volume of e-WOM, source credibility and perceived credibility all contribute and highlight the necessary characteristics and elements a successful social media influencer must maintain (Reyes-Menendez, Saura & Martinez-Navalon, 2019). Tourism marketers who began working early with bloggers and online sources became important travel influencers (Gretzel, 2018). Recent examples of social media influencers in the travel and tourism are vlogs like Jack Harries of JacksGap who co-creates with Marriott, earning 900,000 views (Gretzel, 2018). Marriott has worked with other influencers, which demonstrates how companies can utilize influencer marketing. Travel and tourism are important industries and despite its prominence in the world there is a lack of
research on travel and the tourism influencer marketing phenomenon (Gretzel, 2018). Social media is the tip of the iceberg when attempting to influence sustainable travel. How consumers perceive travel in social media influencers should be investigated further.

4.3 Characteristics of SMI communication

4.3.1 User-generated video content

Social media influencers on social networks also brings in a new generation of content, user-generated content. Unlike before media content can be created by anyone and everyone. The most well-known sites include Facebook, and YouTube (Elliot, 2016). Media is no longer limited to major industrial-economic actors (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). The power of electronic consumer-to-consumer (C2C) communication is the preferred source for travel information (Elliot, 2016). User-generated content allows each user to be both the recipient and a content provider (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018).

User-generated content is successful due to the proximity between producers and consumers (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). There is a newfound intimacy created between producers of content and consumers (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). Social media presence allows for a sense of intimacy and immediacy of a relationship (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). It even shows that high levels of social presence make the social media influencer more influential (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). To further emphasize user-generated contents impact, 29% of online consumers in the U.S. watch user-generated video content at least once a month (Elliot, 2016). YouTube’s audience rapidly grows across all demographics. The majority of young internet users, 80% are aged 18-29 in the U.S. (Madden, 2009; as cited in Morris & Anderson, 2015).

In the context of this paper, user-generated content refers to video blogs or vlogs. User-generated video content can be considered as visual stories (Elliot, 2016). These vlogs are self-made productions that are created with an intent to convey a meaning (Pace, 2008; as cited in Elliot, 2016). Vlogs posted on platforms like YouTube are widely popular yet scarcely studied particularly in terms of sustainable
tourism. YouTube remains one of the most popular video sharing online platform. Google purchased YouTube in 2006 for $1.65 billion in stock (Latham, Butzer & Brown, 2008; as cited in Elliot, 2016). Vlogs can be seen as multimodal extensions of text-based blogging. This allows greater enrichment found in the complexity and depth of nonverbal behavior (Biel & Gatica-Perez, 2013). One study sought to understand the influence of how vlogging can promote a destination image. Social media and user-generated content is increasingly important to the economic success of a destination (O’Connor, 2008, as cited in Gössling, 2015). Therefore, there is an increase in research regarding user-generated content and its influence. The exploratory case study, using the Philippines, demonstrates how vlogs can vividly create a destinations image (Peralta, 2019). This solidifies how stories and images of user-generated content can influence viewers perspective. Also, it exemplifies how user-generated content like vlogging can be used for promotional and marketing agendas (Peralta, 2019). Although this study uses Facebook as their social media platform, it remains translatable. Plus, it still remains that tourism researchers see the benefit of analyzing travel vlogs as a cost-effective method in collecting rich, authentic and unsolicited consumer feedback (Pan et al., 2007; as cited in Elliot, 2016).

Travel vlogs have great potential to inform tourism marketers and sustainable tourism (Elliot, 2016). Additionally, user-generated video content is found to stimulate fantasies and day dreams, perhaps this creates potential for sustainability goals laced within idyllic content (Elliot, 2016). Previous literature found were relatively heavy in user-generated content but not specific to video content. Some academic articles or conference papers were discovered referring to the potential and need for more research on travel video content, which articulates the gap this research seeks to fill. There is significant need for defining sustainability in travel influencers, as well as their potential influence. The research previously shows there is value in user-generated video content but fails to link sustainable tourism in user-generated video content and perceptions of these messages. Influencer-produced branded content, another term for user-generated content, is often considered more organic, authentic and impactful (Lou & Yuan, 2018). Therefore, the success factors of social media influencers in creating user-generated content must strive for
authenticity, credibility, engagement and reach. Authenticity is frequently positively associated with traveller attitudes (Cohen, 1988; Hughes 1995; as cited in Elliot, 2016).

4.3.2 Authenticity as a basis for trust
Social media influencers critical factor is credibility and likeability. Credibility and likability are highly linked to authenticity. As viewers view perceived authenticity highly, it is the basis for trust translating to credibility. Yet what is considered authentic? A great deal of research demonstrates that user-generated content by social media influencers is seen as more authentic and trusted. As previously mentioned, influencer marketing has mainly been researched in the marketing perspective of a business. Companies fund research to understand how the modern-day consumer learns and what influences them to purchase (purchase intention). One study shows that authenticity is the main effect on audience purchase intentions (Pöyry, Pelkonen, Naumanen & Laaksonen, 2019). This can also be transferred to destination recommendations within tourism, regarding this studies topic.

As authenticity is claimed to build trust and therefore translates to purchases in the business world. It was revealed that the key element behind purchase is trust (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Further research must be conducted a study to fully understand the factors that enable trust (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Chatzigeorgiou (2017) further explains that individuals on social media are trusted based on their reputation, competence and predictability. Along with trust, authenticity is a key element which goes hand in hand. Authenticity can be defined as perceived authenticity. Perceived authenticity is generally understood as a person being true to one's self (Luoma et al., 2019, as cited in Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Moulard, Garrity, & Hamilton Rice, 2015; Fritz, Schoenmueller, & Bruhn, 2017; Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Perceived authenticity is the genuineness, uniqueness and originality of a person or their ideas (Luoma et al., 2019). Successful social media influencers must demonstrate authenticity effectively. Techniques influencers use to demonstrate authenticity include; circulating selfies, posting original and creative content, shooting videos with a sense of immediacy and live elements, interacting with followers, and consistent personal branding strategies (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Guidry Moulard, 2018).
Yet conveying authenticity is not as simple as being oneself. Social media influencers must express, speak and otherwise communicate in a relevant way to a subculture they aim to appeal to. SMIs also need to portray this authenticity with ease and do so comfortably (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). In today's market, a social media influencer's ability to provide authentic experiences becomes a competitive advantage (Luoma et al., 2019). Strategic communication practitioners recognize the need for authenticity in order to engage with communities and cultures (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). Motivations to publish and share are also a major factor for authenticity of an influencer. One article highlights the fame of young men whose YouTube careers started as teenagers. They developed unique and authentic channels, with more than two million viewers, illustrating their success (Morris & Anderson, 2015). Yet they present a new form of masculinity, with authenticity (Morris & Anderson, 2015). This demonstrates the need and different types of success authenticity of a YouTube influencer can provide and share. It also shows the power of influence based on authentic YouTube influencers. Publishing creative content as an outlet is a greater motivator for influencers than promotions and sponsorships. Making money is only in fourth place for influencer motivations (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Guidry Moulard, 2018).

In Luoma et al (2019) study, their results emphasized the importance of experienced authenticity as well as online community engagement, which will be further discussed below. Reinforcing the idea that authenticity leads to trust is that online content generated by amateurs is perceived as more authentic (Luoma et al., 2019). Due to the "spontaneity", ordinary people believe it is more authentic than corporate advertising videos (Luoma et al., 2019). Two types of frameworks of authenticity exist within marketing: indexical and iconic (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Guidry Moulard, 2018). Indexical refers to whether an object is the original, and iconic refers to if an object is perceived to be an accurate representation of something (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Guidry Moulard, 2018). More specifically vloggers self-disclose and speak directly to their audience, meaning the camera. Both of these methods are perceived as authentic (Luoma et al., 2019). Reiterated, authenticity and personality are strong influencers of trust (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). In an older study, there exists a positive influence on web trust (Jones, Leonard, &
Riemenschneider, 2009). In this 2009 study, results show people trust influencers on the web for the last decade. Sustaining the concept that authenticity is a key element to trust. Authenticity of influencers is a key skill to perform. It is vital that social media influencers appear natural. SMIs should not appear scripted or as if they put in too much thought or work. They should display highly skilled forms of emotional and affective labor (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019).

Millennials tend to be the most active online users (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019; Chatzigeorgiou, 2017) Millennials identify with the social network and frequently borrow aspects of their personalities and lifestyle in order to look like them (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). They are often well-educated young people they seek to identify with an influencer (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Young people are digitally competent and active on social media. As a result, they seek online personalities which are authentic (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Social media influencers are seen as more trustworthy if they seem more relatable to oneself (Shan, Chen & Lin, 2019). Audience members can then form strong emotional bonds with influencers (Luoma et al., 2019). Vloggers specifically can be identified as "authentic online celebrities" (Luoma et al., 2019). Their authenticity is further established by their directness, transparency and conversational nature (As cited Luoma et al., 2019, Tolson, 2010). Social media influencers are different than traditional celebrities. They are still seen as an aspirational group but audiences find them personally relevant and a credible source of information (Shan, Chen, & Lin, 2019). Previous research continues to confirm that influencer endorsement must focus on their source of credibility.

4.3.3 Credibility and transparency
Along with authenticity, credibility and transparency are important success factors of social media influencers. A social media influencers influential potential depends on their popularity. SMI popularity is based on the number subscribers, followers, likes, shares and views. Source credibility is defined as a consumers' perception of an information source based on its trustworthiness, attractiveness and knowledge (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Equally, credibility is defined as the degree of trustworthiness and reliability a source has (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). The need to be transparent with audiences is also critical for social media influencer credibility.
This relates to the perception of quality communication by the viewers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). Credibility also relates to homophily as previously mentioned regarding parasocial interactions. Credibility influences viewers through a process of internalization (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). As it is reiterated, influencers need to share similar values and attitudes to be perceived as credible. As stated by Johnson & Kaye (2013) viewers have selective exposure, credibility affects their choice to view or ignore certain content (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019).

As many SMIs are sharing information about products or experiences, with the intent to persuade a purchase, audiences exhibit various coping mechanisms to resist this communication (Luoma et al., 2019). It is important to note that multiple countries have requirements of disclosure statements within an influencer’s post/video (Gretzel, 2018). It is clear advertising laws have adapted to influencer marketing as well. Influencers must be transparent to their audiences if they receive money from the brands to which they advocate and promote (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). Communities can become deeply suspicious and hostile towards forms of advertising or strategic communications (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019) Strategic communications practitioners presenting their own products are immediately perceived as suspicious (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). There is a level of comfort exhibited in audiences when watching trusted streamers review a product (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). Social media influencers or those who create user-generated content are considered to be more credible than company created advertisements (Lee, Lee & Hansen, 2017, as cited in Luoma et al., 2019).

Additionally, Lou and Yuan (2018) suggests that influencer-generated content holds informative value. Some influencer credibility can also positively affect audience trust, which in turn creates brand awareness and purchase intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2018).

Credibility plays an important role in social media influencers skillsets, but transparency is vital to their credibility. One study argued that if an SMI disclosed their sponsorship, that audiences would consider the message less persuasive. The reasoning behind this paper was that audiences might perceive the content as advertising (Evans et al., 2017; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016; as cited in Luoma et al., 2019;). Although further research disputes this. The contrary has been shown.
Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson (2020) study shows that influencers who disclose their sponsorships have higher levels of credibility and purchase intentions. Further research is needed on the types of social media influencers and the transparency of their relationships with companies, of whether levels of payments or compensation change the perception of credibility (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020). Credibility can be attributed to social media influencer by their transparency and ability to build trust, but also on their likability. Another measure of credibility on social media is the number of likes (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020).

4.3.4 Communication reach

Social media reaches further than ever before. As previously stated, many destination marketing organizations turn to the relatively low-cost option of social media, due to its global reach (Hays, Page, Buhalis, 2012). It has the ability for anyone to communicate with everyone (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Reiterated by Lim, Radzol, Cheah & Wong (2017) the use of SMIs reach the target segment often by leveraging a plethora of social media platforms. Social media differs from traditional media channels (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). The key difference is that information in social media is cheap and accessible (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). Anyone can publish or share information in their own unique way. Social media reaches people at a scale and speed larger than any previous communications mediums (Hays, Page, Buhalis, 2012). Social media also allows individuals or companies to reach audiences that might be otherwise hard to reach (Woodcock & Johnson, 2018). Tourism groups recognize there is a need to reach younger generations, those conveniently on social media platforms. YouTube viewers watch 4.95 billion videos every day, proving the sizable potential audience a piece of video content could be viewed. (Geyser, 2018). Additionally, 1.32 billion people use YouTube. Social media influencers have the capability to be more popular than a traditional celebrity (Geyser, 2018). Vlogs are becoming increasingly popular as a communication channel, due to their ability to reach mass audiences (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014; as cited in Luoma et al., 2019). As the tourism industry grows and becomes more affordable, reach is more important to hit the numbers but also target the right travelers. The study of social media influencers becomes clear, the greater reach the greater chance of influence. Regarding sustainable tourism, the use and
study of social media influencers based on their immense reachability is vital in hopes to increase sustainable travel.

4.3.5 Engagement and interactivity

Social media is all together a different method of strategic communication. Social media is readily available and has changed the world of communication between individuals and organizations (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). Unlike traditional methods of advertising, social media platforms allow interaction. Social media produces influencers who build their following based on their engagement and relevant content (Gretzel, 2018). Social media platforms also enable dialogue and a new level of engagement that other communication or broadcasting channels have not. Interactive communication channels have increased (Soler-Adillon, 2017).

Reinforcing this idea, Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar (2018) state the foundation of social media technologies is turning communication channels into an interactive dialogue. It is the art and science of engaging influential people online to share messages and sometimes form sponsored content (Sammis et al., 2016; as cited in Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Online popularity can be altered through engagement with social media (Morris & Anderson, 2015).

User-generated content by social media influencers has reshaped the landscape due to the interactivity (Soler-Adillon, 2017). Additionally, despite traditional media increasing engagement, vloggers maintain a sense of inclusivity and individuality (Morris, & Anderson, 2015). Destinations and tourism should follow suit and adapt to strategic communication channels with high interactivity. Tourism destinations are constantly competing to be the next best location, but with greater interactivity, perhaps tourism management can better match the traveler to the destination for a more sustainable traffic flow. These platforms have become a space for dialogue where information and stories are accessed and disseminated (Soler-Adillon, 2017). By using this storytelling method, sustainability messages can be more effectively shared among travelers as well as operators. Interactive media requires a significant amount of storytelling as well as creating and designing experiences for an active audience. Interactivity also helps shape and influence the type of content created (Soler-Adillon, 2017). Influencers with relationships on YouTube, Instagram and Facebook are not unidirectional. Influencers add comments and discuss content,
with the possibility to respond to messages and comments to build interactivity (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019).

Social media networks are for social interactions and represent the social sphere of communication (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). Interaction is vital to developing online relationships and followers. Interaction in comparison to participation, is the act of interacting with content that is already created or produced (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). Interactivity can also be defined as the ability to partake in the process of interaction (Soler-Adillon, 2017). Recent studies emphasize the need to engage with audience members (Luoma et al., 2019). The more interactivity or engagement, the greater success and credibility (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020). Engagement levels are important to influence consumer decision making (As cited in Luoma et al., 2019; van Ruler). Engagement levels vary from influencer to influencer. It is disclosed that micro-influencers, those who have 1,000 to 100,000 likes or followers maintain the best engagement level (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020). Macro-influencers, 100,000 to 1,000,000 likes/follows, often hire teams to help manage communications and interaction creating a less authentic and personal online relationships (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020). Micro-influencers hit a sweet spot, where they have enough credibility with the number of followers and likes yet maintain a personal relationships and good levels of engagement. Needless to say, engagement is a critical skill that ensures social media influencer success.

4.4 Consequences of SMI communication

Assuming social media influencers are able to be all of the above; authentic, trusted, transparent and credible, their ability to increase brand awareness and purchase intentions are high. Studies show that influencers who are extremely exposed to social networks are able to influence public decisions (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). From the things people purchase, to the services they use, and initiatives they support, influencers can persuade audiences one way or another (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). Marketing industries need to adapt and realize the growth of social media influencers and users. Millennials are the generation with the greatest purchasing power (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). 74% of consumers make their purchase decisions based on social media (Bennett, 2014; as cited in Chatzigeorgiou, 2017).
4.5 Perception of messages

Social media influencers are one strategic method of communication. Their new influence on public opinion and purchase intentions are important to understand. The new wave of user-generated contend is critical to utilize in hopes to promote sustainable travel and as important as authenticity and credibility are, perception by viewers is still under researched. Previous literature shows little regarding social media. Yet social media sites are perceived as the most important channel for searching travel information (Sun, Law & Luk, 2018). There is some research regarding the perception of photos through the online platform Instagram and celebrity endorsement. This research identifies that sponsored content is less favorably perceived (Pöyry, Pelkonen, Naumanen & Laaksonen, 2019).

Yet it must be remembered that as previously stated the opposite has been shown. Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson (2020) study shows that influencers who disclose their sponsorships have higher levels of credibility and purchase intentions. The findings of this research also emphasize the importance of organizations finding suitable matches between endorser and their brand and content for optimal results (Pöyry, et al., 2019). The opportunities for influence have grown due to social media influencers (Pöyry, et al., 2019). Regular people are able to become celebrities in their own way, which is why the perception side of social media is vital (Pöyry, et al., 2019). Reinforcing this weakness or gap in perception, the impact of the internet on tourists’ perception of information sources have been previously ignored despite the rapid development of information and communication technology (Sun, Law & Luk, 2018). One study seeks to evaluate the performance of various search channels for travel related information (Sun, Law & Luk, 2018). Moreover, referring to a destinations image on social media; perceptions of images were stated to be more important than tangible resources (Ivanov, Dillingham, Parker et al., 2018). It is emphasized that perceptions are more powerful than realities in terms of motivating people to act (Gunthrie & Gale, 1991; as cited in Ivanov, Dillingham, Parker et al., 2018).
5 Theory and conceptual framework

5.1 Overview of conceptual framework

There is low awareness of theories and techniques for tourism research in the academic disciplines (Buckley, 2011). Due to the multidisciplinary nature of tourism, social media and communications is based within the business perspective. Framing theory is used within this study. Frames in communication are ways to organize everyday realities (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Therefore, it is relevant to this research as it helps to answer how sustainable travel communication is organized, expressed and shared. Sociological foundations of framing will be used to discuss frames of communication (Borah, 2011). The reason sociological framing will be used is because it is the type of framing focuses on words, images, phrases and presentation styles. Frames within interpretative research helps to promote specific definitions and interpretations (Chong & Druckman, 2007). It is used to identify and track issue definitions and trends (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Specifically, in this case frames will be used to track the definition of sustainable travel and the perception or interpretations of sustainable travel in the second part of the research. Since sustainable travel is difficult to define and relatively new and diverse, frames are the best method to measure sustainable travel, as there is no standardization (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Framing analysis helps tourism researchers to review mass mediated messages and identify the interplay (Ritchie, Burns & Palmer, 2005). It can be used to both distinguish how influencers write and share their messages but also how individuals understand those stories (Ritchie, Burns & Palmer, 2005).

Framing theory helps process communication, this theory will help frame the concepts of sustainability that are communicated (de Vreese, 2005). Since framing involves selection and salience (Entman, 1993). Salience itself is the idea of making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to an audience (Entman, 1993). It aligns with the selection of YouTube travel vlogs and determining the salient messages within them. Additionally, in the interviews that will be completed, salient messages will be the relevant to identifying perceptions. Framing is only defined in relations to a specific issue, and in this instance
sustainable travel is the issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007). The frame defining attitudes towards sustainable travel may include considerations of the social, economic and environmental impacts. Sustainability but more specifically sustainable travel is hardly defined within academic papers and can be articulated in numerous ways.

Frames will be analyzed within the YouTube vlog narratives and within interviews. Framing theory will be used to identify and construct stories and patterns. Frames will identify both direct and indirect messages about sustainable travel. Direct narratives will address sustainability or the reasons for the YouTube influencers’ choice and actions to promote sustainable travel. A direct statement must include outlining the sustainability factor, if a YouTube influencer states choosing a local guide to help support the local economy as the money flows back into the community, this will be identified as a direct narrative. Indirect narratives by the YouTube influencer will include mentioning a sustainable travel behavior or action for non-sustainable reasons. For example, a YouTube influencer promoting the use of a bike in a city as a cheaper and more convenient option, rather than environmental will be considered an indirect narrative of environmental sustainability.

Prior to coding, the research identifies frames for sustainable travel into three categories; social, economic and environmental sustainability. Within each of these categories are sub-codes. Social sustainability refers to topics, phrases or words referring to cultural aspects, historic aspects, independent traveling and interacting with locals/community. Economic sustainability will be identified by reference to accommodation and local restaurants or shops. Environmental impacts within tourism studies research remains crude (Buckley, 2011). Therefore, environmental sustainability refers to nature appreciation, environmental materials/goods and transportation. This research acknowledges frames built around particular values may be more effective in communication (Chong & Druckman, 2007). For example, conservation organizations are likely to be more convincing and persuasive with a message when it is linked to the quality of drinking water (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Yet environmental frames are often strong when referring to
local issues like controlling growth and addressing the common resource pool, yet weak when it is in a larger scope like global issues (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

5.2 Frames in video communication and social media

Media is powerful and disseminates information across many channels. Frames within social media is never neutral (O’Neill, Williams, Kurz, et al., 2015). Previous research regarding frames in social media are few and are relevant to video communications. Frames define issues, identify causes and help the public make moral judgements (O’Neill, Williams, Kurz, et al., 2015). Frames are increasingly important in the age of social media. People are increasingly reliant on media to help interpret and understand more complex issues (O’Neill, Williams, Kurz, et al., 2015). In this instance the complex issue is sustainability and sustainable travel. One previous study uses frames to analyze video communication specifically relating to the news and broadcasting of climate change (O’Neill, Williams, Kurz et al., 2015). The paper covers the production and consumption of climate change media (O’Neill, Williams, Kurz et al., 2015). It also shows that cultural availability of visual content and accessible storylines are important to media coverage framing (O’Neill, Williams, Kurz et al., 2015). Visual content is important alongside narratives, or storytelling. There is an enormous variety of videos which exist in this digital age. Due to major multimedia technology advancements there is a significant amount of video data generated (Ejaz, Mehmood & Wook Baik, 2013). The video data that is analyzed within this research is “native” video data (Knoblauch, Tuma & Schnettler, 2013). Native video data refers to videos that are produced by actors other than the researcher (Knoblauch, Tuma & Schnettler, 2013). YouTube content is native video data. This research examines frames of video communication, specifically pre-recorded and globally shared. Ejaz, Mehmood & Wook Baik, (2013) explain that video data can be summarized using two basic methods; video skimming and key frame extraction. Video skimming is ideal for shorter duration of videos, whereas key frame extraction techniques create summaries from extracting salient frames (Ejaz, Mehmood & Wook Baik, 2013). Key frame extraction provides better browsing capabilities (Ejaz, Mehmood & Wook Baik, 2013). Literature shows the analysis of video communication being quite complex and relates to psychology. When research attempts to understand and
research the human visual attention system, it becomes quantitative and less interpretative. Visual attention is one method to understand where people look on a video (Ejaz, Mehmood & Wook Baik, 2013). Given the interpretative analysis of this research visual cues will support narrative codes, but will not be analyzed. Overall, there is little research regarding the analysis of video communication within the social media context, and specifically regarding YouTube and sustainable travel. Frames in social media tend to cover news media and there is little regarding frames in social media video communications.

5.3 Brief Overview of Theoretical Foundations Utilized in the Study

Theoretical frameworks used in this study is social learning theory. Although a number of theories are used in previous literature, none are quite suited for the study of how travel vlogs on YouTube discuss sustainable travel and the perception of these sustainable travel messages. Social learning theory justifies that individuals learn or develop motives from exposure to direct or indirect social interactions (Lim, Mohd Radson, Cheah et al., 2017). Social interactions and settings are referred to the online social relations from social media but in this instance YouTube influencers. Social learning theory is further explained below. There are two theories which also justify the need for this research. Social media influencers and their impact through perception are critical for further understanding and research.

Source credibility theory is important to understand as a justification for this research. Source credibility is the concept that audiences view a source to gain knowledge and information (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In order for YouTube influencers to exhibit source credibility, they must be perceived as trustworthy, expertise level and attractiveness (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). As credibility was explored in the literature review, this theory is well suited for why this research is needed. There is little research which addresses YouTube travel vloggers and sustainable travel, nor specifically their source credibility. Source credibility theory specifically depends on the quality of an argument which relates greater to the sustainability lists explored within this study. This theory suggests that when people
see valid arguments or reviews about a destination or sustainable travel aspects, audiences will develop a positive attitude towards the endorsed destination or practice (Djafarova, Rushworth, 2017).

Another theory which supports the justification for this research is the halo effect theory. It is a social theory which assumed that influencers and vloggers alike create a positive or negative 'halo' around them (Djafarova, Rushworth, 2017). The idea is that an influencer or vlogger surrounds themselves with like-minded and similar people, therefore a viewer will more likely trust and like other influencers, promoted by the vlogger/influencer they currently trust/watch. In simpler terms, people are more likely to like an influencer, if a 'friend' suggested them and likes them (Djafarova, Rushworth, 2017).

5.4  Brief Overview of Literature Reviewed, Discussed and Applied
Literature that was reviewed shows an array of different theories. Most previous literature attempts to understand the level of trust, authenticity and perceived credibility of social media influencers, using theories like source credibility theory. Previous literature also looks the level of persuasion or what influences purchase intentions. Most of the research revolves around the marketing aspect of products using social media influencers. Influencer marketing regarding communication uses goal-framing theory, reactance theory, attribution theory, communication theory, persuasion theory but most importantly framing theory as the field is still new and unexplored.

5.5  Theoretical Framework
The social learning theory by Bandura has been used in abundance within academic research, especially in the communication and marketing industries (Bush et al, 2004 as cited in Lim, Mohd Radzon, Cheah et al., 2017). This theory will be used as the theoretical framework.

As the objective of this research is to increase sustainable travel awareness and actions, it is first important understand how popular travel vlogs on YouTube
discuss sustainable travel. Social learning theory justifies that individuals learn or develops motives from exposure to direct or indirect social scenarios and interactions (Lim, Mohd Radson, Cheah et al., 2017). Individual motivations and attitudes can be shaped by social settings. Social learning is the basis for learning through or mediated by social interactions (Brunstein, Jaimie, Curi et al., 2015). In the context of this study, social interactions extend to online social interactions. As previously mentioned in the literature review, para-social interactions are online interactions and relationships which develop through interactivity and credibility (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). Social learning theory has emerged to understand how different social actors, like influencers, have been understood to address environmental problems and climate change, as well as education for sustainability (Brunstein, Jaimie, Curi et al., 2015). In this research’s definition of social learning it considers para-social relationships and interactions as a new form of social setting. Sustainability is about how we teach and learn equally as it is what we are teaching and learning (Swartling et al., 2011; as cited in Brunstein, Jaimie, Curi et al., 2015). Social learning is a relevant framework for processes of social change (Koutsouris, 2009). Social learning often can only occur if it allows cooperation, trust, intuition and inspiration (Koutsouris, 2009). It is also stated that the value of information, socio-demographic information and past experiences of tourists affect their perception of social media channels, when viewing travel-related information (Sun, Law & Luk, 2018).

The theoretical framework of social learning justifies that if people view enough sustainable travel content on YouTube, it could lead to people thinking and acting more sustainably. This theory helps to understand consumer consumption through socializations of celebrities, in this instance online microcelebrities. Due to the halo effect, messages of sustainable travel can be indirectly shared with growing social networks.

A few terms will need to be clarified in terms of the research below. The term “sustainability” is used in this paper as general broader term as it is constantly evolving a dynamic (Gössling, 2017). Sustainable travel is defined as decisions and actions during a trip which promotes social, economic and/or environmental sustainability. For example, social sustainability refers to the cultural/heritage
aspects of a destination and interactions with the locals and local community/network. Economic sustainability is defined as aspects which inject capital into the local economy. Finally, environmental sustainability could refer to a multitude of descriptors such as environmentally friendly materials, reduction of carbon emissions or even animal conservation. It also aligns with Beckendorff, Sheldon, & Fesenmaier, 2014; as cited in Gössling, 2017 approach to sustainability, social equity relating to social sustainability, physical integrity – environmental sustainability and local prosperity – economic sustainability. Vlogs or ‘video blogs’ are considered online videos generated to inform and be shared on online platforms like YouTube. Vlogs are considered user-generated content. Social media influencers as previously stated are ‘successful’ individuals that create a substantial following, by generating their own content and creating a specific brand. Success in regards to this research is considered having a following of at least 1 million subscribers.
Theoretical Framework applying social learning theory:

**Content Creator Level**
- Personal Morals & Values
- Travel Experience
- Promotions & Sponsorships

**Education & Awareness**

**Information dissemination by travel vloggers**

**Content Receiver Level**
- e-WOM
- Travel Experience
- Personal Morals & Values

**Perception of sustainable travel messages**
6 Methods

6.1 Philosophical Foundations

The philosophical foundation of this methodology is based on a social constructionism approach. Pernecky (2012) even states it is not uncommon for researcher to use social constructionism and social constructivism interchangeably. The research acknowledges the confusion and interchangeability behind social constructionism and social constructivism (Crotty, 1998 as cited in Hollingshead, 2006). It henceforth refers to social constructionism in its own terms. It recognizes the cousin banner of social constructivism (Crotty, 1998 as cited in Hollingshead, 2006). Yet, when referencing other academic articles, it will use the terminology used by the original authors.

Considering Crotty’s (1998) proposed distinction between the two terms; constructivism examines the meaning-making activity of the individual mind, whereas constructionism is employed in the study of collective generation and transmission of meaning (Pernecky, 2012). Social constructionism seeks the many truths associated with in this case a travel vlog (Butowski, 2019). Additionally, Butowski (2019) treats the opinions of concerned people as the most important factor. Considering this distinction, this research is more social constructionism as it seeks to understand the collective ways YouTube vlogs discuss sustainable travel as well as how a sample of millennials perceive messages of sustainable travel. This research explains how people experience and describe the world they live in, which is principally defined as social constructionism (Pernecky, 2012). Given Golinsky (1998) states there is no agreement as to how the social element should be specified, it is assumed by Hacking (1998) that most items claimed to be socially constructed could be constructed only socially (Pernecky, 2012). As a social constructionist, the research will look for common forms of “constructs” or views of the world, which is shared by most people in society. (Slife & Williams, 1995; as cited in Pernecky, 2012). Social constructionism is more perspectivity than objectivity, applicable in this instance of interpretative research, as well as relativism than realism (Pernecky, 2012). It does not try to rule out what is fundamentally real and not real, it simple states that what exists, simply is (Gergen, 2009; as cited in Pernecky, 2012).

Additionally, Facebook and other social media sites are considered powerful agents
in the construction of touristic realities, YouTube vlogs fit the same classification and is social constructionism (Pernecky, 2012). This is reinforced by Galbin (2014) stating social constructionism sees the language and communication as a central interactive process through which we understand the world and ourselves. Constructionists’ encourage the awareness and importance of how we categorize ourselves, others and the world around us (Loseke, 1999; as cited in Pernecky, 2012). Social constructionism examines communication and the development jointly constructed to understand the world (Galbin, 2014). Essentially that people work together to construct artifacts, specifically in the case of social constructionism, it is how people create these artifacts through social interactions (Galbin, 2014). Constructionism is further justified in this research as it is not concerned with the physical world but how we understand the world (Loseke, 1999; as cited in Pernecky, 2012). Some studies utilize constructionism at a methodology to examine different perspectives of stakeholders involved, to demonstrate various understandings (Ryan & Gu, 2010; as cited in Pernecky, 2012).

Social constructivism is the learning or knowledge acquisition (Doolittle, 1999). Constructivism attempts to reconstruct the world variably from multiple and changing perspectives (Guba, 1990 as cited in Hollingshead, 2006) Social constructionism/constructivism strongly related to social sciences and in this case sustainable tourism as a multi-disciplinary field. Constructivism is not a strict position, but is a continuum. Constructivism includes the interactivity, where the findings are a creation of a process of interactions between both inquirer and inquired (Hollingshead, 2006). The essence of constructivism is heavily based on its subjectivity and relativity (Doolittle, 1999). Meaning how people learn is highly subjective and relative depending on each individual. Since reality may exist differently than a person’s experience, each person’s learnings are created uniquely, making unique realities (Doolittle, 1999). Constructionism is essentially how people learn and construct their own understanding of something to create knowledge through experiences and reflection. YouTube vlogs are a type of storytelling between speaker and listener. This study uses a social constructionist approach as it analyzes the knowledge and experiences expressed by individuals through YouTube videos as well as identifying constructs which viewers perceive. Constructionist
narrative analysis focuses on the language of the speaker as well as considers the social constructs and cultural relations that exist in society (Esin, Fathi & Squire, 2013). Framing theory will be used to analyze narratives. This study additionally assesses how individuals perceive and reflect on sustainability messages potentially expressed in the videos. Constructionist narrative analysis focuses on the language of the speaker as well as considers the social constructs and cultural relations that exist in society (Esin, Fathi & Squire, 2013). It also focuses on the social phenomena or social states that are produced from the speaker, and not the internal conditions of each individual (Esin, Fathi & Squire, 2013).

As the second part of this thesis question is reception; narrative analysis using framing will help understand how the audience receive the information/narrative (Esin, Fathi & Squire, 2013). The narrative analysis of this thesis will aim to segment sustainability messaging referring to any of the sustainability pillars; environmental, social and/or economic. The research will consider the element of language, and how sustainability is discussed or mentioned at all within the YouTube videos selected.

Reflection on role of researcher
As a social constructionist, the research seeks to comprehend the knowledge or the reality of sustainable travel and its messages. This topic is relatable as tourism despite the recent drop due to the COVID-19 pandemic, is one of the major industries in the world. The research considers prior to the pandemic, that sustainable tourism is vital to pursue due to over tourism and anti-tourism sentiments growing in certain areas around the globe. Over tourism/anti-tourism mitigation plans must include all three pillars of sustainability to achieve and maintain success. If one pillar takes precedence over the others, the foundation is bound to collapse and this has been an interesting, political and complicated reflection. The increase understanding and awareness of the common resource pool can hopefully inspire changes in attitude and behavior. As a result of the pandemic which has changed the tourism industry like never before, sustainable travel may be the next adaptation. Additionally, marketing and strategic communication are one major force to understand and utilize to educate and potentially influence. The hours invested into selecting YouTube content and attempting to identify ideal or popular
travel vlogs created a new knowledge or reality, that sustainable travel messages are relatively limited and indirect. Particularly focusing on millennials, due to their activity, interactivity and purchase power, they are reflectively the target audience.

6.2 Research design
This research will highlight ‘popular’ travel influencers on YouTube as an example of a social media platform which is widely used by active internet users. Videos from the travel influencers will be selected and analyzed with the purpose of answering the research question; how do top travel vlogs discuss/encourage sustainable travel behaviour? YouTube videos allow researchers to analyze the narrative discussed by the vlogger, review images that are shown and replay the videos for the interview process. This study seeks to understand how top YouTube travel influencers discuss sustainability. It will explore the narratives and reception. The research will assess and identify sustainability messages relating to any or all of the sustainability pillars; economic, environmental, and social.

The research employed case selection. The video blogs or vlogs selected from the online platform YouTube were based on a specific criterion. Firstly, the research determined successful or popular YouTube travel channels. Successful or popular YouTube travel channels were defined as channels which had at least 1 million subscribers and self-identified as a travel vlogger. Cases identified showed a pattern of singles or couples. These individuals’ backgrounds were often consistent with quitting their previous jobs to travel the world full time. YouTube travel vloggers that were also not considered were young families or singles/groups who travel the world fulltime by sailboat or yacht. The justification for this is that the average millennial searching for a vacation destination are not likely to use this as research information or do the same and quit their jobs to travel by sailboat fulltime. These videos were deemed less relatable and transferable to the average millennial group completing research for their next vacation. The researcher specifically searched for lists using key words like “Top YouTube travel vloggers” or a variation of these words, such as “Top YouTube travel channels”, “Top Travel influencers on YouTube”. The criteria for 'top' travel vlogs include video footage of a destination
visited and the vlogger/influencer discussing the destination, activities and surroundings while narrating and recording. Narration over the video and/or added text to the video during the editing stage were also accepted within this study. Videos with no narration or text information were not considered, meaning videos which were compilations of video footage and images of a destination edited with music in the background. The research aimed to cross-compare several travel influencers on multiple lists, ensuring popularity and high viewership. The research sought to select the channels which appeared on multiple lists. Although, after researching several sites, viewing and studying YouTube channels and videos, few travel YouTube channels appeared on more than two lists. Four channels were identified to fit in the criteria and were selected; Kara & Nate, The Vagabrothers, Lost Leblanc and Fun for Louis. Although there a number of other ‘travel channels which also have 1 million subscribers or more and are identified as travel influencers, they were not selected if they did not seem transferable to the common millennial planning and researching for their next trip, as previously stated. Although travel influencers like these do tend to be more sustainable and sustainably aware, it is of low probability most millennials do the same. Therefore, travel influencers whom share clips, segments and guides to specific destinations around the globe are selected. Once the four travel channels were identified, dozens of hours of content were viewed and examined for general content and sustainability messaging.

This study initially identified popular/successful YouTube travel influencers by subscribers, then hoped to select a common destination which all YouTube influencers had visited and documented. Unfortunately, although travel influencers have traveled to many destinations, no mutual destination was identified which had been traveled by all four travel influencers. Additionally, after viewing hours of travel influencer content, sustainability elements proved difficult to identify. The researcher sought to identify both direct and indirect sustainability messages. No ‘popular’ travel vlogs directly addressed sustainable travel. Little to nothing of sustainability, sustainable travel or responsible travel were mentioned and a common destination could not be found.
As a result of this research roadblock an exploratory pilot research was conducted. A small sample of international millennials were shown three videos and interviewed. The three videos were selected based on three different levels of subscribers; this was done in hopes to broaden the pool of YouTube travel influencers. One travel vlog was chosen based on the top tier of 1 million influencers or more, by The Vagabrothers. The second travel vlog was selected from a travel influencer in the mid-range of subscribers of 435,000, by Margo Lee also known as a micro-celebrity. Finally, the third travel vlog was from a lesser known influencer with 184,000 subscribers, by Use Less, this video was specifically chosen after searching for “sustainable travel”.

The selection of these videos by the researcher intended to cover a diversity in professionalism and variance in popularity as an influencer to determine if there were any major determinants which distracted from the messaging. All three videos were advertised as travel guides to London, England. The third travel vlog by Use Less emphasized ‘sustainable city guide’ within the title and was specifically searched and selected for using the terms “sustainable travel”. The researcher intended to observe the differences in narratives and perception with this specific sustainable travel video. Each video ranged from 10-25 minutes long.

Interviewees were asked to watch the video while on the phone or video call with the researcher, and then directly proceeding the video answer the questions found in Appendix A. Responses to these three interviews proved to be similar. These questions inquired about direct or indirect messages of sustainable travel. Examples of questions include: What kind of impression or information did you take away, “What do you think was the main point of the video or what was the influencer trying to convey? “and “Did you feel sense of sustainability was expressed?” These interviews intended to identify a) if sustainable travel elements are perceived and b) what kind of sustainability messages are perceived. It is important to note that after the exploratory pilot research was completed the three videos were included in the coding process, but not the results below, due to the number of questions and gaps found within these videos/interviews.
The three videos selected for this exploratory research was prior to the four travel influencers found as due to the exploratory research raised the issue of interviewees travel style preference. Some interviewees in the exploratory interviews revealed they would not select this video to watch, because of the style and type of destination. Interviewees expressed their preference for adventure/rural travel rather than city/urban travel. Other considerations raised were distracting or ‘annoying’ influencers. Some of the interviewees also expressed being distracted by the poorer quality of video and described influencers as ‘annoying’ and ‘fake’. This relates back to the literature demonstrating the importance of authenticity and credibility. Additionally, one of the videos was deemed misleading, as it claimed to be a city guide to a new destination, yet related little to tourism within the city. Instead this video shared unconventional activities such as hair salons, nail salons and vintage shopping. The research deemed this video with a high likelihood of bounce out rate as it would not likely be considered a travel vlog. As a result of the learnings in this exploratory research, four travel channels were chosen, and as a result of the exploratory pilot study, two videos per travel channel were identified and selected for analysis and viewing.

Since the exploratory interviews exposed the lack of sustainable travel messages within top YouTube travel vlogs. This study shifted to seek ‘popular’ travel influencers on YouTube, meaning whom have over 1 million subscribers, with corresponding city and adventure videos. Four major YouTube influencers were identified. Additionally, these 8 videos will be analyzed using narrative analysis. Furthermore, a search for sustainable travel videos will be conducted. The research will also attempt to use key words such as; conscious travel, experiential travel, and transformative travel, to broaden the search.

6.3 Sources of evidence
Sources of evidence that were used in this study include video blogs from the online platform YouTube. Video data provides richness of detail in communication analysis (Knoblauch, Tuma & Schnettler, 2013). Not only are video data rich in details but also is beneficial in its permanence to analyze. Hundreds of videos were
viewed throughout the study to gain knowledge and perspective of the diversity in content and how to conduct the research. Only content spoken and written in English were considered. Eight vlogs were chosen from four respective influencer channels with 1 million or more subscribers. From each channel, two types of travel vlogs were selected and categorized based on city and adventure travel types. It has been previously argued that sustainable tourism should be employed in both urban and rural contexts, hence the additional justification for city vs. adventure travel vlogs (Liburd, 2008). Social media influencers are online celebrities in online communities and often these communities coincide. It was noted during the research and selection process that the four ‘popular’ YouTube travel channels did not interact with each other and their networks were separate. In other instances, vloggers refer viewers to other vloggers to create a community and establish a sense of support.

Furthermore, four travel vlogs which were found explicitly searching with the key terms ‘sustainable travel’. Only one YouTube influencer from the four chosen ‘popular’ travel channels appeared to have content regarding sustainable travel, on top of their destination advice and trip exploring videos. Therefore, two other travel vlogs from different influencers of lower popularity. These travel vlogs demonstrate the differences in number of views and differences in sustainability messaging. Sustainable travel messages and vlogs are significantly less followed as channels but also there is lower viewership. The sustainable travel channels show slightly greater social connections and networking, this likely is due to the smaller community that follows or promotes sustainable travel.

The preliminary search for the sample for this study will first be determined by 'top YouTube travel vlogger/influencers' lists published online. The sample will then broaden to top YouTube travel influencers who have at least 1 million subscribers. Based on the literature, the criteria of 'top YouTube travel influencers' must; have more than 1 million followers, likes or views. The amount of travel related content will be considered to determine the criteria of a 'travel vlogger or influencer'. This is self-identified; YouTube influencers must self-identify as a travel vlogger.
Cross examining the top 10-15 influencers within this criterion, will define the sample size. Additionally, within the research question, a sample of interviews will be conducted. There will be approximately 8 interviewees of each gender. The participant will range in nationalities from, German, Swedish, Scottish, Swiss, Spanish, Hungarian, Syrian, Iranian, American, Mexican & Canadian. All interviewees are active YouTube users and consider themselves as relatively independent travelers, especially regarding research. The intention is to create a diverse yet begin an in-depth understanding of how and if sustainability messages in tourism are received. This sample will consist of interviewees between the ages of 20-35, to be considered millennials, as previously justified millennials have the greatest buying power. The sixteen interviewees genders and nationality diversity bring greater diversity in reception and perspectives of the travel vlogs, accounting for social constructs.

Another source of evidence in this research were interviews. 20 interviews were conducted with an even distribution of 10 female interviewees and 10 male interviewees. All within the described criteria between 20-35 years old and YouTube users. The interviews were semi-structured interviews with 14 questions. Two questions aided in the self-perception of travel experience and the other regarding sustainability. 12 questions were based on their perception of the video they selected.
6.4 Research process

As a result of the exploratory pilot research the research process proceeded with the four YouTube travel channels identified after the pilot. Since the exploratory research revealed interviewee travel style/type of destination preferences, the researcher had to consider the choice a millennial would take to select a travel video from YouTube. Therefore, a simple PowerPoint presentation was created for interviewees to select the type of travel they wish to hypothetically research, as well
as the video they would like to view out of four options, but only two different destinations. The two destinations are due to the fact, one common destination documented by all four travel influencers was not identified. These eight travel videos were screenshot from their original form on YouTube to replicated the look and titles of videos on YouTube. This allows for interviewees to select their video as naturally as they might while conducting their own destination research. These videos were viewed and analyzed based on their narratives with the support of images or video footage. Images of beaches and animals were supporting factors to the nature appreciation code of environmental sustainability yet it was also noted in memos the images which pictured ‘negative’ or ‘unsustainable’ travel practices, such as trash along beaches or overcrowding due to tourism, these images may influence the perception side of the research as well. Images from the video were not specifically analyzed through video skimming or key frame extraction (Ejaz, Mehmood & Wook Baik, 2013).

This research was unable to do visual attention-based framework considering the limitation of time and scope of the project. Eight videos were coded using the three pillars of sustainability; economic, environmental and social. For further clarification on coding, see below. Additionally, due to the lack of direct sustainable travel messages, the research chose to include four additional videos which appeared in a search for ‘sustainable travel’, as mentioned within the sources of evidence. These four videos were also analyzed and coded to gain an understanding of how these videos discuss sustainable travel messages. Following the coding process, interviews were also conducted.

As seen below (see Appendix A) the presentation was sent to each interviewee prior to the video call. Each interviewee could select the type of destination they are most likely to research next. The point of this PowerPoint was to address different types of preferences from the millennial group as well as the diversity in content. Given the time limitation of the research this PowerPoint enabled the research to gain insight on eight travel videos rather than selecting one “best” case. The intention of the research sought for interviewees to engage with travel videos that were relevant to them. The choice selection was intended to mimic the real situation of an interviewee selecting a video based on their interests. Interviewees would select a
video based on how YouTube would normally present their videos. The intention of this, was to avoid interviewees not viewing the video, and perceiving any messages due to the lack of interest. The interviewees must generally and genuinely be interested, as to exemplify content they are likely to consume. This aids in more valid measurement in the results to gauge what is likely to be perceived from travel vlogs on YouTube. The research is a vignette-based interview, attempting to identify millennials reactions based on the videos selected and presented. This presentation establishes a common point of reference for all of the interviews. Interviewees must view and select their video through the presentation, a consistent process, shown the same thumbnails, across 20 interviewees. Each interviewee selected their video choice, viewed it, then were immediately asked the below aforementioned interview questions (see Appendix B) over a Facebook video call. Short-hand notes were taken as transcriptions of the interviews. These transcriptions were then later coded to the three sustainability pillars; economic, environmental and social. Memos were also created if there were notable remarks, quotes or a new theme emerged.

6.5 Analytical strategy

Framing theory is the analytical framework used in this study. It captures how ‘popular’ travel vlogs discuss sustainable travel and how these messages are received. It is an interpretative framework which helps attach meanings to processes and a phenomenon (Goffman, 1974; as cited in Uggla & Olausson, 2013). Framing theory is best used to organize ideas and are shaped by culture and socialization. Therefore, framing theory coincides adequately with social learning theory the theoretical framework used for this research. Framing theory is selected as the mediation processes of advertising include aspects of reality and exclude others (Uggla & Olausson, 2013). As stated by Uggla & Olausson (2013) framing mechanisms in tourism advertising provide valuable clues on how they relate to new information about a destination to existing frames.

Narratives are essentially stories which are written or spoken accounts of people’s experiences and lives. Narratives help social researchers explore and understand how people story their lives (Esin, Fathi & Squire, 2013). Framing within narrative analysis seeks to understand how people construct or frame notions of sustainable
travel. Qualitative content analysis fits this study as part of its methodology due to its systematic and flexible criteria (Schreier, 2013). Qualitative content analysis will allow this research to focus on specific aspects, like sustainability within travel and their meanings. The reason qualitative content analysis is fitting, is that it helps with reducing the amount of data or material rather than adding to the data (Schreier, 2013). More specifically narrative analysis will be used to conduct this research. Since this is qualitative research the assessment of travel vlog narratives as well as interview narratives are what the research uses to identify patterns and themes of what sustainable travel messages are being conveyed but also which are being perceived by the small sample of millennials. Reinforced by Peralta (2019) this paper also will assess viewer response and complete content and visual analysis.

This research seeks to identify how YouTube travel vloggers support sustainable travel in the online community. Narrative analysis is essential to human communication and interaction (Peralta, 2019). Since it depicts people's experiences and how they perceive it, it is logically fits this research. Narrative analysis helps to understand how people "represent and restructure the world" (Peralta, 2019). Travel vlogs are people’s experiences and stories shared through the online platform of YouTube. Narrative analysis is the study of stories and experiences of using first person (Riessman, 1993; as cited in Peralta, 2019). They help researchers comprehend the diverse and different stories (Esin, Fathi & Squire, 2013). Narrative analysis is a tool which analyze interviewees experiences, for example social inequalities, or in this study's case sustainability and sustainable travel. As this study focuses on sustainability narratives it is important to define and outline what are sustainability narratives. Within this paper sustainability narratives refer to the three pillars or categories of sustainability, economic, environmental and social.

**Economic sustainability** along with environmental sustainability are more clearly defined. Economic sustainability refers to supporting the local community or destination with capital. Economic sustainability can also be defined as ensuring local prosperity (Gössling, 2017). For example, economic sustainability includes staying in guesthouses or with locals, eating at local restaurants or purchasing from local businesses like shops and markets. Essentially economic sustainability helps inject capital into the local economy.
Environmental sustainability is likely the most well-known or at the forefront of minds when thinking about sustainability. It can also be defined as making optimal use of environmental resources like nature-based attractions, which still maintain essential ecological processes and helping preserve the environment and biodiversity (Gössling, 2017). Environmental sustainability narratives in this research will include environmentally friendly transportations, environmentally friendly materials, nature appreciation, waste management, carbon emissions, animal treatment and welfare.

Social sustainability is likely the least understood of the sustainability types (Dempsey, Bramley, Power & Brown, 2011). Social sustainability narratives will include references to sharing cultural aspects, historical information, engaging with the local interactions and participating in the local community. Respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of a host destination conserving their history and heritage, and contributing to the inter-cultural understanding and tolerance is the essence of social sustainability (Gössling, 2017). Discussed below, codes follow these guidelines of the social sustainability definition.

Data Coding: Coding was used as a method to symbolically assign attributes of sustainability to the travel vlogs. This research sought patterns and similarities to explain how and understand the frequency of these topics. The YouTube videos were categorized as ‘popular travel vlogs’ meaning city travel vlogs or adventure travel vlogs. City travel vlogs refer to the city-centered options about Amsterdam or Copenhagen. A city vlog is defined as a destination with significant infrastructure, buildings, public transportation and bases their attractions on indoor or urban activities. Adventure travel vlogs are considered so by their nature factors. An adventure travel vlog is categorized by the lack of urban population, buildings and infrastructure, their attractions are nature-based and rural. Finally, the last category of travel vlog is the ‘sustainable travel vlog’. This vlog is not as rigidly defined as the two other categories, as they are vlogs found upon the specific search for ‘sustainable travel’ on YouTube. These four types of videos divide the different types of content analyzed. They were also coded for social, economic and environmental sustainability. Narratives and imagery that refer to any of these categories were coded. Vlogs were coded for ‘economic sustainability’,
‘environmental sustainability’ and ‘social sustainability’. Each of these main codes also contained several sub-codes. Economic sustainability sub-codes include ‘accommodation’ and ‘local shops/restaurants’. Environmental sustainability sub-codes contain ‘nature appreciation’, ‘environmentally friendly materials’ and ‘transportation’. Social sustainability which is more difficult to address is sub-coded as ‘independent traveling/self-discovery’, ‘interacting with locals/communities’, ‘cultural aspects’ and ‘historical aspects. There were 41 memos created, 488 codes. The memos address ‘unsustainable’ messages noted. Coding helps make it easier for information to be interpreted. Assigning codes to specific phrases and words helps to better analyze and summarize. The research uses deductive coding, meaning pre assigned/defined/established codes and sub-codes.

6.6 Research limitations

Not all research is created equal, qualitative research like any has its flaws or weaknesses. One of the research limitations of this design was how time consuming and labor intensive it was. Dozens of hours of preliminary searches were completed to understand the scope and the different types of YouTube channels and vlogs existed. Due to the limited time to complete this research, 15 travel vlogs were viewed, selected and analyzed. The research timeline could only allow a certain volume/hours of YouTube content to be identified and analyzed. Several lists of “top” travel influencers were scoured and dissected to determine a reasonable criterion relevant to the research question. Additionally, the channels or influencers chosen had significant reach, following and sufficient content with similar destinations and travel styles proved difficult. Qualitative research is also very particular and detailed. As the researcher worked through hours of vlogs and interviews, small or incremental details could have been missed. Along with how time consuming and detailed qualitative research is, it also proves to be difficult to verify. This type of research is impossible to replicate exactly, as the YouTube vlogs selected could be identical, yet interviewing the same sample would be nearly impossible. Also, in the instance the same sample could be accessed, there are a number of new variables to consider such as priming. The interviewees have already undergone this interview, therefore likely providing different or perhaps more insightful answers as it is the second cycle. Another limitation of this study, is the
lack of previous studies that match this topic and research design. As previously
discuss, the sample size selected was incredibly diverse. The diversity served a
purpose to resonate with the diversity and borderless audience of YouTube viewers,
but could cause other weaknesses such as cultural or communication differences.
The original design process planned for a smaller sample size of 10, within the
millennial range. Due to the change in video selection, where interviewees selected
their own video to comment on, the number of interviewees increased to 20 in hopes
to cover all eight videos from the above slideshow presentation. During the analysis
process of the narratives, images were not specifically analyzed but lent support to
the salience of specific narratives. This research acknowledges the this is a potential
limitation and could be an area for further research. The research is a starting point
to begin to understand the phenomenon of travel social media influencers on
YouTube discussing sustainable travel.

6.7 Reliability and validity
In order for this narrative analysis to be valid and reliable. It must address verite (the
why), integrity (is it logical), rigour (is it in-depth), utility (is the work relevant to
the profession), and finally vitality (is it important and meaningful) (Peralta, 2019).
Due to the fact that realities in narratives cannot be expected to replicate itself,
because stories and experiences happen in different ways and circumstances, the
concept of validity and reliability are not relevant in the context of narrative analysis
(Peralta, 2019). The key to validity and reliability within narrative analysis is being
thorough, honest and transparent. The research conducted attempted to take as many
notes and document each thought and process taken to address thoroughness. The
lack of findings and shift in research also demonstrate the transparency of the work.
Validity and reliability are also assured when the research shows saturation. As the
exploratory interviews initially demonstrate, interviewees answers became similar.
### Table 1: Selected 'top' travel vloggers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YouTube Name</th>
<th>Real Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year Started</th>
<th>No. of Subscribers (as of 2020)</th>
<th>No. of Views</th>
<th>No. of Vlogs (as of 2020)</th>
<th>Self-description on Homepage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vagabrothers</td>
<td>Alex &amp; Marko Ayling</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>32 &amp; 34</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1.01M</td>
<td>73,811,203</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>We’re Alex and Marko. We LIVE to TRAVEL. Our journey of CULTURAL and CULINARY DISCOVERY takes us to some of the MOST INTERESTING PLACES in the WORLD. Want to come with? Subscribe. Stay curious, keep exploring, and we will see you on the road!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Leblanc</td>
<td>Christian LeBlanc</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1.46M</td>
<td>135,060,887</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>QUIT my job to travel the world. This is my story of unconditionally pursuing my passion for filmmaking and travel. Subscribe to join the adventure and let’s #GetLost together!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara &amp; Note</td>
<td>Kara &amp; Nate Buchanan</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>29 &amp; 30</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1.36M</td>
<td>196,152,156</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>Hey, y’all! We are a husband and wife from Nashville, Tennessee traveling to 100 countries by 2020. It all started with an idea to take 1 year off before our lives got too serious, and we thought daily vlogs would be a fun way to document it. We left home with 2 carry-on bags on January 10, 2016, and halfway through we KNEW we didn’t want to stop traveling the world anytime soon! Thank you for following our journey!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun For Louis</td>
<td>Louis Cole</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2.01M</td>
<td>317,949,107</td>
<td>1822</td>
<td>My name is Louis Cole. I make a Daily Vlog of my life! I enjoy traveling the world with friends, having fun and inspiring others!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7 Findings/Results

#### 7.1 Brief Overview of Material

Materials used within this study include extensive computer usage including the programs, Microsoft Word, OneNote, Excel for note taking, writing and information gathering. Additionally, academic journals were accessed through Google Scholar. Mendeley was utilized to organize and manage academic sources throughout the research. Videos from YouTube were transcribed using YouTubes transcripts.
options. MAXQDA was the software used to code and analyze the videos’ narratives and the interviews conducted. Facebook Video calls were utilized to conduct live video interviews with the 23 interviewees. The researcher transcribed live during interviews into an excel spreadsheet. Short hand transcriptions of the interviewee’s response to questions as well as their thought process aloud.

7.2 Brief Descriptive Analysis

In total 15 YouTube videos were analyzed, which equaled 167.83 minutes or 2.98 hours. Within the sample of videos, there were 179 social related sustainability cues, 115 economic sustainability cues and 191 environmental sustainability cues. YouTube travel vlogs ranged from 3 minutes to 14 minutes, with one exception at 26 minutes. The sample used for this study were 12 females and 11 males. Three interviewees were interviewed for the exploratory research and 20, with an even split of 50/50 males and females for the main interview research. All the interviewees are between the ages 20-35. Interviewees are nationals of: Canada, United States, Germany, Switzerland, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Hungary, Iran and Syria. This study acknowledges the diversity of interviewees used within this study. Qualitative studies do not have much generalizability and are exploratory, or exemplar. The intention of the researcher to seek cultural diversity, is to cater to the fact that YouTube vlogs can be accessed by multiple nations. Online vlog content is not regularly restricted by borders or geographical constrictions. This research intends to provide cultural diversity to better understand if sustainable travel messages are received despite the wide range in nationalities of interviewees. It is acknowledged that a disadvantage to cultural diversity are communication issues or obstacles. As this is a framing analysis, people construct their perceptions and meanings differently.

Frame analysis maintains that people all actively classify, organize and interpret life experiences in our own way to make sense of them (Goffman, 1974, as cited in Pan & Kosicki, 1993). People locate, perceive, identify and label everything, essentially into a schemata of interpretations (Goffman, 1974, as cited in Pan & Kosicki, 1993). When using frame analysis, it is important to avoid reducing the content to mere topics and themes (Olausson, 2009; Reese, 2007 as cited in Uggla & Olausson, 2013). The topic of a narrative is only one element of many which makes up a
whole frame (Uggla & Olausson, 2013). How frames intersect and interrelate is important in communicating texts (Uggla & Olausson, 2013). As framing theory provides little guidance. This study uses the following analytical toolbox to guide the process of framing. This toolbox is based on three pillars of sustainability but more specifically relate to sustainable travel. Analytical tools that are also used are repetition of information and association of information with sustainability (Uggla & Olausson, 2013). Repetition refers to how often pieces of information are mentioned and association of information is in what ways pieces of information are anchored to sustainability and thus more prominent. Additionally, framing devices used in the analysis also include visual images and distinction (Uggla & Olausson, 2013). Visual images which make the information more salient as well as distinctions mentioned will be noted. The results will be reported below using three thematic headings of economic sustainability, environmental sustainability and social sustainability. These frames are inspired by the United Nations’ three pillars of sustainable development (Sustainable Development | UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC and SOCIAL COUNCIL., 2020). The concepts of sustainable development are not identical to those of sustainable travel but have been adapted to the commonalities likely mentioned in a travel vlog. Economic sustainability in this paper concerns local economy including accommodations and the mention of local restaurants and businesses. Environmental sustainability here indicates nature appreciation and environmental-friendly materials and transportation. Social sustainability refers to cultural constructs and historical aspects of a destination, alongside mentioning or encouraging interactions with locals.

7.3 How did travel vlogs discuss sustainable travel?

This research attempts to determine how travel vlogs discuss sustainable travel. In the initial stages of research, it was exposed that sustainable travel is sporadically discussed within popular YouTube travel vlogs. This led to the research design to be modified. According to the eight travel vlogs which were selected from the four YouTube travel influencer channels, sustainable travel was not once directly stated. One of the YouTube travel influencers, the Vagabrothers, posted a specific vlog to
address sustainable travel, addressing many sustainability tips or considerations. Additionally, four other ‘sustainable travel’ labeled videos were included in the narrative analysis as a comparison, found from a specific search for “sustainable travel videos”. All the travel vlogs were coded accordingly to the three pillars of sustainability. Codes were identified and assigned to indirect statements of economic, environmental and social sustainability. As previously mentioned, two types of travel videos were selected per YouTube channel; city vs. adventure. The travel vlogs which were selected from the classified four top travel vloggers are hereby known as ‘popular travel vlog’ and will be compared or contrasted with the ‘sustainable travel vlogs’; which are the four travel vlogs which were specifically searched using the parameters of ‘sustainable travel’.

_Economic Sustainability within the vlogs_

Economic sustainability is defined in this research as promoting and adding capital into a destination or area. More obvious economic sustainability narratives include “try to support the local business” (Madeline Olivia, 2019), “vote with your dollar” (Vagabrothers, 2018), “try to support the local businesses” (Madeline Olivia, 2019), and “go eat at local restaurants” (Madeline Olivia, 2019), even sharing “every dollar that we spend goes right back in the local community” (What Doesn’t Suck, 2019). These clear-cut examples are from the specifically labeled ‘sustainable travel’ vlogs. Examples of general economic sustainability codes are “stay somewhere longer” (What Doesn’t Suck, 2019) – referring to spending more money in a concentrated area, “get away from the places that suffer from over-tourism” (What Doesn’t Suck, 2019) – promoting spreading capital into lesser known areas. These general economic sustainability codes were found in both ‘popular travel videos’ and ‘sustainable travel videos’. Two sub-codes were also created for economic sustainability; accommodation and local shops/restaurants. Statements referring to hotels, hostels, Airbnb’s and guesthouses were coded within accommodations. Infrequently did the ‘popular travel vlogs’ mention accommodation options, only in one instance did a YouTube influencer mention that “there’s some great hostels and some amazing hotels” (Lost Leblanc, 2018). Whereas in the ‘sustainable travel vlogs’ multiple videos discussed “rent a house” (Vagabrothers, 2018), “choose accommodations wisely” (Vagabrothers, 2018), “eco-lodges are a great way to be
close to nature” (Vagabrothers, 2018), “find an Airbnb instead of hotels. Find an eco-hostel” (Vagabrothers, 2018). Local eateries, street vendors, markets and stores were coded within local shops/restaurants. Codes which promoted local food halls, street food stands or vendors, mentions of restaurants or famous dishes to try like “the best apple pie in Amsterdam” (Lost Leblanc, 2019) or a “cocktail spot off the beaten path” (Lost Leblanc, 2019) were deemed local shops/restaurants.

Environmental sustainability within the vlogs

Environmental sustainability generally addressed nature appreciation, environmental materials and transportation codes. Narratives from the ‘popular travel vlogs’ referring to environmental sustainability were all allocated to their specific sub-code. Whereas narratives from the ‘sustainable travel vlogs’ expose a few different themes such as statements like “when you go hiking pick up the trash” (What Doesn’t Suck, 2019), “pack like a minimalist” (The Girl Gone Green, 2019), “bring your own eco-friendly toiletries” (What Doesn’t Suck, 2019) and “eating less meat” (Vagabrothers, 2019). These sentiments are not directly related to nature appreciation, environmental materials and transportation but still relate to environmental sustainability. Travel vlogs expressed nature appreciation highly. Messages include “prettiest tree flowers” (Fun For Louis, 2016), “they respected the nature” (Fun For Louis, 2016), “this amazing river flowing through the middle of town” (Fun For Louis, 2016), “the most beautiful beaches I’ve ever seen” (Lost Leblanc, 2018). The ‘sustainable travel vlogs’ are more specific and state “as much as you want a photo riding an elephant swimming consider volunteering at an elephant sanctuary” (Vagabrothers, 2019) and “picking up rubbish and plastic when you’re travelling” (Madeline Olivia, 2019). The environmental materials code had the least amount of codes in the context of environmental sustainability. The only narrative regarding environmental materials in the ‘popular travel vlogs’ was “these boats are actually made partially out of recycled plastic bottles and in this motor, you see behind me is a solar-powered motor” (Kara & Nate, 2019). Environmental materials were discussed much more often in the ‘sustainable travel vlogs’. These videos discussed purchasing more sustainable and durable clothing, recyclable coffee cups, and bringing reusable containers, bags and toiletries (What Doesn’t Suck, 2019). They also discuss avoiding aerosol can sprays, opting for a menstrual
cup for females and to even avoid purchasing animal products as souvenirs or claimed medical benefits (Vagabrothers, 2019). Finally, within the environmental sub-codes is transportation. Transportation was discussed the most out of all the environmental codes and third highest to be mentioned across all codes. Transportation codes were described as relating to more eco-friendly travel methods. Narratives within the vlogs detail “go get ourselves a bike” (Lost Leblanc, 2019), “took a train” (Lost Leblanc, 2019), and “paddle the kayaks” (Kara & Nate, 2020). The way the ‘sustainable travel vlogs’ discuss sustainable travel are more direct. These codes include “take public transport” (Madeline Olivia, 2019), “purchasing a carbon emission offset” (Vagabrothers, 2019), “reduce how often you fly” (The Girl Gone Green, 2019), even “do it by bike, train, horse, sailing or walking” (Vagabrothers, 2019). Environmental sustainability is top of mind when referring to sustainability contrary to social sustainability which is much more difficult to pinpoint and define.

**Social Sustainability within the vlogs**

Social sustainability was the most complicated code studied. Social sustainability in terms of this research is defined by four sub-codes: independent traveling/self-discovery, interacting with locals/community, cultural aspects and historical aspects. General narratives of social sustainability were discussed and overlapped with economic and environmental sustainability codes such as staying at a location longer, slow travel or travel locally. Narratives like these are coded in all three main codes as it can affect and be categorized in all three. Independent traveling/self-discovery has the fewest codes but refers to themes about self-exploring a neighborhood, square or district enjoying the atmosphere a destination has to offer and stumbling across events occurring in the destination. Social sustainability is also discussed in terms of interaction with the locals/communities. Travel vlogs discussed learning the local languages or talking with locals and seek out their recommendations. Some YouTube influencers encourage interacting with the locals, sharing a drink and making new friends. For the ‘sustainable travel vlog’ they dive a little more in depth by stating “we got to know the family and they served us locally made butter and honey” (What Doesn’t Suck, 2019), they also state “try to make meaningful connections with the local community”. Cultural aspects were another
sub-code or theme found among the discussions of the travel vlogs. Cultural aspects were illustrated as “it’s about taking traditional Danish and Nordic recipes and reinterpreting them in a modern way” (Vagabrothers, 2017) addressing social sustainability by new modern takes of traditional food. Another code refers to the culture of jumping into the freezing water, “this is not a true Danish experience unless we took the polar plunge” (Kara & Nate, 2019). Some travel vlogs discuss the red-light district in Amsterdam and the marijuana culture which exists there (Lost Leblanc, 2019). Themes arising around cultural museums, local cultural foods and drink from the region, festivals, nightlife, local languages may stem from an array of history and even major sports events. One ‘sustainable travel vlog’ specifically addresses the preservation of cultural heritage, but particularly in indigenous communities (Vagabrothers, 2019). Although bike related narratives fall under the transportation sub-code of environmental sustainability, some of the YouTube influencers shed light on the bike culture which exists, resulting in dual codes. Cultural codes were noted as the highest social sustainability code. Culture has a diverse definition resulting in a wide variety of sub-codes. Lastly historical sub-codes are interpreted as specific references to the history of the destination. YouTube travel vloggers discuss “Tivoli Gardens one of the oldest amusement parks in Europe” (Vagabrothers, 2017), “Carlsberg brewery… one of the world’s most famous pilsner” (Vagabrothers, 2017), “Anne Frank’s house… it’s not exactly something that makes you feel good but it’s important to recognize what happened in the past” (Lost Leblanc, 2019), and finally the story of the Incas and the lost city (Fun For Louis, 2016). Certain adventure vlogs spend a significantly greater amount of time explaining the history and its profound creations.

7.4 Did people perceive these sustainable travel messages?

Economic Sustainability within the Interviews

Economic sustainability in terms of perception is similar. Economics or capital are more clearly understood than broader and unclear terms than social sustainability. The interviews show a high level of perception to economic sustainability cues from travel vlogs. From encouraging tourists to visit destinations during less busy months to spread the wealth, noticing the local restaurants, pubs, breweries and even local
amusement parks. The most prominent theme to be perceived by the interviewees were messages about avoiding “touristy” destinations and “touristy” areas. Viewers perceived the narratives about going off the beaten path and going more out of the way to find less popular attractions. Other comments in the interviews relating to economic sustainability is whether travel vloggers specify whether the money spent goes to larger corporations that own the smaller businesses. Several interviews note that many of the travel vloggers do not address currency and especially pricing of the destinations they visit. The accommodations sub-code seemed to be low on perceptions regarding the vlogs. Only two interviewees referred to poor accommodation choices made by the travel vlogger. Local restaurants/shop were more perceived than the accommodations sub-code. Five different interviewees noted the promotions of local shops and restaurants. Most comments relate to restaurants that were known for something specific or unique food options. Although economic is more easily defined among interviewees, environmental themes are also prominent.

*Environmental Sustainability within the Interviews*

General environmental sustainability codes were addressed by seven interviewees. Interviewees report the lack of environmental aspects in the travel vlogs. A major theme appears to be visiting less popular locations and choosing to travel at low times. Interviewees expressed the missing knowledge of how busy those destinations that are being visited are. Two interviewees notice how much a vlogger flies within a country and how unsustainable this decision is. Some interviewees clearly question modes of transportation and the lack of information sharing about distances and methods of transport. Another specific statement made by the vlogger which was quite highly perceived was regarding the amount of trash left on a beach, which the vlogger continues to share that he hopes the locals have handled it. The comment regarding the locals being responsible for beach clean-up, was highly perceived, interviewees expressed dis-taste towards this. The environmental materials sub-code is the least perceived of all the main codes and sub-codes. One interviewee noted the recycled materials of the boats used within the video. The low perception rate of one interviewee selecting this video to view, may attribute to the low levels of perception of environmentally friendly materials. Few ‘popular travel
vlogs’ discuss eco-friendly materials; a greater depth and variety are discussed within the ‘sustainable travel vlog’ sample of videos. Transportation is most clear when defining this sub-code. Interviewees were quick and more understanding of the theme. The most common message received was using bicycles and walking. As two videos demonstrate a biking culture, it may be the reason why bikes are coded in the narratives the most. Additional codes for transportation is taking public transport and using boats. Some interviewees noticed the amount some vloggers flew by plane or promoted motorcycles which were on the damaging environmental sustainability side.
Social Sustainability within the Interviews

As previously mentioned, social sustainability is commonly difficult to comprehend or frame. Interviewees struggled to pinpoint or recall social sustainable messages from the travel vlogs. Social sustainability narratives from the perception side include how beautiful a city was, being respectful to the destination and sites, and the perception of significant infrastructure and accessibility. No interviewees noticed or discussed the sub-code of independent traveling/self-discovery. Although there was significantly more conversation about interacting with locals/communities. From remarking on the interactions of the travel vloggers during a football match, and promoting social connections with the locals and encouragement to reach out to the locals this sub-code was often perceived. Some interviewees note the video footage of the travel vloggers playing basketball with the locals or mentioning meeting up with other YouTube vloggers, many interviewees also noticed the encouragement to go out of your way and have a drink with the local people. Three of the interviewees criticized the claims YouTube travel vloggers stated ‘travel as a local’, the viewer did not feel they experienced the destination like a local and rather that it felt contradictory and touristic. Criticism also arose on the lack of information regarding how easy it is to interact or communicate with the local community. Viewers perceived cultural aspects of the social sustainability main code the most. Cultural messages that were perceived refer to the local cultural drink and food, the cultural customs such as coca leaves and shamans in Peru and the red-light district’s prostitution and marijuana culture. Authentic food culture was the most notable narrative within the interviews. There were few codes regarding the culture of a neighborhood of Christiania in Copenhagen. The football match within the Peruvian travel vlog was highly perceived among interviewees. Finally, for the historical sub-code interviewees did perceive historical aspects. Messages about history refer to the Incas within the Peru travel vlog, this specific vlog provided a great deal of historical context to the ruins. As one interviewee stated “good at giving the Coles notes of the history and culture”. Another historical aspect of theme that arose in the conversations was Anne Frank’s home and the history of the Second World War, regarding the
Amsterdam vlog. Despite elements of history presented by most travel vloggers, it was more often not perceived or significant enough to recall among interviewees.

A series of memos were also noted through the coding process of this research. A theme of unsustainability arose from these memos. Travel vloggers share they have taken over an entire restaurant, some explain they only walked to a location because it was the only option, they promote waterpark attractions, taking intranational flights, taking a private boat to secluded locations, renting motorbikes and even a comment about locals dealing with beach trash. Additionally, narratives about changing hotels three times at one destination and promoting chain hotels such as the Marriott feed to the case that unsustainable travel remains at the forefront and unchanged. The ‘sustainable travel vlogs’ on the other hand at least address their hypocrisy of being a travel vlogger. Yet these ‘sustainable travel vlogs’ do promote options and methods to raise awareness, practice sustainable travel behaviors and provide education on elements like carbon emission offsets. Several interviews remarked and perceived the anti-sustainability messages or occurrences, stating high consumption revolving around the hotels, and constant food suggestions and reviews. An interviewee raised the question around sustainability of amusement parks and waterparks. It was also perceived that some travel vloggers have little awareness of sustainability, as one particular vlogger asks if there are any animals in the area while kayaking in a jungle area. This demonstrates the lack of knowledge of environmental sustainability. In one discussion about sustainable travel the interviewee expressed “they could have used their platform to encourage tourism in that area but also do it in a sustainable way. They represent what the majority of travelers’ kind of do in a different area, could encourage a little bit better behaviors”. This statement clearly pinpoints the need for this research and for future sustainable travel vlogs. Another interviewee summarized their viewing experience by stating that “they show the highlights and the Instagram version”. Travel vlogs but social media as a whole is about likability and relatability and this quote highlights how the social media community and network are perceived to only provide positive and exciting content.

Corresponds with table below:
Economic sustainability codes were recorded in the lowest portions, whereas environmental sustainability codes were slightly more common and social sustainability proved to be the most stated within the ‘popular travel vlogs. Regarding interviews environmental sustainability codes were higher, and economic codes were deemed low. Social sustainability codes were consistent with the vlogs at the highest-level of codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Vlog Coding Summary</th>
<th>Kara &amp; Nate</th>
<th>Vagabrothers</th>
<th>Lost Leblanc</th>
<th>Fun For Louis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date Posted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan-19</td>
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<th>Vagabrothers</th>
<th>Lost Leblanc</th>
<th>Fun For Louis</th>
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It seems some codes were perceived or people really searched for things that would not be considered a code – like “it seems like he used local bus transportation but he doesn’t explicitly state anything” people make visual or mental assumptions. These assumptions were noted but not included in the coding process. Statements from interviewees include “like touristy guides must be local”. Reiterating how interviewees may search or assume certain information based on the images from the vlogs. Interviewees seem to recall general items rather than specifics.
8 Discussion
This study offers an initial base to look into the rapidly growing digital world of marketing and communication channels. Social media has international coverage (O’Neill, Williams, Kurz et al., 2015). Social media and social networks are not new concepts (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018). Along with social media, are the actors who are both the content providers and users. The term ‘social media influencer’ has become widespread globally (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). Social media encompasses many online platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. Yet YouTube is one of the major online platforms which active social media users use to learn about and research their next travel destination. As tourism grows, so do the impacts. Sustainable travel is on the rise This research investigated how YouTube travel vlogs discuss sustainable travel. It also explored whether these sustainable travel messages are perceived? The findings show that YouTube travel vlogs uncommonly and indirectly discuss sustainable travel. Elements of sustainable travel were plucked from indirect statements which were categorized into the above coding structure of economic, environmental and social sustainability. YouTube travel vloggers do not discuss sustainable travel directly, but also, they do not discuss sustainable travel options with the intent of sharing sustainability messages. On the perception side of this research generally millennials do perceive these elements of sustainable travel. Although unless interviewees were specifically asked about whether the video, they viewed addressed sustainability pillars, it was seldom they report of the sustainable messaging.

Firstly, the exploratory research identifies the lack of sustainable travel messaging among popular or ‘top’ YouTube travel influencers. Although travel influencers which were not selected for this research, such as Sailing La Vagabonde discuss sustainability and sustainable travel in significantly more direct ways, as they reside on a sailboat and are self-sufficient. Additionally, the exploratory process of this research exposes the many different types of travel vlogs which exist. As previously stated, videos which did not include narration or live conversation or supplementary texts to explain a destination were not included. Some of the top travel influencers have unique styles such as video compilations of tricks and stunts performed by parkouring around major cities. This channel focuses on incredible cinematography,
it incorporates dangerous and impressive stunts performed near or on major historic or culturally important sites (with government approval) and in this fashion shows off the destination. Another top YouTube travel influencer focuses on paranormal tourism and haunting tourism. This social media influencer visits or stays at known paranormal or haunted locations to promote the area. Most YouTube travel influencers which meet the 1 million or more subscribers criteria focus on aerial and drone footage played with music in the background. These videos are generally created as teasers or trailers of a destination rather than being informative.

The average YouTube travel influencer appears to not discuss sustainable travel messages or options within their regularly scheduled vlog posts. One popular YouTube travel channel does create a separate vlog addressing sustainable travel tips as a whole. As analyzed and coded as the ‘sustainable travel vlogs’ these vlogs were summaries and tips to consider a more sustainable mindset while traveling. This research originally sought out travel vlogs which discuss sustainable travel options and activities at specific destinations. During the dozens of hours of preliminary search of YouTube travel channels, some social media influencers mention common animal attractions like riding elephants. Yet instead of promoting these harmful activities as a tourist, they provide options to volunteer at an elephant sanctuary instead for the close encounter or animal interaction. Another example of ideal sustainable travel messages while social media influencers travel, could refer to recommending sustainable transport like walking or electric scooters in major cities. It was clear that few YouTube travel influencers noted sustainable travel options. It is speculated that this is the case because travel influencers in social media are meant to show the positive, fun, rich and lavish lifestyle. Social media is often about the luxuries and the glamour of travel. This is often what appeals to people to create a following. It is speculated that this is what leads to consumption which is contradictory (Gössling, 2017). As millennials and other travelers or vacationers alike, often seek escapes from their everyday work life, viewing lavish travel content provides this escape. Thankfully there is a growing community of responsible travelers. YouTube influencers must appeal to the masses and gain viewership, it might be the case that audiences are not keen to learn or care about sustainable travel content as much as the positive, ‘unsustainable’, getaway type of
content. This research raises questions about whether these market mavens, or social media influencers distance themselves from certain types of travel. Conceivably ‘popular’ travel vloggers avoid or do not discuss sustainable travel as it is often portrayed in a negative green-washing perspective. Intriguingly, perhaps sustainable travel and sustainability is too depressing or considered a killjoy for the getaway, escapism type of aspirational research YouTube travel vlogs tend to be. Nonetheless, sustainable travel is rarely discussed in YouTube travel vlogs and could benefit in understanding whether viewers do consider green-washing and sustainability messages as negative or less attractive.

Social - This research sought to identify YouTube travel influencers to promote social sustainability, and immersion into the culture, history and local communities, yet little were noted. The results of this study expose the lack of sustainable travel messages, but the greatest pillar supported by indirect statements was overall the cultural sub-code of social sustainability. The travel vlogs allude to the local culture by discussing local languages, trying local drinks or street food vendors. Depending on the travel vlog, there is significantly more narratives about the culture and history of an attraction like Macchu Picchu. Videos about specific attractions tend to express more culture messaging. City travel vlogs detail culture much less, for example in the travel vlogs about Copenhagen, culture was referred to local craft beers and breweries, they also discuss popular food culture, like hot dogs and smorrebrød. Culture in Amsterdam relates to the governments’ tolerance to marijuana, or marijuana culture and the red-light district, regarding the sex trade, shows and prostitution. Throughout the process of coding it became more apparent that culture is rooted in history. This made coding more complicated as historic codes and culture codes can often coincide. As distinguished in the results, ‘sustainable travel’ vlogs discussed social sustainability more directly. They discuss actively engaging with the local communities and people, they encourage voting with your dollar and staying in local places and supporting local tours and attractions. Although sustainability is typically pigeon-holed into environmental sustainability, it is apparent that videos which do address sustainability as a whole direct discuss social and economic sustainability as well. Perhaps social sustainability is most difficult to define due to the overlap with the environmental
and economic pillars, despite this idea the discussion is present in the ‘sustainable travel’ vlog narratives. These results regarding social sustainability were surprising in some way, due to the difficulty to define social sustainability. These results could be considered weak due to the lack of definition of social sustainability and overlap of other sustainability pillars. Although it is apparent that culture and history are discussed among travel vlogs, whether these vloggers are aware or direct in addressing the fact. Potential growth or gaps that could be filled by social media influencers or strategic communication using influencer marketing, could be explaining the importance of social sustainability and the benefits to the community as well as to the traveler. Awareness and direct conversations could be increased and blended in to the current content relatively easily and seamlessly, since social sustainability awareness is low. Referring to the results of the interviews despite the high levels of codes noted in the research, the lack of depth of understanding and defining social sustainability is solidified. Social sustainability codes that were perceived the most were food culture and cultural aspects of the country. Historical codes specifically were perceived relatively low. Although number of codes were high, interviewees seem to only perceive and recall general themes rather than discussing specifics. This could be due to the lack of reasoning, explaining or direct messaging of the travel vlogger. If the who, what or why were addressed briefly by the vlogger, social sustainability may be more prominent. Environmental sustainability is often top of mind when considering the term sustainability and sustainable travel. Potentially sustainable travel is contradictory in itself, as travel, as these influencers demonstrate and practice are far from sustainable.

Environment - The results also show how the travel vloggers discuss environmental sustainability, generally it is quite scarce. Although these travelers could be considered hypocritical travelling full-time across the globe creating massive carbon footprints, very vlogs few address or mention the environmental impacts or how to be more sustainable while at a destination. Topics which were recounted in the city travel vlogs were using bicycles, yet it could be argued that the bicycle culture and infrastructure in place is the greater influencer than for environmental reasons. Both Amsterdam and Copenhagen have major bicycle infrastructure in place making it easier and cheaper to travel from point A to point
B. with the ease and freedom of the traveler’s choice. Therefore, when YouTube travel influencers promote and suggest traveling by bike, it is often not rooted in the environmental reasons. Nevertheless, it is encouraged and discussed, some YouTube influencers do point out the perk of bicycles being better for the environment. On the perception side by interviewees, transportation was clearly top of mind when asked about environmental sustainability. Two interviewees perceived that the encouragement to utilize bicycles may not be for environmental reasons but for convenience and due to the easy access, and the city’s infrastructure, which was more in-depth perception than anticipated. Additionally, environmental sustainability was indirectly reported in the adventure travel vlogs as nature appreciation. Nature appreciation narratives considered natural beauty and attractions like beaches, underground caves, coral reefs when diving and rivers flowing down mountainsides. These travel influencers would express the impressive and beautiful landscapes while on tours or self-exploring a natural landscape. In the ‘sustainable travel’ vlogs, specific comments which directly promote “doing your part” and cleaning up pieces of trash found along hikes or beaches. Albeit, one ‘popular’ travel vlog influencer mentioned the large amounts of trash along the beaches (of the Philippines) and states his hopes that the locals dealt with this issue. The lack of shared responsibility sentiment expressed by the influencer is discouraging and contradictory to sustainable travel or responsible travel behavior. A somewhat surprising appalled and insulted response by the majority of the interviewees was encouraging. The perception of this comment was extremely high and interviewees place importance on this type of comment being negative. Finally, the environmentally friendly materials code did not appear often. This research exposes that there is a lack of companies which promote sustainability as an attraction factor, for example one ‘popular’ travel vlog explored Copenhagen by solar powered boats which were also made of recycled plastic. The YouTube influencers did well to explain and share this information, yet there were no other mentions in other videos or it appeared extremely rare during the hours of research prior to selecting the four ‘popular’ YouTube travel channels. It is either the lack of discussion or the lack of presence and promotion. This research perhaps exposes that the masses are not yet interested or place high importance on sustainable content. Tourism related companies which promote sustainable practices would
benefit from attracting top or popular influencers to experience and share their products or services. According to a survey provided by Booking.com, 87% of global travelers state they would like to travel more sustainably (Newsdesk, 2018). The growing interest in sustainable travel should be fostered by social media. Social media platforms can also provide greater e-WOM and the halo effect might positively cultivate greater demand and therefore supply of sustainable travel options like electric transportation or bicycles and shared responsibility to care for the environment as a common resource.

Economic – Economic codes were relatively basic referring people to local restaurants and shops. It was less common for YouTube travel influencers to discuss their accommodations. Some travel vloggers left the topic of accommodations out of their videos completely. The ‘popular’ travel vloggers were noted on occasion staying at international chain hotels depicted in other videos which were not used in this research. The reasons for their stay varied, yet more obviously they were due to sponsorship/collaborations. This refers to the hotel or accommodation facility providing a room for free with the agreement of the influencer creating positive content promoting the business as a form of payment. It can also be assumed with full-time travelers; these YouTube influencers may seize the benefits of loyalty perks with international chains. Yet it is important to note that one of the ‘popular’ travel influencers (LostLeblanc) discloses in another video that it is often beneficial for social media influencers to avoid accommodation sponsorships or collaborations, as agreements can have many requirements and demands, creating more work than it is worth to pay for a more affordable Airbnb or hotel. However, this travel influencer changed hotels three times during his stay in Amsterdam, a travel vlog used in this case selection. He clearly exhibits the lack of awareness regarding environmental sustainability by staying and moving hotels frequently. In comparison to the four ‘sustainable travel’ vlogs; there is heavy discussion regarding options to support the local economy with your accommodation choice. They offer options of eco-lodges, renting homes, doing a house swap, locally owned hotels and hostels or use Airbnb. They also provide the explanations and perks to staying with local families such as homemade foods and products as well as better immersion of the community and culture. The ‘sustainable travel’ vlogs are much
more direct, yet fail to provide names of the business or accommodation they use. These suggestions to begin searches would be a beneficial starting point for researching travelers, and is a gap that should be shifted to fill in future travel vlogs. It is arguable that this case selection did not choose a wide enough variety of travel vlogs, as there are some travel channels which are much more informative and instructional on where to stay and the pricing, but as previously stated, the vlogs selected were based on a minimum 1 million subscribers. Interviewees barely noted any accommodation discussion, and when it was mentioned in the interviews, it was the lack of information provided about where the influencer stayed and what it is like. The results expose a significant amount of discussion on local restaurants and shops. What is interesting to note is the little difference in how ‘popular’ travel vlogs and ‘sustainable travel’ vlogs discuss local restaurants and shops. Both types of travel vlogs present restaurant names and suggest seeking local or independent shops to contribute to the local economy. The ‘sustainable travel’ vlogs explain what the benefits are to the destination and why it is important to support the local economy while traveling. Interviewees definitely observed the discussion of local restaurants more than the local shops. Interviewees perceived the restaurants and in some instances the pricing, but this was rarer as only one travel vlog shared pricing. It was mentioned by other interviewees that pricing was a missing element in the travel vlogs. Interviewees remarked that currency was also missing, and therefore had little knowledge or understanding of how much things costed. There is a possibility that the more lavish travel videos do not disclose the cost of the experience, due to sponsorship and collaboration. The intention of the collaboration may be to inspire and promote the experience, rather than focus on pricing. Additionally, as already noted travel vlogs may aim to be aspirational and lavish, therefore the illusion of an amazing trip and experience should not include the details of cost. The economic side of sustainability is more complicated as the economy is expected to continuously grow, whereas sustainability is aimed to moderate fast growth. Suggestions for YouTube travel influencers might be emphasizing the experience and value which is created by choosing local businesses, local restaurants and accommodations when it is at a higher price point. From a business standpoint, price matching and providing similar value and experience makes the decision to choose sustainable much easier for consumers and
travelers. In general, there are indirect messages of sustainable travel were within YouTube travel vlogs, and even greater amounts of direct messaging in ‘sustainable travel’ vlogs which are clearer and more precise on the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of sustainable travel tips. The perception of sustainable messages was greater than expectations, considering the indirectness of the messages. A limitation or weakness from this result could be that the when interviewees are asked about sustainability, they searched and sought out messages that could be considered sustainable, but otherwise while researching a destination normally the sustainability mindset may not occur. For generalizability of the results, this study cannot and does not claim to contribute any knowledge in terms of the statistical sense. This research cannot directly be transferred to every case of travel vlog nor perception of the travel vlog. Rather the research above should be regarded as a starting point for future research. It illustrates a greater issue that sustainable travel messages are hardly being discussed in YouTube travel vlogs, which is highlighted in the literature review.

8.1 Filling the literature gap
Sustainable travel has become a major concern which has fueled research on how to make people change to more sustainable travel (Gehlert, Dziekan & Gärling, 2013). Through the literature review process, it is clear there is limited research that has been conducted on YouTube and specifically the link between YouTube vlogs and sustainable travel. Aforementioned sustainable tourism is a relatively new academic term and social media has been underutilized for the promotion of sustainability. Increased research should be invested and this research contributes to the literature gap by answering how do YouTube travel vlogs discuss sustainable travel. As Gössling (2017) expresses, IT and specifically in this case social media, creates considerable potential to support sustainable tourism. The research also seeks to delve deeper into understanding if people perceive these latent messages. A significant amount of literature also identifies characteristics of successful social media influencers. Characteristics like authenticity and credibility are key. This is the reasoning behind selecting four channels with a significant following to ensure similar viewership and perceived authenticity and credibility.

The previous literature emphasizes heavily the importance of authenticity and therefore self-determination theory. Self-determination theory is the idea that
authenticity revolves around an individual’s internal motivations (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Guidry-Moulard, 2018). This is perhaps the reason why sustainability messages were indirect and lacked reasoning. The ‘popular’ travel vloggers are passionate about sharing their stories, but maybe less intrinsically motivated to share sustainability information. This theory might also explain the reason ‘popular’ travel vloggers do not share sustainability messages as it is not their own passions and desires therefore will be perceived as less authentic. Moreover, one study reaffirms that attractiveness does not have a major link to purchase intentions. In order for social media influencers to be effective, sponsored content should align with the celebrity posts and align with his or her ideals and values, to be perceived as more authentic (Pöyry, et al., 2019). It was interesting to note how the interviewees often selected based not only on preference but based on similar characteristics to themselves. During the interviews some of the interviewees expressed the choice of the travel vlog due to whether they were similar to themselves, including relationship status. Those who identified as single tended to avoid travel vlogs which depicted couples in the image.

Social media influencers are an important strategic method of communication, which can influence public opinion and purchase intentions. Yet the internet and social media has been studied a great deal more regarding the Web 2.0 and more specifically the Tourism 2.0 environment (Ivanov, Dillingham, Parker et al., 2018). Functions like researching, planning, booking reservations and providing feedback have been the focus (Gössling, 2015). Some literature explores social media perceptions in tourism but lack the any elements of sustainable travel (Shen, Sotiriadis & Zhou, 2020). Articles also discuss how destinations are increasingly reliant on social media to manage consumer opinions (Peralta, 2019). Social media can have a significant impact on destination image and therefore influence their incoming tourism flows. Some research seeks to uncover how to make people change to exhibit more sustainable travel behaviors (Gehlert, Dziekan & Gärling, 2013). Yet the reminder that IT education and environmental learning, or awareness does not always translate to behavior change is important (Juvan & Dolnica, 2014a, 2014b; as cited in Gössling, 2017). Although this research does not seek to understand travel behaviors it is still vital to understand how sustainable travel is
discussed online but specifically on social media platforms. The findings of this research begin to map how sustainable travel is currently being discussed online but also how it might improve. Sustainable travel messages are latent and indirect. Admittedly, ‘popular’ travel vlog channels hardly address the different actions to promote sustainability, it can be found in most travel vlogs.

Media in general has changed due to social media influencers as it brings forth user-generated content. As indicated earlier media content can be created by anyone and everyone. Media is no longer limited to major industrial-economic actors (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). Likewise, there is a new sense of intimacy and immediacy of a relationship social media influencer present (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). This sense of intimacy and relationship help persuade and influence people. Perhaps these para-social relationships can foster growth in the sustainability community and increase the demand for sustainable travel. These online communities continue to grow. This growing impact of user-generated content is emphasized by the 29% of online consumers in the US watch video content at least once a month (Elliot, 2016). The research conducted in this study helps to better understand what type of content exists around sustainable travel and that people are more perceptive to these messages. The results demonstrate how social learning could be a contributing factor to increasing sustainable travel. From an environmental education perspective, sustainability is more about how we teach and learn (Brunstein, Jamie, Curi et al., 2015). This article emphasizes the more places and spaces we inject sustainability education, the more ways of thinking will emerge (Brunstein, Jamie, Curi et al., 2015). It might also be important to note that travel behavior is jointly determined by multiple factors such as; social influence, individual factors and transport environment Gehlert, Dziekan & Gärling, 2013). Gärling (2013) stresses the multitude of factors that influence people, ergo this research does not claim that social media influencers to outright influence sustainable travel but that it can be a factor to persuade and educate. Sustainability is process-oriented, the more we learn the more we are required to reflect (Koutsouris, 2009). Therefore, this research helps to fill this gap of understanding how messages are conveyed as well as reflecting on how viewers perceive them. Learning is the critical key to creating a more sustainable future (Koutsouris, 2009).
The travel industry was one of the fastest growing industries in the world. Yet due to the current COVID-19 pandemic tourism must adapt. Within a matter of months, over tourism has shifted to non-tourism (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020). Despite the unrecoverable economic losses caused by this pandemic it is important to note the opportunity this provides the tourism industry. The decreased amount of traveling and the amount of unemployment, this could be the opportunity for slow travel and local travel to rise. The ‘stay at home’ measures and social distancing appears to be increasing the demand for local travel, and nature-based activities and attractions. Still further, since individuals and families have less money to spend on vacations, might in turn make them more selective. This circumstance could consequently cause individuals to choose local travel in order to create extended trips more affordably and reinvesting into the local economy. As a whole this pandemic could be the start of a triple benefit for sustainable travel.

8.2 Theories in action
Salient messages found in this research revolve mainly around culture, or the top of mind topics like local businesses and environmentally friendly transportation. Culture is one of the top reasons people often travel. To experience a different place than our homes and to potentially gain new perspectives. Similarly, local shops and restaurants are at the core of culture and seeking Transportation is also top of mind when thinking of sustainable travel, as it generally the most publicized, social media and traditional media continually share messages about carbon emissions of flying and other modes of transportation. Framing theory clearly outlines this concept, increased salient messages also increase the probability that information will be perceived by a viewer (Entman, 1993). Seemingly obscure and unimportant pieces of narratives were perceived as highly salient in the interview process. This is likely due to the pattern or self-identified sustainable individuals. Those individuals who considered themselves sustainable, were more likely to notice small pieces of information that seemed unimportant. As sustainability is core to their belief system and values, this could explain their higher levels of perception. For example, one of the interviewees chose a video with the intention to avoid words like “guide” or “top lists” as the interviewee reported they tend to share tourist heavy destinations. This interviewee explained their search process seeks for more in-depth and local
experiences rather than social media influencer suggested “top” lists. Although this research used framing theory to identify salient messages, the presence of frames detected by researchers does not guarantee their influence in audience thinking/perception (Entman, 1993). This strongly ties with the theory of planned behavior as well. Since this theory reflects social norms of a person determines their attitudes and actions (Lopez-Mosquera, Garcia, Barrena, 2013). As above-mentioned, one viewers/interviewees may be more receptive to sustainable travel messages, if they identify as sustainable travelers. As these viewers are more aware of sustainability, perception rates might be higher. However, there is no criteria for what defines a sustainable individual which underlines this as a limitation. This also reveals the need to study moral obligation as a component. In understanding an individual’s moral obligation could improve our understanding of environmentally relevant intentions and behaviors. This may involve greater understanding of willingness to pay in conservation research, as the previous literature uses willingness to pay to gauge and understand moral obligation. At the same time, goal-framing theory may have played a part in this research. It postulates that people frame their goals to help process information (Lindenberg & Steg, 2013). Except humans have multiple goals, and it is important to consider those goals fight for different priorities. Therefore, in terms of sustainable travel, although hypothetically if vloggers or viewers maintain a sustainable travel as a goal, it may be lowered in precedence for fiscal, convenience or comfort reasons. This does coincide with norm-guided environmental behaviour which states that pro-environmental behavior must be guided by the persons core values and norms.

Finally, most importantly this research considered social learning theory to create its theoretical framework. As indicated earlier, learning refers to the people’s ability to process and retain information (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Arguably the public learns over time. It is believed that the public should be more susceptible to framing in the early stages of exposure to an issue like sustainable travel (Chong & Druckman, 2007). This idea that people are more open and receptive to new information/messages. Although from the interviews it did not seem apparent. The findings from the interview suggest those primed in thinking and considering sustainability or sustainable travel, were more receptive or able to identify messages
of sustainability. Priming within the study of mass communications is defined as calling attention to something (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Priming might increase the accessibility to some category or construct in our memories (Chong & Druckman, 2007). As for the theoretical framework based on social learning theory, this research cannot confirm the content creator level. Presumably personal morals, past experiences and sponsorships would be educators and motivators to create sustainable travel content. Within the ‘sustainable travel’ vlogs, it does appear apparent that personal morals and experience are factors to share sustainable travel content. This strengthens the call for more social media influencers who hold sustainable travel close to their morals. As previously mentioned, making money is on in fourth place for an influencer’s motivations (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Guidry Moulard, 2018). Therefore, as encouraging and initiating sponsorships may be, the most effective social media influencers to promote sustainable travel must demonstrate their moral drive and maintain authenticity. This research does appear to contribute to the learnings of the perception side. Interviewees do draw on past experiences and personal motives when noticing sustainable travel content. The research also supports the concept that consistent exposure to sustainable travel e-WOM, could be an effective influencer. Even more, this study acknowledges that framing is critiqued as insufficient for rigorous analysis and it is unable to contribute to theoretical and empirical vagueness (O’Neill, Williams, Kurz et al., 2015). Due to the relativity and subjectivity it is difficult to ensure consistency and transferability.

8.3 Implications
The findings of this research demonstrate messages of sustainable travel are more perceived than expected. The perception of sustainability is increasing. This highlights the opportunities which social media influencers and specifically YouTube travel influencers have to share information and persuade travelers. The results show how sustainable travel is currently discussed but branching off this research there is guidance and direction to what sustainable travel message should look and sound like. The research shows the need to elaborate briefly for the reasons why sustainable travel options are positive and how easy or convenient it can be. Although it may be important to keep sustainability messages light and brief rather
than delving deeper into detail, as this changes the travel vlogs entertainment and style value. In the exploratory interviews, one vlog proved to explain in greater depth the sustainability reasons and causes, which caused disinterest. The research suggests sustainable travel vlogs should be kept similar but stealthily or casually slip in pieces of sustainable travel options. The messages would be even more salient if they appeal to viewers economically or conveniently. Furthermore, the findings support the need to co-produce research, due to the significant interdisciplinary overlap of tourism and sustainability. Research to be conducted with journalists, scientists and institutional actors (O’Neill, Williams, Kurz et al., 2015). As already explained, this pandemic has provided a unique opportunity for social media influencers to shift to travel locally. As restrictions begin to ease, social media influencers find themselves grounded and unable to travel internationally. Therefore, this research sheds light on companies and destinations utilizing their local talent to promote intra-national traveling. Otherwise, these results expose the need for sustainable travel companies to increase investment into social media influencing, as it is a hot topic that should be cultivated to encourage the momentum and educate millennial travelers of the options available globally.

8.4 Limitations
The limitations to this research include the lack of generalizability of qualitative studies. Qualitative research is interpretive and seeks not to understand the cause and effect but describe and understand deeper meanings of sustainable travel messaging. Additionally, arguably, coding data may not produce significant or theorized stories (Roulston, 2013). Another limitation acknowledge by the researcher was the diverse selection of interviewees. The multi-national sample was selected to attempt to represent the idea that YouTube travel vlogs can be accessed and viewed by anyone anywhere in the world. The multi-perception sample hoped to identify some cohesive patterns, but acknowledges a potential issue of different interpretations of interview questions or definitions. For example, what is considered sustainable in one nation, or culture may not be in another, sustainability at its core could be criticized as inconsistent. Additionally, the wide nationality representation provided diverse interests in styles of travel, as travelers often want what is different than their home countries. The research also failed to analyze
visual saliency and use of visual attention modelling schemes. Due to the time constraints of this thesis, the research deemed the narratives and perception parts of the study as greater gaps in knowledge. Time allowing, the study could have benefitted from using a visual attention-based framework as well to understand and test where and what viewers looked at. Further aiding in how to structure and efficiently modify future strategic communications through social media. The research also did not and cannot further the question of why travel vloggers discuss sustainable travel so infrequently and indirectly. Further research would benefit interviewing content providers, like the social media influencers to further the research regarding sustainable travel.

9 Conclusion
Sustainable travel is infrequently and indirectly discussed in YouTube travel vlogs. The research exposes the lack of direct sustainable travel content as well as brief or minimal explanations and promotions to encourage viewers to choose sustainable options while traveling the world. On rare occasions, a ‘popular’ YouTube travel channel dedicates a specific sustainable travel vlog which outlines tips to generally make or seek out sustainable options, but do not incorporate this messaging into their regular content. The research sought to understand how YouTube travel vlogs discuss sustainable travel as well as how people perceive sustainable travel content. Results for the perception part expose there is greater awareness and perception of sustainability than anticipated. Millennials are more understanding and perceptive of the term sustainable travel and elements of sustainable travel without necessarily knowing the three sustainability pillars it could be classified as. Previous literature discusses social media influencers and user-generated content in the business marketing perspective, but minimally explores it within the tourism industry and very rarely in terms of sustainability. The literature also reveals the in-depth research revolving around perceived authenticity of social media influencers and the importance and elements of credibility. Authenticity and credibility are notably strongest when social media influencers disseminate information which lie close to their passions and values. The literature also illustrates how social media clearly has effective communication reach. It has the capacity to extend to anywhere and anyone in the world, in the creation process and viewing abilities. Social media also
allows for a sense of online intimacy and engagement. Online relationships change our circle of influence by increasing it exponentially. The literature has previous devoted understand of purchase intention and persuasion. Clearly there is still plenty room for growth and future studies regarding influence and persuasion, but businesses have invested into product purchase intention, which differs from experience-based products. This research exposes a hole for YouTube vlogs regarding sustainable travel. When completing a specific search, a limited number of travel vlogs appeared. Sustainable may have been previously considered a niche market, but the growing awareness and demand, specifically from millennials should be catered too and studied further. Recommendations for future work should focus on persuasion and influence of sustainable travel, it would be beneficial to further understand how to increase or encourage social media influencers to discuss more topics of sustainable tourism. Vlogging provides many new research opportunities (Griffith & Papacharissi, 2010). The perception side of viewers should also be investigated further to potentially identify different markets and establish how these messages can be most effective among millennial and other generations. It would also be interesting to understand how these travel vlogs influence the older generations who are approaching retirement and potentially traveling the world, another market for quality, high spending travelers. Future research should also seek to visually analyze of travel vlogs, this could benefit companies/destinations and social media influencers to produce targeted and effective content. Imagery is could be highly influential in storytelling and influence. As mentioned before, future studies should explore if sustainability messages especially regarding travel, are perceived negatively or less attractively than aspirational travel vlogs with minimal sustainability content.

10 References


Buchanan, N., & Buchanan, K., [Kara & Nate]. (2020, April 7). FIRST DAY BACK IN THE PHILIPPINES. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zA0mvSC2q3E&t=593s


Shen, S., Sotiriadis, M., & Zhou, Q. (2020). Could smart tourists be sustainable and responsible as well? The contribution of social networking sites to improving their sustainable and responsible behavi


Appendix A: PowerPoint Presentation sent to Interviewees:

Which type of travel would you like to do?

City

Adventure

Click the video you’d like to view!

CITY

ADVENTURE

Click the video you’d like to view!
Appendix B: Table below – Interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profession:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you consider yourself an experienced traveler?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you consider yourself sustainable? Or aware of sustainability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you give some examples of things you do to be sustainable?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which video did you select?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been to the location you viewed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you think of the travel video?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of impression/info did you take away?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was most memorable from the video?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think was the main point of the video, what was the influencer trying to say?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel something was missing from this video? If so: what?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you feel a sense of sustainability was expressed? Elaborate on what is sustainability, if needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you feel the influencer was a responsible traveler?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Or was transparent about their experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you feel the influencer was authentic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did you pick the video?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

The below is a word cloud which demonstrates the most used words within the 20 interviews. This simple gives a sense of what words and topics were brought forth most often.

Appendix D

Appendix B notes the codes that were mentioned in which travel video. The name of the travel vlogger channel is shown, Firstly the city travel vlog, then following the adventure travel vlog. Additionally included, are the three exploratory travel vlogs and then the four ‘sustainable travel’ vlogs. From left to right the travel vlogs are as follows: FunForLouis – Amsterdam, FunForLouis – Peru, Kara & Nate – Copenhagen, Kara & Nate – Philippines, LostLeblanc – Amsterdam, LostLeblanc – Philippines, TheVagabrothers – Copenhagen, The Vagabrothers – Peru, Useless – London, The Vagabrothers – London, Margot Lee – London, What doesn’t Suck – Sustainable Travel vlog, Madeline Olivia.
Appendix E: Table showing number of total codes

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<th>Code</th>
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<th>Documents</th>
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<td>Environmental Sustainability</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Social Sustainability</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic Sustain... Local Market/Restaurants</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Sustain... Street Food</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Sustain... Enviro materials</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sustain... Interacting with Locals</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
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