A Systematic Literature Review of Rural Homestays and Sustainability in Tourism

Zain ul Abedin Janjua1, Gengeswari Krishnapillai1, and Mobashar Rahman1

Abstract
This systematic literature review is designed to evaluate the current state of knowledge in rural homestays and tourism academic literature. With reference to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart, we reviewed 94 studies published in the selected journals from January 1, 2010, to December 31, 2020. Our review explores how sustainable rural homestays have been previously researched in terms of the context, topic, sample, method, geographical location, and theoretical framework. The review provides insights on sustainability and rural homestay tourism from the perspective of co-occurrence beside highlighting the valuable content addressed by authors and suggesting future research directions. In a sustainable rural tourism context, only 51% of the reviewed studies had considered homestay as the core and independent area of inquiry. This review notes an increasing number of researchers from developing countries are working on community-based rural homestays, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. Unfortunately, important topics—like homestay branding, homestay and entrepreneurship, homestays and information and communication technology (ICT) competency, homestay operator’s training and development about sustainability—are rarely addressed in the existing literature.

Keywords
economic sustainability, social sustainability, environmental sustainability, rural homestays, community-based tourism

Introduction
In September 2015, the General Assembly of the United Nations approved a set of goals “to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development agenda,” with each goal having detailed objectives to be completed by 2030 (UN, 2015). The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 specific objectives focused on “areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet” (UN, 2015). By these SDGs, the United Nations highlighted the importance of sustainability for every country and business.

Sustainability is considered a new strategic imperative and a long-term goal for firms, nations, and society as a whole (Finke et al., 2016; Tura et al., 2019). Like other industries, tourism needs to be understood and managed with a wider context of sustainability (Higgins-desbiolles, 2018). Sustainability offers an enduring outlook that stresses commitment to moral beliefs and ethics, integrating the environmental and social uncertainties with economic objectives. Through balanced and complete tactics, the stakeholder’s roles are identified, and resources are used prudently for both present and future generations (Font & McCabe, 2017).

Tourism firms are seen to focus merely on the economic aspect which is contradictory to the concept of the triple bottom line (TBL), which calls for an equal emphasis on all the three key areas: economic, environmental, and social (Wise, 2016). Particularly for the least developed countries, tourism may symbolize “growth without prosperity,” where the government talks about the environment but actually priority is usually given to economic development over environmental security (Ruhanen & Shakeela, 2013).

Governments are currently paying much attention to rural tourism to diversify tourism industry and play an active role in managing economic activities to increase local communities’ incomes (Chin et al., 2014; Nooripoor

1Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Kampar, Malaysia

Corresponding Author:
Gengeswari Krishnapillai, Assist Professor, Faculty of Business and Finance, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat, Kampar 31900, Malaysia.
Email: gengeswarik@utar.edu.my
et al., 2020). Homestay is an attractive sustainable rural tourism product (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013; Walter et al., 2018). Unfortunately, there is no universal definition for a homestay; it is typically defined as a type of accommodation in which visitors stay in the homes of residents (Agyeiwaah, 2019; Agyeiwaah & Mensah, 2017). A homestay is a stay by a tourist, traveler, or student at a house, which is hosted by a local family in a local vicinity (Rizal et al., 2018). Homestay provides tourists with a sense of feeling at home, interaction with the host family, firsthand relationship with locals, the experience of the local culture and low-cost accommodation (Kuhzady et al., 2020; Kulshreshtha & Kulshrestha, 2019).

The homestay business is a component of the broader tourism and hospitality industry, and has the distinct features of intangibility, variability, and inseparability (Sun & Ghiselli, 2010). Homestay business encourages the rural community to get involved in the tourism industry (Samsudin & Malik, 2015). Homestays are an intense visitor-host interaction zone (Walter et al., 2018) with threefold sustainable community-based tourism goals of environmental, cultural, and local employment protection (Reimer & Walter, 2013). A homestay program is typically carried out by individuals who own houses located in the rural areas (Bachok et al., 2018), where tourists pursue their vacation in the cultural and traditional way of local (often rural) community living (Hanim et al., 2014). Variants of the rural homestay concept include cultural homestay, farm stay, heritage homestay, agricultural homestay, leisure homestay, cottage homestay, and so on (Hamzah, 1997). Hereafter, all variants are referred to as the rural homestays in this review.

Several systematic literature reviews (SLRs) on the sharing economy and peer-to-peer accommodation in tourism have been conducted (Prayag & Ozanne, 2018; Guttentag, 2019; Kuhzady et al., 2020). Nevertheless, an SLR on homestay and sustainability in rural setting is still lacking. In response to the growing sustainability awareness and emerging role of the homestay as a sustainable rural tourism product, this SLR sets out to explore the homestay literature from the sustainability perspective.

To contribute to this knowledge gap, capture key insights from the past studies, and identify directions for the future (Kuhzady et al., 2020), this review is well timed. Moreover, this review highlights homestay’s role in sustainable rural tourism and community development to gain long-term social, cultural, economic, and environmental benefits. This review also addresses the increasing importance of homestays as a sustainable rural tourism product.

Therefore, the objectives of this article are as follows: (a) to summarize sustainability studies in homestays from January 1, 2010, to December 31, 2020; (b) to capture the research status for sustainability and homestay tourism based on the keyword co-occurrence; (c) to do content analysis of selected studies; and (d) to present future research direction.

Systematic Literature Review

An SLR, unlike traditional narrative reviews, emphasizes a systematic process for searching the literature, abstraction, and synthesis, which is reported and justified. For enlisting the included and excluded studies at different phases of review, a reporting flowchart is recommended. The reporting, traceability, and processing quality also improves by this flowchart (Yang et al., 2017). The systematic reviews can include knowledge generated through both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Pickering & Byrne, 2014). A systematic quantitative method is considered as an appropriate tool, as the review purpose is charting the homestays and sustainability research from multi- and interdisciplinary hospitality and tourism literature.

The SLR has been used in tourism studies to explore numerous themes such as tourism within a particular country such as China (Bao et al., 2018). Similarly, SLR has been used for event and volunteer tourism (Getz & Page, 2016), tourism demand (Goh & Law, 2011), tourist behavior (Bhati & Pearce, 2016; Pomfret & Bramwell, 2014), tourism attraction (Leask, 2016), and tourism risk (Yang et al., 2017). Likewise, SLR has been used in virtual reality and augmented reality (Yung & Khoo-lattimore, 2017), the use of mixed methods (Khoo-lattimore et al., 2017) sustainability communication in tourism (Tölkes, 2018), and integrated sustainability indicators for tourism (Kristjánssóttir et al., 2017). Many researchers highlighted the importance of SLR in tourism and hospitality, but SLR in sustainability and rural community-based homestays are somehow not addressed by researchers. Therefore, our review will conduct SLR addressing homestays and sustainability.

Practical, objective, and reliable discussions and findings are provided by SLR. SLR presents a significant opportunity for scholars and practitioners to apply existing knowledge for future policymaking and research (Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019). This methodology is predominantly effective in plotting the field scope (Pickering & Byrne, 2014). In the current study, five SLR steps are undertaken, which were adapted from Pickering and Byrne (2014).

In Step 1, review aims are determined, and research questions are formulated; in Step 2, review protocol is formulated by identifying search terms and databases besides drafting the literature selection criteria. Then, in Step 3, the identified databases are searched for relevant literature and then screened against selection criteria. In Step 4, all relevant information is extracted and summarized in tabular form; in Step 5, content analysis is carried out. All steps are shown in Figure 1.

Method

In a nutshell, this SLR explores how sustainable homestays have been previously researched in terms of the research...
topic, context, sample, method, geographical location, and theoretical framework. The SLR started by setting the review aims as detailed in the previous section. This literature review addressed the following research questions:

**Research Question 1:** What is the current state of sustainability studies in the homestay tourism sector from January 1, 2010, to December 31, 2020?

**Research Question 2:** What is the research status for sustainability and homestay tourism from the perspective of a keyword co-occurrence?

**Research Question 3:** What are the important contents addressed in studies by authors? What are the suggestions for future research directions?

**Literature Review Protocol**

Considering the review aims, a review protocol to direct a literature search was developed. The review protocol contained databases, search terms, and literature selection criteria. The following word schemes were used to capture studies that explored homestay from a sustainability perspective:

Sustainable AND “homestays” OR “home-stays,” Sustainable AND “homestays” OR “home-stays” AND CSR, Sustainable AND “homestays” OR “home-stays” AND Economic sustainability, Sustainable AND “homestays” OR “home-stays” AND Environmental Sustainability.

To attain multidisciplinary breadth, the relevant literature was searched in tourism and hospitality’s most significant e-databases. While earlier systematic reviews mostly considered two to three databases (Yang et al., 2017), our review would consider six major databases namely SAGE (Social Science and Humanities → Marketing and Hospitality), EMERALD, ELSEVIER (Science Direct), WILEY Online Library (Business and Management), SCOPUS (Business, Management, and Accounting), and Taylor & Francis Online (Subject: Tourism, Hospitality & Events → Tourism). These six databases were commonly used in previous review studies (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015).

The search terms were examined in the study title, keywords, abstract, or text, and published in English language academic journals within the time frame 2010 to 2020. English is the predominant language of international academic publishing (Kristjánsdóttir et al., 2017), so in our review, this is the main reason for choosing peer-reviewed academic journals published in the English language and covering 11-year time frame.

**Literature Screening**

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology is used for the literature screening that formed the basis of our review (PRISMA, 2019b). The PRISMA checklist (PRISMA, 2019a) sets out the steps that should be followed to carry out a review that is replicable by other researchers and generate trustworthy data. The PRISMA methodology has been adapted for use in tourism research in several publications (Garcés et al., 2018; Stone & Duffy, 2015; Wijesinghe et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2017). Kim et al. (2018) contended that a systematic review in tourism against the PRISMA checklist would contribute to having a clearer understanding of the execution, quality, and rigor of systematic reviews. The reason behind the choice of PRISMA (Liberati et al., 2009) over other existing protocols lies on the recognition of its comprehensiveness, its use in several disciplines worldwide, and its
potential to increase consistency across reviews (Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019).

As of December 31, 2020, the literature searched against the six databases yields 943 studies. In the first stage of the screening process, editorials, conference proceedings, book chapters, and reviews were excluded; then duplicate (overlapping) studies were removed. The remaining 423 studies were matched to the literature selection criteria. As homestays in the context of tourism were the only consideration, publications from medical/nursing-related journals, online booking, and homestays in urban settings were deemed irrelevant and discarded. A total of 200 papers were screened out in this second stage, leaving 223 studies.

In the final eligibility stage, the remaining 223 studies were carefully reviewed one by one against selection criteria. If the abstracts did not contain sufficient information, the full papers were analyzed against selection criteria. Only those studies matching the exact selection criteria were considered. During this stage, 129 studies were excluded as they were unable to meet one or more selection criteria. After these comprehensive stages, 94 studies were considered eligible and selected for the final synthesis and analysis. The screening process is shown in Figure 2.

**Results**

The results section widely explains the evolution of literature and content analysis. In the evolution of literature, journal and year of publications from 2010 to 2020 are discussed. Through content analysis, authors, journals, and research designs (subjects of studies, research methods, and geographical locations) are discussed alongside the common sustainable tourism practices.

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**Figure 2.** A PRISMA flowchart for literature screening process. *Source. Adapted from Moher et al. (2009).*
Descriptive statistics of studies reviewed were computed and presented in Figures 3 and 4. Figure 3 presents the journals that published work on rural community-based homestays related to sustainable tourism.

Eleven papers were published in *Current Issues in Tourism*, having the greatest number of publications related to “sustainability and homestays,” followed by *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* with nine publications and *Journal of Ecotourism* in third place with seven publications. In addition to number of papers published in a journal, it is also important to know the year of publication which is shown in Figure 4. *Current Issues in Tourism* has 11% papers, *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* has 9% papers, and *Journal of Ecotourism* has 7% papers.

**General Overview: Evolution of the Literature**

Figure 4 shows the number of publications distributed yearly, starting from one publication in 2010; the numbers showed an upward trend, in 2011 and 2012 articles published were six and four, respectively. In 2013, the number of publications jumped to nine, in 2014 and 2015 publications slide to six. In 2016, publications stood at 14. In 2017 and 2018 it showed a downward trend to 10 and 11 publications each. In 2019, number of publications were 12 and in 2020 it stood at 15.

**Content Analysis**

Tables 1 to 4 show the selected papers for the content analysis in a summarized form. The following characteristics from each selected paper are summarized: (a) sustainable tourism practices examined; (b) paper author(s) and publishing year;
(c) research design namely the theme of the subject, target population, geographical area of study, and research method(s) applied; and (d) theory(s) applied in study. The SLR outcomes are based on these four characteristics to facilitate an investigation on how the subject is understood and progressed over time.

**Sustainable tourism practices.** Main sustainable tourism practices addressed by researchers are local communities and sustainable tourism development; homestays as a community-based ecotourism product (CBET); rural tourism; ecotourism and sustainability; homestays, economic sustainability and poverty alleviation; women involvement in tourism entrepreneurship; homestays and role of NGOs; and homestays as a cultural tourism product. In addition, women participation in homestays, homestays as potential income sources for rural communities, and local community participation in planning and management of tourism are also studied.

Local communities and sustainable tourism development was addressed in 28 studies; homestays as a community-based ecotourism product (CBET) in 25 studies; rural tourism, ecotourism and sustainability in 17 studies; homestays, economic sustainability, and poverty alleviation in 13 studies; sustainable development related to surfing tourism and women involvement in tourism entrepreneurship in four studies. Most studies are interdisciplinary in nature; two or more sustainable practices are often discussed in one study. Details of sustainable tourism practices studied are shown in Figure 5.

**Author(s) and publishing year.** In total, 205 authors were involved in writing these 94 articles; 13 authors were involved in two or more publications. There are no notable researchers in this field. The articles were published in 35 different journals. Thirteen journals published three or more than three articles, nine journals published four or more than four articles, and five journals published five or more articles.

**Research design.** The research design consists of subject theme, target population, geographical area of study, and research method(s) applied in the study. The subject themes are primarily adopted from the study title, keywords, abstract, introduction, and literature review section. The theme mostly addressed are “the origin of homestay, conservation of biodiversity, social-cultural/economic impacts generated by community-based tourism, stake-holders’ partnerships, digital marketing in rural tourism and the role of NGOs.”

The main respondents of data collection were homestay operators, local communities, tourists, and key stakeholders. Homestay operators were selected as respondents in 21 studies, local communities in 18 studies, tourists in 15 studies, and stakeholders in 19 studies. The details of the respondents are shown in Figure 6.

As for research method category, studies with qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods were included; the total number of qualitative studies were 56 (60%), quantitative studies were 22 (23%), mixed methods studies were 7 (7%), and the remaining exploratory, reviews, or conceptual papers were 10 (11%). Details of the research methods are shown in Figure 7.

The location of data collection is referred to as a geographical area. Major chunk of studies was conducted in the Asia-Pacific region. In Malaysia, 31 (33%) studies were conducted, Indonesia 12 (13%), India 8 (9%), and Thailand 6 (6%); also other regions (n = 27, 29%) were researched, for
Table 1. Content Analysis of All Qualitative Studies (n = 56).

| No. | Sustainable tourism practices examined                                                                 | Author(s) (year), geographical area                                          | Subject theme                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Target of data collection       | Theory applied                                                                 |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Homestays as potential income sources for rural communities                                           | Bachok et al. (2018), Malaysia                                                | The origin of homestay in Malaysia, the process of initiating, selecting the prospective owners, and accommodation. The distribution of revenue from the rental receipts.                                        | Homestay operators            | N/A                                                                            |
| 2   | Tourism as an alternative livelihood to resource-dependent communities                                 | Badola et al. (2018), India                                                   | The requirement of solid local institutions for safeguarding all sections of society with maximum benefits and minimum financial leakages                                                                      | Key stakeholders              | N/A                                                                            |
| 3   | The ecological and cultural aspects of the visitor experience                                         | Tiberghien et al. (2018), Kazakhstan                                         | The geographic imagings (nomadic cultural landscapes), crafts purchased, and performing spaces (nomadic homestays and food) are an authentic ecotourism visitor experience.                                   | Key stakeholders              | N/A                                                                            |
| 4   | Community-impact dimensions                                                                          | Towner and Davies (2018), Indonesia                                           | Socio-cultural impacts generated by surfing tourism                                                                                                                                                         | Homestay communities          | Sustainable livelihood model                                                   |
| 5   | Poverty alleviation key indicators                                                                    | Xu et al. (2018), China                                                      | Women tourism entrepreneurship as a multidimensional poverty alleviation tool in rural China.                                                                                                                   | Homestays, farm-house         | The theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985),                            |
| 6   | Homestay and host learning importance in the sustainable community-based ecotourism                   | Walter et al. (2018), Nepal                                                   | Community-based ecotourism as a project of sustainable community development.                                                                                                                               | Homestay hosts                | Theory of workplace learning (Billett, 2014)                                   |
| 7   | Local management of ecotourism                                                                          | Reimer and Walter (2013), Cambodia                                           | Complexity in addressing environmental conservation, local livelihood, and cultural concerns of community-based ecotourism                                                                              | Key stakeholders (NGOs,      | Honey's (2008) seven-part analytical framework for eco-tourism                |
| 8   | Community-based ecotourism (CBET)                                                                     | Walter (2013), Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam                                | The transformative learning process promotes the sustainability aims of CBET.                                                                                                                                | Key stakeholders              |                                                                                  |
| 9   | Community-level ecotourism stakeholders                                                                 | Palmer and Chaumangghana (2018), Thailand                                    | Community-based ecotourism as an economic, business development, cultural change, and sustainability tool.                                                                                                   | Local stakeholders            | Mezirow's 10 stages of transformative learning                                 |
| 10  | Social capital among homestay operators and host communities in Malaysia                               | Tavakoli et al. (2017), Malaysia                                              | The social relationships among the homestay providers and their family members, other accommodation providers, and other members of the community not involved in the homestay business                   | Homestay hosts                |                                                                                  |
| 11  | Sustainable development concerns of locals related to surfing tourism                                  | Towner and Mune (2017), Indonesia                                            | A sustainable approach to management, marketing, and planning of the surfing tourism industry through more operative governance and active government.                                                            | Key stakeholders              |                                                                                  |
| 12  | Women involvement in tourism entrepreneurship                                                          | Panta and Thupa (2017), Nepal                                                | The requirement to highlight gender stereotypes and attitude toward women entrepreneurship and capacity building in tourism.                                                                                     | Women entrepreneurs           |                                                                                  |
| 13  | Homestays and role of NGOs in volunteer tourism experience                                           | Ageiwah and Mensah (2017), Ghana                                             | The viability of the homestay business and volunteer tourism projects without the NGOs.                                                                                                                        | Local volunteer NGOs          |                                                                                  |
| 14  | The direct-indirect inclusion of the local community in the management of homestays                   | Bhalla et al. (2016), Malaysia                                               | Homestays as a community-based product to generate sustained income for locals, conserving the local cultural and natural heritage.                                                                         | Local communities             |                                                                                  |
| 15  | Community-based homestay program and challenges faced by participants                                  | Kusyuranan and Hussen (2017), Malaysia                                        | Successful ecotourism development and importance of the stakeholder's collaboration and partnership.                                                                                                        | Key stakeholders              |                                                                                  |
| 16  | Responsible tourism in the UNESCO National Park                                                     | Tay et al. (2016), Malaysia                                                  | Exploring the definition, practices and challenges of implementing and achieving responsible tourism by tour operators and park officers in Kinabalu Park, Sabah.                                             | Tour operators, park managers |                                                                                  |
| 17  | Community-based tourism standards (CBTS) certification criteria                                       | Novell et al. (2016), ASEAN region                                           | ASEAN-CBTS' criteria as a benchmark and strategic planning tool for local communities for improved CBT benefits, standards, and performance in the region.                                                        | Industry experts              |                                                                                  |
| 18  | The surfing tourism industry and local participation                                                | Towner (2016), Indonesia                                                    | The main obstacles in local participation in the surfing tourism industry are government support and foreign ownership.                                                                                  | Business operators and       | Okazaki's community-based tourism (CBT) model                                  |
|     | (continued)                                                                                           |                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                          | locals                        |                                                                                  |
| No. | Sustainable tourism practices examined | Author(s) (year), geographical area | Subject theme | Target of data collection | Theory applied |
|-----|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| 19  | ICT adoption and tourism provider's perceptions and attitude | Cheuk et al. (2017), Malaysia | ICT adoption for digital marketing and rural tourism businesses | Homestay operators | N/A |
| 20  | Homestays entrepreneurship and community nonparticipation | Sood et al. (2017), India | Sociocultural, practical, and apprehensions as main reasons for community nonparticipation in (homestay) tourism | Local tourism providers | Typologies of levels of community participation |
| 21  | Community-based rural tourism | Blapp and Mitra (2017), Indonesia | The creative tourism potential in the community-based context of Balinese villages | Locals and tourists | N/A |
| 22  | Surfing tourism's as a significant income and employment provider | Towaner and Oram (2016), Indonesia | The development of surfing tourism and barriers to sustainable tourism development (economic leakages, pressure on the environment and resources) | Surfing tourism operators | N/A |
| 23  | Community-based tourism development | Chaudhary and Lama (2016), India | Understanding the perspective of the local communities in CBT development | Local communities | CBT development planning model Reid's (2003) |
| 24  | Homestays as a pro-poor rural community-based ecotourism business model | Sarkar and Sinha (2015), India | Rural homestays for financial sustainability, equal distribution characteristics, and the objective of conservation of natural resources and local culture | Local communities | N/A |
| 25  | Authenticity of homestays | Muru (2015), Malaysia | Tourist's narratives of authenticity in a Malaysian homestay experience | Bloggers | N/A |
| 26  | Tourism's role in the rural community's standard of living and job creation | Jufar et al. (2013), Malaysia | The economic benefits stemming from tourism development for a local community in the area of Kinsabul National Park, Selat | Locals | N/A |
| 27  | Tourism as a poverty alleviation tool | Truong et al. (2014), Vietnam | The perception among community members toward local tourism, as it benefited non-poor and poor operators only | Local communities | N/A |
| 28  | Homestays as an alternative form of community-based tourism | Asharya and Halpenny (2013), Nepal | Homestays as a pro-women sustainable tourism product that fosters community development and gender equality | Local communities | N/A |
| 29  | Hosts’ relationship with commercial home | McIntosh et al. (2011), New Zealand | The significance of the intrinsic nature of interactions between identity and space within the domain of small tourism business provision | Homestay operators | N/A |
| 30  | Homestays as a cultural tourism product | Masa et al. (2010), Malaysia | The experiential aspects of homestay holidays among domestic students | Students as homestay guests | N/A |
| 31  | Importance of community-based tourism (CBT) in domestic tourism | Kontogeorgopoulou et al. (2014), Thailand | The most important determinants for successful CBT in Thailand are geographic setting, external support, and transformational leadership. | Local communities | N/A |
| 32  | Homestays as a community-based tourism product | Kontogeorgopoulou et al. (2015), Thailand | The implications of successful participation in homestay tourism in Thailand | Local communities | N/A |
| 33  | Community-based tourism (CBT) | Ellis and Sheridan (2015), Cambodia | Community benefits, sustainable, enduring, and local tourism industry can be benefited by appropriate implementation of CBT. | Local communities | N/A |
| 34  | Network relationality principles | Marques and Macos (2019), Brazil | Four key principles of network relationality in homestays are temporary belongingness; a priori empathy; technology (for face-to-face) interactions; and relational spaces. | Case study approach | Network sociology concept (Wittel, 2001) |
| 35  | Community-based ecotourism | Tran and Walter (2016), Vietnam | Women's participation in a community-based ecotourism project in northern Vietnam | Key stakeholders | Longwe's empowerment framework |
| 36  | Role of informal tourism entrepreneurs in tourism | Çakmak et al. (2018), Thailand | The significance of the association between informal entrepreneurs and other stakeholders | Key stakeholders | Bourdieu’s theory |
| 37  | Poverty alleviation tourism policy | Qin et al. (2019), China | The perceived benefits of and concerns about the poverty alleviation tourism policy from economic, sociocultural, and environmental perspectives | Locals | N/A |
| 38  | Economic and social impact of homestays | Kushwastha and Kushwastha (2019), India | Homestay’s impact on economic, social and cultural life | Homestay owners | N/A |
| 39  | Tourism development in Indigenous communities | Fan et al. (2020), Malaysia | Indigenous tourism | Local communities | N/A |
| 40  | Studied: how technological platforms benefit local communities | Ditta-Apichai et al. (2020), Thailand | Business models of online platforms and their roles as mediators of CBT, the platforms’ contributions to the achievement of sustainable development goals | Owners | N/A |

(continued)
| No. | Sustainable tourism practices examined | Author(s) (year), geographical area | Subject theme | Target of data collection | Theory applied |
|-----|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| 41  | Agro tourism                         | Trinh et al. (2020), Vietnam       | Farm tourism within local economic/social/environmental context | Owners | N/A |
| 42  | Volunteer tourism                    | Godfrey et al. (2019), Peru        | Volunteer-host interactions | Tourists | N/A |
| 43  | Community-based tourism              | Ngo et al. (2019), Vietnam         | The importance of acknowledging and integrating ideological and developmental alternatives to community-based tourism enterprises in less-developed countries | Stakeholders | N/A |
| 44  | Community-based tourism              | Birendra (2020), Nepal             | Community-based homestays and sustainable future | Homestay owners | N/A |
| 45  | Local empowerment                    | Marques and Matos (2019), Brazil   | Network relationality in homestays | Owners and tourists | Network sociality and network relationality theoretical framework |
| 46  | Community-based agritourism (CBAT)   | Bhutta and Ohe (2019), Nepal       | The role of skills, training, and capacity building for CBAT development | Farmers | N/A |
| 47  | Homestay enterprise sustainability   | Agyeiwaah (2020), Ghana            | The recognition of sustainability as a tool for socialization have greater potential to achieve socioeconomic sustainable development goals | Homestay Owners/Managers | Social cognitive theory |
| 48  | Community participation in community-based tourism projects | Junaid et al. (2020), Indonesia | CBT as sustainable development tool | Stakeholders | N/A |
| 49  | Community-based ecotourism           | Phelan et al. (2020), Indonesia    | The role of community-based ecotourism in the blue economy | Locals | N/A |
| 50  | Community-based ecotourism           | Phelan, Ruhren, and Mair (2020), Indonesia | Important interactions between community, the local economy, and coastal ecosystems | Locals | N/A |
| 51  | Social entrepreneurship               | Dalles et al. (2019), Cambodia     | Tourism-based social enterprises (TSEs) and community engagement | Stakeholders | N/A |
| 52  | Community-based tourism              | Dolezal and Novelli (2020), Indonesia | Residents’ empowerment and greater inclusion for sustainable CBT development, in line with Agenda 2030 | Stakeholders | N/A |
| 53  | Community-based tourism              | Cornells (2019), Peru              | Power relations between external and internal stakeholders, empowerment of community members and power issues in the authenticisation process of tourist attractions | Stakeholders | N/A |
| 54  | Ecotourism                           | Mentes and Kafley (2019), Bhutan    | Ecotourism as a development paraxe | Stakeholders | N/A |
| 55  | Community-based ecotourism           | Sen and Pierre Walter (2020), Cambodia | Three areas of transformative learning: environmental conservation, gender roles and local culture | Stakeholders | N/A |
| 56  | Community-based ecotourism           | Kunjuraman (2020), Malaysia        | Community-based ecotourism provided as an alternate livelihood to local communities | Stakeholders | N/A |

Note. ICT = information and communication technology.
Table 2. Content Analysis of All Quantitative Studies ($n = 22$).

| No. | Sustainable tourism practices examined | Author(s) (year), geographical area | Subject theme | Target of data collection | Theory applied |
|-----|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| 1   | Relationship of tourist's satisfaction and perceived value in community-based homestays | Rasoolimanesh et al. (2016), Malaysia | This study investigated the perceived value and the satisfaction of tourists staying at the rural homestay | Tourists | N/A |
| 2   | Development of socioeconomic and social capital in rural areas | Amin et al. (2013), Malaysia | The predictive determinant of quality of life amongst the homestay participants | Homestay operators | N/A |
| 3   | Community-based tourism and sustainability | Ernawati et al. (2017), Indonesia | Producer and consumer (host-guest) viewpoints on CBT products | Tourists and community members | N/A |
| 4   | Tourist's green purchasing behavior in a rural tourism context | Chin et al. (2018), Malaysia | The significant relationship between the tourist's green purchase behavior and three-dimensional marketing tools (eco-branding, eco-labeling and ecological ads) in rural tourism | Tourists | Theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985) |
| 5   | Operator's perception of socioeconomic impacts of homestays | Bhuiyan et al. (2013), Malaysia | Socioeconomic benefits from homestays can be ensured by proper planning, marketing, research, and increased customer services | Homestay operators | N/A |
| 6   | Malaysian homestay program and sociocultural factors | Meimand et al. (2017), Malaysia | Local community perception of sociocultural benefits as a function of tourism development in homestays | Homestay operators | Social exchange theory |
| 7   | Surfing tourists and local community economic links | Towner (2016), Indonesia | Pressure on local resources and sustainable tourism management issues due to the increase in foreign surf tourists | Tourists | N/A |
| 8   | Tourist satisfaction influenced by homestays facilities and services | Ogucha et al. (2015), Kenya | Tourist (homestays guest) satisfaction due to service quality level (tangible and intangible) | Tourists | Expectancy-disconfirmation theory |
| 9   | Attitudinal-behavioral dispositions of consumers toward electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) | Rizal et al. (2018), Malaysia | User e-WOM intentions and satisfaction due to the synergy between information quality, system quality, and electronic service quality | Tourists | DeLone and McLean's theory of information system success |
| 10  | Malaysian homestay program and sustainability criteria | Kasim et al. (2016), Malaysia | Sustainability criteria used by the operators to rate services and to promote their homestays, to attract more visitors and generate more income | Homestay operators | N/A |
| 11  | Sustainable rural tourism and local community perspective | Fong et al. (2016), Malaysia | Selected rural areas and sustainable rural tourism development | Local communities | Social cognitive theory, sustainability theory |
| 12  | Ecotourism and sustainability | Jeppikes and Thipsa (2012), Thailand | Environmental and natural resources conservation effectiveness and protection of land ownership by locals | Local communities | N/A |
| 13  | Homestay establishment brand equity and correlation with customer experience | Lu (2015), Taiwan | Ecological significance and organic farming affect homestay experiences that influence brand equity | Visitor of homestay | Customer-based brand equity (CBBE) by Kellar |
| 14  | Agro-tourism impact on socioeconomic conditions in coastal villages | Shafie et al. (2014), Malaysia | Agro-tourism improves the quality of life and economic conditions of villagers. Homestays uplift the coastal villages' image | Local Communities | N/A |
| 15  | Local stakeholders and authorities' social responsibilities | Ponnan (2013), Malaysia | Responsible and efficient local stakeholders for the continued improvement of rural homestay tourism as a viable economic activity | Stakeholders | N/A |
| 16  | Local tourism activities and homestays | Bhuiyan et al. (2012), Malaysia | Homestay program as a multiethnic cultural experience for tourists and as an economic tool for the local people | Homestay operators | N/A |
| 17  | Ecotourism development and homestays | Bhuiyan et al. (2011), Malaysia | Sustainable ecotourism development and homestay operation with appropriate planning and execution, operational guideline and management, proper development and financial distribution | Secondary data | N/A |
| 18  | Tourist perceived value and community-based homestay hospitality | Jamal et al. (2011), Malaysia | The functional, emotional and experiential factors as important determinants of the perceived value of community-based homestay tourism | Tourists | N/A |
| 19  | Rural home commodification | Ye et al. (2018), China | Effects of commodification on perceived authenticity in commercial homes (homestays, farm stays, etc.) | Tourists and commercial homeowners | N/A |
| 20  | Economic development in rural areas by rural tourism | Lo et al. (2019), Malaysia | Sustainable rural tourism development and community support | Tourists | N/A |
| 21  | Cultural and rural attractions’ positive influence on rural homestay choice | Day et al. (2020), India | The role of destination attractiveness and travel motivations influencing the choice of travel accommodation especially with regard to rural homestays | Tourists | N/A |
| 22  | Influence of tourists’ perceived value and demographic characteristics on the homestay industry | Zhao et al. (2020), China | Impact of demographic variables of tourists on their perceived functional, emotional, and social values via multilayered hierarchical approach | Tourists | Social stratification theory |
| No. | Sustainable tourism practices examined | Author(s), (year), geographical area | Subject theme | Target of data collection | Theory applied |
|-----|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| 1   | The tourism industry and the role of homestays | Ahmad et al. (2014), Malaysia | Motivational factors in relation to homestay entrepreneur’s decision-making and their behavior | Homestay entrepreneurs | N/A |
| 2   | Community-based tourism (CBT) | Curcija et al. (2019), Malaysia | Conflict management model as a tool to address conflicts, and to improve CBT outcome | Key stakeholders | Sustainable livelihoods approach (Wu & Pearce, 2014), social exchange theory |
| 3   | “Commercial home” as an opportunity for the growth of entrepreneurship | Jones and Guan (2010), China | The relationship between travel characteristics and demographics of tourists and the willingness to use homestays/B&B | Residents of Hong Kong | N/A |
| 4   | The small and medium accommodation business development | Jaafar (2012), Malaysia | Entrepreneurial marketing strategies develop a sustainable business model for urban and island accommodations. | Small and medium urban hotels and island chalets | N/A |
| 5   | Community’s role in homestays | Agyeiwaah (2013), Ghana | Local traditional cultures and home-like accommodation are the motivational factors underlying tourists’ choice of the homestay. | Stakeholders | N/A |
| 6   | Disadvantaged women as self-reliant homestay entrepreneurs | Kwaramba et al. (2012), South Africa | Women homestay’s entrepreneur’s concern of reduced self-confidence, diminished networking capabilities with other sectors | Women homestay operators | N/A |
| 7   | Effect of development on landscape and social environment | Pérez albert et al. (2020), Cuba | Impact of homestay tourism in social and physical term | Homestay owners | N/A |
| No. | Sustainable tourism practices examined                                                                 | Author(s), (year), geographical area | Subject theme                                                                 | Type                  | Theory applied                          |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1   | Community-based ecotourism                                                                         | Regmi and Walter (2016), Nepal       | Sustainable development benefits of a locally controlled and participatory form of community-based ecotourism | Conceptual paper      | N/A                                    |
| 2   | Rural tourism as an important component of the tourism industry                                     | Nair et al. (2014), Malaysia         | Limitations in current rural tourism definition in Malaysia and proposed rural tourism definition | Conceptual Paper      | N/A                                    |
| 3   | Practice-based learning in homestay hosting in CBET                                                | Regmi and Walter (2016), Nepal       | Ecotourism development and management related to hosting learning capacity and education | Conceptual paper      | Billett’s model of workplace learning  |
| 4   | Responsible rural tourism and contemporary innovations                                              | Nair and Hussain (2013), Malaysia    | The challenges and opportunities for responsible governance in rural tourism destinations | Literature review     | N/A                                    |
| 5   | Strengthening the linkages between tourism and agriculture                                           | Addinsalla et al. (2016), South Pacific | The agritourism development model for linking agriculture and sustainable tourism (“homestays” and “farm tourism”) in the South Pacific | Exploratory           | N/A                                    |
| 6   | Homestay as a new rural tourism product                                                              | Zamani-Farahani (2011), Malaysia     | Homestay as a combination of rural tourism, agro-farm tourism, cultural tourism, and recreation activity operated under the assistance of the government in Malaysia | Exploratory           | N/A                                    |
| 7   | Community-based tourism (CBT) as a sustainable alternative to mass tourism                          | Dodds et al. (2016)                  | CBT provides tools for empowerment, greater economic benefits, and poverty alleviation mechanism for improvements in the quality of life of locals | Exploratory           | N/A                                    |
| 8   | Heritage tourism and homestays                                                                     | Munjal (2019), India                | Development of homestays or heritage hotels offers a unique experience for visitors | Exploratory           | N/A                                    |
| 9   | Environment protection, community participation, and socioeconomic development of local communities | Puri et al. (2019), India            | Conservation of biodiversity in the region and socioeconomic development of the locals | N/A                   | N/A                                    |
example, Vietnam \((n = 5)\), Ghana \((n = 4)\), and Peru \((n = 2)\). The geographical details of the studies are shown in Figure 8.

**Theory(s) applied.** By far most of the studies \((n = 72, 76\%)\) did not have any theory applied; the remaining \((n = 22, 24\%)\) used a theoretical framework and theories of interdisciplinary background. The predominant theories applied were the theory of planned behavior, social exchange theory, and theory of workplace learning.

**Discussion**

The results are summarized as follows: In a sustainable rural tourism context, 48 (51\%) of the 94 studies reviewed had
considered homestay as the core and independent area of inquiry. Nonetheless, the literature was selected for containing “homestays” in the title, abstract, text, and keywords. Sociocultural sustainability was addressed in 35 studies, economic sustainability directly addressed in 19 studies, and surprisingly, environmental sustainability related to rural community-based tourism or homestays was directly addressed in only six studies. Rural community-based tourism was addressed 45 times (48%) either directly or indirectly in the above-surveyed studies. Holistically sustainability was discussed in 28 studies.

We reviewed the literature systematically to identify the significant research domains of homestays as a sustainable rural tourism product by examining sustainable tourism practices, study areas, subject theme, study subjects, and theoretical contexts. This review has found that an increasing number of researchers from developing countries are working on community-based rural homestays, especially in the Asia-Pacific region that includes Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Rural tourism products have a huge potential across the Americas, Africa, and in the Caribbean (UNWTO, 2018). Rural tourism products improve livelihoods, promotes poverty alleviation, and enhances the protection of biodiversity and cultural heritage development (Haywood et al., 2020). However, an important rural tourism product—homestay—is not currently being studied by researchers in Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. In articles studied, we found only four African, one Caribbean, and four South American studies. These regions have massive potential for rural tourism but somehow are ignored.

Most studies originate from Asia-Pacific region, indicating that most countries’ rural tourism policies are efficient and effective in the region, especially for rural homestays. Also, the government departments overseeing rural tourism seem competent. Asia-Pacific region is suitable for tourism throughout the year just like most countries of Africa, Caribbean, and South America; yet more tourists visit rural areas of countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Nepal compared with South American countries (Ecuador, Brazil, Bolivia etc.) or African countries (Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, etc.). Perhaps the reason is better rural infrastructure, better country branding, promotion, country image, and connectivity with tourist home country. African, Caribbean, and South American countries need to improve their rural tourism infrastructure. Countries lagging in sustainable rural tourism products like homestays must also aim on expanding partnerships between national and international public and private stakeholders, as well as local rural communities.

The SLR results demonstrate that rural tourism researchers focused more on social pillar followed by economic pillar of sustainability, and environmental sustainability is not addressed as it should have been. Perhaps this is because all tourism products are perceived as environmentally sustainable; in fact, they are not. The environmental issues of tourism development require special attention (Streimikiene et al., 2021). As the development of tourism and particularly rural tourism is linked with all three dimensions of sustainability, one dimension cannot be ignored at the expense of others (UNWTO, 2018). Sustainability goal cannot be achieved by targeting a single aspect; it is essential to target all aspects simultaneously and attain the objective of long-term rural tourism development. Also, it is necessary to remind that the theoretical definition of sustainability in tourism involves economic, social, and environmental protection dimensions (UNWTO, 2018; Streimikiene et al., 2021).

The outcomes of this SLR will help researchers and rural tourism managing authorities to have an easy access to publications on sustainable rural tourism, thereby contributing to
narrowing the knowledge gap in sustainable rural tourism. Hence, the study can also be helpful to rural tourism researchers and practitioners.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Recommendations

Conclusion

A significant number of critical issues have been revealed by this review and content analysis of published literature. Branding, entrepreneurship, information and communication technology (ICT) competency, homestay operator training, and development are rarely addressed in the literature.

Rural communities especially homestay operators lack essential marketing skills especially branding skills; wide-ranging studies had linked the positive effects of CSR and sustainability with substantial performance brand equity (Wang & Sengupta, 2016). Only two articles addressed branding (eco-branding, eco-label, environmental branding, and brand experience) nevertheless homestay branding is largely ignored.

ICT is associated with innovation, productivity, internationalization, and development, and this association is proofed in all firms generally and particularly in small and medium enterprises (Giotopoulos et al., 2017). Developments in ICT provide competitive advantage and open new possibilities in rural tourism (Agyeiwaah & Mensah, 2017). Technological development can provide significant solutions for dealing with sustainable challenges of tourism development (UNWTO, 2018). In this information age, benefits of ICT competency in tourism is indisputable, but unexpectedly, only two studies addressed this critical area.

Sustainable entrepreneurs merge social and environmental concerns with economic objectives, so they are genuine models for generating social and environmental wealth (Muñoz et al., 2018). Human resource management (HRM) is one aspect of tourism firm’s effort to engage in social sustainability (Wikhamn, 2019). Having sustainable HRM practices is important for hospitality firms and their stakeholders (tourists, local communities, employees, NGOs) to project the image as socially responsible entities (Wikhamn, 2019). Besides many other important areas, entrepreneurship and HRM were somehow ignored in surveyed studies.

Moreover, the study highlights important implications for rural community-based homestays to position their tourism products strategically based on sustainability.

Limitations

This review is not without limitations as the research was limited to 11 years (January 2010 to December 2020); this period was selected due to resource constraint. A systematic review comes with its own limitations because of its retrospective, observational, and selective nature (Yang et al., 2017). Moreover, the publication language was limited to English, and all papers selected were journals and peer-reviewed papers so publication bias may be considered as a limitation. Conference papers, media articles, and other sources of gray literature were also ignored.

Despite these few limitations, this is the very first attempt to carry out a systematic review regarding sustainable homestays as a rural community-based tourism product. This review has revealed the entwined relationship between sustainable homestays and rural community-based tourism and has advanced future research direction.

Future Recommendations

SLRs can provide limited explanations to practical issues (Petticrew & Roberts, 2012; Tölkes, 2018), so future research needs to consider other review protocols to create a knowledge base that can benefit researchers and practitioners. As a commercial homestay’s business grows, it loses its authentic feel (Ye et al., 2018). So, homestay operators should fully exploit local cultural values while designing their homestays; homestay should reflect the identity and perception of an authentic rural community-based product.

In addition, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had a significant impact on tourism industry especially rural tourism, due to the widespread introduction of travel restrictions by countries, as well as massive and unprecedented slump in demand among travelers (Gössling et al., 2020). Tourism is considered as one of the hardest sectors hit by the COVID-19 outbreak (UNWTO, 2020). The current COVID-19 outbreak and high risk of future pandemics have given rise to new challenges for sustainable tourism development (Streimikiene et al., 2021). So, future SLRs should comprehend tourism and natural crises (pandemics).

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ORCID iDs

Zain ul Abedin Janjua https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8248-4501
Mobashar Rahman https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1182-2504

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