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**Fashionable Destination? The Making of Cuba as a Business  
Opportunity and Tourist Destination in U.S. Online Media**

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Hilary and Trinity Terms  
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## Introduction

On 17 December 2014 the American and Cuban presidents made a historic announcement, starting a new chapter of bilateral relations devoted to enhancing economic and social ties. “In the most significant changes in our policy in more than fifty years, we will end an outdated approach that, for decades, has failed to advance our interests,” stated Obama in an address from the White House. Meanwhile, Raúl Castro said that both nations “should learn the art of coexistence in a civilised manner”, highlighting that Cuban people will continue to be faithful to their ideals of independence and social justice. “Strongly united throughout these 56 years of revolution, we have kept our unswerving loyalty to those who died in defence of our principles since the beginning of our independence wars in 1868”, he added.

Two areas of relations between the two countries have been of particular interest since the announcement: U.S. investment in Cuba and U.S. tourism to Cuba.

Although the trade and financial embargo on trade with Cuba has not been lifted by the U.S. Congress, representatives of foreign companies – including American ones – have met Cuban officials to discuss trade and investment against the backdrop of the recent rapprochement with the U.S. and the process of change taking place inside the island. The government of Cuba implements the guidelines of the economic and social policy of the Party and Revolution. On this basis private sector initiatives have expanded nationwide while state-owned enterprises have been required to improve their efficiency. In addition, a new Foreign Investment Act came into force in July 2014 to attract investors interested in settling in the Special Economic Development Zone at Mariel Port and elsewhere in Cuba.

Interest in visiting the island as a vacation destination rocketed after 17 December 2014. Global leaders, politicians, and ordinary people continue to flock to Cuba’s patrimonial cities and historical sites, and the media consider it as a new and highly fashionable destination. Pictures of famous personalities driving along Havana’s seafront promenade in vintage cars have been splashed across the front pages of newspapers and magazines.

The global media coverage has directed attention to Cuba as both a business opportunity and a tourist destination. These aspects have been prioritized in the agenda of different American media organizations, with the intention to inform, comment, and promote the rapprochement through travel sections in a context where stories about Cuba sell.

This study presents a content analysis of news stories in online editions of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Miami Herald*, and the *Tampa Bay Times* between 17 December and 24 December 2014. It focuses on analysing the discourse of news items, considering the interactions between headlines, sources, print texts, and pictures.

This is an important issue to analyse because it could be a useful instrument to help journalists, business leaders, politicians, and social researchers to understand the new political and social context through the role of American online reporting on Cuba after the announcements of 17 December 2014.

The questions I will answer are:

- 1- How favourable was the attitude of different U.S. online media organizations reporting on Cuba as a business opportunity and tourist destination during the first week after the 17 December announcements?
- 2- What topics were dominant, salient, and present in the American media with regard to Cuba as a business opportunity and tourist destination?
- 3- What were the differences and similarities between American online media organizations reporting on Cuba as a business opportunity or a tourist destination?

The methods I have used are: bibliographical search, used throughout the paper to find out required information; historical analysis to research the history of the relations between Cuba and the U.S.; and analysis–synthesis to concisely present the results obtained after detailed analyses.

This research paper is divided into seven chapters, preceded by this brief introduction. The first chapter explains the methodology on which the paper is based. The second provides an overview of the context, while the third covers the American media

portrayal of Cuba as a tourist destination. The fourth chapter deals with the reporting on Cuba in the travel sections, and the fifth with Cuba as a business opportunity. The sixth chapter develops the content analysis of the sample illustrated by tables, which leads to the results, introduced in the seventh chapter. The paper concludes with a bibliography.

# 1. Methodology

Content analysis has a long history in the social sciences, having been used to summarize, measure, and examine symbolic communication by means of representative samples of different forms of speech. This research technique has been widely used in journalism, political science, advertising, and psychology, and also in the broader field of discourse analysis, dating back to the final decades of the twentieth century.

This study uses content analysis as a research technique to standardize results from texts, taking into account the particularities of the online scenario. In this regard, the American scholar Sally J. McMillan considers the growing nature of the World Wide Web has turned the online scenario into a “moving target for communication research”, while stating that

*Content of traditional media such as newspapers and broadcast assumes some linearity or at least commonly accepted sequencing of messages. Hypertext, a defining characteristic of the Web, defies this assumption. Each individual may interact with content of a Website in different ways. Furthermore, the Web is both “like” and “unlike” print and broadcast as it combines text, audio, still images, animation and video. Researchers should build on early theoretical and empirical in defining their Web-based research. (McMillan, 2000)*

Archiving and searching for messages, preparing messages for coding, handling of messages during coding, and “automatic” content analysis coding are mentioned by Kimberly A. Neuendorf as some of the tasks for content analysis in the wake of the spread of new technologies.

*There has been a need for the content analysts to understand the nature of the medium in which the target messages are found and the operation of the equipment for delivery of the messages. This could be as simple as knowing how to find specific news articles in a newspaper’s morgue, learning how*

*to record any play back audiotape or videotape or knowing how to use transcription equipment. But with the explosion of options in electronic and digital media, new considerations have come into play. (Neuendorf, 2002)*

This research has followed several steps to implement content analysis, details of which will be outlined in chapter 6. Firstly, the research questions were formulated and the sample was selected from stories in five different online media outlets. Secondly, the time frame was identified, the categories defined, and the data coded. 231 stories from five American online media organizations reporting on U.S.–Cuba relations and the new Obama policy towards the Caribbean island between 17 and 24 December 2014. Finally, the information was analysed and interpreted in chapter 7

This study used online search engines and human intervention to assure reliability of measurements:

*Human intervention may be needed to ensure that the computer-generated list does not include any spurious or duplicate. Once a list has been generated, the researcher needs to determine the best way to draw a random sample (McMillan, 2000).*

This research paper combines quantitative and qualitative research to deal with topics that cannot be comprehensively explained by using one method alone. That is why this study is only a first approach to the way the press presents news about business and travel destinations in the novel and changing scenario of Cuba–U.S. relations, exploring cultural and social mediations that influence the media consumption of Internet users.

## 2. Context

Cuba boomed in the global news because of its recent political rapprochement with the U.S., after Presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro announced their willingness to restore full diplomatic relations, severed since 1961. The leaders' remarks were made within the framework of a prisoner exchange agreement that cleared the way for a new impetus in the common political history of the two nations.

Presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro thanked Pope Francis and the Canadian government for their mediation during 18 months of secret talks and for calling on the U.S. Congress to lift the embargo against Cuba, dating back over 50 years. Nonetheless, there is still a long way to go to forge a new relationship capable of erasing a half-century of mistrust.

In his address on 17 December 2014, Obama said

*I do not believe we can keep doing the same thing for over five decades and expect a different result. Moreover, it does not serve America's interests, or the Cuban people, to try to push Cuba toward collapse. Even if that worked – and it hasn't for 50 years – we know from hard-earned experience that countries are more likely to enjoy lasting transformation if their people are not subjected to chaos.*

Meanwhile, the President Raúl Castro stated the “willingness to discuss and solve our problems without renouncing any of our principles.” So, political confrontation between Cuba and the U.S. did not end on 17 December 2014, it just moved to another battleground.

Since then, many rounds of talks have been held and diplomatic ties have been re-established. Once again, there are embassies in Havana and Washington. Obama became the first U.S. president to visit the island in nearly a century, the Buena Vista Social Club band played in the White House, and American airlines now fly to the island. The Obama administration ended the longstanding “wet foot, dry foot” policy that allowed Cubans who arrived in the U.S. without a visa to become permanent residents. However, this bilateral approach may be reversible in the light of President Donald Trump's statements in Florida on 16 June 2017 pledging “to help the Cuban

people by imposing restrictions on travel and business in Cuba”, as reported by the Associated Press.

Obama issued executive orders to loosen the embargo and a group of agreements were signed between the two governments to enhance collaboration in economic and social fields. Nonetheless, the blockade, as it is known in Cuba, remains the main obstacle to the normalization process and even hinders third countries’ commerce with the island.

The bilateral U.S.–Cuban agenda has included topics geared toward cooperation in healthcare, direct mail, environmental protection, air travel, and agriculture. Moreover, high-level delegations representing both governments have discussed human rights, economic claims for compensation of American properties nationalized after the revolution, and damages provoked by the blockade policy against Cuba.

Americans still cannot travel to Cuba as tourists in the ordinary way. Information published on the website of the U.S. Embassy in Havana states:

*Travel to Cuba for tourist activities remains prohibited by statute. However, the Department of Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has issued general licenses for 12 categories of travel. Individuals who meet the regulatory conditions of the general license they seek to travel under do not need to apply for an additional license from OFAC to travel to Cuba. The 12 categories of authorized travel to Cuba are: family visits; official business of the U.S. government, foreign governments and certain intergovernmental organizations; journalistic activity; professional research and professional meetings; educational activities; religious activities; public performances, clinics, workshops, athletic and other competitions, and exhibitions; support for the Cuban people; humanitarian projects; activities of private foundations or research or educational institutes; exportation, importation, or transmission of information or informational materials; and certain authorized export transactions.”*

Despite these restrictions, from January to July 2015 visits to Cuba by U.S. citizens increased by 54% compared to the same period of the previous year. This figure was “influenced by the historic thawing of relations between the Caribbean nation and Washington”, reported the Associated Press. The Cuban tourist industry has been experiencing an upward trend for the last two decades, becoming a key source of income for the national economy. In 2016 the number of visitors reached 4 million for the first time. After the first three months of the current year, Americans had become the second tourist source market behind Canadians.

Because of the embargo policy toward the island, economic relations have not developed at the same pace as the tourist sector. However, to mention just one example, some 30 U.S. companies participated in the Havana trade fair in 2015, while the tractor firm Cleber became the first U.S. company with permission to do business at Cuba’s Mariel Port, a free trade zone that is attracting the attention of foreign investors. Obama’s new policy towards Cuba envisaged the sale of agricultural equipment such as Cleber’s product: “The tractor, which the owners call the ‘Oggún’ in homage to the Afro-Cuban Santería spirit of metal work, also provides a valuable lesson to companies hoping to be the first in their fields to get into Cuba,” reported USA TODAY on November 2015.

According to the report on Resolution 70/5 of the United Nations General Assembly entitled “Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America against Cuba” – presented by the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs and dated June 2016 – the principal laws of Congress and the administrative provisions that establish the blockade policy are the Trading with the Enemy Act (1917), Foreign Assistance Act (1961), Presidential Proclamation (3447), Control of Cuban Assets Regulations of the Department of the Treasury (1963), Export Administration Act (1979), Export Administration Regulation EAR (1979), Cuban Democracy Act or the Torricelli Act (1992), Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act or the Helms Burton Act (1996), Section 211 of the Emergency Supplementary Appropriations Act for the 1999 fiscal year, Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act (2000).

On October 2016, the U.S. abstained for the first time from voting against an annual United Nations resolution calling for the end of American blockade against Cuba. “The vote passed overwhelmingly, with the support of 191 countries ... The UN General Assembly has voted to approve the resolution every year since 1992, and the U.S. has always strongly opposed it,” reported the BBC.

Cuba’s government has denounced the fact that some blockade sanctions were implemented even after the thaw. For example, on 6 August 2015, some weeks after the Cuban flag was raised again in Washington, OFAC levied a fine of \$271,815 on a U.S. maritime insurance company (“Navigators”) for violating the regulations against Cuba and other countries. According to OFAC, on 1 April 2011 Navigators paid \$21,736 in interest to a Cuban national. Likewise, on 1 April 2016, some days after Obama’s visit to Havana, the U.S. bank Citibank refused client payments to the Cuban company Havanatur Argentina.

Although efforts are being made by both sides to build a constructive relationship between Cuba and the U.S., there is still an ongoing debate that is likely to continue generating headlines and stories in the short and long term.

## **2.1 Which came first: the editorial or the news? *New York Times* editorials and Cuba**

The coverage of the Cuba–US political rapprochement did not begin after the historic remarks of 17 December 2014. Although the presidents’ joint announcement was considered a very well-kept secret, the media had beaten them to it. Before 17 December, the *New York Times* (NYT) had published a set of editorials relating to Cuba:

- “Obama should end the embargo” (11 October 2014)
- “Cuba’s impressive role on Ebola” (19 October 2014)
- “The shifting politics of Cuba policy” (25 October 2014)
- “A prisoner swap with Cuba” (3 November 2014)
- In Cuba, Misadventures in Regime Change (10 November 2014)

- “A Cuban Brain Drain, Courtesy of the U.S.” (16 November 2014)
- “Cuba’s economy at a crossroads” (14 December 2014)

These opinion pieces provide insights into the portrayal of the island nation as a business opportunity for Americans, while criticizing the Cuban socialist model.

According to Marie Sanz, a Harvard Kennedy School Fellow,

*Including its series of editorials, the Times published 47 pieces on the island from February 2014 to September 2015. In contrast, the Miami Herald, the leading newspaper in Florida (home to nearly a million Cuban-Americans) published a mere 17 stories during the same period ... The 2014 editorial series clearly did not tip the White House toward finally accepting normalization – after all, it had just concluded 18 months of secret talks to nail down the terms of the agreement. But the Times’ heavy barrage of timely editorializing contributed to the public discourse that followed.” (Marie Sanz, *The persistent advocate, the New York Times’s editorials and the normalization with Cuba*)*

During Obama’s presidential campaigns and administration periods a variety of news items, articles, and editorials had already been published which showed a different tone of speech over Cuba from George W. Bush’s administration. Indeed, ranging from a *Miami Herald* article (“Our main goal: freedom in Cuba”, 2007) by Barack Obama, to more recent examples such as “It is time for the U.S. to end its senseless embargo of Cuba” (*Forbes*, 16 January 2013) and “Lift the Cuban embargo” (*New York Times*, 12 December 2013).

“Obama should end the Embargo” (*New York Times*, 11 October 2014) outlines some points that reappear weeks later as part of Obama’s 17 December 2014 remarks, particularly concerning support to the private sector and telecommunications in Cuba:

*Fully ending the embargo will require Congress’s approval. But there is much more the White House could do on its own. For instance, it could lift caps on remittances, allow Americans to*

*finance private Cuban businesses and expand opportunities for travel to the island ... It could also help American companies that are interested in developing the island's telecommunications network but remain wary of the legal and political risks. Failing to engage with Cuba now will likely cede this market to competitors. The presidents of China and Russia travelled to Cuba in separate visits in July, and both leaders pledged to expand ties.*

The editorial "The shifting politics of Cuba" describes the embargo as a failed policy and considers that a growing number of politicians

*"...call the embargo a failure and argue that ending America's enmity with Cuba represents the best chance of encouraging positive change on the island. Several prominent Cuban-American businessmen who were once strong supporters of the embargo have changed their stance and become proponents of engagement. The pro-embargo lobby raises a fraction of the money it once did. President Obama now receives more correspondence from lawmakers who favour expanded ties than from those who want to keep robust sanction."*

The *New York Times* editorial "Cuba's economy at a crossroads", which bears the same title as a 2010 *Financial Times* article, goes through the island's historical economic ties, including the period of dependence on the U.S. before the revolution, Cuba's relationship with the socialist bloc, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the economic crisis in Venezuela. This influential multimedia editorial pointed out challenges for the Cuban economy such as the dual currency system, the purchasing power of citizens, and lack of supplies for the private sector. It concludes:

*Washington could empower the reformist camp by making it easier for Cuban entrepreneurs to get external financing and business training. That type of engagement is unlikely to succeed unless the United States abandons its policy of regime change.*

Speaking to the BBC, Andrew Rosenthal, the editorial page editor of the *New York Times*, had already said the editors believed that “for the first time in more than 50 years” there were favourable conditions for the approach.

*Nevertheless, it is intriguing that the Times has been running so many consecutive pieces on the same country, at clearly defined intervals, in two languages and in moments when President Barack Obama is defining his agenda for his remaining two years in office. (New York Times goes on a Cuban crusade, BBC, 11 November 2014)*

### **3. The American media portrayal of Cuba as a tourist destination**

American online press coverage of Obama's policy shift toward Cuba accompanied, followed up, and even preceded the announcements of 17 December 2014. Indeed, the *New York Times's* editorials of the previous weeks helped to shape public opinion surrounding this topic. To a lesser or greater extent, the editorial flows of American media houses during the coverage were generated from Cuba and the U.S. by means of correspondents, contributors, or journalists who framed items, mediating audience perceptions on both shores.

Partly because of the echo chamber role of the media, the way Cuban and American societies see one another is coloured by a dispute that dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century. Media organizations affect public opinion by developing collective attitudes about public affairs. Indeed, even though Cuba and the U.S. are just 90 miles apart, the *Washington Post's* "Newspaper in Education" supplement, aimed at high-school students, asked: "Where in the world is Cuba?" saying that

*Neighbors don't always get to know one another. You get to know the Canada family on one side of you and the Mexico family on the other side of your home. Yet a couple doors down, the Cuba family and others are barely recognized. Through this month's activities, you will get to know Cuba.*

News about Cuba became a major presence in mainstream and alternative media organizations all over the world after the 17 December announcements. Albeit from different editorial perspectives, the portrayal of Cuba as a new business opportunity and tourist destination has become part of the media agenda through news stories, opinion pieces, editorials, and advertorials.

#### **3.1 The change narrative**

On 1 April 2015, the CNN International Edition published a photo-essay including Cuba among the destinations likely to be transformed in the short term because of the arrival of tourists, improvements in transport infrastructure, climate change, or

Hollywood movie advertising. Entitled “10 places to see before they’re changed forever”, the text promotes Havana, Cuba’s capital, as a destination where “vintage cars, colonial palaces and beautiful wall murals are still part of the scenery”. The caption to a picture of the city’s historic centre warns, “Don’t expect Havana to look like this much longer”. The other destinations on the list included remote Greek islands, Antarctica, St Helena in the South Atlantic, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Nicaragua, Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe, and Reydarfjord in Iceland. Other potentially fashionable places mentioned were Austria’s Oetzal valley and the island nation of Malta, settings for the James Bond film *Spectre* and the Angelina Jolie film *By the Sea* respectively.

Almost a year later, “How tourism will change Cuba”, a *National Geographic* article, considered that the development of the island will depend on the increasing number of American vacationers, stating that “As the end of the embargo looms, American investors are lining up to claim their piece of the tourism pie in Cuba”. NatGeo’s expedition section invites travellers to discover Cuba by describing Havana as a city “frozen in time” and the island as a “fast-changing island nation”. A similar perspective is shared by another *National Geographic* article, “How mass tourism will change Cuba”.

A *Vox* article, “9 Questions about Cuba you were embarrassed to ask” (21 March 2016) explains the news website’s thinking about the rapprochement between the island and the U.S.:

*But this deal means that Cuba is going to become a freedom-loving capitalist democracy now, right? ... That is the idea: that opening up economy to outside investment and tourism will help liberalize the country more broadly, as the flow of ideas, money and people helps along pre-existing Cuban desires for greater freedoms and rights. That is also why one of the American conditions for the recent deal is that Cuba will allow wider internet access, thus encouraging the growth of grassroots political culture.*

The idea of “a country frozen in time” crops up again and again in American online journalism writing on Cuba as tourist destination. However, the high educational level of the Cuban people, a result of the public policies enacted by the revolutionary government since the early 1960s, is also recognized.

However, a *Huffington Post* article, “The fantasy of Cuba where time stood still“, by professor of anthropology Ruth Behar, pointed out that

*This assumption – that Cuba has remained frozen in time for more than 50 years – is rooted in a long American romance with the island. As early as 1821, Thomas Jefferson spoke of the American desire to possess Cuba, declaring, “I have ever looked on Cuba as the most interesting addition which could ever be made to our system of States.” Although territorial dreams were held in check (except for the base of Guantánamo), the U.S. sought to develop Cuba in its own image.*

### **3.2 The fantasy of American cars**

Since the rapprochement, news coverage of visits of actors and world-class musicians such as Rihanna have direct or indirectly reinforced the idea of Cuba as a tourist destination and the “frozen in time” metaphor. The Barbadian singer-songwriter made the front cover of *Vanity Fair* leaning against a Chevrolet Impala in Havana. The photoshoot “Rihanna in Cuba: the cover story” includes an interview with the singer-songwriter and pictures taken by the famous photographer Annie Leibovitz at Paladar La Guarida, Old Havana’s streets, La Rosa bar, and Josie Alonso’s house. It also features metaphors and cultural and patriotic symbols of Cuba in tune with the story (photographs entitled REBELLE WITH A CAUSE, ISLAND GIRL, CUBA LIBRE, for example). As Jessica Diehl revealed in the behind-1950s scenes story “The styling secrets of our Rihanna cover shoot in Cuba”,

*It’s a combination: you have Rihanna, then you have Cuba, then you have [photographer] Annie [Leibovitz] who loves Cuba, and has photographed lots of things there. It’s taking into account the coloring, and the mood, and the sort of patina*

*of the places and houses and music venues and things like that. It became about what would be, in our imaginary world, believable, because it didn't feel completely right to go 4,000 percent over the top – we wanted to be part of Cuba, we didn't want to be outside of Cuba.*

Cuban vintage cars have become the visual metaphor of the new rapprochement between the island and the U.S, appealing to a nostalgic iconic 1950s element in Cuba, without distinguishing between vehicles devoted to tourism (classic cars) and public transport (*almendrones*). It is possible to reach a broader understanding of the place of vintage cars in American culture by analysing some ideas in the preamble to *The Great Book of American Automobiles*, edited by Andrew Montgomery:

*(...) Remembered or imagined or merely dreamed about, American automobiles have woven themselves into the pattern of the nation's past more strongly and securely than those of any other country on Earth ... The United States is a big place. Unlike any other country, and with due respect to its indigenous peoples, the vast majority of its population is descended from adventurers: those who had set out from the Old World and crossed an ocean before setting out to traverse a continent and create a nation. If we accept the beginning of the twentieth century as coinciding with the birth of automobile, it is worth noting that, whereas in Europe and the rest of the world few people ever travelled more than a few miles from the place where they were born, most Americans had come a long way already. (Montgomery, 2002)*

Montgomery also points out that because

*automobiles are and have ever been accessible in the United States, their place in their popular culture is unique. No other country has ever celebrated cars in songs as America has from the Cadillacs, all shiny and new, to the T-Bird that Daddy took away and the Chevy that drove to the levy. (Montgomery, 2002)*

The American writer and political expert Peter Kornblun (“Cuba’s Classic Car Détente”, *Cigar Aficionado*, July/August 2016) defined Cuba’s abundance of classic cars as a symbol of the people’s resilience and the country’s socioeconomic transformation:

*An estimated 60,000 American-made cars are on the island – almost all of them dating back to the early and mid-20th century heyday of the big three Detroit automakers. “The narrow old streets are jammed with big American automobiles,” The Nation magazine reported in January 1928 when President Calvin Coolidge became the first, and, until Obama, the last U.S. president to visit the island. By the 1940s and ’50s when Cuba had become a playground for the American rich and famous, as well as the U.S. mafia, the country also became a national showroom for shiny, new, Detroit-manufactured automobiles. Ford, Chrysler, Chevrolet and Cadillac dealerships lined Havana’s leafy Prado boulevard. Indeed, Cuba gained the dubious distinction of importing more Caddys – Fleetwood convertibles, Devilles, Eldorado Broughams – than any other nation in the world.*

Discussing the reopening of the American Embassy in Havana, a *Cubadebate* article (“Symbols”, 16 August 2015) asserts:

*But what no one said, this magnificent body that circulates throughout Cuba, heirs of iron and tin from the Second World War, survived a blockade that did not let even a washer slip through – like nothing that the Cubans needed to live. However, inside they were ingeniously repaired with Russian motors, Chinese batteries, Polish brakes, Angolan tires, light bulbs from any part, and shock absorbers made with nickel from the “Che Guevara” factory in Moa. The form is not innocent regarding the content and this symbol for those who inhabit the island it is joke. At least.*

### 3.3 The tourist invasion

The assumption relating to the “invasion” of American travellers is reiterated in headlines, news items, and opinion pieces such as a *Newsweek* article (“Cuba braces itself for a second American invasion”):

*Now Cuba is readying for a second invasion, when direct scheduled flights start from America in September – six U.S. airlines led by American and JetBlue have been approved by Washington for up to 20 flights a day to Havana, plus more to other cities (in addition to current charter flights).*

Other articles from the same perspective include: “Is Cuba all set for the tourism boom?” (CNN, 18 December 2014), “Why Cuba Isn’t Ready for American Tourists Just Yet” (ABC News online edition, 3 February 2015), “Cuba booming as tourists flock there before Americans come” (AP, 23 March 2015), “Is Cuba ready for boom of American tourism?” (CBS News online edition, 15 January 2016), and “Is Cuba ready to cope with American tourists?” (*Newsweek*, 9 November 2016). These news items refer to the island’s limitations in terms of accommodation, infrastructure, transport, and facilities. As can be seen, American visitors to Cuba are often called “tourists” despite the fact that the U.S. legal system does not allow them to travel to the island under that category. This could encourage the mistaken idea that the embargo has been lifted.

An article entitled “Growing flow of Americans remakes Cuba” stresses the hypothetical effect of American travellers on Cuba, also reflecting on non-U.S. holiday-makers visiting the island:

*Though the U.S. embargo still officially bans them from hitting Cuba’s beaches as tourists, Americans are nevertheless shaking up the country’s tourism industry and communist economy as they flock to the island. ... For decades, Cuba’s tourism sector catered instead to Canadians and Europeans booking inexpensive package deals in Varadero and other beach resorts. (Wall Street Journal, 12 July 2016)*

The idea of an “American invasion” is also related to the supposed cultural influence of U.S. citizens spreading their values among Cubans and transforming the political and social system of the island. A pioneer *New York Times* opinion piece (“Invade Cuba with tourists”, 9 April 2013) had already suggested a change of U.S. policy towards Cuba, calling on Obama to “go much further and lift all travel restrictions on Cuba, and lift the trade embargo as well”. “Welcome back, Cuba!” (*New York Times*, 18 December 2014) and “American tourists want to see a Cuba that Cubans would rather leave behind” (*Washington Post*, 18 March 2016) back this perspective.

Likewise, the arrival of the first American cruise to Havana in five decades was reported by *National Geographic* using a symbolic picture showing a Cuban vintage car in the foreground and a cruise ship in the background. The news item was entitled “Here comes a wave of change for Cuba” while the caption highlighted “A curiosity, a portent, a looming symbol of the impending change: This May, for the first time in nearly four decades, an American cruise ship sailed into Havana Bay.” Moreover, the locals’ welcome was described as follows: “Crowded around the terminal as the *Adonia* docks in Havana, Cubans cheer as though the Americans were rock stars.”

The previous example follows a similar rhetorical construction to that of “Visit Cuba, before it changes”, compiled by Louis A. Pérez, Jr (NACLA, 17 August 2016), who warns that “as relations with Cuba move toward normalization, the transformation of ‘people to people’ travel into an element of U.S.–Cuba policy revives old racialized representations of the island and its people.” Pérez, who is the J. Carlyle Sitterson Professor of History and Director of the Institute for the Study of the Americas at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, assures us that “‘selling Cuba’ has become a subject of expanding interest among travel agents and marketers at travel conventions and in trade publications – often for exorbitant prices.”

## 4. It's time to go: travel sections reporting on Cuba

Cuba's boom in the media after 17 December 2014 is hard to explain without analysing the role of media travel sections, which are oriented to marketing operations, combining news, entertainment, and advertising, including their portrayal of stereotypes, cultural frames, and political considerations.

News relating to Cuba as a travel destination appeared at two levels – hard news (economics, politics, and business) and soft news (entertainment, travel sections). Global news media such as *National Geographic*, CNN, and the *New York Times* are reliable examples of the latter.

News about Cuba as a tourist destination was published by American media long before the reestablishment of relations between the two countries was announced. Indeed, tour operators like National Geographic Expeditions were among the first U.S. outlets to offer people-to-people travel back in 2011.

The American media have a long-standing relationship with tourism. That's why both bad and good publicity about Cuba has been generated from the U.S. in recent decades, depending on the historical period and the business model and editorial agenda of media organizations.

A few weeks before the thaw, on 18 November 2014, the Business Wire website published a news item under the title "The New York Times expands travel program". The following example shows how travel sections work as business model suggestions. There was a very clear strategy positioning Cuba as a tourist destination amongst *New York Times* readers, even before the historic announcements.

NEW YORK--([BUSINESS WIRE](#))--The New York Times today announced the expansion of its travel program, Times Journeys ([nytimes.com/times-journeys](http://nytimes.com/times-journeys)) to now include 29 itineraries, visiting 36 countries and seven continents.

For 2015, new Times Journeys include many places with troubled pasts, including Cuba, Sri Lanka, Colombia and Iran. These journeys will offer exclusive insights into the history and forces that brought these areas to worldwide prominence.

Each exclusive travel experience is inspired by Times content and joined by either a New York Times journalist or Times-selected expert, including Pulitzer Prize winners John Burns, Jeffrey Gettleman, Serge Schmemmann and David Shipler.

In 2015, Times Journeys offers six distinct trip styles: “Activities & Sports,” providing opportunities to hike the mountains of Patagonia or around Mont Blanc; “Food & Wine,” focusing on the best of Italian or Provençal cuisine; “Arts & Culture,” allowing immersion in Italian or Irish opera or photography in Morocco; “History & Context,” visiting China, Cuba and Iran; Science & Nature taking you to the extremes of Antarctica or the wilds of the African plains and “Politics & Perspective,” revealing clear-eyed looks at Russia, the Northern Ireland peace process and the Israeli-Palestinian conundrum.

Times Journeys for 2015 include a number of trips to areas of the world that ordinary offerings do not visit, including Colombia, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. With curated content from The New York Times and dedicated subject matter experts, travelers will be able to better understand the past, present and future of these controversial lands.

“Since launching Times Journeys, we’ve learned that our customers choose to travel with The New York Times because of our longstanding and extensive knowledge of some of the most thought-provoking destinations in the world,” said Michael Greenspon, general manager, News Services and International, The New York Times. “We’ve fine-tuned the business over time, ultimately growing it from an educational cruise offering to a comprehensive travel program exploring many of the uncommon lands we cover in our news.”

The New York Times is working with specialty travel providers Abercrombie & Kent, Academic Travel Abroad, Insight Cruises and Mountain Travel Sobek to develop and operate these programs.

For more information, please visit [nytimes.com/times-journeys](http://nytimes.com/times-journeys).

Times Journeys launched in 2012, primarily as a cruise program.

Cuba ranked second, behind the Italian city of Milan, according to *New York Times's* "52 places to go in 2015", published on 11 January 2015.

*Cuba has long been the forbidden island, a tropical bastion of communism whose mystique was amplified by the fact it was largely off limits to Americans. Now, as part of the détente between the United States and Cuba, Americans wishing to go there will face fewer restrictions, provided their visit is "purposeful" (strictly sun-and-sand holidays are still prohibited).*

Viñales, a famous Cuban valley, appeared in the *New York Times's* "52 places to go in 2016", ranking 10th:

*The increasing accessibility of Cuba for American travellers goes well beyond Havana. Less than three hours' drive west of the bustling capital is Viñales, a lush valley of deep-red earth and tobacco fields and mogotes, stunning limestone outcrops that are often shrouded by morning mist. Explore the valley – a Unesco World Heritage site – from the village of Viñales, where every other pastel house is a bed-and-breakfast.*

Likewise, the *Boston Globe* chose Cienfuegos amongst places to travel in 2016:

*As soon as the political doors were flung open at the end of 2014, Americans clamoured to visit the previously-forbidden Communist island. It quickly topped every traveller's must-visit list in 2015. It will get even more frenetic in 2016 with a recently announced increase in commercial air travel. Havana is the centre of the frenzy, followed by the historic city of Trinidad. But Cienfuegos should be high on your list of Cuban cities to see. You can dine by the water, walk around the arty town square, or catch an up-and-coming singer at a quiet club. The once-moneyed yachting town feels like a relaxing, wealthy escape, circa 1957. Direct flight? No, but never say never. Best time to go: November.*

Notwithstanding differences in dates, the *New York Times* and the *Boston Globe* coincided in using the “forbidden island” label to present Cuba as a tourist destination. Likewise, the same perspective dominates the speech of *National Geographic’s* “How to plan an unforgettable trip to a long-forbidden island”, which used “It is not a trend. It is a small tsunami” as a catchphrase to attract the audience’s attention from the very beginning of the opinion piece.

“Cuba. The time is now: a people-to-people experience”, one of the tourist packages organized by the *New York Times’s* journeys section, assures readers that “Frozen in time and poised for change, Cuba has intrigued Americans even as they were threatened by its Soviet partner.” This perspective is also expressed in “Cuba, frozen in time”, an article published in the *New York Times’s* online edition on 15 July 2016.

“Habana: insider guide”, published on the CNN International website, provides information about historical and cultural spots in Cuba as well as nightclubs, restaurants, and shopping attractions, taking for granted that the “largest island in the Caribbean and its capital of Havana stand on the precipice of dramatic change” and defining the atmosphere of the city in the following way:

*Old Havana overflows with colonial castles, convents and cobbled plazas. Detroit dowagers with fins sharp enough to draw blood rattle along the Malecón seafront boulevard. And the Tropicana cabaret – a sensual salsa-charged extravaganza – recalls the pre-revolutionary heyday of sin. Welcome to communism, Caribbean style. Socialism and sensuality.*

An article published on the Business Destination website on 23 November 2015 entitled “The tourist appeal of communism” explains that after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc, a new tendency in tourism promotion emerged, removing the socialist ideology from the field of politics and repositioning it in the tourism sphere. “No longer a challenge or a fear, it now forms a key part of that market, where its remnants and relics can be observed free from political influence – as is part of the appeal of any other ruined civilization.”

Travel sections have traditionally been regarded as belonging to the soft news area (entertainment, fashion, and environment) rather than hard news (economy, politics). However, this does not exclude them from political approaches to events or topics covered. “7 things Americans should know about travelling to Cuba” (CNN Travel, International edition, 22 September 2015) openly takes sides, by affirming that “While it’s hard to cut the Cuban government out of the equation, there are ways to make sure your stay benefits Cuba’s growing number of small entrepreneurs. For starters, stay in a ‘casa particular’ or private home rather than a government-run hotel.”

The American online news coverage on Cuba as a tourist destination after the announcements of 17 December 2014 has been heterogeneous, in accordance with the diverse nature of media organizations. The prevailing approaches of the corporate press have focused on reporting the new political and economic scenario between the island and the U.S., as well as publishing information, and hence widening knowledge about Cuba’s tourist spots by using different journalistic genres and advertorials as well.

Media travel sections have acted like travel agents, providing insights into Cuban reality and facilitating online reservations or flight and travel information, according to the dynamics of travel journalism. At the same time, they emphasize Americans’ shared values and stereotyped messages about Cuba through cultural and political representations. Therefore, most media outlets consider that the new categories set by the Obama administration have largely eased visits to Havana, even though the embargo remains a real obstacle to “sun and sand” tourism or doing business with this neighbouring country.

The speech on change, the “frozen in time” and “forbidden island” metaphors, the U.S. “tourist invasion” and the alleged influence of American values in transforming the Cuban political landscape are reiterated throughout the media’s depiction of the island as a tourist destination. The coverage has attracted multiple storytellers – journalists, contributors, and first-hand impressions of skilled narrators who have visited the island – making every traveller a potential storyteller.

## 5. Cuba as a business opportunity

Expectations concerning Cuba as a new business opportunity broke the internet in the wake of the joint government announcements about the restoration of diplomatic relations. The theme hit the headlines across American online media: “U.S. to restore full relations with Cuba, erasing a last trace of cold war hostility” (*New York Times*), “Jeb Bush wants a tougher Cuban embargo” (*Mother Jones*), “If Cuba embargo lifted, Jacksonville mayor says more aggressively to be a trade hub with island” (*Florida Times–Union*), “Ag interests, lawmakers back Cuba relations” (*Bloomington Pantagraph*).

Digital journalism is a huge area in the U.S., involving online media organizations, blogs, social media, and legacy media websites. Hence, online content represents a myriad of editorial perspectives and journalistic sources. However, some trends may be identified by analysing the media portrayal of Cuba as a business opportunity between 17 December and 24 December 2014.

As a Google News Trends map shows, the generation of content on Cuba in the U.S. steadily increased from 30 November to 17 December 2014. Then there was a downward trend until 28 December 2014, only reaching a new peak on 18 January 2015, coinciding with the beginning of the first round of diplomatic talks.

### 5.1 What the White House said

A White House report published on 19 December 2014 (“What they are saying: How a new course on Cuba can help American agriculture and trade”), provided information about coverage of the country’s new policy toward Cuba in the American online media. The sample included 57 news items, divided into 36 headline articles and 21 editorials. As the White House report highlighted, “Headlines and editorials from across the country show just how much opportunity there is to promote American agriculture and trade moving forward”.

The headline articles were published by regional and local media outlets, mainly based in the southern part of the U.S. Most headlines identify a new business opportunity in Cuba. The sample includes headlines such as “Cuba thaw could mean more money for Alabama” (*Anniston Star*), “Cuba policy could spell out big money for Ark. rice

growers” (KATV, Arkansas), “Port Manatee ready to do business with Cuba” (WTSP, Tampa Bay), “U.S.–Cuba deal a cause of optimism” (*New Orleans Times-Picayune*), “Normalized relations with Cuba could be a plus for Montana farmers” (*Billings Gazette*), “Texas rice farmers optimistic about end to Cuba embargo” (*Beaumont Enterprise*), and “Nebraska eyes Cuban market” (*Lincoln Journal Star*).

In terms of the structure of news headlines, 11 out of 36 use the terms “benefit” or “beneficial” to refer to the new political landscape, showing a favourable opinion about the increasing of commercial transactions with Cuba: “Alabama could benefit from US–Cuba thaw” (*Montgomery Advertiser*), “JAXPORT could benefit from more trade with Cuba” (WJAX, Jacksonville), “U.S. farmers to benefit from eased relations with Cuba” (*Des Moines Register*), “Cuba could be beneficial for Illinois trade” (*The Times* [Ottawa, IL]), “Louisiana benefits from improved U.S.–Cuba relations” (*The News Star*), “Strain: Farmers would benefit by Cuba trade” (*Shreveport Times*), “South Mississippi positioned to benefit from trade with Cuba” (*Biloxi-Gulfport Sun Herald*), “South Dakota farmers to benefit from eased relations with Cuba” (*Argus Leader*), “Texas business could benefit from improved Cuba correspondence” (*Amarillo Globe-News*), “South Dakota farmers to benefit from eased relations with Cuba” (*Argus Alexander*), “Texas businesses could benefit from improved Cuba correspondence” (*Amarillo Globe-News*).

The editorials listed in the White House report follow a similar trend to that of the news stories. According to the *Orlando Sentinel*,

*This is the door that’s taken more than five decades to open. President Barack Obama’s call for normalizing relations with Cuba is more than a door; it’s a historic opportunity for a more-effective U.S. strategy to ease decades of tension and promote reform on the island. There are good, practical reasons for normalizing relations, from better trade, especially given the recent upgrades at Cuba’s harbor in Mariel; to environmental concerns, specially given Cuba’s plans for deep-water oil exploration not far off our coast; to improved coordination on weather emergencies, especially given the sweep of killer hurricanes.”*

An editorial published by *The Republican*, under the title “Changed policies toward Cuba: a recognition of reality” argues this new momentum is an “historic shift that could revitalize the flow of money and people across the narrow waters that separate the two nations.” Meanwhile, the *Palm Beach Post* pointed out “Time for U.S.–Cuba policy, start by ending the embargo,” and Minnesota Public Radio reported, “After working against embargo, Cargill welcomes Cuba news.”

The *Anniston Star’s* editorial (“Alabama and Cuba”) shed light on the experience of the state’s entrepreneurs trading with the Cuba under U.S. legal restrictions, stating that the trade embargo had damaged the island nation but hadn’t changed its behaviour. The editorial also claims that “the embargo has kept Southern states like Alabama from fully tapping into what should be a prime trading partner.”

Meanwhile, the *Lincoln Journal Star* gives insights into Nebraskans’ first-hand experience of the benefits of extended commercial flow with Cuba. Its editorial also described difficulties concerning banking transactions with the island and the Cuban economy’s challenges.

*In 2001, Congress carved out an exception for agriculture and medical products in the U.S. embargo on trade with Cuba. Since then, Gov. Dave Heineman has led three trade missions. A tally of goods exported to Cuba several years ago put the value at more than \$70 million worth of products such as dry beans, corn, wheat, pork and beef.” (“A beneficial move to Cuba”, Lincoln Journal Star)*

Despite the dominant economic perspective in all this news, it is worth noting that these headlines and editorials, either through titles, leads, or bodies, reinforce the idea that a new approach to Cuba could fuel transformations in the political system of the island: “A way to advance freedom in Cuba” (*Tampa Bay Tribune*); “Obama’s approach is best way to help Cubans, promote democracy” (*Fresno Bee*); “Obama initiates a 21st Century solution” (*Quad-City Times*); “Hello, Cuba. It’s about time” (*Louisville Courier*). In “A gamble on Cuba that’s worth taking”, the *San Diego Union Times* explicitly pointed out that “The hope is that increased U.S. engagement,

investment and tourism in Cuba achieves what sanctions and diplomatic pressure could not.”

A reading of the headlines and articles compiled by the White House suggests there was a homogeneous consensus regarding Obama’s policy toward Cuba. However, further research confirms that online coverage of the détente was in fact much more diverse.

## **5.2 What the others said: business is business?**

A *Washington Post* editorial on 17 December 2014 (“Obama gives the Castro regime in Cuba an undeserved bailout”) demanded that commercial restrictions over the island be maintained, naming the new initiative an “undeserved bailout” for the Cuban government:

*Full diplomatic relations will be established, Cuba’s place on the list of terrorism sponsors reviewed and restrictions lifted on U.S. investment and most travel to Cuba. That liberalization will provide Havana with a fresh source of desperately needed hard currency and eliminate U.S. leverage for political reforms.*

The editorial pointed out that the full lifting of the embargo required Congress’s approval, and called for increasing pressure on the Cuban government. Meanwhile, the picture accompanying the opinion piece shows a group of demonstrators in Little Havana, Florida, holding banners against the new political momentum. “That the embargo has not succeeded in destroying communism does not explain why all sanctions should be lifted without any meaningful political concessions by Cuba,” it concluded.

Another example is a *Miami Herald* editorial dated 17 December 2014, stating that

*President Obama promised that the United States would not relent in efforts to help the Cuban people. We are calling on Cuba to unleash the potential of 11 million Cubans by ending unnecessary restrictions on their political, social, and economic activities. That should remain the guiding principle of American*

*policy toward Cuba, with or without sanctions. ("New day for Cuba–U.S. relations", Miami Herald).*

However, an editorial issued few hours later set as a condition for the future relationship the fact that “until Cuba makes fundamental democratic reforms, the trade embargo should remain in place.” (“A roll of the dice on Cuba”, *Miami Herald*).

An article in the *Wall Street Journal*, also published on 17 December 2014 (“U.S. companies consider the possibilities of Cuban trade; normalizing diplomatic relations is one thing, but lifting the embargo is another”) provides some insights into the American entrepreneurial sector’s increasing interest in investing in the island:

*Coca-Cola Co. sells its namesake cola in every country but Cuba and North Korea. It quickly resumed shipments to Myanmar in 2012 after the U.S. dropped sanctions against the Southeast Asian country. On Wednesday, the company said its re-entry to Cuba depends on timing and regulation. Its rival, PepsiCo Inc., said it looks forward “to adding Cuba contingent on business relations becoming normalized.”*

Also on 17 December 2017, *USA Today* published an opinion piece by Senator Robert “Bob” Menendez, who openly sided against loosening the embargo and strongly criticized President Obama’s attendance at the Summit of the Americas held in Panama City on 10 April 2015. On the same date, a *USA Today* editorial entitled “Obama cracks the ice with Cuba” states: “A broad trade embargo, which can only be lifted by Congress, will remain in place. But full diplomatic relations will be restored, and talks on matters of common interest will begin.” It also highlighted: “trade will be selectively increased” and “travel restrictions will be slightly loosened”. The editorial considers it is the time for Americans to feel confident in the “power of their ideas and the strength of our economy to lure Cuba to freedom’s gates.”

Another opinion piece dated 18 December 2014 (“A victory for oppression; President Obama's policy is bad news for the Cuban people living under a dictatorship, and it sends a dangerous message to the world”), credited to Marco Rubio and published in the *Wall Street Journal*, describes Obama’s policy towards the island as “bad news for the Cuban people” that “sends a dangerous message to the world”. The Cuban-

American senator stressed that the effectiveness of the embargo could be debatable because Obama unilaterally “granted concessions” to Havana.

A *Boston Globe* editorial on 17 December 2014 recognized that reactions to the announcements were mixed, considering people in favour of the approach as well as a representative part of the Cuban diaspora residing in Florida who accuse the Cuban government of violating human rights. “The embargo had become a dead end, reflecting more spite than strategy, and persisting in part because of the strong voting block of exiled Cubans in Florida, a key swing state (As expected, Obama’s new U.S. policies on Cuba were met with outrage from Cuban-American lawmakers from both sides of the aisle),” the editorial added.

Just few days later, an opinion piece published on *Mother Jones* (a reader-supported non-profit news website) noted that an ABC/CBS poll revealed that 64% of the American public supported establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba:

*Those are remarkable numbers. Everyone supports an end to the embargo by wide margins, even Republicans. I checked all the other crosstabs, and it turns out that ending the embargo is supported by all parties, all ideologies, all sexes, all ages, all races, all education levels, all incomes, and all regions ... The only subgroup that opposes it – barely – is conservative Republicans, who make up about 17 percent of the population. So naturally that means the embargo will stay in place. It no longer really matters what the other 83 percent of us think. (“Everyone wants the Cuban embargo to end”, Mother Jones, 23 December 2014)*

## 6. Content analysis

This section shows the main results of the content analysis applied to 231 stories from five American online media organizations reporting on U.S.–Cuba relations and the new Obama policy toward the Caribbean island between 17 and 24 December 2014. The media selected were the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Miami Herald*, and the *Tampa Bay Times*.

The research was focused on determining the relevance of Cuba as a business opportunity and a tourist destination within the editorial agenda of different media outlets at the time the country started to trend in the news. To achieve this goal, the following categories were taken into consideration:

- 1- Saliency: The topic is highlighted as the headline, lead, or first paragraph of a news item, story, or article.
- 2- Dominance: The topic was considered the central idea of the story, news item, or article, having a greater presence than other topics forming part of the journalistic narrative.
- 3- Presence: The topic was mentioned in the story, news item or article, being subordinated to other issues with greater relevance.

The following tables show the overall and specific results considering the 231 stories and articles taken from the above-mentioned media outlets.

**Table 1 Saliency, Dominance and Presence of Business Opportunity (BO) and Tourist Destination (TD) in five media organizations by percentage**

Media organizations	Saliency (%)		Dominance (%)		Presence (%)	
	BO	TD	BO	TD	BO	TD
Overall results	17	10	11	7	55	46

- Overall, in the sample analysed, there was a favourable trend portraying Cuba as a business opportunity (BO) or tourist destination (TD) between 17 and 24 December 2014.

- Around half of the stories reflected an increasing interest for investing in and travelling to the island, appearing either as salient or dominant in a considerable part of the sample. (See Table 1) It must be borne in mind that the global agenda setting of the news coverage ranged from diplomatic relations and prisoner exchange to historic articles and reactions in Cuba and the U.S.
- Cuba appeared more often as a business opportunity than as a tourist destination, highlighting agriculture, aviation, public transport and telecommunications, among other sectors.
- The potential scenario for business made more headlines than the appeal of travelling freely to Havana because the embargo has a greater effect on initiatives to encourage trade and commerce between the two countries.
- Most stories reporting on Cuba as a business opportunity or tourist destination focused on the benefits to the island from the new relationship with the U.S. However, mining, biopharmaceuticals, baseball players, Cuban cigars, and rum appeared among the potential benefits to the U.S.
- In general, despite the fact that Americans cannot visit the island as ordinary tourists, visiting Cuba is a less conflictual topic than doing business there considering the legal barriers American companies must face as a result of the embargo policy.

**Table 2 Saliency, Dominance and Presence of Business Opportunity (BO) and Tourist Destination (TD) in the New York Times (%)**

Media organization	Saliency (%)		Dominance (%)		Presence (%)	
	BO	TD	BO	TD	BO	TD
<i>New York Times</i>	14	9	12	7	60	68

- The portrayal of Cuba as business opportunity and tourist destination was present in more than 60% of the New York Times stories, while the topic was salient and dominant in a representative percentage of the sample, coinciding

with the point of view of the editorial board which, in various editorials, supported the Obama policy toward Cuba. (see Table 2)

- In general, Cuba was portrayed more as a business opportunity than a tourist destination, albeit the number of references to travel restrictions for American citizens and Cuban tourist attractions were slightly higher.
- Most stories concerning Cuba as tourist destination and business opportunity reinforce the idea that economic approach is a vehicle for political change, prioritizing the entrepreneurs and the private sector in the island.
- The *New York Times*'s dominant perspective in its reporting on Cuba as business opportunity or tourist destination assumes the embargo policy against the island is outdated and constitutes the major obstacle to a free flow of commerce and trade between the two countries.
- The *New York Times* was the most quoted newspaper during the time period of this analysis, being referred to by many media outlets reporting on the Cuba–U.S. thaw as an example of editorial leadership.
- Between 17 and 24 December 2014, the *New York Times* published stories reinforcing the idea of Cuba as business opportunity and tourist destination, such as “Cuba the next Cancun? It should be so lucky”; “Clamoring for Cuba”; “As Havana celebrates historic shift, economic and political hopes rise”; “How travel to Cuba may change”; “Cuba’s change opens a door to lost assets”; and “Cuba’s zeal for tight control clashes with need for growth”.
- The introductory paragraphs of the opinion piece “Cuba the next Cancun? It should be so lucky” states “This fear – that Cuba will be spoiled by vulgar American capitalism – is pretty insulting to Cubans, who ought to be able to decide for themselves where to spend their money”. The article sheds light on the development model of the Mexican resort area, reaching the conclusion “If you want to visit a planned economy on vacation, you don’t need access to Cuba; you can just fly to Cancun.”
- During this period, the *New York Times* published three editorials concerning the Caribbean island. “Mr Obama’s historic move to Cuba” explained the reasons for the new policy toward the island:

*The changes the Obama administration announced have the potential to empower Cuba’s growing entrepreneurial class by*

*permitting commercial and financial transactions with the United States. The White House also intends to make it easier for American technology companies to upgrade the island's primitive Internet systems, a step that could go a long way toward strengthening civil society.*

- During the research period the *New York Times* published two other editorials (“Cuba’s gay rights evolution” and “Cuba’s promising new online voices”) and several opinion pieces.

**Table 3 Saliency, Dominance and Presence of Business Opportunity (BO) and Tourist Destination (TD) in the Washington Post (%)**

Media organization	Saliency (%)		Dominance (%)		Presence (%)	
	BO	TD	BO	TD	BO	TD
<i>Washington Post</i>	5	3	2	3	65	66

- More than 60% of stories published by the *Washington Post* online edition mentioned Cuba as a tourist destination and business opportunity, highlighting confrontational reactions to the Obama policy coming from politicians and citizens as well as the editorials. (See Table 3)
- Among the media outlets analysed, the editorial position of the *Washington Post* was the most critical of the Obama approach, considering he was giving concessions to the Cuban government and representing an extreme right-wing position opposed to the thaw. “Obama gives the Castro regime in Cuba an undeserved bailout” (17 December 2014), “Detente with the Castros” (18 December 2014) and “President Obama’s betrayal” (21 December 2014) are some of the editorials and opinion pieces considering the new political momentum as inconvenient for the U.S. government.
- Cuba as business opportunity prevailed over tourist destination. Agriculture, conglomerates, and telecommunications companies are mentioned among the sectors Americans are interested to invest in. On the other hand, Cuban nickel

deposits, offshore oil reserves, and coveted cigars are recognized among the interesting economic attractions for the U.S.

- Concerning tourism, “Economic impact from new Cuba policy is limited now” (*Washington Post*, 19 December 2014) assures readers that

*its tropical climate and abundant beaches have made it a popular destination for Canadian and European tourists, just as it was for Americans before the 1959 revolution. Cruise companies, airlines and hotel operators are among those poised for the moment that Congress might lift the embargo.*

- In the *Washington Post’s* narrative, Cuba had a marginal dominant or highlighted presence as business opportunity and tourist destination. The number of news items and articles aimed at explaining the potential areas of investment for American business people and companies was marginal and Cuba’s tourist potential was barely highlighted in the headlines.
- Most the debate regarding the Obama policy toward Cuba centred on political concerns. The point of view of the *Washington Post’s* editorials was connected with hard-line Florida politicians’ reactions against the Cuban Revolution.

**Table 4 Saliency, Dominance and Presence of Business Opportunity (BO) and Tourist Destination (TD) in the Wall Street Journal (%)**

Media organization	Saliency (%)		Dominance (%)		Presence (%)	
	BO	TD	BO	TD	BO	TD
<i>Wall Street Journal</i> online edition	20	3	8	3	63	36

- The *Wall Street Journal* is a specialized media outlet aimed at entrepreneurs, investors, and people interested in commerce and finance. That’s why a significant proportion of its stories on Cuba were headlined from the economic

perspective (20%) and the presence of Cuba as business opportunity (63%) was considerably larger than as tourist destination (36%). See Table 4.

- Contents relating to Cuba went far beyond the news media agenda, providing data on the Cuban scenario for business and giving information on social and political contexts as well.
- Information on Cuba as a tourist destination was not a dominant topic during the period analysed and had a marginal presence both in headlines and first paragraphs of the stories.
- Opinion articles published in the *Wall Street Journal* discussed the legitimacy of Obama's policy towards Cuba, agreeing with the idea that the approach is driven by political intentions to undermine the Cuban political system.
- In an article published on 18 December 2014, Florida senator Marco Rubio considered the new policy would have "far-reaching consequences" for the American people, taking for granted that Obama had made "concessions" to the Cuban government.
- "U.S. companies consider the possibilities of Cuban trade; normalizing diplomatic relations is one thing, but lifting the embargo is another", explains the increasing interest of General Motors, Cargill Inc, Caterpillar, and some other American companies in the Cuban market, stating:

*Since the U.S. embargo – put in place in 1960 after Fidel Castro's communist rebels took power in Cuba – U.S. firms have lost out on the 11 million consumers 90 miles off the Florida coast, and Americans have had little access to Cuban cigars and Havana Club rum.*

- "U.S. relaxes rules on Cuba travel" (*Wall Street Journal*, 19 December 2014) shines a light on the new rules for travelling to the island:

*Under the new policy, an administration official said on Thursday, citizens still may only travel to Cuba for eligible purposes, but they will no longer need a U.S. government license to do so. ... Changing the ban on tourism to Cuba would require an act of Congress, and even with the new policy, travel won't suddenly be as easy as jetting to Puerto*

*Rico. U.S. citizens will still generally need Cuban visas, obtainable from the Cuban government's office in Washington, D.C."*

**Table 5 Saliency, Dominance and Presence of Business Opportunity (BO) and Tourist Destination (TD) in the Tampa Bay Times (%)**

Media organization	Saliency (%)		Dominance (%)		Presence (%)	
	BO	TD	BO	TD	BO	TD
<i>Tampa Bay Times</i>	22	11	22	6	53	39

- More than 50% of the stories in the Tampa Bay Times reference Cuba as a business opportunity, while the island is presented as a tourist destination in nearly 40% of the sample. (See Table 5)
- Cuba as a business opportunity raised a greater number of expectations than as a tourist destination, having a salient and dominant presence in a representative part of the stories.
- Topics concerning Obama's policy towards Cuba made the headlines frequently, considering the *Tampa Bay Times* is based in Florida. The state is closely linked to the island for geographical, historical, political, and social reasons and a considerable part of the Cuban diaspora resides there.
- A *Tampa Bay Times* editorial ("Obama's new Cuba policy long past due, good for Florida", 19 December 2014) considers that

*Obama has made a historic policy change that positions the United States and Florida for the future. The vitriolic criticism by Rubio and other congressional Republicans is out of date and out of touch, and Congress should lift the embargo and stop clinging to a failed policy.*

- In general, the prevailing perspective was that commerce and trade with Cuba could be good for business in Florida. The article "Renewed relations could

boost port” (18 December 2014) stressed the privileged position of Tampa Bay with its proximity to Cuba:

*News that the United States plans to ease some travel restrictions and restore full diplomatic relations with Cuba – the biggest movement toward normalization with the Communist country in a half-century – impacts few places more than Tampa Bay ... This is home to one of the largest Cuban-American populations in the nation. And thanks to Port Tampa Bay, it is arguably best positioned to become a top trade conduit with Cuba, as well as a travel hub.”*

- This media outlet dedicates a significant space to the Florida politicians’ debate on the new policy toward Cuba. For instance, 15 of the 30 articles analysed gave opinions for or against Senator Marco Rubio, who opposed the Obama’s policy toward Cuba.
- The perspective of some stories recognizes there are substantial differences in the way younger and older generations of Cuban-Americans interpret the U.S.–Cuba relationship, and an increasing number of people support a different approach to Cuba.

**Table 6 Saliency, Dominance and Presence of Business Opportunity (BO) and Tourist Destination (TD) in the Miami Herald (%)**

Media organization	Saliency (%)		Dominance (%)		Presence (%)	
	BO	TD	BO	TD	BO	TD
<i>Miami Herald</i>	22	26	13	8	35	22

- The presence of Cuba as business opportunity or tourist destination in the *Miami Herald’s* narrative is smaller than in the other media outlets analysed, since the media organization dedicated a considerable part of its news coverage to reporting on Florida-based reactions, albeit assuming there was a

big gap between younger and older generations of Cuban-Americans in terms of their perceptions of Cuba. (See Table 6)

- Although interest in trade and commerce was a dominant presence in stories, the portrayal of Cuba as a potential tourist destination made the headlines in a significant part of the news and opinion pieces analysed, such as: “Interest in Cuba travel jumps”; “Historic agreement expands rights to Cuba”; “Keys tourism bureau has slogans ready for post-embargo Cuba”; “U.S.–Cuba travel business prepares for seismic shift”; “U.S.–Cuba thaw may rock Caribbean tourism”.
- Referring to the Obama policy towards the island, the editorial “A roll of the dice with Cuba” considered that the principles of American policy towards the Caribbean nation “may be harder to achieve under the new rules, which expanded trade, travel and remittances,” conditioning the new relationship by saying that “the trade embargo should remain in place” until the country makes political changes.
- Explaining the decisions President Obama had made concerning Cuba, the opinion editorial “President Obama’s new Cuba policy looks forward, not back”, by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, U.S. Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker, and U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Jacob J. Lew states “ [The President] has authorized U.S. officials to expand travel, increase remittances and grow bilateral trade” while highlighting the priority given to the Cuban self-employed sector: “In this regard, the Commerce Department will ease current export limits on a variety of products that would help Cuban small businesses grow such as construction firms, agricultural companies, automobile repair and others”.
- The portrayal of Cuba as a business opportunity and tourist destination was, by and large, more politicized in the *Miami Herald* than in the *Tampa Bay Times*, also based in Florida.

## 7. Conclusions

The news coverage from 17 to 24 December 2014, in the selected media outlets for this research paper, included six major areas – diplomatic relations, reactions to the approach in Cuba and the U.S., prisoner exchange, democracy and human rights, the Cuban socio-economic context, and Cuba as a business opportunity and tourist destination.

The portrayal of the island as a business opportunity and tourist destination in the American online media was, by and large, favourable, even though opinions about the rapprochement between the U.S. and Cuba were not homogeneous.

Regarding business opportunities, potential areas for investment such as agriculture, telecommunications, construction materials, ports, public transport, aviation, cruise-ship companies, and the hotel industry were identified. The majority of stories and articles focused on the benefits Cuba might take from the U.S., keeping in mind the unbalanced economic relationship.

Mining, biopharmaceuticals, cigars, rum, and baseball players were highlighted among the important benefits Americans could take from doing business with Cuba. In relation to starting up business with socialist countries, there were two prevailing ideas:

- Cuba could be a social partner like VietNam, Laos, or China
- Trade with communist countries did not lead to political changes.

Stories and articles showing the island as a business opportunity agreed in emphasizing that Obama's policy towards Cuba was intended to empower the emergent private sector in the island rather than the state sector.

Russia, China, and Canada are portrayed as competitors for American investors interested in the Cuban market, while Venezuela is shown as a country going through an economic and political crisis that will no longer be able to supply oil to Cuba.

In general terms, travelling to Cuba is portrayed as a less conflictual issue than doing business there, considering the severe restrictions imposed by the embargo policy. Moreover, news relating to Cuba as travel destination appeared at two levels – hard news (economics, politics, and business) and soft news (entertainment, travel sections). Moreover, the portrayal of Cuba as a tourist destination was linked to some

preconceptions such as the fantasy of classic American cars, the island “frozen in time”, or the expected “tsunami” of American tourists heading to the island. Cuba is described as likely to become an important new holiday destination for Americans and a real competitor for other resort areas around the Caribbean.

The coverage of U.S.–Cuba détente during the period analysed was characterized by a notable number of editorials reinforcing the point of view of media organizations. In this regard, while the starting point of the new Cuba–U.S. approach can be specifically dated to 17 December 2014, the news coverage had been initiated some weeks earlier with a series of bilingual editorials in the *New York Times*.

Excluding global news agencies such as Associated Press or Reuters, most of the news flow concerning the U.S.–Cuba thaw came from media organizations based outside Florida, such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*.

In the U.S., the most and least favourable perspectives on the new bilateral momentum between Cuba and the U.S. were published by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, respectively.

The *New York Times* presented the most favourable portrayal of Cuba as a business opportunity and tourist destination, in continuity with the historic position of the newspaper concerning the relationship between Cuba and the U.S. and the bilingual editorials it published before the 17 December announcement.

Although negative reactions to the thaw had a greater presence in Florida media outlets, the *Washington Post* editorials were the most critical of Obama’s new policy towards Cuba (“Obama gives the Castro regime in Cuba an undeserved bailout”, 17 December 2014; “Detente with the Castros”, 18 December 2014; and “President Obama’s betrayal”, 21 December 2014).

Most of the news stories and articles analysed here reinforce the idea that the embargo is the main obstacle to increasing trade and commerce between the U.S. and Cuba, as well as the number of holidaymakers visiting the Caribbean island. It is clearly understood in all news media that only the U.S. Congress can lift the embargo. The embargo is portrayed as a bilateral issue between the U.S. and Cuba, with almost no mention of its effect on third countries, although several companies and banks based outside the U.S. have been fined for trading with the island.

Cuba as a business opportunity was notably salient in the *Wall Street Journal*, a specialized publication aimed specifically at providing news and data relevant to entrepreneurs, business people, and market makers. Most of the stories and articles suggest the change of policy was likely to promote political changes in the Cuban political system by means of what is called “business diplomacy”.

Although the topic was widely referenced in general terms in big global news media like the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post*, the portrayal of Cuba as a business opportunity and tourist destination was more salient and dominant in the Florida local press – the *Miami Herald* and the *Tampa Bay Times*. The news coverage immediately after the announcements of 17 December 2014 shows an increasing gap between the way younger and older generations of Cuban-Americans in Florida understand relations with the island.

The news coverage of all media outlets analysed for this paper gathered different reactions to the new approach between Cuba and the U.S. from a range of sources, including politicians, business people, government officials, academicians, and ordinary people. The authors of stories and articles covering the Cuba–U.S. thaw were journalists in the newsrooms, correspondents on the ground, regular columnists, politicians, academics working as political commentators, and visitors to Cuba giving their first-hand impressions of the island through travel stories.

The portrayal of Cuba as a business opportunity and a tourist destination was, on the whole, framed by political considerations, confirming the influence of political interests and forces on the rapprochement between these two neighbouring countries.

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