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FLYING GREEN: MEDIA'S POWER IN TRANSFORMING AIR TRAVEL AND TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY NARRATIVES IN BRICS+ NATIONS

This study explores the transformative role of media narratives and smart technologies in fostering sustainable air travel and tourism within BRICS+ countries. As environmental degradation accelerates and public awareness rises, media platforms are becoming critical instruments for shaping sustainability discourses, consumer behavior, and policy frameworks. The study applies a secondary data analysis approach, utilizing a curated dataset of 106 journal articles, policy documents, social media content, and tourism industry reports spanning the years 2015 to 2024. The research employs content analysis, thematic analysis, and the Sustainability Narrative Analysis Tool (SNAT), underpinned by Media Framing Theory. Key findings demonstrate that media narratives significantly influence consumer decision-making, industry adaptation, and the adoption of smart technologies like VR, AI, and IoT to support sustainable tourism. Nevertheless, challenges such as greenwashing and digital divides hinder full realization of media's transformative potential. A conceptual model is developed to illustrate the interplay between media discourse, technology adoption, and sustainable tourism outcomes. This study provides policy-makers with evidence-based recommendations for designing inclusive sustainability regulations, offers guidance for industry stakeholders in implementing ethical green marketing, and encourages media professionals to adopt responsible storytelling. The paper contributes an original conceptual framework bridging digital communication and sustainable tourism governance within the emerging economies of the BRICS+ alliance.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, media framing, smart technology, BRICS+ Nations, climate governance.

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Жасыл әуе сапарлары: BRICS+ елдеріндегі әуе көлігі мен туризмнің тұрақтылығы туралы баяндауларды өзгертудегі медианың рөлі

Бұл зерттеу мына сұраққа жауап іздейді: BRICS+ елдерінде медиа тұрақты туризм мен әуе сапарлары дискурсына қалай ықпал етті? Туризмнің қоршаған ортаға әсері мен тұрақты маркетингтің қажеттілігі артып келе жатқан қазіргі кезеңде бұл жұмыс туризм мен тұрақтылық арасындағы алшақтықты толтыруды көздейді. Зерттеу медиа мен технологиялардың тұтынушыларға, салаларға және саясатқа әсерін талдап, тұрақты тұтыну мен өндіріске әкелетін үлгілерді анықтайды. Зерттеу әдістемесі ретінде 2015–2024 жылдар аралығындағы ғылыми мақалалар, әлеуметтік желідегі жазбалар, үкіметтік құжаттар мен академиялық еңбектер пайдаланылып, сандық және сапалық деректер негізінде медианың дискурстық құрылымдары сараланды. Мазмұндық және тақырыптық талдаулар арқылы кең таралған медиа фреймдер анықталып, олардың жағымды немесе жағымсыз сипаты бағаланды, сонымен қатар олардың көпшілік пікірін немесе салалық шешімдерге әсер ету деңгейі зерттелді. Ұсынылған үлгі медиа-хабарламалар, смарт-технологияларды пайдалану және тұрақтылық көрсеткіштері арасындағы өзара байланысты сипаттайды. Зерттеу нәтижесінде тұрақты әуе көлігі мен туризмнің әлеуметтік-экологиялық дискурстарын айқындайтын негізгі құрылымдар анықталды. Жасыл өнімдер жайлы баспасөздегі ақпарат тұтынушы қабылдауын қалыптастырып, индустрияның бейімделуіне ықпал етеді. BRICS+ елдері аясындағы қазіргі ынтымақтастық дәстүрлі туризм дискурсын тарихи мұраны сақтау мен қорғауға басымдық бере отырып қайта қарастыруда. Алайда, цифрлық теңсіздік пен «жасыл жуу» секілді мәселелер әлі де өзекті. Ұсынылған ұсыныстар саясаткерлерге тиімді реттеу тетіктерін әзірлеуге, салалық оқилдерге тұрақты стратегияларды іске асыруға, ал медиа мамандарына тұрақтылықты дұрыс баяндауға көмектеседі. Бұл зерттеу медианың экологиялық тұрақтылық пен тұтынушылыққа ықпалын зерделеу үшін бастапқы қадам ретінде қызмет атқарады. Сонымен қатар, BRICS+ елдерінің ерекшеліктерін ескере отырып, смарт

әсері туралы жаңа тұжырымдамалық үлгі ұсынады. Осылайша, бұл еңбек тұрақты туризм жайлы пікірталасты жалғастырып, жаһандық климаттық өзгерістер контекстіндегі медианың ролін көрсетеді.

Түйін сөздер: жасыл туризм, медиа фрейминг, жаңа медиа, BRICS+ елдері, климаттың өзгеруі.

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Зелёные перелёты: роль медиа в трансформации нарративов устойчивого туризма и авиаперевозок в странах BRICS+

Данное исследование посвящено следующему вопросу: как медиа влияют на дискурсы устойчивого туризма и авиаперевозок в странах BRICS+? По мере того как последствия туризма становятся всё более очевидными, а потребность в устойчивом маркетинге возрастает, данная работа восполняет разрыв между устойчивостью и туризмом. В исследовании анализируются способы, посредством которых медиа и технологии воздействуют на потребителей, индустрию и политику, способствуя формированию моделей устойчивого потребления и производства. Используются как количественные данные вторичного характера, так и качественные данные, полученные с использованием теории фрейминга в медиа. В качестве источников рассматриваются научные статьи, публикации в социальных сетях, правительственные документы и академические работы за период 2015–2024 гг. Содержательный и тематический анализ позволил определить основные медиа-фреймы, оценить их позитивную или негативную направленность, а также степень влияния на общественное мнение и действия заинтересованных сторон. Предлагаемая модель фокусируется на взаимосвязи между медийными сообщениями, использованием смарт-технологий и показателями устойчивости. В результате исследования были выделены основные дискурсивные конструкции, способствующие продвижению экологического и социального аспектов устойчивого авиасообщения и туризма. Восприятие потребителей и адаптация отрасли формируются под влиянием публикаций о «зелёных» продуктах, что ведёт к росту потребления. Современное сотрудничество в рамках BRICS+ переосмысливает традиционные туризм-дискурсы, акцентируя внимание на историческом наследии и охране природы. Вместе с тем сохраняются такие проблемы, как цифровое неравенство и гринвошинг. Представленные рекомендации помогут политикам в разработке эффективных нормативных актов, бизнесу – в реализации устойчивых стратегий, а журналистам – в профессиональном освещении проблем устойчивости. Исследование служит отправной точкой для дальнейшего изучения роли медиа в обеспечении экологической устойчивости и потребительской культуры. Кроме того, разработана новая концептуальная модель, раскрывающая влияние медиа на внедрение смарт-технологий в контексте специфики стран BRICS+. Таким образом, работа продолжает дискуссию об устойчивом туризме и подчёркивает значимость медиа в трансформации глобального климатического сознания.

Ключевые слова: зелёный туризм, фрейминг, новые медиа, страны BRICS+, изменение климата.

Introduction

Aviation and tourism sectors are primary determinants of global economic development and it is worth mentioning that they create a significant share of the gross domestic product and employment rates in numerous countries, including the states within the BRICS+ partnership agreement until 2024 (Seyfi & Hall, 2024). However, the environmental footprint of these industries inclusive of greenhouse gas emissions and loss of ecosystems has become a major global concern. As a result, sustainable tourism has emerged as a way of achieving the objective of creating value for the economy without compromising the earth's environment. Communications me-

dia as a tool for changing perception and behavior is central to the dissemination of sustainable practice discourses especially in emergent economy nations in the context of the BRICS+ discussions (Sankar & Ilangoan, 2025).

Many papers have been written on how media and technology support the promotion of sustainable tourism. Sankar and Ilangoan (2025) stress that VR and interactive media improve the sustainability of eco-tourism by using narratives. Seyfi and Hall (2024) outline how the geopolitics of BRICS nations can transform the discursive construction of tourism and argue how they can disrupt Western compliance sustainability frames. In addition, Næss and Hahm (2024) present the work

that shows that media play an essential part in raising public's awareness on sustainable tourism practices, and Masson (2024) question the ability of media to contribute to greenwashing. However, knowledge of the systemic role of media in promoting sustainable tourism practices within the BRICS+ environment and the prospect of integrating smart technologies with sustainable frameworks remains limited.

Prior research revealed the role of media in tourism and sustainability, but it mainly targets developed countries or few country case studies. Consequently, there is a critical gap concerning the integrated impact of media narratives and smart technologies in enabling sustainable tourism in BRICS+ countries. This is a very important gap, especially in view of the socio-economic cultural and environmental contexts in these countries.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine how media can help change air travel and tourism sustainability discourses in the BRICS+ countries. It examines how new technologies and media shape consumers and business actors' behaviors, industries, and policies to support sustainable tourism.

Background

The study is located at the forefront of social concerns, global sustainable development initiatives, and the ever-evolving media and technology landscape. Due to their varied socio-economic profiles and significant geopolitical importance, BRICS+ nations offer a compelling context for examining these phenomena. While prior research has described the role of media and technology in transforming the tourism sector, no studies have investigated their impact on fostering sustainability in emerging economies. This paper, therefore, addresses this gap by exploring how BRICS+ countries can leverage media and technology to encourage sustainable tourism.

The study's main contribution lies in constructing a novel theoretical framework that links media narratives with smart technology adoption within the unique socio-economic and cultural contexts of BRICS+ countries. Beyond theoretical and practical implications, this paper also offers guidelines for tourism and aviation business actors.

The paper begins with a general introduction that illustrates the topic's relevance, provides a brief literature review, defines the research gap, and outlines the research aim and main contributions. The method section describes the approach employed for secondary data analysis, along with the ana-

lytical tools used. The findings section presents an overview of the results regarding media discourses, smart technology use, and sustainable practices. The discussion contextualizes these findings within the broader sustainability discourse, concluding with a summary of implications and directions for future research.

This paper focuses on the intersection of sustainability challenges and growth opportunities for the aviation and tourism industries in BRICS+ countries. While media and smart technologies can significantly encourage sustainable tourism practices, few of these emerging economies have comprehensively explored their impact on consumers, industries, and policies.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the key discursive structures of sustainable air travel and tourism in BRICS+ countries.
2. To analyze how smart technologies can support sustainable tourism experiences.
3. To assess the effect of different media stories on consumer behaviors, business strategies, and policy decisions.

Research Questions

1. How are BRICS+ nations discursively constructing media discourses related to sustainable air travel and tourism?
2. In what manner do intelligent systems play a role in improving sustainable tourism experiences?
3. What do these media narratives do to the behavior of the consumers, the practices and policies of the industries and the policies and laws?

It is important to note that this research has academic implications as well as important practical implications. In general, for policymakers, it provides understanding of what makes sustainability frameworks effective. For industry actors, it gives an approach to how sustainability can be implemented into business processes. To the media practitioners, it raises awareness of effective communication in products, events and information about sustainability. In addition, the study helps to address an important research gap by exploring the concept of sustainable tourism in the context of BRICS+ nations, inclusive of a global outlook.

This study not only identifies dominant narratives in sustainable tourism within BRICS+ but also offers a novel integrated model linking media impact and smart technology with policy and consumer behavior – providing actionable insights for stakeholders.

Literature review

To fully comprehend the role of media and technology in sustainable tourism, this study draws upon insights from various theoretical perspectives and recent literature. For instance, Sankar and Ilangoan (2025) highlight how virtual reality and artificial intelligence contribute significantly to shaping green tourism experiences. Their work also underscores the importance of engaging narratives in developing sustainable tourism, particularly within emerging economic markets. Other scholars supporting these ideas include Seyfi and Hall (2024), who consider the geopolitical importance of BRICS+ nations in this context, and Næss and Hahm (2024), who discuss the media's role in promoting sustainability agendas.

However, other authors, such as Masson (2024), offer a critical perspective, cautioning against the media's potential role in contributing to greenwashing. This critical viewpoint aligns with broader concerns raised by scholars examining sustainability in BRICS+ countries. For instance, Zhang (2024) analyzes the geopolitical considerations of sustainability in these nations, while Magolie (2024) investigates infrastructural investments aimed at addressing poverty and enhancing sustainable tourism, both implicitly and explicitly highlighting the complexities of sustainability communication and implementation.

Conversely, critics like Lee (2024) and Dominguez (2024) argue that media often provides mere 'lip service' to sustainability issues, failing to engage with the complex underlying problems or the comprehensive frameworks designed to address them. This divergence in perspectives highlights the field's complexity and the necessity for an all-encompassing framework that accounts for the variety of positions held by researchers and practitioners.

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks that will be significant in the study are as follows.

This study is underpinned by media framing theory, particularly as it applies to sustainability narratives. Entman (1993) initiated contemporary discussions on framing, defining it as the careful selection and emphasis given to specific aspects of reality, while marginalizing or ignoring others, thereby shaping public perception and decisions. Building on this, scholars like Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) have expanded on the concept of media framing and its profound influence on public attitudes and behaviors.

In the context of sustainable tourism development, these frameworks allow us to view media as a crucial platform that shapes discussions and, consequently, guides consumer and industry behavior. Media, for instance, acts as a primary source of information regarding the availability of eco-tourism products, best practices in sustainability, and the negative effects of conventional tourism. For example, Seyfi and Hall (2024) contend that media framing activities in BRICS+ countries have been instrumental in advancing ecotourism, rooted in cultural and environmental values for sustainable living. Conversely, Masson (2024) demonstrates how media can promote greenwashing, fostering scepticism among consumers. The way sustainability is presented, therefore, significantly influences stakeholder attitudes toward the transition to sustainable processes. The theoretical foundation of this research integrates insights from communication scholarship, tourism literature, and sustainability science.

Media framing, as defined by Entman (1993), is the process by which certain aspects of reality are made prominent while others are marginalized or ignored, thereby shaping public perception and decisions. In the context of sustainable tourism, the media serves as a crucial source of information regarding eco-tourism products, best practices in sustainability, and the adverse effects of conventional tourism. For example, Seyfi and Hall (2024) contend that media framing activities in BRICS+ countries have been instrumental in advancing ecotourism, rooted in cultural and environmental values for sustainable living. Conversely, Masson (2024) demonstrates how media can inadvertently promote greenwashing, fostering skepticism among consumers. The way sustainability is presented, therefore, significantly influences stakeholder attitudes toward the transition to sustainable practices.

Smart Technology Adoption: Recent technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT) are revolutionizing the tourism industry by offering innovative solutions to sustainability challenges. Buhalis and Law (2022) emphasize that applying new technologies in tourism is crucial not only for achieving sustainable outcomes but also for improving operational efficiency and minimizing negative environmental impacts. For instance, Sankar and Ilangoan (2025) argue that VR's immersive capabilities allow for experiences that don't require physical travel to environmentally sensitive areas, thus reducing ecological footprints (Rena, 2024).

Similarly, smart IoT in transportation and AI-powered recommendations for eco-friendly travel options, alongside IoT applications in hotels and airlines, enhance efficiency by conserving energy and reducing waste. These technologies also contribute to environmental conservation by making sustainable choices more appealing and engaging for tourists. Ultimately, integrating such technologies is vital for achieving environmental sustainability and economic development goals in BRICS+ countries.

Consumer Behavior: Media and technology are also significant determinants of consumer behavior, particularly in the context of travel. Næss and Hahn (2024) found that increased awareness of air travel's negative environmental effects has prompted media to promote green solutions, such as carbon-neutral flights and sustainable lodging options. Consequently, smart technologies further assist consumers by providing tailored information on their environmental impact. Gössling et al. (2021) highlight how crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, amplify the media's importance in shaping consumer attitudes toward safer and more sustainable travel, underscoring the imperative of robust media strategies during global challenges. For instance, these technologies can estimate a tourist's carbon footprint and recommend eco-friendly travel alternatives. However, the effectiveness of these tools ultimately depends on the quality of information provided and the consumer's willingness to make sustainable choices (Masson, 2024).

Policy and Industry Practices Media plays a significant role in influencing policy and industry practices related to sustainable tourism. Government officials rely on public discourse, often shaped by media narratives, to ensure that sustainability principles are integrated into tourism sector legislation. For example, consistent media promotion of environmental stewardship has notably influenced the development of China's green aviation and Brazil's ecotourism strategies (Zhang, 2024). For their part, organizations often adopt green technologies and methods in response to both regulatory demands and evolving customer needs. The synergy between media and policy can thus drive substantial changes in tourism practices, exemplified by BRICS+ nations' collaborative ventures in green technology (Seyfi & Hall, 2024).

These concepts are discussed as related yet overlapping, constituting an integrated and evolving model where media and technology serve as crucial means for promoting sustainable tourism. Media framing influences public perception and govern-

mental goals, while smart technologies provide the tools to achieve these objectives. Consumer behavior critically links these elements, transforming mere awareness into tangible sustainable actions. Ultimately, policy and industry practices formalize these changes, effectively closing the sustainability feedback loop and establishing sustainability as a cornerstone for tourism development.

Visual representation of the Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Tourism in BRICS+ Countries

To holistically capture the interconnected dynamics of media, smart technologies, consumer behavior, and sustainability governance within the BRICS+ tourism landscape, the study proposes a conceptual framework. This model visually maps the interdependencies that drive sustainable air travel and tourism narratives across emerging economies.

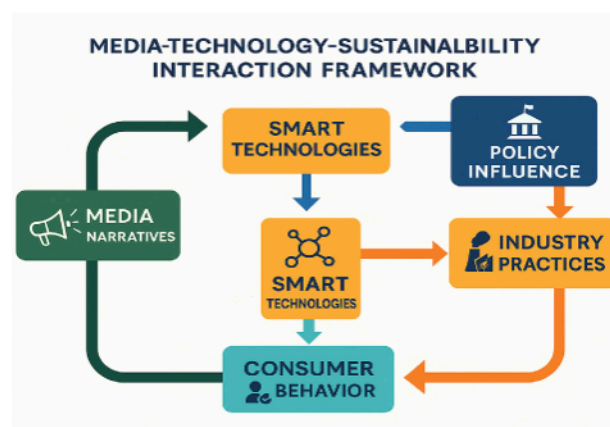


Figure 1 – Media-technology-sustainability interaction framework
Note – compiled by authors

This framework not only synthesizes the core findings of the study but also offers a strategic lens through which policymakers, industry actors, and researchers can understand and influence sustainable tourism practices in the digital era. It serves as a blueprint for guiding inclusive and innovation-driven transitions in BRICS+ tourism governance.

How media has impacted various aspects of tourism and sustainability:

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions, behaviors, and policy responses related to sustainable tourism. Through its capacity to inform, frame narratives, and mobilize collective awareness, media has significantly influenced tourism practices across diverse global contexts. The following examples illustrate the breadth of the media's impact:

1. Promoting Sustainable Tourism as a Social Responsibility

Illustrative Case: The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Rise of “Staycation” Culture

During the COVID-19 pandemic, widespread media coverage emphasized the environmental benefits of reduced international travel, notably lower greenhouse gas emissions and improved air quality. Platforms ranging from traditional news outlets to social media catalyzed a shift in public discourse, promoting localized travel or “staycations” as both a health-conscious and environmentally responsible choice (Gössling et al., 2021).

Impact: This media-driven trend heightened public awareness of eco-friendly travel alternatives and encouraged support for local economies, reinforcing tourism as a socially responsible endeavor.

2. Promoting Ecotourism

Illustrative Case: Costa Rica’s Government-Led Ecotourism Campaigns

The Costa Rican government, leveraging global media platforms including National Geographic and BBC Travel, positioned the nation as a premier destination for ecotourism. These media campaigns highlighted the country’s biodiversity, conservation initiatives, and sustainability management practices (UNWTO, 2020).

Impact: As a result, there was a significant rise in eco-conscious tourism, which contributed to environmental protection and increased economic returns from sustainable tourism activities.

3. Influencing Consumer Behavior

Illustrative Case: The Swedish ‘Flygskam’ (Flight Shame) Movement

The Swedish media played a crucial role in popularizing the concept of Flygskam, or flight shame—a grassroots movement discouraging short-haul air travel in favour of low-emission alternatives like rail transport. This narrative gained widespread traction through both mainstream and social media (Seyfi & Hall, 2024).

Impact: The campaign led to a measurable decline in domestic air travel in Sweden and an uptick in investments toward railway infrastructure, demonstrating how media narratives can influence consumer choices and infrastructure development.

4. Media Exposing Unsustainable Business Practices

Illustrative Case: Palm Oil and Deforestation Campaigns

Investigative journalism and documentaries—such as the BBC’s “The Burning Issue”—have uncovered the environmental destruction linked to

tourism-driven demand for unsustainable palm oil. These reports highlighted how deforestation in Southeast Asia is often fuelled by tourism-related industries (Masson, 2024).

Impact: Public awareness campaigns spurred global consumer protests and compelled corporations to adopt certified sustainable palm oil sourcing practices, illustrating media’s power in holding businesses accountable.

5. Media-Induced Policy and Industry Changes

Illustrative Case: Blue Flag Beach Certification Initiatives

Media coverage of Blue Flag beach certifications—a globally recognized eco-label for clean and sustainable beaches—has exerted pressure on local governments and tourism boards to comply with environmental standards related to water quality, waste management, and biodiversity protection (UNWTO, 2020).

Impact: In countries like Greece and Spain, media attention led to improved environmental stewardship and strengthened the eco-tourism brand appeal, aligning tourism development with sustainability goals.

6. Showcasing Technological Solutions for Sustainable Tourism

Illustrative Case: Virtual Reality (VR) Tourism during the Pandemic

As physical travel declined during the pandemic, media outlets and tourism stakeholders promoted virtual tourism experiences, such as virtual safaris and online museum tours. These initiatives highlighted how technology can provide immersive, educational experiences with minimal environmental impact (Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2023).

Impact: This media-driven promotion of VR tourism not only sustained public interest in global destinations but also expanded public understanding of how technology can contribute to low-impact, sustainable tourism.

7. Combating Greenwashing through Media Accountability

Illustrative Case: Social Media Activism against False Sustainability Claims

Social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Instagram, have become tools for public scrutiny and corporate accountability. Citizen journalists and environmental activists have exposed inconsistencies in airline companies’ carbon offset claims, initiating widespread backlash and demands for transparency (Becken & Hay, 2012).

Impact: These media-led accountability efforts have led to increased public skepticism of corporate

sustainability claims, encouraging more rigorous sustainability reporting and regulation across the tourism sector.

Synthesis of Media's Influence

These case studies collectively underscore the multifaceted influence of media on tourism and sustainability. From shaping consumer behaviors to prompting institutional reforms and technology

adoption, media remains a central actor in the global push for sustainable tourism. The following table synthesizes the cases to illustrate their diverse contexts and tangible outcomes.

The following table offers a tabular representation of the case studies thereby giving a clear perspective of how media has shaped tourism practices across the world.

Table 1 – Case Studies showcasing media's role in influencing tourism practices globally

Case Study	Context	Media's Role	Impact	Lesson	References
Flight Shame Movement (Sweden)	Encouraged travelers to avoid flights due to carbon emissions.	Media promoted the term <i>flygskam</i> and highlighted low-carbon alternatives like trains.	4% decline in domestic flights, increased rail investments, inspired similar movements globally.	Media creates social pressure to shift consumer behavior and influence policies.	Gössling et al. (2021).
Costa Rica's Ecotourism Branding	Positioned Costa Rica as a leader in ecotourism.	National Geographic and BBC Travel showcased biodiversity, carbon neutrality, and eco-lodges.	Boosted GDP by 6%, increased eco-tourism traffic, reduced deforestation by over 50%.	Media campaigns can position countries as sustainable tourism leaders, benefiting the economy.	UNWTO (2020).
Blue Flag Certification	Certification for beaches meeting sustainability standards.	Promoted as eco-friendly destinations in travel blogs, documentaries, and news outlets.	Boosted tourism in Greece and Spain, encouraged environmental policy adoption for maintaining certification.	Media exposure can drive environmental policies and attract eco-conscious travelers.	UNWTO (2020).
Palm Oil and Deforestation	Highlighted tourism-related demand for unsustainable palm oil.	Investigative journalism and viral campaigns exposed deforestation impacts.	Consumer boycotts, corporate commitments to sustainable palm oil sourcing.	Investigative media holds industries accountable, driving corporate and consumer-level changes.	Masson (2024).
Virtual Tourism in Japan	Kept international tourists engaged during the pandemic.	Media promoted virtual tours of temples, cherry blossoms, and tea ceremonies on YouTube/IG.	1M+ participants, increased post-pandemic interest in visiting Japan, showcased VR's potential to reduce tourism's environmental footprint.	Media amplifies tech-driven solutions to make tourism sustainable and resilient to disruptions.	Xiang & Fesenmaier (2023).
Social Media Activism Against Greenwashing	Airlines overstated sustainability claims.	Influencers and activists exposed discrepancies on Twitter and Instagram.	Greater transparency, improved corporate reporting of carbon emissions, discerning eco-conscious consumers.	Social media holds corporations accountable and promotes transparency.	Becken & Hay (2012).
"Don't Mess with Texas" Campaign	Reduced littering across highways through cultural pride and humor.	Celebrities featured in anti-littering campaigns via TV, radio ads, and billboards.	72% reduction in highway litter within a decade, became a global model for environmental campaigns.	Culturally resonant campaigns shift public attitudes effectively.	UNWTO (2020).
Responsible Tourism in Bhutan	Promoted «High Value, Low Impact» tourism for preservation.	National Geographic highlighted cultural heritage and limited tourist inflow policies.	Maintained carbon-negative status, preserved culture, boosted revenue through tourism fees.	Media can encourage innovative policies by spotlighting successful national strategies.	Gössling (2023).

Note – compiled by authors

The compiled case studies reinforce the central thesis of this paper: that media functions not merely as a passive reflector of public discourse, but as an active agent shaping the trajectory of sustainable tourism. Whether through amplifying grassroots environmental movements, exposing unsustainable corporate practices, or promoting technological alternatives such as virtual tourism, media interventions have demonstrated measurable impacts on consumer behavior, industry adaptation, and policy formation. These examples also highlight the dual potential of media – to empower transformative sustainability narratives or, conversely, to facilitate greenwashing when unchecked. For BRICS+ nations, where tourism intersects with diverse socio-economic and ecological realities, strategically harnessing media for sustainability goals is not optional – It is imperative. Future policy and practice should thus integrate media strategies that are inclusive, evidence-based, and locally resonant to support a resilient and regenerative tourism sector.

How Media Shapes Policy Changes

This paper aimed at examining how the changes in media coverage affect public policies and their implementation to discover that media remains a significant actor in policy making and has the potential to drive change. Here's a detailed explanation of the mechanisms through which media impacts policymaking:

1. Promoting Policy Deficit Awareness

Media remind and recall existing gaps in policies to the public and policymakers. Situations exposing fraud and scandals, which organized oversight calls for government intercession, are usually depicted in investigative journalism, documentaries, and news reports. Example: Exposés about deforestation for tourism development in South-east Asia have led to better policies and industry responsibilities (Masson, 2024).

2. Influencing Public Opinion

Media influences the views of the members of society by presenting certain problems in a particular manner, thus leading to the development of support for or opposition to policy. Example: The flygskam in Sweden fueled by the media narrative of climate change that put social pressure towards travelling through the flight restriction that reduced air travel demand and provided more funding towards railway construction (Gössling et al., 2021).

3. Amplifying Advocacy Efforts

Public campaigns mostly use the media to convey their agenda to the target groups. Activists are able to reach a large audience and apply pressure

on policymaking through the use of social media in particular, and at a very low cost. Example: Hashtags on both Instagram and Twitter pointed out the falsehoods of airlines regarding their carbon offset schemes, and in turn forced companies to become more responsive to corporate accountability and more strict, formal guidelines for sustainability reporting (Becken & Hay, 2012).

4. Setting the Policy Agenda

Media, in other words, decided which problems should be given attention. Officials use media content to identify public issues of interest to citizens and to set the legislative agenda. Example: Ample coverage of the Blue Flag beach certification program pressured governments in Greece and Spain to uphold higher compliance with environmental standards to maintain their certifications (UNWTO, 2020). Paul and Rena (2024^e) illustrate how national frameworks like India's Viksit Bharat 2047 are embedding sustainability and digital innovation at the core of governance transformation—mirroring similar efforts across BRICS+ nations. In regions with limited institutional support, digital crowdfunding platforms have emerged as enablers of community-based sustainable tourism ventures by broadening access to capital and global audiences (Paul & Rena, 2024^e).

5. Offering Research-Based Information

In this case, facts, figures and findings are used from written academic papers, opinions from professional practitioners and articles and case studies to support policy issues. Such knowledge can help policy makers to come up with solutions that can be proven effective in the field. Example: Articles highlighting the successes of Costa Rica in utilizing sustainable tourism have been used to encourage other nations to come up with similar policies and policies (UNWTO, 2020).

6. Generating Political Will

Protest is a way through which the media can make politicians and other industry heads act on environmental and social issues which they might not want to address. Example: Due to awareness created by the media in relation to climate change and the impact of tourism, many countries have set carbon neutrality objectives such as Bhutan's tourism policy coined "High Value, Low Impact" tourism.

7. Supporting International Engagement

Other examples shown in the media should be used by policymakers as a guideline to emulate those countries whose measures they borrowed. It promotes debates on issues such as climate change, sustainability of tourism and tourism development.

Example: Reporting of Sweden's climate friendly measures such as carbon taxes has impacted on similar measures adopted by other countries in Europe (Gössling et al., 2021). Media acts as an intermediary between the public, interest groups and policy makers; thus, making sure that deserving causes are addressed. Through framing stories, giving voice to some and silencing others and creating an environment of responsibility, the media plays an influential role in the policy context particularly for sectors such as tourism and sustainability. Nevertheless, the problem arises of how to maintain the influence of the media together with the provision of accurate information to prevent mere promotional publications made in the form of 'green' content.

Trends for Media within Sustainable Tourism and Policy Framing for the Future

The roles of media, technology and sustainable tourism are dynamic and are changing at a faster pace. Future trends reveal that the media is set to change the behavior of society, how industries operate, and policies are made. Here are the key future trends to watch:

1. Increase of Immersive Technologies Usage

Trend: Augment reality and virtual reality will become popular for traveling since customers will be able to sample some destinations ahead of real events. *Impact*: Reduces the CO₂ emissions resulting from exploratory travel through availing work-related virtual substitutes. Allows the promotion of sustainable tourism by providing the outcomes of the tourists' activities. Example: Literature suggested that using Virtual Reality to create tours to heritage sites may inform travelers of preservation requirements while offering a fulfilling encounter without interacting with the tangible environment (Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2023; Rena, 2024).

2. AI in its broad sense

Trend: AI technologies will advance, and consumers will be able to get more customized, real-time experiences, that are also sustainable (Rena, 2024). *Impact*: Personalized suggestions concerning the usage of environmentally friendly products. Improved opportunity to factor the environmental costs for travel decisions. Example: Self-driving apps that count and pay for carbon footprint will equip travelers with tools to make more sustainable decisions (Hamid et al., 2023).

3. Blockchain for Transparency – Improvement

Trend: Here, blockchain technology will be used to independently confirm the sustainability of products and services so that the level of greenwashing will be minimized. *Impact*: Enhancements of cred-

ibility of the consumers about the eco-certifications and offset programs. Strengthens response – ability and responsibility within the tourism sector. Example: Real-time tracking of carbon credits and sustainable certifications using blockchain systems can help travelers to be confident of authenticity of environmental stewardship claimed by industry (Becken & Hay, 2012).

4. Hyperlocal Tourism and Resident Economic Enhancement

Trend: Media will pay more attention to the development of niche tourism especially domestic tourism promoting small scale tourism. *Impact*: Reinforces the local economy by direct revenue that will be used to fund projects in those areas. Minimizes intrusive tourism and maintains cultural and other resource value. Example: This makes impeccable sense, especially with increased campaigns on cultural tourism such as in the Gross National Happiness country of Bhutan (Gössling, 2023).

5. Policy-Creating Partnership through Media

Trend: Multimedia marketing will foster global cooperation on sustainable policies in tourism. *Impact*: Explores opportunities of linking global tourism practices with sustainable development goals (SDGs). Presses countries into adopting set policies on eco-tourism. Example: Reporting on Sweden's climate efforts has already prompted other countries to act in a similar manner (UNWTO, 2020).

6. Data-Driven Storytelling

Trend: Media consumption: big data analytics – will improve a narrative, meaning media can offer better narrative that is precise and customized (Rena, 2024). *Impact*: This increases public engagement since the content organization can target different audiences. Enhances the advocacy efforts by presenting a numeric summary of the company's sustainability measures. Example: Thus, platforms using data on travel intentions will develop campaigns for promotion of green tourism (Hamid et al., 2023).

7. Focus on Regenerative Tourism

Trend: The media will move from increasing awareness about sustainability to raising awareness for regenerative tourism, which is the act of making places even better than they were found. *Impact*: Promotes users within the tourism sector, as well as enterprises, participating in processes of environmental reconstruction, and the construction of communities. Opens the sustainability concept beyond mere preservation to active enhancement. Example: Campaigns promoting coral reef restoration projects in line with tourism promotions will become more popular (Gössling et al., 2021).

8. *A Revised Role of Social Media in Activism*

Trend: Social media apps will continue to be used to increase awareness, pressure corporations and governments over their sustainability promises. **Impact:** Ensures that the voices of groups that suffer the impacts of unsustainable tourism are heard. Improves the level of transparency by providing information in real time realize. Example: Campaigns revealing environmental breaches will spur fast industry and policy reactions as witnessed with airline carbon offset criticisms (Masson, 2024). Technology continues to play a significant role for the media in sustainable tourism; there is more transparency than before, and consumers are more privileged. During the advancement of the tourism industry, the media will remain to be influential in advocating for sustainable policies, policies on ethical tourism, and encouraging travelers in the use of regenerative tourism.

Critical Analysis

Analysis of these concepts shows that the four concepts are interconnected in media sphere in ways that present a shift towards media and technology and sustainability. Sankar and Ilangovan (2025) have pointed at the innovative role of smart technologies, but the opponents insist that the use of such technologies is more restrained by the spheres of activity. In the same way, although there is increased awareness levels, the changes in behavior as well as in the adoption of policies have not followed this trajectory (Masson, 2024). These challenges sum up the need to take an integrated approach that will focus on the potential of media and technology within as well as the constraints in promoting sustainable tourism.

This study's literature review focuses on the various approaches and theoretical viewpoints that underpin it. By synthesizing these insights, the research aims to address the central question: What is the role of media and smart technologies for the change in air travel and sustainability discourses in the BRICS+ countries? This question drives the subsequent research and serves as a base for coming up with concrete recommendations for policymakers, industries, and media personnel.

Methodology

This study investigates the central research question: *In what ways do media and smart technologies enhance air travel and tourism sustainability discourses in BRICS+ countries?* To address this inquiry, a secondary data analysis was employed,

drawing from a diverse body of peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, media reports, and technology-based case studies. The temporal scope of the data spans from 2015 to 2024 – a decade marked by significant advancements in smart technologies and a heightened global focus on sustainability challenges.

The study focuses on BRICS+ countries, which include the core BRICS members – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—along with other strategic partner countries participating in expanded cooperation initiatives. These nations offer a compelling research context due to their shared yet diverse socio-economic, political, and environmental dynamics. As emerging economies with growing tourism sectors and distinct geopolitical leverage, BRICS+ nations reflect the global complexities of sustainable development.

The data corpus comprises 106 documents, including academic publications, policy frameworks, and industry reports sourced from Scopus, Web of Science, and ResearchGate. Key scholarly sources include Sankar and Ilangovan (2025) on the role of smart technologies; Seyfi and Hall (2024) on geopolitical narratives in tourism; and Masson (2024) on the media's contribution to sustainability discourses. Additionally, media texts from major news outlets, national tourism boards, and government-sponsored sustainability campaigns across BRICS+ countries were reviewed for thematic relevance.

To analyze the collected data, the study employed a combination of qualitative tools designed to uncover both depth and comparative breadth in sustainability discourse. Content analysis was used to identify dominant media frames, recurring narratives, and discursive patterns related to sustainable tourism messaging. In parallel, thematic analysis was applied to academic and policy literature to extract underlying themes, relational dynamics, and latent meaning structures, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model. Additionally, the Sustainability Narratives Analysis Tool (SNAT) was utilized to compare sustainability discourses across the BRICS+ countries, enabling the identification of regional variations and commonalities in sustainability communication. The selection of these analytical tools was guided by their methodological robustness and their alignment with best practices in qualitative research, as outlined by Krippendorff (2018) and Braun and Clarke (2006).

Target Population and Data Validation

The study focuses on actors with direct influence over sustainable tourism strategies: policy-

makers, tourism industry professionals, and media practitioners within BRICS+ countries. This purposive sampling is grounded in the pragmatic logic of stakeholder relevance, as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2017).

To ensure reliability and validity, all data were systematically cleansed – removing duplicates and verifying source authenticity. Triangulation techniques were applied through cross-referencing multiple data sources and analytical frameworks, following the methodological recommendations of Denzin (2012).

Theoretical Foundation

The analysis is grounded in media framing theory, which examines how specific aspects of reality are emphasized or omitted in media narratives to influence audience perception and behavior (Entman, 1993). Within the context of this study, media framing theory serves as a lens through which to understand how sustainability narratives are constructed, transmitted, and internalized by various stakeholders.

By integrating media framing theory with insights from sustainability science and tourism studies, this methodology enables a multidimensional examination of how media and smart technologies shape sustainable tourism practices in BRICS+ nations. This interdisciplinary approach supports a comprehensive exploration of media's catalytic role in advancing environmental, economic, and cultural sustainability.

Results and discussion

The principal finding of this study is the identification of dominant media narratives that actively promote sustainable tourism within BRICS+ countries. These narratives frequently emphasize themes such as environmental preservation, cultural heritage, and community engagement (Seyfi & Hall, 2024; Sankar & Ilangovan, 2025). Their presence across diverse media platforms signals a growing capacity to influence public perception and behavior toward sustainability-oriented goals. For instance, ecotourism campaigns in countries such as India and Brazil have contributed to raising awareness around local conservation efforts, thereby fostering eco-consciousness among both domestic and international travellers.

These findings align closely with the theoretical framework of media framing, as outlined in the literature review, wherein media narratives are understood to shape discursive environments that influ-

ence consumer choices and institutional responses. Environmentally conscious tourists, as shaped by these narratives, tend to favour eco-friendly travel options. In turn, industries respond to this consumer demand by integrating sustainable practices and technologies – such as energy-efficient systems or green certification schemes – into their operations. This illustrates a feedback loop between media narratives, consumer behavior, and industry adaptation.

In support of these observations, the study further highlights the pivotal role of smart technologies in enhancing sustainable tourism experiences. Innovations such as virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI) offer environmentally responsible alternatives by minimizing physical footprints while maintaining experiential value. Blockchain-enabled platforms not only enhance data transparency but also support verifiable eco-certification systems for sustainable air travel, a shift explored extensively by Paul and Rena (2024^b) and Rena (2024) in the context of emerging digital economies. Xiang and Fesenmaier (2023) illustrate how AI applications support personalized and low-impact travel recommendations, while Sankar and Ilangovan (2025) show how virtual tourism of ecologically sensitive areas – such as South Africa's natural reserves – provides immersive experiences without compromising environmental integrity.

Moreover, media coverage has demonstrated considerable influence on policy development within BRICS+ nations. Policies such as China's green aviation initiatives and Brazil's ecotourism frameworks have been informed, in part, by sustained media attention to environmental degradation and the need for sustainable regulation. These examples underscore media's role not only in shaping public opinion, but also in prompting institutional reform and cross-sector collaboration.

However, the study also acknowledges opposing findings. While media narratives often support sustainability, they can inadvertently facilitate greenwashing – the dissemination of unverified or misleading claims about environmental responsibility. As Masson (2024) argues, without enforceable regulatory benchmarks, corporations may exploit sustainability discourse for reputational gain without meaningful action. This critique highlights the need for greater transparency and the development of standardized criteria to assess sustainability claims in tourism marketing.

A secondary but significant finding relates to the emergence of cooperative programs among BRICS+ nations that utilize shared media platforms for sus-

tainability communication. These initiatives enable countries to engage in cross-national benchmarking, promote best practices, and co-invest in sustainable tourism technologies. For example, collaborative efforts between South Africa and India have resulted in joint investments in eco-tourism infrastructure and innovation (Seyfi & Hall, 2024). Such cooperation strengthens regional capacity for sustainability implementation and reflects the strategic importance of media in international development dialogues.

In a preliminary response to the research question, the findings suggest that media and smart technologies hold considerable potential to transform sustainability discourses and practices in air travel and tourism across the BRICS+ context. By shaping public awareness, industry behavior, and policy design, these tools contribute to a more sustainable tourism paradigm. Nevertheless, challenges such as digital inequality and the risk of greenwashing remain significant barriers. The practical impact of media-driven sustainability efforts is likely to vary by country, depending on digital infrastructure, regulatory environments, and cultural readiness to adopt green tourism principles. As such, further em-

pirical research is needed to evaluate the contextual uptake of sustainability narratives, particularly in less digitized BRICS+ economies.

Proposed Model

Building upon the findings and thematic insights of this study, a conceptual framework – the Media-Technology-Sustainability Interaction Model – is proposed to explain the dynamic interplay between media narratives, smart technologies, consumer behavior, industry practices, policy influence, community engagement, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation. The model integrates theoretical constructs from media framing, sustainability science, and smart tourism to illustrate how information flows and digital innovations co-shape environmentally responsible practices. By mapping these relationships, the framework offers a comprehensive lens to understand how sustainable tourism discourse is constructed, disseminated, and institutionalized across diverse socio-political contexts. It further serves as a strategic guide for researchers, policymakers, and industry actors seeking to operationalize sustainability goals through effective media engagement and technological innovation.

Model:

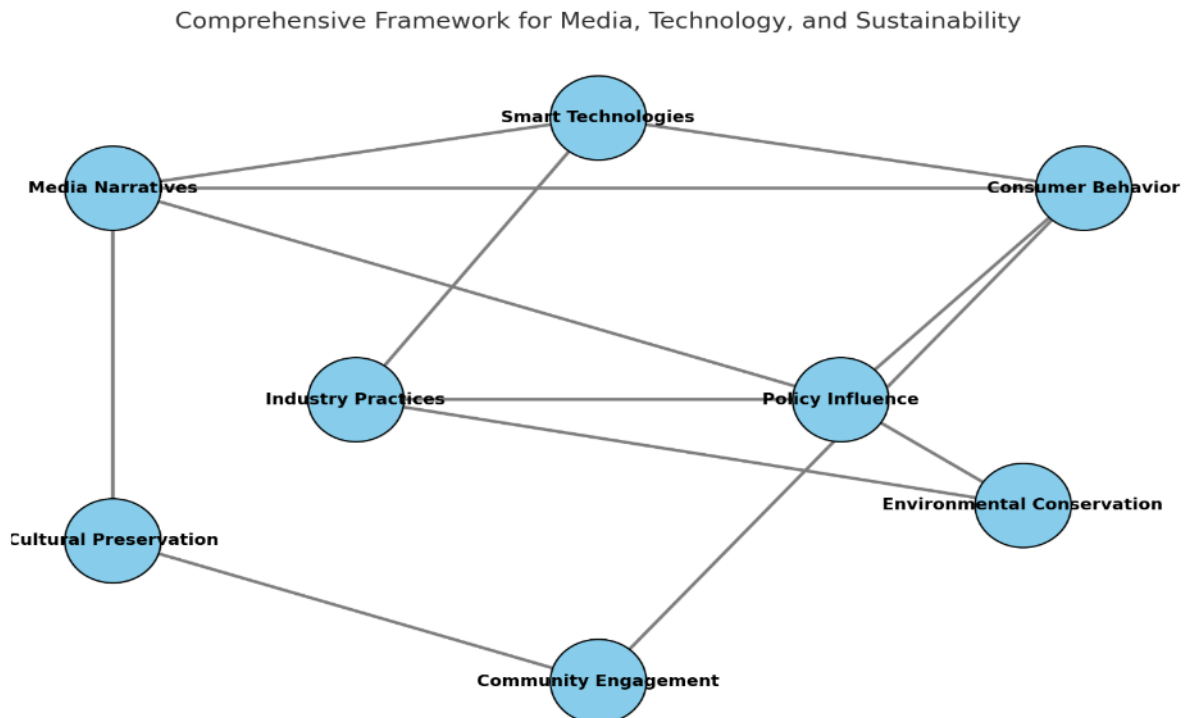


Figure 2 – Comprehensive Framework for Media, Technology and Sustainability
Note – compiled by authors

Components:

The proposed Media–Technology–Sustainability Interaction Framework illustrates the complex yet interconnected roles of media narratives, smart technologies, consumer behavior, industry practices, and policy interventions in promoting sustainable tourism across BRICS+ countries. This model is grounded in the understanding that sustainability is not a linear goal, but a dynamic and ongoing process shaped by communication, innovation, and stakeholder engagement.

Media Narratives form the starting point of this interaction. Through their emphasis on environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, and inclusive development, media platforms set the tone for how sustainability is perceived and prioritized. By framing sustainability as both a moral imperative and a practical goal, media influence the design and dissemination of technologies and help cultivate eco-conscious behaviors among consumers.

Smart Technologies – such as Virtual Reality (VR), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT) – serve as enablers of sustainable tourism by offering immersive educational experiences, reducing the need for physical travel, and optimizing resource use. These technologies not only support environmental conservation but also stimulate innovation in the tourism and aviation sectors by enabling new forms of engagement that are less intrusive to ecosystems.

Consumer Behavior is both influenced by and a driver of media and technological trends. As consumers are increasingly exposed to narratives promoting environmental responsibility and offered tech-enabled tools for sustainable choices, their preferences shift toward eco-friendly products and experiences. This growing demand exerts pressure on both public and private institutions to respond with appropriate strategies and offerings.

Industry Practices adapt in response to both market signals and regulatory expectations. Companies across the tourism value chain are beginning to adopt green technologies, sustainable supply chain models, and certification standards to remain competitive and align with evolving consumer values. Such adaptations lead to measurable outcomes, including reduced emissions, improved energy efficiency, and enhanced community relations.

Policy Influence is shaped by public discourse, often driven by media coverage and consumer advocacy. Informed citizens and empowered consum-

ers increasingly shape the policy agenda, prompting governments to implement stronger environmental regulations and sustainability incentives. This reinforces a feedback loop in which policy supports industry transformation and facilitates broader public engagement.

The model also incorporates Sustainability Goals, particularly the dual objectives of environmental conservation and cultural preservation. Media stories that valorize indigenous knowledge, historical heritage, and ecosystem services contribute to a more holistic view of sustainable tourism. Eco-tourism and community-based tourism initiatives are aligned with these goals, offering inclusive benefits to local stakeholders while preserving natural and cultural capital.

Community Engagement represents a vital pillar of the model, emphasizing the importance of involving local populations in sustainability efforts. Media campaigns and policy frameworks that prioritize equity and participation help ensure that the economic, environmental, and cultural benefits of tourism are shared more broadly and justly. Local voices, when amplified by media and supported by enabling policies, contribute to a more resilient and inclusive tourism economy.

How the Framework Functions

At its core, the framework demonstrates a cyclical and mutually reinforcing process:

- *Media Narratives* initiate the discourse, shaping awareness, values, and the innovation agenda.

- *Smart Technologies* operationalize these narratives by offering practical tools and scalable solutions.

- *Consumer Behavior* responds to these stimuli, driving demand for sustainable alternatives.

- *Industry Practices and Policy Interventions* evolve in response, creating structural support for sustainability.

Together, these components drive progress toward the three pillars of sustainable development—economic viability, social equity, and environmental integrity. The model reinforces the understanding that tourism sustainability cannot be achieved through isolated efforts. Rather, it requires a coordinated interaction of media systems, technological advancement, institutional adaptation, and citizen participation. In the BRICS+ context, where structural disparities and innovation capacities vary, this integrated approach offers a flexible yet robust pathway for advancing sustainability in tourism and air travel.

Conclusion

Media narratives act as powerful catalysts in shaping public consciousness and guiding the trajectory of sustainable tourism. As communicative discourses, they can either open or restrict the space for sustainability by framing cultural, environmental, and community values in ways that influence behavior, attitudes, and ultimately policy. Research has shown that media narratives are not merely reflective but actively constitutive of tourism discourses, driving both public opinion and industry standards toward sustainability goals (Entman, 1993; Seyfi & Hall, 2024). Complementing this communicative force, smart technologies such as virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI), and big data analytics are increasingly enabling tourism systems to minimize ecological footprints while enhancing visitor engagement through low-contact, energy-efficient experiences (Hamid, Bhat, & Khalid, 2023; Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2023). Together, media and digital innovation have contributed to a broader alignment between public discourse and industry practices, leading to enhanced regulatory frameworks and compliance standards. This shift has been particularly notable in BRICS+ countries, where collaborative governance models have made measurable progress in transitioning toward greener tourism economies (Becken & Hay, 2012; UNWTO, 2020). When these findings are triangulated with existing scholarship, the study supports the views of Seyfi and Hall (2024), who emphasize the instrumental role of media in shaping global tourism policy; Hamid et al. (2023) and Xiang & Fesenmaier (2023), who advocate for the transformative potential of smart technologies; and Becken and Hay (2012), whose work connects sustainable tourism directly to climate adaptation strategies. However, the present study respectfully diverges from Masson (2024), who casts doubt on media efficacy due to risks of greenwashing. While this concern is valid, the current findings suggest that well-calibrated and transparent media campaigns can drive meaningful change in both public policy and industry practice. Ultimately, this paper contributes to the field by proposing a novel conceptual framework that synthesizes media influence, technological enablement, consumer behavior, and policy harmonization to advance sustainable tourism

in the BRICS+ context. This integrated model fills a crucial gap in literature by contextualizing sustainability implementation within emerging economies undergoing rapid digital and environmental transformation.

Limitations and Future Validation

While this study presents a promising conceptual framework that integrates media, technology, and sustainability in BRICS+ tourism, the analysis is based on secondary data. The findings are therefore primarily descriptive and interpretive. Empirical validation through field research, interviews, or case studies in BRICS+ countries is recommended to test the framework's robustness and practical applicability. Future work may also involve longitudinal data collection to evaluate real-time media impacts on consumer and policy behavior.

Recommendations

The study recommends that in the future, we change our policies and practices as follows:

This requires the formulation of standardized procedures for assessing the truthfulness of sustainability statements so that the vice of green washing can be checked.

Firmly support the development of solutions that are inclusive and can be integrated on a large scale to provide solutions for digital inequalities and to expand new forms of sustainable mobility.

Strengthen existing and new inter-country cooperation within BRICS+ countries to benchmark and collectively develop sustainability policies.

Future Research Directions

Therefore, after this study has answered its research question, it has developed new questions to be asked in the future. Future research should be investigated:

What applications of the outlined emerging technologies can create more transparency and accountability in sustainable tourism?

The impact of long-term media-oriented campaigns on consumers and their behavior as well as industries.

An analysis of how regional disparities in socioeconomic development affect the progression of sustainable tourism in the BRICS+ countries.

Answering these questions, subsequent research can develop and enhance the integrated framework and contribute to the creation of a more environmentally friendly tourism industry globally.

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