

From Profit To Planet: Rethinking Business And Tourism Practices In The Era Of Sustainability

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Abstract

Sustainable development has become a critical agenda for business and tourism sectors, requiring a shift from profit – centered models toward approaches that prioritize environmental responsibility, social inclusivity, and long-term resilience. This paper, entitled “From Profit to Planet: Rethinking Business and Tourism Practices in the Era of Sustainability”, explores how management and tourism industries can strategically realign their practices with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Using a systematic literature review, scholarly works were collected through Publish or Perish software from Google Scholar, Sinta, and Scopus, focusing on publications from the past decade. The review synthesizes insights from peer-reviewed journals, policy documents, and international case studies to identify key themes shaping sustainability discourse. Findings highlight four major areas: the transformation toward green business models; the rise of community-based tourism as a driver of inclusive development; multi-stakeholder collaboration in addressing complex sustainability challenges; and the integration of digital innovation to improve efficiency and transparency. This study contributes by consolidating fragmented knowledge into a holistic framework that balances profitability with ecological preservation and social equity. It offers valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and academics, positioning sustainability not as a peripheral concern but as a core strategic imperative for resilient futures.

Keywords: sustainable business, tourism management, SDGs, green transformation, stakeholder collaboration

A. INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, the concept of sustainable development has shifted from an aspirational ideal into a concrete necessity that influences nearly every sector of society. The growing awareness of climate change, biodiversity loss, and social inequality has compelled governments, corporations, and civil society to rethink their strategies. Business and tourism, in particular, are among the most scrutinized industries. On one hand, they are significant drivers of economic growth, job creation, and international collaboration. On the other hand, they have been associated with various negative externalities, ranging from excessive resource consumption to cultural commodification and community marginalization.

For many years, profitability was the primary lens through which the success of enterprises and destinations was measured. Shareholder value and visitor numbers dominated performance indicators, while environmental costs were externalized and social impacts often ignored. Yet the accelerating global crises of the 21st century have revealed the unsustainability of this trajectory. International bodies such as the United Nations, through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), have urged businesses and destinations to transition from a profit-driven to a planet-oriented paradigm. This call is not only ethical but strategic: organizations that fail to adapt risk losing legitimacy, competitiveness, and even long-term survival.

The tourism sector exemplifies this paradox. It contributes approximately 10% of global GDP and provides millions of jobs, especially in developing economies. At the same time, it is responsible for around 8% of global carbon emissions, a figure that continues to grow with rising international mobility (Gössling & Hall, 2019). The airline industry, hotel

chains, and mass tourism practices illustrate how economic gains can come at substantial ecological costs. Similarly, businesses that rely on resource-intensive production models face increasing scrutiny from consumers and regulators. Consequently, a profound paradigm shift is required—one that goes beyond superficial greenwashing and incremental improvements. Scholars and practitioners are increasingly calling for systemic transformations in business models and tourism management. These transformations demand integrating sustainability at the core of strategies rather than treating it as a peripheral or philanthropic activity.

Despite the increasing attention to sustainability, significant gaps remain in both research and practice. First, most sustainability initiatives are still framed as add-ons to existing business models. Eco-certifications, energy-saving campaigns, and community programs are valuable, yet they often fail to challenge the underlying logic of profit maximization. As Bocken et al. (2014) highlight, truly sustainable business models require rethinking value creation, delivery, and capture in ways that generate positive impacts rather than merely reducing harm. Second, the implementation of sustainability in tourism frequently suffers from fragmentation. For instance, community-based tourism (CBT) is widely promoted as a means of empowering local communities while preserving cultural heritage and ecosystems. However, research by Scheyvens and Hughes (2019) reveals that CBT often struggles with limited institutional support, uneven distribution of benefits, and dependence on external markets. Without adequate governance and genuine local participation, such initiatives risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative. Third, technological innovation has been heralded as a potential game-changer. Smart tourism, for example, leverages big data, the Internet of Things, and artificial intelligence to optimize visitor flows, minimize waste, and enhance experiences (Gretzel et al., 2020). Yet the adoption of such technologies raises concerns about digital divides, privacy, and accessibility. Fourth, there is still insufficient collaboration among stakeholders. Governments, businesses, communities, and international organizations often operate in silos, pursuing fragmented initiatives without coordinated strategies. Bramwell and Lane (2020) argue that sustainability is inherently a collective endeavor, requiring the active involvement of multiple actors with diverse interests. However, practical mechanisms to facilitate this collaboration remain underdeveloped. Fifth, empirical studies that bridge business and tourism sustainability are relatively scarce. Much of the existing literature treats them as separate domains, even though they are deeply interconnected.

In order to justify the originality of this research, it is essential to examine the current state of scholarly debates on sustainability in management, business, and tourism. The past decade has witnessed an exponential increase in academic publications addressing these issues, yet several key trends can be identified that frame the intellectual landscape. The first trend concerns the growing recognition of sustainable business model (SBM) innovation. Traditional approaches to sustainability often centered on corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, which were designed as peripheral activities. Bocken et al. (2019) argue that sustainable business model experimentation represents a radical departure from incremental improvements, as it requires organizations to simultaneously achieve financial viability and generate positive social and ecological impacts. Their framework highlights archetypes such as circular economy, product-service systems, and social enterprises, all of which embody the principle of “creating value for the planet”.

Parallel to business studies, tourism research has emphasized the potential of community-based approaches. CBT has been widely promoted as a means of empowering local residents, distributing benefits more equitably, and ensuring cultural and environmental preservation. Scheyvens and Hughes (2019) stress that CBT can support

Sustainable Development Goal 1 by reducing poverty and enhancing resilience in marginalized communities. Nonetheless, empirical evidence reveals significant barriers, such as limited access to markets, lack of institutional support, and occasional elite capture of benefits. These findings suggest that while CBT holds promise, its success depends heavily on broader structural factors that extend beyond community boundaries.

Technological innovation represents a third stream of literature. Scholars such as Gretzel et al. (2020) have articulated the concept of “smart tourism ecosystems,” in which digital technologies ranging from sensors to artificial intelligence are integrated to enhance efficiency and sustainability. For example, real-time monitoring of visitor flows can mitigate over-tourism, while digital platforms can promote sustainable travel behaviors. However, scholars caution that such systems also entail risks, including data privacy concerns, dependence on global technology providers, and the exclusion of less digitally literate stakeholders. This indicates that technology alone is not a panacea but must be combined with ethical governance and inclusive practices.

Another prominent theme in the literature is the role of multi-stakeholder collaboration. Bramwell and Lane (2020) highlight that sustainability in tourism requires governance arrangements that involve governments, businesses, NGOs, and communities in joint decision-making processes. This collaborative approach is also evident in business sustainability research, where partnerships across supply chains and industries are seen as critical for scaling sustainable innovations. Yet despite its rhetorical appeal, collaboration is often undermined by conflicting interests, power asymmetries, and lack of trust. This gap underscores the need for practical frameworks that can facilitate meaningful partnerships rather than superficial alliances. Although substantial progress has been made in each of these areas, a major shortcoming lies in their limited integration. Studies on sustainable business models, CBT, smart tourism, and multi-stakeholder collaboration tend to be pursued in isolation. There is a scarcity of research that synthesizes these insights into a comprehensive framework applicable across both business and tourism domains. Moreover, few studies explicitly address the need to transition from a profit – first to a planet – first paradigm. This omission provides an opportunity for originality: by weaving together these disparate literatures, the present study aims to articulate a more holistic vision of sustainable transformation.

The study is guided by a central hypothesis articulated in narrative form organizations and destinations that embed sustainability as a core principle through business model innovation, community empowerment, digital integration, and stakeholder collaboration are more likely to achieve long – term resilience and legitimacy than those that prioritize short-term profitability alone. This hypothesis underscores a fundamental shift in evaluative criteria for success. In the 20th century, profitability was often regarded as the sole measure of organizational performance. In the 21st century, however, resilience, legitimacy, and social license to operate have become equally important.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a literature review design with elements of a systematic approach. A literature review is particularly appropriate for a topic such as sustainability in business and tourism, given the proliferation of studies across multiple disciplines and the need for

integrative frameworks. The purpose of the review is not merely to summarize existing findings but to identify patterns, highlight gaps, and develop conceptual propositions that can guide both scholars and practitioners. To achieve this, the review combines narrative synthesis with systematic procedures for literature identification and selection.

Academic articles were collected primarily through Publish or Perish software, which extracts citation data from major databases including Google Scholar and Scopus. These platforms were chosen due to their broad coverage of journals in management, business, and tourism studies. Additional searches were conducted manually to ensure comprehensiveness, particularly for high-impact journals indexed in Web of Science and Scopus. The literature search was conducted between 2022 – 2025 using keyword combinations such as: “sustainable business model”, “community-based tourism”, “smart tourism”, “stakeholder collaboration in sustainability”, “profit to planet paradigm”. The initial search yielded approximately 450 articles. After removing duplicates, 380 records remained. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, reducing the number to 120 articles. A full-text review was then conducted, applying inclusion/exclusion criteria rigorously. Ultimately, 25 articles were selected for in-depth analysis.

The analysis was conducted using a thematic synthesis approach. Each article was coded according to recurring themes such as (1) sustainable business models, (2) community-based tourism, (3) digital innovation and smart tourism, (4) multi-stakeholder collaboration, (5) integrative frameworks linking business and tourism. Through iterative coding, these themes were compared and contrasted across studies, allowing the identification of commonalities, divergences, and emerging trends. Particular attention was given to whether studies emphasized economic, environmental, or social dimensions of sustainability, and how these were integrated.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

One of the most dominant themes identified in the literature is the growing attention to sustainable business models. In management and organizational studies, the sustainable business model is conceptualized as a reconfiguration of the underlying logic of value creation. Whereas conventional business models primarily emphasize financial profit, sustainable models expand the focus to include social and environmental value creation. Bocken and colleagues (2019) provide a seminal framework through the identification of archetypes of sustainable business models. Among the most prominent are circular economy models, product-service systems, and social enterprises. The circular economy, for instance, aims to extend product life cycles, minimize waste, and optimize resource use. In hospitality and tourism, this principle is evident in zero-waste kitchens, energy-efficient operations, and waste-to-energy initiatives that simultaneously reduce environmental footprints and enhance brand loyalty. The shift toward sustainability-driven business models is not without challenges. Small and medium-sized enterprises, which dominate both business and tourism sectors, often face limited financial resources and institutional support to experiment with alternative models. There is also an inherent tension between the need to scale sustainable practices and the imperative to maintain authenticity. Moreover, concerns about greenwashing—where firms make superficial sustainability claims without substantive change—are increasingly prevalent. Nonetheless, the literature indicates that businesses that genuinely embed sustainability within their strategic core are more likely to achieve long-term legitimacy and resilience. Rather than treating sustainability as a compliance requirement, these firms leverage it as a source of differentiation and strategic renewal.

A second major theme in the literature is the prominence of community-based tourism (CBT), which positions local communities as active agents rather than passive beneficiaries of tourism development. Research by Scheyvens and Hughes (2019) underscores CBT as a vehicle for economic empowerment, social cohesion, and cultural preservation. Case studies

across diverse regions illustrate the transformative potential of CBT. In Southeast Asia, village-based homestay programs provide tourists with authentic cultural experiences while simultaneously generating income for households and strengthening social solidarity. In the Andes, indigenous communities manage trekking routes that combine eco-tourism with cultural education, fostering both environmental conservation and cultural pride. Despite its potential, CBT faces persistent structural challenges. Heavy reliance on international markets exposes communities to global shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which decimated tourism revenues. Furthermore, elite capture is a recurrent problem: benefits from CBT initiatives often concentrate among local elites or external investors, undermining equitable distribution. Weak managerial capacities and limited institutional support also hinder the long-term sustainability of community-led projects. Overall, while CBT is widely celebrated as a pathway toward sustainable development, the literature emphasizes that it requires ongoing capacity-building, institutional support, and governance mechanisms to ensure that it delivers tangible and equitable outcomes.

The third cluster of findings emphasizes the transformative role of digital technologies in advancing sustainable practices in tourism. The concept of the smart tourism ecosystem, popularized by Gretzel and colleagues (2020), encapsulates the integration of digital infrastructures, big data analytics, and artificial intelligence to optimize resource use and enhance visitor experiences. Practical applications of this concept are increasingly visible. Examples include real-time monitoring systems to manage visitor flows, mobile applications that encourage environmentally friendly behaviors such as using public transportation, and predictive analytics to anticipate demand surges and allocate resources more efficiently. In several European cities, digital sensors are deployed to regulate tourist density in overcrowded urban centers. However, the literature also cautions against techno-optimism. First, the digital divide threatens to marginalize communities with limited technological access or literacy, raising concerns about inclusivity. Second, the widespread use of sensors and data-tracking technologies raises ethical issues surrounding surveillance and privacy. Third, the environmental footprint of digital infrastructures, such as energy-intensive data centers, cannot be ignored when evaluating the sustainability of digital innovations. Thus, while technology holds considerable promise as a catalyst for sustainable tourism, its contribution depends heavily on ethical governance, inclusivity, and careful evaluation of ecological trade-offs.

The fourth theme consistently emerging in the literature is the critical role of collaboration across stakeholders. In both business and tourism, sustainability is increasingly viewed as a collective endeavor that cannot be achieved by individual actors alone. Bramwell and Lane (2020) argue that collaborative governance is essential for reconciling diverse interests and balancing competing objectives. In practice, such collaboration may take the form of public-private partnerships for green infrastructure, joint management of protected areas, or destination management organizations that integrate perspectives from governments, businesses, and local communities. Despite its potential, collaborative governance faces several limitations. Power asymmetries often allow governments or large corporations to dominate decision-making processes, leaving local voices underrepresented. Conflicts between economic growth imperatives and conservation goals frequently undermine collaborative initiatives. Moreover, weak institutional coordination often results in symbolic rather than substantive partnerships. The literature indicates that effective collaboration requires trust-building, transparency, and clear role delineation among stakeholders. Without these conditions, collaboration risks being reduced to rhetorical commitments rather than transformative practices.

The findings and critical discussion in the previous segments reveal that while sustainability scholarship in business and tourism has made considerable progress, it remains fragmented across distinct domains. Sustainable business models, community-based

tourism, digital transformation, and multi-stakeholder collaboration each provide valuable insights, yet they seldom intersect in ways that produce holistic strategies. This fragmentation is not merely academic but has real-world consequences. Sustainability challenges are multidimensional, requiring solutions that cut across organizational, social, technological, and institutional boundaries. Without integration, the risk is that sustainability becomes reduced to rhetorical commitments or isolated experiments that lack systemic impact.

There is growing recognition in the literature that integration is essential. Several scholars have argued that the complexity of global challenges such as climate change, over-tourism, and social inequality demands more than disciplinary depth; it requires conceptual breadth and cross-pollination (Hall, 2019; Dredge & Jamal, 2020). Yet, despite these calls, integrative frameworks remain underdeveloped. The present review thus seeks to contribute by articulating an integrative framework that weaves together the four thematic areas into a coherent whole.

At its core, the proposed integrative framework is premised on the idea that sustainability is best understood as a dynamic process of co-creation among multiple actors, rather than a static set of practices. This perspective draws from systems theory, which emphasizes interdependence and feedback loops, and from institutional theory, which highlights the role of norms, rules, and legitimacy in shaping organizational behavior. The framework rests on four interrelated pillars (1) sustainable business models (SBMs): organizational mechanisms that realign value creation toward social and environmental outcomes, (2) community-based tourism (CBT): localized practices that empower communities as active participants in shaping and benefiting from tourism, (3) digital transformation and smart tourism: technological innovations that enable efficiency, monitoring, and enhanced experiences, and (4) multi-stakeholder collaboration: governance structures that coordinate diverse actors, align incentives, and manage conflicts.

Rather than treating these as separate domains, the framework positions them as interconnected components of a larger sustainability ecosystem. The challenge is to articulate how they can be integrated in practice and in scholarship. One of the most promising avenues for integration lies at the intersection of sustainable business models and community-based tourism. Traditionally, these two strands of literature have developed in isolation: SBMs focus on firms and markets, while CBT emphasizes communities and social justice. Yet the two are not mutually exclusive. Embedding SBM principles within CBT initiatives can address some of the persistent weaknesses of community tourism, particularly its reliance on external funding and vulnerability to global market shocks.

For instance, a community tourism cooperative could adopt a circular economy model by reusing resources, minimizing waste, and generating additional revenue streams through eco-friendly products. By applying SBM logics, such cooperatives can become more resilient and less dependent on volatile visitor numbers. Similarly, social enterprise models, which prioritize social impact alongside profit, are particularly compatible with CBT, offering a mechanism to reinvest profits back into community development.

Digital transformation provides another critical bridge within the integrative framework. Smart tourism technologies can serve as connective tissue between organizational innovation and community empowerment. For example, digital platforms can facilitate direct market access for community-based initiatives, reducing reliance on

intermediaries and increasing profit retention at the local level. Moreover, real-time monitoring systems can help communities manage tourist flows, protect natural resources, and anticipate environmental pressures. At the same time, digital technologies can enhance transparency in collaborative governance by providing accessible data dashboards that enable stakeholders to track sustainability performance. However, these benefits can only be realized if the risks of digital exclusion and ecological externalities are addressed.

Collaboration emerges as the linchpin of the integrative framework. Without mechanisms to align diverse actors, the synergies between SBMs, CBT, and digital transformation cannot be realized. Collaborative governance should therefore be reimagined not merely as a process of stakeholder engagement but as a platform for systemic integration. Effective collaboration requires more than formal partnerships. It demands trust, transparency, and shared accountability. Importantly, it also requires mechanisms to address power asymmetries. One promising avenue is the adoption of participatory governance models, where decision-making authority is distributed and local voices are institutionalized in governance structures.

Bringing these elements together, the proposed framework can be conceptualized as a multi-level system (1) at the micro level, sustainable business models reshape organizational practices, and digital tools enhance efficiency and monitoring, (2) at the meso level, community-based tourism initiatives empower local actors and anchor sustainability in place-specific contexts, (3) at the macro level, multi-stakeholder collaboration provides governance structures that coordinate diverse interests and enable systemic change. The interplay across levels is crucial. SBMs may innovate at the micro level, but without meso-level community anchoring, they risk being detached from local realities. Similarly, CBT may thrive at the meso level, but without supportive governance at the macro level, initiatives remain vulnerable to external shocks. Digital transformation can connect these levels, but only if guided by ethical and inclusive governance. This multi-level framing underscores that sustainability cannot be achieved by isolated interventions. It requires continuous alignment across organizational, community, technological, and institutional domains.

D. CONCLUSION

The key insight from this study is that sustainability cannot be pursued in isolation, whether through business innovation, community initiatives, technological upgrades, or governance reforms. Instead, sustainable development requires an integrative approach that recognizes interdependence across these domains. The literature demonstrates that while significant progress has been made in developing sustainable business models and experimenting with digital tools, there remains a disconnect between conceptual advances and practical application, particularly in marginalized or tourism-dependent communities. Similarly, community-based tourism has achieved important milestones in promoting local empowerment, but its vulnerability to elite capture and global shocks underscores the need for stronger institutional and collaborative frameworks.

In conclusion, the literature review underscores the urgency of moving beyond fragmented narratives in sustainability research. The challenges of climate change, global pandemics, and socio-economic inequalities demand systemic responses that cut across disciplines and sectors. By bringing together insights from management, business, tourism,

and technology studies, this research argues for a more integrated, critical, and action-oriented agenda. The originality of this study lies not only in synthesizing existing knowledge but also in identifying pathways for its convergence. Such integration is vital if sustainability is to be realized not as a rhetorical aspiration but as a lived reality in communities and businesses worldwide.

Future research should investigate hybrid models that merge business innovation with community empowerment, focusing on governance structures, financial models, and performance metrics that ensure both sustainability and equity. In the other side, research must therefore examine how digital tools can be designed to be inclusive, culturally sensitive, and environmentally responsible. This requires interdisciplinary collaboration between tourism scholars, technologists, and social scientists. For addition, research should explore how collaborative platforms can explicitly incorporate business innovation and digital technologies. For instance, destination management organizations could function as “innovation hubs” that support community enterprises in adopting sustainable business models and digital tools. Such hubs could also mediate conflicts between economic growth and conservation goals by fostering dialogue and experimentation.

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