

# FALLING TREES

*(November 2021)*

The United Nations World Tourism Organization has determined that there were just 25 million tourist arrivals in 1950.

There was usually one camera with very limited features per family of tourists, say less than 10 million units, and photos had to be processed later at relatively high cost, which made the photographer avaricious of his shots, especially considering that rolls of film only contained a few pictures. After a picture was printed an individual had little opportunity to broadcast it to even a limited audience, let alone a large one.

However, in 2018 the number of tourist arrivals had increased to 1,400 million.

In 2021, there were 4,606 million active internet users worldwide, of which 4,320 million accessed the internet via mobile devices.

Meanwhile the number of people who own a smartphone with camera is 7101 million, nearly 90% of the world's population.

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In other words, the number of photographs taken in 2021 is possibly a million-fold the number of photographs taken in 1950 and the 2021 photographs can be immediately broadcast worldwide to huge audiences, and almost for free, whereas in 1951 only those with professional access to Life Magazine et al. had any chance of reaching the public.

As for films and video, their incidence in 2021 is most probably several million-fold that of 1951.

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Consequently, a 2021 picture of a forest fire, storm, iceberg, quake, or any other catastrophe has close to no historical value for comparative scientific purposes.

Whereas a tree falling in the forest can only be heard if someone (furthermore not deaf) is within hearing distance, there is no doubt that the tumbling of the tree would happen if there were no one around to hear it, although there wouldn't be anyone to report the event.

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You may also consider that:

1. For reference, the first color photograph appeared in the New York Times in 1997, and there were virtually no photographs in the Wall Street Journal until 2007.

In 1997 the New York Times sold 1.1 million copies a day, and the Wall Street Journal (the country's largest circulation) 1.8 million.

2. In 2021 up to 3 billion pictures and movies (3,000 million) are shared on the Internet daily.

It is reasonable to assert again that a single picture taken in 2021 of a single event somewhere in the world has therefore not much historical significance, especially in remote places.

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I would rather say that what has changed is our hugely increased selective awareness of things.

Furthermore, we refer to some events as apocalyptic only because of the very small comparative size of the human being. An ant can drown in a drop of water. Our tallest trees are but blades of grass when seen from an airplane. The tallest mountains, which we deem majestic, would rise only  $7/10^{\text{th}}$  of a millimeter if Earth had a diameter of one meter. When Mr. Amazon Goes to Space (Mr. Deeds Goes to Town and Mr. Smith Goes to Washington), his lofty excursion takes him to an altitude of 7 millimeters, while at the same scale the moon (the nearest celestial body) hovers indifferently at a 30 meters distance and the closest star is 4 million kilometers away. I kid you not.

Still at the same scale, in the last 18,000 years the seas have risen 10 micrometers and, if both polar caps were to bizarrely melt entirely and simultaneously, the seas would rise another 6 microns or so.

That a first photograph was taken of an iceberg breaking away from a glacier does not mean the event never occurred before the invention of photography and the generalization of mass travel. To wit, S/S Titanic did collide with an iceberg that had to come from somewhere, and the seas did rise 120 meters in 18,000 years as a consequence of icebergs breaking loose and then melting.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Internet was a great invention, as were the inventions of the printing press, which has been used for the likes of Dante and Schopenhauer, of the piano for the benefit of Mozart and Chopin, of pigments for Rembrandt and Modigliani, which of course does not mean that everybody who was ever given a grand piano for Christmas has become a Beethoven.

Now, how much of what has been printed, composed, or painted since is valueless? 99.99%? 99.9999%? Why should the Internet turn every user into a great genius just because it is available almost for free?

The Internet is an unsurpassed tool for finding treasures of knowledge in the farthest reaches of the world. However, it seems that quite a lot of users scorn museums and show only an interest for scavenging garbage dumps and then bragging publicly about their finds.

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