THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESPONSIBLE TOURISM AND ONLINE TRAVEL PLATFORMS:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY LOOKING AT WHICH MARKETING STRATEGIES ARE BEING USED
TO PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE TOURISM WITH THE GROWING DEMAND FOR SUSTAINABLE
TRAVEL PRODUCTS

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ABSTRACT

The tourism industry is a global phenomenon that contributes a significant proportion to the world's overall GDP. With such a significant impact on the world's economy, the industry is faced with unprecedented challenges that threatens its future growth. Therefore, to combat global issues such as climate change and mass tourism, the term responsible tourism has emerged in response to the negative social and environmental impacts. Through a set of industry protocols, responsible tourism aims to maximize the positives by encouraging sustainable tourism behavior that enriches and benefits host destinations. It is important to acknowledge responsible tourism shares common traits with 'sustainable tourism', 'ethical tourism', 'eco-tourism' and a host of other socially conscious tourism practices. However, the industry has favored the term responsible tourism to describe a distinct market niche that seeks to engage in a higher level of responsibility. Parallel to the industry, consumer needs are rapidly changing and have become more complex, meaning there is a higher level of demand for sustainable travel products. With an increasing number of consumers actively seeking sustainable travel products and services, a whole new market segment of responsible consumers concerned with social and environmental issues has arisen. In general, responsible tourism has become an established area within the tourism industry. With a new wave of technological advances such as E-Tourism, a new type of intermediary has emerged. These new types of digital platforms are rapidly growing and have little to no research that explores the relationship between online travel platforms and responsible tourism. This therefore lends itself to the exploration of looking at "*how online travel platforms are promoting responsible tourism, with the growing demand for sustainable travel products*". In order to fully investigate the proposed research question, textual analysis is used as an appropriate research method, alongside an interdisciplinary theoretical approach. A selection of sustainable travel platforms serves to research the problem and a thematic analysis approach is used to analyze the complete data set. The findings indicate several marketing activities being used to promote responsible tourism. First, the platforms appear to target distinct customer segments through certain content. Second, the promotion of sustainable products through alternative appeals is implemented. Finally, themes are created based on the values and initiatives of the travel platforms.

KEYWORDS: *Responsible Tourism, Sustainability, Sustainable development, Online travel platforms,*

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry has experienced a recent phase of metamorphosis due to the unprecedented challenges facing the industry. The current needs of the travel consumer are shifting and the demand for integrating the general concept of sustainability is increasing (Bonadonna, Giachino & Truant, 2017). With this change in attitudes, the modern-day tourist is looking for eco-friendly alternatives to respond to the pressing needs of a changing landscape both socially, economically and environmentally. The National Geographic recently reported that vacationers are no longer content purely sustaining, they are looking to enrich destinations visited (Flint, 2019). Therefore, the industry has responded to the changing needs of the travel consumer by introducing alternative forms of tourism.

1.1 Global Tourism Concerns

The recent phenomenon of globalization has brought both promise and concern within the tourism industry (Dwyer, 2015). Defined as a process of integration and interaction amongst companies, people and governments, globalization affects all sectors of the tourism economy (Dayananda, 2019). In particular, globalization has enabled rapid growth, especially in its mass form (Egresi, 2016). At the forefront of a fragmented industry are the global economic, social -cultural, environmental and even political challenges exacerbated by mass tourism (Wheeller, 1991).

In general, mass tourism refers to a movement consisting of two central characteristics; participation of large numbers of people in tourism and standardized holidays, rigidly packaged and inflexible (Pigram & Wahab, 1997). As a result, these central themes have constituted a high influx of travellers (Fang, 2020). Further to this, mass tourism is established as a crucial factor for the development of the tourism industry due to its "foreign revenues, employment opportunities for the local people and economic growth for many developing and least developed countries" (Fang, 2020, p. 45). However, continuous tourism demand has put considerable pressure on the social, economic and natural environment, leading to negative impacts (Manente, Minghetti & Mingotto, 2014). In an endeavour to minimize the impact of conventional mass package tourism, alternative forms of tourism have been established, in particular the development of both sustainable and responsible tourism (Fang, 2020).

The industry recognizes the need to implement more sustainable practices within everyday activities and take responsibility for its actions by attempting to minimize the negative outcomes of mass tourism and maximizing the positive. Sustainable tourism has been studied and accepted by many researchers and aims to decrease tourism activities on the

natural environment and the culture of local communities, as well as generate economic benefits for host communities (Mihalic, 2016; Fang, 2020). With the vision to reduce the negative impact tourism activities are having on local communities and the natural environment, sustainable tourism development aims to implement a range of principles and objectives that acknowledge the needs of the present, without comprising future generations to meet their own needs (Fang, 2020). Current research perspectives discuss the resurgence that tourism-related actors have a moral and ethical responsibility to look beyond self-interest, thus encouraging behavioral changes and contributing to sustainable development (Bramwell, Lane, McCabe, Mosedale & Scarles, 2008).

Within the domain of sustainable tourism is the notion of responsible tourism, a term favored within the industry to describe a new concept that aims to promote a new type of tourism. The concern over the natural and social environment led Swiss ecologist Jost Krippendorf to search for alternatives that challenged the sense of mainstream mass tourism (Mihalic, 2016). In his endeavour, the industry called for higher responsibility for the effects of behavior and travel on host communities, both human and physical (Mihalic, 2016). With this in mind, responsible tourism as a concept has come to the forefront of the industry to encourage sustainable urban behavior. Tourism businesses are leveraging the opportunity the concept brings through tourism initiatives including; enhanced holiday experiences, socio-economic benefits, quality of life for local residents and protection of natural resources (Spenceley et al., 2002). The tourism industry is recognized as a key player in triple bottom line impacts (people, planet, and profit) yet recent years have shown a great deal of harm which has led to the need for responsible tourism in both its principles and practice. To some extent there is a certain amount of pressure on the industry to respond to pressing issues facing the industry such as climate change, mass tourism, overdevelopment and poor development ("The Case for Responsible Travel", 2019). No longer is the concept of responsible, ethical or sustainable travel a luxury within the industry, rather a responsibility both travellers, tourism providers and destinations must act upon ("The Case for Responsible Travel", 2019).

Overall, the widespread apprehension of the effects produced by mass tourism and the growing attention paid to sustainability has led to the planning of actions aimed at managing and developing tourism in a more responsible way (Manente et al., 2014). With the idea of responsible tourism being a generally under-explored notion within the industry, it presents a valid case to explore this concept and to investigate the ways in which online travel platforms are promoting responsible tourism end-to-end. Although there have been previous studies supporting the emergence of responsible tourism as a concept, there is no supporting evidence exploring the relationship between the recent phenomena of online platforms and responsible

tourism, in particular the marketing techniques used to promote positive change within the tourism industry.

1.2 Trend Towards Sustainability

Further to the unprecedented challenges the industry faces, the demand for sustainable travel choices is continuing to increase ("The Case for Responsible Travel", 2019). It was reported that social and environmental considerations play a role in the decision-making process of the consumer ("The Case for Responsible Travel", 2019). Similarly, a study by Abta (2015) claims almost a third of consumers (29%) would likely choose one company over another based on their environmental principles. Finally, a survey produced by McKinsey & Company found that 66% of consumers are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products ("The Case for Responsible Travel", 2019).

The trend towards more sustainable travel products is continuing to increase, meaning there is a higher level of responsibility for tourism actors to implement responsible tourism practices within their current business models. In particular, Flint (2020, para. 2) acknowledges "travellers are increasingly interested in trips that mean something, and for the long-term". This shows travellers are no longer content on merely travelling without a purpose. Instead, they are looking to have a positive impact on the planet, local communities, destinations and on themselves (Flint, 2020). This is also known within the industry as impact tourism, referring to travellers seeking to give back to host communities through enriching destinations ("The Case for Responsible Travel", 2019).

Further studies suggest several lifestyle trends that underpin the rise of sustainable tourism, including the search for authenticity and self-fulfillment and the need to be close to nature (Weber, 2019). According to a travel report by Trekksoft (2016) travellers in the future will be more interested in the social, economic and environmental impact they have on a destination. With these aforementioned insights, it is evident more and more travellers are taking sustainability into account when booking a holiday (Weber, 2019). It can be acknowledged within the literature that several segmentations for sustainable tourism can be found, including the so called LOHAS (lifestyle of health and sustainability) group (Weber, 2019). This target group are often connected to sustainable consumption, characterized by both social and environmental awareness, pleasure and consumption (Weber, 2019). Ultimately, this group is willing to pay more for sustainable products that fill these requirements.

With this paradigm shift towards more sustainable practices, firms have been seen to implement corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives as a broader trend towards

considering social and environmental business activity (Caruana, Glozer, Crane & McCabe, 2014). CSR studies have been heavily researched and tends to be based off the concept of tipple bottom line, implying businesses are responsible for their social, environmental and economic effects they produce (Manente et al., 2014). In practice, CSR has become operationalized in terms of what managers believe external stakeholders, especially consumers, expect of them (Caruana et al., 2014). However, concurrent research suggests that tourism actors have leveraged the concept in an attempt to merely boost sales (Fang, 2020). There is an increasing need to explore responsible business practice, in particular the marketing strategies being used to promote positive social and environmental development to an increasingly concerned consumer segment. The rise of online platforms and the increasing amount of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) leads to the exploration of how these businesses are promoting responsible tourism through sustainable businesses practices.

Whilst consumer demand is on the rise, research suggests that despite growing awareness amongst travellers about the impact they are having when travelling to host destinations, the practice and behavior is somewhat lacking (Hjalager, 2008). Therefore, there is an increasing need for tourism actors to market responsible tourism to create awareness and provide reliable information on the impact tourists are having in order to encourage behavioral change.

1.3 The rise of online travel platforms

There has been a recent surge within the tourism industry of online platforms, a new type of intermediary, facilitating the buying and selling of travel and tourism products. The revolution of the internet and the rise of information and communication technology (ICT) has brought about new economic actors, whilst others have disappeared (Belleflamme & Neysen, 2009). Amongst this digital revolution is the rise of electronic platforms, a new type of virtual entity that has not only changed business processes but reconfigured the landscape of commerce (Buhalis, 2003). Ultimately, digitization has minimized the gap between people and places, with the tourism sector being a top recipient of this radical change in technology (Jain, 2019). According to WTTC, online platforms are contributing a pivotal role to the growth of the world's GDP (Jain, 2019). This shows the significant impact digitization has had on the travel industry and its changing paradigms.

With online tourism playing a vital and growing role in the travel sector, it is important to acknowledge how these new entities are marketing responsible tourism. Sofronov (2018) suggests online content is now a primary travel information source, surpassing traditional media and marketing. Current studies present online tourism activities to include travel agencies, tour operators and other tourism-related entities operating in a virtual space through

a dedicated portal (Sofronov, 2018). Through this recent phenomenon, travel business are able to connect with consumers through booking platforms, social media, online marketing, travel apps and search functionality (Sofronov, 2018).With this new way of interacting, tourism businesses, in particular small medium enterprises (SMEs) are able to connect with current and potential customers in an innovative and revolutionary way.

Ultimately, digital platforms are disrupting the way tourism operates from end to end by offering global access to consumers and allowing service providers to gain competitive advantage and enhance the development of the tourism sector (Worldbank, 2018). This digital transformation has been linked to the sharing economy within current literature, with peer to peer platforms such as Airbnb continuing to grow. The World Bank Group suggest that P2P accommodation will have a growth rate of 31% between 2013 and 2025, six times the growth rate of traditional hostels and bed & breakfasts (Worldbank, 2018). This stems from an increasing number of tourists seeking authentic experiences, better value for money and sustainable tourism products (Cheng, 2016). Through these digital platforms, travelers are able to experience a new way of travelling through meaningful social encounters with locals (Cheng, 2016). This is just one example of a new type of platform that facilitates the buying and selling of tourism products and connects people with places.

With a plethora of new information and digital platforms available, consumers knowledge, behaviors and attitudes are changing (Wolfe, Hsu & Kang, 2008). Consequently, it is imperative these new travel entities encourage responsible tourism behavior through the promotion of sustainable travel products. There has been no existing evidence supporting the relationship between responsible tourism and online travel platforms, in particular the marketing strategies being used by online travel platforms to encourage responsible tourism. This lends itself to the research problem that has been described below.

1.4 Research problem

Taking into account the aforementioned insights, research indicates that over the last century, a growing amount of issues have arisen economically, socially and environmentally. This has had a direct impact on people and their natural environment through effects such as, pollution, waste, energy inefficiency, land use, sewage and so forth (Durlacher, L., Dinica, Reiser & Fika 2019). The challenge remains on how the industry can tackle issues such as the global threat of climate change and mass tourism through effective digital marketing strategies in a positive way in order to generate value for companies and societies alike (Durlacher et al., 2019). Through responsible tourism, businesses have the ability to create a positive impact on not only its employees and stakeholders but also on the ecological well-being of societies

(Durlacher et al., 2019). Present literature has a high focus on the destination level rather than micro-level of firms (Dwyer, 2005). With a high focus on destination management, it is evident tourism managers are starting to take action on the issues that pose a risk to the general economy and the growth of the travel industry. For example, Lillehammer in Norway have been seen to pioneer the implementation of ecologically sustainable practices through hosting the first 'White Green Games' for the Olympics back in 1994 (Welford & Ytterhus, 2009). Despite the few early pioneers of this concept, there are insignificant examples in more recent years that indicate the relationship between online travel platforms and its intrinsic relationship with responsible tourism. This research will help uncover the marketing strategies used by a new type of information source to reveal how they are promoting the recent phenomena of responsible tourism in response to a growing demand for sustainable travel products.

1.5 Research question

Considering the above observations, a central research question has been formulated which is as followed "*How are online travel platforms promoting responsible tourism with the growing demand for sustainable travel products?*"

The subject of this study concerns platforms that are seen to use marketing techniques to promote sustainable travel products in both their application and practice through responsible tourism principles. As Milhac (2016) suggests, discourse lies between sustainability as a concept and responsibility as a practice, explaining the need for tourism businesses to move from market driven and environmentally laissez tourism to more environmental and social value driven responsible tourism. Therefore, this study aims to uncover the promotional techniques being used by the platforms to appeal to a segmented market, whilst continuing to encourage positive behavioural changes.

Several sub-questions have been developed to help give focus to the study and systematically answer the proposed research question:

Sub-research question 1: *What consumer attributes and characteristics drive the platforms selection of a specific target audience for the promotion of responsible tourism?*

This first sub-question aims to uncover the profile of responsible travellers and the key characteristics of this consumer. By delving deeper into consumer attitudes and demands within the tourism market, it will provide a clearer understanding of the specific criteria the platforms are using to target a niche target segment. By developing a greater understanding of

the market for responsible tourism it will allow for further investigation into the promotional activities being used and why.

Sub question 2: *What sustainable product segments are being promoted within the platforms and how?*

This sub-question refers to the sustainable products the platforms seem to be promoting. By looking at which products are being promoted within the platforms and how they are being communicated, it should help give clarity to the promotional techniques being used to attract both the ethical and conscientious consumer. In particular, the analysis aims to reveal how these product segments are promoting higher levels of responsibility compared with mainstream booking platforms.

Sub question 3: *What values and initiatives do the platforms display to market responsible tourism?*

By looking at the values and initiatives displayed within the chosen platforms, it will help uncover and compare the platforms communications of responsible tourism. In particular, it will help reveal how the platforms are communicating social, economic and environmental initiatives to responsible consumers, as well as providing valuable insights into the platforms beliefs that guide or motivate actions and attitudes.

1.6 Academic Relevance

Currently standing, there is relatively little research supporting the recent phenomena of online tourism platforms. Present research acknowledges the different types of platforms that have emerged from e-tourism which has been described as a new digital ecosystem comprising of several typologies of platforms that interact, provide valuable information and connect tourists (Negre, Santana, Hernandez & Moreono-Gil, 2018). Peer-to peer-platforms (P2P) have picked up considerable attention following the notion of the sharing economy and its intrinsic relationship with these new types of digitally intermediated P2P businesses (Wang, Li, Guo & Xu, 2016). Subsequent studies look deeper into the technical role of e-tourism intermediaries, specifically exploring the paradigm shift of the travel distribution role and a parallel change in consumer attitude and behavior (Buhalis & Licata, 2002). With an increasing amount of niche tourism businesses appearing online, there is a need to explore how these online platforms are marketing the emergence of responsible tourism.

Responsible tourism research adopts a top down to its understanding and has picked up considerable attention within tourism research (Caruana et al., 2014). Research is multi-faced

taking into consideration a host of perspectives from relative industry actors and their ethical and moral responsibility (Bramwell et al., 2008). Lane, Mosedale, Bramwell, McCabe and Scarles identify five main areas within responsible tourism research, including: types of actor relations; production-consumption nexus; the role of tourism related actors and their responsibilities; political assumptions underpinning responsible tourism and tourism actor's involvement in attitudes towards responsible tourism (Caruana et al., 2014). Whilst studies vary in terms of how they frame the loci of responsible tourism, there are no existing studies exploring the marketing activities of a new type of tourism actor in the form of online platforms and how they are promoting responsible tourism.

Despite a few studies exploring marketing in relation to how it can construct responsibility issues, there is no subsequent evidence supporting the promotion of responsible tourism from sustainable travel platforms and the need to market to a consumer actively seeking sustainable travel products. Previous studies tend to focus on host communities, looking at the perceived impact of responsible tourism on quality of life of communities within tourism destinations (Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017). Moreover, other studies look at tourist accounts of responsible tourism and their ethical values, attitudes and behavior (Bramwell et al., 2008). Research indicates there has been a plethora of studies looking into tourism businesses that shape and package tourism products (Kasim, 2007). In particular, how they can influence responsible tourism behavior by looking beyond self-interest and contributing to sustainable development (Bramwell et al., 2008). Despite research showing a growing demand for more responsible tourism and the responsibility of tourism businesses, there is no significant evidence supporting the marketing tactics used by online platforms and their place within the tourism industry.

1.7 Social Relevance

The detrimental effects produced by mass tourism has led to considerable damage on both the environment and local communities (Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017). In particular, the global threat of climate change, socio-economic inequalities and the diminishing of natural resources has forced tourism actors to take greater responsibility for their actions through considering the direct impact they are having on the natural, social and economic environments (Frey & George, 2010). With greater responsibility comes an increasing demand for sustainable travel products and the need for tourism businesses to maintain satisfaction levels through adopting more socially responsible and environmentally-orientated marketing practices (Caruana et al., 2014).

Indeed, Krippendorf recognised early on that the emancipation of tourists was probable, suggesting tourists were becoming more demanding (Goodwin, 2005). With a change in demand, tourists were seeking self-realisation through creative activities, contact with other people and knowledge (Goodwin, 2005). King (2002) adds to this idea by suggesting travel is less about things and places and more about fulfilment, experiences and rejuvenations. Therefore, responsible tourism has emerged as a tourism initiative, aimed to achieve good through improving quality of life of local residents, enhancing holiday experiences, adding to the socio-economic benefits and protecting natural resources within tourism destinations (Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017). With an ever increasing need to protect both people and places, the concept of responsible tourism has come to the forefront of mainstream tourism literature in order to safeguard the industries growth (Hanafiah, Azman, Jamaluddin, Aminuddin, 2016).

Overall, the rise of travel platforms has led to a new type of informational retrieval, meaning there is an increasing need to understand how these new tourism businesses are positioned within the tourism industry and most importantly, how they are promoting responsible tourism. There has been academic debate on the discourse between how responsible tourism as a practice implements the concept of sustainability (Mihalic, 2016). Travel organizations have adopted such concepts such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) and triple bottom line (TBL) into their business practices in order to respond to a change in consumer demand as they a feel a sense of social responsibility (Mihalic, 2016). There is a need to look into these businesses' practices, specifically the marketing techniques used to promote responsible tourism in order to maintain the industry's future growth.

1.8 Chapter Outline

In order to provide clarity and a definitive answer to the proposed research question, the following thesis will follow five main chapters consisting of the introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, results and a conclusion. After the introduction, the second chapter consists of a theoretical framework aimed at methodically defining key concepts and discussing relevant theories. By establishing relevant links within, the given research will increase the credibility and allow for a critical discussion about the related existing studies. This framework will help understand the topic and constitute for the creation of the coding frame for textual analysis.

The third chapter focuses on the methodology chosen to help answer the research question, thus a detailed research design will be presented. The decision to use a qualitative approach will be explained, in particular the choice to use textual analysis. The sampling and data collection will then be acknowledged, taking into account the specific sampling decisions

made to collect the online travel platforms. A description of using thematic analysis as part of the data analysis will be explained, acknowledging Braun and Clarke's six steps of analysis. The operationalization of the research will be described in detail, taking into account the theoretical concepts that will be used as sensitizing concepts to guide and structure the analysis. Chapter three will conclude with a discussion about the validity and reliability of research, aiming to uncover the study's credibility by assessing the aptness of the toolkit and instruments used for the analysis.

The fourth chapter will contain a detailed results section of the analysis, where an appropriate interpretation of the data will be presented in relation to the research question. The findings will be thoroughly processed and arranged, relating them to the research question and relevant theory.

The fifth and final chapter will provide a detailed conclusion, including a general theoretical discussion of the implications of the research findings. This should help provide valid answers to the research question "how online travel platforms are promoting responsible tourism, with the growing demand for sustainable travel products". This chapter should clearly address the central question from the introduction and provide valuable insights into the sub-conclusions made within previous chapters. The theoretical implications, interpretation of the data, as well as the unexpected outcomes from the results will be explained and justified. The conclusion will demonstrate limitations of the study and provide relevant suggestions for future research, in order to improve the credibility with a larger pool of data such as more platforms analysed or identifying new pressing questions.

2. Theoretical Framework

Due to the intended study being a relatively new concept within the tourism industry, there has been limited research to support the direct link between the recent phenomena of online travel platforms and responsible tourism. Previous discussions and research support the idea that mass tourism has had a significant impact on the tourism industry, with a specific focus on the social, economic and environmental implications on the destinations, communities and societies at large (Leslie, 2012). In response to a widespread concern, growing attention has been made to the topic of sustainability which has ultimately led to the development of managing tourism more responsibly (Manente et al., 2014). With this in mind, the study proposes to uncover the marketing strategies being used to promote the concept of responsible tourism.

In order to do so, it is important to first acknowledge the historical evolution of tourism marketing and its progression throughout the years. By defining key concepts and highlighting unique characteristics within tourism, marketing, it will provide a greater understanding of the key trends shaping the industry today. Hudson (2008) explains, marketing is a vital component within the tourism industry as it is the principle management influence, meaning marketing in the industry creates a systematic link between supply and demand which has the ability to contribute to consumer behaviour. For this reason, it seems fitting to look at studies relating to marketing strategies and the theoretical approaches and concepts that have been looked at in previous studies. This should help give clarity to an ever-changing tourism marketing landscape and highlight areas of further research.

Once a connection between marketing and tourism has been established, the emerging concept of responsible tourism will be explained. As Fang (2020) mentions, in recent years the resonance of sustainable and eco-friendly tourism has been intensified due to both an increase in consumer demand and the negative impacts tourism has brought to the industry. This shows the need to research theories relating to this phenomenon to better understand how they are being communicated through online travel platforms. It is important to acknowledge that due to the term responsible tourism being a relatively new concept, research is multi-faceted giving a wide range of perspectives, altering one's viewpoint on particular issues (Bramwell et al., 2008). The theories selected will focus on identifying the general meaning of the term, its recent application within the industry and the target segments.

The use of online platforms has been used within the travel industry to build and promote destinations (Molinillo, Cabanillas, Sanchez, & Buhalis, 2018). The internet has opened up a new paradigm where tourists have wider access to online information sources and tourism companies have the ability to reach consumers online through various strategies (Negre et al., 2018). Therefore, it seems fitting to examine the recent rise of online platforms and the context of them within the tourism industry.

2.1 Tourism Marketing

Tourism is recognized as a major player to the world economy with its economic success driven by marketing initiatives and working in favourable market conditions (Middleton & Hawkins, 1998). However, poorly managed tourism has led to environmental consequences which has had a direct impact on all sectors within the travel and tourism industry. Marketing has been used within the industry to encourage travel to destinations around the world by attracting tourists through various promotional techniques. This has led to considerable impacts on host communities. This then lends itself to an exploration of the relationship

between tourists and host communities and the detrimental impact tourism can have if not managed responsibly.

2.1.1 Defining Tourism

In order to establish a solid definition of tourism marketing, it is important to acknowledge the context within its field. Tourism in general is multifaced, covering a wide spectrum of concepts such as hospitality, leisure, recreation and entertainment (Netto, 2009). Despite its numerous definitions, researchers and professionals have struggled to come to a general consensus over its meaning (Netto, 2009). With tourism being a complex phenomenon, the definitions proposed vary depending on its context. In 1881 the word 'tourism' was defined by *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as "The theory and practice of touring; travelling for pleasure" (Fuster, 1971, as cited in Netto, 2009, p. 44). It appears this definition corresponds to the exploration and discovery of new places, therefore providing a well-grounded definition.

Research suggests the first academic definition of tourism appeared in 1911 by Herman Von Schullen (Wahab, 1977, as cited in Netto, 2009). Schullen refers to tourism as the sum of operations that are linked to the arrival, stability and displacement of foreigners in and out of a city, region or country (Netto, 2009). Similar to the previous definition, Schullen aimed to contextualise tourism as an economic driver that links tourists with host destinations. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) takes less of a conceptual approach by focusing on the commercial, political and normative principles (Leiper, 1979). The definition indicates the activities produced by the persons travelling outside their usual environment for either leisure, business or other purposes (Leiper, 1979). Its definition has become widespread with numerous countries and organizations adopting its main principles (Leiper, 1979). Although this provides more clarity towards a definition of tourism, the industry is interdisciplinary, meaning there is a plethora of understandings, explanations and descriptions of tourism (Darbellay & Stock, 2012). For the purpose of this study, tourism as a concept will be looked at within the context of marketing and its unique characteristics throughout history.

2.1.2 An Introduction to Tourism Marketing

With an established definition of tourism, the relationship between tourism and marketing will be discussed. The general concept of marketing tends to be based around consumer needs and market offers, thus how marketing is perceived by both suppliers and consumers is critical (Dolnicar & Ring, 2014). The traditional marketing rationale materialized the trading of

goods, yet the development within the field of services added to marketer's increased interest for characteristics in the field of services, including tourism (Kulcsar, 2012).

Similar to other fields, practice came before theory with differentiated marketing approaches already being applied to services providing companies (Kulcsar, 2012). Tourism marketing can be acknowledged as a distinct field of services and has been explored and analysed by many experts, including Swiss Author Jost Krippendorf who attempted to define the concept of marketing in tourism (Kulcsar, 2012). Krippendorf (1971) suggests that marketing in tourism is a systematic and co-ordinated execution of business policies by tourism organizations, both public and private, operating at local, regional, national or international level (as cited in Kulcsar, 2012). They aim to achieve high levels of customer satisfaction within identifiable tourist groups, and in doing so achieve an appropriate return. This definition captures the concept that tourism essentially, meeting the needs of customer segments for a profit by relevant tourism providers. Bukart & Medlik share a similar view by suggesting tourism marketing to be a set of activities that aim to optimise satisfaction levels of tourist groups and individuals in order to sustain tourism growth (Raina & Agarwal, 2004). The aforementioned views clearly contextualise tourism marketing as a process of meeting the needs of consumers through the products and services provided.

With a clearer understanding of marketing within the tourism industry, it seems fitting to highlight the unique features of tourism marketing throughout the years that differentiates them from other market segments.

2.1.3 Historical Evolution of Tourism Marketing

The historical evolution of tourism marketing has developed from an original focus on sales and production orientation, to consumer-orientated marketing and later sustainability plus societal orientation (Palatkova, 2012). International tourism trends and the development of the demand and supply shift has contributed to the various approaches of marketing tourism services (Palatkova, 2012). Marketing in tourism has distinct characteristics that are based on tourists being temporary, therefore exposed to goods and services for shorter periods of times (Sofronov, 2019). The consumer orientated approach still dominates today's marketing activities, with marketeers placing significant attention on consumer wants and needs, developing segmentation strategies and products accordingly (Jamrozy, 2007). Notably, marketing as a definition has previously been defined as "the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives" (American Marketing Organisation, 2004, as cited in Jamrozy, 2007, p.120). With a high focus on designing the

marketing mix and the exchange process between the customer and organisation, the industry later called for a more social and societal approach to tourism marketing (Jamrozy, 2007). Alternatives to traditional forms of marketing have emerged, including societal, environmental, sustainable, quality of life, relationship, casual and green marketing approaches (Jamrozy, 2007). Each of these terms have been used accordingly, yet marketing and tourism academics struggled to agree on conceptual definitions for each term (Jamrozy, 2007). The general definition of marketing has changed in favour of alternative tourism marketing approaches which will be further discussed.

2.1.4 Tourism Marketing: A Paradigm shift towards sustainability

Krippendorf (1987) proposed that tourism marketing needed to take an ecological approach to tourism in order to safeguard its growth in the 21st century. As current research stands, there has been a paradigm shift moving away from economic benefits towards a more sustainable approach. Sustainable tourism adopts a more holistic view to marketing, taking into consideration "social equity, environmental protection and economic liveability" (Jamrozy, 2007, p117). With these fundamental changes taking place within the industry, Krippendorf (1987) realised that tourists derive satisfaction from all areas of life, implying marketing would need to take a more socially responsible and environmentally orientated approach to respond to the pressing needs of a changing consumer.

One of these approaches includes societal marketing which evolved in the early 1970s promising a more socially responsible and ethical model for marketing activities (Crane & Desmond, 2002). Such activities take a more holistic view to marketing by considering societies at large and how marketing efforts can contribute to long-term interests rather than only considering consumer satisfaction (Jamrozy, 2007). Societal marketing has often been confused with social or cause marketing which takes a more customer-orientated approach to marketing and has been defined as the marketing of social ideas and causes which bring social good to society (Crane & Desmond, 2002). Hall (2014) adds to this by suggesting social marketing to be the utilisation of marketing principles that enable behavioural changes resulting in long-term benefits to communities and individuals. Both concepts have been used interchangeably and share similar characteristics by claiming a certain level of social responsibility to be undertaken by marketeers in order to enhance the social environment (Jamrozy, 2007). With societal marketing still being a relatively unexplored area, tourism literature recognises the social responsibilities tourism businesses have by looking beyond profitability and customer satisfaction, in turn adopting a more explicit social orientation (Crane & Desmond, 2002).

A further strategy aimed at a more ecological approach to marketing is green marketing, closely linked with environmental marketing, ecological marketing and even responsible marketing (Polonsky, 1994). Green marketing emerged in the 1980s due to the rapid increase in green consumerism, with consumption shifting towards greener products (Peattie & Crane, 2005). This shift works in conjunction with the societal marketing concept where Kotler addressed concerns over the society and environment through calling for societally responsible marketing (McDanial & Rylander, 1993). Within these considerations are environmental concerns that threaten societal welfare (Kotler, 1976 cited in McDanial & Rylander, 1993). With research alluding to consumers becoming increasingly concerned about the pressing issues facing society, the emergence of green marketing was established (McDanial & Rylander, 1993). In an attempt to address society concerns, green marketing integrates environmental issues into organizational activities, including the promotion and advertising of products with green attributes (Polonsky, 1994). Overall, green marketing has picked up considerable attention with a number of marketing academics calling for change (Polonsky, 2011). It is clear new strategic marketing strategies have been created as a direct response to social and environmental problems, seeking to improve the quality of life for societies and the natural environment (Polonsky, 2011).

2.1.5 Responsible Tourism Marketing

The aforementioned insights indicate tourism marketing has evolved over time with marketeers revaluating their practices, actions, theories and assumptions due to the issues threatening its future growth (Font & McCabe, 2017). The paradoxical nature of both climate change and mass tourism alongside a host of other issues has led tourism marketers to reconsider the direct impact they can have on the social, economic and natural environment through strategic marketing approaches. Jamrozy (2007) proposes a sustainable tourism marketing model (STMM) which places the above approaches into the model and reflects the sustainable development principles. By the model incorporating societal, environmental and consumer perspectives, it acknowledges sustainability marketing to take a holistic view, considering other factors rather than just economic benefits (Jamrozy, 2007). This shift again integrates societal, economic and environmental objectives with the goal of considering all aspects of sustainability and facilitating change.
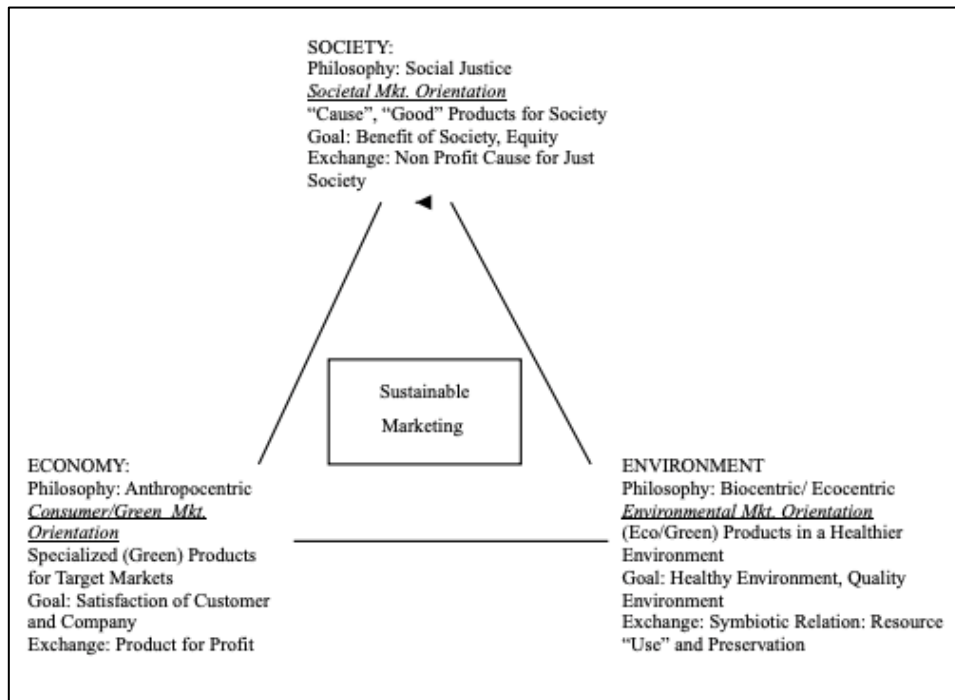
Figure 1. Sustainable marketing model (Jamrozy, 2007)

Traditionally, marketing has been considered an enemy of sustainability, whereby the concepts are antithetical and mutually conflicting (Font & McCabe, 2017). Marketing in general has been defined as "the activity, set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large" (American Marketing Association, 2013, as cited in Font & McCabe, 2017, p.870). This definition proposes a benign view to marketing. Other perspectives take a more maleficent perspective, criticising the role of marketing fuelling hedonistic consumerism and leading to direct impacts on all levels of the tourism environment (Font & McCabe, 2017).

To combat this, the emergence of sustainability marketing research has come to the forefront of a fragmented industry. Sustainability is associated with a more positive moral standing in academic discourse and social understanding, afflicted by various interpretations and contrasting viewpoints (Font & McCabe, 2017). More specifically, sustainability refers to a particular set of ethical values and principles, guiding action in a harmonious and responsible way (Font & McCabe, 2017). It has been acknowledged that marketing can have a significant impact on sustainable tourism development, so much so that the American Marketing Association (2007) redefined marketing's aim to "consider wider societal issues beyond those of clients and customers" (as cited in Pomering, Noble & Johnson, 2011, p.953). This illustrates the importance of looking beyond tourism's economic benefits and recognising the importance of sustainable tourism at all levels of tourism activity. In order for tourism actors to react to the prevalent environmental, social and cultural impacts facing the industry, they

must carefully consider how to pursue sustainability outcomes to ultimately bring behavioural change.

Within tourism literature, marketing has traditionally focused on topics such as internet marketing, destination image and market segmentation (Li & Petrick, 2008). This is due to the tourism industry being multifaced and including multidisciplinary interests (Jafari 1997 as cited in Li & Petrick, 2008). Amongst a host of business perspectives, tourism marketing appears to be the most popular topic, including other related topics such as management and motivation (Li & Petrick, 2008). The above research supports the idea that sustainability marketing literature is becoming increasingly popular with the concept being studied through different perspectives (Kumar, Rahman, Kazmi & Goyal, 2012). With new tourism businesses appearing online and current issues such as mass tourism at the forefront of a fragmented industry, there has been an influx of online platforms that exist to promote newer more responsible ways of tourism. This then presents a gap in research to explore how these online travel platforms are marketing responsible tourism through their various promotional techniques. The industry is calling on higher responsibility for the effects of behaviour and travel. There is a need to investigate how online platforms are communicating responsible tourism through digital marketing strategies that ultimately create an end-to-end brand contributing to positive change.

2.2 Responsible Tourism

As introduced briefly in the introduction chapter, responsible tourism is critical to safeguard tourism within the 21st century due to the unprecedented challenges the industry faces. The term responsible tourism derives from the topic of sustainability which has picked up growing attention within academic research (Manente et al., 2014). Since the 1980s, the widespread concern of mass tourism has led to an indiscriminate development (Manente et al., 2014). The concept of sustainable development was introduced in response to the negative impacts mass tourism has on the social, economic and natural environment (Manente et al., 2014). This has ultimately led to alternative forms of tourism such as the emergence of responsible tourism which contributes to the sustainability of tourism practices. (Manente et al., 2014). Given the presence of numerous overlapping concepts and definitions, this subchapter aims to clarify the implications and meaning of responsible tourism, and explore its connection with other forms of tourism. Also, a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour will be looked at in order to determine how independent online travel platforms are communicating responsible tourism through marketing strategies.

2.2.1 Defining Responsible Tourism

There has been much discussion amongst academics in tourism research, tourism practitioners, tourists and society at large about the term responsible tourism and the role it plays within the industry (Burrai, Buda & Stanford, 2019). The general concept of responsible tourism has been significantly researched over an extensive period of time (Caruana et al., 2014). This is due to the concern over the natural and social environment which has led to the emergence of alternative tourism forms and concepts. These have been given an array of names within the industry such as "soft, quality, eco, responsible, minimum impact tourism, green and ethical tourism" (Mihalic, 2016, p.461). Del Chippa (2009) mentions that differentiating responsible tourism from other forms of tourism is a complicated task due to the high number of definitions and overlapping terms (as cited in Manente, et al., 2014). However, the industry has been seen to favour the term 'responsible tourism' to target a distinct target niche seeking to engage in more responsible forms of tourism (Goodwin & Francis, 2003). SNV (2009) reported that tour operators are more likely to use the term responsible tourism as an alternative label which is reflected in the promotion of tourism products describing them as 'responsible' experiences (as cited in Caruana et al, 2014). This idea was first introduced by King (2002) who implied destination marketing organisations would need to reconsider promoting to the mass market but instead engage the customer through experiences. King (2002) further argues travel and tourism is connected to a lifestyle and personal enhancement, thus there is a need to connect customers with the experience rather than promoting the place.

The meaning of responsible tourism continues to be at the forefront of considerable debate in both its theory and practice (Caruana et al., 2014). Practitioners suggest there are several protocols that can define responsible tourisms key principles and practices which can be used by industry actors to help outline the meaning and promote the possibilities of responsible tourism to consumers (Caruana et al., 2014). The 2002 Cape Town Declaration exemplifies responsible tourism under the following terms; "(i) minimizing impacts; (ii) generating economic benefits for host communities; (iii) involving local people in decision making; (iv) conserving natural and cultural heritage; (v) providing meaningful connections between tourists and local people; and (vi) being accessible and culturally sensitive" (World Tourism Market Responsible Tourism, 2013, as cited in Caruana et al., 2014, p.116).

The notable characteristics of this concept generally focus on the responsibility of key role players in the tourism sector and destinations at large taking action to achieve sustainable tourism development (Fang, 2020). This is down to a change in consumer behaviour, with tourists looking at reputation and responsibility from the companies they purchase from (Fang,

2020). Caruana et al (2014) mentions, such constructions of responsible tourism by industry actors has a direct effect on the consumers and their actions. Therefore, a majority of responsible tourism research focuses mainly on the above principles and the actions both tourists and tourism businesses can make to minimize the negative social and environmental impacts. Lacking in research however is how these principles are being marketed through online travel platforms. This is particularly relevant in today's society where traditional business models are being replaced by online businesses looking to facilitate buyers and sellers. Therefore, by identifying the key marketing strategies being used to promote responsible tourism, this will provide a comprehensive look into how this can directly impact consumer behaviour.

2.2.2 Responsible Consumers

Having acknowledged the emerging concept of responsible tourism and its specific origins, it is critical to consider the motivations of the responsible consumer and its various target segments. According to Ferry (2008) and Goodwin (2005), since the mid-1990s, there has been a dynamic shift in the way in which companies, individuals and tourists looked at tourism that negatively impacted the environment (as cited in Tichaawa & Samhere, 2015). The diminishing of flora and fauna and the global threat of climate change has resonated with consumers, prompting them to become vigilant towards host destinations and the direct impact of their actions (Tichaawa & Samhere, 2015). Therefore, the industry has seen a prominent shift in consumer behaviour, with mass tourism becoming less desirable in favour of new, more environmentally friendly products and services (Tichaawa & Samhere, 2015). As a result, the concept of responsible tourism has emerged, responding to the desire to address pressing issues facing the industry.

Indeed, the trend towards responsible tourism can also be linked to wider consumer market trends such as lifestyle marketing and ethical consumption (Goodwin & Francis, 2003). Research indicates traditional recreational holidays are being replaced in favour of self-fulfilling, rejuvenating and experience-based holidays which is closely linked to the lifestyle market (Goodwin & Francis, 2003). Lifestyle marketing targets specific groups through establishing relationships between the unique product offerings (Sathish & Rajamohan, 2012). Therefore, King (2002) stated that there needs to be a shift towards creating holiday experiences rather than promoting the physical properties of the product or service. Furthermore, a change in consumer attitudes has led to a wider market trend of ethical consumption, linking directly back to responsible tourism. Ultimately, the moral concerns

over society's excessive levels of consumption has resonated with consumers, thus seeking out new ways of being more responsible when travelling (Weeden, 2014).

However, it can be said there is no pre-defined category for consumers of responsible tourism, yet market segments are drawn around the conceptions of responsible tourism expressed by the industry (Caruana et al., 2014). Krippendorf (1987) recognised a change in tourism behaviour early on, suggesting the industry would have to adopt more 'environmentally-orientated and socially responsible' (p.117) marketing initiatives in order to retain satisfaction levels and meet the complex needs of a more segmented and demanding market (in Caruana et al., 2014). A significant proportion of research acknowledges the responsibility tourism actors have in benefiting participant travellers, tourist business and host populations through promoting new forms of tourism, without causing social and ecological damage (Fang, 2020). However, the challenge remains on how tourism actors can develop a sense of moral and ethical responsibility, looking beyond self-interest (Bramwell et al., 2008). Therefore, the emerging concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been used within the industry and is based off the concept of "triple bottom line" (Manente et al., 2014). This is where the business looks to expand its success measures from being purely financially based, to also include social and environmental impact as a measure of success as well.

CSR is essentially a framework used by tourism actors to change management practices (Manente et al., 2014). Kalish (2002) argues CSR can directly increase consumer confidence, with customers and society at large lacking trust in ethical behaviour and business standards. Consequently, an extensive amount of research focuses on the principles and practices of CSR in relation to business activity and the social, economic and environmental impacts they produce with their activities (Manente et al., 2014). Though responsible tourism and CSR derive from different contexts, they share the same principles in promoting the integration of sustainable practices within the tourism industry (Manente, Minghetti & Mingotto 2012). However, limited studies address which marketing strategies are being used to change consumer behaviours, leading to 'responsible' consumers. With a plethora of research perspectives on responsible tourism, it is useful for the intended study to look at how industry actors can influence consumer behaviour and ethical decision making through marketing strategies.

2.2.3 Responsustable Tourism

The widespread concern of mass tourism and the growing attention of sustainability has led the tourism industry to rethink how they can manage and develop tourism in a responsible manor (Manente et al., 2014). The emerging concept of sustainable tourism was introduced to the industry which reflects how tourism related actors have the ability to change behavioural patterns through developing ethical and moral responsibility within business practices (Bramwell et al., 2008). The general concept of sustainable tourism is supported by three main pillars; environmental, socio-cultural and economic responsibility. This study will follow these three main principles, in order to drive the research categories and sub-categories. These concepts have been applied to mainstream academic tourism literature primarily focusing on sustainable tourism development and can also be referred to as triple bottom line (TBL). However, recently there has been an increasing amount of attention on the notion of responsible tourism. Mihalic (2016) mentions the idea that these two existing terms present a discourse and instead suggested the term responsustable tourism which joins the two terms to demonstrate how responsible tourism behaviour is based on the concept of sustainable tourism. To complement this, Mihalic created a Triple-A model which provides a conceptual model comprising of three stages; Awareness, Agenda and Action. This explains how companies can move from the awareness phase of tourism to actually implementing responsible practice that is benefiting the greater of society. Milhalic's model offers an integrated sustainability-responsibility model, aiming to close the gap between the current discourse, moving from market-value and environmentally laissez fair tourism towards environmental and social-value driven responsible tourism (Milhalic, 2016).

Figure 2: Triple A-Model for responsustable tourism (Mihalic, 2016)

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In particular, this study will look at the first pillar of awareness by examining the promotional techniques and how these are essential for the final two stages to be met. Analysing the awareness phase in depth provides the foundation of research that leads to the eventual change in consumer behaviour, the final action phase.

2.3 The Digital Tourism Landscape

In order to understand the recent concept of E-Tourism and its association with online platforms, one must acknowledge the origins of such phenomena. Although limited in application, several studies refer to the development of information communication technologies (ICTs) and the intermediation theory to describe online platforms and their application within the tourism industry (Steinbauer & Werthner, 2007). Essentially, online platforms have created a new economic phenomenon, whereby new business models have been created, with a more collaborative and sustainable approach to society (Casais, Fernandes & Sarmento, 2020). Since the arrival of the internet, the structure of the tourism industry intermediation has changed considerably (Hikkerova, 2010). Therefore, there have been several studies indicating the emergence of a new type of information retrieval through the concept of e-tourism. Findings from previous research will help to review relevant findings of these various concepts, reflecting on the transformation of digitization within the tourism industry and a change in consumer behaviour.

2.3.1 E-Tourism

Due to the proliferation of the internet, this has revolutionized the distribution of information and sales within the tourism industry (Kim, 2006). Known for being an information intensive industry, consumers heavily rely on ICTs when booking, planning and being on holiday (Steinbauer & Werthner, 2007). Therefore, the industry has had to adapt to radical changes with advances in technology, leading to a change in consumer behaviour and new business opportunities (Steinbauer & Werthner, 2007; Berger et al., 2006). Buhalis & Jun (2011), state that travel planning, including booking and travel information is one of the main reasons for using the internet. This has shown the emergence of electronic tourism (e-tourism) reflecting the digitalisation across all processes and value chains in the tourism, travel, catering and hospitality industry (Buhalis & Deimezi, 2004).

E-tourism has opened a new paradigm, bringing both opportunity and challenges to an ever-changing landscape. Tourism actors have had to adapt current business models in light of a complex and dynamic digital ecosystem (Negre et al., 2018). This new internet powered

business environment connects tourists with several typologies of platforms and provides a new type of information retrieval where everything is connected to each other (Negre et al., 2018). The e-network is shaped by; review channels, social media platforms, general search engines, tour operators' websites, online travel agencies (OTAs), communication exchange channels, blogs/ microblogs and the different major tourism services providers (Negre et al., 2018). The result of this complex network has not reduced the number of intermediaries, but simply created interrelated connections through a number of platforms (Negre et al., 2018). Although a relatively new concept within the tourism industry, academic research adheres to e-tourism as a new tourist information paradigm whereby tourists have access to a wide range of online information sources, each connected to each other (Negre et al., 2018).

However, with the internet revolutionising the distribution of tourism information and sales, and consumers decisions relying on the information available, there is a certain responsibility for online businesses to market the concept of responsible tourism effectively. Barnett & Standing (2001) argues companies need to implement new business methods and be creative in their marketing strategies in order to respond to a rapidly changing business environment, brought about by the internet. Therefore, the term e-marketing has picked up considerable attention, referring to an electronic market place bringing new ways of marketing (Rayport & Jaworski, 2001).

he developments in ICT has influenced all marketing functions, redefining marketing relationships with its customers (Rayport & Jaworski, 2001). Within the context of the tourism industry, there has been little evidence supporting the relationship between the marketing of responsible tourism through a new type of information retrieval. It is key to acknowledge and analyse the existence of these E-tourism businesses to lead into the overall basis of this study which focuses specifically on online platforms, detailed in the next sub-section. This will allow for a greater understanding of the techniques being used across the digital ecosystem to promote responsible tourism.

2.3.2 Tourism Platforms as Tourism Intermediaries

With tourists having access to a wide range of online information sources, new economic actors have appeared, including electronic platforms that facilitate the exchange between buyers and sellers (Belleflamme & Neysen, 2009). Such platforms are able to "exchange information on the products, compare the characteristics of various products and, if necessary, to carry out online transactions" (Lin, 2006 as cited in Belleflamme & Neysen, 2009, p.217.).

Belleflamme & Neysen (2009) have identified two types of virtual platforms within the tourism industry that often coexist within the same sector. The first platform acknowledged is

the online information platforms (OIP) including web portals, online directories, and classified ads. These OIP's focus on the gathering of information from various holidays services to ensure that information is readily available for the consumer in a single place. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, accommodation, flights, restaurants and leisure parks (Belleflamme & Neysen, 2009). The overall aim of these OIP's is to educate travellers, so they are able to make informed decisions when purchasing and booking.

The next example laid out by Belleflamme & Neysen (2009) with regards to virtual platforms, is the electronic marketplace (EMP). This includes both online booking platforms and electronic travel agencies (Belleflamme & Neysen, 2009). Once visiting the aforementioned OIP's, informed consumers are then able to carry out reservations, choose a product and secure payments electronically, allowing buyers and sellers to operate and accomplish online transactions (Belleflamme & Neysen, 2009).

In order to fully understand these two types of virtual entities, it is important to acknowledge the presence of intermediaries. Belleflamme & Neysen (2009) defines an intermediary as an economic agent, acting as a middle man by helping facilitate the buying and selling of particular transactions.

In order for OIP's and EMP's to coexist successfully, Spulber (2003) suggests the intermediary helps by either buying into the supplier in order to resell to the purchaser, or simply helps these two protagonists find each other. Within an industry persistent of change, there has been a recent surge of tourism intermediaries stemming from the digitization of information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Romero & Tejada, 2019). These new virtual entities have revolutionized all business processes by redefining traditional value chains (Romero & Tejada, 2019). This network of intermediaries and platforms create a digital ecosystem that allow a traveller to seamlessly move through the process of education, decision making and final transaction in a synchronised manner. With this new way of receiving information along with the facilitation of buying and selling, there is a gap in the research to explore how these new virtual entities are promoting responsible tourism end to end.

3. Methodology

In order to achieve the purpose of intended study, this chapter will give a comprehensive overview of the method used to help answer the research question "how online travel platforms are promoting responsible tourism with the growing demand for sustainable travel products". It is critical to identify an appropriate research methodology for collecting information as this should ultimately provide answers for the intended study. Therefore, the research conducted will have a qualitative approach which is often regarded as exploratory

and unscientific, thus in line with the intended research (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). The following sections will explain the steps taken and key decisions made during the research in order to acknowledge the studies overall reliability and validity. This will include the research design, sample and procedure, operationalization of concepts and its overall credibility.

3.1 Research Design

Qualitative research was deemed most appropriate to answer the research question. Golafshani (2003) mentions, qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach, seeking to comprehend phenomena whereby the researcher focuses on the context specific setting rather than seeking to manipulate the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, in context, responsible tourism has been looked at in its natural setting to uncover the specific marketing strategies used by online travel platforms to promote the recent phenomenon. This methodological approach is prevalent in tourism research, yet tourism marketing has heavily relied on quantification and structured surveys (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Furthermore, qualitative analysis covers a wide variety of approaches, varying in concepts, analytical rules and assumptions (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove, 2016). However, all methods contribute to developing understanding of complex phenomena, through description and interpretation (Vaismoradi1 et al., 2016).

Due to the nature of this study, a textual analysis in the form of thematic analysis was utilized in order to answer the research question. These two common approaches to qualitative research are being used interchangeably, yet there are no set boundaries for the researcher between the two methods (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). However, this approach allows the researcher to analyse textual data and elucidate themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Therefore, textual analysis was firstly applied to study the language of online travel platforms in order to determine how responsible tourism is being communicated. This involved further interpretation of the data to uncover which marketing tactics are being used to promote responsible tourism, thus thematic analysis was applied to analyse and report themes within the data. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ultimately, textual analysis was valuable to answer the main research question, alongside the three sub-questions.

3.1.1 Textual Analysis

In order to understand the method of textual analysis it is important to acknowledge the concept of a text which is a key feature of this methodology. Brennen (2017) denotes a text as more than just a "printed document, textbook or written cell phone message" (p.193). Brennen (2017) further explains textual analysis sees texts as cultural artefacts, whereby meaning is constructed of one's everyday lives through material documentary evidence. In addition, cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall (1975) refers to texts as "literacy and visual constructs, employing symbolic means, shaped by rules, conventions and traditions intrinsic to the use of language in its widest sense" (as cited in Brennen, 2017, p.193). Therefore, in qualitative research, interpreting texts are key to unlocking traces of socially constructed reality from the perspective of understating the relationship between media, culture and society (Brennen, 2017). This may be understood through words, ideas, themes, concepts and issues found in texts, considered in a particular context (Atkinson and Coffey, 2011).

This methodology is key to understanding language and aims to describe the structure, content and functions of the messages within the given texts (Frey et al., 1999). Given the general concept of textual analysis, this method was deemed most appropriate for the proposed study, thereby was used to study which marketing techniques are being used within online travel platforms to communicate responsible tourism. This methodology is particularly useful for the intended study as it enables the researcher to look at numerous texts in the form of primary or secondary data in order to discover its symbolic meaning (Bainbridge, 2011). Carley (1994) also brings to light that the analysis of natural language is embedded in everyday culture, thus reflecting the extant culture. Applied to the phenomena of responsible tourism, thematic analysis can be used to examine the language of the online platforms in order to discover how it is being communicated to an ever increasing ethically concerned consumer.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

A critical stage in qualitative research is the collection of data and sampling which can determine the study's overall findings and has a profound effect on the quality of research. Tongco (2007) asserts the importance of data collection in research, stating it should contribute to a wider understanding of a theoretical framework. There are numerous approaches to qualitative data collection and analysis, representative of a diverse range of epistemological, theoretical and disciplinary perspectives (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2014). However, Guest et al (2014) mentions that for a well-grounded study it is appropriate to combine elements and techniques from across traditions and epistemological perspectives.

In essence, sampling takes place after a research question has been formulated and resources identified (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Within qualitative research a sample criterion is usually based on the topic and methodology (Elo et al., 2014). An initial sample selection is guided by the existing literature and the researcher's conceptual framework (Gibbs et al., 2007). The results of this first analysis is then fed back into the sampling procedure in order to intensify the understanding of the research problem (Gibbs et al., 2007). In addition, the search for disconfirming cases is a key part of the process as it allows the researcher to validate their analysis and diversify the sample (Gibbs et al., 2007). Once the collection of data has become repetitive and no new emerging issues occur, data saturation is attained, thus the data collected has been satisfied (Gibbs et al., 2007).

In the process of obtaining a diversified sample, Gibbs et al (2007) states the importance of exploring both the theoretical framework and its concepts to discovering new theories and concepts emerging from data collection, thus increasing the studies generalisability. Therefore, within qualitative studies, sampling strategies are used to directly impact the results generalisability (Gibbs et al., 2007).

With this studying focusing on textual analysis in the form of thematic analysis, purposive sampling is deemed the most common method used for these methodologies (Elo et al., 2014). Purposive sampling is essentially a tool for information selection, whereby cases are selected that provide the utmost insight into the research question (Devers & Frankel, 2000). This is considered a non-random technique, meaning randomization is not important and does not require any underlying theories or a set number of informants to carry out the process (Tongco, 2007; Etikan et al., 2016).

Denvers & Frankel (2000) suggest that for effective sampling and credibility of the research, certain guidelines can be put in place to help identify the most appropriate sites and individuals. For example, it is critical to be thorough and patient when choosing the most relevant sources (Devers & Frankel, 2000). A selection of the most appropriate data is essential for ensuring the credibility of textual analysis; thus, a strategy must be put in place to ensure trustworthiness (Elo et al., 2014).

3.2.1 Textual Analysis: Steps to Data Collection

With regards to this study, the focus is on online travel platforms that clearly communicate the recent phenomena of responsible tourism. The selection criteria were therefore based on certain aspects of responsible tourism including the social, economic and environmental issues that are being communicated through the marketing tactics discovered.

Four key stages were carried when collecting textual and material data for the analysis. The first being locating the data. Identifying the most relevant data is necessary to answering the proposed research question. Thereby, data for this study has been collected from Google due to the data it beholds.

A corpus of texts refers to "a population of texts to be analysed" (Grimmer and Stewart, 2014, p. 272) and can be defined as the second stage of textual analysis. These texts tend to be guided by the research question and theoretical framework. Therefore, within this study a selection of 40-60 online platforms were aggregated to form the corpus of texts. The themes within this in order to bring the corpus together were the presence of the three pillars; social, economic and environmental in the selected travel platforms. The use of these three pillars helped determine the relevance of the texts and condense them into the final sample. Searching key terms such as sustainable, eco-friendly, socially-conscious and responsible within the travel platform sphere allowed for the collection of data that fitted within the three pillars laid out previously.

The third stage in textual analysis is retrieving the data and storing it. The data was screenshotted and placed in appropriate folders. It is noteworthy to mention the screenshots comprised of the promotional aspects of the platforms in order to provide insights into the marketing techniques being used to promote responsible tourism.

The final step involved delving into the data, noticing patterns, and deciding on a unit of analysis. In this case, the homepage was beneficial as it helped determine what kind of platform it was and the types of products it was selling. Furthermore, the part of the platforms often referred to as the values section was beneficial to help uncover the principles being promoted. Through focusing on certain elements of the platforms, data immersion was able to take place.

3.3 Data Analysis

Now the data has been successfully retrieved and collated through textual analysis, qualitative data analysis allowed for a deeper understanding and interpretation of the given data. In particular, a thematic analysis approach has been utilized which uses a systematic process to derive meaning from texts, code and create categories in relation to the description of a social reality (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). More specifically, the use of thematic analysis in relation to textual documents allows for identification, analysis and uncovering of patterns, thus describing and organising the data in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis is commonly linked to disciplines such as psychology, thus remains relatively uncommon within tourism research (Walters, 2016). However, Hannam & Knox

(2005) recognise the value of thematic analysis has on unpacking inherent cultural meanings within written texts. Therefore, thematic analysis has been applied within this study to depict how the platforms are promoting responsible tourism through sustainable tourism products and which marketing strategies they are using. Moreover, thematic analysis was used as a versatile tool to interpret both visual and text elements within the platforms. However, it is often argued there is no clear arrangement about the definition of thematic analysis and the processes it involves (Hannam & Knox, 2005). On the other hand, Braun & Clarke (2006) acknowledge that thematic analysis is a foundational method for qualitative analysis that should be taken seriously. In this sense, thematic analysis is flexible in its approach as you are able to derive meaning through a particular epistemological or theoretical position, as well as methods that are independent from theory and epistemology, thus can be applied across a range of epistemological and theoretical approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.3.1 Data Analysis: Six Steps

In order to fully comprehend thematic analysis as an analytical approach to textual analysis, Braun & Clarke (2006) acknowledge six key stages of analysis to help guide the gradual progression within the analytical process. Therefore, this study followed the researchers' six-step guide consisting of familiarising yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for relevant themes, reflecting and reviewing main themes, naming and defining final themes and finalising the analysis through an overall reflection of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data collected from the platforms were first organised and saved into the software programme Atlas.ti which helped facilitate the organisation of a large sum of media texts including both text and image analysis. The software was also used for the thematic analysis process as it allows for a combination of data and constitutes codes directly into the software. Therefore, the data of each platform was broken down in order to construct a deeper meaning.

Through open coding, each line and visual element of the platform were characterized by assigning specific themes (code), thus capturing initial ideas and thoughts of each platform. Boeije (2010) refers to the breaking down of data as fragments which are then compared among each other, grouped into relevant categories and labelled with a code. It is important to acknowledge the relevance of a code in thematic analysis as it is a summarizing phrase applied to a piece of text, thus articulating the meaning of the fragment (Boeije, 2010, p. 96). Secondly, the platforms were reviewed and axial coding was determined based on broader themes which were then assigned to the platforms that consolidated the open codes. This step is crucial for making meaningful connection between categories and eludes to a more abstract

process consisting of coding around several single categories (Boeije, 2010, p.108). Therefore, Boeije (2010) suggests the axil coding process helps conclude which elements in the research are the dominant ones and which are less important. The final stage consisted of identifying the selective codes through integrating axial codes. The objective was to select dominant topics where certain categories can be adopted as theoretical concepts relevant to the research (Boeije, 2010, p. 115). Essentially, selective coding is considered the search for important categories and possibly a core category which does not necessarily appear form the data yet is central to the integration of theory (Boeije, 2010, p. 115). In order to clearly see the distinct connections between each hierarchical phase, a coding tree was utilized.

Overall, this qualitative research process is defined by three types of coding which are depicted as linear stages of the general research. By alternating between data collection, data analysis and sampling a spiral of analysis took place which is critical for qualitative data as it allows for a simultaneous process of analysis (Boeije, 2010). Lastly, the research was guided by three main principles suggested by Boeije (2010) which include: constant comparison, analytic induction and theoretical sensitivity. Through constant comparison, variation was found within certain phenomenon and indicated which variations of the phenomenon manifest themselves. Furthermore, analytical induction was used as a search strategy to find the most suitable theoretical framework for the research material. Finally, proactive attention was given to theoretical sensitivity which enables creative development of ideas from the given data, thus the data is viewed through a theorical lens (Boeije, 2010).

3.4 Operationalization

The main research question was divided into three sub-questions which played a role in the analysis phase. To guide the intended research question, some dominant concepts derived from the sub-questions. These included the target segments of responsible tourism, the sustainable products also referred to as alternative appeals and the platforms communication of specific values and initiatives. The insights discussed in the theoretical framework proposed the responsible consumer to be ethically minded, thus seemed beneficial to explore the specific attributes they pose. Next, the literature discusses E-tourism as a new phenomenon and a new way of receiving information. Therefore, the second sub-question was set to determine the alternative product segments of mainstream tourism to ensure a holistic analysis. Following the literature review, Mihalic's conceptual framework provided an integrated sustainability-responsibility model which was used to help construct valuable insights into the values and initiatives of the platforms. Based off the three pillars of sustainability, the final sub-question highlighted the key patterns being used across the various platforms and provided a holistic

view of the digital marketing strategies used and how responsible tourism is being communicated.

Textual analysis was processed on a sample of platforms that displayed sustainable principles. In particular, this research aimed to uncover the marketing techniques being used to promote responsible tourism. Therefore, through its various communications, the platforms were thoroughly analysed in order to reach a final conclusion. To fully immerse in the data, Fereday & Cochrane (2006) suggest an indictive or deductive approach. Both approaches aim to prepare, organise and report findings (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Due to no previous studies joining online platforms with responsible tourism, the literature review was limited, thus an inductive or conventional approach was chosen. In order to reveal new insights, codes and categories were taken from the data and then defined. The inductive approach is considered highly important in qualitative research as it proposes a true description without bias (Mayring, 2014). Notably, a criterion is set in place for the selection process in creating categories (Mayring, 2014). This tends to include deductive elements as it is established within theoretical consideration in regards to the aims of analysis and subject matter (Mayring, 2014). Therefore, this research approach opens up new insights and is useful in new areas of research (Marks & Yardley, 2004). Within the context of the proposed research, an inductive approach was mainly used to discover the specific marketing strategies the online platforms are communicating to a niche customer segment. Schreier (2012) further suggests to pinpoint key aspects of the main research question in order to not get lost in the data (p.58). Therefore, this was taken into consideration and allowed the emergence of new patterns deriving from the various platforms. Particular attention was paid to the consumer, the product segments and the values and initiatives of the platforms.

Overall, textual analysis served to breakdown the platforms in order to construct meaning of the specific communications being used to promote responsible tourism. Through looking at specific parts of the platform, the promotional techniques were revealed and provided valuable insights to help answer the main research question.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Within qualitative research, Riessman argues special attention should be paid towards the studies persuasiveness, plausibility, reasonability and how convincing the overall research is (Riesman, as cited by Silverman, 2011). These attributes contribute to the overall credibility of research which is critical in establishing trustworthiness. Central to the discussion of the credibility of scientific research are the two overriding concepts of 'reliability' and 'validity' (Silverman, 2011). For this reason, particular attention was paid to these concepts throughout

the conducted research. In order to fully understand the above concepts in qualitative research, it is necessary to define them. In general, reliability refers to the stability of findings, whereas validity is concerned with the truthfulness of findings (Altheide & Johnson, 1994 as cited in Silverman, 2011). In this sense, both concepts are achieved when the researcher follows numerous verification strategies throughout the research process (Altheide & Johnson, 1994 as cited in Silverman, 2011). From this perspective, validity and reliability are conceptualized as rigor, trustworthiness and quality in the qualitative paradigm (Golafshani, 2003). Furthermore, Patton (2001) suggests reliability and validity should be used when designing the study, analysing the results and judging the studies overall quality. Therefore, in order to increase the studies overall trustworthiness, the research was conducted in a rigorous and methodical manner in order to ensure quality results.

Lincoln & Guba (1985) propose a certain criterion in order to meet a studies trustworthiness, these include credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and reflexibility (as cited in Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). In light of these insights, a criterion was set in place to ensure a rigorous thematic analysis process that ensured the studies trustworthiness and produced insightful findings.

Firstly, concerning the quality of analysis, Schreier (2014) proposes conducting a pilot phase where the coding frame is tried out on part of the material. This involves: selecting material; trial coding; evaluating and lastly modifying the coding frame (Schreier, 2014). Consequently, a trial coding frame was developed to test the appropriateness of the given codes as well as help establish a strong final coding frame that could be used to answer the proposed research question. By selecting a representative sample including all types of data and data sources, this ensured exhaustiveness for both trial and initial coding (Schreier, 2014). A large enough sample size of platforms also contributes to the study's overall reliability. Following this notion, the sample considered was based around all types of travel platforms that exemplified some form of sustainable practice and responsible tourism behaviour. Ultimately, this improved the overall consistency of coding units and developed a strong final coding frame.

Secondly, an audit trail was undertaken throughout the methodology. As defined by Sandelowski (1986), a study is defined as auditable when another researcher can clearly follow the decision trail. With this in mind, a record of all decision processes, research and eventual codes has been logged for anyone to understand how sustainable tourism platforms were selected. This allows the methodology to be clearly seen, both for those platforms proactively included in the analysis, and those that were disregarded. An audit trail also ensures this study has what Tobin & Begley (2004) define as 'transferability', in other words the generalizability

of this inquiry. By following the audit trail of this responsible tourism study, another researcher could apply the methodology to their own work.

Lastly, the validity of all platforms involved in this study was enhanced by multi-dimensional vetting. Firstly, each platform was identified and cross-referenced by certain keywords, to ensure the credibility of each platform included in the study. A second layer of vetting was then applied to determine whether the platforms had any accolades associated with sustainability or responsible tourism. Indeed, not every platform met this criterion, nevertheless, the platforms that did ensured a higher level of reliability, thus increasing the studies overall trustworthiness and credibility. In addition, the content and marketing strategies of each platform was analysed to group them for this study. By vetting each platform in terms of keyword, content and marketing voice, it was possible to only select the most valid sources for this inquiry. Whilst the vetting process was not exhaustive, it ensured a reliable enough basis for codifying.

4. Results

The following section aim to provide insight into answering the proposed research question "how online travel platforms are promoting responsible tourism with the growing demand for sustainable travel products". Data has been carefully analysed using textual analysis, and thematic analysis also applied to thoroughly breakdown the data. In order to provide clarity to certain aspects of the research question, the results will follow three subsections based on the results found. Firstly, the target of responsible consumers' segment determined by the ethically concerned and the conscientious consumer will be elucidated and will constitute the first section (sub-question 1). This should help identify the specific characteristics of the responsible consumer to whom the platforms are promoting themselves. Then, explanations of the alternative appeals of the travel platforms will be discussed, with a specific focus on the promotion of sustainable travel products (sub-question 2). Finally, the third section will reveal responsible communications within the platforms and how they are communicating certain values in order to encourage and promote responsible tourism behaviour (sub-question 3). Through an exhaustive analysis process, a coding tree was created, displaying all themes created to help answer the research question and a complete list of all the platforms analysed (see Appendix A).

4.1 Responsible Consumers

This theme was created to discover how sustainable tourism platforms are promoting responsible tourism to a niche target segment who carry specific attributes that differentiate them from other tourists. Two themes appeared prevalent when answering the research question "what consumer attributes and characteristics drive the platforms selection of a specific target audience for the promotion of responsible tourism". these were *ethically concerned* and *conscientious*. For each of these themes, several characteristics emerged.

4.1.1 The ethically concerned consumer

The ethically concerned consumer appears to be the main target audience the online travel platforms are trying to target when promoting responsible tourism. This customer group as identified by Weeden (2014) appear to be driven by a complex set of values, and have predisposed concerns or interest. This theme became apparent through the platforms' tone of voice and imagery used, depicting certain characteristics aimed at travellers who express a high level of concern when visiting destinations. The insights provided by textual analysis imply predisposed motivations for targeting the ethically concerned consumers. These include **authentic experiences**, **changemakers, socially conscious** and **interactive.**

Authentic Experiences

A motivational factor for targeting the ethically concerned traveller is through experience-based travel. Both EMP's and OIP's are seen to use experiential marketing techniques to target ethically concerned tourists. Holiable, a digital platform focusing on sustainable and responsible travel, adheres to this insight by displaying within their homepage what appears to look like a normal booking platform. The fundamental difference appears when describing the products and services provided as experiences. The platform uses phrases such as "find your next sustainable travel experience" and "new green travel experiences" (see figure 4.3). This shows the platform targeting experience seekers in search of unique and authentic experiences, suggesting an interest in internal determents compared with external travel where the focus is generally on climate and demography.
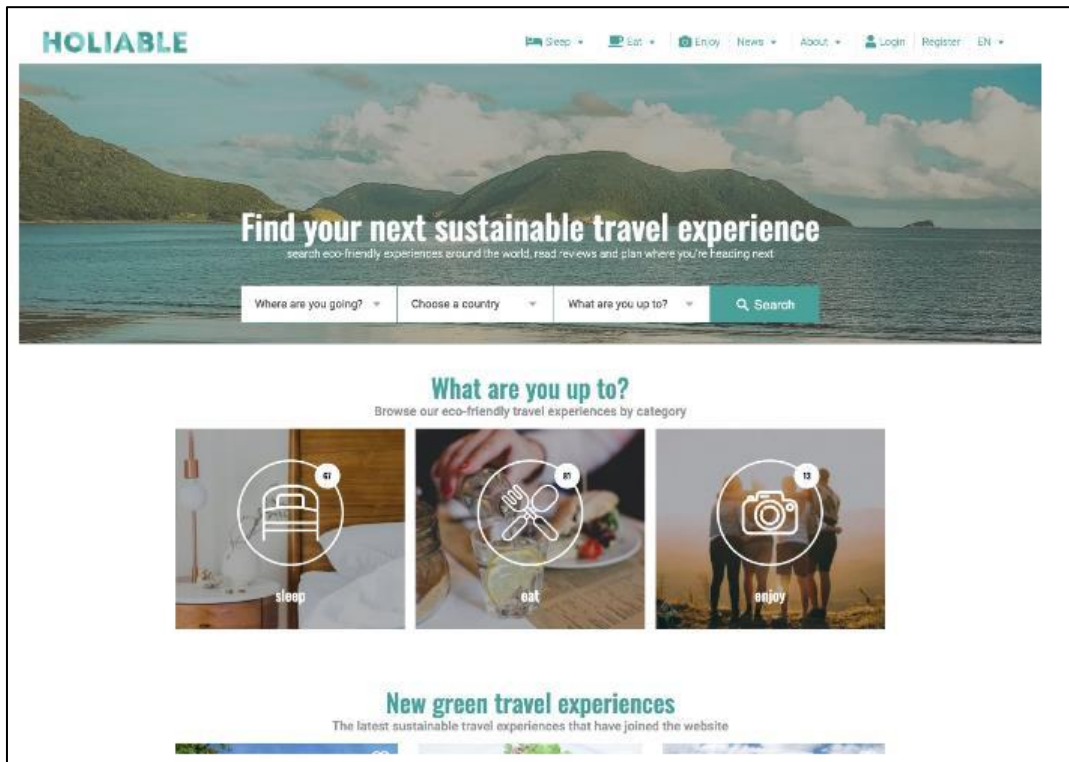
Figure 4.3 Screenshot retrieved from platform Holiable

By connecting the ethically concerned traveller with locals of host communities alludes to promotion of authentic and immersive experiences, counteracting the negative effects mass tourism brings. Therefore, this is a direct consideration for responsible tourism and approves King's (2002) research, where he suggests the importance of connecting the consumer to the experience rather than the promotion of the destination. Better Places Travel use phrases such as "connects you directly with one of our local travel experts and together you design your ideal travel experience" (see figure 4.4). Indeed, this supports King's idea as the platform has placed significant emphasis on promoting to a consumer who is looking for self-fulfilment and realization, stemming from growing awareness of sustainability issues within the tourism industry.
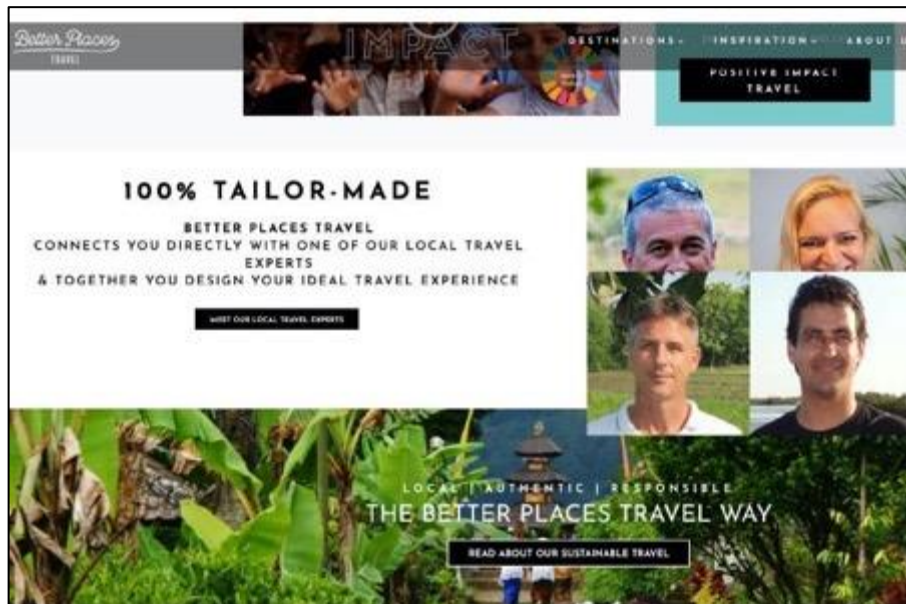
Figure 4.4 Screenshot retrieved from platform Better Places Travel

Furthermore, figure 4.5 states "Clean Travel connects you with immersive experiences that support local communities". It is evident they have highlighted the words 'experiences' and 'local', suggesting the mutual benefits the promotion of local experiences can have on both the traveller and locals. Host communities are able to share their knowledge, traditions and values with prospective travellers whilst benefiting from the economic incomings, whereas travellers are able to fully immerse themselves into authentic, local experiences
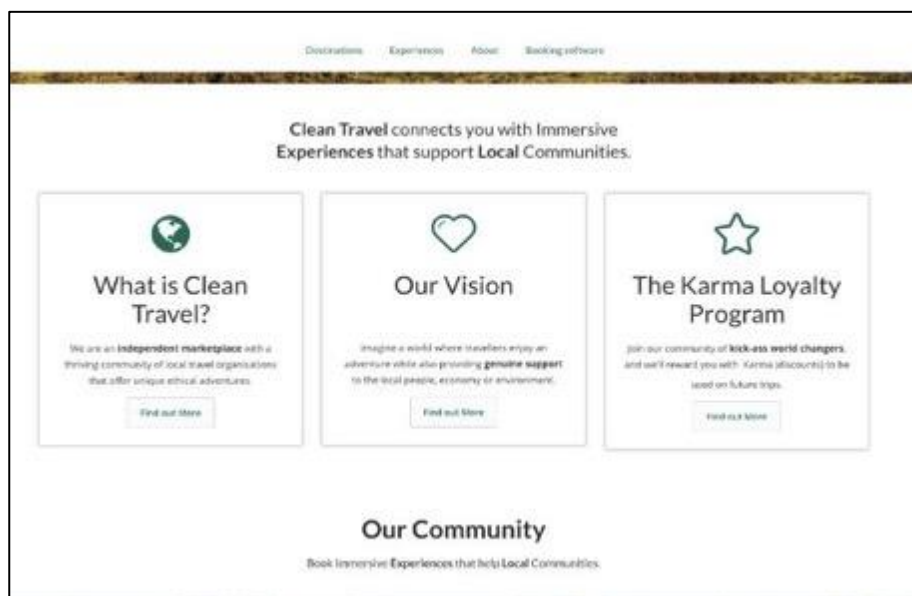
Figure 4.5 Screenshot retrieved from platform Clean Travel

These new findings reinforce Goodwin & Francis's (2003) research that there has been significant shift from the predominance of traditional holidays. The shift is towards more experiential vacations, with consumers looking for "experiences, fulfilment and rejuvenation rather than 'places and things" (King, 2002). He further discusses the promotion of lifestyle,

where the marketing pays less attention to the physical properties of the products and services, thus higher consideration is given to what the customer would like to see in themselves, creating an all rounded holistic experience (King, 2002).

This is also seen through the use of impactful imagery as seen by figure 4.6, where the image depicts experiences as a range of activities with the tagline "one's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things". Krippendorf recognised early on that we would see an increasing amount of 'emancipated tourists' whose needs would develop from physical recreation such as sleeping and eating to 'emotional recreation', thus pursuing activities and experiences that we could not practise in everyday life (Goodwin & Francis, 2003).

Figure 4.6 Screenshot retrieved from platform Clean Travel

By Krippendorf contextualising responsible tourism in relation to Maslow's hierarchy of needs presents a well-rounded view of the changing needs of the consumer. In general, the analysis revealed the promotion of purposeful and memorable experiences, through encouraging local travel. Each platform analysed seemed to use words such as 'local', 'meaningful', 'authentic', 'immersive' and 'connect' , implying each is experience is unique and aims at targeting the ethically concerned travellers looking for alternative holidays.

Changemakers

Textual analysis revealed the promotion of responsible tourism to a consumer concerned with making a difference when travelling. In particular, the platforms seem to target a consumer looking to actively participate in change through philanthropy, stewardship, service or cultural exchange. Overall, a majority of the platforms address this niche target audience as 'changemakers', promoting to the ethically concerned who crave positive change within

society. B Greener state within their homepage "the community of change-makes in tourism" (see figure 4.7). By referring to this niche as a "community" suggests a lifestyle trait, promoting to consumers who share common attitudes and interests, thus actively seek to create positive change through active participation.

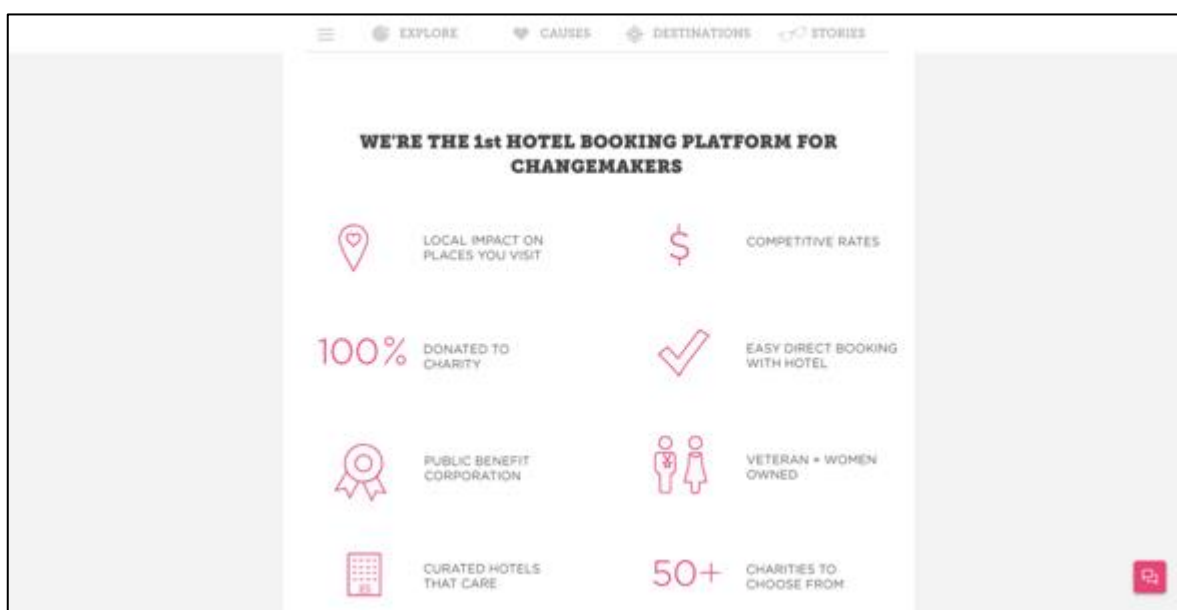Figure 4.7 Screenshot retrieved from platform B Greener

Figure 4.8 Screenshot retrieved from platform Kind Travler

Similarly, Kind Travler state "we're the 1st hotel booking platform for changemakers" (see figure 4.8). It is evident the platform has listed the positive benefits of booking within the platform and how it contributes to change within the industry. For example, by stating "100% donated to charity" directly targets those looking for travel experiences where they are able to give back to the tourist destination.

This insight approves Goodwin & Francis's (2003) research where they imply responsible tourism has emerged as a wider consumer market trend towards ethical consumption and lifestyle marketing.

Socially conscious

The term socially-conscious is seen to be used frequently amongst the different platforms to target consumers looking to positively enrich destinations. In general, there is a strong indication from the analysis that the platforms are targeting the socially conscious consumer through clearly stating their CSR policies. Figure 4.9 shows &Beyond's core conservation principles, addressing people, wildlife and land. By being open and transparent with their commitment to conservation promotes to a socially-conscious consumer seeking to align their values with particular lifestyle choices. Further to this, figure 4.10 shows the platforms legacy and overall impact over the years, acknowledging the positive work they have achieved. Again, this resonates with the socially conscious consumer actively searching for platforms that contribute to sustainable development.
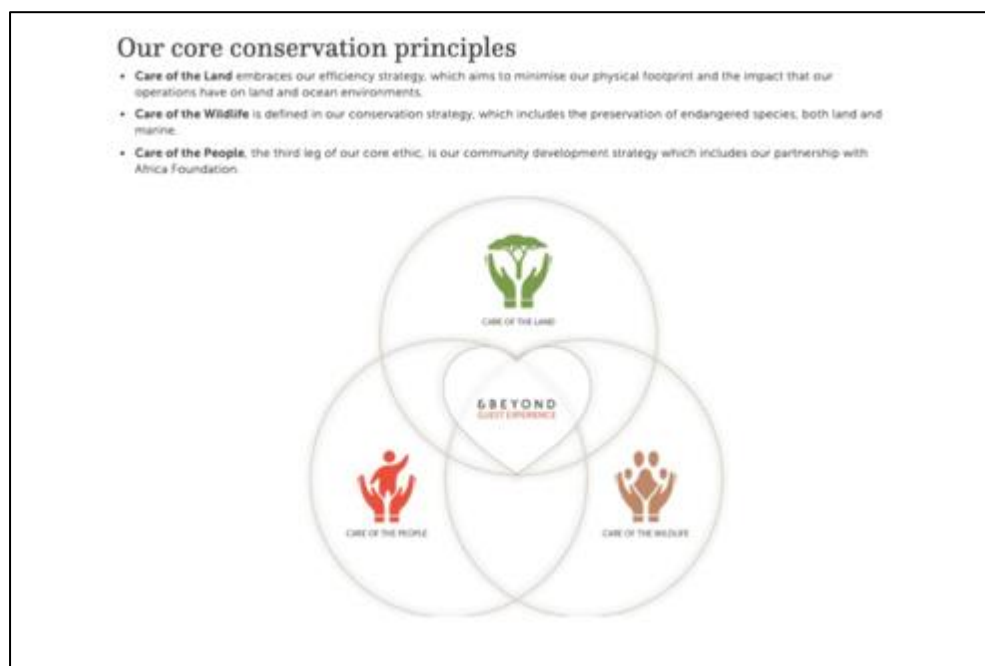
Figure 4.9 Screenshot retrieved from platform & Beyond

Figure 4.10 Screenshot retrieved from platform & Beyond

Likewise, Sumak Travel also address their responsible tourism policy by acknowledging the three pillars of sustainability (see figure 4.11). Each pillar outlines the efforts to give back to the society through stating their policies to protect both people and places.

Figure 4.11 Screenshot retrieved from platform Sumak Travel

Further evidence suggests the socially conscious consumer to have an above average social and environmental consciousness, meaning they are more inclined to source a platform that clearly promotes sustainable products and services. This appears prevalent within the platform Coral Road by stating "coral road connects sustainable travel destinations with travellers who care about sustainability" (figure 4.12).
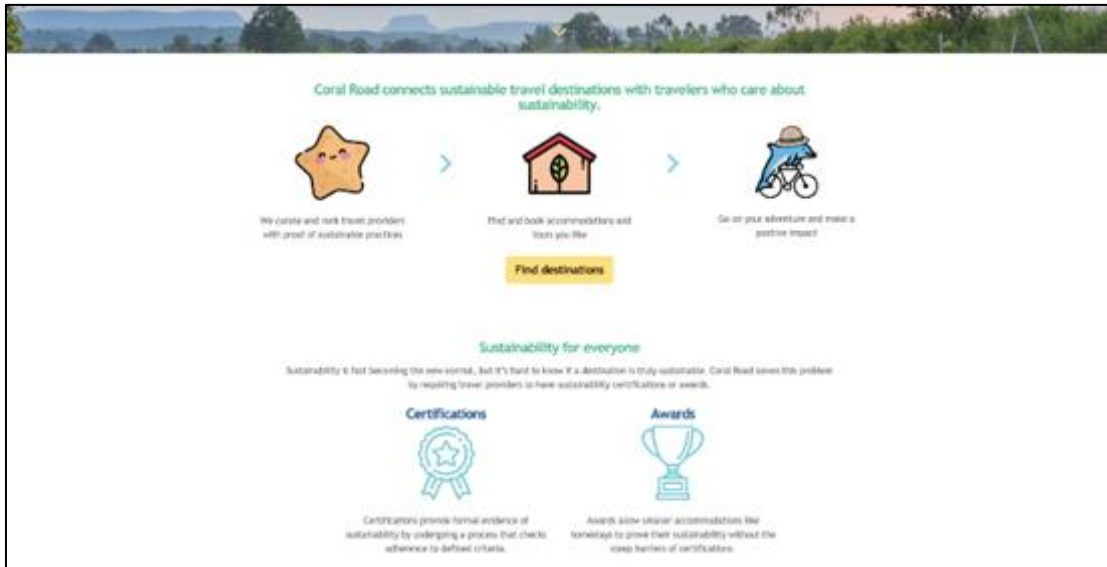
Figure 4.12 Screenshot retrieved from platform Coral Road

This clearly promotes to a consumer actively searching for alternatives to mainstream package holidays and are travelling for a purpose. Therefore, this adheres to Caruana et al (2014) insight of the need to market to a growing consumer who shares high levels of concern regarding social, environmental and ethical issues.

Correspondingly, Kind Traveler directly address themselves as "the 1st socially conscious give + get hotel booking and media platform that empowers travellers to positively impact the destinations they visit" (figure 4.13). By promoting themselves as a socially-conscious platform targets consumers actively seeking socially responsible tourism businesses where they are able to positively impact destinations through being responsible tourists.
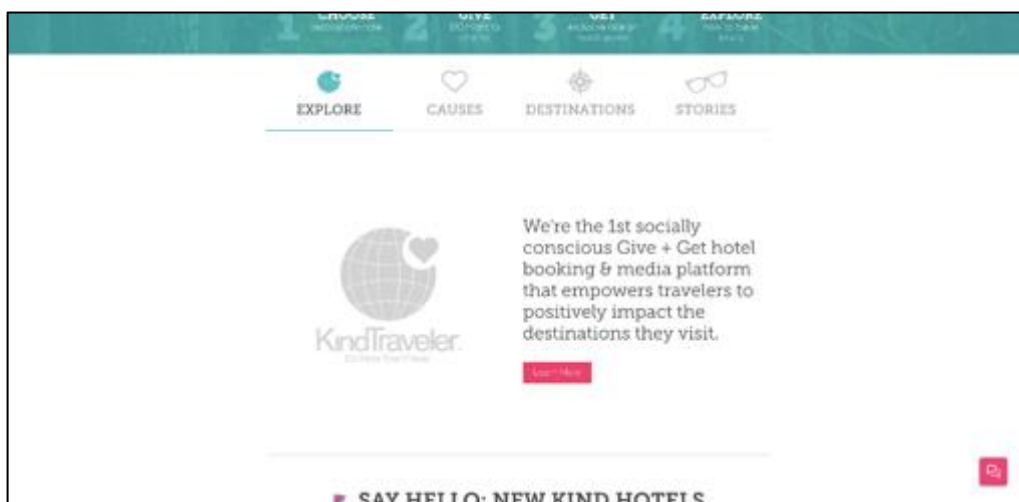
Figure 4.13 Screenshot retrieved from platform Kind Traveler
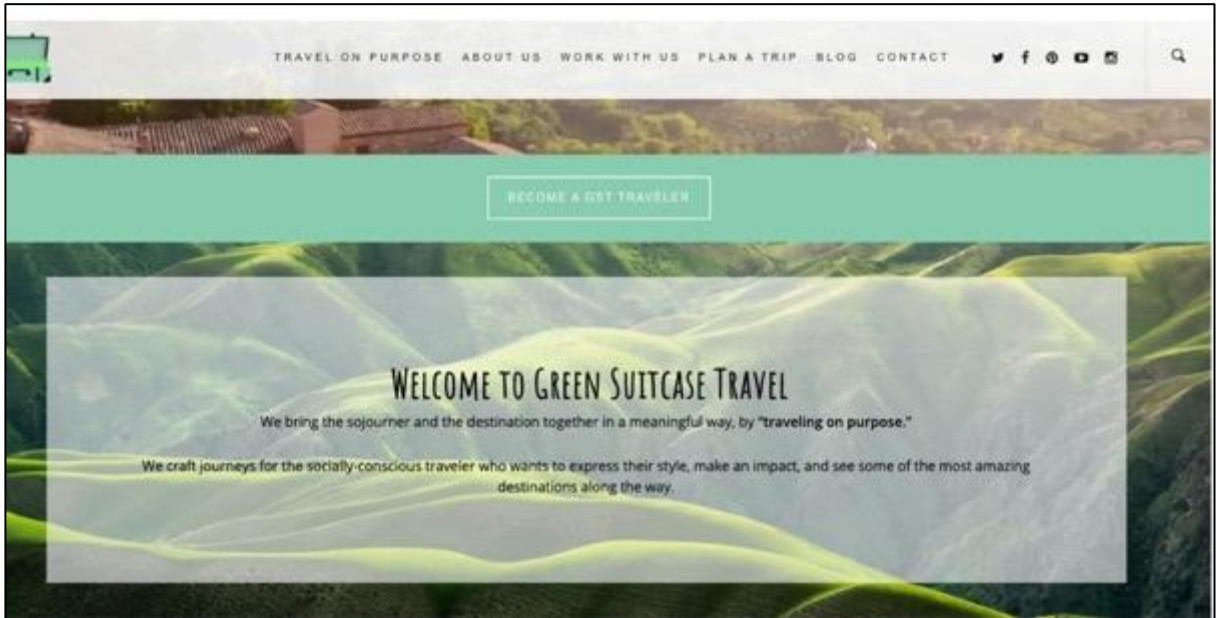
Figure 4.14 Screenshot retrieved from platform Kind Traveler

Finally, Green Suitcase Travel state "we craft journeys for the socially- conscious traveller who wants to express their style, make an impact, and see some of the most amazing destinations along the way" (figure 4.14). The word impact has been used by both platforms, suggesting the promotion of responsible tourism to a consumer who is concerned about the impact they have whilst travelling, thus actively seek alternative holidays that have purpose and contribute to greater societal issues. Overall, the above insights conform Krippendorfs belief that tourists' needs are becoming more complex, resulting in the need to adopt more environmentally-orientated and socially responsible marketing practices (Caruana, 2014).

Interactive

The final sub-category that emerged from the data was interaction. This category was created on the basis that the platforms appear to promote to the ethically concerned consumer who actively seek interaction with the natural, social and cultural environment. Although initially linked to experiences, interactive travellers place higher significance in planning their trip as well as developing personal relationships whilst on holiday. Through seeking mutually benefiting experiences, the interactive traveller takes a more hands-on approach to travelling. A key example of this is shown by figure 4.15 which clearly indicates the meeting and interaction with locals through the imagery used. The wording above also suggests the chance to develop personal relationships through close contact with locals.

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Figure 4.15 Screenshot retrieved from platform Dura Travels

Ultimately, the platform is encouraging interactivity though experiencing the local way of life by staying in a village where you are able to fully immerse in the host community's way of life. Armensk et al (2011) explains in their research that creating a positive interaction between tourists and local residents is critical for maintaining sustainable tourism development within a destination. Similar to experiences, interactivity is growing in demand with ethically aware tourists seeking mutually benefiting experiences. The platforms seem to especially target this category through encouraging cultural exchange and hand-on participation.

Furthermore, emphasis is placed on the participation of consumers planning their trip, reflecting their personal wants and needs. Better Places Travel quotes "we put you directly in contact with a local expert, then together you design your ideal travel experience" (see figure 4.16). This shows an emphasis on allowing consumers to construct their own memorable experiences through a cultural exchange. This idea is confirmed by King (2002) who explains customers have become an active partner in the marketing process, meaning they are able to dictate what and how they receive information.

Figure 4.16 Screenshot retrieved from platform Better Places Travel

4.1.2 The conscientious consumer

In comparison to the ethical consumer, the conscientious consumer has been identified from the data as a new target segment of responsible tourism. Through observation, it became apparent the promotion of responsible tourism was also aimed at those seeking to both **learn** and **explore**. In general, this new insight appeared to target those seeking to satisfy a range of recreational, emotional and social needs.

Learn

The findings from this study present the targeting of customers who are mindful of their impact, thus appear curious and are actively searching for platforms where they are able to learn about local cultures above all how they can become more responsible in their actions. Textual analysis suggests there is a high focus on informing curious travelers through educational and factual content. For example, the OIP Manana states within their home page "home of the conscious traveler", followed by a search bar with the text "I'm curious about" (see figure 4.17).
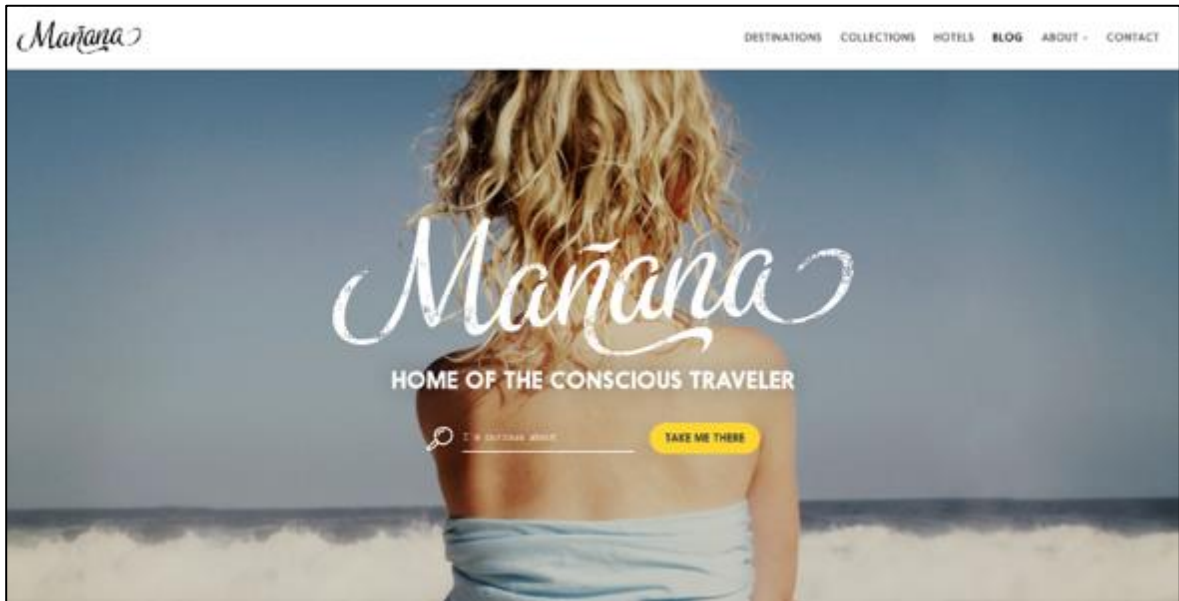
Figure 4.17 Screenshot retrieved from platform Manana

This directly considers a change in both attitude and behaviors of a customer segment seeking alternative options to mainstream package holidays. Therefore, the word 'curious' directly promotes to a niche customer segment who are eager to learn and explore new destinations whilst being conscious of their actions. Moreover, the platform is seen to have a "who you are" section where they describe and acknowledge the conscious traveler (figure 4.18). The platform directly addresses and acknowledges the conscious traveler by explaining their key attributes.
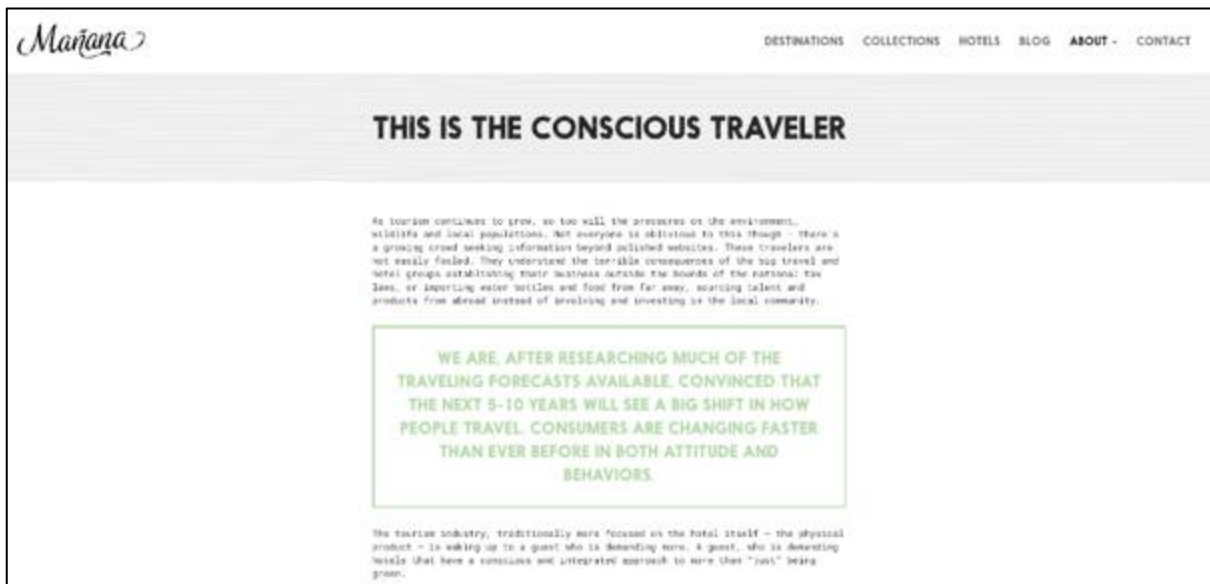
Figure 4.18 Screenshot retrieved from platform Manana
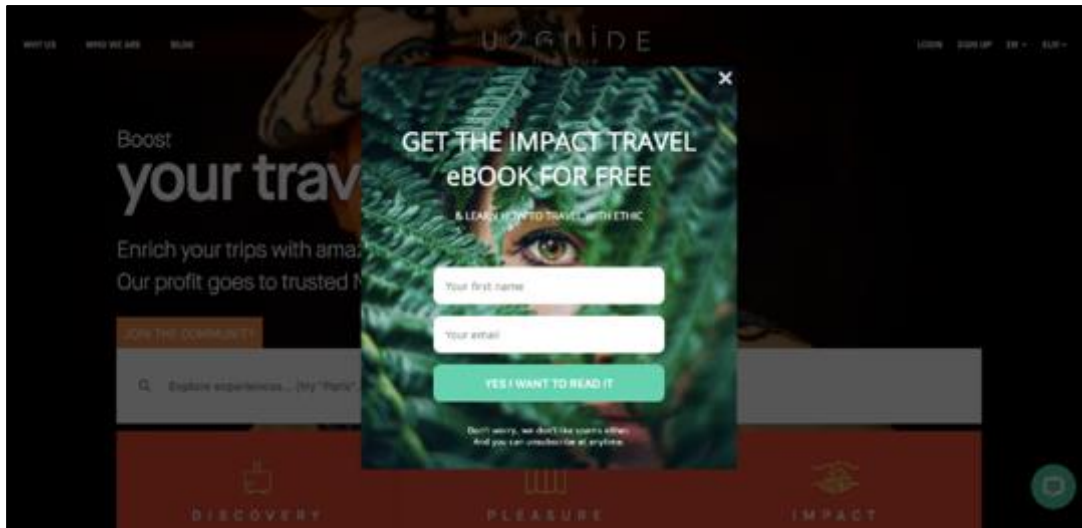
Figure 4.19 Screenshot retrieved from platform U2 Guide

Similarly, U2 Guide presents the promotion of an eBook as seen by figure 4.19 where they state "Get the impact travel book for free and learn how to travel with ethic". The use of an eBook as a marketing strategy is a strategic way to target a consumer seeking knowledge of how to be a responsible consumer. The word 'ethic' alludes to a set of moral principles, suggesting the promotion to a mindful consumer looking at becoming an ethical consumer through educating themselves and sharing knowledge with others.

In comparison, Good Travel Guide promotes to a conscious consumer though providing valuable information into responsible destinations. In particular the online information platform informs potential customers of responsible tourism through stating the benefits of visiting the destination, alongside its sustainability efforts (see figure 4.20).
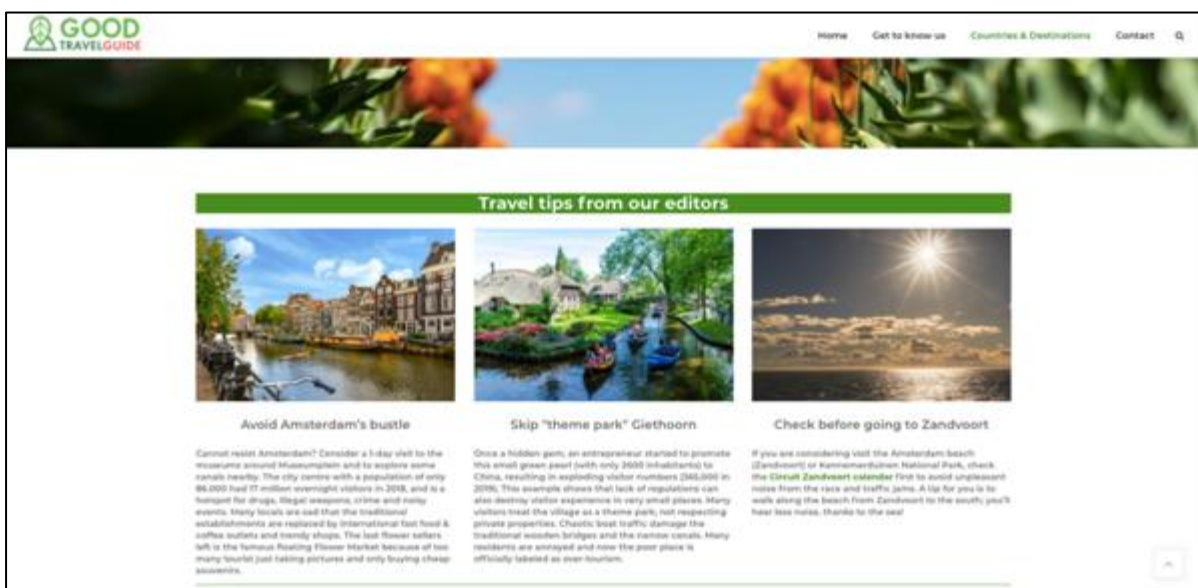

Figure 4.20 Screenshot retrieved from platform Good Travel Guide

It is evident the platform is providing informative tips to a conscious consumer seeking to educate themselves on destinations that are both sustainable and responsible. Furthermore, figure 4.21 represents key facts about the local culture and life of the destination, further educating future travelers about the local culture they might visit.
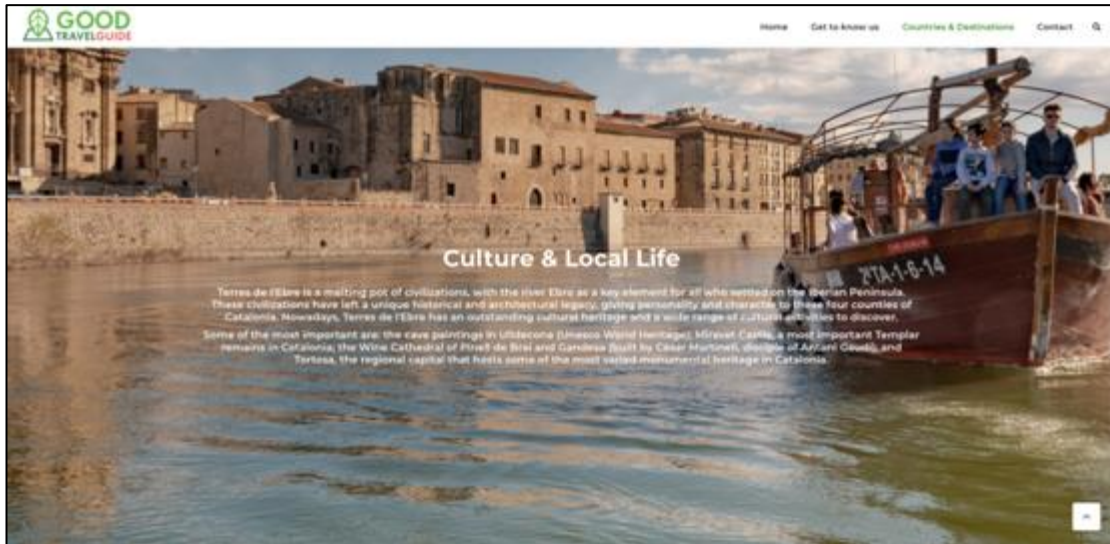

Figure 4.21 Screenshot retrieved from platform Good Travel Guide

4. 2 Alternative Appeals

This theme was based off the alternative factors that persuade consumers to purchase products or services from sustainable online travel platforms. Six main themes became apparent from the material when looking at the types of products the platforms are promoting to the ethical and conscientious consumer. These include *sustainable luxury, nature and eco-tourism, adventure tourism, culture and community-based tourism, backpacker and youth tourism and finally volunteer and educational tourism*.

4.2.1 Sustainable Luxury

This emerging trend appeared prevalent within the data, thus has been created as an overarching category. This theme refers to a specific product segment, targeting those looking for luxury products mixed with sustainable values. Several sub-categories appeared from promoting sustainable luxury holidays including **high-end accommodation**, **travellers philanthropy**, and **meaningful & authentic trips**. These will be discussed further to uncover the promotional techniques of sustainable luxury travel.

High-end accommodation

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The promotion of sustainable luxury is prevalent particularly within online booking platforms. There is an emphasis on luxury experiences through high end accommodation. By listing high-end accommodation within the platforms that clearly display sustainable values and initiatives suggests the coexistence of both sustainability and luxury. The analysis therefore revealed high-end accommodation to be distinguished by both price and personalized services, thus adhering to an affluent consumer looking for exclusivity through quality and service. The accommodation listed within this category includes resorts, boutique hotels, eco-lodges, camps and spas, each focusing on creating holistic experiences.

The analysis presents high-end accommodation to be promoted both directly and indirectly within the platform. Often referred to as 'green' accommodation, socially conscious booking platform Kind Traveler provide appropriate details to the ethically concerned and conscientious consumer about the hotel's community impact, green features and wellness factors (see figure 4.22). This clearly promotes responsible tourism by laying out the specific 'kind factors' the hotel practices such as water management and energy efficiency. The platform also provides detailed information about the neighborhood's local sustainable businesses. By promoting such activities as 'mindful adventures', 'conscious culture', 'kind eats and drinks' and 'do good for the day' suggests the promotion of sustainable luxury through its added services and targets those looking to enrich not just the destination but the host communities through supporting local enterprise and taking part in cultural exchange (see figure 23).
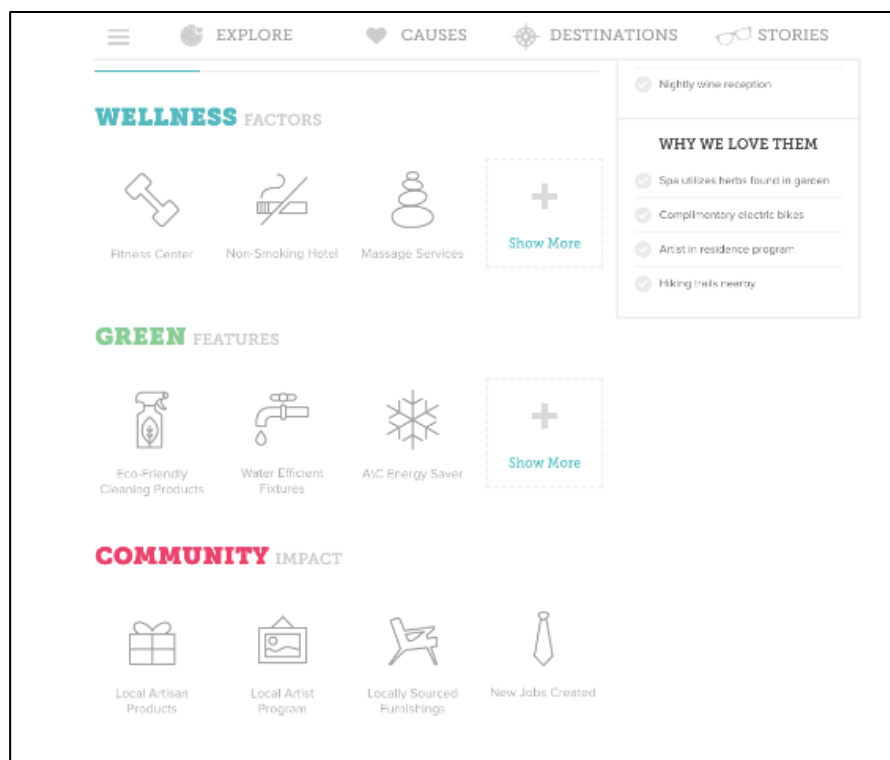

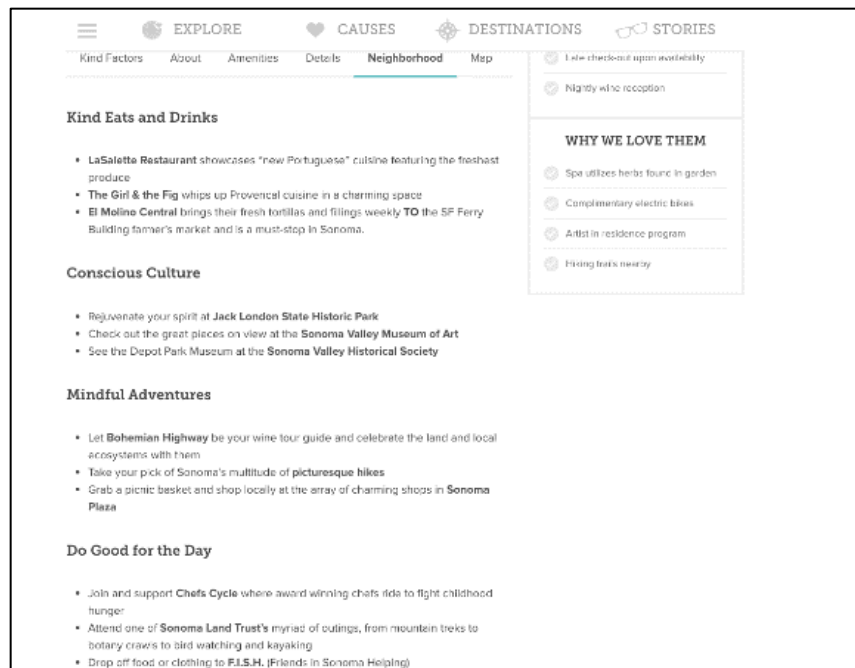Figure 4.22 Screenshot retrieved from platform Kind Traveler

Figure 4.23 Screenshot retrieved from platform Kind Traveler

Furthermore, booking platforms Bookdifferent and Ticati provide a unique selling point though implementing eco-conscious practices and initiatives such as 'staygreenchecker' and 'greenleafratings' (see figures 4.24 and 4.25). This appears to be a unique way to overcome greenwashing by clearly displaying ecolabels, thus reflecting the platforms corporate social responsibility. Although this does not directly imply to the promotion of luxury accommodation, it suggests a certain standard of accommodation needs to be met in order for it to be certified, thus increasing its overall credibility. The expectations of the luxury consumer are assumed to be considerably higher. Therefore, these types of initiatives convey quality of service by addressing the members that have gone above and beyond to satisfy specific eco-friendly standards such as fair working conditions and animal protection.
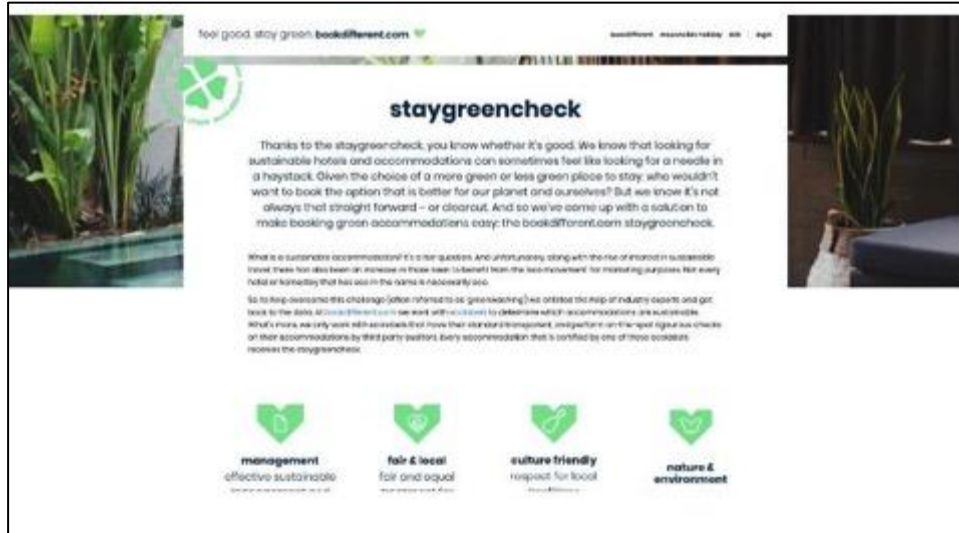
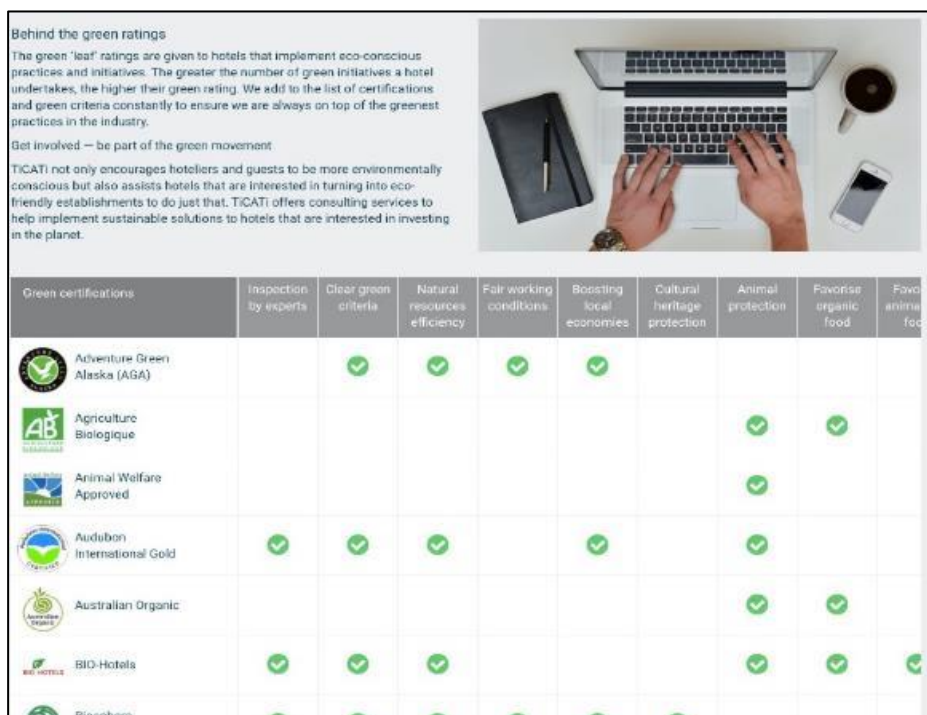Figure 4.24 Screenshot retrieved from platform Bookdifferent

Figure 4.25 Screenshot retrieved from platform Ticati

Lastly, booking platform Bouteco are dedicated specifically to the eco-luxury traveller which is mentioned in their home page as a feature in The Independent's 50 Best Travel Websites (see figure 4.26). By stating the feature within the home page adheres to the site's trustworthiness, attracting consumers looking for high quality service. The promotion of responsible tourism is also suggested through the use of social media (see figure 4.27). The platform encourages users to post their favourite eco hotels through the hashtag Bouteco. This is a ploy to boost awareness of the brand and positively inspire others to book more sustainably through products such as accommodation.

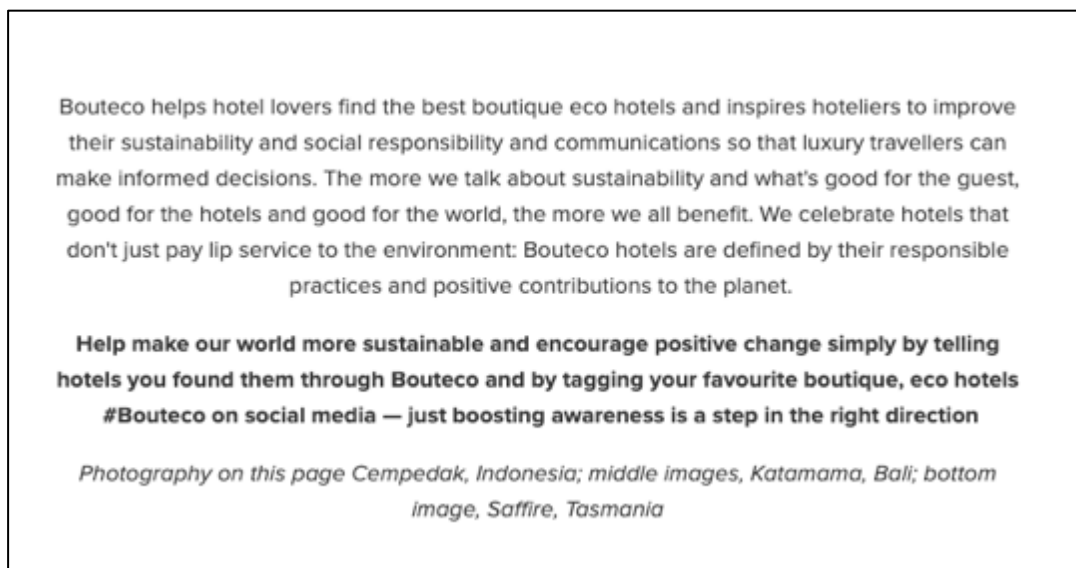Figure 4.26 Screenshot retrieved from platform Bouteco

Figure 4.27 Screenshot retrieved from platform Bouteco

Travellers Philanthropy

Another key element highlighted within the platforms linked to sustainable luxury is holidays where you are able to give back. Tour operators and travel agents in particular are seen to be promote travellers philanthropy as a method to improve the environmental and social responsibility of the platform. By partnering with charitable organizations, supporting local projects and giving consumers the chance to donate to local and international charities. The analysis suggests that high-end tour companies in particular are promoting travellers philanthropy through emotive language connecting the consumer with specialized charities.

For example, luxury tour operator &Beyond directly links consumers to dedicated charities where they are able to donate to a selection of causes such conservation and community development (see figure 4.28). The language used such as 'leave a legacy' denotes to the direct impact the consumer can have on a destination if they make a donation.
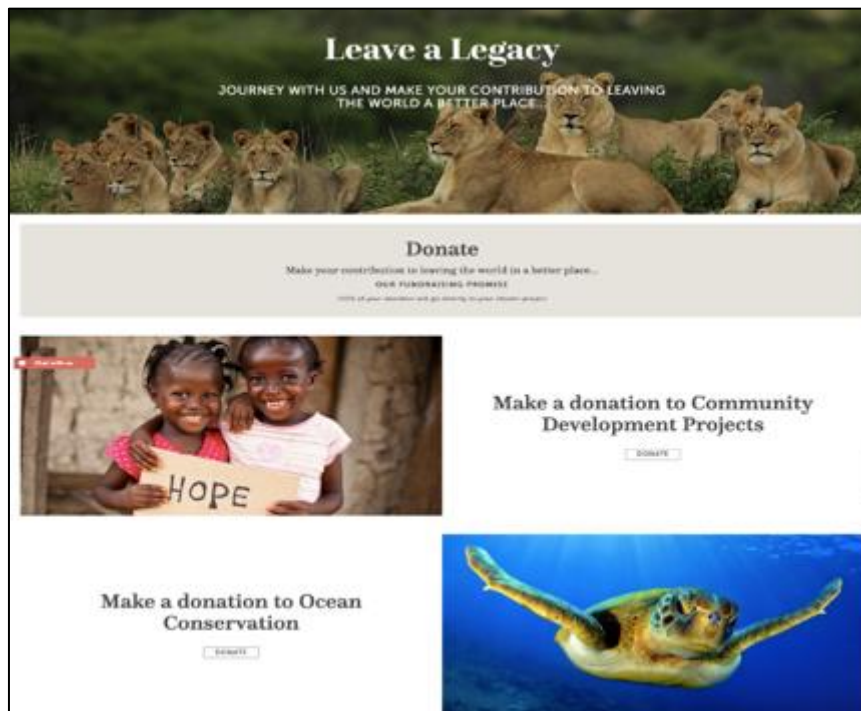
Figure 4.28 Screenshot retrieved from platform &Beyond

Kind Traveler are also seen to promote philanthropy through a unique initiative. Figure 4.29 signifies a 'give + get' initiative which incentivizes consumers to make a donation to either a local or global charity, and in return you are able to unlock exclusive Kind Traveler rates. By framing it as a donation, the platform is promoting philanthropy in a tactical way that has mutual benefits to both the platform, charities and consumer. Words such as 'exclusive rate', implies the promotion to a higher clientele looking for high quality services mixed with philanthropic purposes.
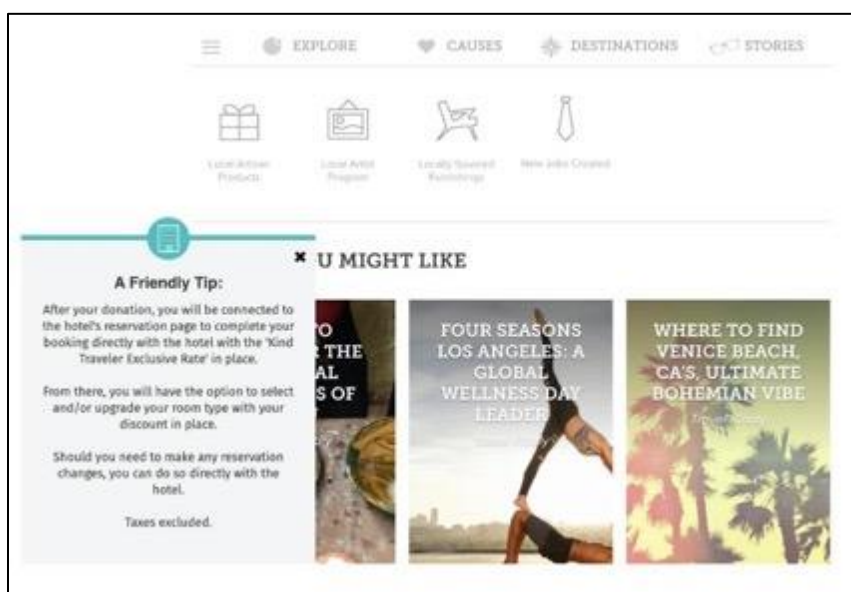

Figure 4.29 Screenshot retrieved from platform Kind Traveller

Figure 4.30 Screenshot retrieved from platform Kind Traveller

Moreover, Responsible Travel have a give back programme where they are seen to campaign for change with NGOs and activists. Through this programme, socially conscious travellers are able to give back through the initiative Trip for a Trip. By booking through Responsible Travel, the platform will pay for a day out for a disadvantaged child. Figure 4.31 represents a description of the initiative alongside an impactful video. This appears to be a form of content marketing due to the platform stimulating interest through promoting the services it provides. The content explains the initiative, whist implementing thought provoking insights into the lives of disadvantaged children. This evidently links responsible tourism practices by promoting the benefits to local communities.
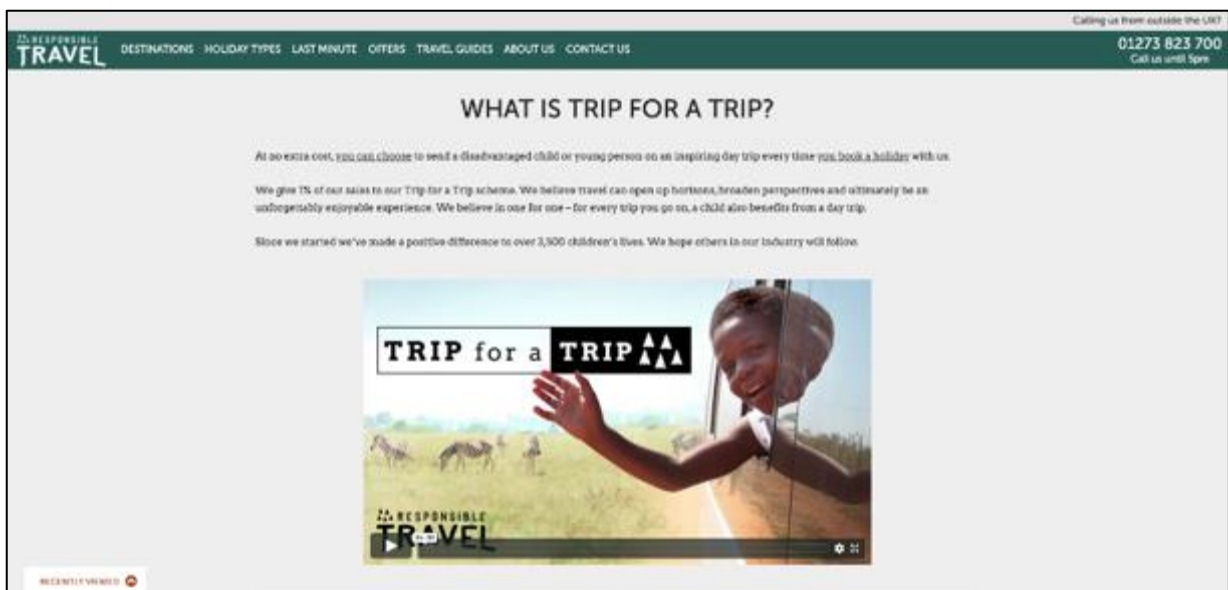

Figure 4.31 Screenshot retrieved from platform Responsible Travel

Similarly, Steppes Travel incentives customers to book within their platform by pledging to add £50 into the Steppes fund for change with every booking (figure 4.32). With half of the money supporting women's empowerment, girls' education and wildlife conservation, and the other half spent on expanding their woodland and searching for clean and safe future energy solutions. Through being transparent, the consumer can directly track where their money is going and can follow the projects progression.
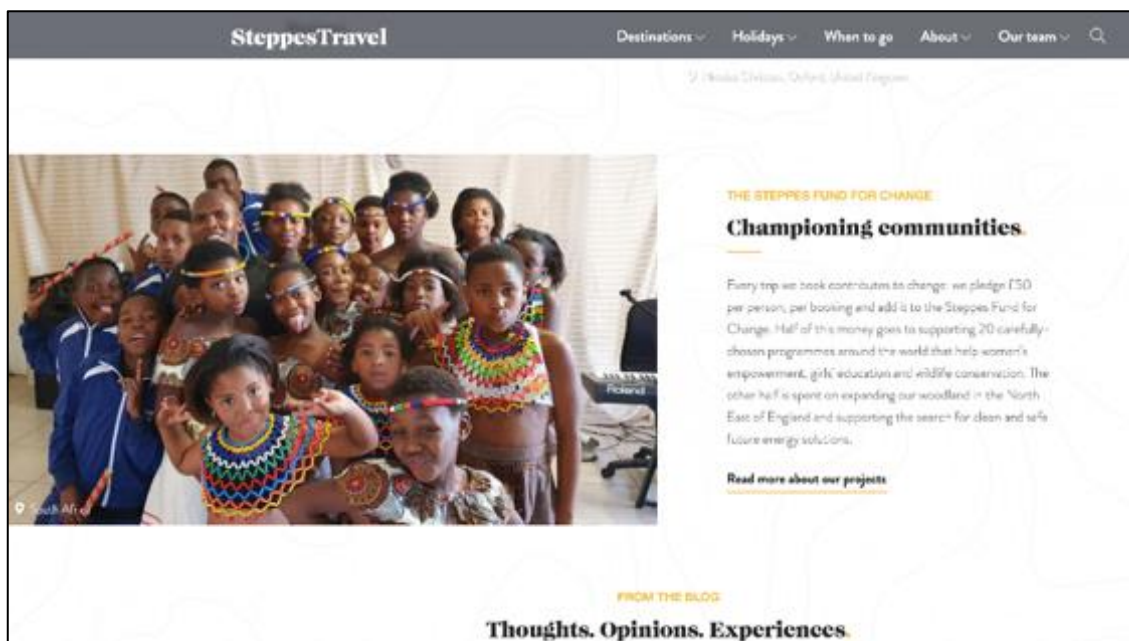

Figure 4.32 Screenshot retrieved from platform Steppes Travel

Meaningful & Authentic Trips

Another key element that became significant through textual analysis was the promotion of meaningful and authentic trips through tailormade tours. It became noticeable that the practicing of responsible tourism was being exemplified through products such as nature-based, cultural and adventure trips where guests could fully immerse in a holistic experience, without skimping on the amenities or service provided. For example, Fair Voyage states on their homepage 'experiential luxury trips with positive impact' (figure 4.33). Figure 4.34 displays a luxury tailormade tour to Kilimanjaro with all the inclusions laid out.
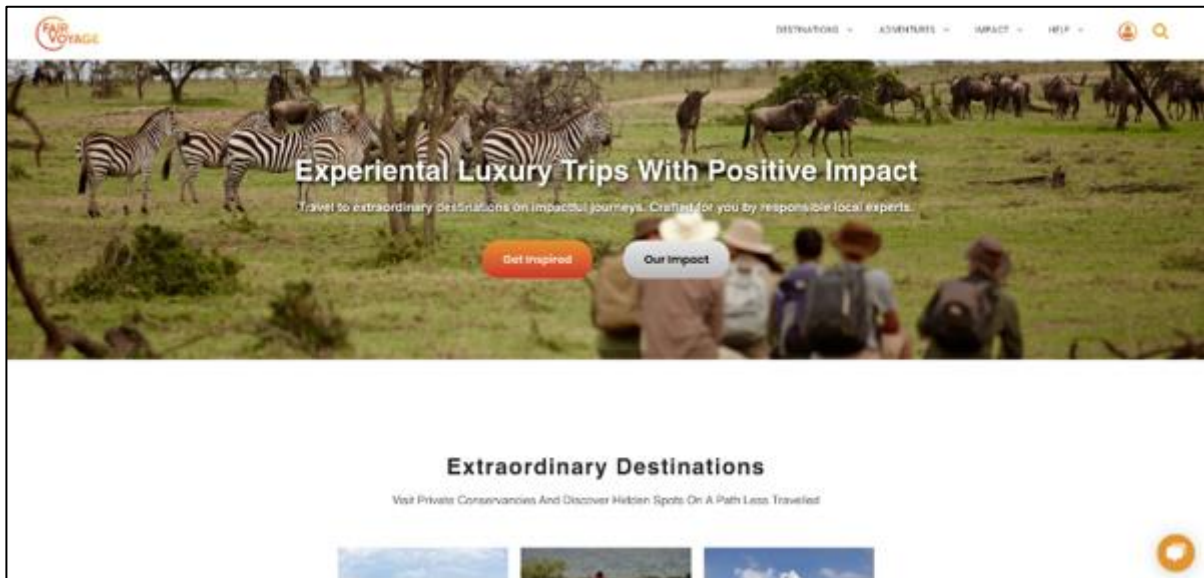
Figure 4.33 Screenshot retrieved from platform Fair Voyage

Within these inclusions are extra details of handy suggestions such as advocating travellers to tip their porters who tend to rely on gratitude's as a substantial source of income. This eludes to the promotion of responsible tourism by educating ethically concerned travellers on how they can enhance positive impacts to tourist destinations. Moreover, figure 4.35 shows this particular tour operator has been approved by KPAP Partner for Responsible Tourism. Essentially, this provides credibility to the tour as it is shown to be committed to socially responsible travel practices by verifying fair porter treatment practices. By displaying this tour as a partner for responsible travel ensures the ethically concerned consumer that fair and ethical treatment of the mountain crew is apparent.
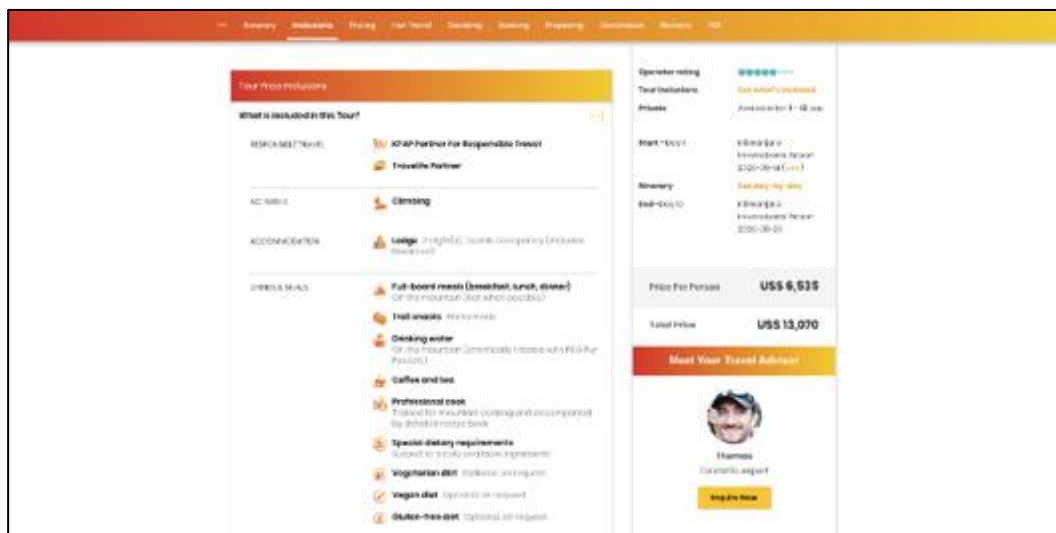

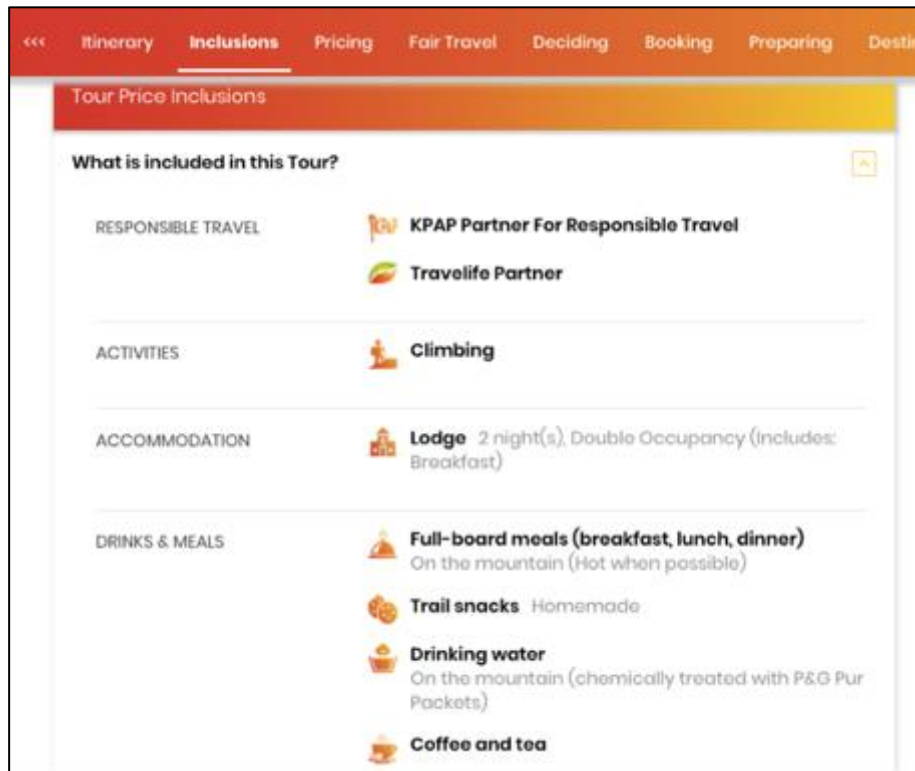Figure 4.34 Screenshot retrieved from platform Fair Voyage

Figure 4.35 Screenshot retrieved from platform Fair Voyage

The tour has also reached the Travelife certified status, the highest level a tour operator can reach. By attaining this status suggests the assessment carried out by an independent auditor reaches more than the basic sustainability requirements set out by Travelife, thus are in line with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council criteria. By adding an affiliate link to the criteria set out points the conscientious consumer directly to the website. This can be seen as strategic marketing initiative to increase the trust and quality of the platform.

In comparison, socially-conscious booking platform Responsible Travel have a devoted section to luxury tours. Within these tailor-made tours includes unique and personalized experiences that focus on experiential luxury. The platform states within this section "don't expect air-conditioned and all-inclusive, expect off the beaten track and originality" (see figure 4.36). This proposes the promotion of sustainable luxury by focusing on providing bespoke and unique experiences, rather than endorsing mainstream package holidays where little focus is paid to the overall holistic involvement and more on the promotion of the place.
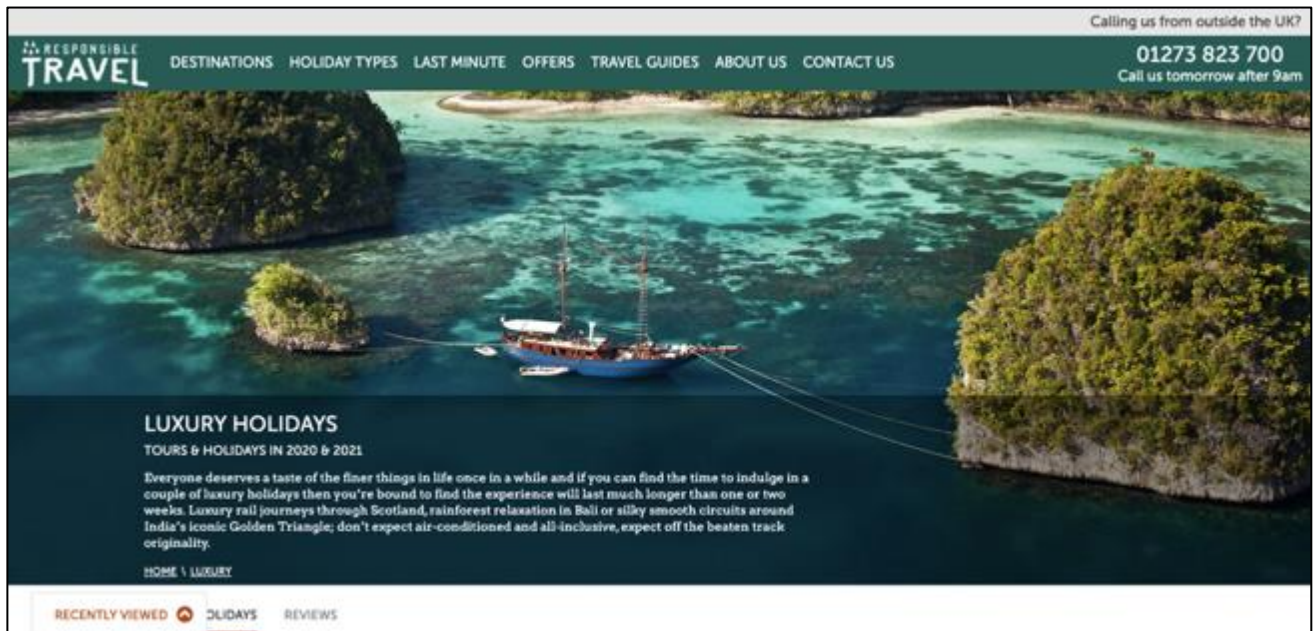
Figure 4.36 Screenshot retrieved from platform Responsible Travel

The platforms tailor-made tours allow consumers to actively participate in creating their own unique experiences through the online holiday planner. Hanna et al (2017) suggests there is noted emphasis on tourists looking for memorable experiences through a connection with ethical and authentic encounters. The analysis corresponds to this notion by displaying a more pragmatic approach, linking sustainability to tourist experience where the creation and portrayal of memorable experiences is at the forefront. This essentially provides a unique selling point to the consumer, without explicitly referencing sustainable tourism as an opposition to mass tourism. Therefore, the holiday planner enables travelers to create their own luxury experiences, with a particular promotion on authenticity. For example, a tailormade trip to Si Lanka clearly advocates authentic experiences by displaying an image of their local culture with the wording "Tailor made sounds too impersonal when describing this trip. This Anglo-Sri Lankan duo create holidays from the heart. Their passion for the country is impressive and infectious." (see figure 4.37).

Figure 4.37 Screenshot retrieved from platform Responsible Travel

4.2.2. Nature and Eco-Tourism

Nature and Eco tourism is a recurring product segment that is being promoted throughout the platforms. This market segment is seen to place emphasis on the destination's natural environment for its settings and attractions. Textual analysis revealed that both concepts fall under the same category as they have a high focus on the natural environment, however, eco-tourism can be seen as more rigorous, having a direct impact on the welfare of local communities. With this in mind, three subcategories became evident throughout the analysis including **soft adventure, hard adventure** and **wildlife tourism** which will be discussed further.

Soft Adventure

Taking a more relaxed approach to adventure, soft adventure refers to activities that require little to no experience. This encourages experiences though the use of the natural landscape, yet is less physically and mentally demanding. Soft activities include backpacking, horseback riding, safaris, surfing, kayaking, camping more. Therefore, the platforms are promoting experiential travel through soft activities, creating deeper relationships with the communities they visit and enriching natural environments. Manana Travel are seen to promote a glamping experience amongst the stars. By using words such as "off the beaten track" alludes to a unique experience where travelers can be close to nature (see figure 4.38). Furthermore, a detailed description of the camp is displayed where the platform uses phrases such as "pristine clear waters", "white sand beaches", "treetop dining room", "explore this nature lovers paradise" and "sleep by the sounds of the bush at night" (see figure 4.39).

Figure 4.38 Screenshot retrieved from platform Manana Travel

Manana Travel highlights the benefits of experiencing travel through nature by seemingly taking the consumer into an idyllic state of mind. Phrases such as "reconnect with nature", and "take you to the heart of nature" imply the protection and consideration of the natural environment. Lastly, this particular platform states "Paperbark Camp follows a sustainable philosophy and has Advanced Eco Accreditation". Essentially, this promotes to a highly concerned tourist looking to leave minimal impact on the environment by ensuring travellers that sustainable practices are being implemented to ensure the highest level of commitment to the environment is being applied. This is also known as hard eco-tourism due to the camp looking beyond just implementing sustainable practices, thus approaching nature from a holistic view by working with guests to ensure their experience goes beyond a basic understanding.
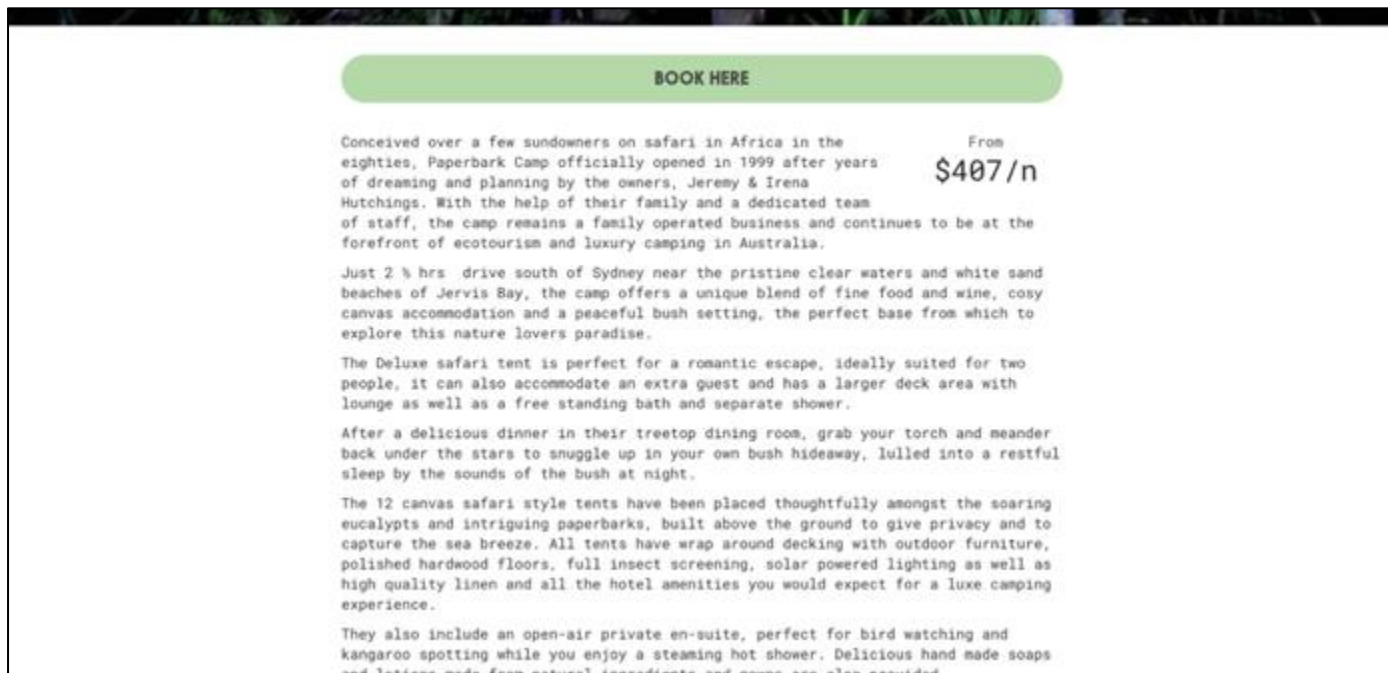
BOOK HERE

Conceived over a few sundowners on safari in Africa in the eighties, Paperbark Camp officially opened in 1999 after years of dreaming and planning by the owners, Jeremy & Irena Hutchings. With the help of their family and a dedicated team of staff, the camp remains a family operated business and continues to be at the forefront of ecotourism and luxury camping in Australia.

From
$407/n

Just 2 ½ hrs drive south of Sydney near the pristine clear waters and white sand beaches of Jervis Bay, the camp offers a unique blend of fine food and wine, cosy canvas accommodation and a peaceful bush setting, the perfect base from which to explore this nature lovers paradise.

The Deluxe safari tent is perfect for a romantic escape, ideally suited for two people, it can also accommodate an extra guest and has a larger deck area with lounge as well as a free standing bath and separate shower.

After a delicious dinner in their treetop dining room, grab your torch and meander back under the stars to snuggle up in your own bush hideaway, lulled into a restful sleep by the sounds of the bush at night.

The 12 canvas safari style tents have been placed thoughtfully amongst the soaring eucalypts and intriguing paperbarks, built above the ground to give privacy and to capture the sea breeze. All tents have wrap around decking with outdoor furniture, polished hardwood floors, full insect screening, solar powered lighting as well as high quality linen and all the hotel amenities you would expect for a luxe camping experience.

They also include an open-air private en-suite, perfect for bird watching and kangaroo spotting while you enjoy a steaming hot shower. Delicious hand made soaps and lotions made from natural ingredients and gowns are also provided.

Figure 4.39 Screenshot retrieved from platform Manana Travel

Hard Adventure

In general, the activities being promoted convey active participation and are shown to target travellers seeking intensive recreational experiences, where they are able to challenge themselves both physically and mentally. The term hard adventure has been used to describe this sub category as the concept is used within academia to describe activities with higher levels of risk, targeting those with advanced skills. Examples of hard adventure include mountain climbing, trekking, caving, paragliding, hiking and so forth. These actives are based in rugged and natural outdoor locations, through a high level of interaction with the environment. Platforms such as Much Better Adventures and Adventure Alternative specifically target adventure seekers looking for exploration through travelling to remote and wilderness destinations, with perceived and possible risk.

Both platforms have clear consideration for the natural environment through the promotion of each adventure. For example, Much Better Adventures state their goal is "to protect our world's wild places, one adventure at a time". This is clearly shown within each adventure by promoting the benefits of using the natural landscape for outdoor activities. Each tour shows a difficulty level, alongside the group size, accommodation type and various other details (see figure 4.40). The inclusion of locals allows for a cultural exchange for the traveller as we all as providing jobs to host communities, ultimately giving back to the local economy.
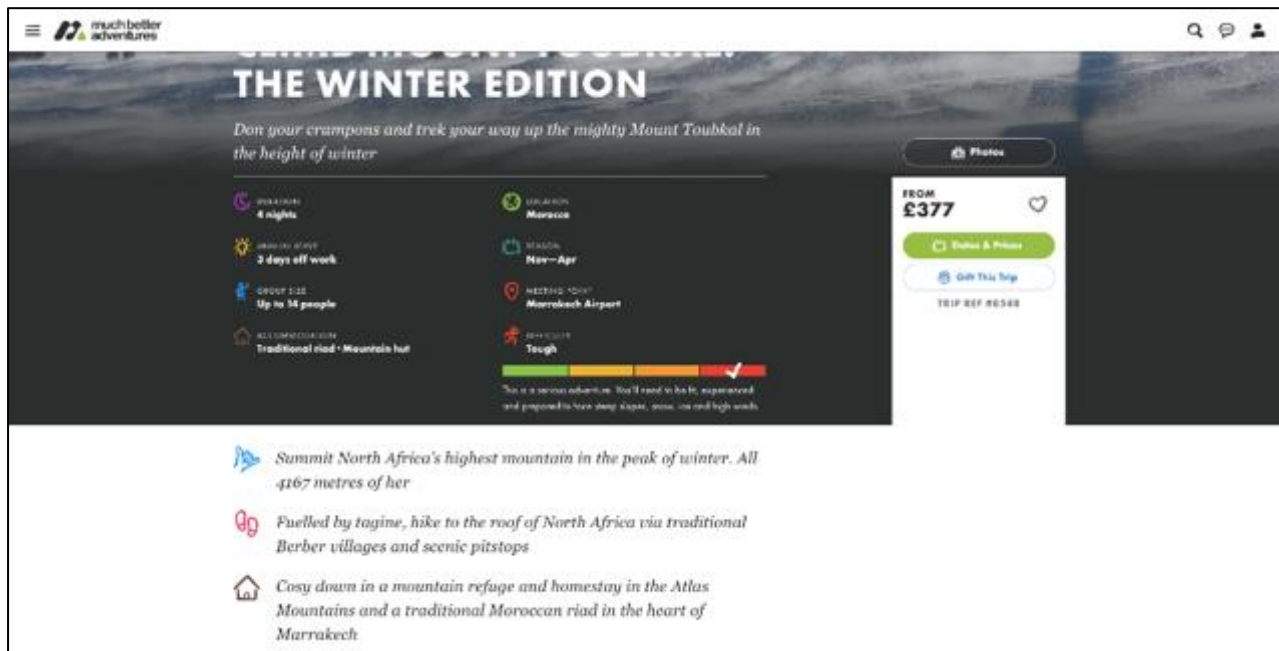
Figure 4.40 Screenshot retrieved from platform Much Better Adventures

Furthermore, both platforms are seen to promote insightful blogs which include guides, factual information and inspiring stories all based around adventure (see figure 4.41 and 4.42). A particular blog post from Much Better Adventures adheres to the mutual benefits adventure tourism such as hiking can contribute to benefiting wildlife and the natural environment. At the end of the blog post is a direct link to a similar trip where you can read a day-by-day itinerary of the bear watching and hiking adventure. This appears to be a strategic marketing strategy aimed at educating and promoting the tours beforehand through a blog, explaining to the ethically concerned traveller the benefits of each trip and how they can enrich the natural environment when hiking.
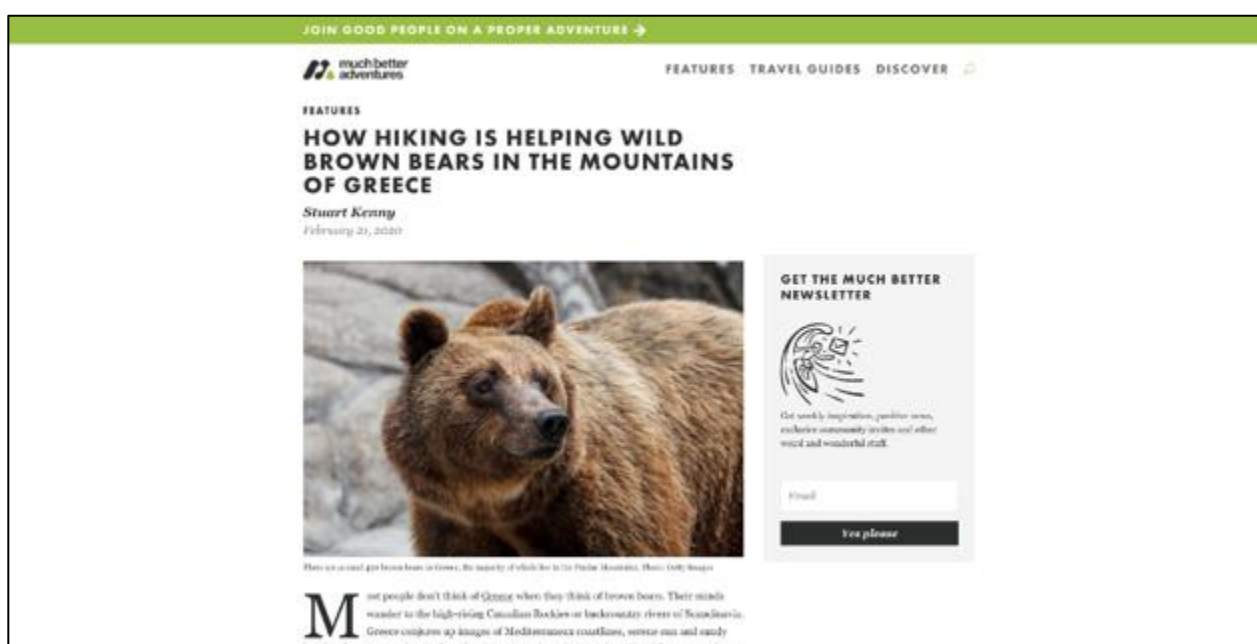

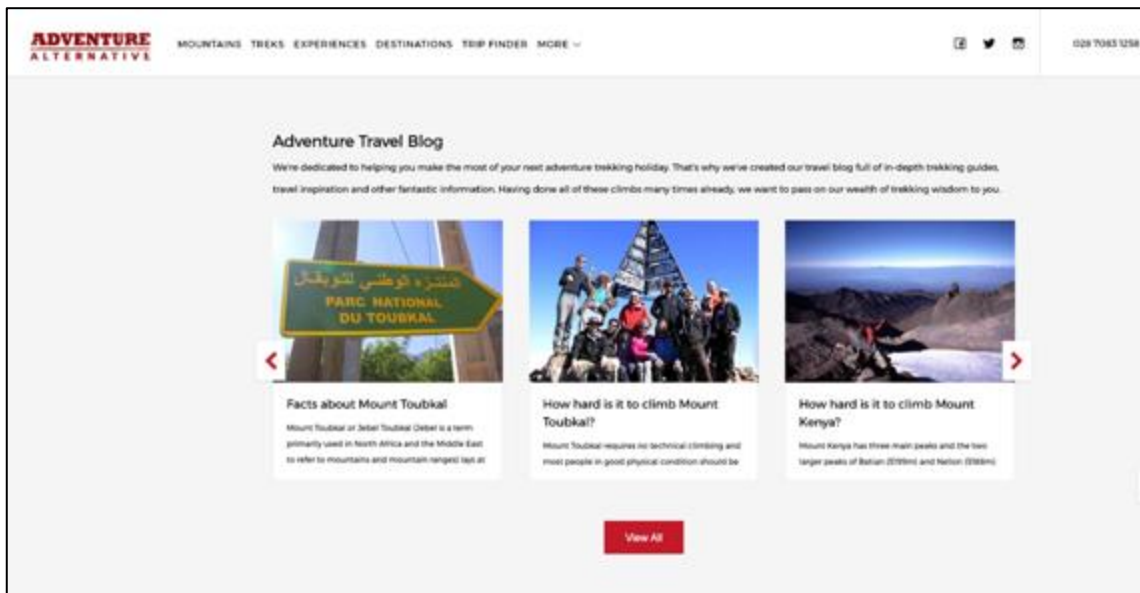Figure 4.41 Screenshot retrieved from platform Much Better Adventures

Figure 4.42 Screenshot retrieved from platform Adventure Alternative

Similarly, Adventure Alternative's blog posts focus on providing factual information about the different mountain ranges the tours visit. By explaining in detail facts about each potential trip gives the consumer the necessary information to prepare them for travelling within unfamiliar territory and adheres to the responsibility travellers have when visiting unfamiliar territory. They also provide a more holistic view to hard adventure through dramatic videos of the natural landscape and its beauty (see figure 4.43).
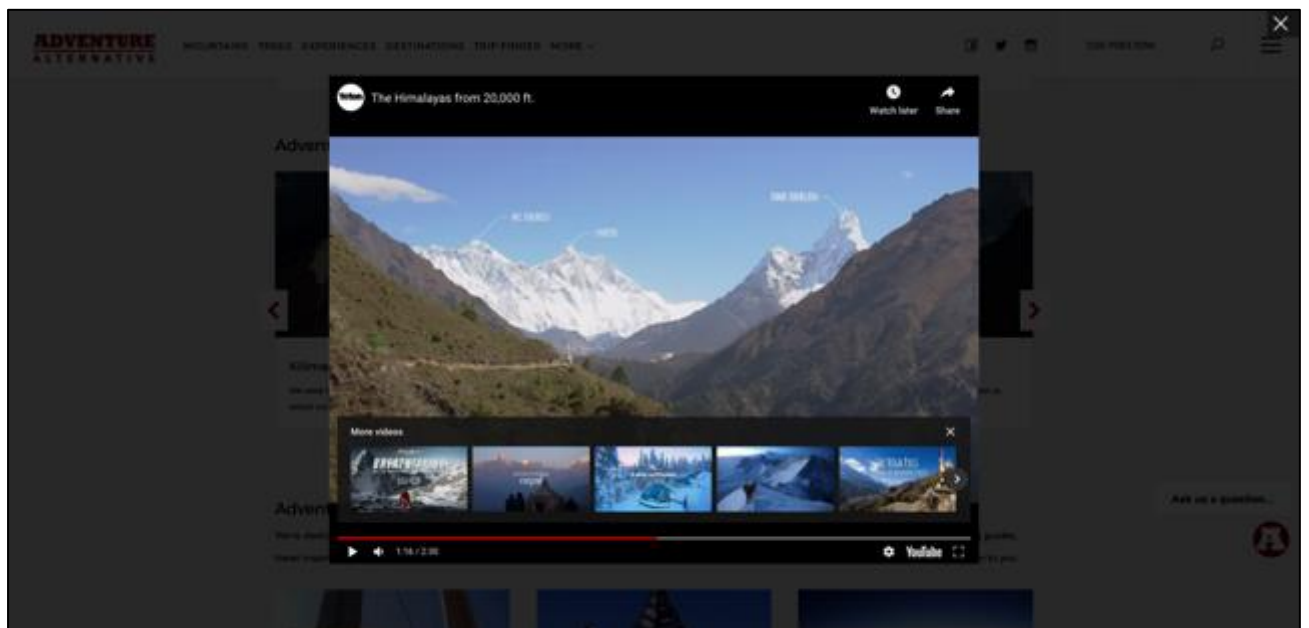

Figure 4.43 Screenshot retrieved from platform Adventure Alternative

Wildlife Tourism

It was evident from the analysis that a majority of the platforms were promoting wildlife through nature-based tourism. In particular, the platform & Beyond specifically promote African Safaris through various marketing techniques. Within their homepage is a link to a

live stream safari tour where the consumer is taken on an immersive experience, getting a glimpse into the safaris the platform provides (see figure 4.44). By leveraging livestreaming within the platform is a unique digital marketing strategy that builds trust with potential consumers by engaging them through getting up close and personal to the natural environment.

Furthermore, next to the livestream is the promotion of the platform's digital magazine, &Beyond TV and thought-provoking podcasts. The image within these promotions connects travellers with local cultures who are seen to share the natural landscape with wildlife. &Beyond's TV allows travellers to watch educational and interactive episodes of animals in their natural habitats and ultimately prepares them for a trip with &Beyond (see figure 4.45).
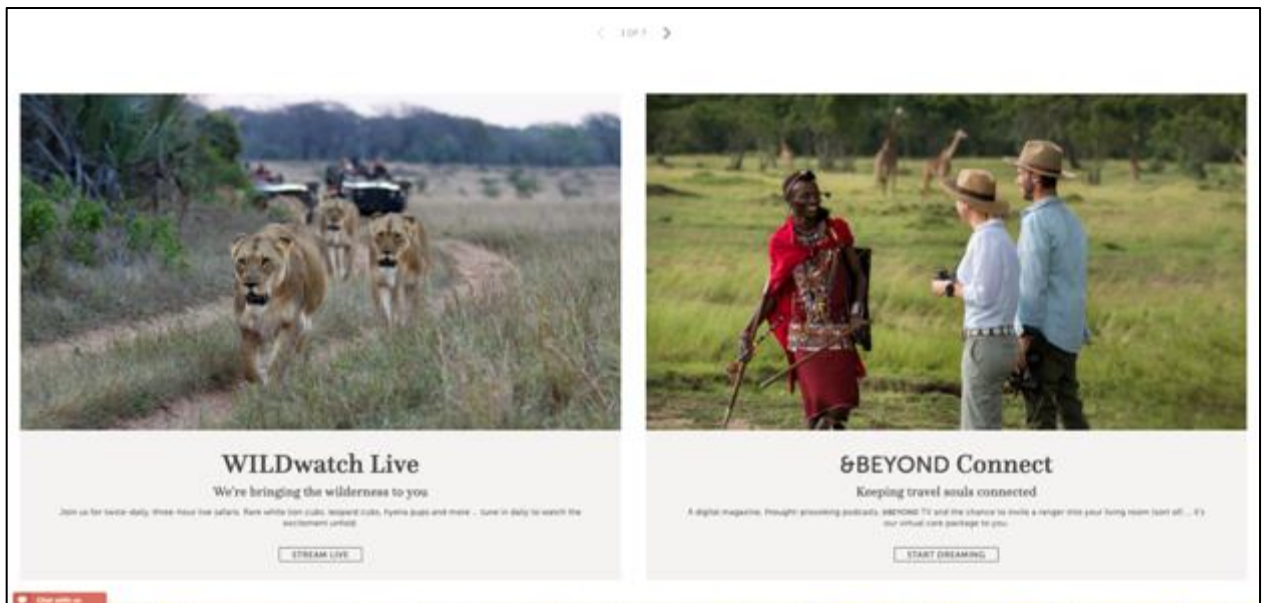

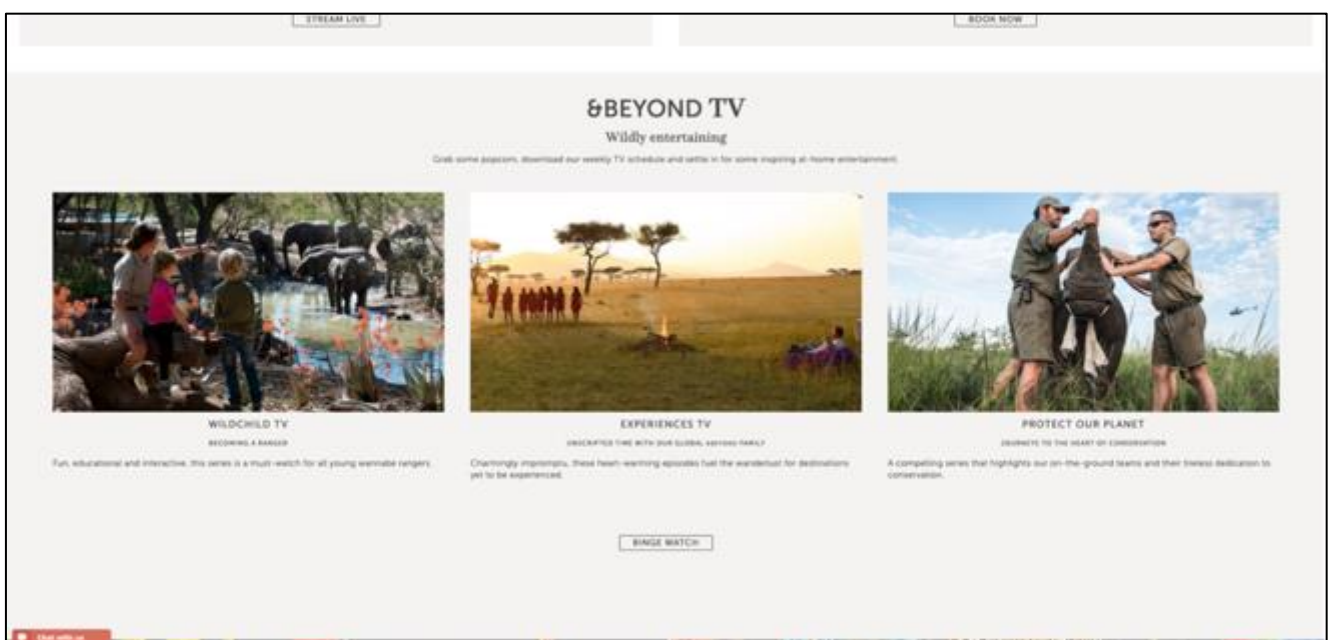Figure 4.44 Screenshot retrieved from platform &Beyond

Figure 4.44 Screenshot retrieved from platform &Beyond

By booking a wildlife tour through tour operators encourages travellers to be respectful of animals by educating them beforehand. &Beyond's podcasts focus on changemakers who dedicate themselves to conservation and community empowerment (see figure 4.45). By sharing emotive and powerful stories encourages travellers to view animals as a valuable commodity and a vital component of the tourism industry that should be looked after.
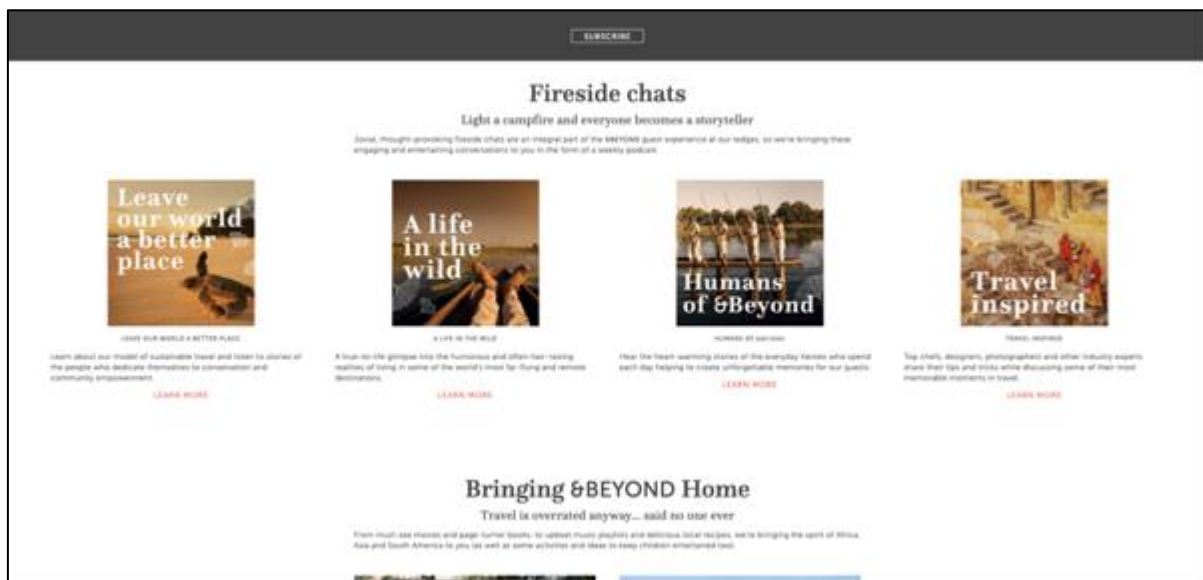

Figure 4.45 Screenshot retrieved from platform &Beyond

4.2.4 Culture and Community-Based Tourism

According to qualitative analysis, the platforms clearly displayed experiences through the promotion of culture and community-based tourism. Indeed, both culture and community-based tourism is shown to bring together travellers and locals within host destinations. Through a range of promotional activities, the analysis brings to light the social and environmental practices being implemented within this product segment to preserve and enhance local culture and ensure the revenue from tourist is bringing positive change to underprivileged communities. Therefore, two sub-categories appeared including: **cultural exchange** and **interactive activities**

Cultural Exchange

It appears a high emphasis has been placed on cultural trips where travellers are able to interact with locals by exploring new cultures, customs, traditions, beliefs and much more. Novelli (2005) suggests niche tourism has emerged to counter-point mass tourism, and implies a more sophisticated set of practices that differentiae and distinguish tourists. He further

explains niche tourism offers opportunities for greater sustainability (Novelli, 2005). This appears to be the case within the platforms as they are targeting a consumer that is more aware of sustainable development and environmental issues through the promotion of local culture. For example, the platform I Like Local is a dedicated platform specifically for interacting with locals. The platforms use phrases such as "travel your way, support their way", implying a mutual benefiting travel experience (see figure 4.46). Accompanied with this statement is an authentic picture of a local suggesting by booking the local way you are able to interact with host communities and experience their culture first hand.
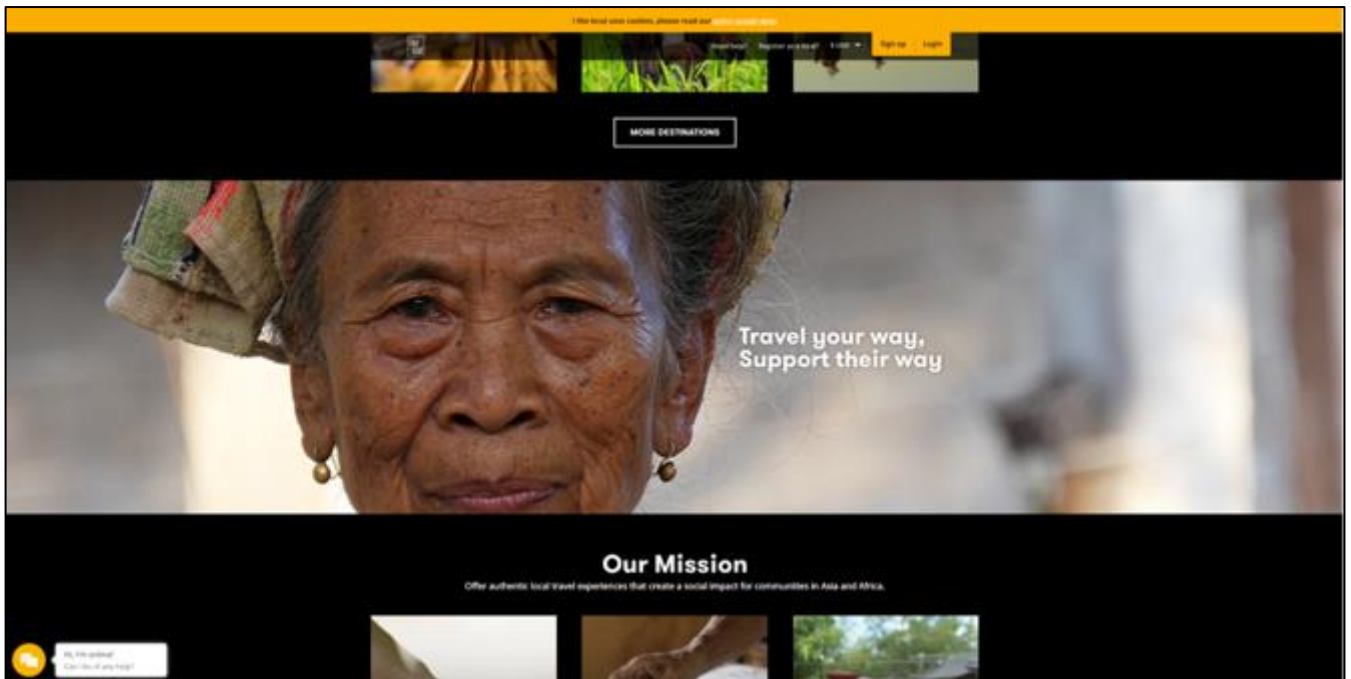

Figure 4.46 Screenshot retrieved from platform I Like Local

Figure 4.47 Screenshot retrieved from platform I Like Local

In general, community-based tourism is tourism in which locals invite tourists to visit their communities with accommodation often included. Locals are able to earn an income through jobs such as tour guides, service and produce providers, entrepreneurs and so forth. By I Like Local explaining first-hand the benefits the platform has brought local shows the mutually benefiting exchanges tourists, locals and the platform can have. Kitt, a local from Thailand explains "I Like Local not only helps me to provide basic needs for my family, but also for my village. With the money I am able to educate farmers and help them to farm in harmony with nature and not harm it" (see figure 4.47). This shows the direct benefits of booking within the platform as it puts emphasis on shared leadership, emphasizing community well-being. Therefore, this is just one example of how community-based tourism can create a cultural exchange where travellers are able to connect closely with local communities and locals are able to work with tour operators, thus creating new job opportunities.

Interactive activities

Another sub-category that appeared predominant is the promotion of interactive, hands-on activities. The review of findings indicates a significant proportion of the products promoted incorporate interactive activities within local communities. These activities appear to be a trend towards authenticity where consumers are able to immerse themselves in the language, crafts, customs, cuisine and other aspects of the region visited. Through cultural tourism, travellers are able to learn about other cultures through active participation. For example, I Like Local promote a tour to Yogyakarta where tourists are able to learn how to make pottery (see figure 4.48). It is through these activities travellers are able to interact with locals whilst learning about new cultures. This promotes responsible tourism as it considers the bigger picture through preserving local culture and traditions as well as encouraging travellers to book locally.
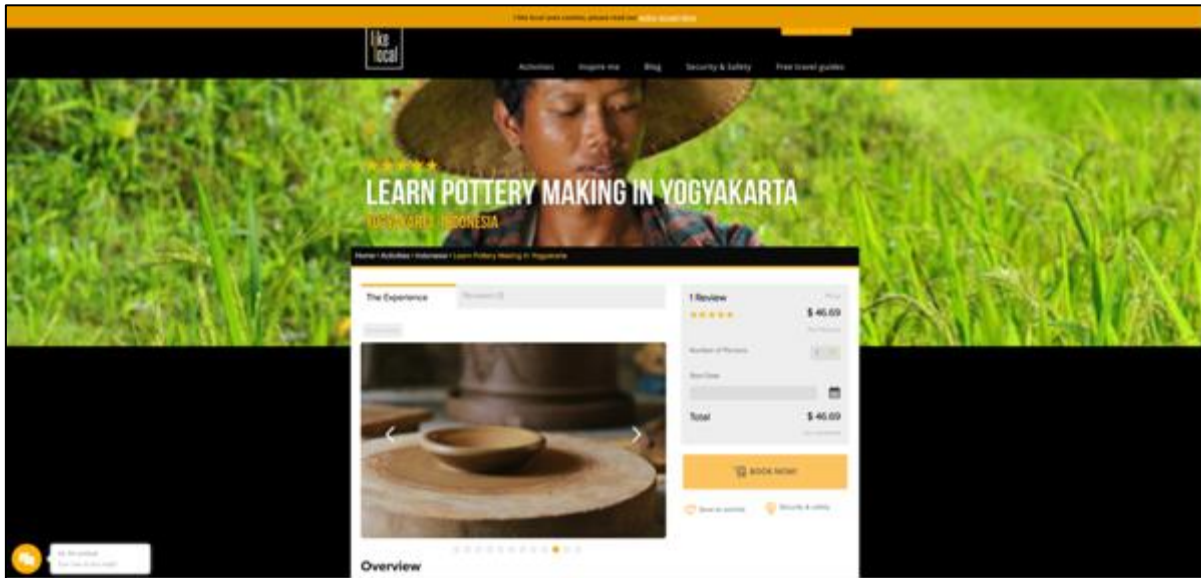
Figure 4.48 Screenshot retrieved from platform I Like Local

Similarly, Duara Travel are also seen to promote cultural-based tourism through interactive experiences. The platform specialise in village experiences where travellers are able to fully immerse in the local traditions and come into close contact with locals. For example, figure 4.49 represents a trip to Bali which specializes in art, handcrafts and music culture. Through this trip, travellers are able to engage deeply with locals through experiencing traditional life. Phrases such as "cooking and eating together with your host family" and "Practicing the livelihood of the family: Wood crafting, preparing daily religious offering suggests an interactive experience where visitors learn new crafts and take in local traditions.
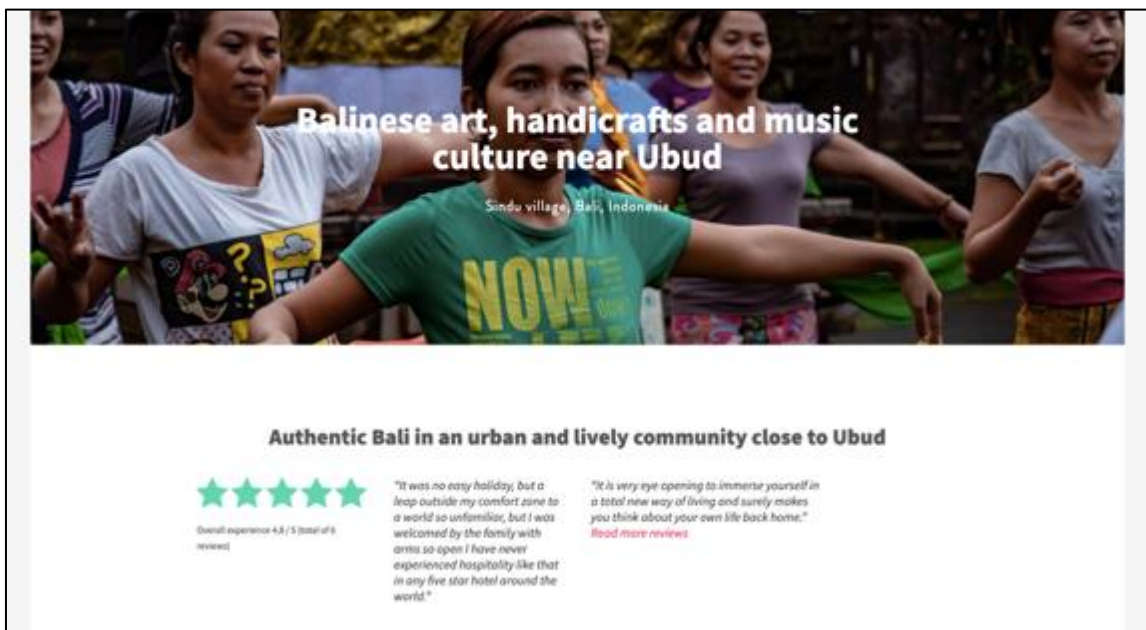

Figure 4.49 Screenshot retrieved from platform Duara Travels

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There is a particular emphasis on educating travellers about the village's local cultures beforehand such as the type of community, its livelihood, what it is famous for, religion and language (see figure 4.50). Ultimately, this is a ploy to preserve local culture, facilitate jobs for the local communities and encourage travellers to use locally owned businesses.
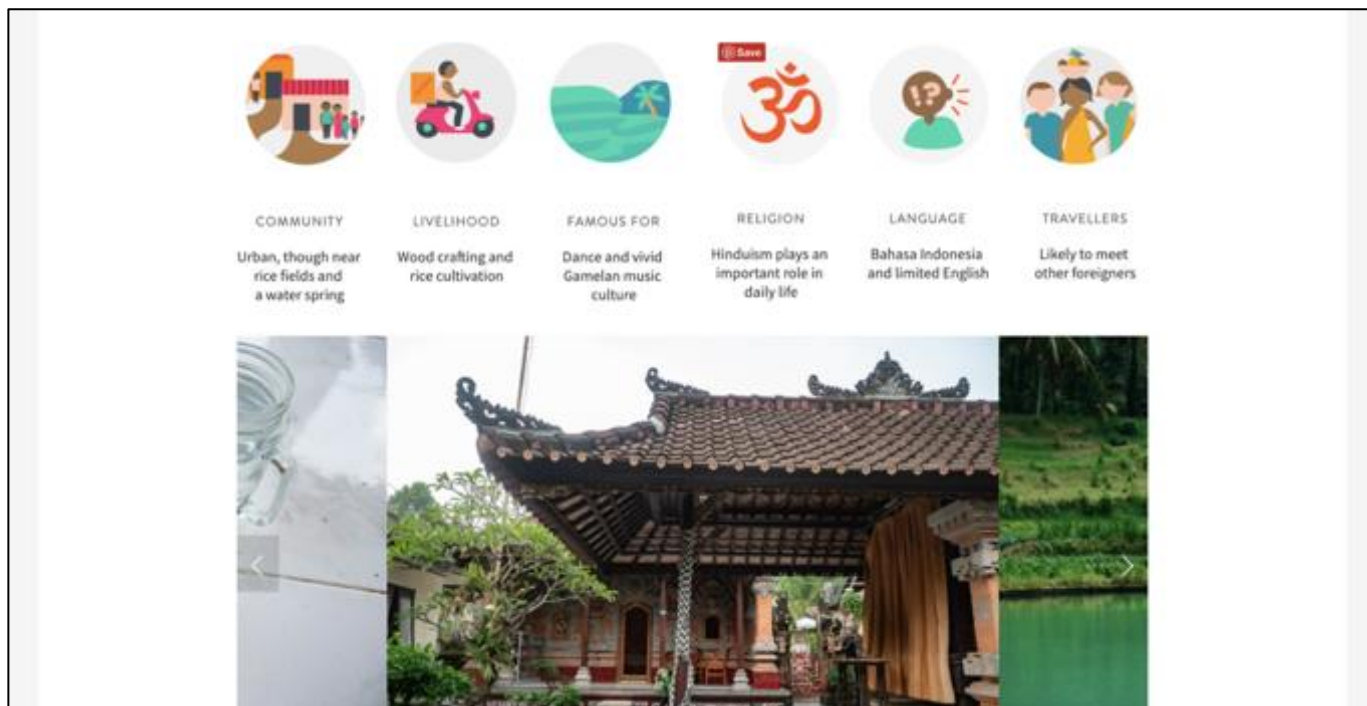

Figure 4.50 Screenshot retrieved from platform Duara Travels

4.2.5 Backpacker and Youth Tourism

This market segment is a predominate theme, and thus constitutes a main category. The analysis revealed this product segment to be at the forefront of many of the platforms, targeting a younger generation of travellers. The analysis also revealed youth tourism to be linked to backpacking, thus can be considered a niche segment of youth tourism. Therefore, through textual analysis it appeared the platforms to be promoting backpacker and youth tourism through **group travel**, **solo travel** and **volunteer and education,** which thus constitutes the three sub-categories.

Group Travel

There is a clear promotion of group travel amongst the platforms, targeting travellers looking to meet new people and experience new places. FTLO Travel is a platform specifically promoting to young professionals as specified within their homepage where they state "modern group travel for ages 25-30" (see figure 51). It is evident they are promoting to a younger generation looking to interact with other people their age and experience new places

in a group setting. Notably, tourism research shows an increasing attention is being paid to young travellers, in particular millennials aged 16-29 (Cavagnaro, Staffieri & Postma, 2017). This is due to the younger generation actively seeking cultural experiences, building on life experiences and learning about new cultures outside their normal environment (Cavagnaro, et al, 2017). Therefore, FTLO travel have targeted millennials through the promotion of group travel where they state "We run laid-back group trips for young professionals that are hassle-free (like a vacation) but have the adventure and cultural enrichment of solo travel" (see figure 52). This is a clear alternative to mass package holidays that are seen as impersonal and lack trips that connect like-minded individuals seeking authentic and culturally enriching experiences.

Figure 4.51 Screenshot retrieved from platform FTLO Travel

Figure 4.52 Screenshot retrieved from platform FTLO Travels

Similarly, Intrepid are seen to promote smaller group travel by stating within their homepage "small group travel that makes a difference". Within the platform they have a dedicated section entitled "18 to 29s trips where they display a range of group-based trips (see figure 53). Through the use of video, the platform is seen to entice the younger generation through showing past experiences, connecting travellers with similar values and beliefs. This can be acknowledged as content marketing, aiming to stimulate interest with younger travellers through a video of travellers past experiences. Essentially, the promotion of group base travel stimulates meaningful trips where travellers are able to travel solo whilst sharing experiences within a group setting.
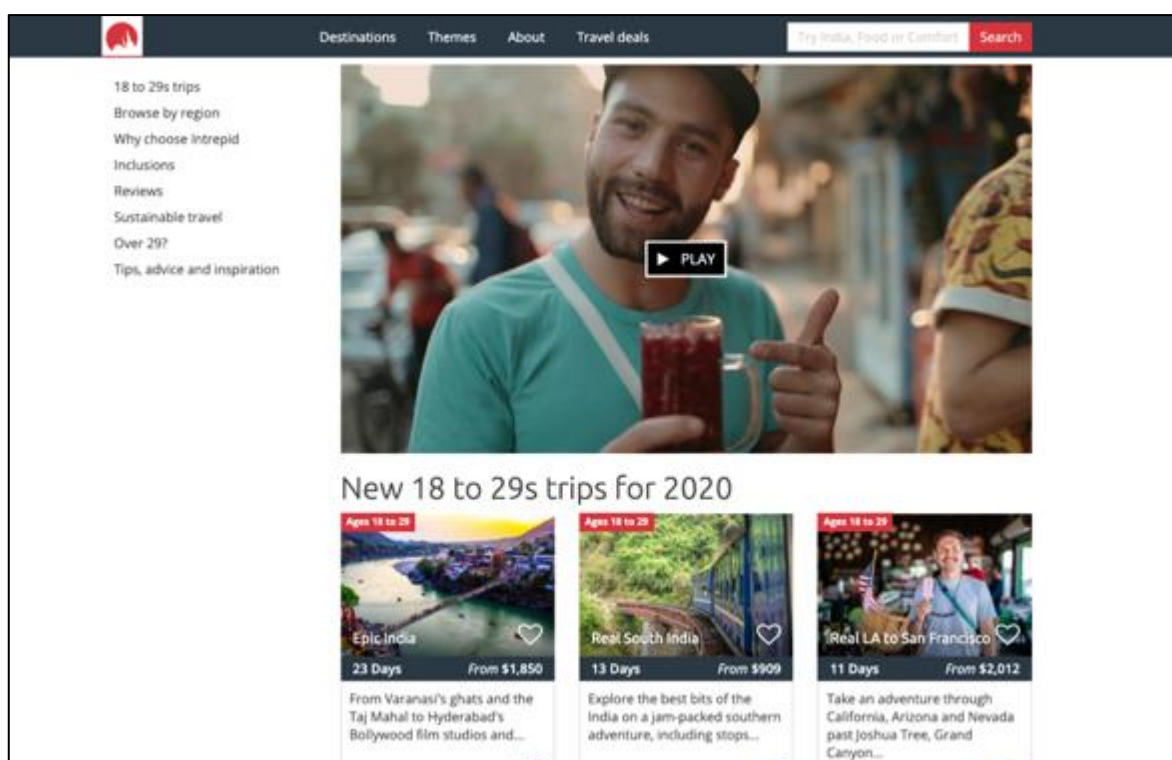
Figure 4.53 Screenshot retrieved from platform Intrepid Travel

Solo Travel

This product segment indicates the promotion of solo travel, intended mainly for young backpackers seeking independent, budget travel. In particular, Backpacker Bible is an online travel resource providing travel advice specifically for backpackers looking to travel solo. Within the platform is a separate section giving advice on how to travel responsibly, with helpful tips to maximize the benefits of responsible tourism. There is specific emphasis on educating the solo backpacker on how they can make informed choices prior to travelling. It is clear they have added backlinks to relevant charities through the travel advice (see figure 4.54). Furthermore, the platforms blog includes post entitled "tips of travelling with a low

budget" and "how to travel the world and get an education (at the same time)" (see figure 4.55). This again provides valuable resources to a young backpacker looking to combine travelling solo with building upon their current skills and knowledge of responsible tourism.

Figure 4.54 Screenshot retrieved from platform Backpacker Bible
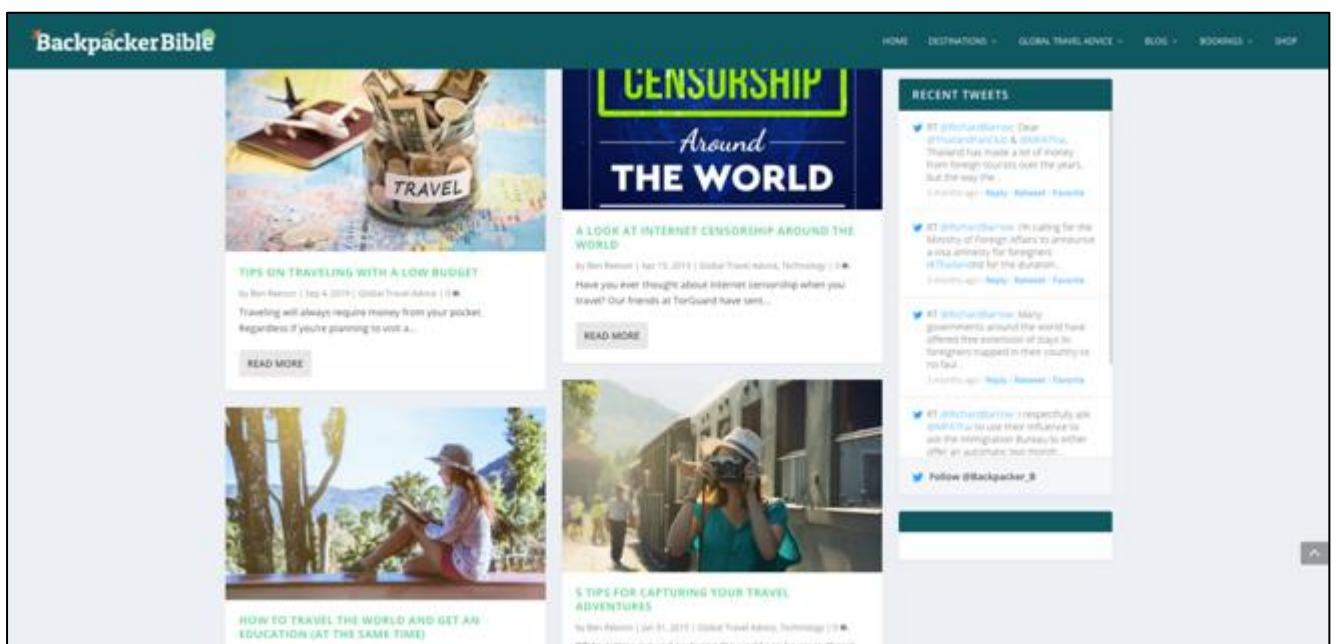

Figure 4.55 Screenshot retrieved from platform Backpacker Bible

Volunteer and education

Finally, textual analysis revealed the promotion of volunteer and educational tourism to younger travellers looking to participate in philanthropy. It is important to acknowledge the platforms promoting two distinct types of voluntary work. Firstly, the platforms appear to

target the dedicated travellers devoted to spending all or most of their time volunteering. In contrast, the platforms also appeared to target holidaymakers who have a vacation mindset, meaning an integrated approach is applied where the traveller can participate in optional excursions that have a volunteer aspect, also known as voluntourism. However, textual analysis revealed a higher promotion to a younger generation seeking to give back, thus devoting their travels to volunteer work.

Responsible Travel have a dedicated section within their platform just for volunteer travel. There are a broad range of volunteering experiences including marine conservation, gap year ideas, internships abroad, community projects, teaching abroad and so forth (see figure 4.56).
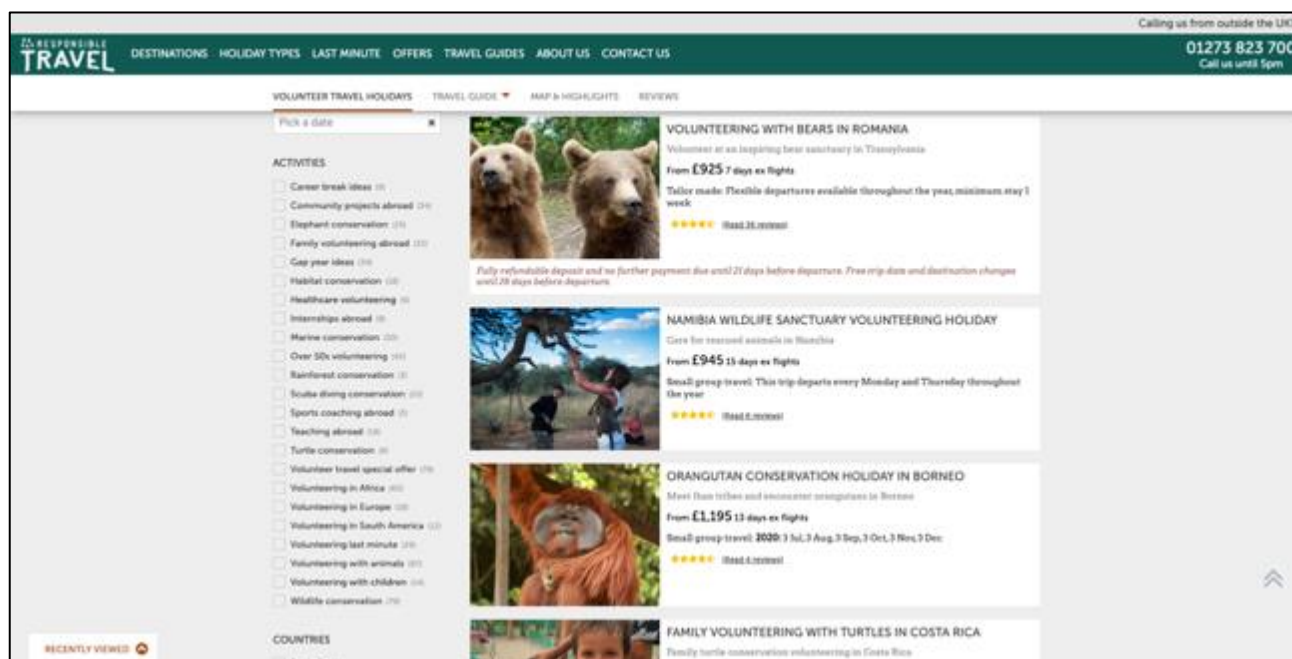
Figure 4.56 Screenshot retrieved from platform Responsible Travel

Furthermore, the platform states "Volunteering abroad used to be a long-term commitment for a highly qualified few. Today, opportunities have opened up for people of all skill levels, in virtually every country in the world". This suggest the promotion to a wide range of travellers, including younger travellers on their gap year looking to immerse in new experiences. By providing volunteer travel guides (see figure 4.57), the platform readily equips tourists through offering necessary tips needed to fully ensure the transformational experiences are for the better. There is a specific focus on transparency, with the platform discouraging travellers to participate in voluntourism due to the concept seeming to embody tourism, yet is shown to be unethical and ineffective (see figure 4.58). It is through insights like these, young travellers are able to educate themselves before-hand in order to align their skill set and knowledge with the right volunteer holiday.

Figure 4.57 Screenshot retrieved from platform Responsible Travel

Figure 4.58 Screenshot retrieved from platform Responsible Travel

4.3 Sustainable Communications

The final theme constitutes the specific communications of how the platform is promoting responsible tourism through its various *values* and *initiatives*. These two predominant themes emerged from the data when looking at the platform's corporate social responsibility and its specific communications that aim to align with both an ethical and conscientious consumer.

Therefore, textual analysis revealed further sub-categories which will be explained below.

4.3.1 Values

According to qualitative analysis, the online platforms share similar values through their marketing activities in order to appeal to a segmented target market. Each platform presents a core set of values that align with the notion of sustainability. More specifically, it became clear through the analysis that the platforms are advocates of sustainable development, thus recognizing the need to promote certain values, behaviors and attitudes in order to facilitate change and meet the needs of responsible consumers. Therefore, these guiding principles include **transparency**, **education**, **commitment**, **responsibility**, and **trust**.

Transparency
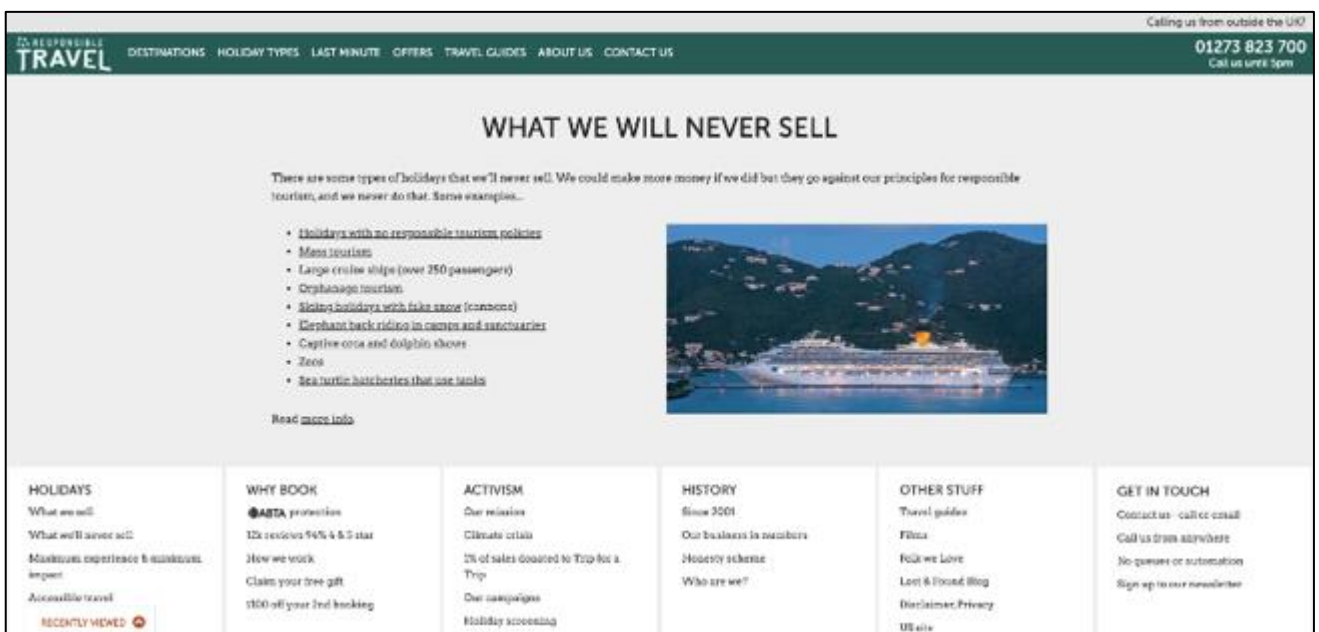
Figure 4.59 Screenshot retrieved from platform Responsible Travel

In general, the sustainable platforms are seen to promote transparency to the consumer by openly explaining how they operate. Through textual analysis, the tone of voice became apparent and supports the idea that transparency is a fundamental component to building lasting relationships with all stakeholders. Responsible Travel state the holiday's they will never sell (see figure 4.59). By clearly communicating the holiday's that are not sustainable alludes to the promotion of responsible tourism through transparency and further educating travelers of the holidays that have a negative impact on natural and social environment.

Furthermore, Duara Travels is seen to promote transparency through its payment process, showing the customer a clear breakdown of how their payment gets divided. This can be seen by figure 4.60 and displays most of the payment is given back to the community members hosting families as well as the rest of the host community. By displaying transparency through the platform's payment process shows an innovative way to engage in responsible tourism by encouraging consumers to give back to its host destination by booking through the platform.
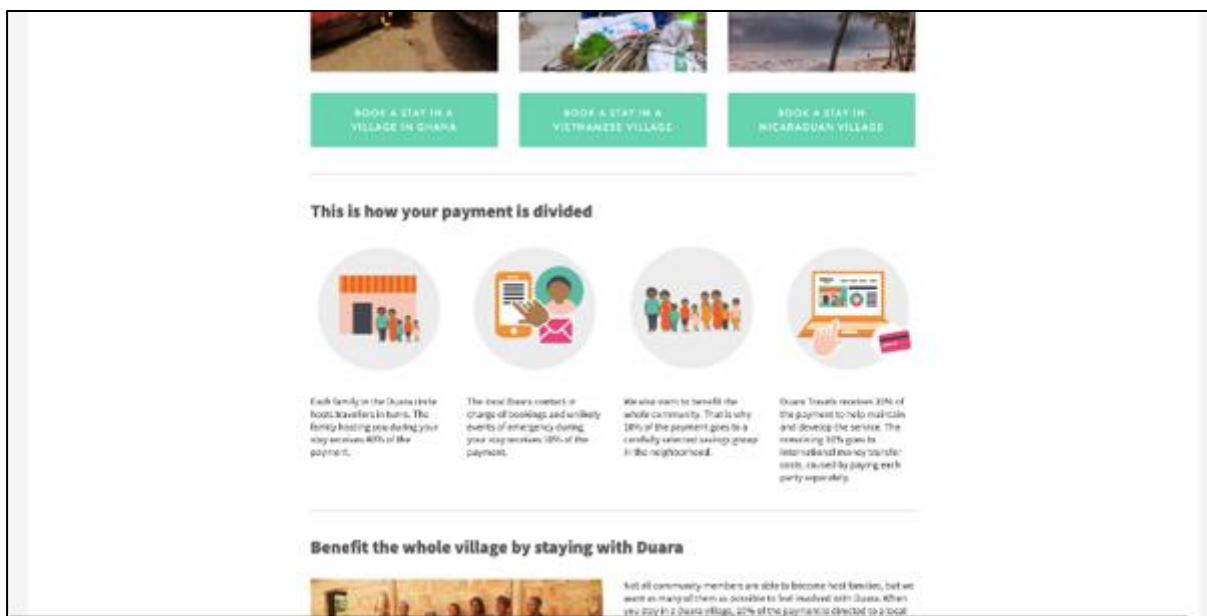
Figure 4.60 Screenshot retrieved from platform Duara Travels

Education

It became apparent a key focus is on education, targeting travellers who are both ethically concerned or conscious about how they can become more responsible when travelling. By providing valuable tips and facts about sustainable tourism suggests a clear promotion of responsible tourism. Rickshaw Travel have a dedicated section to responsible travel, with a section called 'how to be a meaningful traveller' (see figure 4.61). Within this they state "every traveller can play their part in minimizing the negative impact of tourism". Therefore, by listing insightful tips such as 'buying local' or 'living local' provides informative information to the traveller on how they can contribute to reducing the negative impact tourism is having through a variety of behavioral changes.
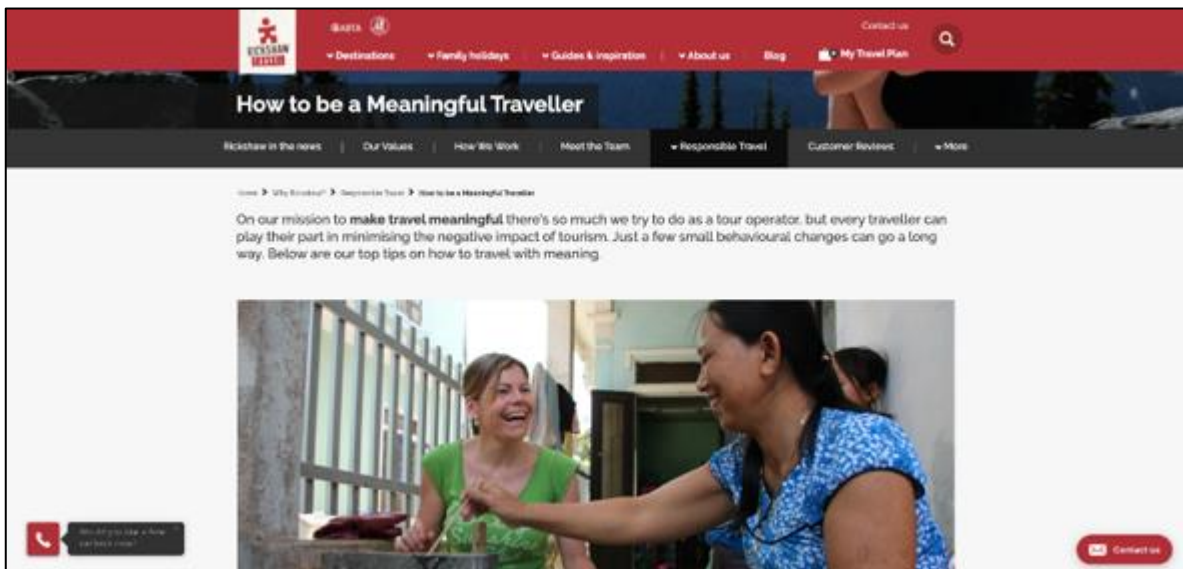
Figure 4.61 Screenshot retrieved from platform Rickshaw Travel
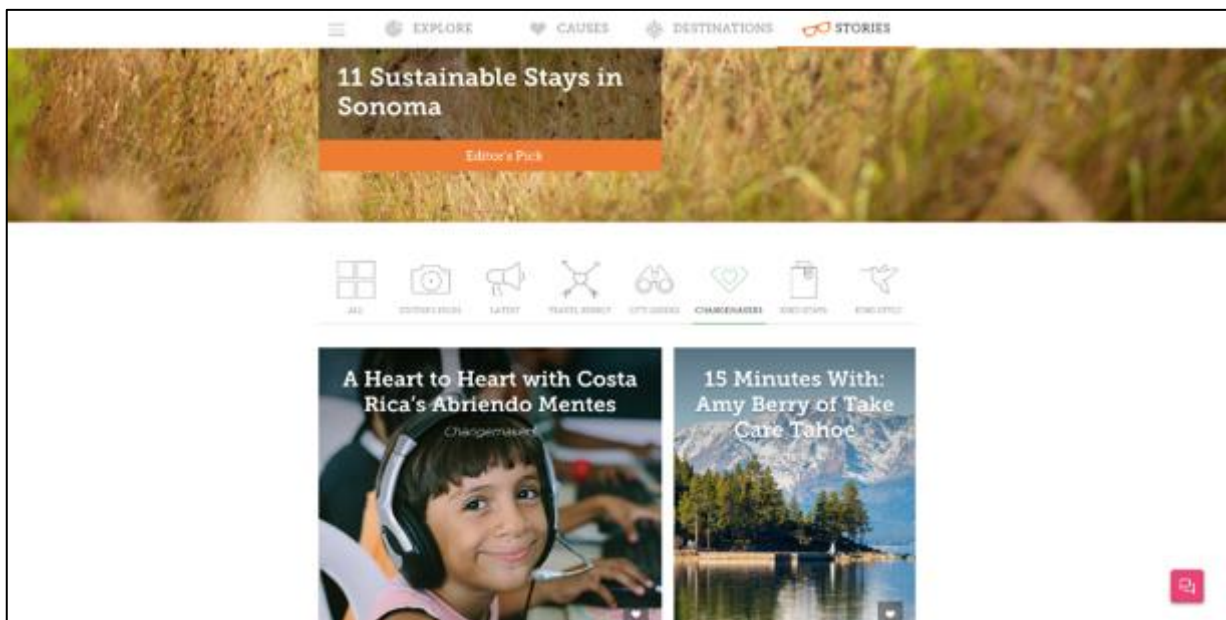
Figure 4.62 Screenshot retrieved from platform Kind Traveler

Kind Traveller follow similar values by stating "we seek to inspire conscious decision-making that keeps the greater good in mind". One way they have done this is through inspiring stories, where they have a dedicated section called 'travel kindly' and 'changemakers' (see figure 4.62). These blogs posts include inspiring stories about changemakers who are making a difference. For example, one story follows the platforms partner Abriendo Mentes, a non-profit organisation aimed at "empowering individuals from local rural/underserved communities to develop the skills they need to seize educational and economic opportunities for themselves and their families". The story follows Rachael Sine, county director about her experience working for this NGO. It is through stories and people like Rachel who have the

ability to educate perspective travellers about Responsible Travel as they are able to inspire them through their personal doings and promote conversations about responsible travel.
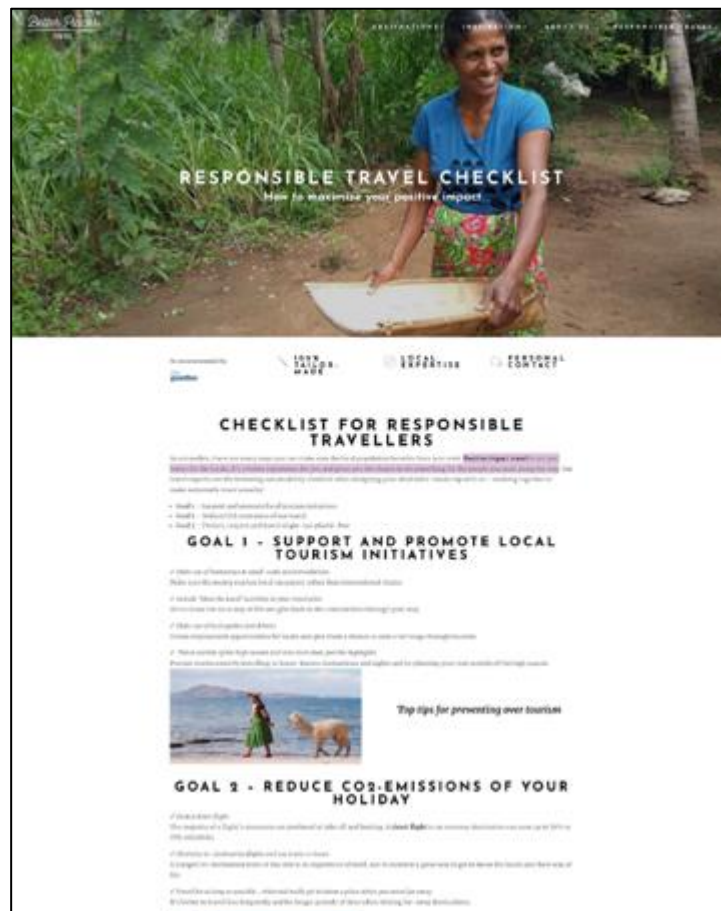
Figure 4.63 Screenshot retrieved from platform Better Places Travel

Similarly, Better Places Travel provide a checklist on how travellers can maximize their positive impact (see figure 4.63) It appears they are promoting positive impact travel through a social marketing strategy, promoting the social good consumers can achieve through educating themselves properly before travelling. Lastly, the use of imagery of a local woman looking content further implies the positive impact tourists are able to contribute to sustainable development through educating themselves on how to be responsible.

Honesty

Similar to transparency, honesty is shown within the platforms values by expressing the truth about certain issues and principles within the industry. The findings indicate honesty to be a core value, whereby certain issues regarding the industries growth is brought to light as well as initiatives that are based on honesty. Responsible Travel are seen to regard this value through their honesty scheme business model (see figure 4.64). This is an initiative created by the platform based on trust, meaning they rely on the specialist holiday companies to declare the booking via the scheme. This unique initiative promotes the impact responsible tourism can have if all parties involve work together towards the common goal of positively impacting both people and places when travelling.

Figure 4.64 Screenshot retrieved from platform Responsible Travel

Moreover, Earth Changers displays honesty through stating "We're not a travel agent or a tour operator but we curate this unique collection of outstanding positive impact tourism to help guide you". This appears to be the case within its 'purpose' section going through critical issues such as climate change, conservation and equality. Under each section is a detailed description of each issue, addressing the sustainable development goals (SDGs), a collection of global goals designed to achieve a more sustainable future. Figure 4.65 represents targets that are unlikely to be met due to the unprecedented challenges the industry still faces. Therefore, by being honest and providing the truthful facts promotes the need to act fast and contribute to responsible tourism.
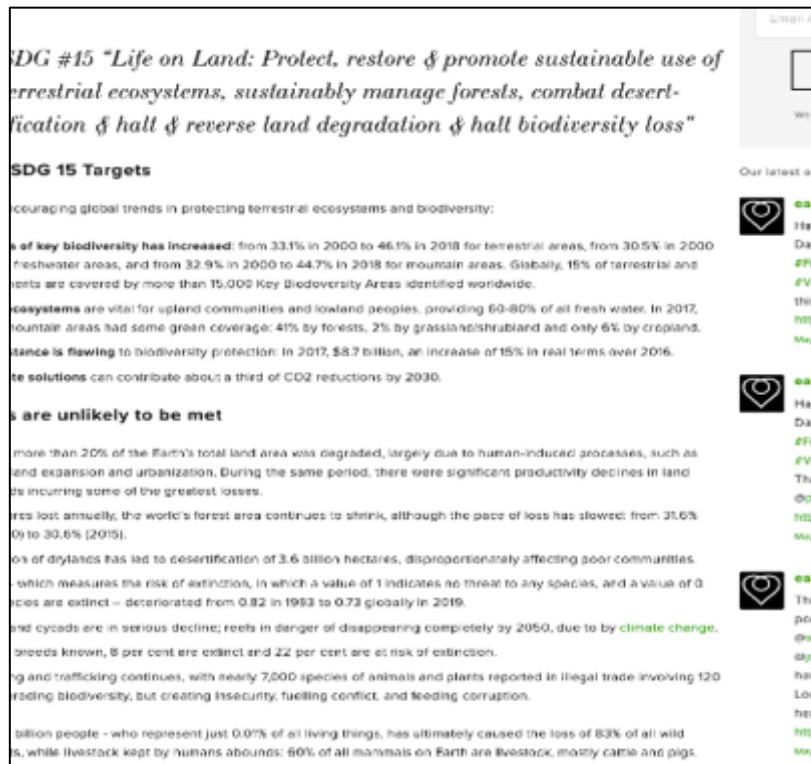
DG #15 "Life on Land: Protect, restore & promote sustainable use of errestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertfication & halt & reverse land degradation & halt biodiversity loss"

SDG 15 Targets

ncouraging global trends in protecting terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity:

s of key biodiversity has increased: from 33.1% in 2000 to 46.1% in 2018 for terrestrial areas, from 30.5% in 2000 freshwater areas, and from 32.9% in 2000 to 44.7% in 2018 for mountain areas. Globally, 15% of terrestrial and ents are covered by more than 15,000 Key Biodiversity Areas identified worldwide.

cosystems are vital for upland communities and lowland peoples, providing 60-80% of all fresh water. In 2017, nountain areas had some green coverage: 41% by forests, 2% by grassland/shrubland and only 6% by cropland.

tance is flowing to biodiversity protection: in 2017, $8.7 billion, an increase of 15% in real terms over 2016.

te solutions can contribute about a third of CO2 reductions by 2030.

s are unlikely to be met

more than 20% of the Earth's total land area was degraded, largely due to human-induced processes, such as and expansion and urbanization. During the same period, there were significant productivity declines in land s incurring some of the greatest losses.

res lost annually, the world's forest area continues to shrink, although the pace of loss has slowed: from 31.6% 09 to 30.6% (2015).

on of drylands has led to desertification of 3.6 billion hectares, disproportionately affecting poor communities.

which measures the risk of extinction, in which a value of 1 indicates no threat to any species, and a value of 0 cies are extinct – deteriorated from 0.82 in 1993 to 0.73 globally in 2019.

nd cycads are in serious decline; reefs in danger of disappearing completely by 2050, due to by climate change.

breeds known, 8 per cent are extinct and 22 per cent are at risk of extinction.

g and trafficking continues, with nearly 7,000 species of animals and plants reported in illegal trade involving 120 rading biodiversity, but creating insecurity, fuelling conflict, and feeding corruption.

billion people - who represent just 0.01% of all living things, has ultimately caused the loss of 83% of all wild s, while livestock kept by humans abounds: 60% of all mammals on Earth are livestock, mostly cattle and pigs.

Figure 4.65 Screenshot retrieved from platform Earth Changers

Commitment

Each platform is committed to create change through its social, economic and environmental impact. However they differ in their level of commitment to creating positive change within the travel industry. Platforms such as Good Travel Guide clearly communicate their commitment to responsible tourism through only listing tourism businesses that meet a certification criterion. This reduces the chance of greenwashing by only listing companies that are committed to sustainable and responsible tourism.
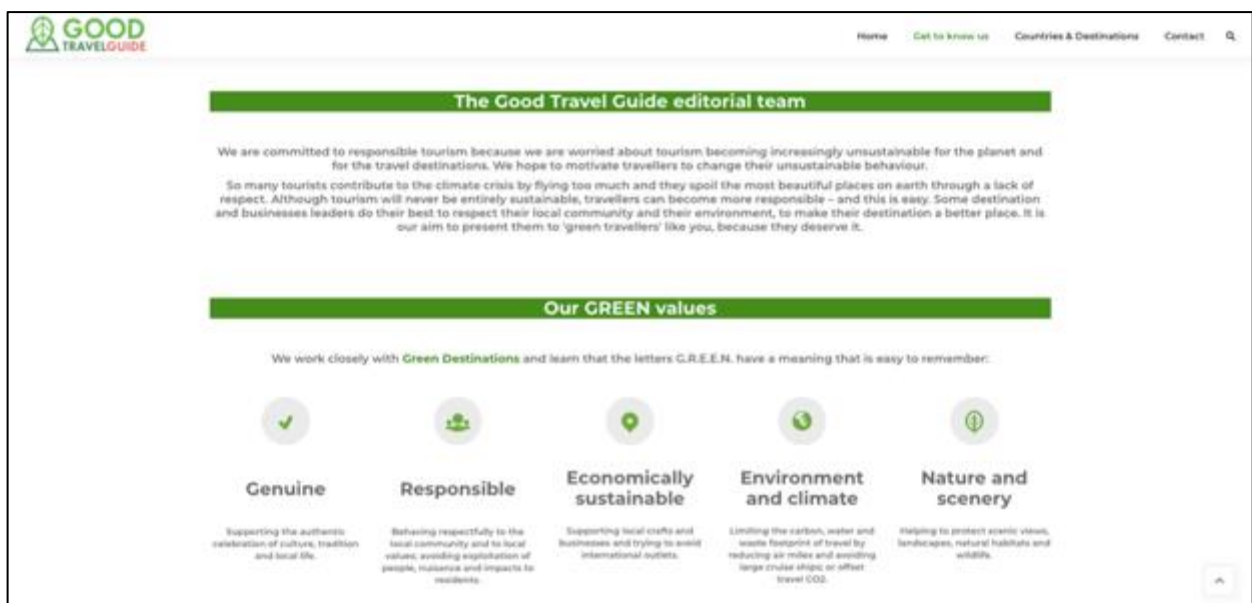

Figure 4.66 Screenshot retrieved from platform Good Travel Guide

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The platform shows the GREEN values each business must commit to in order to display the platforms Good Travel Seal which are checked by industry experts (see figure 4.66). This clearly shows the platforms level of commitment to creating positive change through a vigorous screening process.

Furthermore, Better Places Travel's level of commitment is shown through their certified B Corp (see figure 4.67). Essentially, the platforms level of commitment has been recognized through their general awareness and impact of the natural and social environment. Therefore, by achieving the B Corp status means the platform clearly looks beyond the economic benefits by showing they are committed to channeling positive change through solving social and environmental problems.

Figure 4.67 Screenshot retrieved from platform Better Places Travel
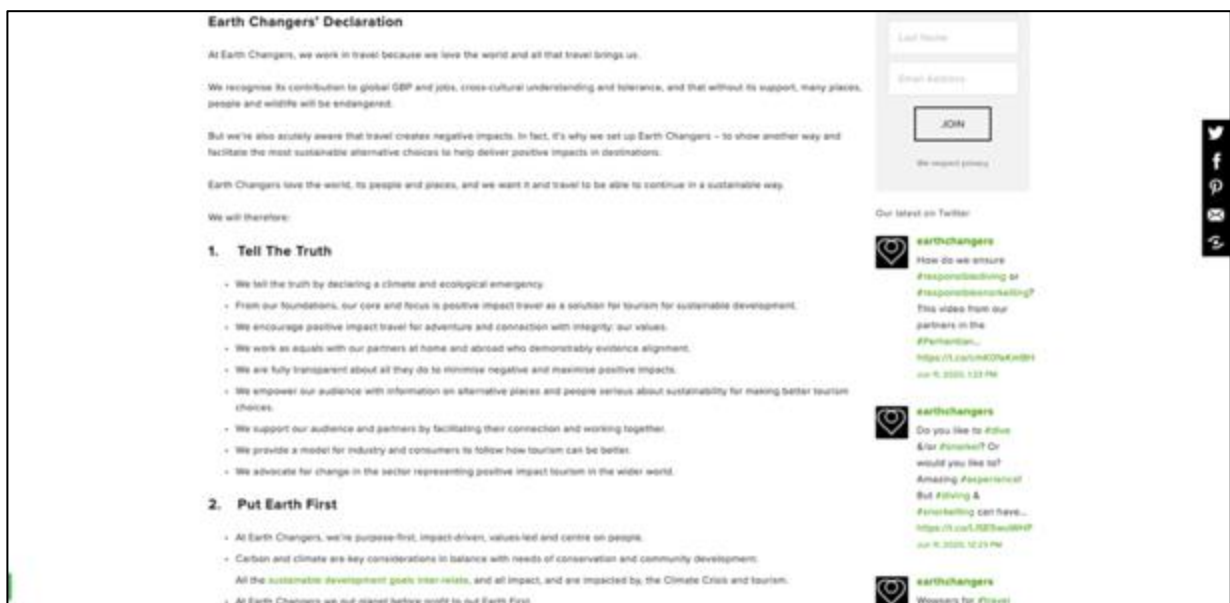

Figure 4.68 Screenshot retrieved from platform Earth Changers

Finally, Earth Changers show their level of commitment by stating their declarations (see figure 4.68). It appears the platform aim to commit to five key areas including developing a 'climate emergency plan', cutting carbon emissions, working together, advocating change and sharing commitment and progress publicly. Through these areas, Earth Changers explicitly go into detail about how they will reach these targets. This contributes to the platforms CSR and encourages travelers to share similar values.

Trust

Complementary to transparency, the interpretation of data presents trust to be a core value within the platforms, aiming to build trust with multiple stakeholders through their sustainable business practices. From the interpretation of data, it also became apparent trust is being built through testimonials and past reviews. Both Kind Traveler and FTLO Travel clearly display within their platforms past reviews each explaining travelers' different experiences through booking on the platforms. Figure 4.69. presents a testimonial from actor/ activist Ian Somerhalder where he states "Being a Kid Traveler is leaving the community and the environment better than you found it". By promoting responsible tourism through testimonials builds trust with potential travelers. In particular, consumers may feel more inclined to trust an activist who is seen as a reputable source by bringing about social change, thus increasing the brands overall credibility.
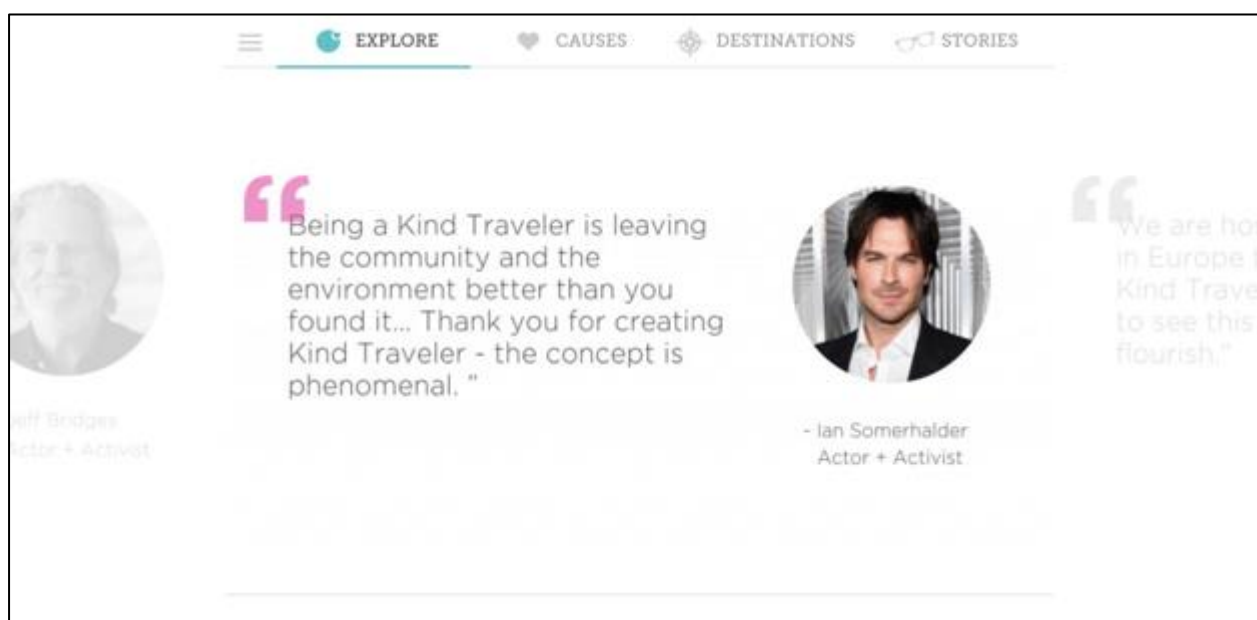

Figure 4.69 Screenshot retrieved from platform Earth Changers

On the other hand, FTLO Travel clearly show verified reviews within their platform which show legitimacy and reassure customers about the platforms sustainable and responsible actions. For example, one past review states "FTLO is everything that the reviews say it is and more. Definitely not your typical group travel, and can't even be compared to the large cookie-cutter providers that are out there today" (see figure 4.70). This review is one example of how potential customers of responsible tourism can see if their personal values align with the platforms through past reviews that acknowledge the difference between larger tour operators.
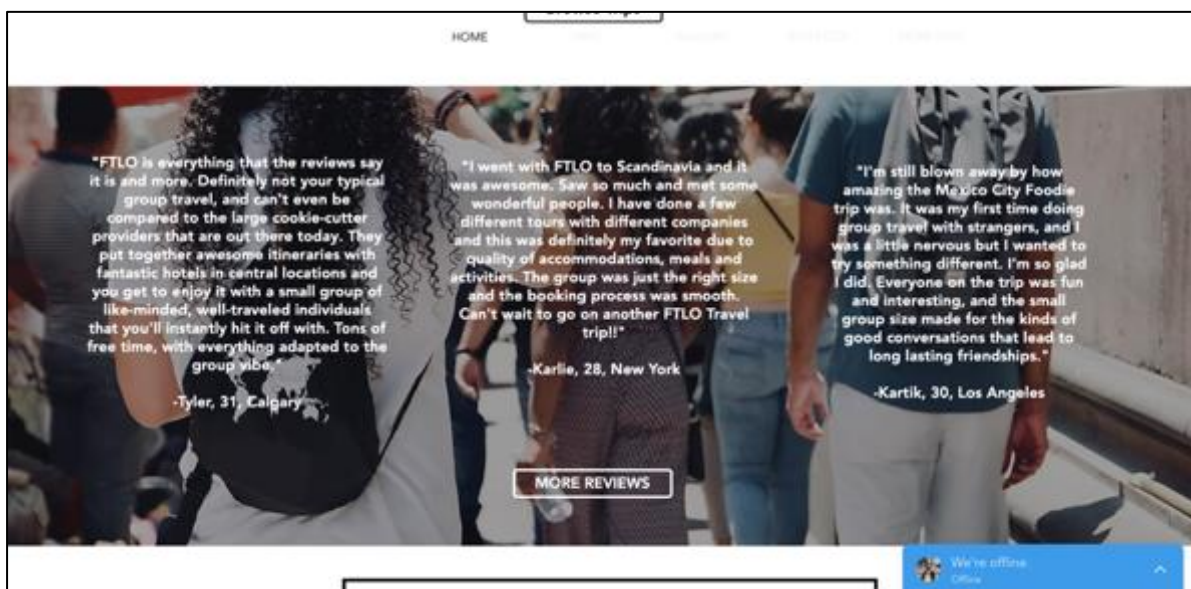
Figure 4.70 Screenshot retrieved from platform FTLO Travel

Figure 4.71 Screenshot retrieved from platform Intrepid Travel

Finally, Intrepid Travel are seen to build trust with consumers through taking a holistic view to their business operations and its various points of impact. By showing their measurable impacts and results builds trust with a consumer and is closely linked with commitment as it acknowledges the responsibility of their business operations through

identifying nine of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) launched by the United Nations (see figure 4.71). Ultimately, these goals underpin Intrepid's corporate responsibility by identifying nine goals where they can significantly contribute to the industry's growth. Due to the platform being a signatory to the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) this further builds trust due to the UNGC already being a trusted and reputable corporate sustainability initiative.

4.3.2 Initiatives

This final theme was based off the three pillars of sustainability and looks at how the platforms contribute to sustainable development through their CSR initiatives. The three pillars of sustainability include social, economic and environmental. However, the analysis revealed both **social** and **environmental** initiatives to be promoted more frequently, thus represent the final two sub-categories.

Social

Under the three pillars of sustainability is social, referring to people and their natural environments. Textual analysis revealed the online platforms to promote social initiatives through the use of loyalty programs. In particular, Clean Travel are seen to implement an innovative loyalty program through encouraging travelers to join a community of changemakers through signing up for the program and earning 'karma points (see figure 4.72). By signing up for the program, customers are awarded with points based on their level of commitment in supporting, helping and growing a community of like-minded individuals looking to empower local leaders as well as educate future community members. Therefore, this social initiative creates brand advocates through promoting to customers who are ethically concerned, thus are more likely to share positive reviews, refer a friend or book with a local partner. This adds to the promotion of responsible tourism by identifying travelers who have a strong affiliation to positively changing the travel industry, thus leading to positive word of mouth and encouraging new travelers to contribute to responsible lifestyle choices. Moreover, by incentivizing travellers with rewards through their lifestyle choices increases trust with new customers as the message is more authentic.
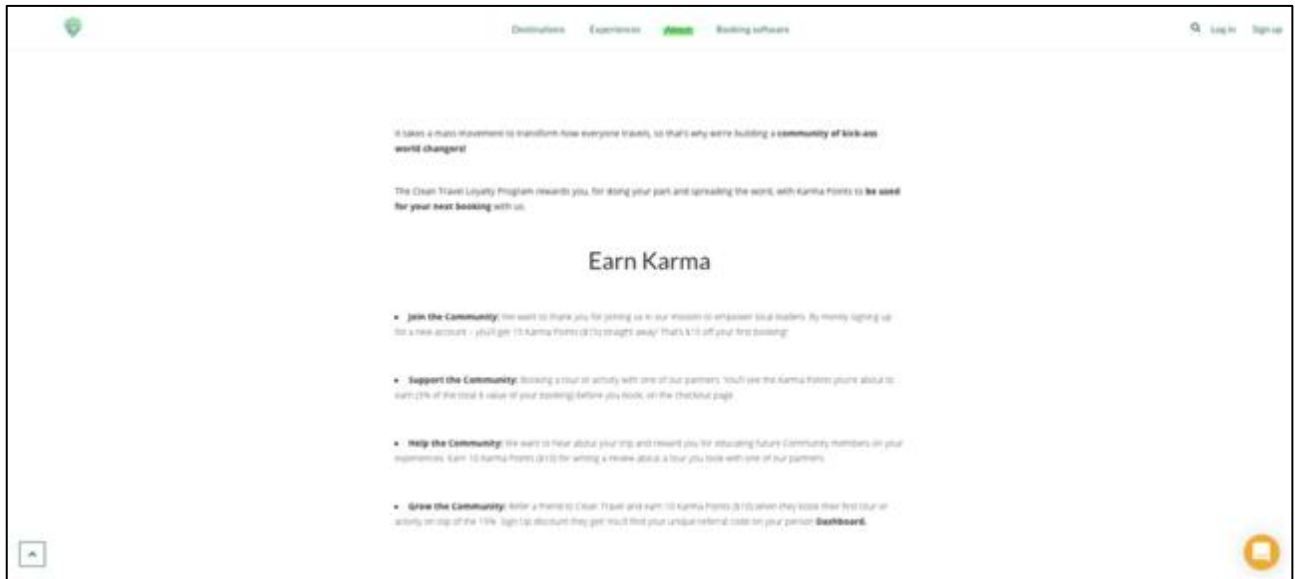
Figure 4.72 Screenshot retrieved from platform Clean Travel
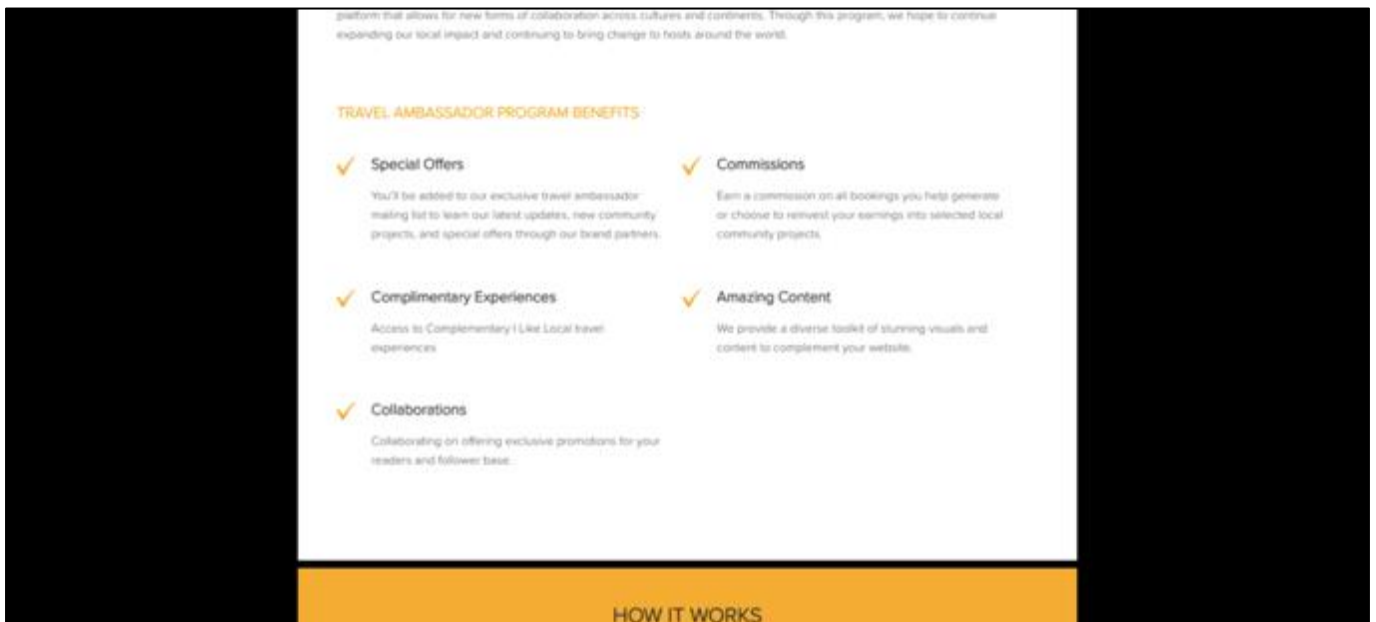
Figure 4.73 Screenshot retrieved from platform I Like Local

Similarly, I like Local follows an ambassador program promoting to a community of responsible travellers as well as local hosts actively taking part in sustainable development within host communities. Through this program, they describe their aim as "to bridge the gap between our hosts and travelers by building a platform that allows for new forms of collaboration across cultures and continents". Therefore, this initiative suggests a collaborative approach to responsible tourism, acknowledging relevant tourism actors that have the ability to contribute to positive social impacts. It is evident the benefits of the program include special offers, commissions, collaborations, unique content and complimentary experiences (see figure 4.73). With a particular emphasis on local experiences, I Like Local

promote the program with a short video of the founder I Like Local and the story behind the brand (see figure 4.74). Through engaging new hosts and travelers to the program with a personalized video promotes to a community of changemakers and provides a USP against other social impact platforms. Through affiliate links, travel ambassadors are able to work alongside I Like Local to promote the social benefits of booking on the platform such as 100% of the money asked by local hosts is directly paid to them without the platform taking a commission. It is through programs like this, established links can be made within the industry, increasing the positive message of responsible tourism and its overarching benefits.

Figure 4.74 Screenshot retrieved from platform I Like Local

Environmental

It became apparent from the data a range of environmental initiatives were being communicated, in particular the promotion of reducing carbon footprints through carbon offsetting. Steppes Travel and Flygreen are both seen to offset carbon emissions through different initiatives. First, Steppes Travel pledge to offset 100% of the emissions of the flights taken by clients through planting trees (see figure 4.75). Below shows a clip of a video produced by the platform that shows the hands-on approach of planting the trees in conjunction with Woodland Trust (see figure 4.76) . This ultimately takes the consumer on a holistic journey where they are able to experience first-hand the vigorous process of how their money is being put to good use.
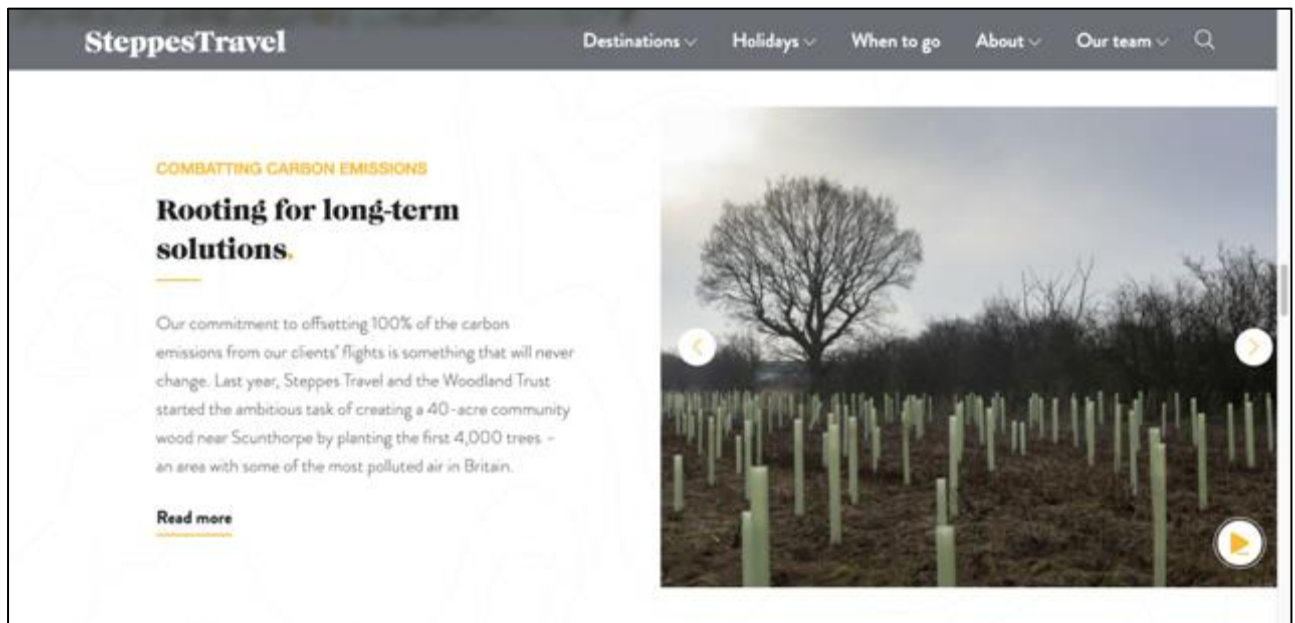
Figure 4.75 Screenshot retrieved from platform Steppes Travel
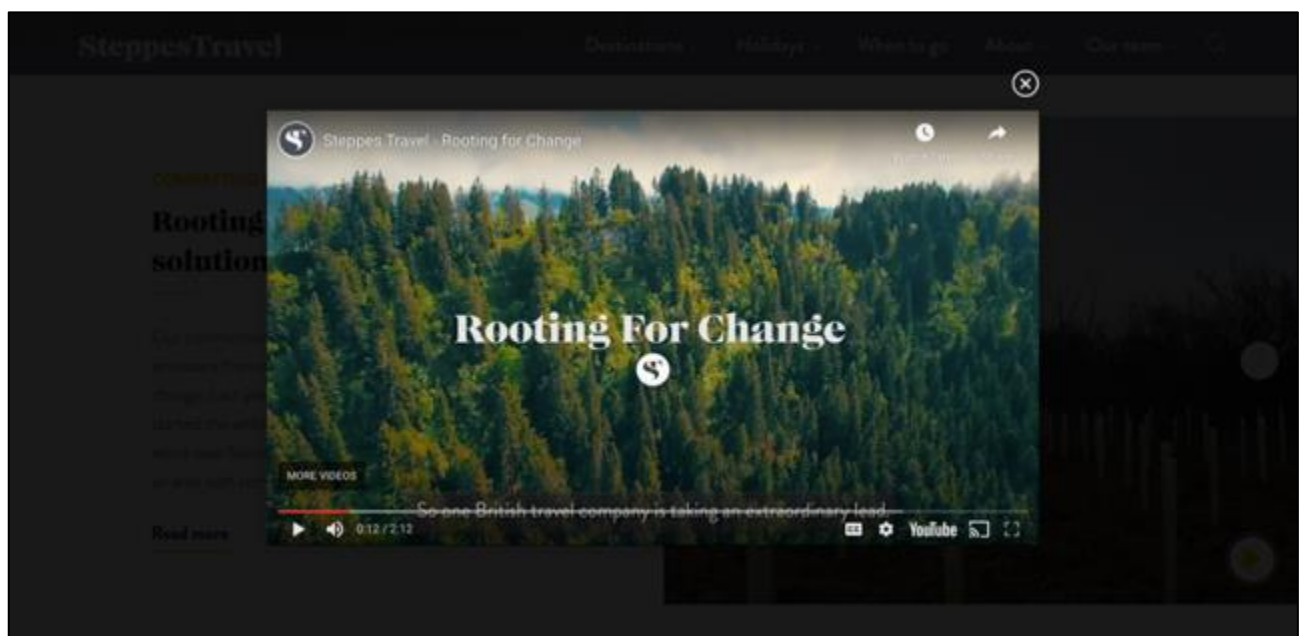
Figure 4.76 Screenshot retrieved from platform Steppes Travel

Furthermore, FlyGreen a comparative booking platform state "FlyGRN's revenue goes directly into offsetting the carbon emissions of your flight by supporting solar cooking projects in Chad" (see figure 4.77). This is further followed by the hashtag 'howflygrn'. This incentivizes travellers to book within the platform by explaining the benefits of booking with FlyGreen instead of other mainstream platforms and encourages them to share it on social media using the hashtag. They further state "you will receive a CO2 certificate in your mailbox" by booking with FlyGreen (see figure 4.78). This is a clever way to entice consumers to contribute to responsible tourism through giving them a sense of involvement and ownership by being part of a wider community of changemakers looking to actively

participate. This further provides a USP to the platform by directly acknowledging the efforts of each customer reducing their carbon footprint.

Figure 4.77 Screenshot retrieved from platform FlyGreen

Figure 4.78 Screenshot retrieved from platform FlyGreen

5. Conclusion

In order to answer the main research question, alongside the three sub-questions, a detailed conclusion will present the above results. Indeed, the results aimed to answer the central research question *"How are online travel platforms promo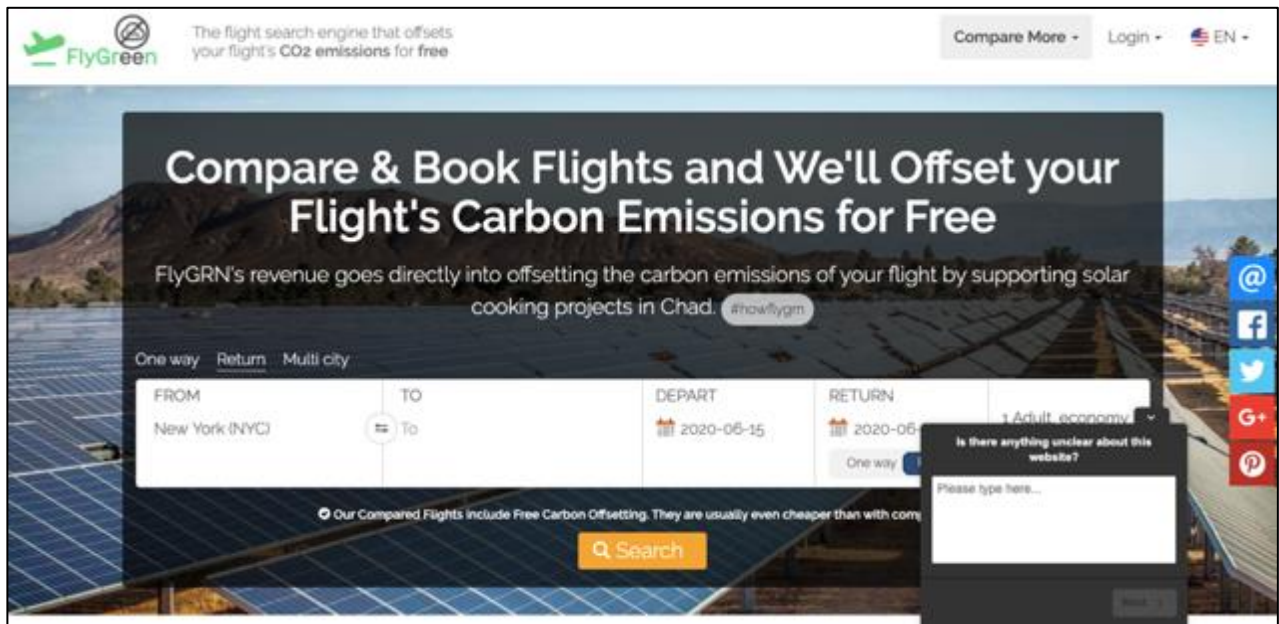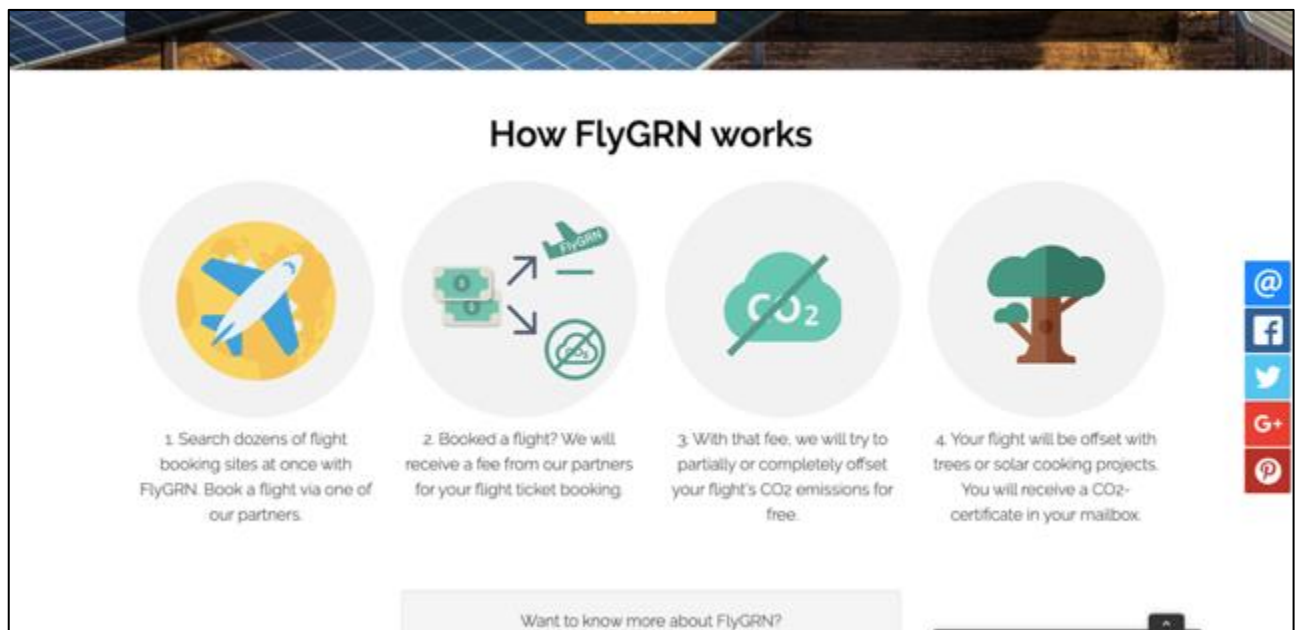ting responsible tourism with the growing demand for sustainable travel product"*. The following chapter will provide a logical conclusion alongside a general theoretical discussion of the implications of the research. It will further indicate the limitations of the study and relevant suggestions for future research. Following these guidelines, this chapter aims summarize and reflect on the results of analysis, thereby drawing valid conclusions.

5.1 Main Findings

The online travel platforms clearly displayed certain promotional techniques to reach a specific target segment looking for alternatives to standardized package products and mass consumption. With a strong indication of facilitating the buying and selling of sustainable travel products, the platforms analysed displayed both visual characteristics and specific marketing techniques aimed at promoting responsible tourism. Previous research revealed two specific platform types, Emp's and Oip's, both virtual platforms that often coexist within the same sector (Belleflamme & Neysen, 2009). These new entrants clearly displayed similar marketing techniques to promote the benefits of responsible tourism. Previous research reviewed exemplified tourism marketing to take more of a sustainable approach to marketing. This was evident when analysing the platforms, thus conforming to previous insights. In general, the present study aimed to provide clarity to the promotional techniques being used by new tourism businesses. The main purpose was to reveal how the online platforms are marketing to an increasingly concerned tourist actively searching for sustainable travel products. In light of the previous insights, this research concludes three main practices. First, the ability to target niche customer segments with specific characteristics defining them. Second, the marketing of alternative appeals that differentiate them from mainstream tourism products and lastly the sustainable communications displayed by the platforms that align with responsible tourism principles.

The research was divided into three sub-questions which was necessary when answering the central research question. Dominant themes and recurring patterns appeared when looking at the marketing techniques being used by the online platforms. In terms of the study looking into responsible consumers, the results revealed certain characteristics that had been taken into consideration when marketing to a niche customer segment. Due to limited studies on the

target audience of responsible consumers, new insights were presented. For example, the data revealed the targeting of responsible consumers who are conscientious about their travel decisions, yet lack the relevant knowledge and recourses in order to travel responsibly. Therefore, the results revealed the promotion to a conscientious consumer looking to educate themselves through learning and exploring the key principles of responsible tourism. This insight was mainly found within Oip's specifically providing educational content and information that is readily available and can be passed on to other conscientious consumers. The analysis further revealed a clear promotion to the ethically concerned tourist as previously mentioned in the literature. Here, the promotion focused on targeting the socially conscious looking for unique experiences and interactivity.

Furthermore, the promotion of sustainable travel products revealed new insights into the alternative appeals of searching and booking within online travel platforms. Notably, the unique offerings created USPs and revealed specific marketing techniques aimed at a wider selection of target segments. Some of these techniques included experiential marketing, relationship marketing and social and societal marketing as mentioned previously within the literature review.

Finally, the communication of responsible tourism attached to values and initiatives was revealed. Through looking into the platforms CSR, certain patterns became apparent when communicating responsible tourism to niche customer segments. By depicting certain values and initiatives, the platforms clearly aligined their values with responsible consumers through a selection of marketing techniques.

Overall, it is clear each chapter was relevant to the research. The introduction made clear the global tourism concern regarding mass tourism, a change in consumer attitudes resulting in higher demand for sustainable travel products and the new e-tourism marketplace consisting of online travel platforms. It further acknowledges the social and academic importance of the study and presents a valid research problem. The theoretical chapter provided a comprehensive look into previous studies regarding tourism marketing, responsible tourism and online platforms within the context of e-tourism. Essentially, this provided a framework for this exploratory study. Moreover, the methodology was set in place which strongly participated in the analysis process and contributed to the findings of valuable outcomes. Through qualitative textual analysis with the application of thematic analysis, the online platforms were collated and fully investigated in order to discover the marketing tactics being used to promote responsible tourism. The application of thematic analysis further enabled patterns and themes to arise which contributed to the study's overall credibility. Finally, the

operationalisation used sensitizing concepts based off the theoretical framework which helped investigate the concepts during textual analysis.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

After reviewing the current literature, research findings substantiate the value of particular theoretical perspectives, whilst other perspectives are brought to light. Indeed, the theoretical implications of the findings lead to unanticipated new insights, stemming from unforeseen observations. Although the research and processes taken generally provide corresponding and valid information, additional approaches and practices appeared during the findings.

Notably, Caruana, Glozer, Crane & McCabe's (2014) research claims there is no predefined category for responsible consumers, suggesting market segments are derived from the conceptions of responsible tourism expressed by the industry. The results conformed to this insight by revealing the targeting to a new customer segment stemming from travellers actively seeking to learn and explore the notions of responsible tourism. It appeared a high majority of the platforms focused on the educational element, marketing to a conscientious consumer who seeks to hold certain values and behavioural traits of a responsible consumer, but does not necessarily no how. This is also linked to the work of Mihali (2016) where he addresses the importance of creating awareness in order for both sustainable and responsible tourism to be met. Moreover, Weeden (2014) links ethical tourism with responsible tourist behaviour suggesting it is a pre-defined category of responsible tourism. This appeared to be the case within the platforms also targeting the ethically concerned consumer who possess high levels of moral concerns over societies high levels of consumption.

Furthermore, Goodwin & Francis (2003) research implied responsible tourism to be linked to wider consumer market trends including lifestyle marketing and ethical consumption. They further suggested recreational holidays are being replaced with fulfilling, rejuvenating and experience-based holidays. The results revealed this to be the case, with lifestyle marketing being a key tactic when promoting sustainable travel products to a segmented market. For instance, the terminology used within the platforms such as 'community' and 'changemakers' revealed the marketing of products to responsible consumers who carry predisposed values and beliefs. In addition, the findings correlated with the work of King (2002) who previously suggested less focus should be placed on the marketing of the destination but connect the customer with the experience. A clear use of experiential marketing techniques has been communicated throughout the platforms, with

particular attention placed on connecting the consumer to the experience. In comparison with conventional mass packaged holidays, the platforms placed significant promotion on authentic, unique and immerse experiences that looks beyond physical needs, thus targeting consumers travelling with a purpose. This again follows Goodwin & Francis (2003) research where they state Krippendorf mentioned early on the emancipation of tourists and placed this within Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Essentially, it is clear the promotion of responsible tourism to tourists looking to discover more about themselves through self-actualization and improve or modify their behaviours when travelling.

Also, it became evident relationship marketing was being used throughout the platforms to promote sustainable travel products. Some recurring strategies included affiliate marketing, referral marketing and partner marketing. This new insight can also be linked to Krippendorf's (1987) work where he claimed the industry would need to adopt more environmentally-orientated and socially responsible marketing strategies in order to retain customer satisfaction levels. Therefore, the results revealed the platforms to promote responsible tourism through creating lasting relationships and establishing positive brand awareness. It is also noteworthy to mention the sustainable marketing model as proposed by Jamrozy (2007) where he suggested a holistic view to marketing incorporating societal, environmental and consumer perspective, considering other factors than just economic benefits. This is confirmed within the results due to a high focus on building customer relationships through acknowledging their sustainable practices and principles.

Furthermore, as McDanial & Rylander (1993) reference, the shift towards greener products derives from wider societal issues, thus calling for societally responsible marketing. This insight is confirmed through the results revealing there is a high focus on improving quality of life for host communities through the promotion of local experiences.

Finally, Krippendorf (1987) proposed the evolution of marketing to take a more ecological approach to tourism. In particular, the emergence of social and societal marketing mentioned by Jamrozy (2007) appeared within the results. Through considering society's long-term interests, the platforms analysed implemented a range of values and initiatives contributing to their CSR standards. It is evident the platforms are working collectively with relevant tourism actors to consider wider societal issues that encompass the core principles of responsible tourism. Therefore, through promoting and aligning values within the platforms adhered to the promotion of encouraging responsible tourism behaviour. Lastly, Kalish (2002) argued CSR can directly contribute to an increase in confidence with consumers lacking trust in businesses ethical behaviours and business standards. Therefore, it became clear particular

attention was paid to the platforms CSR standards through promoting certain initiatives, ultimately contributing to sustainable tourism development.

5.3 Social Implications

It is evident this study is a new interdisciplinary approach, merging the recent concept of responsible tourism with the emergence of online travel platforms and its marketing techniques used to promote responsible tourism. The presented study makes several noteworthy contributions to current literature by attributing new insights into the understanding of how responsible tourism is being promoted though a new type of information source. In general, the study has contextualised the meaning of responsible tourism within a marketing context, and presented the key characteristics of a new type of virtual entity in the form of online platforms. By acknowledging the need to explore the key communications of these new virtual entities and its promotional strategies of responsible tourism considers the wider societal issues that are at the forefront of the tourism industry. Therefore, the social relevance of this study arises from the current global issues impacting the development of the industry, with mass tourism in particular resulting in the need for new forms of tourism.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Firstly, due to textual analysis relying on a high level of interpretation, this automatically plays a role in the study's overall credibility. Therefore, particular attention was paid to the reflexibility in order to avoid potential subjective connection that could reduce the studies quality of research. However, future research should include a mixed method approach by combining interviews with textual analysis which should complement the subject of the present study. By interviewing CEO's of the platforms analysed will provide a deeper interpretation of the platform's customer segments, sustainable products and specific communications. Ultimately, this will further uncover the specific promotional techniques, contributing to answering the 'why' instead of just the 'how'.

However, the main limitations of this study lie in the collection of data. By specifically collecting independent travel platforms that were already clearly focused on sustainability and responsible tourism did not allow for a true representation of how the larger mainstream platforms such as booking.com are seen to promote responsible tourism even if they do not directly display it. This would have provided a valuable comparison of the marketing strategies being used to promote responsible tourism and helped acknowledge the differences and similarities of smaller enterprises versus mainstream platforms, thus challenging the

research. In order to combat this, future research should incorporate mainstream platforms and take into account peer-peer platforms in order to compare and contrast how responsible tourism is being promoted.

Due to the global pandemic of Covid19 at the forefront of the travel industry, current research lacks relevancy as not all the platforms are updated, meaning the research is lacking a true representation of this current time. As there is no initial evident research that links responsible tourism with online travel platforms, further research would contribute to the overall understanding of the relationship between these relatively new phenomena. First, the study presented provides a valuable starting point into the platforms key marketing strategies being used to promote responsible tourism behaviour. However, in order to fill in the gaps of academic literature and add to its current understanding of responsible tourism, it would beneficial to look at current global issues that may impact its development. For example, the global pandemic of corona virus is at the forefront of a fragmented industry, thus there is a need to investigate how the travel industry and the platforms will respond to these global issues through marketing strategies. This will ultimately influence the progression of responsible tourism due to the significant impact it has had on the industry.

In general, future research should look at the macro environment, investigating the external factors and forces that influence its development in the field of marketing. More specifically, by taking into consideration all business entities, operating in the economy will allow for a more holistic view of how marketing techniques are being used to promote responsible tourism. In particular, by considering variables such as political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, legal and environmental (PESTLE) that are not controlled by the platforms will have a significant impact on the success of marketing activities and contribute to the overall reputation of the platforms in the long run. Indeed, this approach will continue to build on marketing strategies being used by the platforms by taking in account external factors that may affect the platforms success, strategies and decision making.

Lastly, this study has honed in on the activities undertaken to make responsible tourism known to the consumer through promotional techniques. However, with a strong focus on the promotion within the marketing mix, to enrich future research it would be beneficial to look more specifically at the distribution methods of the intermediaries in order to uncover the processes and activities required to reach the product to the consumer. This would further delve into the complex nature of online platforms and help understand the platforms distribution strategies, revealing how place within the marketing mix directly affects the platforms promotion activities within the context of responsible tourism.

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Appendix A: Platforms

Platform Type: Electronic Marketplace (EMP)		
Name	**Website**	**Description**
Responsible Travel	https://www.responsibletravel.com/	Booking platform for sustainable and authentic holidays
&Beyond	https://www.andbeyond.com/	Luxury sustainable safari tour operator
Adventure Alternative	https://www.adventurealternative.com/	Tour operator focusing on sustainable tourism
Sumak Travel	https://www.sumak-travel.org/	Tour operator specialising in community-based eco-tourism
Intrepid Travel	https://www.intrepidtravel.nl/	Focus on local expereinces
Kind Traveler	https://www.kindtraveler.com/	Socially conscious 'Give + Get' hotel booking platform
Aracari	https://www.aracari.com/	Luxury and sustainable South American travel operator
Rickshaw Travel	https://www.rickshawtravel.co.uk/	Sustainable tourism tour operator: Asian Tours
Earthchangers	https://www.earth-changers.com/	Online eco-travel booking platform
Steppes Travel	https://www.steppestravel.com/	Tour operator offer eco-luxury holidays: focus on wildlife
Book Different	https://www.bookdifferent.com/en/	Environmentally friendly accommodation
Ecobnb	https://ecobnb.com/	Environmentally friendly accommodation
Fair Voyage	https://fairvoyage.com/	Find & customize best fair trips with verified sustainable destination
Impulse	https://impulsetravel.co/tour-operator/en/	Tour operator, connect you with locals in colombia
U2guide	https://www.u2guide.com/	Experience trips with local guides, fund NGOs
Clean Travel	https://www.cleantravel.org/	Enriching ethical tours
Not on Map	https://www.notonmap.com/	Facilitates Socio-Cultural Exchange through travel expereinces
Backstreet Academy	https://www.backstreetacademy.com/	Peer to peer platform for immersive responsible travel experiences
Dura Travels	https://www.duaratravels.com/	Booking platforms for local expereincs
I Like Local	https://www.i-likelocal.com/	Booking platforms for local expereincs
Green Suitcase Travel	https://greensuitcasetravel.com/	Connects sustainable travel destinations with travelers
Book it Green	https://bookitgreen.com/en/	Green accomodation
Travganic	https://travganic.com/	Green Tours and Expeditions
Much Better Adventures	https://www.muchbetteradventures.com/	Adventure tour operator

Platform Type: Online Information Platforms (OIP)		
Name	**Website**	**Description**
Kynder	https://www.kynder.net/	Eco-conscious platform
Holiable	https://www.holiable.com/	Digital platform involved in sustainable and responsi
Bouteco	https://www.bouteco.co/	Luxury sustainable eco-hotels
SustyTrip	https://sustytrip.com/	Enable people worldwide to make sustainable travel
Ecosia	https://www.ecosia.org/?c=en	Eco search engine
One Planet Rating (app also)	https://oneplanetrating.org/	Global citizens rate & review travel and tourism rela
Better Places Travel (Tour operator)	https://www.betterplacestravel.com/	Connect directly with local travel experts and design
Greenloons	https://greenloons.com/	Providing trusted, transparent information about aut
FlyGreen	https://flygrn.com/	Compares cheap flights and offset your carbon emiss
Manana	http://mananatravel.com/	Directory for eco friendly accomodation
Bee Hive	http://beeplushive.com/	Platform to discover the best in sustainable travel ex
B greener	https://bgreener.org/	Hand-picked sustainable and luxury businsses
TiCATi	https://www.ticati.com/	Green accomodation
For The Love Of Travel	https://www.ftlotravel.com/	Group travel for young proffesionals
Backpacker Bible	https://backpackerbible.org/	Online travel resource - responsible travel guides
Coral Road	https://www.coralroad.com/	Eco-friendly adventures
Travara	https://travara.com/	Sustainable resources
Good Travel Guide	https://goodtravel.guide/	Sustainable resources

Appendix B: Coding Tree

Theme 1	*Selective Codes*	Axial Codes	Open Codes
Responsible Consumer	*Ethically Concerned traveller*	Authentic Experiences	E.g "Aracari goes beyond conventional definitions of luxury to embrace authentic untapped experiences"
		Changemakers	E.g. "The community of change-makers in tourism"
		Socially-Conscious	E.g. "We're the 1st socially-conscious Give + Get hotel booking & media platform that empowers travelers to positively impact the destinations they visit"
		Interactive	E.g "We put you directly in contact with a local travel expert, then together you design your ideal travel experience"
	Conscientious traveller	Learn	E.g. "Get the impact travel book for free and learn how to travel with ethic"

Alternative Appeals			
	Sustainable Luxury	High-end accommodation	"E.g Dotting the powder-white beaches of a private island in the Maldives, boutique hotel Soneva Fushi's eco-chic villas are the stuff of romantic Robinson Crusoe fantasies".
		Travellers philanthropy	E.g "At no extra cost, you can choose to send a disadvantaged child or young person on an inspiring day trip every time you book a holiday with us"
		Meaningful/Authentic Trips	E.g "On this tour we will have a local guide who will walk you through the most sacred buddhist site in Kathmandu, Swoyambhunath stupa complex (aka Monkey Temple). Not only will he share in his depth knowledge about the various monasteries and their religious significance but he will also show you around the Sangey Choelinng monastry "
	Nature & Eco	Soft Adventure	E.g "the camp offers a unique blend of fine food and wine, cosy canvas accommodation and a peaceful bush setting, the perfect base from which to explore this nature lover's paradise"
		Hard Adventure	E.g "Adventure Alternative offers high quality adventure holidays including climbing expeditions, trekking holidays and wildlife safaris"
		Wildlife Tourism	E.g "Botswana safari holidays offer a unique experience for travellers looking to explore in remote wilderness areas where other visitors are limited and wildlife watching is exceptional".
	Culture & Community	Cultural Exchange	E.g "We warmly welcome you to help us on our farm, share knowledge, relax in the middle of nature and learn about our culture and local farming. We will offer you a place to sleep and healthy homegrown food"

		Interactive Activities	E.g "What's a better way than to learn pottery in a city that is well-known for its traditional craftsmanship? If you've been wanting to practice basic pottery skills, give your trip to Yogayakarta a fun twist by learning it in Kasongan Village, the village of pottery. Get a peek into de daily lives of pottery craftsmen"
	Backpacker &Youth	Group Travel	E.g "Not only do we spend countless hours planning the best itineraries, we try to curate groups of similar travelers to give everyone the best experience possible".
		Solo Travel	E.g "This tour has been designed for the more independent traveller and has all the makings of a genuine adventure in culture, visiting different remote Yolŋu homelands. Not only will you participate in a variety of cultural programs and activities, but you will cross a diversity of incredible landscapes during the tour".
		Volunteer and education	E.g. "Volunteer at an inspiring bear sanctuary in Transylvania"

Sustainable Values and Initiatives	Values	Transparency	E.g "We are not fans of making profit our overriding objective. If we were, then we'd risk exploiting the environment, local residents, our customers and staff. We need to make a profit, but we see this as no more or less important than our wider responsibilities"
		Education	E.g "Through education of today's most pivotal societal concerns, we seek to inspire conscious decision-making that keeps the greater good in mind.
		Honesty	E.g "Here's the funny thing. We've found that when you place trust in good people, they repay it and the honesty scheme works. So far we've sold £150m worth of holidays, all voluntarily declared by our holiday providers – maybe it's the biggest honesty scheme in the world?"
		Commitment	E.g "Since launch, Earth Changers have committed to raising awareness and advocating to Tell the Truth, put Earth First, and Act Now"
		Trust	E.g "We are a sustainable tourism platform designed to help you find a trusted local operator or travel agent to organise all or part of your holiday"
	Initiatives	Social	E.g "At no extra cost, you can choose to send a disadvantaged child or young person on an inspiring day trip every time you book a holiday with us"
		Environmental	E.g "When booking through Better Places, you are also travelling carbon neutral. We compensate not only the in-destination travel you book through us, but also the emissions from the flight you took to reach your destination – all at our expense".