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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKING MEDIUMS ON THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS OF TOURISTS: A CASE STUDY OF STRAY LTD AND SPACESHIPS NEW ZEALAND LTD

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Abstract

This thesis examines tourist decision making in relation to the use of blogs and social networking sites. Specifically, the research examines the tourist behaviour involving these mediums in the pre-experience decision making phase of the travel experience through case studies of two New Zealand tourism businesses which involve backpacker and fully independent tourists as their customers (Stray Ltd and Spaceships New Zealand Ltd).

The thesis research used both quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to examine the influence of blogs and social networking sites on tourists' decision making. The quantitative data comprised of 206 semi-structured surveys completed by customers of the two companies. Qualitative data consisted of the collection of 330 photographs posted on the companies' websites which had been taken by customers, 19 customer videos, customer comments from both companies' websites, the content of the companies' Facebook and Twitter social networking sites, and a semi-structured interview with a representative from both companies.

Analysis of the data revealed that Facebook is the most commonly used social networking site, with the usage of social networking sites being higher than that of blogs. However, neither Facebook nor blogs featured strongly when used by customers to make decisions, with travel ratings websites and official destination websites being more commonly used. Analysis of the qualitative data showed a difference in language, structure and time between the social networking site content and customer comment data. Customer comment data features more descriptions of a customers' trips and why they would recommend the company, rather than when the customers are going on the trip and what they are looking forward to, which was a characteristic of social networking site content. Analysis of the photographic and video data revealed differences between the two customer types, suggesting there is a clear difference between backpackers and fully independent travellers and their motivations for travel.

This thesis contributes to the previous attention given to the role of technology in tourist decision making and trip bookings through focusing on the

use of social networking sites and blogs and how this applies to tourism businesses.

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Chapter 1.0 Introduction

1.1 Context of proposed research

Social networking sites and travel blogs have taken tourism and travel booking experiences to a new level not previously witnessed. For example, social networking sites have allowed tourists to communicate with not only the tourism operator but also other tourists who have recently experienced services from the operator whom they are considering booking their travel with. This has allowed the tourist to gather information first-hand from the other tourists and make decisions about the operator or the experience.

On a wider level, that the Internet is a proven tool for advertising, marketing and information communication (for example, Hoffman and Novak 1996). Doolin, Burgess and Cooper (2002) have advocated that the Internet is an important tool for destination marketing in New Zealand because of its ability to share information. This shows that the Internet is regarded as a useful tool that can be used by tourism businesses for their marketing and advertising to tourists. Indeed, Buhalis (1998) states that information is the "lifeblood of tourism" (p. 409), with information technologies providing a competitive advantage to tourism businesses. Tourism in the past has had many different intermediaries in the delivery of a tourism product starting with the travel agent (Akehurst, 2009). This is argued to be changing with the use of the Internet and how people conduct their information search and decision making. Werthner and Ricci (2004), for example, have ranked tourism as an industry that is at the forefront of Internet use and online transactions with the industry being orientated towards Internet and social communication in order to deliver an experience and make a sale. The use of websites has been found to be effective as people have access to them 24 hours a day and around the world (Lin & Huang, 2006). Arguably, this has seen a change from traditional sales and marketing techniques to a more community orientated approach to target customers. Because of this, it is claimed that more tourists are using 'online travel communities' and social networking sites in order to find information, with this also becoming a large part of tourism businesses focus on marketing (Wang *et al.*, 2002).

Social networking has been popular, in particular, with Free and Independent Travellers (FIT) and backpackers as it is claimed that these types of tourists not only want to experience a destination but also its people, and meet other travellers at the same time, as they have the desire to experience new cultures, activities, and experiences (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Murphy, 1999). The use of blogging has also expanded the way in which information sharing and communication has been done over the Internet. Through blogging, tourists post their stories about their experiences on their personal Internet site, the operator's site, or a networked site. This is a simple way of both communicating with others and also for a person to gather information. More than 133 million blogs have been indexed according to Singer (2009) since 2002, which shows that blogs can be seen as a large source of information, allowing for over 77% of Internet users to read blogs. This shows that there is a wide range of knowledge available through blogs which are freely available to anyone online. With the blogs being generated mainly by people who have experienced the product or service, the information is generally invaluable as it is based on opinion and perceived authentic content.

Social networking sites have also witnessed increased success and use. Facebook, which has over 500 million users worldwide, is now one of the biggest social networking sites in the world. Its advertisers have quadrupled since 2009, with 176 billion display advertisements being placed in the first quarter of 2010 (Bloomberg, 2010). This shows that advertising is a major asset to both the advertisers and Facebook, with information being able to be targeted at a wide range of demographic users easily. Thereby, both blogs and social networking sites have become large resources from which tourists can make decisions. Information can be obtained and questioned from both sources. This may be argued to be particularly true for FITs and backpackers as these types of tourists often travel large distances to their destinations; therefore, keeping in contact with family and friends is a priority. The use of social networking sites and blogs has therefore become popular as they are easily accessible for both the tourists and their network of friends. This has also subsequently allowed organisations to target their promotions towards their target market.

Despite the above, a review of literature on the topics of social networking sites and blogging has identified a gap in knowledge of the decision making process and the promotional uses of these sites (outlined below in 1.2 Thesis aim). This has also been identified as a relevant research area by the tourism industry as the Internet is widely used by both backpackers and FITs with Tourism New Zealand indicating that tourism businesses can use social networking sites and blogs to support tourists' decision making (Tourism New Zealand, 2009b).

1.2 Thesis aim

A review of relevant literature revealed a gap in knowledge relating to research into the impact of social networking mediums, such as blogs, on the decision making process of tourists and the power of promotion through these mediums (Pudliner, 2007). Mack, Blose and Pan (2007) for example advocated that more research could be conducted on the "usefulness of blogs in the decision making hierarchy, between developing awareness of the product and post purchase evaluation" (p. 142). A challenge that has also been recognised by Deans and Thyne (2007) is the need for a better understanding of behaviour by both individuals and organisations in online environments with there being many challenges for both groups involved. Meeting these calls for greater research in this area, the aim of this thesis is to explore how blogs and social networking sites can be used effectively by tourism businesses to support tourists' decision making, and how these behaviours are influenced by the use of blogs and social networking sites.

1.3 Research objectives

The following specific research objectives have been developed for this research:

- To understand tourists' decision making and pre-experience behaviours and how these behaviours are influenced by blogs and social networking site use.
- To explore how blogs and social networking sites can be used effectively, by the case study companies of Stray Ltd and Spaceships New Zealand Ltd, to support tourists' pre-experience behaviours.

1.4 Research context: Blogs and the tourism industry in New Zealand

The types of tourists discussed in this thesis, as customers of the two case study companies, are important market segments for the New Zealand tourism industry. The backpacking sector for example, made up eight per cent of all international arrivals in the year to June 2009 according to the International Visitor Survey (Ministry of Tourism, 2009b). This equated to 183,100 backpackers visiting New Zealand, which is up four per cent on previous years. Tourism New Zealand has recently targeted this sector of the New Zealand tourism market with their 'Go All the Way' Campaign to promote travel through various social networking mediums (Tourism New Zealand, 2009b, 2009d). The wider tourism industry in New Zealand is worth 10% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of New Zealand, with the industry worth $50 million per day to the country (Tourism Industry Association of New Zealand, 2009). However, international arrivals are reportedly down 2.8% on the previous year ended August 2009 with international expenditure also down 2.6% or $161 million for the same period. All of these statistics have revealed a general decline in the tourism industry in New Zealand, which is in line with the global economic crisis. Despite this, backpacking travellers generally reject this trend. Spending on average per night for a backpacker guest is NZ$84, which includes transportation, accommodation and meals (Ministry of Tourism, 2008a). This is considerably less than other tourists; however, backpackers stay longer than other tourists which in turn equates to a similar amount spent on average by other tourists (Tourism Industry Association of New Zealand, 2009).

Both backpackers and FITs are reportedly attracted to New Zealand for a number of reasons; such as New Zealand's clean and green image, the landscape of the country, and most of all for the adventure and extreme sports activities that they can undertake (Ministry of Tourism, 2008b). Backpackers and FITs are also the types of tourists who travel no matter what global events unfold. With the global economic downturn currently impacting on tourist arrivals to New Zealand, backpacker tourism has reportedly been relatively unscathed, with backpacker and FITs still travelling to New Zealand (Tourism New Zealand, 2009a). This is claimed for a number of reasons, such as the relatively cheap travel and living

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expenses in New Zealand compared to their country of origin or other destinations, and that they have a passion for travel which is not necessarily related to their wealth.

In September 2009, Tourism New Zealand launched the 'Go All the Way' campaign aimed at the youth backpacker sectors of the New Zealand Tourism market. It was identified by George Hickton that the youth and backpacker market are still travelling and spending despite the recession and current economic climate (Tourism New Zealand, 2009d). The campaign aims at encouraging tourists from the UK and Europe to come visit New Zealand as most go only as far as Australia in their gap year. The 'Go All the Way' campaign is working in conjunction with the 'Gap Year: Challenge New Zealand' competition of five tourists travelling New Zealand undertaking challenges and having their experiences put onto online social networking sites. This will allow easy promotion of New Zealand and its culture through marketing mediums that are attractive to the target audience of youth travellers. Through Tourism New Zealand putting more use and investment into social networking sites and communication mediums it shows that this area of promotion and communication is expanding and of significance for both the tourism sector and tourists. Catharine Bates from Tourism New Zealand acknowledges that word of mouth is a powerful influence in tourism and very significant in the backpacker market (Tourism New Zealand, 2009c). With social networking sites and blog sites becoming more popular for tourists to use, it can be seen that this is a new form of communication by word of mouth which is potentially as strong and effective. This promotion targets the backpacker market in the New Zealand tourism industry and is a boost for this growing sector of the tourism industry in New Zealand. The promotion provides justification for the study of this topic as being pertinent not only to scholarly interest, but also to that of the New Zealand tourism sector.

Recent research has validated the importance of the Internet in tourists' planning. The Tourism Industry Association of New Zealand (2009) found that 26% of respondents used online reviews as a tool for planning a New Zealand trip, 15% used online reviews of destinations or activities, and 11% used online travel

itineraries or blogs as a main tool to plan their New Zealand trip in the last six months. Overall, this shows that 35% of respondents used an online planning tool, which was greater than gaining advice from friends or relatives (27%). This highlights the importance of planning travel via online tools and shows that online resources such as reviews and blogs are being used. Social networking sites in New Zealand have mainly been targeted at teenagers, with sites such as Bebo being very popular with youth markets. Both Boyd (2007) and Boyd and Ellison (2008) note that Bebo is popular in New Zealand with the youth market which has grown in popularity since 2005 and changed the way teenagers communicate online. Both Boyd and Boyd and Ellison also note that these social networking sites are not just popular in New Zealand, but also were popular around the world at that time. The authors comment that there are no reliable statistics on social networking sites, with it being difficult to gauge how many people use them; however they are reported to be growing worldwide. Lenhart (2009) found that 70% of Gen Y (18-31 years) have a social networking site profile, with 93% of these young adults using the Internet. With there being such a large social networking user community, sites are beginning to be made around networks of people rather than interests (Boyd, 2007; Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Blogging services that use social networking sites have become popular and mainly dominate the market. Boyd and Ellison (2008) found that Live Journal and Windows Live Spaces are said to dominate their markets through giving the user the ability to also share their blog through social networking sites. It has also been said that statistics on blogs are hard to determine because of blog sites not being tracked in English speaking media (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). However, the literature supports the overall scope and reach of social networking sites and blogs and their effects on their users, and thereby lends support to its further investigation through scholarly research.

1.5 Social networking sites in the news

Despite the above, it should be noted that social networking sites have also received unfavourable commentary during the period of this thesis research. Bad publicity has followed the likes of Bebo, Facebook and Twitter for security problems, the uses of personal information, and cultural material. Most of the

media focus in recent months has been on Facebook. The social networking site has had problems surrounding privacy issues, mainly around the protection of user's information. The company has been urged by not only users but also politicians to strengthen and simplify security around users' status updates and photos posted. The situation with the security issues has become tense with the German consumer protection minister (AP, 2010b) calling for change along with mass user protests (AFP, 2010). Unlike blogging, where there are serious penalties for disclosure of personal information (Fisher, 2010), social networking sites have little legislation around information use. This is made harder particularly by the sites being popular in so many different countries, and country legislation potentially being behind the times of the social networking site development.

Facebook has also had problems with use by different cultural groups. For instance, it was used in Iran as a means of publicising political movements of protest (Margolis & Marin, 2010). It is now also causing cultural problems with Pakistan courts imposing bans on the use of Facebook for the wrongful depiction of the Muslim prophet Mohammad (Reuters, 2010). Bangladesh has also imposed a similar block regarding drawings of Islam's prophet Mohammed (AP, 2010a). These are both cultural areas where Facebook use has come under recent scrutiny. Although not directly related to tourism or marketing, it can be seen that there are areas of concern surrounding the use of social networking sites. In addition, Google and Facebook have both been asked by Congress in the United States to cooperate with government inquiries into privacy practices used by both companies. With both online companies using member's profiles to customise other sites, it has been bought to the attention of privacy watchdog groups the severity of the sharing of information to third party groups (Tessler, 2010).

It can be seen that there are noted problems with the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. However, success has been found for some companies using the sites to their benefit in advertising (Bloomberg, 2010). For example, the future use of the site will potentially depend on the changes made on security and the uses of the social networking sites as consumers and social networking companies balance the use of information and sharing.

1.6 Tourism business case studies

Stray Ltd and Spaceships New Zealand Ltd were selected as the two case study tourism businesses for the thesis. Both companies are New Zealand owned and operated tourism companies aimed at the free and FIT market and backpackers. The directors of Stray Ltd and Spaceships New Zealand Ltd have operated a leading-edge backpacker service for over 17 years, being involved first in Kiwi and Oz Experience bus networks and now Stray hop-on hop-off adventure bus in New Zealand, and Spaceships New Zealand campervan rentals. The two businesses are separate companies that operate at the same premises in Auckland, New Zealand. Both companies are owned by the same directors.

The development of Spaceships New Zealand Ltd evolved from identifying the need for an alternative budget type of campervan. The solution was to use late model Toyota Previa vans and convert them into campervans in Spaceships New Zealand's own factory, which gave them customised design options to meet travellers' needs. The New Zealand operation of Spaceships New Zealand Ltd has offices in Auckland and Christchurch. The company started in 2004 and has since expanded to Australia and the United Kingdom, providing a global network from which to attract tourists to travel to New Zealand, Australia, or the United Kingdom.

Stray Ltd was developed as a differentiated guided hop-on hop-off bus network. It was developed as a way to give tourists flexibility; they can get on or off the tour anywhere they want on specific routes throughout New Zealand, allowing tourists to spend more time at any chosen destination (Stray & Spaceships New Zealand, 2009a).

Most Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customers are overseas tourists, therefore the marketing and service tourists receive needs to be of a high standard for them to make a decision about the product and also to aid their decision making to choose Stray and Spaceships New Zealand over other companies (Stray & Spaceships New Zealand, 2009b). Indeed, for both companies, their biggest target market is Europe, with Scandinavia and Western European tourists making up the biggest percentage of the market (35% from UK/Ireland, 10.8% Germany,

8.1% Scandinavia, 6.9% The Netherlands, and 5.8% Switzerland) (Stray & Spaceships New Zealand, 2009b). The European segment of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's market is solely reached through the Internet as there are no representatives of the companies in these regions (Geddes, 2010).

At present, both companies rely on different media to communicate and advertise to potential customers throughout the world, with the main medium of the two businesses being the Internet. Not surprisingly, the Internet can be considered the most effective tool to communicate to a large number of tourists at one time due to the large distances covered and overcoming time differences (Lin & Huang, 2006). The majority of communication forms and messages are conducted via the Internet and email; with both businesses having their own specific website which contains blogs and photos of tourists' travel experiences with the companies. This shows that their customers are likely to be IT savvy.

The Stray and Spaceships New Zealand strategy for social networking sites is of a simple structure. The social networking sites and blog searching is conducted mainly by one employee. This consists of updating the social networking sites with new content, photos, comments, recommendations, competitions, and links. Search engine optimisation is also carried out through Google and other search engines. The use of blogs also aids search engine results with the newer content on websites being picked up by search engines better. With the Stray and Spaceships New Zealand Facebook pages being set up by ex customers the company has administrator rights to these sites. The company also asks the makers of the sites to update content for them. The Twitter social networking sites have been set up by the company with this being part of the company employee's role. The company websites are constantly updated by their IT specialist with new content, applications, and information. The customer comments placed on Stray and Spaceships New Zealand websites are not managed by the company, they are simply replied to. If comments are degrading to the company they are then managed, however, authentic communication is key to their advertising and brand with this being the aim of gaining the customers' feedback and comments; "It is about communicating with people and providing authentic communication about our products" (Geddes, 2010)

There are a number of ways in which Stray and Spaceships New Zealand use social networking sites, company websites, blogs and search engines in order to influence their customers' decision making. Overall the main concept that is prevalent for their use of these mediums is communication. The use of social networking sites, websites, blogs, and search engines are efficient ways of communicating with a large amount of people. It can be seen that these are simple to use for a company that is close to its target market. With the target markets of both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand being active in their travels, their use of social networking sites is large and will only grow in the future to fill their need of socialising, keeping connected to friends and family while travelling, and sharing their travel experiences.

The two businesses were appropriate case studies for the thesis as they align with the focus of the research on decision making and pre-experience behaviours. It is outlined by the two businesses that most of their clients are overseas tourists (Stray & Spaceships New Zealand, 2009b), meaning that the use of social networking sites and blogs is important for their decision making and contact with other people (Geddes, 2010). These topics are also relevant currently to the New Zealand tourism industry through promotions by Tourism New Zealand (Go all the way campaign) (Tourism New Zealand, 2009b), making it appropriate to these specific case study businesses.

1.7 Key definitions

This thesis encompasses terminology and definitions that are unique to social networking and blogging and the tourist markets of Fully Independent Travellers and backpackers. These are all outlined in this section of definitions, which will introduce these as common terms used throughout the thesis.

1.7.1 Social networking and blogging

Young (2006) calls the writing and use of blogs as a means of communication an old pastime that has been created into a new medium with the use of the Internet. Blogs are mostly personal views and beliefs on topics that are of concern or interest to the person/author. They are published through the communication by means of the Internet with authors using their own personal

websites, companies' websites, or blog websites to host their blogs. These are generally categorised into topics or date order with links available in the blogs to other websites or themes that they are discussing in their blog. The use of the links in blogs enables the author to gain views by the general public, as the use of links and fresh content enables the blog to feature highly on search engine results.

Kennan and Shiri (2009) define social networking sites as "websites that encourage social interaction through profile-based user accounts" (p. 439). Social networking sites and blogs have created a new means of an old communication form (Young, 2006) with their structure being defined by Boyd and Ellison (2008) as;

> "a web-based service that allows individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (p. 211).

This shows that social networking sites and blogs are a new form of communication from which connections are being made, maintained and shared with other users.

1.7.2 Fully independent travellers and backpackers

Backpackers have been defined and researched in a wide range of literature. Most of this literature has originated from Australia or New Zealand with there potentially being more of an emphasis on the backpacker market in these countries. Backpackers were broadly defined by Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) as being "predominantly young tourists on an extended holiday or working holiday" (p. 819). The backpacker sector was recognised as a large economic contributor to destinations and countries' economies. The definition was developed further by Murphy (1999) as being a traveller who "exhibits a preference for budget accommodation, places an emphasis on meeting other people, has an independently organised and flexible travel schedule, go on longer rather than brief holidays, and place emphasis on informal and participatory recreation activities" (p. 21 – 22).

In contrast, independent travellers are defined by Hyde and Lawson (2003) as "travellers who have flexibility in their itinerary and some degree of freedom in where they choose to travel within a destination region" (p. 14). Tourism New Zealand (2007) also provides a more complete definition of FITs as having to have an international air ticket booked and some additional bookings made that are not part of a travel retailers package. Yamamoto and Gill (1999) provide a definition of FITs as being "those that make travel arrangements on their own and follow a personally determined schedule" (p. 134). This definition focuses on the booking and motivation of travel that is individually motivated for the specific tourist.

In this thesis, the term backpacker is not defined by choice of accommodation, or age demographic. Rather, the term backpacker is defined from previous literature surrounding the actions of the tourist such as "extended holiday" (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995), "places an emphasis on meeting other people, and has independently organised flexible travel arranged" (Murphy, 1999).

1.8 Organisation of thesis

The current chapter has provided an overview of the use of the Internet in tourism, social networking sites and blogging popularity. Within this literature, the thesis aims are outlined. The thesis research context of blogs and the tourism industry of New Zealand at the present time are discussed and the tourism businesses used as case studies in the thesis are described.

Chapter 2.0 provides a review of the literature on social networking sites and blogging, an understanding of backpacker and FIT tourists to New Zealand and their motivations and uses of social networking and blogging. The pre-experience perspective of tourism and decision making is explored with information searching, information gathering, travel planning, and branding.

Chapter 3.0 presents the methodology used to understand tourists' pre-experience decision making behaviour and how it is influenced by social networking sites and blogs. The quantitative method, a survey of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customers, is outlined. Qualitative methods are discussed with data collected from customers' comments on the websites of Stray

and Spaceships New Zealand, customer photos and videos collected and analysed from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand websites, the Facebook and Twitter content of both companies, and a semi-structured interview with a manager from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand. The methods for data analysis are also explained.

Chapter 4.0 provides the findings and discussion from survey data, and findings of the analysis of the collection of comments from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand website, video and photos from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's website, Facebook and Twitter content of both companies' social networking sites, and interview data from a semi-structured interview with a manager from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand. This chapter identifies and discusses key findings of the research in separate quantitative and qualitative sections. The chapter shows the use of social networking sites and blogs by tourists visiting New Zealand, what they are used for, their main content, the content of photos and videos from customers of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand, and the opinions of the company on this form of communication and pre-experience decision making.

The concluding chapter (Chapter 6.0) highlights the main findings of the research and further explores the implications of these findings. Limitations of the research are discussed and recommendations for future research outlined. Specific findings, recommendations and implications are also made for Stray and Spaceships New Zealand.

Chapter 2.0 Literature review

This chapter draws on a number of different areas of literature in order to review areas of social networking and blogging, backpackers and FITs, and pre-experience decision making in order to answer the research objectives. This chapter first reviews social networking sites and blogging literature focusing on their influences, history, what social networking sites and blogging are, and who uses them. This is followed by a review of literature on the decision making of tourists, usability of technology and the Internet in tourism, authenticity of social networking sites, blogging and the Internet and experience of tourists is also discussed. Backpackers and FITs in New Zealand are discussed with comparisons made between the two types of tourists and their part in tourism in New Zealand; motivations of both FITs and backpackers are examined with social networking campaigns targeting backpackers and FITs in New Zealand outlined.

2.1 Blogging and social networking sites

This section reviews literature on the history of blogging and social networking sites, the purposes of them and their users, the influence of social networking sites and blogs and the usability of the Internet.

2.1.1 The history of blogging

The term 'weblog' was first developed in 1997 by Jron Barger (Wired, 1997) with it being shortened to 'blog' by Peter Merholz in 1999 (The Economist, 2006). It was mainly developed through authors writing about personal diaries, issues and politics. This soon changed as it fast developed as a tool to comment on and influence news and political issues with blog communication being viewed by Youngs (2009) as a large development in the history of the Internet. Blogs have been written on almost everything that consumers do or have an opinion on. They are mostly personal views and beliefs on topics that are of concern or interest to the person/author. They are published through the communication means of the Internet with authors using their own personal websites, companies' websites, or blog websites to host their blogs. These are generally categorised into topics or date order with links in the blogs to other websites or themes that they are discussing in their blog. The use of the links in blogs enables the author to gain views by the general public, as the use of links and fresh content enables the blog

to feature highly on search engine results. It must be remembered that, in most cases, the people that create blogs are not experts in their field, making the blog sometimes irrelevant with information needing to be checked before being used, especially with a large number of people blogging as a hobby. Tourism is among one of the most popular subjects on the Internet for blogging; however, there has been little research into the type of traveller that creates author blogs (Carson, 2008). However, there is a large amount of literature on the use of blogging as a tourist planning and information gathering tool (for example, Carson, 2008; Li & Buhalis, 2005; Weber & Roehl, 1999b).

2.1.2 History of social networking sites

It is suggested that social networking sites too have become a global success with two thirds of the world's Internet population visiting a social networking site in 2008; this accounts for 10% of the total Internet time used (Nielson, 2009). Social networking sites are popular as they allow users to construct their own profile with pictures, comments and interests that can be shared with other users in their network of friends (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). There is an emphasis on networking through the relationships that the person has with another individual or organisation, for example, old friends, relatives and organisations. The public display of connection is what Boyd & Ellison (2008) find as being critical to a social networking site, as it is a way of keeping up with your circle of friends socially and in real time. Speed is another factor in their popularity, with social networking sites being easy to use and quick to update. For example, new posts on Twitter are limited to 160 characters, allowing for thoughts to be expressed and read quickly (Twitter, 2010).

The first recognisable social networking site, SixDegrees.com was launched in 1997. The site allowed users to construct their own profile and list their friends (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). During 1997 and 2001, a number of social networking sites were launched under a similar concept, with new concepts such as instant messaging and comment pages being developed. From 2001, the development of social networking sites came about through business orientations with today's popular social networking site 'LinkedIn' being popular with entrepreneurs, investors and business people. Today, the social networking

landscape is still not complete with sites such as 'Facebook', 'Twitter', 'MySpace', and 'Flicker' all constantly changing the social networking site market with innovations such as geotag when comments are made, and the analysis of your profile for use by advertisers, with both these innovations bringing about sales for companies who use social networking sites to help their clients (Roberts, 2009). Twitter is a major social networking innovator, with new applications and tools enhancing the way in which social networking sites are used, and people communicate and socialise together.

Some social networking networks have also been created to support only niche markets (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Keenan & Shiri, 2009). A site such as 'Facebook', when it was developed in 2004, was targeted towards college audiences (Cassidy, 2006) with users needing to have a 'harvard.edu' email address to become a user (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Anyone can now join with the network being global and claiming more than 350 million active users (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). It has been identified that Facebook's users spend on average 20 minutes on the site per day, with two-thirds of users using the site at least once a day (Cassidy, 2006; May & Kwong, 2007). Most of the research conducted on Facebook has been focused on privacy issues to do with the personal information of users (for example, Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Stutzman, 2006) which has provided relative negative publicity for the social networking site.

'Twitter' is a similar social networking site to Facebook with its high popularity and social use. Twitter has become popular as it is a form of informal social communication that has been adopted to achieve a variety of social purposes (Zhao & Rosson, 2009). It is estimated that there were 75 million views of Twitter in January 2010 alone according to Schonfeld (2010). However, Twitter is claimed to target a younger demographic of users, with 33% being aged from 18 – 29 years, and 22% being aged between 30 – 49 years with the site being popular for its celebrity use and micro blogging capabilities (Monty, 2009). This shows that Twitter is a popular informal micro-blogging website that has become very popular for social networking amongst a younger demographic of users.

Social networking site usage has recently broken away from its confines of only computer based usage. It is now being used through a number of wireless applications via mobile phone. Pew Internet (2010) found that 25% of Twitter users used the site via wireless means. Facebook has a similar mobile communication usage rate with over 100 million users accessing it via mobile devices. This makes the person twice as active in using Facebook than a non-mobile user (Facebook, 2010). It can be seen that this allows the users to more easily access the social networking site and stay connected. This is argued to pose a new development in the use of social networking sites and their portability (Ellison *et al.*, 2009; Funk, 2009). It also allows a new target market to be born through the social connection of organisations with their clients, and clients with their friends. This is currently being done by a business in Auckland, New Zealand Giapo, an Italian gelato store. The gelato shop engages with its customers through Facebook, Twitter and YouTube allowing customers free Internet usage and promotions through the social networking sites. This allows an instant database for Giapo to use and has gained a national following in New Zealand, with 1500 followers on Twitter and 4200 on Facebook (McDonald, 2010). This automatically changes the user's personal content to be a more activity based content through specific content being posted by the user (Keenan & Shiri, 2009). The content is more real-time based with a specific theme to what the user is doing at the time when a 'Tweet' is made.

There is a need for the users to have an interest in the product in order to communicate their opinion (Brown *et al.*, 2007). This is related to word of mouth communication where it has been found that 90% of word of mouth conversations occur offline with just 15% of consumers participating in word of mouth conversations all together (Keller & Berry, 2006). Word of mouth conversations rely heavily on the Internet in order for the information to be communicated to their social network of friends, this being non-face-to-face communication. It can be seen that social networking sites do provide information to add to the social interaction and consumption behaviour of consumers (Brown *et al.*, 2007; Wellman *et al.*, 1996) with purchasing decisions being influenced by them (Funk, 2009). Because of this, social networking sites have been argued to have had a

new influence on word of mouth communication with users of social networking sites having easier access to both the social networking site and the ability to communicate their views and opinions instantly to their social connections and friends (Ellison *et al.*, 2009; Ellison *et al.*, 2007; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010).

It can be seen that there has been a clear evolution of social networking sites through the years from sites that allow a profile and list of names to begin with (Boyd & Ellison, 2008) and now the wider adoption of social networking sites on mobile devices (Facebook, 2010). Research shows that social networking site use is changing the way communication takes place and how relationships are maintained. This is predicted to evolve further with more utilities being available through social networking sites (Ellison *et al.*, 2009). Future predictions on the use of social networking sites in the future are difficult as they are driven by consumers' needs, social trends, the social networking sites themselves, and advertising on social networking sites (Liedtke, 2010).

2.1.3 Purposes and users of social networking sites

Social networking sites have been setup and used for many purposes, such as communication between people, relationship building, friend networking, knowledge share and marketing. In an industry report by Nielson Online (Nielson, 2009) it was found that social networking sites were the fourth most popular online activity, rating higher than email use.

The main demographic statistics for social networking site usage show that the median age of Facebook users is 33 years, MySpace 26 years, and Twitter 31 years of age. There has been a theme of movement to Twitter with its micro-blogging use and appeal to a younger generation (Read Write Web, 2009). In 2009, there was a large use of blogs by men, with two-thirds of users being male (Singer, 2009). Singer (2009) identified that there is a large age bracket for bloggers, with 60% being between 18 – 44 years of age. A wide number of the blog population studied were also well educated, with 75% having a college degree and 40% having graduate degrees, with one in three bloggers having a household income over US$75,000 (Singer, 2009). This shows that bloggers are educated and have an income from which they can afford to own a computer and

Internet connection. From this it can be seen that bloggers also have a disposable income that attracts advertisers to this market.

A majority of the social networking site literature focuses on teenagers and young adults as main users of social networking sites (for example, Ellison *et al*., 2007; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; Park *et al.*, 2009; Zhao & Rosson, 2009). Facebook, one of the most widely used social networking sites, was created specifically for college student use. This then made it instantly popular when access was given to commercial organisations and the public (Ellison *et al.*, 2007). With social networking use trends, other sites have also become popular with the youth market, such as Twitter; thus, it can be seen that the youth market has a large interest in online communication and communities, with the sites being oriented towards this market (Ellison *et al.*, 2007). This has raised questions of its use amongst scholars, and particularly students, with their new reliance on social networking sites (Barratt *et al.*, 2005; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). The use of Facebook in particular has also expanded rapidly amongst individuals outside of university and college with a 181% increase in use by 25 – 34 year olds and 98% increase in use by 35 years and older age groups (Lipsman, 2007). This shows that social networking sites are very popular among youth markets, with social networking sites being developed specifically to target these markets.

Other factors that influence the success of social networking sites are the type of user and the amount of time spent on social networking sites. Digital Media Wire (2009) found that usage had tripled in the past year, with surfing time on blog sites and social networking sites equating to 17% of Internet users in August 2009. Spending on advertising over the period from August 2008 to August 2009 grew by 119% from US$49 million, August 2008, to US$108 million in August 2009. This shows that social networking sites have become popular for Internet users and as a result it can be seen that there is a large increase in advertising spend to target this segment of the Internet market. Advertising spend on Facebook advertisements also can be aimed at the income of users. It was found that of United States Facebook users, 55% earn $US60, 000 – 100,000 per annum and 30% earn $US30, 000 – 60,000 per annum. These statistics show that advertisements can result in revenue for advertising companies,

as the income demographics show higher disposable income users relating to Facebook (Hazlett, 2008). Facebook is also available in more than 15 languages, allowing for easy communication between people and the targeting of different countries with advertisements and its use.

2.1.4 The influence of social networking sites and blogs

There has been an increasing amount of academic literature published about social networking (Akehurst, 2009; Gunter, 2009; Schmalleger & Carson, 2008) and blogs (Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Lin & Huang, 2006) as a form of marketing, tourism, communication, relationships, and knowledge share. These topics are discussed within a wide range of disciplines including management, science, psychology, sport and tourism.

With social networking and blogging being areas of new discussion and action, they will be outlined and discussed below in relation to their history, what they are, their uses and their significance. Blogs have developed to now be seen as the electronic 'word of mouth' in many sectors of business, especially tourism. It is argued by Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008) that the Internet and blogs are now among the main forms of information source for consumers making purchasing decisions. They go on to find that, "managers and marketers have recently begun to consider and devise strategies to manage human online interpersonal influences" (p. 459). This is also seen as an opportunity for most tourism organisations. Akehurst (2009) finds that the Internet provides a method of communication and distribution for many organisations which is a way of channelling and targeting specific clients to businesses. With tourists having command of what organisations they research through Internet resources, they develop their own evaluation and choose organisations that suit their needs and personality for their travel experience.

Akehurst (2009) argues that the information delivered on tourism organisations' websites is accurate and does attract customers and bookings, and are becoming enhanced from the sharing of information that is generated by a tourist, such as a blog. This is called User Generated Content (UGC) whereby a person generates information that is viewed on the Internet; examples of this are

Internet sites, blogs and social networking site profiles (Akehurst, 2009; Shao, 2009). It is this area of UGC and social networking among tourists that is having an important impact on the tourism industry, and that has enormous potential for tourism marketing. With the definition shown by Winn (2009) that a blog search engine includes entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video, entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. The updating of these entries is normally done by one person, the 'blogger'. In some instances, blog entries are personal with only limited 'friends' or 'networks' having access to these blogs. In other cases, they are available to anyone with links, photos, pictures and comments attached to them.

Social networking sites and blogs are different from each other. A social networking site allows the user to have more control over their profile, who views their profile and content and who they are friends with on the site (Keenan & Shiri, 2009). This is done through requests via email and is designed to be a more closed network of people that the user knows and is in communication with. Literature has also focused on the emphasis of a social networking site user having a relationship intention between two users; this is 'networking' (Boyd & Ellison, 2008), which is different to a blog, by it being more open and available to more people. A blog is a more open area of communication whereby the blog can be found through most search engine results, and can be read, commented on and further used by others. A blog is more a short story or sharing of personal views on a subject rather than a community networking area of which a social networking site allows more. Studies have shown the popularity of both types of communication with blogs allowing for the content to be publicly accessed (Lenhart, 2009).

2.1.5 Usability of the Internet

Beyond the specifics of social networking and blogging, the use of technology and specifically the Internet has changed how people communicate, how companies advertise, and how information is gathered and depicted. In relation to tourism, communication through blogs and social networking sites has changed how tourists now travel, communicate with others and book travel products and experiences. The tourism industry is beginning to embrace the use of

'virtual' technology and the Internet. Wilson (2009) describes the world as being now conveyed through a virtual world by the use of interactive computers that can be accessed anywhere in the world. This allows both tourism organisations and tourists to access, update, communicate, book, download information, and upload information that can be seen by anyone in the world. Wilson (2009) finds that the computer is now being used as a tool to construct tourism experiences, expectations of tourists and post experience communication with others.

Usability has been used as a study of Internet websites for a number of years. It has been commonly used to find problems with a website through a wide variety of data able to be collected and used for analysis (West-Newman, 2009). This has allowed researchers, web developers, and companies to analyse their websites for the best configuration in order for customers or web users to easily navigate their websites, find the information they want, and make enquiries and purchases from the websites. This information can allow companies to design their websites in ways that attract attention to their brands and products and also convert into sales and repeat website visits. It has been found from research that web users scan across a webpages, reading sideways. The type of reading done on a webpage is different from reading a book, magazine, or newspaper as the Internet webpage is the only page that is being read (Papson *et al.*, 2004b). Because of this, it puts more importance on the design of the webpage with the capacity to use hyperlinks, links to other webpages, advertisements, pictures, videos, and text to share information with the viewer. Part of the usability of a website is the ease of navigation for the user.

There are two theories that are directly related to the navigation of websites; cognitive load theory and cognitive learning processes. Cognitive load theory proposes that "maps lessen the user's cognitive load" (Papson *et al.*, 2004), allowing for easier learning of the structure of the website by the user. Cognitive learning process stresses the use of maps being created by the user of the website to improve their learning of the site (Nilsson & Mayer, 2002). Observations have been made about these learning and user techniques, one of which is that cognitive learning with no map means a deeper learning process (Nilsson & Mayer, 2002), and it was claimed that the use of markers and icons used as

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markers did not stay in the memory of users as much as linguistic markers (Papson *et al.*, 2004). This is interesting as it shows that maps are not needed and that users will develop their own map and style of using a website with this being aided by linguistic markers being used more than pictorial or icon markers. Therefore, it can be seen that text on a webpage is crucial for the navigation of a website. This also translates into the usability of a website, with text having more of an effect on the user than icon markers on a page. Text can get across a message to a user more than icon markers can, leaving icons and pictures to be used as attention grabbers for the websites. The use of text and its effectiveness can directly be seen on blog sites. Blog sites are all text because it is how users communicate information, with pictures and icons being used in side bars, with advertisements or links to other websites.

Social networking sites are also laid out this way; however, they give the user more access to pictures because pictures are another way of sharing information. On social networking sites, text is the primary way of communicating with other users, and pictures are a means of communicating what a user has recently experienced, who with, when, and, if they are loaded quickly, how the user felt and connected with the experience. This shows that, for an organisation to use their website effectively, it must use text to communicate its message with pictures and icons to support this text and allow users to form their own map of the website and ways that they use it. The strong use of text should also be included in blog sites and social networking sites that the organisation uses in order for the communication of a message to be achieved, and photographs and icons should be used to keep users interested.

In relation to online bookings, it was found by Weber and Roehl (1999a) that people who book tourism experiences online have used the Internet for more than four years. The people that book online would then have a wide knowledge of the Internet and also where to go in relation to get the best deals online. It was found by Xu (1999) that there is a considerable difference with travel expenditure, with bookers spending more once they are at the destination with people also shopping and looking around before purchasing airline tickets over the Internet (PhoCusWright, 1999). This can be seen as an obvious relationship with non-

bookers identifying social, economic and personal problems as perceived risks of using the Internet to book travel experiences (Morrison *et al.*, 2001), the biggest perceived risk being the concern for security of online credit card use and the pricing of the experience (Genshaft, 1999). This shows the importance of usability of a website in order for it to be simple, friendly, authentic and credible in order to get the trust of the consumer and allow them to develop a reduced sense of risk through them identifying that the company offers the best experience. This is difficult to do with people often booking in advance and booking travel products overseas; however, it is argued that online travel bookings and ecommerce will continue to grow and become a traditional way of shopping (Morrison *et al.*, 2001).

2.2 Decision making

There has been a great deal of literature and debate on decision making models, practices and concepts (for example Alkaraan & Northcott, 2007; Decrop & Snelders, 2005; Fodness & Murray, 1997; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Leo *et al.*, 2005). Previous literature on tourist decision making of relevance to this thesis include pre-experience decisions, information search and analysis, notably the work of Fodness & Murray (1999) and Gursoy and McCleary (2004). Both Fodness & Murray (Fodness & Murray, 1999), and Gursoy and McCleary (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004) discuss tourists' use of information search and how this is influenced by the tourists' information sources that they used. This is very relevant to the thesis relating to both decision making and the pre-experience of the tourist.

2.2.1 Pre-experience in relation to tourism experiences

The pre-experience phase of the travel experience involves the different decisions to be made when the tourist is planning their experience. The on-site experience has not yet occurred, could be some time off occurring or is just about to occur. In this pre-travel experience phase, the levels of pre-planning the tourist enters into may differ, with some tourists only opting to have a plane ticket booked, and others having all their plans booked and pre-arranged. Key questions which aid the understanding of pre-experience behaviour involve; What

information sources are consulted? What information is sought by the tourist? How is the experience booked? What time frame does this all take place in? What location this is booked from (before or during the travel experience)? Are Internet resources used in information search; if so, what types?

Travel planning and related behaviour have generally been studied from the different perspectives of decision making, attitudes, and psychology (Posner, 1989). The study of cognitive approaches and processes to travel planning have found (Stewart & Vogt, 1999) that information is used in order to make decisions, and that these decisions change through the formation of preferences and also because of the processes that tourists go through during booking their travel experience (Stewart & Vogt, 1999). The cognitive approach to decision making studies how memory is created, used and how this explains people's perspectives, experience, knowledge, and learning (Abelson & Levi, 1985; Schank, 1989). The models that have been developed focus on the processes involved in the decisions with there being an end goal in the process (Abelson & Levi, 1985; Hoc, 1988; Simon, 1978). Another approach to travel planning is planned behaviour, whereby a tourist would use an attitudinal approach to goal directed behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Stewart & Vogt, 1999). This model of planning uses intent as the factor to direct the travel planning. Thus, the perceived and actual behaviour of a tourist can be studied through their attitudes and experiences. This links closely with FIT and backpackers and their need for self-change from their travel experience. FIT and backpacker tourists often only have their plane tickets booked, with their accommodation and travel activities being booked later and more often during their travel experience (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Murphy, 1999; Tourism New Zealand, 2002). This relates to planned behaviour as there is intent of the FIT or backpacker to visit a destination and that destination is concentrated on as the travel intent rather than the activities and accommodation at the particular destination (Um & Crompton, 1990).

For both FITs and backpackers, it is potentially difficult to observe their travel planning and decision making, especially in the pre-experience or pre-trip phase. Technically, they have not booked any other form of travel experience, in some cases only having an airline ticket booked (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Loker-

Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Murphy, 1999; Tourism New Zealand, 2002). Thus, they have not pre-purchased some parts of their travel (Hyde & Lawson, 2003). However, Hsieh, O'Leary & Morrison (1993) find that independent travellers may have some parts of their trip pre-booked. There is an area of the unknown in this topic of the literature, with a number of factors needing to be investigated, such as proportion of travellers that do this, how flexible is a flexible itinerary, and do tourism operators have an opportunity to influence the FITs and backpackers' decisions, and in what ways? (Hyde & Lawson, 2003). Parr (1989) found that some tourists knew what they wanted to do and others had no idea of what they wanted to do. This was also found by Crotts & Reid (1993), with most deciding on what activities they wanted to do prior to arrival, and the travellers that did not know mainly being international and long haul travellers. In New Zealand, this can be seen as a large proportion of travellers, with 2.4 million international tourists arriving in the year to February 2010 (Ministry of Tourism, 2010a). With travel decision making involving many different complex decisions that are often made in a complex series (Dellaert *et al.*, 1998) it is evident why some decisions are not just made at the pre-experience stage and are made later in a tourist's travels. The Ministry of Tourism showed that a total of 84% of arriving international tourists to New Zealand were either FITs or semi-independent travellers (SITs), both of which either have limited or no travel activities booked within New Zealand (Ministry of Tourism, 2010b).

However, Jeng (1997) found that there was a core set of decisions that were made pre-travel, these being; date of the travel, the main destination, and travel route. Secondary decisions were made before departing on the travel and were considered as being flexible relating to attractions and activities. En route decisions also took place about dining and shopping. This shows that there are distinct levels of a tourist's pre-trip decisions, and that there is a wide gap in the timing of decisions and when they are made. It could be argued that most tourists do not simply go to one destination however, visiting multiple destinations during their travels over a period of time (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995). Woodside & MacDonald (1993) found that decisions relating to multi-destination travel were made interdependently with these including destination, accommodation, travel

route, attractions, and travel transportation. This shows that there are common factors in the pre-travel stage of a tourist's decision making that have been researched and are prevalent in tourist's decisions about their desired travel experiences.

2.2.2 Information search

Information search is potentially the greatest factor involved in a tourist's pre-travel experience. It is carried out by tourists in many different ways through a variety of information sources (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). It has been defined by Engel, Blackwell & Miniard (1995) as being a motivated activation of knowledge that is stored by a tourist as a memory or acquisition, with information being gathered from a relevant source. This shows that the information search can be either internal or external, with knowledge coming from past memory or the acquisition of new knowledge from an external source. There has been a general consensus shown throughout literature (Bettman, 1979; Engel *et al.*, 1995; Fodness & Murray, 1997, 1998; Kim *et al.*, 2007; Wicks & Schuett, 1991) that information search is both internally and externally facilitated. Information search takes place whenever a tourist needs to make a decision, with it initially being internal and then external to fill in areas of knowledge that are not available to the tourist (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). Hyde and Lawson (2003) outline that most studies on information search have been conducted on the independent traveller, mainly involving the amount of information search done, and the sources of information used. This thesis will focus mainly on the sources of information used, with a lesser focus on the time spent on information search.

Choices of information search vary with the stages of the tourist's decision making. Travellers who are going to a familiar destination use a high level of information gathered from friends and families' past experiences (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998), whereas travellers going longer distances are generally looking for a wider range and volume of information from which to make their decision (Hyde & Lawson, 2003). This can be seen as standard planning and researching by tourists in order to make the best out of their travel experience.

There are various ways in which the information search market can be segmented in relation to the type of tourist. Tourists seeking security and comfort are likely to use travel agents and package tour operators, with more independent travellers using guide books and brochures and fully independent travellers using advice from people they meet along their travels or through more independent means such as the Internet (Snepenger, 1987). Fodness & Murray (1997, 1998, and 1999) segmented the tourist market through the amount of information search conducted. This puts the tourist into a general category depending on length of vacation, number of attractions and destination visited. However, it does not account for the types of sources of information gathered that have increasingly changed to meet tourists' demands and have altered tourist information search.

The use of the Internet has changed the way in which tourists conduct their information search with the Internet making it one of the most effective means for information search (Newhagen & Rafaeli, 1996; Werthner & Klein, 1999). It has changed the amount of time spent on information collection with large amounts of detailed information being able to be accessed at any time for most destinations around the world. Akehurst (2009) states that "tourists and travellers have at their command online resources which enable research of possible destinations, transportation, accommodation and leisure activities" (p. 52). This shows the expansion of the Internet and the wide range of information available to consumers before they even have to book a product. However, there have been many questions asked about the information available to tourists through the Internet (Luo *et al.*, 2005). Is it relevant for all tourists? Is it accurate and up to date? Can it aid tourists to make an informed decision better than other information sources? These are all current questions that are being debated by tourism organisations and academics in the decision to find the best format to give information to tourists over the Internet (Buhalis, 1998; Luo *et al.*, 2005).

Information search has also been researched through the extent of effort that is taken by the tourist in this process (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2000) with this also becoming a stressful and frustrating period of time for a tourist (Radosevich, 1997). A contingency model was proposed by Schul & Crompton (1983), which focused on effort put in by the tourist when information search was conducted.

This was assessed through time and the number of sources used. However, it can be viewed as being out of date with the increased use of the Internet in particular. The contingency model did allow research to be conducted into multiple information sources used which was not done, as noted in previous research (Fodness & Murray, 1997; Snepenger *et al.*, 1990) and is very relevant today as tourists use a combination of information sources to make their decisions. Lo, Cheung, & Law (2002) identify that first-time travellers spend more time on information search and pre-trip planning than those of repeat travellers, business travellers, and leisure travellers. It can be seen that, according to Fodness & Murray (1997), these travellers would be extensive information searchers using a variety of search sources and spending a longer period of time on pre-trip planning. This can be attributed to the first-time traveller wanting to minimise the risk they perceive in travelling and also to find the most information on their travel plans to use pre-trip and during their trip.

With there being a reliance on information for a number of everyday decisions, most of the information being used is common to the individual and used for a specific task. Moutinho (1987) defined information search as being the need to consult a range of sources prior to making a purchase decision. Information is used and shared in many different media such as word of mouth, books, television, print media, and the Internet. With there now being so much information through the wide range of media, it is sometimes difficult to collate this information to make an accurate, informed decision that the person will benefit from with the tourism industry in particular being an intensive information industry (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2000; Poon, 1993). The Internet has allowed interactivity to occur in the collection of information in order for it to be narrowed down to a more specific preference (Newhagen & Rafaeli, 1996; Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006). However, tourists still feel overwhelmed with the amount of information available to them today on the Internet (Newhagen & Rafaeli, 1996). The information gathering and search process of a tourist is one of the most studied topics in consumer studies (for example, Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Schmidt & Spreng, 1996b). This is because organisations can have an influence over the consumer's decision making process and purchasing behaviour. With

almost all decision making models having a pre-purchase and information gathering component to them (Bettman *et al.*, 1991; Engel *et al.*, 1995; Howard & Sheth, 1969; Hyde, 2008; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005), it is commonly important to the literature on decision making.

There is normally a large amount of money involved in the travel experience and some travel experiences are only done once, resulting in decisions on travel needing to be the best made to gain the most out of the experience. Fodness & Murray (1999) found that "from a consumer's perspective, the most immediate objective behind the development and implementation of search strategies is to facilitate the purchase decision making process" (p. 225). Tourism information search is looked upon as the first step in a travel decision making process (Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004). Academic scholars equate this with the broader motivation for travel and need to make better and more informed consumption choices (Engel *et al.*, 1995).

A New Zealand study conducted by West-Newman (2009) on backpacker information searching, found that tourists travelling to New Zealand consulted mostly common sources of information before embarking on their trip to New Zealand. These were word of mouth from friends, relatives and other travellers, television documentaries and advertisements, guide books and books, and the Internet (West-Newman, 2009). These are all common sources of media and information that are all easy to access and provide a wide range of information for the tourist to sort through. It can be seen that most of these media sources are inexpensive with word of mouth being the cheapest; free, and guide books such as Lonely Planet commonly costing the most. The amount of time that is spent using these information sources will vary between individual tourists (Hyde, 2008), with many tourists' travel experiences involving multiple destinations and plans for activities, resulting in more time spent on information gathering.

Research by Schmidt & Spreng (1996) and Srinivasan & Ratchford (1991) found that in the information search stage of decision making there are typologies that influence the searching strategies of consumers. They revealed nearly 60 variables that are likely to influence the searching strategies, ranging from

environment, situational, consumer characteristics, and product characteristics (Fodness & Murray, 1998, 1999). This shows that there is a wide range of influences that have a bearing on the end decision made by the consumer. Many of these typologies are simple to identify, being who is involved in the decision or travelling group, the number of experience options at a particular destination, and money that can be spent. However, some typologies are more subtle and have a large influence on decision making and information gathering, such as the social composition of a travelling group and personal preferences of travel.

Fodness & Murray (1998) developed three information search strategies that are spatial, temporal and operational. The spatial dimension relates to the external and internal information searches that are conducted by the tourist through either accessing contents of memory that a tourist has, and the tourist acquiring new information externally. This is generally done from a variety of different external sources through main areas of media sources, with the internal information coming from other tourism experiences, life knowledge, and other general knowledge that has been gained by the tourist. Temporal relates to the timing of the search, which relates to a wide range of time frames, being the ongoing development of knowledge, ongoing searching, pre-purchase decision information collection, or a current purchase decision. In tourism, this can relate to a large amount of information that can be gathered. Tourism product purchases can occur a long period of time in advance of the trip itself, meaning there is a large amount of potential information gathered and having to be processed (Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004; Schul & Crompton, 1983). The third dimension is operational; this is reflecting on the successfulness of the search that was conducted and its ability to problem solve in the decision making process. This can be hard to gauge with a large amount of information not necessarily giving the answer to a problem. However, there are a wide range of media available now in order for information to be gathered, effectively enabling the tourist to make a better informed decision. All three of these information search strategies, spatial, temporal, and operational, interrelate through each strategy helping the other in the overall information search (Fodness & Murray, 1999). There are many different external influences on information search. Factors such as demographic

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variables, situational variables, time constraints, product characteristics and consumer characteristics, for example, all play important roles in a consumer's information search (Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004). It has been seen that these can influence information search conducted by backpackers and FITs tourists with Decrop & Snelders (2005) suggesting that tourists do wait for information to be provided to them rather than searching for it because of their flexibility in their planning of travel and other contributing factors.

Situational variables, such as previous satisfaction, time constraints, perceived risk and who the person is travelling with in their travel party also play a role in the information search conducted. Time is reported as the biggest factor, especially with backpackers and FITs. They tend to spend longer in destinations (Murray, 1991), allowing them to find and search more on what activities to do with minimal set plans or previous decisions made. It has been stated previously that backpackers and FITs tourists commonly do not have many activities booked before departing, other than their plane tickets with many of them travelling independently, thus their information search is done mainly by themselves (Hyde & Lawson, 2003c; Murphy, 1999; Tourism New Zealand, 2002). With backpackers, only having their airline ticket booked (Tourism New Zealand, 2002), the destination is the first major decision that is made and where a large amount of time is spent on information search. This shows that the decisions that are made by tourists before they leave are sometimes limiting on alternative purchases and information later in their travels (Hyde, 2008). This fits in well with their independent travel through them relying on their own information search through different sources in order to make their decisions (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Murphy, 2001). Previous satisfaction also comes into situational variables of information search a great deal as backpackers and FITs have often experienced a wide range of different attractions and destinations before reaching New Zealand, showing that they have a previous knowledge background from which to make decisions (Werthner & Klein, 1999; Wong & Yeh, 2009).

Product characteristics are a main factor in any decision to purchase a tourism product as they must fit with what the tourist wants to do and experience (MacCannell, 1999). There are two main factors that product characteristics share,

they are, purpose of the trip and mode of transport (Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004). The purpose of the trip is the most important area for any tourist, this is the reason why they want to travel, where they want to go, and what experiences they want to have. As Gursoy & Chen (2000) find, this then allows the tourist to do a more accurate information search in terms of finding adequate internal and external information in order to answer their questions and purpose. These external and internal information searches also dictate to an extent the mode of transport used.

Consumer characteristics play a major role in the information search that is conducted by a consumer. Characteristics such as involvement, motivation and prior product knowledge are important to information search. It was seen by Bettman & Park (1980) that information search depends on a person's ability to be motivated and their ability to perform an information search. If ability or motivation do not exist together the information search is then compromised by the consumers as they have no clear path for information search (Schmidt & Spreng, 1996). Prior information knowledge is a major factor in consumer characteristics that can influence information search. This is linked with internal information search and prior experiences of the consumer which has been researched thoroughly throughout the literature (for example, Fodness & Murray, 1997; Gursoy & Chen, 2000; Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998).

The Internet has become the main new information communication technology used by many travellers looking for destination marketing (McCole & Palmer, 2002; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2002). Bell (2008) finds that by 1997 travel has become the Internet's second largest part of business, this being 13 years old it would be interesting to see its development now. Tourists have access to a number of online resources such as previews of destinations, blogs, web diaries, social networking site entries, news articles and reviews, and online booking and ratings systems. This shows that today purchase decisions can be largely based on the Internet (Dorsey *et al.*, 2004; Lai & Shafer, 2005); thus having a strong and trusted brand is an advantage to attract and retain customers.

It must also be seen that destination image is incorporated as part of both branding and information search. Destination image has been suggested as being a

pivotal aspect of promotion strategies (Eastlack, 1982; Goodrich, 1978; Hunt, 1975; Reilly, 1990; Woodside, 1982; Woodside & Jacobs, 1985). Although with this literature being of an older date it is still relevant today. Aspects of a destination must be matched to a need of a segment in the market in order to make them attractive to customers, which takes place through promotional campaigns (Reilly, 1990). This has been achieved by many destinations; in particular, Tourism New Zealand's 100% Pure Campaign has achieved this, allowing it to identify target markets and to influence these markets' decisions.

Information gathering and search is thus important in every travel decision that a tourist makes. The information gathering and search takes place using different forms of information and strategy in order for the tourist to collect the most relevant information to make an informed decision and to get the most out of their travel experience.

2.2.3 Travel planning

Planning requires a large amount of time to get the best out of the information that has been sourced by the tourist. Hyde and Lawson (2003) emphasise that independent travellers have not pre-purchased or planned elements of their travel. This is because they have a flexible itinerary with only some parts planned. Tsang (1993) found that of travel planning visitors to New Zealand, more than 40.0% had conducted no pre-planning of travel activities. This is a very interesting statistic as it shows that a majority of independent tourists who come to New Zealand have pre-planned their activities. It was seen previously that there is a large number of independent tourists that visit New Zealand each year (1,090,443 visited New Zealand in 2007). This shows that there is an opportunity for all tourism organisations to target this type of tourist as they are a large target market of potential new clients. Tourists who are independent travellers characteristically travel with mobile devices, such as laptops and cell phones, enabling them to make bookings immediately and remotely while en route to the destination or later within the destination. This is therefore a large opportunity for tourism organisations to engage with independent travellers quickly through the Internet and have an influence over their decisions via the Internet. With independent tourists having access to mobile devices, tourism organisations can

promote their experiences en masse to travellers while they travel to the destination once the traveller has made a booking, in order to aid or alter the tourist's decision making and planning ability. Akehurst (2009) found that the Internet increases the effectiveness and efficiency of traditional marketing functions enabling it to open new markets and types of tourism planning undertaken by tourists and tourism organisations. This shows that there is a large opportunity area for tourism organisations to aid and influence tourists' plans both pre-departure as well as en route and on destination arrival.

2.2.4 How blogging and social networking sites affect tourists' decision making, planning and information search

As discussed earlier, blogging and social networking sites are having a large effect on the information search, and travel planning of tourists. Information search has always been difficult for tourists with a large amount of information available and using the Internet can make it more difficult because of usability issues and dynamic problems with a tourist's information background and stage in their travel planning (Jeng, 1999; Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006). However, with the use of blogging and social networking sites, information can be from a different source that has had a previous experience with the tourism product. This then cuts down the reliance on internal information search as the use of external sources such as social networking sites and blogs as the user can tailor their search and information to their needs (Ellison *et al.*, 2009). With information being then sourced from social connections, ideas, photographs and comments all aid the decisions of the tourist which comes as a social outcome (Park *et al.*, 2009). Because social networking sites and blogs are Internet based, a consumer conducting an information search can easily navigate through interconnected Internet sites searching for information that is of value to them (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006). Value is added to this process because the consumer is able to find information easily and quickly. This is a reason for the use of social networking sites and blogs for information search and planning as they provide a value to the consumer through their ease of access and navigation (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006).

2.3 FIT and backpacker tourists in New Zealand

This section focuses on FIT and backpacker tourism, the differences and similarities between FITs and backpackers, and the motivations of both FITs and backpackers, experience in relation to FITs and backpackers, and reviews the backpacker and social networking campaigns used by Tourism New Zealand to promote backpacker tourism in New Zealand.

2.3.1 FIT and backpacker tourism

Stray and Spaceships both encompass the FIT and backpacker markets into their products. Stray is aimed at the backpacker market with tours consisting of smaller groups with an adventure tour aspect to them which includes guides, and a set itinerary; whereas Spaceships gives the client a more independent travel experience with no set itinerary or guide set. The New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015 offers a variant definition of independent travellers. They use the term 'interactive travellers', with them being "regular international travellers who seek new authentic experiences that involved engagement with natural and cultural environments. They enjoy sharing and interacting with others, commonly using the Internet to plan, schedule and book their holidays" (Tourism New Zealand, 2007, p. 20). This type of tourist is primarily New Zealand's marketing interest in promoting New Zealand to the world. Traits that these tourists have are very important to the ongoing marketing of tourism in New Zealand to the world through the interactive tourist promoting New Zealand to friends and relatives, their need to consume authentic and new experiences and book their experiences directly with tourism organisations through the Internet (Ministry of Tourism, 2008a; Tourism New Zealand, 2007). Thyne, Davies, & Nash (2005) describe this sector of the tourism market as being "a major global cultural, economic, and social phenomenon" (p. 97) which has assisted many countries economically and socially.

In particular, these markets spend on average a longer time in New Zealand, and secondly they engage in a wide range of communication. It has been found that backpackers on average spend NZ$84 per day on transportation, accommodation, and meals (Ministry of Tourism, 2008a). Whilst this is not a high daily spend, backpackers usually spend a longer period of time in New Zealand or

in a particular area, thus contributing a large amount to the local economy. The average spend by a tourist in New Zealand is $2,829 (Ministry of Tourism, 2009a). This cannot be directly compared with backpackers' expenditure as it is not defined by days spent in New Zealand; however it shows that with backpackers intending to stay longer in New Zealand, their average total spend would be similar if not more than that of any other tourist type in New Zealand. Stivala (1991) also found that backpackers "distribute their spending further in the country they are travelling in with low daily expenditures being compensated for by a longer overall time spent in the country (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995). It was evident in a study conducted by Loker-Murphy & Pearce (1995) that backpacker spending in Australia was greater than that of other visitors to the country. Average nights spent at a backpacker's establishment was 16 in 2007, which exceeded that of hotels (5 nights) and motels (7 nights) (Ministry of Tourism, 2009a). Overall, backpackers' establishments hosted 4.3 million guest nights in 2006, compared with 2001 guest night figures of 3 million.

With the backpacker spending a relatively long period of time in New Zealand, as shown above, there is a large amount of communication that the backpacker engages in with family and friends both at home and at their destination. McCullough (2003) emphasises that backpackers are travelling with modern devices such as cell phones, credit cards, and laptops, and regardless of age, are very well educated and expect the latest communication facilities at destinations. This is a major avenue whereby New Zealand can be promoted for free to a wide range and number of people. Through this communication, other tourists may be enticed to visit New Zealand and its experiences, as they have been motivated by their friends and family. This shows that the FIT, backpacker and interactive tourist are a major asset to the tourism industry of New Zealand and one that fits appropriately with business investment in technology as a form of advertising and communication.

2.3.2 FIT vs. backpackers

In 2007 there were 1,090,443 FITs who travelled to New Zealand. This is a vast amount more than that of backpackers, with 183,063 backpackers visiting New Zealand in the year ending September 2009. This number has increased 6%

on the previous year's statistics, when there is a overall decline in arrivals of 2.4% (Tourism New Zealand, 2010). It was found that 46% of visitors to New Zealand in 2008 travelled as a FIT visitor, with a further 38% travelling as a semi-independent traveller with most of their activities booked.

There are a number of different sectors that make up the FIT tourism market and these have been studied in depth, for example the adventure travel sector (Sung *et al.*, 2000), bicycle travel sector (Ritchie, 1998), and the backpacker sector (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2001; Cave *et al.*, 2007). These three different sectors of FIT tourism and tourists all require different types of accommodation, activities, transportation, and excitement in order for them to fulfil their expectations and motivations. In particular with the backpacker sector of FIT tourism, care must be taken to not view all FITs as backpackers, with Parr (1989) showing that backpackers are not just budget tourists and have demands for a wide variety of accommodation, activities and accommodation types. On a more personal level it has been found that a common motivation for backpackers to travel is the desire to construct a new temporary identity (Cohen, 2004; Elsrud, 2001; Maoz, 2007). This identity is constructed just for that particular travel experience with some of the identity continuing into their life after their travel experience. Backpackers create this identity through tourism allowing them to define themselves from their experiences on other travel and what they want to gain out of their current travel experience. Common personal characteristics also determine this identity, nationality, age, and gender. Both FITs and backpackers are looking to gain the skills and wider set of life perceptions that will aid them in later life through the experiences, social connection, and cultural knowledge they are seeking in their travels. This shows that there are a number of interrelated items for the individual's actions and desire to travel (Inkson & Myers, 2003).

Arguably, both groups of tourists (FIT and backpackers) are seeking an experience that will change them as a person. This is apparent with it being part of the 'backpackers' culture'. Inkson & Myers (2003) stated that backpackers have a "desire to see the world and are willing to follow their curiosity, travel light, and search for whatever employment they need along the way" (p. 170). This shows that there is a desire for self-development through the travel that they organise

themselves (Inkson & Myers, 2003). The concept of individual travel and self-discovery also aligns with FIT travellers. Krippendorf (1987) finds that travelling offers a sense of freedom and self determination that they may not have in their normal lives as there are more opportunities for freedom in travel. The need for freedom and curiosity in FIT and backpackers travel is very prevalent with Uriely, Yonay, & Simchai (2002) noting that backpackers travel for experiences as a form of "time out" from their normal activities (for example, Cave *et al.*, 2007; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Thyne *et al.*, 2005). Loker-Murphy & Pearce (1995) found that the distance from their 'regular environments' allows backpackers to pursue their quest for new experiences. They themselves need to have relationships with other travellers in order to have motivations to travel and are also looking for external relationships with other travellers and groups in order to travel. This can be seen in the definition of both FITs and backpackers (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Tourism New Zealand, 2002), and also through their use of social networking sites and blogs to continue these relationships (Bell, 2008). This shows that there are quite simple reasons for both FITs and backpackers to travel in order to find a new experience.

Comparatively, FITs have more freedom in their travel and what they are wanting to experience (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Tourism New Zealand, 2002), and backpackers seek a more structured travel experience through using formal transport or accommodation (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Murphy, 1999). Both of these types of tourists are beneficial to a local destination's economy with them spending on average more than regular tourists (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Stivala, 1991). They have also been viewed as very good advertisements for the destination as they communicate regularly with other travellers and their friends and relatives, giving reliable information on their experience (Ministry of Tourism, 2008a; Tourism New Zealand, 2007). This links with the thesis research areas of social networking and blogging of tourists in order for them to communicate with one another, friends and relatives and to also make decisions from information collected from these media.

2.4 Chapter summary

This literature review has covered the main areas of literature that surround the aim of the thesis with it analysing literature on social networking sites and blogs, the pre-experience and decision making influences through information search, and explores the differences and similarities between FITs and backpackers tourists and their involvement in New Zealand tourism. The literature review has provided an understanding of tourists' decision making and pre-experience behaviours and how these may be potentially influenced by blogs and social networking sites used by FITs and backpackers.

Chapter 3.0 Methodology

This chapter outlines procedures that have been undertaken by the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to answer set research objectives and to explore the wider aim of the research of how blogs and social networking sites can be used effectively by tourism businesses to support tourists' decision making.

The following specific research objectives have been developed for this research:

- To understand tourists' decision making and pre-experience behaviours and how these behaviours are influenced by blogs and social networking site use.

- To explore how blogs and social networking sites can be used effectively, by the case study companies of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand, to support tourists' pre-experience behaviours.

The chapter first discusses the research methods used in relation to both quantitative data and qualitative data collection. The quantitative data collection section includes the survey design and questions asked. The qualitative data section includes the photographic analysis and discussion of the history of photographic research in tourism, method used for analysis of the photographs and shared videos and design of the Stray and Spaceships New Zealand company interview. The sampling techniques used, ethical considerations and limitations of the research are also explained.

In order to achieve the thesis objectives, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data methods were deemed appropriate. Specifically, the role of blog and social networking use in tourists' pre-experience decision making behaviours was researched through:

- A semi-structured self-completed survey of Stray and Spaceship New Zealand's clients.

- Content analysis of customer comments on the Stray and Spaceship New Zealand's websites, and Stray and Spaceship New Zealand's Facebook and Twitter social networking sites.

- Content analysis of photographs and videos taken by customers and posted on Stray and Spaceship New Zealand's websites.
- A semi-structured company interview with a representative of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand.

3.1 Research context

An instrumental case study was used for this research (Jennings, 2001) to enable the researcher to make links between academic literature and industry operations and the use of social networking sites and blogs. As introduced in Chapter 1.0, the case study focused on two companies (Stray Ltd and Spaceships New Zealand Ltd) with the purpose of studying the pre-experience decision making of tourists and the influence of social networking and blogs on the decision making. The opportunity to use Stray and Spaceships New Zealand as case studies provided a contemporary industry context for the research. Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's target markets of backpackers and FIT tourists aligned well with research into the use of social networking sites and blogging, with these mediums being popular with backpackers and FITs (see Chapter 2.0). The setting of the case study was the premises of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand located in Auckland, New Zealand where surveys were handed out to customers by employees of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand. This was also where the semi-structured manager interview was conducted, both companies being managed through the central office located in Auckland. The other setting of the research was on the Internet where the qualitative data was collected from the Facebook website, Twitter website, and Stray and Spaceships New Zealand websites. Through conducting a case study, extensive data was collected (Patton, 2002) that allowed for in-depth insight to be gained into the uses of social networking sites, blogging, customer comments, photographs and videos and their role in tourist behaviour; Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's Internet and social networking site operations and the company's online strategy could also be examined. The study is grounded by the context that the case study applies specifically to Stray and Spaceships New Zealand and their operations. As such, the findings cannot necessarily be generalised to other cases.

3.2 Research methods

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods have been used for the collection of data for this thesis.

Quantitative methods enabled the researcher to gather data on the use of blog and social networking communication as a form of decision making amongst Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's customers in order to answer the thesis objectives outlined above. Specifically, an online survey was used to measure the use of this communication in the pre-experience phase of a tourist's decision making.

Secondary qualitative data methods enabled exploratory research to take place through collection of words, pictures, videos or narratives which allowed the researcher to collect participants' experiences (Ruane, 2005). This enabled the research to encompass a wider social aspect through analysis of the communication of comments, extracts and photographs of Stray and Spaceships clients and, how these have an effect on the pre-experience decision making of tourists.

Together, the quantitative and secondary qualitative methods enabled the researcher to study the blog communication of tourists and its effects on pre-experience decision making, from both the extent to which social networking and blogging are used by the customers in their decision making and, the nature of the qualitative information posted on these sites.

3.3 Quantitative data

The *quantitative data* collection and analysis was done through a self-completed survey of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customers before they departed on their travel experience. An online version was also used. The collection of the quantitative data took place over a period of time starting from 22nd of February 2010 until 25th of May 2010. This time was the main summer and shoulder season for tourism in New Zealand. Bookings were still full for both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand which helped with completion rates. The

surveys were targeted at booked clients of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand with them being administered on a next client to book basis; the researcher had no bearing on participants chosen; rather this was done by Stray or Spaceships New Zealand staff members and each participant had an equal chance of being included.

The self-completed surveys gave insight into the tourists' pre-experience decision making and their use of blog and social networking site communication. Questions for the survey were developed from key literature on decision making, blogging and social networking, tourist motivations, and literature and industry statistics on different types of tourists. The surveys were split into surveys for Stray customers and Spaceships New Zealand customers, both surveys were identical. Consent to participate was achieved through the participant completing the survey. The paper surveys were distributed by Stray and Spaceships New Zealand to customers before they departed on their travel. Participants had the right to opt out through either stating this to a Stray or Spaceships New Zealand staff member, or, through not completing the survey. The online surveys were administered through Stray and Spaceships New Zealand staff emailing the web addresses to customers that booked travel with the companies', this was included in a confirmation of booking email. No refusal rate was determined, although Stray and Spaceships New Zealand staff were not asked to keep a record of this.

Sample size for survey sampling is a complex and important issue (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Jennings, 2001). There have been many suggestions by a number of academics on sample size (Jennings, 2001; Newport *et al.*, 1997; Ruane, 2005; Tichurst & Veal, 1999) and the implications of using the statistics to get the best results out of data. Participant numbers were assessed one month after the start of the survey with the objective of 400 participants being needed from each company in order to obtain an overall 95% confidence level in the data (Jennings, 2001), with the surveys for both companies being identical. The customers were present at the Auckland, New Zealand Stray and Spaceships New Zealand premises or they were directed to the survey website. This allowed easier collection and administration of the surveys. Ethical approval was gained for the conducting of surveys of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customers. (see Appendix A, Letter from Ethics committee research approval).

The final sample size achieved was 137 Stray participants and 70 Spaceships New Zealand participants that were collected from the Auckland premises of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand. For the online surveys, one survey was completed by a Spaceships New Zealand customer and no surveys were completed by Stray customers. Because of the poor response, the online survey results were not used as data in the thesis research. The results for the online surveys were surprising, given the profile of the customers being potentially more IT savvy than other tourists. The online surveys did not yield the sample size that the researcher expected, with possible reasons for this being poor promotion of the survey and only targeting booked customers which narrowed the potential sample population. Low response rates have been found in other literature using internet surveys (Couper, 2000; Sills & Song, 2002). The response rates are considerably lower than the targeted 400 participants for each company for both types of survey. Through using Malhotra, Hall, Shaw & Oppenheim (2006), to calculate the sample size achieved, a confidence level of 26.3% for Stray and 18.8% for Spaceships New Zealand. With the confidence levels for both surveys being low the data is not strongly reliable. Because of the particularly low results from the online surveys, the data was not used in the quantitative findings of the thesis research. As such, care should be taken not to over generalise the findings made in the thesis. The focus of the quantitative survey findings, presented in Chapter 4.0, are of the separate data sets of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand and not of combined data sets. The logic to this being that because of the potentially different client markets between the two companies, different results may be evident.

3.3.1 Survey questions

The survey was split into four sections; trip, use of travel information sources in general travel planning, travel booking with Stray/Spaceships New Zealand, and respondent demographics. (Copies of the survey for each company are included in Appendices B and C).

Section A consisted of questions about the respondent's trip to examine general characteristics of the respondent's travel intentions. Three questions were used in this section. The first asked the respondent their length of intended travel

with Stray or Spaceships New Zealand in days and weeks. This was to determine the amount of time spent using the product. The second question was an open ended question asking what countries the respondent intended visiting before reaching New Zealand and, the fourth question related to countries the respondent intended to visit after New Zealand. The general questions aimed to ease the respondent into the survey.

Section B of the survey focused more specifically on the thesis aim, that is, the use of travel information sources by the respondent for the planning of their trip. Question four, for example, asked what social networking sites respondents are members of. These included Facebook, Twitter, Flicker, Bebo, You Tube, Digg, Stumble Upon, LinkedIn and My Space as they were are deemed to be the most popular social networking sites used by backpacker travellers (see Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Respondents were then asked in question five to rate themselves as users of general web browsing, social networking websites, blogs on the Internet, and email communication. A seven point likert scale was used for this (1 = Extremely Low Usage, 7 = Extremely High Usage). A zero (N/A) point was not used for this question as the researcher believed that most respondents would be familiar with these forms of Internet tools. Seven point likert scales were used as they are a rating scale that was developed in order to measure attitudes of respondents to particular variables (Jennings, 2001); they also have a middle point of four whereby the participant has a more even spread of importance that they can place on a variable. A 0 (N/A) point was used in likert scales that featured in the survey as a participant may not want to answer the question or have no opinion on the variable asked. Question six asked respondents to rank the importance of using stated information sources including social networking sites, official destination websites, news websites, travel ratings websites, blogs of tourism organisations, and travel news websites in their search for travel information. The importance of reasons for blogging and social networking were asked. These were asked in two separate questions, one focusing on blogging and the other focusing on social networking using the same variables with variables including; cheap source of information, ease and convenience, keep family and friends updated, and recommendations by others. These variables were adapted

from Boyd & Ellison's (2008) definition of social networking sites, Kennan & Shiri's (2009) understanding of sociability and social interaction formed from using social networking sites, and Lin & Huang's (2006) work on blogs as a tourism and marketing tool for tourism organisations and destinations. Participants were asked these questions to gain an understanding of the importance placed on social networking sites and blogging as information sources by respondents and to make comparisons between social networking sites and blogging. Following these sets of questions, question 12 asked respondents to rate the importance of following up on information found from a blog in order to further research the tourism organisation or experience, discuss this information with friends/relatives, or further research the destination or accommodation. This question was asked in order to gain insight into the nature of information followed up in the decision making process of a respondent in relation to using blogs.

Moving beyond general travel booking and information search behaviour, Section C of the survey included questions about the respondents' recent booking with Stray or Spaceships New Zealand. Question 13 asked respondents to rate how important different factors were in their decision to book with Stray or Spaceships New Zealand. Again, a seven point importance rating likert scale (1 = extremely unimportant, 7 = extremely important, 0 = N/A) was used. Variables included length of trip, price of travel, ability to travel free and independently, safety, and the opportunity for adventure travel. Respondents were asked how long they spent planning for this particular trip (days, weeks or years). This was important in order to find the length of time spent on decision making by the respondents, which aligns with decision making literature (in particular Correia & Pimpao, 2008; Wong & Yeh, 2009). Open-ended questions were asked about the processes that the respondents took in deciding to travel with Stray or Spaceships New Zealand. With decision making being different for each traveller (Decrop & Snelders, 2005), it was seen by the researcher that it would be best to ask about this process in an open-ended question in order to then relate the findings to literature used so as to gain a better understanding of the respondent's decision making patterns. This was conducted through question 16 asking for the respondent to describe the process/steps that they took in deciding to book with

one of the companies. The question was asked as an open-ended question in order for the customer to describe the process they went through to make their decision. Respondents were asked if they used any particular social networking site to plan their travel with Stray or Spaceships New Zealand and when this was accessed. Question 22 asked respondents to rate how important to them, in general, it is to make decisions on travel 'before leaving', 'make travel purchase decisions while on holiday', 'have travel decisions influenced by others', 'have travel decisions influenced by marketing'. This gave the researcher a clearer understanding of respondents' time preference for finalising travel decisions.

The final section of the survey, Section D, comprised questions on the demographics of the respondents, including the age and gender of the respondents; their country of residence and occupation; accommodation preferred and accommodation mainly used during their present trip; the number of people in the respondent's travelling party and who the respondents are travelling with, that is, 'friends', 'family', 'relatives', 'wife/husband', 'partner', and 'other'. Once the 'crux' questions relating to the tourists' decision making process and use of blogs/social networking had been asked; it was important to be able to profile these responses according to the particular type of tourist, and to establish any difference in behaviour between the tourist types. Finally in the survey, respondents were asked if they were happy to discuss their travel experience further at a later date, and if so, to leave their email address for follow up questions to be asked. As a requirement of research ethics, the email addresses were kept confidential and used only for follow up questions which were sent out by email after all of the survey data was collected, that is, on 25th of May 2010.

Analysis of the quantitative data was conducted through uni and bi-variate analysis. This allowed for the use of frequency distributions and measures of tendency towards the use of blogs and social networking sites. Bi-variate analysis allows for analysis of two related variables that may be able to describe, for example, the relationship between consumers and blogs (Jennings, 2001). Specifically, analysis was conducted using exploratory factor analysis of variables relating to the usage of Internet resources and customer demographics to see if there was a relationship between the two variables. Mean scores, standard

deviation, and standard error results are reported for relevant results from survey questions. Tests with two or more variables were conducted using different variables to find relationships in the data, including regression analysis of length of trip and price, sociability and price of travel, and adventure travel and sociability. These tests were performed to see what the respondents wanted from their Stray and Spaceships New Zealand experience and to also categorise them into types of travellers. Factor analysis tests were conducted in order to find key relationships between the use of social networking sites or blogs and information search components. Factor analysis was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to find specific factors involving social networking sites or blogs that influenced information search. SPSS computer software was used for the analysis of the quantitative data gathered. Analysis of the survey data is presented for Stray and Spaceships New Zealand together and individually, where the data is most relevant for both companies.

3.3.2 Follow up questions for survey participants

A set of 11 follow up questions were made in order to gain a better understanding of questions asked in the initial survey (these additional questions are listed in Appendices D and E). Participants were contacted if they had left details of their email address on the survey form following a request for further follow-up information. Specifically, the survey asked for consent from the participant for the researcher to email them with follow up questions. The follow-up questions were designed to be short and easy to answer, with them focusing on the topics of social networking and blog use to plan travel in New Zealand, when these particular websites were accessed, if information was posted on a social networking site or blog used by the respondent, and if the participant has subsequently become a member of a Stray or Spaceships New Zealand social networking site. The questions asked allowed the researcher to gain extra knowledge on the respondent's use of social networking and blogging in their decision making in order to provide further insight into the thesis aim.

Whilst the follow up emails were sent to 15 Stray participants and nine Spaceships New Zealand participants on 25th of May 2010, only four responses were gained from Stray participants and one gained from Spaceships New

Zealand participants. The email contained a cover letter attached explaining the research and follow up email and questions (see Appendices D and E). Questions were formatted in the email and an attached Microsoft Word document for the participants to fill in either of them.

3.4 Qualitative data

In addition to the quantitative data collection, in order to achieve the thesis aim, it was deemed important to conduct c*ontent analysis* research which was performed on the comments posted by customers on Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's websites, their Facebook and Twitter webpages, and the content of photographs and videos collected from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's website. A content analysis of this data took place with main common themes and information being analysed (Patton, 2002).

3.4.1 Content analysis

Although there were found to be many public blogs about tourism activities in New Zealand that included Stray and Spaceships, to reduce the number to a manageable level, it was decided by the researcher to only refer to the comments on Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's website, Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's Facebook and Twitter web pages made by tourists. The content analysis of the comment data collected was analysed inductively in order to study the content in order to indicate their use in relation to experience and the qualitative nature of communication. This was felt important because the companies were in direct control of these Internet pages and were aware of the activity and information posted on them. These pages were also analysed over more general postings because they represent, specifically, the direct marketing tools of the company. Both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand are able to control the Facebook and Twitter social networking site pages through adding content themselves and adding 'fans' who want to follow the company. The customer comments posted were not censored by the company; however, in most cases, a company representative, on behalf of Stray or Spaceships New Zealand, returned comments to those posted. Most of the comments posted came from tourists who had used Stray and Spaceships New Zealand before, or, who were planning on

using them. "Stray-aways", Stray's Facebook group, at the time of writing currently has 1,705 'fans' who have loaded 355 photos and 10 videos on to the social networking site. Spaceships New Zealand, "Spaceships", currently has 1,019 'fans' on its Facebook site with 44 photos and one video uploaded onto the site. Twitter only allows Stray and Spaceships New Zealand to "tweet" on their page, with the tweets being commented on, or, "re-tweeted" by fans of the site on their personal twitter page. This changes the data content collected from the social networking sites. Thus, content analysis data of the Facebook sites of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand included the postings of members and company responses; whereas content analysis data of Twitter included only Stray and Spaceships New Zealand information that includes company generated information or links to other information for followers. "Straybus", Stray's Twitter page, has 343 'followers' and is 'following' 258 people. The 'followers' are people who Stray has as fans of Stray's Twitter site (Stray provides information, Tweets, to) and 'following' are people that Stray follows (i.e. they can use information from, ReTweet). The Spaceships New Zealand Twitter page, "SpaceshipGlobal", has a following of 1,068 and 936 followers.

Blogs and social networking site communication is a relatively new mediums that Volo (2009) suggests creates great opportunities to obtain; "blogs and comments represent a totally unplanned and research-uncontaminated description of vacations" (p. 117). Thus, the comments posted by customers on Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's websites and their Facebook and Twitter web pages are a key secondary qualitative data research tool in examining the pre-experience decision making of tourists – specifically with regards to products and experiences provided by the two companies. The comments on Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's website and their Facebook and Twitter web pages collected were also compared and contrasted against each other to see if there are any interesting qualitative differences in the data collected. Furthermore, these comments provide a qualitative dimension in addition to the survey information to shed light on customers' decision making behaviours.

The comments on Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's websites, Facebook and Twitter web pages were collected over a period dating from 22nd of

February 2010 until 25th of May 2010. This is the summer and shoulder seasons and high period for tourism New Zealand thus it was expected that a large base of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customers would contribute content to these websites during this period as they use/consider the companies' products. The customer comment data, from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customer comments sections of their websites, was managed through the author profiles of the comments being given a number and date that each comment was posted online. This has been similarly used to analyse tourists' comment behaviour (see Bauer, 2000; Herring *et al.*, 2005). Following the analysis method adopted by Herring *et al.* (2005) in their study to describe the characteristics of blogs, a content analysis guide was constructed for similar application in the present thesis research (see Appendix F). The analysis is also consistent with that used by Bates & Lu (1997), Ha & James (1998), & McMillan (1999); some further dimensions were added by Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus (2005). The main elements that were borrowed, for the management of the customer comment data, were variables that would identify the overall comment through; title, the time acquired, and the comments URL, information about the comment author from; their name and number of authors, the history and activity level in the blog, how long it was, when the next and previous comment was made, and how many words and paragraphs were in the comment. Additional variables were added by the researcher in order to make the guide context specific to the research and data used. For example, variables that were added included the customer comments being made, origin of the comment author, any previous comment made (date order), next comment made (date order), and the number of comment authors. This allowed for easier categorisation and management of the customer comments. Specifically, they were categorised according to the date and time frame of the previous comment made by a customer and next comment made by a different customer, number of authors, other comments or replies, and the information about the authors to enable the researcher to identify, quantify and manage the comment extracts. The previous studies by Blood (2002) and Herring, Scheidt, Wright & Bonus (2005) similarly advocated the importance that research into blogs and social networking sites is managed correctly, as blogs are in most cases

interlinked with conversational exchanges occurring within the blogs. As such, the content analysis guide served as the template for the structured retrieval and management of all the web material.

Where possible, the customer comments and photographs were classified by the company the customer was travelling with, the demographics of the user and, the content that was posted. Other factors like how much information was posted in the comments or photographs, the date and word count was also noted. This is also consistent with the research done by Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus (2005), to provide a standard guide for categorising the data.

The comment extracts appear in date order on Stray and Spaceships New Zealand websites and were organised that way by the researcher when first collected in order for them to be easily stored. This section of the website can be described as 'a traveller's lounge' with comments being made mainly be ex-customers about their trip and experiences with the company. These comments were unfiltered by the companies having access to them, sometimes commenting back to the customer author, with other travellers also subsequently commenting on a customer author's comment. Thus, the nature of the communication was interactive. Such comments are a good way for travellers to gauge a company's reputation and the types of people who use the company product and also for the company to rectify any problems that have been mentioned and use it as a method of communication (Akehurst, 2009). Thus, some comment extracts also had replies attached to them; the replies were also used in the data analysis.

The secondary qualitative data collected from both the Stray and Spaceships New Zealand public websites, Facebook and Twitter social networking websites was also retrieved and managed according to the content analysis guide. Extracts were then analysed using ATLAS ti, content analysis software. This program gives the researcher a wide range of abilities to perform content analysis on the wealth of comment extracts collected from the Stray and Spaceships New Zealand websites. Comment extracts for the customer comments, Facebook, and Twitter content input into the Atlas Ti program, with common words found through analysis. These were used on all comment, Facebook and

Twitter data as codes (see Appendices G and H: Content analysis codes resulting from the ATLAS ti coding procedure). The software reads text that is submitted to it and summarises the main ideas (ATLAS ti, 2009). The software also has a distinguished record in leading journals around the world which shows its accuracy and academic repute (for example Mehmetoglu & Dann, 2003; Pope *et al.*, 2000). The computer software is qualitative focused, enabling the researcher to focus on the comments extracts data and the common codes most frequently emerging from the data. Through the use of the codes for the data in ATLAS Ti, outcomes could be found from the data and findings presented, (see Chapter 5.0: Analysis of network communications) through discussion of each data set.

The content analysis and management stage took place when the comments were taken off the companies' websites. A critical part of the comments that was discovered were the replies that they generated. Some of these were from the companies and some from other tourists. Comparisons were made between the length of the comments, the geographical location of the author, gender of the author, and tone of the comment in order for general themes and subjects to be established. This analysis was conducted by the researcher through using the content analysis guide.

3.4.2 Photographic analysis
Photographs and photograph analysis have had a significant influence on tourism research and its marketing (Garrod, 2009; Palmer, 2009; Urry, 1990). Arguably, the photographs posted on company and social networking websites have a potentially large influence in the attraction and promotion of tourists to both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand. In the section below, the history of photograph analysis in tourism research is discussed, and the research methodology for this part of the data collection phase outlined.

3.4.2.1 History
Photographs taken by tourists and taken for destination promotion have featured in previous tourism research (Albers & James, 1988; Chalfen, 1979; Crang, 1997; Garrod, 2009; Jenkins, 2003; Palmer, 2009). These previous studies have mainly involved data from Volunteer Employed Photography (VEP), postcard collections and, collections of brochures or marketing material from

destination campaigns. Both postcards and photographs are arguably the most popular images associated with tourism as they can immediately bring visual focus for a tourist, user and researcher (Palmer, 2009). In research, it is important to distinguish between the depiction of a destination in advertising material through photography, and the actual photos taken by a tourists in order to remember their experiences. Horne (1992) states "that it was the camera that invented most of the sights we (as tourists) were expected to see" (p. 112 – 114). Chalfen (1979) describes a tourist's camera as being their "identity badge" with them having photos that hold meaning to them stored on it; the aim being to capture pictures and memories of the destinations they have travelled to and the elements they have enjoyed from them. However, there has been limited focus in previous tourism research on those photographs that are loaded on to the Internet by tourists, especially the travel company's website having the ability to load their photos onto social networking sites, blogs, news websites and their personal website. Arguably, the access the Internet has given tourists has expanded the sharing of photos to a new level with tourists' networks. They can now be uploaded and accessed by people immediately, instead of waiting for development of a film. Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Bebo, MySpace and Flicker allow for this. However, it has arguably not changed the way in which photos are taken, and what they are taken of, with the destination and tourists themselves being the main subjects in the photos. However, Hunter (2008) has identified that imagery has become an even more difficult problem to solve for researchers because of the new communication techniques used and the changing nature of social networking sites and interactive websites (Crick, 1985).

Nevertheless, the analysis of photography has given scholars the ability to research tourists' motives for taking photographs and what they are looking at. The importance of this was drawn attention to by Urry (1990) with the examination of the relationship between tourism as a production system and photography by tourists while on holiday. From this, the paradigm of the tourist's gaze was engineered symbolising how tourism is produced and reproduced.

3.4.2.2 Visitor Employed Photography

Visitor Employed Photography (VEP) is a method that relies on participation by the tourists. For instance, the tourists is employed to take photographs of scenes that are important to them. In essence, the tourists are driving the research by themselves with the researcher encouraging participants and instructing the tourists to think about and express their feelings (Garrod, 2009). This then gives the researcher data on what is important about the destinations the tourists have visited and how they express their feelings through photography (Stedman *et al.*, 2004). VEP was first researched in the 1970's by Cherem & Traweek (1977), with subsequent developments being done by Cherem and Traweek (1977) & Chenoweth (1984) in regards to how VEP was employed as a research method over a range of different topics. In contrast to VEP, photographs collected in this thesis research were those taken by tourists; however, the tourist has not been contracted to take the photographs, as the photographs are on a publicly used website; thus being public data. The photos collected for the research were of images, scenes and people that tourists regarded as important to them during the travel experience. It must also be noted that not all tourists take photos while on holiday, with other means of physical evidence used such as videos posted, narrative, or no photos at all. Not all customers of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand post their photos onto the company's website, but it is an available source of information regarding the nature of the travel experience that can be shared through social networking for those who choose to do so; and can be especially important as "attention grabbers" within a website (Papson *et al.*, 2004).

3.4.2.3 Content analysis of photographs

As alluded to above, tourist photography has long been the focus of scholarly research (Albers & James, 1988; Chalfen, 1979; Cherem & Traweek, 1977; Crang, 1997; Hunter, 2008; Stedman *et al.*, 2004). The two main techniques that are used commonly in analysing photographic data are content analysis and semiotic analysis. Content analysis was deemed most appropriate in the analysis of photographs collected from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's companies' websites. These photographs were photos taken by tourists that have been uploaded onto each company's website. The photographs are then public content

and can be viewed by any Internet user. The photographs cannot be altered in any way through them being viewed on the website. The analysis involves the set up of a categorisation scheme whereby photographs are measured against and compared to a set of pre-determined criteria. Criteria can come in a range of different measurements including frequency of a particular person or subject, landscapes shot, photographic techniques, or colours in the photos (Jenkins, 2003).

Content analysis can be seen as an established analysis tool to analyse communication (Holsti, 1969; Stepchenkova *et al.*, 2009). It has been used to analyse a wide range of data with it now having a large benefit for use with electronic data (Neuendorf, 2002; Rainer & Hall, 2003). However, there is still a need for manual time to be spent on data preparation, collection, and other work to aid the content analysis (Stepchenkova *et al.*, 2009). The technique of content analysis is an unobtrusive method by which data can be collected and analysed through the use of a wide range of differing data types, such as visual, interview transcripts, and comments and posts on Internet websites. It provides a clear systematic approach to the collection and analysis of the data. Weber (1990) described it as "a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text" (p. 9). It allows for examining the data for structures, themes, and key features to which the researcher can point attention and develop meaning from Gray and Densten (1998) & Stepchenkova, Kirilenko, and Morrison (2009). For this research, content analysis was conducted solely by the researcher to fulfil the requirements of his Masters research. This was done through creating different Microsoft Word documents that contained the individual photographs for each company. Then, content of the images were analysed through a deductive style using Hunter's (2008) typology as a frame to guide the analysis process (see Appendix I). This was deemed an appropriate guide for the content analysis of photographs. The common content of the photographs were then reviewed in relation to each of the categories of the typology and written about from the categories descriptions. For example, it was found that the analysis of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand revealed a number of photographs with orange as the main colour as it is the colour used in the company's brand. The Stray bus or Spaceships New Zealand vans were also expected to feature in some photographs

as it is the mode of transport offered by the companies. This was distinguished through Hunter's (2008) typology allowing for the analysis of the content in the photographs to be conducted through main content such as 'tourism products'.

To explain the typology further, Hunter (2008) provides a content analysis typology that focuses on two representations within photographs; space and subject (detailed in Appendix I). Both representations contain four different categories. 'Space' contains the categories of 'natural landscape', 'cultivated landscape', 'heritage and material culture', and 'tourism products (facilities, accommodations, and cuisine)'. 'Subject' contains the categories of 'no human subject', 'tourist', 'host' and 'tourist and host'. Together, these provide a framework for the different focuses of the photograph content. Hunter (2008) provides clear detail in what each subsection covers with most of what is photographed by both tourists and in marketing advertisements being included. This helps both the researcher and other users to identify clearly what the content in the photograph can be classed as and serves as a useful systematic tool for analysis of the content of photographic data. However, it should be noted that the typology is mainly aimed at the analysis of destination marketing photographs. Tourism products are an example of this, with Hunter (2008) describing them as being "depicted as vacant and expecting, clean and well lit" (p. 360). Adaption of the typology was therefore made in order for it to be more relevant to the activities and the expected photograph content of the customers' photographs in the context of the present research. Specifically, this included more emphasis being placed on the brand image of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand, where this brand is placed in the photos, whether there are more group or individual photos and the sorts of landscape or activities that are photographed. Tourists visiting New Zealand arguably place great importance on the scenery of the country (Ministry of Tourism, 2008b; Tourism New Zealand, 2009c) and as they are mainly travelling as backpackers and FITs, the capturing of groups or individuals in photographs may also be appropriate.

Over the period of data collection, a total of 330 photographs were collected. 190 Stray photographs were collected and all stored in a Microsoft Word document. These were then split into separate Microsoft Word files for

analysis. 140 Spaceships New Zealand photographs were collected at the same time and were also stored in one Microsoft Word document before being separated for analysis. This was also conducted at the same time as the Stray photograph data collection and subsequent analysis. The photographs were not included in the body or appendix of the thesis for ethical reasons. The findings from the customer photographs analysis will be included with the analysis of the customer videos in order to present the analysis of the imagery data together and to use Hunter's (2008) typology consistently for both sets of data (see Chapter 5.0).

3.4.3 Analysis of shared videos

With there being many different social mediums and ways of recording experiences available to tourists, a further avenue of research is that of the analysis of shared video posted by travellers. Most shared video, today, is done over the Internet via YouTube or other social networking sites. These sites allow this to be conducted for free and can be shared straight after the video is uploaded to a wide range of social networking and company websites. Stray and Spaceships New Zealand both have areas on their websites where customers' videos can be viewed. This allows the opportunity for the tourism product to be 'sampled' and opinions formed before a purchase decision is made. Jansson (2002) likens this to the globalised media culture and the ability to experience without being at the destination. Tourists also have a need to share their experiences with others (Brown & Chalmer, 2003). This is becoming more convenient with the use of mobile communication and social networking sites to show friends and family their video experiences of a recent trip, or even their anticipation of where they are going through destination promotion videos.

The video analysis that was conducted for this research was based on Hunter's (2008) typology of photographic content analysis (please refer to Appendix I for the Typology used in the thesis for both photographic and video content analysis). Specifically, the videos posted by customers were played in their entirety, accessed from the Stray and Spaceships New Zealand websites, with the video being analysed for its content through Hunter's (2008) photographic typology techniques, as described above. A log of all the videos

were kept with the content, video time length, and title of the video, and date they were recorded. All of the videos were available through YouTube format. In keeping with the ethical considerations of this research, no names of subjects or places were identified. The findings from the customer video analysis will be written with the analysis of the customer photographs in order to keep the analysis of the imagery data together and to use Hunter's (2008) typology consistently for both sets of data.

A video content analysis is the combination of a number of technical steps in order to deconstruct the content of a video. The content analysis is similar to a normal content analysis; that is, the search to find common themes and representation in the data. The process of content analysis for this research first involved viewing the individual videos and describing what was in the videos. This was conducted using the categories provided by Hunter's (2008) typology and adapting this for use with videos, as with the photographic content analysis.

Rose (2001) described a video content analysis as being first the dividing of the video into smaller sequences, shots, frames, or still images. These are then put into logical sequence; it is sometimes difficult to analyse the entire video with it needing to be broken down in to further detail to interpret the underlying meaning of the content. The second way of conducting the content analysis is to play the video in its entirety, enabling the video to be all linked together through its emotional and narrative content (Rose, 2001). The analysis for the thesis was conducted through allowing the video to run for its entirety in order for the researcher to gain an understanding of the entire video.

During the period of data collection, a total of 16 videos were collected from the Stray website for analysis. These were of between 0.17 minutes and 10.5 minutes in length. The average length was 5.38 minutes. They were not stored in any way but viewed from the Stray website which uses YouTube to show the videos. Videos were then analysed straight away after viewing them. Five Spaceships New Zealand videos were collected from the Spaceships New Zealand website. These were of 0.40 minutes to 1.26 minutes in length with the average length being 0.77 minutes. They were also collected at the same time as the Stray

videos and analysed at the same time so that comparisons between both sets of videos could be made. Similarly, none of these videos were stored with them being viewed from the Spaceships New Zealand website which uses YouTube to show the videos. The content analysis of the videos will be presented in a deductive style as a frame to look at the content of the videos that were posted online by the customer. This was done through a discussion of the videos content through Hunter's (2008) typology, with statistics about the videos' also being discussed. This will be done separately for both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand.

3.4.4 Stray and Spaceships New Zealand company interview

In addition to the above qualitative data analysis, a semi-structured interview was conducted with a representative from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand on the 25th of May 2010 (see Appendix J: Stray and Spaceships New Zealand Company Interview Questions). This was conducted at the Auckland New Zealand premises of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand and lasted approximately 30 minutes. A total of 26 questions were asked. These were arranged surrounding the topics of the current Internet and online strategy of the company, the profile of customers of the company, peak seasons of online use in relation to sales and company views on social networking sites, blogging, and Internet use in the future. This allowed the researcher to gather data on the Stray and Spaceships New Zealand views and current strategies of social networking sites, blogging, and Internet use and their target markets, in order to provide valuable context to the research.

3.5 Ethical considerations

This thesis research was approved by the Waikato Management School's Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix A Letter from Ethics committee research approval). *Ethical considerations* that needed to be considered included the privacy and security of the online and paper surveys, comments and photograph analysis, and the participants identity's. Fully informing participants of the information and research was also an ethical requirement. This was

achieved through an introduction statement at the beginning of the survey for all participants to view.

3.6 Limitations

All research has its limitations; many of these can pose avenues for future research. One limitation of this research was the need for participants to have access to the Internet in order to participate in this research. This is because both uploading comments and photographs on the companies' websites and participating in the online survey requires the Internet. This may have narrowed the number and type of participants in the research, however, arguably, Internet savvy customers are the market sought by this study i.e. Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customers who use the Internet, blogs, and social networking sites. However, some of this narrow scope was overcome by also using paper self-completion surveys of customers when they arrived at the Stray or Spaceships New Zealand premises to begin their tour. In fact, this provided a larger scope and pool of participants for research data. Within the requirements of Masters degree study, there was a limited time slot of when the survey, comments extracts and photographs could be collected. This was primarily in the summer and following shoulder seasons of New Zealand's tourism market, which may limit the type of tourist visiting New Zealand. Thus, the results are limited by the sample of tourists that booked Stray and Spaceships products at the time of the year that the survey was conducted. The research was limited to the type of clients that Stray and Spaceships attract to their company. This makes the research specific to their market and ones similar. As the research was conducted on two companies that operate in the FIT and backpacker sector of the New Zealand tourism industry, this potentially provides a limiting comparison for use in other sectors of the tourism industry in New Zealand. It would be useful for this research to be replicated across other sectors of the tourism industry.

The qualitative research that was conducted on blog and social networking sites was also limited to Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's comments sections of their websites, Facebook, and Twitter entries. There are many other social networking sites and blog sites that have content posted about Stray and Spaceships New Zealand, thus limiting this research to limited blog and social

networking sites resources. A broader qualitative research scope could be used to include a wider range of social networking mediums in future research. Not all of the blogs, social networking sites about Spaceships New Zealand and photographs and videos from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customers could be collected or analysed within the scope of thesis research. Similarly, the sample size in this research is relatively small, and thus, future research should draw on the tentative findings made here.

Furthermore, the conceptual scope of the study could be considered narrow as there are a number of other stages in the tourist experience that could include researching the during and after travel experience and social networking mediums effects on these other dimensions of the experience and tourist behaviour. Despite the above limitations, this study does make a contribution to the scholarly study of understanding the influence and use of social networking and blog use in tourist decision making, and also to the marketing and management of the two case study companies; specifically, how they target their customers through social networking sites and blogs in order to gain sales and market exposure.

Chapter 4.0 Survey results

This chapter presents the results of the quantitative data collection, the self-completion survey. The chapter discusses the significance of these findings in relation to the thesis aim; specifically to understand tourists' decision making and pre-experience behaviours and how these behaviours are influenced by blogs and social networking site use. This chapter comprises three sections relating to the demographics and profile of respondents, their travel information sources, and travel booking. Various analysis techniques were used in the data analysis; specifically, one sample t-tests, variance analysis, factor analysis, and basic mean analysis (see Chapter 3.0).

First, a profile of the survey respondents; their gender, age, country of residence, the number of people in the respondents' travel groups and who they are travelling with is presented. The data is presented for both Stray and Spaceships, and, where applicable Ministry of Tourism data is included for comparison. Other demographics such as occupation, type of accommodation preferred, type of accommodation used, countries visited before visiting New Zealand, and countries visited after New Zealand are also profiled.

Second, the types of travel information sources and resources used by the respondents are presented in this chapter. This includes mean and standard deviation scores of information sources assessed, a comparison of the perceived relative importance of blogging and social networking sites in decision making, correlation coefficients are used for finding travel information, and the overall importance of using blogging and social networking sites. From this analysis the type of information important to the respondent in order for them to make an informed travel purchase decision is discussed.

Finally, this chapter includes analysis of the respondents' views on their travel bookings with Stray or Spaceships New Zealand. Analysis is done on important factors for booking with Stray or Spaceships New Zealand, the importance of decision information and where this information was sourced for their decision, length of time on a decision, different sources of information and where a travel decision is made. This information can be linked to the types of

travel information sources used and also the use of Internet resources such as blogging and social networking sites in deciding to purchase the company's travel product/experience.

4.1. Profiles of survey respondents

4.1.1 Gender

The profile of the survey respondents shown in Table 1 (p. 69) revealed that the gender of Stray participants was skewed towards more females (80 respondents, 58.4% of respondents) than males (38 respondents, 27.7% of respondents). In comparison, the gender of Spaceships New Zealand respondents was more evenly balanced, with 20 respondents (28.6%) for both genders. The higher female response rate for Stray respondents can possibly be attributed to security factors, with a group tour being safer than travelling alone, which is popular among young female backpacker tourists (Obenour, 2005; Wilson & Little, 2008). Of the Spaceships New Zealand customers, 8 respondents (11.4% of respondents) indicated both male and female responses, of which it must be assumed both genders are travelling together as a couple or group.

4.1.2 Age

The majority of the Stray respondents were of the age group 19 – 25 years (51.1% of respondents), with 30.7% of the respondents aged 26 – 35 years. This shows that the age of these travellers is young, which also reflects a reason for travelling with an organised tour company. Spaceships New Zealand customers also represented a large response from young age groups of 19 – 25 years (37.7% of respondents) and 26 – 35 years (21.7% of respondents). There was a relatively large proportion of missing responses (13.9% for Stray and 31.9% for Spaceships New Zealand) related to the age category of respondents. However, in general, it can be seen from the data that the customers of both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand reflects the younger age groups. This fits in with the characteristics of backpackers, FITs and youth travellers (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995). With backpackers generally wanting to socialise and meet with other people, it can be surmised that the customers would want to travel with similar age groups of people. These results can be compared with the Accommodation Profile – Backpackers from the Ministry of Tourism for 2009

(Ministry of Tourism, 2008a). It can be seen that the combined data sets (Stray and Spaceships New Zealand) show a similar proportion of younger travellers compared to the Ministry of Tourism data. Specifically, backpackers in the age bracket of 19 – 25 years (39.8%) and 26 – 35 years (38.8%) were reported by the Ministry of Tourism in 2010, compared with 19 – 25 years (46.6%) for Stray and Spaceships New Zealand, and 26 – 35 years (27.7%) for both companies' respondents. This shows that the backpackers from the Ministry of Tourism research have similar age characteristics to those from the Stray and Spaceships New Zealand survey data collected. In addition, scholarly research similarly comments on the younger range of backpackers as being the main age group of this sector of tourism (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Murphy, 1999).

4.1.3 Country of origin

Respondents of the survey were found to come from a wide range of origins (see Table 1 on p. 69). A majority of the respondents for Stray and Spaceships New Zealand came from Europe (93 respondents or 67.8% for Stray; 38 respondents or 54.2% for Spaceships New Zealand). This represents a majority of the sample population. From the survey it can be seen that Europe is a main market for both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand. The other main origin of Stray respondents was North America (18 respondents, 13.2% of respondents) which is another major market. The Asian and South American markets for both companies were very small for both companies. These results were compared with the Ministry of Tourism visitor arrival data to April 2010 (Ministry of Tourism, 2010), which showed that 44.8% of visitors arrived from their origin countries in Australasia, compared to 0.7% for Stray and 4.3% for Spaceships New Zealand. This is considerably lower compared with the national data; however, most of the arrivals from the Ministry of Tourism data are from Australia (Ministry of Tourism, 2010). Europe is a significant market for tourism in New Zealand with this showing through the 16.2% of visitors arriving from Europe from the Ministry of Tourism data (see Table 1, p. 69). This is a significant statistic as it can be aligned with the size of the European market for both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand. British, Scandinavian, German, and French customers were the

main European customers for both companies. This is also the case as seen from the Stray demographic data (Stray & Spaceships New Zealand, 2009b). The survey findings also revealed that, the Asian market is a small market, with Japanese and Taiwanese customers being "pretty minor" (Geddes, 2010). Spaceships New Zealand does target Australian and New Zealand tourists with this mainly being done through people seeing the vans as billboards, with minimal advertising being done to this market.

A majority of customers are thus FITs and backpackers with their average age being 27 years old. Some customers of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand however are older, 50 to 60 years old, with this type of travel suiting their needs of ease of transportation with the vehicles used being smaller (Spaceships New Zealand vans). These demographics all relate to literature from Hecht & Martin (2006) and Ministry of Tourism backpacker demographic data (2008a). It can be seen that the travellers are of an age of FIT and backpackers with the majority of them being of a younger age, with older travellers also classing themselves as FITs and backpackers. The customers also come from countries that have a long history of backpacking and independent travel, with the customers seeking a new experience in a different country to grow their knowledge and personal experiences.

4.1.4 People in travel group

The majority of Stray respondents were travelling with one person in their travelling group (60 respondents, 43.8% of respondents). In comparison, Spaceships New Zealand respondents were also mainly found to be travelling with one other person, two people in their travel group, 39 respondents (57.4% of respondents). It can be seen that Stray respondents acknowledged that they were travelling in a group with responses of 10 or more (6 respondents, 6.4% of respondents), with no Spaceships New Zealand respondents travelling with more than 10 people. This potentially supports the finding that both companies are providing services for customers either travelling alone or with another person.

4.1.5 Travelling party

The majority of survey respondents were travelling with 'friends' or 'partners'. For Stray, 35 respondents (31.8%) of respondents were travelling with

'friends' and 4 respondents (3.6% of respondents) with 'partners' or 'other' (4 respondents, 3.6% of respondents). These results affirm results from 'people in travel group' where it was found that 43.8% of all respondents travelled or with one other person (16.8% of respondents), showing that respondents are travelling with friends, partners or others. This is also supported by literature on independent travel, with literature suggesting that backpackers and FITs both travel alone, with independently organised travel (Murphy, 1999), or with their partners, and their travel experiences allow for the growth in their relationships with other people (Inkson & Myers, 2003).

Table 1: Gender, age, country of residence, number of people in travel party:
Profile of Survey Respondents

	Stray (N)	Stray (%)	Space-ships New Zealan-d (N)	Spaceshi-ps New Zealand (%)	Total combined results (N)	Total combined results (%)	New Zealand Visitor Arrival Data – April 2010 (%) (Ministry of Tourism, 2008a)
Gender							
Male	38	27.7%	20	28.6%	58	28.0%	N/A
Female	80	58.4%	20	28.6%	100	48.3%	N/A
Male & Female Ticked	0	0.0%	8	11.4%	8	3.9%	N/A
Missing	19	13.9%	22	31.4%	41	19.8%	N/A
Total	**137**	**100.0%**	**70**	**100.0%**	**207**	**100.0%**	**N/A**
Age							
Below 18	2	1.5%	1	1.4%	3	1.5%	0.0%
19-25 years	70	51.1%	26	37.7%	96	46.6%	39.8%
26-35 years	42	30.7%	15	21.7%	57	27.7%	38.8%
36-45 years	1	0.7%	3	4.3%	4	1.9%	6.3%
46-56 years	2	1.5%	2	2.9%	4	1.9%	8.0%
57-65 years	1	0.7%	0	0.0%	1	0.5%	5.5%
65 years +	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1.5%
Missing	19	13.9%	22	31.9%	41	19.9%	0.0%
Total	**137**	**100.0%**	**69**	**100.0%**	**206**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**
Country of residence							
Europe	93	67.8%	38	54.2%	131	63.0%	16.2%
Other	22	16.1%	24	34.3%	46	22.0%	21.3%
North	18	13.2%	4	5.7%	23	11.0%	9.8%
South East Asia	2	1.5%	0	0.0%	2	1.0%	3.2%
Africa	1	0.7%	0	0.0%	1	1.0%	0.7%
Australasia	1	0.7%	3	4.3%	4	2.0%	44.8%
Central Asia	0	0.0%	1	1.4%	1	1.0%	4.0%
South America	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%
Total	**137**	**100.0%**	**70**	**99.9%**	**208**	**100%**	**100.0%**

	Stray (N)	Stray (%)	Space-ships New Zealand (N)	Spaceships New Zealand (%)	Total combined results (N)	Total combined results (%)	New Zealand Visitor Arrival Data – April 2010 (%) (Ministry of Tourism, 2008a)
Number of people in travel group							
1	60	43.8%	4	5.9%	64	31.3%	N/A
2	23	16.8%	39	57.4%	62	30.2%	N/A
3	7	5.1%	3	4.4%	10	4.9%	N/A
4	1	0.7%	1	1.5%	2	1.0%	N/A
5	1	0.7%	0	0.0%	1	0.5%	N/A
6	2	1.5%	0	0.0%	2	1.0%	N/A
8	0	0.0%	1	1.5%	1	0.5%	N/A
10 & over	6	6.4%	0	0.0	6	6.4%	N/A
N/A	2	1.5%	0	0.0%	2	1.0%	N/A
Missing	32	23.4%	20	29.4%	52	25.4%	N/A
Total	**137**	**100.0%**	**68**	**100.0%**	**205**	**100.0%**	**N/A**
Travelling with							
Friends	35	31.8%	14	20.6%	49	27.5%	N/A
Partner	4	3.6%	21	30.9%	25	14.0%	N/A
Other	4	3.6%	0	0.0%	4	2.2%	N/A
Relatives	1	0.9%	0	0.0%	1	0.6%	N/A
Wife/husband	1	0.9%	8	11.8%	9	5.1%	N/A
Family	0	0.0%	3	4.4%	3	1.7%	N/A
N/A	3	2.7%	0	0.0%	3	1.7%	N/A
Missing	62	56.4%	22	32.4%	84	47.2%	N/A
Total	**110**	**100.0%**	**68**	**100.0%**	**178**	**100.0%**	**N/A**

4.1.6 Occupation

Table 2 (below) shows that, the occupations of respondents were distributed between eight different occupations. For Stray respondents, 'student' (38 respondents, 27.9% of respondents) and 'business' (28 respondents, 20.6% of respondents) occupations featured the highest. This can be related to the respondents either, finishing their studies and wanting to travel, or respondents wanting to travel as they have saved money for the experience by working.

Spaceships New Zealand also had a high response rate from respondents having the occupation of 'students' (14 respondents, 20.0% of respondents). The occupation of 'business' also featured highly with 9 respondents (12.9% of respondents). For both companies, missing responses were also significant, with 29 (21.3% of respondents) responses for Stray and 26 (37.1% of respondents) for Spaceships New Zealand. Previous literature suggests that backpackers and FITs seek an experience that is different to that of their normal life experiences or work and many travel on a gap year during/before/after study or backpack to destinations that they desire to visit (Anderson, 1970; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Uriely *et al.*, 2002).

Table 2: Stated occupation of respondents

Occupation	Stra-y (N)	Stray (%)	Spaceships New Zealand (N)	Spaceships New Zealand (%)	Total combined results (N)	Total combined results (%)
Student	38	27.9%	14	20.0%	52	25.2%
Business	28	20.6%	9	12.9%	37	18.0%
Health	12	8.8%	6	8.6%	18	8.7%
Education	9	6.6%	1	1.4%	10	4.9%
Hospitality	9	6.6%	3	4.3%	12	5.8%
Trade Industry	8	5.9%	4	5.7%	12	5.8%
Unemployed	2	1.5%	2	2.9%	4	1.9%
Administration	1	0.7%	5	7.1%	6	2.9%
Missing	29	21.3%	26	37.1%	55	26.7%
Total	**136**	**100.0**	**70**	**100.0%**	**206**	**100.0%**

4.1.7 Accommodation mainly used (during trip)

Table 3 (below) illustrates that a large number of Stray survey respondents used 'backpacker hostels' (98 respondents, 78.4% of respondents) as the main type of accommodation during their trip. Only five other respondents used the remaining types of accommodation, such as holiday park (2 respondents, 1.7% of respondents), hotel (2 respondents, 1.7% of respondents), and motel (1 respondent, 0.8% of respondents). Not surprisingly, while on a Stray bus tour, the accommodation is organised and backpacker hostels are used.

Table 3: Accommodation type mainly used (during trip).

Accommodat-ion type	Stray (N)	Stray (%)	Spaceshi-ps New Zealand (N)	Spaceship-s New Zealand (%)	Total combine-d results (N)	Total results combine-d (%)	Ministry of Tourism Accomm-odation Profile Backpac-kers (%) (Ministr-y of Tourism, 2008a)
Backpacker Hostel	98	78.4%	6	8.5%	104	53.1%	14.0%
Holiday Park	2	1.7%	18	25.4%	20	10.2%	20.0%
Hotel	2	1.7%	0	0.0%	2	1.0%	33.0%
Motel	1	0.8%	1	1.4%	2	1.0%	32.0%
Holiday Park & Other	0	0.0%	3	4.2%	3	1.5%	N/A
Backpacker-s Hostel and Hotel	0	0.0%	1	1.4%	1	0.5%	N/A
Backpacker-s Hostel & Holiday Park	0	0.0%	3	4.2%	3	1.5%	N/A
Motel & Other	0	0.0%	1	1.4%	1	0.5%	N/A
Other	0	0.0%	11	14.5%	11	5.6%	N/A
Missing	22	18.3%	27	38.0%	49	25.0%	N/A
Total	**120**	**100.0%**	**71**	**100.0%**	**196**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

In contrast, Spaceships New Zealand respondents rarely used backpacker hostel accommodation (6 respondents, 8.5% of respondents). Instead, they mainly used holiday parks (18 respondents, 25.4% of respondents). Smaller response rates were found for motel (1 respondent, 1.4% of respondents), holiday park and other (3 respondents, 4.2% of respondents), backpackers hostel and hotel (1 respondent, 1.4% of respondents), backpackers hostel and holiday park (3 respondents, 4.2% of respondents), and motel and other (1 respondents, 1.4% of respondents). The response of 'other' did feature as significant for Spaceships New Zealand data (11 respondents, 14.5%). This is because accommodation is included in the van and can be used for accommodation. Further responses were given in the 'other' category which included the side of the road, rest areas, beaches, and DOC campsites. Such 'freedom camping' as it is known, has

become a topic of debate in New Zealand recently (Rushworth, 2010). With this data being compared to the Ministry of Tourism Accommodation Profile of backpackers it can be seen that backpacker hostels have a 14.0% share of the guest nights from all types of accommodation. This is smaller compared with hotels (33.0% of respondents) and motels (32.0% of respondents). However, this is potentially because the backpacker accommodation sector is smaller in comparison to the hotel and motel sectors within New Zealand, and not surprisingly, backpackers mainly use backpacker hostels as their accommodation choice (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Ministry of Tourism, 2008a).

4.1.8 Accommodation type preferred (before trip)

Table 4 (see p. 74) shows the type of accommodation preferred before the survey respondents travelled. The majority, 86 (71.7% of respondents) of Stray respondents were likely to stay in backpacker hostels, with 9 Stray respondents (7.5% of respondents) likely to stay in hotels. It can again be seen that they have pre-decided on the type of accommodation used. This is mainly because Stray provides recommended accommodation for their bus tour groups. The use of holiday parks (2 respondents and 1.7% of respondents) and motels (1 respondent, 0.8% of respondents) features very low which can be attributed to the type of tourist that travels with Stray, being mainly backpackers or FITs (see Table 4, p. 74). Spaceships New Zealand responses are more spread out through the different types of accommodation. Backpacker hostels still featured highest with 16 responses (22.5% of respondents), with holiday parks also featuring as significant (11 respondents, 15.5% of respondents). Spaceships New Zealand respondents suggested they would use other types of accommodation, which again featured the use of the side of the road, rest areas, beaches, and DOC campsites as places to stay. This potentially reveals that the tourist is pre-determined in the accommodation they want to use before they begin their travel, which for some Spaceships New Zealand customers seems to include freedom camping areas. One of the reasons for this is cost, as the Spaceships van does have cooking and accommodation facilities provided; it is cheaper to freedom camp than use holiday parks. With freedom camping becoming an issue of debate because of its impact on the surrounding environment, it is an area that tourists need educating

on in order to influence their immediate preferences; however, there exists the opinion that they have paid a premium to use their van and to 'visit' New Zealand where they like (New Zealand Herald Staff, 2009). Through combining the results for both companies, not surprisingly, backpackers' hostels were the most preferred accommodation type (102 respondents, 53.4% of respondents), with hotels (13, 6.8% of respondents) and holiday parks (13 respondents, 6.8% of respondents) also having smaller but significant results.

Table 4: Accommodation type preferred (before trip)

Accommodatio-n	Stray (N)	Stray (%)	Spaceships New Zealand (N)	Spaceships New Zealand (%)	Total combined results (N)	Total combine-d results (%)
Backpackers	86	71.7%	16	22.5%	102	53.4%
Hotel	9	7.5%	4	5.6%	13	6.8%
Holiday Park	2	1.7%	11	15.5%	13	6.8%
Motel	1	0.8%	0	0.0%	1	0.5%
Other	0	0.0%	6	8.5%	6	3.1%
Backpacker Hostel & Holiday Park	0	0.0%	6	8.5%	6	3.1%
Backpacker Hostel & Hotel	0	0.0%	2	2.8%	2	1.0%
Holiday Park & Other	0	0.0%	1	1.4%	1	0.5%
Backpackers Hostel, Hotel, Holiday Park, Motel & Other	0	0.0%	1	1.4%	1	0.5%
Missing	22	18.3%	24	33.8%	46	24.1%
Total	**120**	**100.0%**	**71**	**100.0%**	**191**	**100.0%**

4.1.9 Destinations visited by respondents before visiting New Zealand

Table 5 (below) shows that Australasia was the most commonly visited destination among the survey respondents before they visit New Zealand (Stray 98, 36.9% of respondents; Spaceships New Zealand 33 respondents, 23.5% of respondents). Other destinations that were visited before coming to New Zealand feature significantly less in the results. For example, a lesser proportion of Stray respondents visited South American destinations (23 respondents, 8.7% of respondents). However, a large number of Stray respondents did visit South East Asia before travelling to New Zealand (82 respondents, 31.0%) potentially

showing a flow from their destinations of origin to South East Asia and then on to New Zealand.

Spaceships New Zealand respondents' results were similar with Australasia featuring highly and South East Asian countries (51 respondents, 36.8% of respondents) being the next to feature. The desire to visit Australia and South East Asian countries before visiting New Zealand might not be surprising given the origin of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customers being mainly from Europe (131 respondents, 63.0% of respondents).

It must also be noted that there are more destinations listed for both Stray (266 countries listed as been visited) and Spaceships New Zealand (140 countries listed as been visited) than there are survey responses (Stray; 137 responses and Spaceships New Zealand; 70 responses), showing respondents visit multiple destinations while travelling. This shows that the respondents from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand have a potentially rich and complex travel itinerary which includes many destinations throughout the world en route to New Zealand. The behaviour involved in this complex decision making would be a worthwhile topic of research investigation.

Table 5: Destinations visited before the trip to New Zealand

Country	Stray (N)	Stray (%)	Spaceships New Zealand (N)	Spaceships New Zealand (%)	Total combined results (N)	Total combined results (%)
Australasia	98	36.9%	33	23.5%	131	32.2%
South East Asia	82	31.0%	51	36.8%	133	32.6%
Other	27	10.2%	25	17.8%	52	12.8%
South America	23	8.7%	7	4.9%	30	7.7%
Europe	13	5.2%	11	7.7%	24	5.8%
Central Asia	11	4.2%	6	4.3%	17	4.1%
North America	9	3.4%	7	5.0%	16	3.9%
Africa	3	1.2%	0	0.0%	3	0.7%
Total	266	100.0%	140	100.0%	406	100.0%

4.1.10 Countries visited by respondents after visiting New Zealand

Table 6 (below) shows the destinations visited by respondents after visiting New Zealand. Similar results were found to the destinations visited before

visiting New Zealand (Table 5, above); that is, Australasia (72 respondents, 33.0% of respondents) was the most visited country by Stray respondents, with South East Asia also being popular (64 respondents, 28.4% of respondents). These results were similar for Spaceships New Zealand respondents with Australasia being visited most (42 respondents, 31.3% of respondents), with North America (26 respondents, 19.3% of respondents) and South America (17 respondents, 12.5% of respondents) also being visited by respondents after their trip to New Zealand. Thus, the findings suggest a tourism flow from New Zealand going onto either Australia, or the Pacific Islands and USA with South East Asia, in regards to Spaceships New Zealand respondents.

Table 6: Destinations visited after the trip to New Zealand

Country	Stray (N)	Stray (%)	Spaceships New Zealand (N)	Spaceships New Zealand (%)	Total combined results (N)	Total combined results (%)
Australasia	72	33.0%	42	31.3%	114	32.0%
South East Asia	64	28.4%	28	20.7%	92	25.4%
Other	30	13.5%	19	14.8%	49	13.7%
North America	22	9.9%	26	19.3%	48	13.5%
South America	13	5.6%	17	12.5%	30	8.4%
Europe	11	4.8%	1	0.7%	12	3.5%
Central Asia	10	4.4%	0	0.0%	10	2.9%
Africa	1	0.4%	1	0.7%	2	0.6%
Total	**223**	**100.0**	**134**	**100.0%**	**357**	**100.0**

4.2 Use of travel information sources

The customers of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand are perceived by the companies to be 'Internet savvy'. It is estimated by Stray and Spaceships New Zealand that 30% of customers to both companies book online through the companies' websites (Geddes, 2010). Other bookings come from travel agents, phone enquiries, and emails direct from customers. There are agents for Spaceships New Zealand located in Europe to gain bookings for the company. With bookings being mainly done "6 months in advance" (Geddes, 2010) the use of agents in Europe is large with Spaceships New Zealand being booked fully for New Zealand's summer. For Stray, the company has a number of New Zealand

and Australian agents with only a few international agents. This is because bookings are not in the same time frame as Spaceships New Zealand. The bookings for Stray tend to be from weeks to days before the travel experience begins. Because the Stray booking and decision making time is much less than Spaceships New Zealand customers, it was viewed by the companies' that social networking sites and blogs do influence the decisions of tourists. It can be seen from the analysis of network communication data (see Chapter 5.0) that tourists do ask questions on the Stray website more about what the trip will be like and what the benefits are. This shows that customers are potentially seeking and following recommendations by other and use social networking sites as a smaller information source. The Stray Facebook social networking site has been set up by ex-customers, with the questions from tourists being answered mainly by ex customers who have had the best experience with the company (Geddes, 2010). This shows that the social networking site of Facebook is not only potentially used as an information source but also a way of staying in touch and communicating a past experience to others. Because of this, the Facebook social networking site is perceived as a great asset to Stray and Spaceships New Zealand, with the company having a good presence on the site and not needing to engage directly with the customer gives them free advertising to their target market (see Chapter 5.0). It was viewed by the company that most of their market use social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook;

> "We see it on Internet cafes with our market on Facebook and Twitter, e.g. if Jim was on Facebook and saying he was travelling with Stray it would influence maybe his mates because they are hearing about it from him and maybe seeing his photos"
> (Geddes, 2010).

This shows that the company does value the customers' use of social networking and views it as a medium to access and target their customers; however, a lot of it is still experimentation with there being a view of these sites wanting them to bring business for the companies but different ways of using these sites are being used to find the best way possible.

"A lot of the things like Twitter is just experimentation, we did work with things like a couple of guys who were leading Lonely Planet's best blogs, but it is about communicating with people and providing authentic communication about our products"

(Geddes, 2010).

The discussion of the company views (see above) on social networking sites and blogs that were found from the company interview will be continued below and clarified through the analysis of the survey findings in the relation to travel information source use and social networking site membership.

4.2.1 Social networking site membership

Results of the survey revealed a wide variety of sources of travel information being used by respondents. Specifically, it was found that respondents were members of many different social networking sites, with many respondents indicating more than one site. A total of 60 (44.7% of respondents) Stray respondents were solely members of Facebook, with 27 (37.5% of respondents) Spaceships New Zealand respondents being members of Facebook. The next significant results from respondents came in the form of them being a member of multiple social networking sites. A total of 12 (8.8% of respondents) Stray respondents were members of both Facebook and YouTube, with others preferring Facebook and MySpace (5 respondents, 3.7% of respondents). Spaceships New Zealand results were found to be similar with Facebook being the most preferred social networking site (27 respondents, 37.5% of respondents), with respondents being members of multiple sites such as Facebook and YouTube (7 respondents, 9.7% of respondents) and Facebook and MySpace (5 respondents, 6.9% of respondents). In addition, other social networking sites were noted. The social networking sites that were listed were Hyves, Stvdirz, and Meinvz.de. These are forms of social networking platforms in the countries of The Netherlands and Germany. Both Stvdirz and Meinvz.de are targeted towards students in these countries. Overall, 10 Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customers were members of Hyves, 5 were members of Stvdirz, showing that these sites were popular with both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand respondents from The Netherlands and Germany.

Overall, it can be seen that the survey respondents were members of multiple social networking sites. The most popular social networking site was Facebook, with this not only being individually the most popular site but also featuring in most combinations of results that were attained. With respondents being members of multiple social networking sites, it can be seen that they are very active in their use of social networking sites. The respondents were aware of what they are members of and, what social networking sites they use most often. It is also clear that these are being used as a tool for information not only from text information (Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace) but also audio-visual information through YouTube. With Stray respondents being a part of 136 different social networking sites and Spaceships New Zealand respondents 72 sites, it is clear that these are popular means of communication and networking that are being used globally, and in particular, by this profile of respondents (Akehurst, 2009a).

4.2.2 Respondents' use of Internet resources

A seven point likert scale (1 = Extremely Low Usage and 7 = Extremely High Usage) was used to ask respondents to rate themselves as users of web browsing, social networking websites, blogs, and email communication. It was found for Stray respondents that they had a mean of 5.3 for use of the Internet, mean of 5.1 for use of social networking websites, 3.0 mean for use of weblog communication, and 5.6 for use of email communication. The standard deviation for Stray respondents to the four questions was 1.8 to 2.5. This shows that there is a limited range of responses, with most of them being close to the mean result. Overall, the mean results show that Stray respondents were found to have a higher usage of web browsing, social networking sites, and email communication. Stray respondents were found to have a slightly lower usage of blog communication, which is an interesting result.

A test of Pearson's correlation coefficient was run for how respondents of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand rated themselves as users of web browsing compared to social networking sites, blogs on the Internet and email communication. It can be seen that for both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand that there is a correlation between general web browsing and social networking

sites, blogs on the Internet, and email communication. This is because for all 151 Stray respondents and 70 Spaceships New Zealand respondents a significant value of 0.000 was found for all relationships, with the probability being less than 0.05 meaning these relationships were significant. All of the variables were positively related to each other for both sets of respondents. For example, social networking site use was positively related to the use of official destination websites by Stray respondents with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.509. Other significant results are official destination websites' correlation to blogs of tourism organisations for Stray respondents with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.598. Spaceships New Zealand respondents had significant results to note also with official destination websites being positively correlated with blogs of tourism organisations (Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.602). This confirms that both respondents of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand are proficient users of the Internet, social networking sites, blogs, and official destination websites.

Through bi-variate analysis it can be seen that there is a difference for Spaceships New Zealand respondents with lower mean scores being found compared to those of Stray respondents. Email communication had the highest mean of 5.3 compared to slightly lower means of 4.8 for web browsing, and 4.1 for social networking sites. There was a large standard deviation for Spaceships New Zealand data with this ranging from 1.9 to 2.3 (see Table 7 below). The Spaceships New Zealand standard error, however, does confirm this is a representative result of the population. A standard error of 0.2 for all of the data collected for these questions shows that it is representative of the users' usage of web browsing, social networking sites, blogs, and email communication. This shows that respondents' answers did vary from low to high usage.

Table 7: Mean and standard deviation scores for use rating

	Stray mean scores*	Stray standard deviation	Stray standard error	Spaceship-s New Zealand mean scores*	Spaceships New Zealand standard deviation	Spaceship-s New Zealand standard error
Email communicatio-n	5.6	1.8	0.1	5.3	1.9	0.2
General web browsing	5.3	1.8	0.1	4.8	2.0	0.2
Social networking sites	5.1	1.9	0.1	4.1	2.1	0.2
Blogs on the Internet	3.0	2.5	0.2	2.6	2.3	0.2

* Likert scale used 1 = Extremely unimportant, 7 = Extremely important

A t-test was conducted on respondents' usage of general web browsing, social networking sites, blogs on the Internet, and email communication of Stray respondents. It was found that on average email communication had a higher usage (M=5.60, SE=0.149) compared with the usage of blogs on the Internet (M=3.03, SE=0.209). Results for the usage of general web browsing (M=5.38, SE=0.152) and social networking websites (M=5.18, SE=0.159) showed the usage of these websites by respondents of Stray was relatively high.

The t-test for Spaceships New Zealand respondents on their usage of general web browsing, social networking websites, blogs on the Internet, and email communication also showed differing results. Email communication had the highest usage result (M=5.3714, SE=0.23127), with this being significantly higher than the use of blogs on the Internet (M=2.6714, SE=0.28102). This shows that the use of email communication is higher than that of blogs with it also being higher than use of general web browsing (M=4.8286, SE=0.25085) and social networking websites (M=4.1857, SE=0.25763).

4.2.3 Importance of information sources

The importance of information sources in tourist decision making revealed that Stray respondents placed more preference on using official destination websites with the highest mean of 5.1. Social networking sites (mean score 4.1), news websites (mean score 4.0), travel ratings websites (mean score 4.9), and travel news websites (mean score 4.1) also had reasonable mean scores, showing

that they were important for a respondent to use as a source of information. Standard deviation was high for these results, ranging from 2.4 for social networking site use to 2.0 for official destination website use (see Table 8).

Table 8: Mean and standard deviation scores for importance of using the following travel information sources

	Stray mean score*	Stray standard deviation	Stray standard error	Spaceship-s New Zealand mean score*	Spaceships New Zealand standard deviation	Spaceships New Zealand standard error
Official destination website	5.1	2.0	0.1	5.0	2.0	0.2
Travel ratings website	4.9	2.1	0.1	5.0	2.0	0.2
Social networkin-g site	4.1	2.4	0.1	3.8	2.4	0.2
Travel news websites	4.1	2.2	0.1	4.3	2.3	0.2
News website	4.0	2.4	0.1	4.4	2.3	0.2
Blogs of tourism organisati-ons	3.7	2.4	0.2	3.7	2.5	0.2

* Likert scale used 1 = Extremely unimportant, 7 = Extremely important

Spaceships New Zealand respondents had a different area of focus for their importance of information sources, which can be seen through mean scores for question six. Travel ratings websites had the highest mean scores of 5.0 with official destination websites featuring closely with a mean score of 5.0. Blogs of tourism organisations and social networking sites featured lower with mean scores of 3.7 and 3.8 respectively, showing that they are only regarded as a moderate source of information for respondents. The standard error of 0.1 for the first four variables and 0.2 for blogs of tourism organisations strongly shows the importance placed by respondents on using these types of information sources, as this is representative of the population, with the standard error being low. The use of blogs of tourism organisations features quite low, with both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand respondents giving these lower levels of importance as sources of information. This is interesting, as it shows the respondent is more

interested in interacting with a social network of people, or travel destination, rather than a company's blog about a certain travel destination. It has been seen in literature that social interaction is a contributing factor in the purchase of a backpacking experience (Murphy, 2001), stemming from word of mouth communication with the Internet contributing to this to make it easier to interact as a social network (Wang *et al.*, 2002). Xiang & Gretzel (2010) found that websites have facilitated information exchange amongst travellers and that social networking sites are the main facilitators of this exchange, which supports the results shown.

Spearman's correlation coefficient test was run to see the relationships between social networking sites, blogs of tourism organisations, and official destination websites for Stray and Spaceships New Zealand respondents. It can be seen that for Stray and Spaceships New Zealand all of the correlations were significant, with significance scores of 0.000. Notable significant results for Stray were the use of blogs and official destination websites with this being positive (0.447), it can be seen that the use of blogs increases with the use of an official destination website and vice versa. However, social networking sites were not strongly linked to blogs of tourism organisations or official destination websites, with these results being significant but not as positive (blogs of tourism organisations 0.309, p score of 0.000, official destination websites 0.303, p score of 0.000). Spaceships New Zealand had strong significant results for use of blogs of tourism organisations and social networking websites (0.430, significant result of 0.000) with social networking sites and official destination websites also having a strong positive correlation (0.463, p value of 0.000). Blogs and official destination websites and official destination websites usage also had a positive result with a correlation score of 0.473 and a significance value of 0.000. This shows that Spaceships New Zealand respondents were high users of social networking sites, blogs of tourism organisations and official destination websites with their use of these all being positively correlated with each other.

A one sample t-test showed that Stray respondents placed a great importance on using social networking sites to keep family and friends updated (mean score of 6.1). They also held importance on the variable of its social (mean

score of 5.5) and the ease and convenience of it (5.1). These are similar results to Stray respondents' importance of using blogging with keeping family and friends updated also being important. All of these results had p values of 0.000.

Spaceships New Zealand respondents placed great importance on keeping family and friends updated through using social networking sites (mean score of 5.7), ease and convenience (mean score of 5.3), and its social nature (5.2). These are similar to the results from Stray respondents with all variables having a significant relationship with p values of 0.000. The results were interesting, as cheap sources of information and accurate information both do not feature as being important in social networking site use compared to blogging use with both having higher mean scores for Spaceships New Zealand respondents. This shows that Spaceships New Zealand respondents place a higher importance on using social networking site for convenience and their social nature rather than using them as sources of information.

4.2.4 Comparison of importance of blogging and social networking sites

Table 9 (p. 86) shows that there was a difference between respondents' use and importance placed on blogging compared to social networking sites. The mean scores have a large difference for Stray respondents between blogging importance and that of social networking sites. Social networking sites had a higher mean for use as a 'means of communicating with other travellers' (5.4) compared to that of blogging to communicate with other travellers (3.3). The respondents were also found it more important to participate in social networking comments to gain information (4.6) compared to using blogs to gain information (3.1). This shows that blogs may be a good source of information or company links; however, respondents did not find it important to participate in them to gain more information. The standard deviation for Stray respondents was smaller for that of the social networking questions than the blogging questions. With the deviation slightly lower for social networking site importance it potentially shows that the respondents are more certain about their use of social networking sites than the use of blogs to source information from. Results were similar for Spaceships New Zealand respondents. Differences between the mean results were found. For instance, findings revealed that Spaceships New Zealand respondents

ranked the use of social networking sites to communicate with other travellers as important (4.9 mean score), with blogs also being considered as a means of communicating with other travellers (4.0 mean score).

There appeared to be a slightly smaller gap in the means between blogging importance and social networking site importance for many of the variables, with respondents of Spaceships New Zealand finding it more important to participate in blogs and social networking sites comments to gain information (blogs importance mean score of 4.0; social networking site importance mean score 4.7), find information about travel products via blogs and social networking sites (blogging importance mean score of 4.0; social networking site mean score of 4.5). Spaceships New Zealand standard error is slightly higher than that of Stray standard error. A standard error of 0.3 was found for all of Spaceships New Zealand's respondents' data for blogging and social networking sites (see Table 9, below). Respectively, there were differing reasons for the differences between Stray respondents and Spaceships New Zealand's blogging and social networking importance. With Spaceships New Zealand respondents having the use of a van for their travel, they are not restricted in where they go and were may be more interested in blog content as it could include more detail and interesting points about areas that may not be able to be accessed on a bus tour. Spaceships New Zealand respondents are in contact with mainly only themselves, compared to Stray respondents who travelled in a large group. This could make the Spaceships New Zealand customers less interested and likely to engage in social networking between other travellers which has reflected in the importance they give to finding information from other travellers via social networking sites with pre-experience information and communication coming from means other than social networking sites and blogs.

Table 9: Mean and standard deviation scores for importance of use of blogging and social networking sites

	Stray mean*	Stray standard deviatio-n	Stray standard error	Spaceships New Zealand mean*	Spaceship-s New Zealand standard deviation	Spaceship-s New Zealand standard error
10. Blogging importance						
Use blogs as a means of communicating with other travellers	3.3	3	0.2	4.0	3.2	0.3
Participate in blog comments to gain information	3.1	2.9	0.2	3.9	3.2	0.3
Find more information about the travel product	3.4	3	0.2	4.0	3.1	0.3
Find more information about the opinions of the blogger	3.1	3	0.2	4.0	3.2	0.3
Confirm authenticity of the travel experience	3.5	3	0.2	4.0	3.2	0.3
11. Social networking sites importance						
Use social networking sites as a means of communicating with other travellers	5.4	2.3	0.1	4.9	2.7	0.3
Participate in social networking comments to gain information	4.6	2.5	0.1	4.7	2.8	0.3
Find more information about the travel product	4.2	2.6	0.2	4.5	2.8	0.3
Confirm authenticity of the travel experience	4.2	2.6	0.2	4.7	2.8	0.3

* Likert scale used 1 = Extremely unimportant, 7 = Extremely important

4.3 The travel booking

4.3.1 Important factors for booking with Stray and Spaceships New Zealand

There were four main factors that were found to be very important for Stray respondents to book travel with Stray. The first factor was for the tour to be

'social – ability to meet others', which had a high mean score of 6.1. Respondents wanted 'access to places off the beaten track', with a mean score of 6.1, which is the marketing slogan for Stray tours. This suggests the customers can identify the brand and image of Stray and what differentiates Stray from its competitors. It also shows that respondents were looking for a potentially different and unique experience, which Stray caters for. The respondents wanted to 'see a wide range of attractions' with a mean score of 6.2. This is the highest mean score for Stray respondents. Stray respondents also held high importance for 'experience authentic New Zealand', with a mean score of 6.0, which is also shared in the literature by Bell (2008b) as both a reason for backpackers to visit New Zealand and to promote New Zealand as a country. All of the mean scores were representative of the population of respondents as the standard errors for these results are all consistent and low (0.1 standard error).

Spaceships New Zealand results were also found to be similar with there being five different attributes being of high importance for respondents in their decision to book with the company. The highest mean score of 6.7 was found for 'ability to travel freely and independently'. This result is not surprising given the Spaceships New Zealand van allows customers to decide their route and travel to where they want. The high mean score also shows that the customers are potentially more independent in their travel than that of Stray respondents, where the mean score is slightly lower (5.8). Thus, the Spaceships New Zealand respondents could potentially be classed as FITs and Stray respondents as backpackers given their higher dependence on meeting people (Stray mean score 'social – ability to meet others' 6.1) and organised travel. Hyde & Lawson (2003b) make this distinction through their definition of FITs being based on behaviour and that independent travellers do have flexibility in their itinerary, compared to more packaged tours. The Spaceships New Zealand standard error results also confirm the data is representative of the population with scores ranging from 0.2 to 0.3. Although higher than Stray standard error ratings, they are still good. Other important high mean scores are 'price of travel' (mean score of 6.5), 'length of your trip' (mean score of 6.2), 'see a wide range of attractions' (mean score of 6.5), and 'experience authentic New Zealand' (mean score of 6.6) (see Table 10,

below). These findings potentially suggest that there is an independent nature about the type of travellers and customers Spaceships New Zealand has.

Table 10: Mean and standard deviation scores for important factors in decision to book with Stray or Spaceships New Zealand

	Stray mean*	Stray standard deviation	Stray standard error	Spaceships New Zealand mean*	Spaceships New Zealand standard deviation	Spaceships New Zealand standard error
Ability to travel free and independent	5.8	1.9	0.1	6.7	1.7	0.2
Social – ability to meet others	6.1	1.6	0.1	5.0	2.7	0.3
Price of travel	5.7	2.0	0.1	6.5	1.8	0.2
Length of your trip	5.8	1.8	0.1	6.2	2.0	0.2
Recommendat-ions from friends	4.9	2.7	0.2	4.6	3.2	0.3
Opportunity for adventure travel	5.8	1.8	0.1	5.9	2.5	0.3
Access to places off the beaten track	6.1	1.7	0.1	6.3	2.3	0.2
Safety – a good way of travelling on my own	5.5	2.2	0.1	5.8	2.6	0.3
See a wide range of attractions	6.2	1.7	0.1	6.5	2.0	0.2
Experience authentic New Zealand	6.0	1.9	0.1	6.6	1.8	0.2
Offers travel for backpackers	5.9	2.0	0.1	5.3	2.8	0.3

* Likert scale used 1 = Extremely unimportant, 7 = Extremely important

Length of trip and price of travel was found to show a significant relationship in that 62.3% of the length of trip is determined by price, meaning that the other 37.7% is explained by other variables. There was a significant relationship between the length of trip and price of travel, with the coefficient showing a result of 0.000 meaning that price of travel is significant in contributing to the length of travel undertaken by a Spaceships tourist. This is potentially

because the Spaceships New Zeeland tourists are more independent and their length of travel is dictated by time of travel. This result was confirmed through the company interview where the market is mainly influenced by price (personal communication, Geddes, 2010).

Spaceships New Zealand respondents' length of trip was found to be influenced by price. With a r square result of 0.623, 62.3% of Spaceships New Zealand respondents find length of trip is influenced by price compared to 50.9% of Stray respondents. A significant score of 0.000 was also found for this test, showing that this is a highly significant result (see Table 11). This shows that length of trip is influenced by price for both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand respondents.

Table 11: Regression analysis of length of trip vs. price of travel

	Stray	Spaceships New Zealand
R Square	0.509	0.623
Level of significance	0.000	0.000

Price of travel was also found to be effected by the importance of sociability to meet others while travelling. It was found that 50.9% of Stray respondents said the price of travel was affected by the importance they place on sociability and meeting others while they travel. This was found to be significant at a significance level of 0.000. For Stray respondents this is particularly true as their style of travel is a bus tour for backpackers, with social elements in the different activities that are done while on the tour. These results potentially confirm that this is important and one of the predictors in their willingness to pay, with respondents expecting a sociability element to the trip.

For Stray respondents, 60.5% found that it is important that the opportunity for adventure travel is influenced by sociability and meeting others (significant at 0.000). This strongly relates to Stray's target market and their mission of wanting to get people off the beaten track to travel New Zealand, and being a hop on hop off service with a sociable influence (Geddes, 2010; Stray & Spaceships New Zealand, 2009a). The target market of Stray is backpackers and FITs with these types of tourists also relating to Stray's mission and product

(Geddes, 2010; Stray & Spaceships New Zealand, 2009a). This is why Stray is successful and has aligned with backpacker markets in New Zealand, so that it can take advantage of the importance its customers place on the opportunity for adventure travel in New Zealand; that is, sociability and meeting others.

The importance of adventure travel and sociability for Spaceships New Zealand (48.1%) customers was found to be slightly less than that of Stray (62.3%). An r square result of 0.481 shows that 48.1% of respondents found it important to have the opportunity for adventure travel that was influenced by sociability (see Table 12). This is lower than that of Stray and can potentially be attributed to Spaceships New Zealand's more individual style of travel, whereby a campervan is used by individuals or smaller groups compared to Stray, which uses buses. The use of campervans immediately reduces the level of sociability for tourists, with this being hard to attain and influence, as it is sometimes their reason for booking with Spaceships New Zealand. To capitalise on these findings, it would be good if sociability could be increased with the networking of tourists and promotion of the Spaceships New Zealand brand more likely to take place.

Table 12: Regression analysis of adventure travel vs. sociability of respondents

	Stray	**Spaceships New Zealand**
R Square	0.623	0.481
Level of significance	0.000	0.000

First in this factor analysis it can be seen that multicollinearity of the variables is not a problem, with a determinant value of 0.119, which is larger than 0.00001 (see Table 13 below). This shows that the data correlated well. The KMO statistic for these factors is good with a score of 0.830, showing that a factor analysis is appropriate for the data. Bartlett's test is also highly significant (p< 0.000) showing that the factor analysis was appropriate. Overall, the analysis showed that the factors of general web browsing and email communication have a higher usage from users (mean 4.9 and 4.82 respectively) with low standard deviation scores of 1.7 and 1.9 respectively. This shows that the usage of these variables is good from Stray respondents, showing they were Internet savvy travellers. Blogs on the Internet, however, have a low mean score, 2.21 and a higher standard deviation 2.0, showing that Stray respondents are potentially

lower users of blogs and higher users of social networking sites, mean score of 4.5 and standard deviation of 1.9. Overall, the factors of these variables relates to the use by gender, with 73% of the variance of variables of general web browsing, social networking websites, blogs on the Internet, and email communication being explained by gender. This shows that gender can explain the usage of these variables by Stray respondents.

Table 13: Exploratory factor analysis key statistics Stray respondents

	Stray
Multicollinearity	0.119
KMO Statistic	0.830
Bartlett's Test Statistic	0.000
Variance 1	0.73

There was no multicollinearity in the exploratory factor data of both usage of Internet tools and gender for Spaceships New Zealand respondents with a determinant value of 0.143 (see Table 14), above 0.00001, showing that the data correlates well. The KMO statistic was of a standard value with it being 0.613, lower than that of Stray respondents (Stray KMO statistic of 0.830). Factor analysis for these variables was suitable for this data. The Bartlett's test, however, did show a significant result ($p < 0.000$), with this showing that the factor analysis was appropriate for the data used. The inverse correlation matrix shows that there were significant relationships between social networking and general web browsing of genders (significant at 0.29), blogs on the Internet and general web browsing (significant at 0.002), and blogs on the Internet and social networking sites (significant at 0.001). These were similar results to other tests; however, this does show that gender did have a positive influence on the relationships between these variables. A total of 62% of the variance from the data could be explained by gender influence on the variables used. This is lower than the variance of Stray respondents. Overall, results show support for the conclusion that gender of Spaceships New Zealand respondents influenced the relationship of gender with variables of usage of web browsing, social networking websites, blogs, and email communication.

Table 14: Exploratory factor analysis key statistics Spaceships New Zealand respondents

	Spaceships New Zealand
Multicollinearity	0.143
KMO statistic	0.613
Bartlett's test statistic	0.000
Variance 1	0.62

4.3.2 Importance of blog material on decision to travel with Stray and Spaceships New Zealand

Both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand view blogs as being a very valuable resource to their business operation (Geddes, 2010 #2). Blogs are seen as a more rich resource with the potential tourist being able to see what the experience is like and gain a more in-depth feeling about the tourist's experience. Search engines also aid this with the Stray and Spaceships New Zealand company brand names being well-used and received through blog search engines such as StumbleUpon. With blogs being written in a time series after the experience occurs there are generally a number of them written, each about different places or activities. Stray and Spaceships New Zealand both ask customers if they can link to their blogs in order for them to be used in the future as promotion for the company. This is a good way of showing timely information and other ideas for travel for the potential, future and past customers. Photos and videos are sometimes also shown on these blogs, with these being of high quality and creativity also being unique selling points for Stray and Spaceships New Zealand, and more generally for New Zealand as a destination.

It was found that respondents did not find blog material important. Mean scores for both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand were low, indicating relatively little importance being placed on blog material. Stray had a mean score of 2.9 with a high standard deviation of 3.1. The standard error of 0.2 for this data for Stray shows that the data is representative of the population studied even with a low mean score. Spaceships New Zealand respondents had a similar mean score of 2.8 with a standard deviation of 2.7. The standard error of 0.3 for Spaceships New Zealand shows that the standard deviation and mean for the data is representative of the population. This again shows that blog material can have

somewhere between no importance and some importance on the use of blogs for decision making and purchasing Spaceship New Zealand products.

Of those respondents who did indicate use of blogs in travel decision making, the main content that is looked for in a blog by Stray respondents was found to be travel advice (M=4.9007, SE=0.22897). This is compared to that of photos of travel destinations (M=3.5166, SE=0.26526). Other information, such as relevance of information (M=4.8874, SE=0.22524) and personal interest (M=4.6490, SE=0.23136), also featured highly. This can be compared with Spaceships New Zealand t-test, which shows that travel advice (M=4.7286, SE=0.32680) is also highly important, with photos of travel destinations (M=4.0571, SE=0.39242) also not being as important. Overall this shows that blogs are used as an important source of travel advice, with it being important for respondents to have relevant information and for the reader to have a personal interest in them. Photos used in travel blogs were not as important. This is consistent with the findings of the literature review (see Chapter 2.0) whereby text provides important information for travel search, with images serving mainly as 'attention grabbers'.

One sample t-tests of the importance of reasons for blogging showed that keeping family updated is the most important reason for Stray respondents to blog. A mean score of 4.5 was found for this compared with information sources (3.8) and ease and convenience for blogging (3.9). It was found that it was not highly important to blog to promote a company/product (3.1) or to discourage others not to visit (3.0). All of these results were significant relationships, with a p value of 0.000.

Spaceships New Zealand one sample t-tests of the importance of reasons for blogging showed that keeping family and friends updated was also very important (mean score of 4.6), along with ease and convenience and accurate information, with mean scores of 4.5 and 4.4 respectively. This is different to Stray respondents' one sample t-test where keeping family and friends updated was important; however, accurate information and ease and convenience variables were not as important. These results show that both backpackers and FITs had a

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high importance of keeping friends and family up to date through blogging; however FITs potentially place more importance on using blogging to find out information, and find this convenient compared with backpackers.

4.3.3 Length of time spent planning trip

Results of the survey analysis revealed that the longest time spent, by one respondent, planning a trip with Stray was four years, with the next longest being three years. Three years was also the maximum amount of time for Spaceships New Zealand respondents to be planning their travel. The shortest amount of time a Stray respondent spent on planning their travel was half a day with the shortest time for a Spaceships New Zealand respondent being one day. The most common response was for times ranging around; one day (21 respondents, 13.9% of respondents), two days (19 respondents, 12.6% of respondents), to two weeks (9 respondents, 6.0% of respondents) for Stray respondents. Spaceships New Zealand customers spent anything from 1 day (4 respondents, 5.6% of respondents), to one week (4 respondents, 5.6% of respondents), to one year (5 respondents, 7.0% of respondents) as being the most frequent amount of time spent planning travel.

4.3.4 Importance of consulting information sources

The most important information source that was consulted before booking with Stray or Spaceships New Zealand was found to be 'other travellers'. A mean score of 5.2 was found for Stray and 5.2 for Spaceships New Zealand. Possible reasons for this are that the type of travellers that Stray and Spaceships New Zealand target are backpackers and FITs; with them being social with other travellers, information is sourced both while on travel and before travel. Stray had consistent standard error results of 0.2, which shows that the data is representative of the population surveyed. Social networking sites featured moderately for both companies. A mean score was found of 3.4 for Stray and 4.0 for Spaceships New Zealand respondents. This is relatively lower for both companies compared to results from previous questions, such as the usability of social networking sites and blogs (Question 1). This may be because social networking sites are not viewed by respondents as being an information gathering tool, but more a communication tool. Other sources of information that were important to Stray

respondents as information gathering tools were 'travel books and guides' (mean score of 4.4), 'family and friends' (mean score of 4.6), and 'direct marketing from travel companies' (mean score of 4.2) (see Table 15, below). Sources of information that were important to Spaceships New Zealand respondents for information gathering were 'previous travel experience' (mean score of 5.0), 'travel books and guides' (mean score of 4.9), and 'other company websites' (mean score of 5.1). Higher standard error results for these questions were found with them ranging from 0.3 to 0.4. The results were representative of the population, being lower than the standard deviation; however, the results are higher than those of Stray data. It can be seen that there was a high standard deviation for all of the responses to the questions with these being considerably high for this set of results.

Overall, it was found that the main sources of information were other tourists, travel books and guides, previous travel experience, company websites, and direct marketing from travel companies. This aligns with literature found by Gursoy & Chen (2000) and Uysal, McDonald, & Reid (1990), that traditional information sources are still used by tourists, with these travel information sources being the main sources of information used by most tourists. Social networking sites and blogs did not feature highly as important information sources. This may be because they are used more as a communication and socialising tool rather than information sources, as found from previous questions, with users finding them to be easier source of information, with Internet resources being complex (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006).

Table 15: Mean and standard deviation scores for importance of consulting the following information sources before booking with Stray or Spaceships New Zealand

	Stray mean *	Stray standard deviation	Stray standard error	Spaceships New Zealand mean*	Spaceships New Zealand standard deviation	Spaceships New Zealand standard error
Travel blog Internet sites	3.1	3.0	0.2	4	3.4	0.4
Other company websites	4.0	2.9	0.2	5.1	3.0	0.3
Direct marketing from travel companies	4.2	2.9	0.2	4.6	3.2	0.3
Newspapers	2.8	3.1	0.2	3.7	3.4	0.4
Family and friends	4.6	2.9	0.2	4.7	3.2	0.3
Tourism New Zealand advertisement-s	3.8	3.0	0.2	4.4	3.2	0.3
Social networking sites	3.4	3.0	0.2	4.0	3.4	0.4
Travel books and guides	4.4	2.9	0.2	4.9	3.1	0.3
Previous travel experience	4.1	3.0	0.2	5.0	3.1	0.3
Magazines	3.3	3.1	0.2	4.1	3.4	0.4
New Zealand I-Site information	3.2	3.1	0.2	4.3	3.4	0.4
Other travellers	5.2	2.7	0.2	5.2	3.0	0.3
Stray/Spacesh-ips New Zealand traveller comments webpage	4.1	3.1	0.2	4.6	3.2	0.3

* Likert scale used 1 = Extremely unimportant, 7 = Extremely important

4.3.5 Blogs of other tourists consulted to plan travel with Stray or Spaceships New Zealand

Not surprisingly given the earlier findings about blog usage, a total of 102 Stray respondents (67.5% of respondents) did not consult blogs for their travel plans with Stray. This represented a majority of the respondents and shows that blogs were not widely used by tourists when planning travel. A similar result was

found for Spaceships New Zealand respondents with 43 respondents (61.4% of respondents) not consulting blogs while planning travel with Spaceships New Zealand (see Table 16). This is again an interesting result as it was found in previous results (see Table 9: Mean and standard deviation scores for use of blogging and social networking sites, above) that Spaceships New Zealand respondents did have a slightly higher use or importance for using blogs although this did not constitute the majority of respondents on the whole.

Table 16: Table showing respondents' access of blogs to plan travel with Stray or Spaceships New Zealand

	Stray (frequen-cy)	Stray (%)	Spaceships New Zealand (frequency)	Spaceships New Zealand (%)	Total results (frequenc-y)	Total results (%)
Yes	14	9.3%	4	5.7%	18	8.1%
No	102	67.5%	43	61.4%	145	65.6%
Don't Know	9	6.0%	3	4.3%	12	5.4%
Missing	26	17.2%	20	28.6%	46	20.8%
Total	**151**	**100.0%**	**70**	**100.0%**	**221**	**100.0%**

4.3.6 Importance of when travel decisions are made

Travel decisions were found to be made at many different points in a tourist's travel experience. It was found that most travel decisions of both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand respondents were; confirmed before leaving (Stray mean score of 5.3; Spaceships New Zealand mean score of 5.3), 'travel purchase decisions made while on holiday' (Stray mean score of 5.5; Spaceships New Zealand mean score of 5.5). A slightly smaller mean score was found for both companies regarding whether travel decisions being influenced by marketing. A mean score for Stray of 4.1 and for Spaceships New Zealand of 4.1 shows that marketing was important to respondents but not as important as having travel decisions influenced by others. Stray standard error results were consistent (0.1 to 0.2), with this showing the data was representative of the population. Spaceships New Zealand standard error results were also similar; however, higher at 0.3 for all questions. This shows the awareness of FITs and backpackers to friends' and relatives' advice rather than marketing influences. It aligns with results found about information sources from earlier questions in the survey (see above), which

was also found in backpacking literature through the socialisation of tourists as information is shared amongst them (Fesenmaier *et al.*, 1993; Hyde & Lawson, 2003).

Table 17: Mean and standard deviation scores for where decisions are made

	Stray mean *	Stray standard deviation	Stray standard error	Spaceships New Zealand mean*	Spaceships New Zealand standard deviation	Spaceships New Zealand standard error
Make travel purchase decisions while on holiday	5.5	2.3	0.1	5.5	2.3	0.3
Have travel plans confirmed before leaving	5.3	2.5	0.2	5.3	2.5	0.3
Have travel decision-s influenced by others	5.1	2.5	0.2	5.1	2.5	0.3
Have travel decisions influenced by marketing	4.1	2.9	0.2	4.1	2.8	0.3

* Likert scale used 1 = Extremely unimportant, 7 = Extremely important

4.4 Stray – Customer survey follow up questions

A follow up email was sent to 15 Stray customers who supplied their email contact in the initial survey. A total of four responses were gained from this. Social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Google were found to be used to plan their travel to New Zealand. Only one of the four respondents used blogs as a tool for planning their travel with Stray and Spaceships New Zealand. This was a similar to the results gained from the survey questions with blogs being used less than social networking sites. The respondents outlined that they accessed the blog and social networking sites before visiting New Zealand. One participant commented that they had posted information on the Facebook site of Stray, swapping information with other travellers. This was also done through the use of Hotmail which is an interesting result. Email addresses would have been exchanged between the two people, thus occurring before the respondent travelled with the company. This is a high level of information sharing as personal information has been exchanged in order for email contact to be made. The

respondents also found that the social networking sites were a good source of up to date information for them to use for their travel decisions.

4.5 Spaceships New Zealand – Customer survey follow-up questions

Follow up questions were emailed to nine Spaceships New Zealand customers. One response was gained from this. The respondent uses Twitter and Facebook and did access information from these social networking sites before travelling to New Zealand. The information gathered was on activities they would like to do and also contact information for people that they enjoyed their activities with. Information was posted by the respondent on the Facebook sites of the activities that they enjoyed, mainly thanking them for their service and recommending them to other travellers. The respondent also found that the social networking sites were a good source of quick information with it being timely. This result was also found from the follow up question respondents of Stray. The respondent is a member of the Stray Facebook and Twitter social networking site which they said "enabled them to see what travellers did with their vehicles (i.e. where they took them, etc)". This shows that social networking sites were used by respondents' as a form of information collection and ideas for travel, although the sample size in this study was small and care should thus be taken in generalising the findings to other populations..

4.6 Chapter summary

In summary, it was found that respondents in the surveys were generally young, with no difference evident between genders. Spaceships New Zealand respondents stated that their reason to book with Spaceships New Zealand was the ability to travel freely and independently, with the use of the Spaceships New Zealand van allowing this. This shows that the respondents are a more independent type of traveller with it aligning with literature from Hyde & Lawson (2003) surrounding the motivations of independent travel. Stray respondents found it important to have a social trip and meeting others. The type of accommodation used and preferred also places them into the backpacker and FIT markets with respondents using backpacker hostels during their trip. There were differences between both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand respondents with Stray respondents having higher usage of backpacker hostels than Spaceships

New Zealand respondents, showing more independence in travel of respondents. Overall, this aligns specifically with FIT and backpacker literature from Parr (1989) and Hyde & Lawson (2003) and also industry data profiling backpacker tourists to New Zealand (The Ministry of Tourism, 2007) frequently using backpacker hostels and adventure tourism experiences to class themselves as backpackers or FITs.

In terms of pre-experience decision making and information search, it was found that a wide range of resources were used by respondents. In relation to social networking and blog use, Facebook was the most popular. A number of other sites were used in combination with Facebook, showing that respondents were users of a wide range of social networking sites in order to keep in contact with friends and family, and also to gather information for decision making purposes. Both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand respondents indicated they placed little importance on blog material with other information sources such as other travellers, and travel books and guides having higher mean scores. Rather, it was found that Stray respondents had a preference for using official destination websites, and social media websites as information sources. Spaceships New Zealand respondents focused their use on travel ratings websites, and official destination websites, showing a difference in dependence and independence of information gathering between the two types of respondents. This confirms the literature (Keenan & Shiri, 2009; Schmalleger & Carson, 2008; Thevenot, 2007) that social networking sites and blogs are used for some information search and decision making; however, these are more strongly used for communication with friends and relatives. Time spent on decision making varied for both companies, with some travellers spending as little as half a day and others spending up to one year compared, with literature suggesting information search for decision making takes place until information can be found that enhances the quality of a tourist trip (Fodness & Murray, 1997) through both internal and external search means (Schmidt & Spreng, 1996). This means that the time spent on decision making can vary. Stray respondents seemingly spent less time planning their trip than Spaceships New Zealand respondents which can potentially be attributed to the independence of the product being consumed. The survey findings also suggested

that most travel decisions were made and confirmed before leaving, and also while on holiday, with smaller mean scores for the influence of tourism destination marketing on travel decisions.

Chapter 5.0 Analysis of networking communications

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative data analysis that has been conducted for the thesis research. The chapter begins with an analysis of customer comments from both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand company websites, followed by content of the Facebook and Twitter sites for the two companies. The analysis of the photographs and videos posted by customers on Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's websites is conducted using Hunter's (2008) typology (See Chapter 3.0).

The key findings was the use of key words that have been used such as; recommend, experience, and place, by customers and potential customers in all of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's online communication through its comments section on its website, Facebook, and Twitter social networking webpages. This shows that despite different social networking mediums (Facebook, Twitter, and company websites) being used, there are a number of common words in the comments made. While there were key words which were used there were also some clear differences in the responses and type of language used. A more in-depth analysis of the connections between the content of the collected data showed that there were some common links between several key areas. These areas were: place, the descriptive words used about the travel experiences, and the recommendation of the product. This chapter will examine these areas in greater detail.

5.1 Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's social networking sites and customer comments content

5.1.1 Customer comments content

Examining the customer comments posted on the Spaceships New Zealand website showed the wide range of content. Some of this content includes comments discussing the experiences customers had and the independence that the Spaceships New Zealand van had given the customer in order to travel around New Zealand. Destinations from throughout New Zealand have been discussed and reaching those destination has been attributed to the versatility and freedom that the Spaceships New Zealand van provides the customer. For example, one customer posted the comment:

Great way to travel!

Hi guys

Just want to shout a big thanks to all the helpful and friendly staff at both the Auckland and Christchurch offices! We had a lovely time travelling NZ in our Spaceship, visiting beautiful places like Abel Tasman and Milford Sound to name a few.

We loved the versatility and freedom we had with our Spaceship, it's such a great way for independent travel and your friendly outgoing staff made it all the more merrier!

Thanks a bunch!

(Spaceships New Zealand customer comment extract)

Spaceships New Zealand were thanked a number of times in the customer comments for their service and the products they provided, this is evident in the customer comments below. Spaceships New Zealand were acknowledged by the customer as the provider of the experience for the customers. This demonstrates to other potential customers the appreciation for the service the customer has had. The Spaceships New Zealand customer comment, below, also shows the enjoyment the customer had from the product. The customer discussed the facilities of the vans and what they can be used for, not just transportation, with DVD players and an IPOD connection being mentioned. This assists other travellers in their decision making as it outlines what is provided in a Spaceships New Zealand van. These comments also contained recommendations of the product to other travellers because of the facilities that are provided in the van.

Avatar

We hired a top of the line Spaceship named Avatar at the end of January for a North Island three week escapade and we were not disappointed, it felt like we were floating on clouds for the whole trip as it was such a smooth and comfortable drive! Loved all the mod cons, DVD player, IPOD connector and the bed was great, descent size and very comfortable.

Wish I could go back and do it all over again!

Really recommend this product to anyone contemplating a driving / camping holiday around NZ. Staff were also a pleasure and so friendly to deal with.

Thanks Guys

(Spaceships New Zealand customer comment extract)

The above comment relates to travel that has been experienced and shows that the customers had enjoyed their experience and wanted to tell others about their travels. This aligns with descriptions of FITs and backpackers and their socialising with other travellers (Cave *et al.*, 2007; Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Thyne *et al.*, 2005). However, it can be noted that there are no customer comments discussing the anticipation of a customer about to travel with Spaceships New Zealand. This would allow for more socialisation between customers both past and future through recommendations of where to go and the facilitation of travelling together in groups.

Stray customer comments were mainly written by individual authors about their recent experiences with the company. The comments contain references about people they met, places and experiences they had, drivers of the company, and places they want to go back to and recommend to others. The comments below, refer to the experience that was had and shows reflection on customer's experiences. The comments also give evidence that they would go on the tour again. Reflection content can be seen with comments such as "Keep up the good work" referring to the customers previous experience with the company.

Thanks Stray!

Just a quick note to say thank you Stray, myself and 4 friends did both the North and South Island and have to say we had an amazing time. Our drivers were all really cool, Trouble was full of information, laid back and nothing was too much........trouble!! Hoover was hilarious and Nat couldn't do enough for us. I will definitely be recommending Stray to others and plan on coming back to tour with you again. Keep up the good work!

(Stray customer comment extract)

camper trailers

I've had a great trip all down to stray and our bus driver honey!!! I've met some amazing friends for life. I did the short moe pass which was ace I still got to see everything I wanted and more :) Nightlife was great critic; it was well worth seeing with Stray. I would defo do it again!!!

(Stray customer comment extract)

Awesome Time!

My daughter is living in Paihia and when I said I was coming to visit she suggested we do a Stray tour. The Tom Pass was recommended to her by driver "Scratch" who I thank very much for the suggestion. Our driver for the 5 days was "Metro" and I couldn't have asked for a more fun, hard working and organized person. I also felt truly comfortable with his careful driving skills as we snaked our way through the mountains. He went above and beyond to make sure everyone was enjoying themselves. The games while travelling were so much fun, even for a mom, and was a great way to meet everyone else on the bus. My daughter and I saw so much and Metro was very informative with tidbits of information as we toured. Thank you for a great 5 days for both of us and I have already passed word along to friends that hope to visit New Zealand next year.

(Stray customer comment extract)

5.1.2 Facebook content

The Stray Facebook data content included photographs that had been posted by former customers of their experiences, comments regarding the selling of items and selling of Stray bus tickets, and comments about the trip that the customer was about to go on. The comment below shows excitement that the customer has about their impending travel with Stray and their desire to find out if other people were going on the same tour.

Helloo, I'm starting the stray everywhere pass from Hahei on Sunday 7th...anyone else going to be on that bus/starting there? Can't wait!

(Stray Facebook extract)

The comment above shows that the tourist was excited about their upcoming experience and wants to make social connections with other people before the trip begins. It also relates to results found in the Stray surveys that showed customers using social networking sites, such as Facebook, were seeking communication with other travellers. The person was looking for socialisation with other travellers, making them a backpacker type tourist that is wanting to meet other people and experience a destination as described by Hyde and Lawson (2003) and Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai (2002).

Interestingly, the start dates of travel and directions they were travelling in were also included in the persons' comments, showing others when they were beginning their Stray trip, more examples can be seen in the Facebook comments below.

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Hi, is anyone starting the short moe from Auckland on 27th feb?

(Stray Facebook extract)

Starting from Auckland on 2nd march - going north first

(Stray Facebook extract)

The comment above shows that Stray customers try to coordinate travel with other friends or other people who are in similar locations. It increases the evidence that backpackers, such as Stray customers, are interested in socialising during their travel experience and want to meet new people while travelling. However, it must be noted that through doing this, the safety of the traveller is potentially compromised in the process through other users knowing the movements of this person. Conversely, safety is a reason for some backpackers to travel in larger groups (Mohsin & Ryan, 2003; Murphy, 1999; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). It could also be said that Facebook is way for backpacker's to update friends and relatives as to were travelling. Overall, this shows that Stray Facebook content was differing to Spaceships New Zealand Facebook content through what was posted and how the customers communicate with others.

Considering Spaceships New Zealand, there were two comments on the Facebook webpage that showed enjoyment by a customer's. The remaining customer comments contained references to their anticipation of their trip and what they wanted to do. Both comments below, shows the customers excitement towards their trip and also where they are travelling, New Zealand and Australia.

Can't wait to travel Australia in our spaceship! X

(Customer comment – Spaceships New Zealand Facebook page)

Can't wait to be travelling around New Zealand in the spaceship. I am sure it will be great fun!!

(Customer comment – Spaceships New Zealand Facebook page)

This shows that customers had built expectations and excitement about their trip in the pre-experience stage of decision making, which has been shared via social networking sites compared with customer comments of the company's website. The customer was connected with the social networking sites of Spaceships New Zealand before they visit and begin their Spaceship's New

Zealand experience. This, however, gives little opportunity for promotion of the company after the customer's experience, as the comments focus on events, feeling from before the trip occurred. This demonstrates on social networking sites for other customers that the person is excited with pre-experience anticipation on social networking sites; however, this is not necessarily followed up and shown post trip through social networking site communication.

It was found that the Facebook content made by Spaceships New Zealand customers did not feature descriptive wording when recommendations were made. Only words such as 'thanks' (19 times) and 'great' (11 times) were posted. This can be compared with the Spaceships New Zealand customers' comments which have a wide variety of positive words being used in the content. This is because the comments are made by customers who have not used Spaceships New Zealand and are commenting before their travel. The comments of customers post-trip would potentially differ in using more descriptive words about their travel and recommendations, which was seen more in the customer comments section of Spaceships New Zealand's webpage.

Customers included descriptions about their van and the time they had but generally stopped short of using descriptive words. This is in contrast to the customer comments on Spaceships New Zealand website where words are used to describe their trip and recommend it to others (See comments below). These words included "not disappointed", "smooth and comfortable drive", "wish I could go back and do it all over again" and "really recommend this product". This shows a high level of satisfaction being gained from the product, resulting in the customer recommending Spaceships New Zealand to other travellers.

5.1.3 Twitter content
Descriptive words that were used by the company on its social networking site Twitter are limited by the word length that are allowed for tweets and customer content. Main features of the Tweets were information about events or Spaceships New Zealand's related products which included weblinks or content about events in order to advertise them to their followers on Twitter. This was valuable information for customers and potential customers of Spaceships New Zealand, keeping them informed about the product. With the Twitter content,

below, referring to Spaceships New Zealand company news and local events, the content and purpose of Spaceships New Zealand Twitter page is that of an information and promotion tool for Spaceships New Zealand. Descriptive words were not used in Spaceships New Zealand Twitter content; however, words about an area of New Zealand or company event are used (see below content).

> We have a beautiful brand new orange Spaceship in the depot without a name on it :(Add your space related...
>
> (Spaceships New Zealand – Twitter content)
>
> Our UK Spaceship depot has now been relocated from Sheerness to Middlesex, not far from the London Airport!
>
> (Spaceships New Zealand – Twitter content)
>
> In Auckland this Saturday (13th Feb), Anika Moa and Sola Rosa are playing at the Auckland Zoo!
>
> (Spaceships New Zealand – Twitter content)

With the Twitter data collected only featuring the company posts and not fans or customers, it can be seen that this mainly shows the amount of times Spaceships New Zealand have posted information on their Twitter page. Interesting words such as 'day' (21 times) and 'campervan' (21 times) also appear in the data, showing that Spaceships New Zealand is promoting its product and making clear what type of product it provides. 'UK' is used a number of times (20 times) indicating either promotion of their UK operations, where a Tweet has been made from or in reference to information about the UK area. This is interesting as 'Zealand' (13 times) and other place names within New Zealand such as 'Auckland' (13 times) appear far less in the data than the UK.

The Twitter social networking site is formatted in order for users to put content on their own page and for followers to 'retweet' the information, use this information, or to comment on this information. Information cannot be posted by a follower on a person's page. This in most ways limits the content to that of Stray itself. Because of this, Stray Twitter data was centred on topics that are relevant from Stray's perspective.

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There was a similar trend between Stray and Spaceships New Zealand's Twitter word counts. Both social networking sites have common phrases and words used on the social networking sites when information was posted on them. 'RT' and 'Retweeted' were both used a similar amount of times, seven and six respectively. This links with how the social networking site, Twitter, was used in order to communicate with the companies' followers. However, this use is not considerably high which showed there was a trend in the information being posted on this website being made by Spaceships New Zealand and not information coming from other sources. This keeps the fans up to date with content only from Spaceships New Zealand; however, this may limit them to the amount and type of information posted. 'Campervan' features highly with seven uses which shows that Spaceships New Zealand do show what type of transport and product they provide to their target market.

No customer comments were made on the page, with only other customer comments being 'retweeted' by Stray if they were of importance. Because of this, descriptive words were rarely used on Twitter webpages, with Stray posting comments towards followers who were enjoying or using Stray's products at the time. Places were also not mentioned on the Stray Twitter webpage as there is not enough room for this to be done; however, they were mentioned through website links to other webpages (including blogs or new articles), with customers not being able to post comments about places of interest that they liked.

This is how Twitter was unique through its limit of characters used and how this influenced content posted on Twitter webpages, with it coming mainly from the company rather than from customers. Recommendation of a product is done through 'retweets' of a customer, links to external blogs, or Stray's own 'tweets', which is different to customer comment content and Facebook content. The above findings show that Twitter is used by Stray and Spaceships New Zealand as an information communication tool with customers of both companies. The content of this social networking site is specific to the company other external events with the content being generated only by either Stray or Spaceships New Zealand, making it limiting for customer socialisation.

5.1.4 Individual themes

Individual themes of experience, place and recommendations were used in to analyse the customer comments of both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand. These are discussed below

5.1.4.1 Experience and adjectives

Descriptive words such as 'enjoyed', 'experience', 'fun', 'amazing', 'fantastic', and 'awesome' provided interesting results between the two data sets. For the Stray customer comments, up to five different describing words were contained in a comment, with this showing the writing style being descriptive in a customer's comment. In two instances for separate comments there were different descriptive words being used; 'amazing', 'recommend', 'time', 'enjoyed', 'great', 'thanks'. These comments were short in length; however do describe positive reflections of the product

However, it also comes from Spaceships New Zealand using the vans as a promotional tool. Competitions are run to name a new Spaceships New Zealand van which also creates pride from customers through their suggestions and comments. The comments, below, show the communication with the Facebook users in order to find a new name for a new Spaceships New Zealand van. This enabled the company to stimulate communication and content on their Facebook site.

> "Spaceships GREETINGS ALL! We here at the Spaceship head quarters are most impressed with the selection of Space related names being added to the Fan page! Please keep them and remember you could be the chosen one!"

(Spaceships New Zealand – Facebook comment)

This type of posting gained brand awareness in the market place and promotion of the brand well after a customer has completed their trip.

5.1.4.2 Place

Place was found to be a major differentiation of Stray's product for its customers. The company's product is unique in the way it gets tourists off the beaten track and allows them to decide on their travel plans while on tour. This was clearly seen in the customer comments on their website. Tourists have

discussed the unique places that they had enjoyed the most, with Barrytown, Franz Joseph Glacier, and the West Coast of the South Island being discussed a number of times.

> I take so many memories with me the people I've met and the places I've been barrytown with python, queenstown with fergburgers and teapots and karoke in makarora
>
> (Stray Customer Comment)

The comment above shows the enjoyment the customers had on their trip, with emphasis being placed on the time spent in Barrytown, Queenstown and Makarora. These were mentioned as being the places where the customer had a good time. The description of their trip and the events they went on show what the destination and New Zealand is like to other travellers which is a good marketing tool for not only Stray but also New Zealand. This also allows future travellers to develop an image of the destination and attractions that they want to visit while on a Stray tour in New Zealand, with Barrytown being a part of this (Gartner, 1993). This is again where Stray can gain from the customer comments where positive word of mouth (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995) about features of their services will gain them both repeat and new customers.

Places in New Zealand were discussed in all of the online content that was analysed. They were discussed in both a broader context and a more specific place context. A number of comments on both Facebook and the customer comments page discuss New Zealand and also Australia, with more specific places such as Auckland, Christchurch, Abel Tasman, Milford Sound being discussed.

It can also be seen that there was a difference in time that the comments were written by the customer. The customer comments discuss places the customer have been to, whereas the Facebook comments discuss the customers going to the place soon with Stray. This shows the different socialisation that occurs between the two sets of data. Facebook allows customers to interact with one another before a tour, whereas customer comments were focused more on the experiences that have occurred.

5.1.4.3 Recommendations

The data collected also shows that there is a clear link between customers' satisfaction and their recommendation of the Stray product. 'Recommend' was used nine times in the customer comment data with the word being used along with places the person has visited while on the tour and also the drivers names that they had while on their tour. The two customers comments below, reinforce the recommendations that former customers give both companies in their customer comments. Both of these comments positively display the companies and the benefits the customers gained from using them.

> I had an incredible experience with Stray and particularly with our driver Scratch on the Ron pass recently. Stray runs a great organization and Scratch was a plethora of local knowledge and "insight". I enjoyed my time so much that I even followed up with two weeks in a Spaceship. I would recommend Stray to anyone without a doubt.
>
> (Stray Customer Comment – Ron Pass)

> Arrived in Auckland with no itinerary and 15 min worth of googling tour companies under my belt, I wandered into the Stray office- 1/2 hr later and a cuppa later had a Jill pass in my hot little hands. Who would have known that was the best decision I was to make during my time in NZ. Had the best time. I got on and off 3 times on a whim as nothing was planned, if I liked somewhere I stayed, if not I moved on and had no troubles with bookings. Even when the web site wouldn't let me change dates I just emailed the Stray and they changed them. Not that I needed to have bothered as our driver was so cool and casual and just said "don't worry about it there's room on the bus I'll call them and let them know you are with me" Thanks Mambo you rock..!! Same with Cathy when I got on her bus and I was not on her list I just showed my Stray card and no probs. Had between 15 - 20 peeps on each bus of all ages and nationalities and met a heap of like minded travellers on my journey, i.e. Enjoyed adventure and activities during the day and a cold beer in the evening and not out to get wasted every night and sleep all day. As a single (more mature in years, not in heart) traveller I can think of no better way to get around and see NZ, cool peeps, cool drivers and a great atmosphere would recommend it to anyone.
>
> (Stray Customer Comment – Aussie Traveller)

These types of customer comments are very valuable to Stray and show the high quality of service perceived. However, the comments still need to be viewed by a potential customer to aid in their travel decision making, and generate value for Stray. Facebook and Twitter allow for a larger target audience, however

it can be seen that these types of longer messages are not posted on Facebook or Twitter as customers used a different writing style compared to Stray's Customer Comments, that is, a shorter style containing less description of events and the companies'.

The overall enjoyment of the experience is shown less in the comments from customers both on the Spaceships New Zealand webpage and social networking sites. Rather, a majority of the Facebook comments from customers were about their excitement and anticipation before their Spaceships experience has begun.

The customer comments, below, on Spaceships New Zealand's webpage potentially show a wider range of post trip content. The comments focused on the trip the customer had experienced with places being described, the features of the van the customer liked explained. This is great promotion for the company as it highlights all aspects of the company, the vehicles, features of the vehicles, what people can do in New Zealand, and the staff and assistance customers receive.

> Really recommend this product to anyone contemplating a driving/camping holiday around NZ. Staff were also a pleasure and so friendly to deal with.
>
> (Customer comment – Spaceships New Zealand customer comments page)
>
> Recommend Spaceships to all ages!
>
> Thanks a bunch.
>
> (Customer comment – Spaceships New Zealand customer comments page)

5.1.5 Summary of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand social networking site and customer content findings

Overall, customers were satisfied with the product, and through Spaceships New Zealand customer comments did recommend the product. This was also found with Facebook content that customers did recommend the product and were proud of their van and travels. Because of this, Facebook, Twitter and the customer comments pages all provide good recommendations and show strong customer satisfaction of their travel and of the company. Themes have emerged

from the written communication. These have been based around the respondents recommending the companies to others, which have featured mainly in the customer comments. Place and scenery also featured in the customer comments and some Facebook and Twitter content. There has also been the emergence of time that the comments have been made with Facebook comments occurring before the trip in a more social way and the customer comments being post-trip, focusing on recommending the company and where the tourist has been.

5.2 Imagery analysis

The following section analyses the imagery data collected from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand. This consisted of customer photographs and customer videos which were analysed through Hunter's (2008) typology. The two themes found through the content analysis of the photographs were that the Stray photographs showed a traveller looking for adventure and group travel, whereas Spaceships New Zealand photographs showed travellers looking for freedom and fun with a unique form of transport, the orange campervan. The typology and analysis of the customer photographs and videos for both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand are outlined below.

5.2.1 Stray customer photographs

A total of 190 photos were collected from Stray's website over the period of data collection. These were all taken by tourists who were customers of Stray. The Stray bus featured in 32 of these photos with 168 photos having people in them. Most of the photographs had groups of people in them, mainly more than four people. This showed the relationships customers form as a group while on the bus tour together. Very few of the photos involved scenery and the Stray bus, with only 14 photos having the bus and a wider angle involving scenery in the background. As described earlier in the thesis, the Stray tours attract primarily backpacker tourists, with many of them going on adventure tourism activities while on the tour. There were 46 photos that included adventure tourism activities, branding and adventure/outdoors equipment in them (see Table 18). Most of these photos had bungee jumping or kayaking in them, with the photo including either one or more than three people in the picture, once again showing group activities

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that were included on the tour. This is a common theme of backpackers' activities, in that they are looking for thrill seeking adventures and are willing to pay to experience the many different adventure tourism activities (New Zealand Tourism Research Institute, 2009). Stray have many different organised activities for its groups to participate in. One type of these is Maori cultural activities and sites of significance that are visited. Most of these photos were of groups learning poi or the haka, with some having Maori carvings or meeting houses in them also.

Table 18: Showing key frequencies from Stray customer photographs

Total number of photos collected	190
Number of photos with a Stray bus as the main feature	32
Number photos with people included	168
Number of wide angle photos with scenery and bus included	14
Number of photos with a backpacker attraction or activity in E.g. bungee jumping, white water rafting experience	46
Number of photos with Maori culture in them	11

5.2.2 Spaceships New Zealand customer photographs

From the 140 photos collected from Spaceships New Zealand's website, (the vast majority 136 photos) included a Spaceships New Zealand van in them. This is a very large proportion of the photos featuring the logo, colour and actual product of the company, with all of these photos being taken by customers of the company. While a large number of photos included the Spaceships New Zealand van, a considerable number also included people in them, with 82 photos having a person in the photo. There were 46 photos taken featuring the van, taken from a wide angle and including scenery in the background. Some of these had been taken creatively, with mountains, rivers, and beaches featuring in them. Only one photo included an adventure tourism activity, with this being mountain biking and having the van also in the photo. This potentially revealed that customers are more interested in travelling to remote destinations and do not hold a great emphasis on taking part in the adventure tourism activities that New Zealand offers. This is potentially the opposite of what the Stray customers' photographs showed. The photographs also showed the elements of freedom and space shown through the various photos featuring many different natural landscapes. Hyde & Lawson (2003b) define the FITs as having a flexible itinerary. This is shown through the photographs with destinations visited not major attractions and varying destination to that of other travellers and those of Stray customers. The natural

landscape shows the importance of freedom and self-determination, with the photos showing that the customers explored different areas of New Zealand. Krippendorf (1987) advocates that the natural landscape is very important to the FIT and backpacker. There were 71 photos showing the participants using the vans facilities and equipment (see Table 19 below). This was seen through photographs of cooking, opening doors, photos of inside the vans', photos of the bed, and photos of the extendable pop-out function of the van. One point of interest was that there were no photos with Maori culture symbols, customs, or buildings in them. This was in contrast to what was included in a number of Stray traveller's photos.

Table 19: Showing key frequencies from Spaceships New Zealand customer photographs

Total number of photos collected	140
Number photos with van included	136
Number of photos with people included	82
Number of wide angle photos with scenery and van included	46
Number of photos with a backpacker attraction or activity in E.g. bungee jumping signage	1
Number of photos showing vans uses such as cooking, sleeping, storage	71
Number of photos with Maori culture in them	0

5.2.3 Stray customer video analysis

A total of 16 customer videos were collected from Stray's company website. The videos were all taken by customers participating in travel around New Zealand. Most of the videos contained adventure tourism activities with bungee jumping being a main feature of many of the videos. The average length of the videos was 5.38 minutes, with the longest being 10.05 minutes and shortest 0.17 minutes (see Table 20 below). The longest video (10.05 minutes) was a feature about the travellers and where they had been and where they were going in the future. They also contained natural landscapes of New Zealand featured through still shots and moving video recorded by the tourist.

Table 20: Length of Stray customer videos

Number of videos	16
Average length of videos	5.38 minutes
Longest video	10.05 minutes
Shortest video	0.17 minutes

5.2.4 Spaceships New Zealand customer video analysis

Five customer videos were collected from Spaceships New Zealand's company website. These ranged in length from 40 seconds long to 1.26 minutes long. The average length of these videos was 77 seconds (see Table 21). It could be seen in all of the videos that the Spaceship van was the feature of the video. The van was featured in different ways, through being in car parks while lunch was being prepared, a full tour of the van, and videoing while driving the van. The videos also included natural landscape scenes around New Zealand with the coast and mountains being main features.

Table 21: Length of Spaceships New Zealand customer videos

Number of videos	5
Average length of videos	77 seconds
Longest video	1.26 minutes
Shortest video	40 seconds

5.3 Typology of tourism representation by space

Hunter's (2008) typology includes several categories that were used for the analysis of the customer photograph and video data collected from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand websites. These typology included space categories with; natural landscape, cultivated landscape, heritage and material culture, tourism products relating to the space category of the typology. The above typologies will be considered in more detail below.

5.3.1 Natural landscape

The typology of natural landscape included the feature of "oceans, beaches, forests, lakes, wild animals, fields, or sky in the photograph or video" (Hunter, 2008, p. 360). The analysis was done on the basis of how much of the natural landscape featured in the photograph or video in order to be classed as natural landscape.

Seven Stray photos out of 190 were identified as showing natural landscape. There are no Spaceships New Zealand photographs that have been identified as including natural landscape, with all of the photographs that have been collected as data including a man-made item in them. The Stray photographs were mainly scenes of beaches around the Coromandel Peninsula with Cathedral

Cove being photographed. Two scenes with wildlife included, showed that the customers are interested in the natural beauty of the country, with seals and a whale's tail being photographed, and natural backgrounds of hills and beaches included. Two sunsets have also been photographed, with one having the entire sky yellow including clouds and landscape and the other just including a setting sun and landscape. Rock formations in the sea have also been photographed.

Most of the Stray videos featured a type of natural landscape. A number of the videos had activities including walking on beaches, bungee jumping, and horse trekking, which all featured natural scenery of New Zealand. Two of the Stray videos also featured a guided walking tour in the Franz Joseph Glacier with tour guide, tour party and featuring both still photos and videos of the glacier and mountains. This showed the tour group getting up close to the natural landscape and how they became a feature within that landscape of the glacier, compared with doing a bungee jump, which does not become a part of the landscape. Beaches also featured a number of times in the videos. These areas were mainly the Pancake Rocks on the West Coast of the South Island and beaches in Northland. Most of these showed the tourist walking the beach, or travelling in a bus on the beach. The videos that were made featuring the natural landscape were predominantly made up of moving video images, with a few still shots of groups or individuals included.

Natural landscape did not feature highly in the Spaceships New Zealand customer videos. One video included views from a ski field at Coronet Peak and one the Lyttelton Harbour, both in the South Island. Both of the videos were taken with the van being the feature looking out to the natural landscape. This showed the independence that can be achieved by the Spaceships New Zealand van and how customers used the van to gain independence.

5.3.2 Cultivated landscapes
Cultivated landscape included photographs and videos that contained landscapes that had been altered by the addition of man-made equipment or structures. There were 72 Spaceships New Zealand photographs that were identified as having cultivated landscapes included in them. Most of these

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landscapes include the Spaceships New Zealand van or implements from the van in the landscape. The photographs were mainly wide-angle photographs - including the Spaceships New Zealand van and the natural landscape in the background. Some of the photos also included the landscape in the foreground with the Spaceships New Zealand van placed in the photo so as to show the beauty of the landscape. Tourists were included in the photographs through being in the Spaceships New Zealand van or posing with the van. The photos also show the capabilities of the Spaceships New Zealand van through the tourist engaging in cooking, sleeping, driving, and opening areas of the van. The photos featured a number of different weather conditions with some involving snow, rain and sun in them.

A large number of cultivated landscapes have been photographed in Stray's customer photographs. A total of 46 photos, including landscapes that have been pruned or altered by humans. There were different extremes of the landscape being cultivated, some photos had the entire landscape changed, while others just had a small element altered. A number of photos had farmland in the background, with the landscape being altered through fences, buildings or roadways. Being a country with most of its rural land used as farmlands, it is easy to see the international interest in photographing New Zealand farms and sheep. The inclusion Stray bus changed the landscape to one which was considered open. It was included in photos with mountains, beaches, lakes and rivers in the background. This clearly represents that the bus tours do get off the beaten track and offer different experiences for their customers. Mountains were included in many of the cultivated landscape photos. Other mountain photos included the snow and the Stray bus, or chairlift operations on Mount Ruapehu. Additional cultivated landscapes are beaches with the tour group kayaking, with houses in the background, skydiving planes at airports, or rivers with bridges included. All of these depicted the natural beauty of New Zealand that the customers are seeking while on their visit, but had some element of a cultivated landscape, which was mainly in the background of the photograph.

The only cultivated landscapes that featured in Spaceships New Zealand videos were parks or rest areas where tourists had filmed their videos. The videos

mainly featured the Spaceship van with the park and rest area being in the background. The locations for these videos were chosen as areas of convenience as the customer is focused on showing the Spaceships New Zealand van in the videos. The main cultivated landscape that was in the Stray videos was the gumboot throwing competitions, whereby a park is chosen and tourists try to throw a gumboot the furthest. This location had a mown field, fences, and houses in the background, located in a town. The location included a human implements, with the fence being the man-made implement. Mountains surrounding the town could also be seen and the Stray bus featured in the background.

5.3.3 Heritage and material culture

The use of heritage and material culture features highly in tourism in New Zealand (Tourism New Zealand, 2007). The category of the typology specifies that it includes ethnic or history and for the tourist to be involved with this culture or heritage (Hunter, 2008). Spaceships New Zealand photographs and videos did not feature history or culture items, and Stray photographs and videos had a low number of videos or photographs with culture in them.

There were nine photos that included heritage and culture material through showing an ethnic group or unique history of New Zealand that Stray includes in its tours. This is an interesting aspect of the photographic data collected, as a number of Stray photographs included Maori culture in them. Nine of the Stray photographs have Maori culture in them. This is shown through a wide range of different photos. Four of the photos had a group of people in them either being instructed or posing for a photo. These photos included a Maori person in indigenous costume with the tourists in the group. There was one photo taken inside a whare where there are no people inside, the subject being the Maori carvings. Two photos included tourists posing with Maori warriors in their indigenous costume, which showed the involvement of the Maori people with the tourists in their experience. There were no historic buildings or areas included in the photographs. One statue was included with the Stray bus in the background, but it is difficult to identify what the statue is and where.

The main feature of Stray videos including heritage and material culture were Maori culture Kapa Haka performances. These featured large groups of people performing traditional Maori songs and haka. People featured in the videos were both tourists in the Stray bus group and Maori cultural instructors. This allowed the tourists to experience New Zealand culture and heritage and learn specific cultural aspects at the same time. It could be seen in the videos that the tourists were enjoying learning and performing the cultural songs and haka, which became a feature of their tour. This was the only type of heritage and material cultural video posted on the website. There were others that did feature heritage areas such as the Kawarau Bungee Jump Bridge; however, this was not the feature of the video, the bungee jump was.

5.3.4 Tourism products (facilities, accommodation, and cuisine)

This category of the typology included a wide range of different tourism activities, with the typology referring to the products as something a tourist would consume (Hunter, 2008). Many Spaceships New Zealand photographs were identified as having tourism products in them. There were 140 photos identified that had tourism products of Spaceships New Zealand's vans, motor camp sites, camp sites, DOC products, and rest stop sites included. Spaceships New Zealand vans featured in 138 of these photographs. These photographs depicted the accommodation, facilities, cooking facilities, and transportation that the van provided its customers. The only element that the van does not provide is the attraction. A DOC walk sign with a tourist in the photograph was one photograph that did not include a Spaceships New Zealand van. The other photograph that did not include a Spaceships New Zealand van is a rest stop, where lunch food and beverages were shown. Some of the photographs included camp sites, which can be classed as accommodation facilities used by the tourist.

A large number of tourism products were included in the Stray photograph data. There were 84 Stray customer photographs found with tourism products in them, with these mainly being adventure tourism products including large groups of people and individuals in the photos. The adventure tourism products that were included in the photos were bungee jumping, kayaking, white water rafting, caving, skydiving, surfing, and the Sky Tower Sky Jump. Some branding was

evident in the photographs including the Nevis bungee jump site logo included, the Sky Tower in the background showing the Sky Jump, and Cathedral Cove Kayak Tours logo. The photographs were all taken as physical evidence of the tourist on the experience with physical materials used in the service, such as harnesses, also being included in the photos (Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Titz, 2001). There was one photo including cuisine, which showed two men eating a burger at a bar. Accommodation did not feature strongly in the photos. Some backpacker lodge accommodation used by Stray was included, but only the outside of cabins were shown and the Stray bus was included, which demonstrated the importance of the bus in their transportation. A reason for the low level of accommodation being shown in the photographs could be due to the tourists bus pass including accommodation that was backpacker lodges at most destinations, with the lodges and style of accommodation not being of great importance to the tourists because the experiences on their travels are valued as being more important. This is shown through the bus being included in more of the photographs. Transportation was the main feature in the photographs of tourism products. The Stray bus featured in 33 photos with groups of tourists also included in these photos, showing how they were transported on their tour. Most of these photos did not include other tourism products, with one including accommodation and others including the bus with natural scenery such as mountains and rivers.

All of the Stray and Spaceships New Zealand videos featured a type of tourism product. These products ranged from including the Stray bus, Maori cultural performances, cuisine, bungee jumping, skydiving, Spaceships New Zealand van and boat trips. The Spaceships New Zealand van and Stray bus was the customer's primary tourism product and provided a number of tourism services for the customer. It is the customer's form of transport and, for Spaceships New Zealand customers, accommodation while in New Zealand, with it also having cooking and entertainment facilities. All of these were shown in the videos that customers made, with customers showing pride and enthusiasm in the product. The tourism products were captured using still photos and moving images which featured the activity taking place. These were all taken at a number of different locations throughout New Zealand, with Northland, Queenstown,

Franz Joseph Glacier, Rotorua, and Taupo being the main areas featured. Accommodation did not feature in the videos, however; with it being a backpacker accommodation type tour showing the type of accommodation would not have been a priority for a customer. The transportation type, Stray bus, was included in a number of the videos; this showed others how they travelled around New Zealand and featured the brand of tour and company they travelled with. The videos had fun with showing the bus, through it getting push-started in one video with one customer saying 'And that's how you start a journey with Stray'. This can be looked at light-heartedly, as that is the type of tour they were on, with fun being the main feature. Inside the bus was also shown with 'We are the Champions' by 'Queen' being played as fun after the gumboot throwing competition. This demonstrates the type of tour the customer is looking for, with fun a big emphasis. Also the experience they are given is unique to both the company and the driver who is in charge of the group. Other types of transport were boat trips customers went on in the Bay of Islands, with a sailing trip being the main boating experience. Plane trips at the end of the videos were shown to symbolise the end of their time in an area of New Zealand. Other tourism products that are shown in the videos are the rest areas and car parks that the videos are made in and also the ski field car park and ski lift that the 'Spaceships Winter Adventure' video is made on.

Overall, it can be seen in this typology category that there was large evidence of natural landscape being photographed and videoed by Spaceships New Zealand customers, showing their higher independence in their travel. This is compared to Stray customer photographs and videos' that had lower levels of natural landscape with this data including cultivated and human subjects. A high number of cultivated landscape photographs were analysed from Spaceships New Zealand customers, showing their travel incorporating the Spaceships New Zealand van in most of them. Stray photographs featured cultivated landscapes including buildings and tourism activities being consumed. Rest areas were the main cultivated landscapes featuring in the Spaceships New Zealand videos. Heritage and material culture featured more in Stray customer's photographs and

videos through Maori culture with this not featuring in Spaceships New Zealand customer photographs or videos. Tourism products also featured more in Stray photograph and video data, through a number of the videos having adventure tourism activities in them.

This typology clearly showed the difference between the two customer types of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand, through the independence and socialisation of both types of tourists.

5.4 Typology of tourism representation by subject

The typology of subject included categories of no human subject tourist, host, and tourist and host for the analysis of the Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customer photographs and videos (Hunter, 2008).

5.4.1 No human subject

No Spaceships New Zealand photographs were found to have no human subject in them. The photograph data, from Spaceships New Zealand customers, all had some form of human subject. Most of the photographs included the Spaceships New Zealand van as the primary subject with scenery and natural landscape in the background. There were some photos that did not include the Spaceships New Zealand van, but did featured man-made objects and attractions. Seven photos were found to have no human subject included from the Stray photographs. The Stray photographs featured natural scenery of New Zealand. All of these photos are related to marine scenes with Cathedral Cove, whales, and seals being included in the photos. Two photos included sunsets with the beach and ocean in them, depicting light change on the landscape. All of these photos showed reasons why tourists travel to New Zealand to experience its natural beauty. It was noted that there are no photos with forests, lakes, fields or mountains in them which is an interesting observation in the data collected.

Human subjects featured in all of the videos viewed. This is because Stray is a type of travel experience that involves all the people in the tour group (Stray & Spaceships New Zealand, 2009a). The tour group is the feature of the trip, with this being shown in the videos. The number of people featured in videos ranged

from one to groups of 20 or more. People did not feature in parts of the videos such as the Franz Joseph Glacier, Pancake Rocks on West Coast of South Island, and on some beaches in Northland. Pristine places were still shown in the videos but the videos did also include human subjects in them. There is limited video content from Spaceships New Zealand customers containing human subjects. All of the videos had humans in them and products that have been made by them, with the customer taking the video. The 'Cruising in our Spaceship' video is the closest to achieving no human subject, with Lyttelton Harbour being the main feature in the video with the Spaceship van still being shown. Two other videos featured the customers showing the features of the Spaceships New Zealand van in the video.

5.4.2 Tourist

This category of the typology refers to the interaction of the tourist with the tourism leisure experience. This provided a large amount of data from both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand through the visitors interacting with a number of different tourism leisure activities. There were 85 Spaceships New Zealand photos identified as having a tourist featured in them. All photos, except one, were with tourists with their Spaceships New Zealand van. All of the photographs except one were taken from outside of the van, with them showing the van and scenery around the van. The photo taken from inside the van had the tourist lying on the van's bed. The Spaceships New Zealand photographs with the van in them and tourists all showed the van's brand, orange colour, and tourist in different places throughout New Zealand. This showed the potential customer the accessibility the vans have in getting to remote locations, which also aligns with them being a more independent type of traveller (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Sung *et al.*, 2000). Most of the photos also show the functionality of the vans with cooking, eating, and sleeping facilities all being shown.

Tourists have been included in 171 of the Stray photographs collected. Many of these contain tourists in groups of three or more people. They are all shown enjoying the experiences they have had and their engagement with the tourism product, hosts, and other tourists. This is an attribute of a backpacker tourist with them wanting to engage with both the tourism experience and other

tourists (Hecht & Martin, 2006; Murphy, 1999; Thyne *et al.*, 2005). The tourists were also engaging with the natural and man-made activities and scenery of New Zealand. Some of these photos included activities that can only be experienced in New Zealand, such as sand boarding on sand dunes, the bra fence, and Maori cultural experiences. These promote both New Zealand and the experiences that can be had by tourists with Stray. All of these photos show the different experiences that can be had and also the differing activities that can be experienced. The Stray tourists are looking for a tour in which they can do as many activities as possible in the time they have in New Zealand, with these photos showing the opportunities for the different experiences that can be had. There are only 28 photos that include the Stray bus with tourists featured in the photo. However, these photos do show the bus with tourists in different locations, which again is one of the reason why tourists choose Stray; to get off the beaten track and to have a wide range of experiences while in New Zealand. Many unique adventure tourism products have tourists included with them such as the Zorb, bungee jumping, skydiving, and white water rafting. Many of these adventure tourism products were invented in New Zealand, once again showcasing our country in the photos and showing the experiences on offer with a Stray tour. All of these photos aid the decision making process of the tourist through showing the experiences the tourists had while on a Stray tour.

The tourist features in all Spaceships New Zealand videos. They are mainly the commentators in the videos with descriptions of where they were, what they were cooking, or where they were going next. The Spaceships New Zealand customers take pride in showing the Spaceships New Zealand van that they were using and its features with cooking, storage and the bed being the main features of the van that are shown. Two of the videos 'Spaceship Presentation pt1' and 'Spaceship Presentation pt2' were created by two German tourists who showcased their Spaceship van. The short videos show the features of the van, with the first video focusing on the driving of the van and cooking equipment and the second video showing the DVD player, bed, pop-out area of the van, and storage facilities.

The tourist was the main feature of all of the Stray videos. The reason for this is that the Stray customer was on a tour with other backpackers. Backpackers

are seeking interaction with other tourists in their travels, to both make friends and to enjoy their travel with others. The Stray customers featured in all of the videos were partaking in various activities from leisure sports, adventure tourism activities and cultural activities. Bungee jumping, bus tours, sailing trips and glacier climbing were the main paid for tourism activities that featured in the videos. Other activities such as visiting the Pancake Rocks and gumboot throwing were free activities. With this said, it was seen that the enjoyment gained from these activities is greater from a higher costing experience than from a smaller costing one, with this also being focused more in the video. All of these events were well documented by the Stray customers taking videos, still photos, and purchasing other memorabilia as physical evidence of them partaking in the 'adventure experience'.

5.4.3 Host

The host category of the typology included the host's involvement with the tourists on the tourism experience and also the preparation of that experience. The type of tourist that Spaceships New Zealand and Stray customers were means, they have little interaction (apart from Stray or Spaceships New Zealand employees) with the hosts both pre-experience and during the experience, which was shown in the data collected. There were seven photos from Stray customers that included the host in the customer's photograph, compared to no Spaceships New Zealand photographs featuring hosts. All of the Stray photographs include the tourist and the host working and manufacturing the product, service, and or experience. In relation to the Spaceships New Zealand photographs, independence of Spaceships New Zealand customers is shown through their travel not including photographs with hosts. Five of the Stray photographs have Maori hosts involved, with small groups of two or three people or larger groups of up to 20 people with the Maori host. These photos show the Maori warriors creating the tourist experience through their expressions and indigenous dress. The Stray customers did not photograph or video their bus drivers often with them not being focused on as a subject of their photographs or videos. Skydiving and bungee jumping are the two other photos that have hosts involved in them. The host in the skydiving photo was the instructor with the customer skydiving with the instructor. The

bungee jumping photo has the jump instructor aiding the customer before the jump. Both the photos show that safety is involved in the tourism product through harnesses, ropes, and hosts' involvement. Both also showed the excitement that is brought to the tourist through the host's involvement in the adventure tourism product. It is noted that with so many photos having been taken involving groups of people, there could be more hosts included that cannot be identified in the photos collected.

Hosts did not feature in any of the Spaceships New Zealand customer videos. Tourists are the only people to be involved in the videos. The videos are created on topics that do not include hosts with them being taken in rest areas or on the road. The type of tourist may have had an influence on the exclusion of hosts with this showing the independence of the tourists (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Sung *et al.*, 2000). In contrast, the host did feature in the Stray videos of the tourists' experiences.

5.4.4 Tourist and host

This category of the typology is a contributing factor towards the overall enjoyment of the tourists' experience. The typology allows the analysis of the tourist engaging with the host while a tourism experience is taking place (Hunter, 2008). Literature suggests that this needs to be in place in order for the tourist to gain the most out of the experience (Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Titz, 2001).

Nine photos were identified from Spaceships New Zealand customers that included the tourist and host in them. As found with the host as subject; there were no tourist and host photographs identified for Spaceships New Zealand photographs. This is could be because of the independence of Spaceships New Zealand customers' travels while using the vans and their pride in the vans thus only uploading photographs that included the van and not of other experiences they had when on their travels (Parr, 1989). In contrast, there were a number of the Stray photographs involving tourists in their interactions with Maori people as the host and tutor of the group. There were two photos of skydiving experiences through tandem skydiving with the hosts being with the tourists on their skydives and instructing them. There was also a photo of a tourist and host with a bungee jump experience, through the host aiding the tourist before this jump. It must be

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noted that there could have also been more photos in this category, as there have been a number of photos involving large groups of people that a host may been included in but is difficult to identify. This is a similar observation to that of the host as the subject.

The tourist and host featured in most of the Stray videos by customers. This involvement varied from being instructed and helped to bungee jump to being personally taught how to throw a gumboot and sing a Maori song. The involvement between tourist and host and the reactions between both could be seen in different circumstances with the host making the greatest effort in the experiences that were videoed. This allowed the tourist to have a greater experience. Again there were a range of tourism experiences that were shown in the videos with the hosts' involvement, interaction, performance, and type of guide varying in all of them. The Stray bus hosts did not feature, other than video of gumboot throwing; this is because the tourists are focused on having as many experiences as they can while on their travels. However, the gumboot throwing video did showcase the type of product Stray offers, with a unique experience and the fun that was had between the tourists and host while on their bus tour.

Tourists and hosts do not feature in the Spaceships New Zealand customer videos. Tourists have recorded the videos with other tourists in them; however, no hosts are included. This affirms the independence of the customers who travel with Spaceships New Zealand.

Overall it can be seen that there was a potential difference between customer videos of Spaceships New Zealand and Stray. Stray's customer videos and photographs featured a wide range of adventure tourism activities that were conducted in groups, including bungee jumping, canyon swings and white water rafting. The Stray customers videos were longer, with individuals featuring specifics of their own trip as to where they were travelling and what they were enjoying about their trip. In comparison, Spaceships New Zealand customer videos were very short (average length of 0.77 minutes) with the Spaceships New Zealand van and individual customers featuring in all of the videos. Stray videos were found to include the adventure activities that customers participated in. They were also presented in a diary format, through customers showing numerous

events and activities they have participated in. In Spaceships New Zealand videos the main subject was the Spaceship orange van shown through the customer discussing the features of the van. The independence and features of the Spaceships New Zealand van were well shown throughout the videos and photographs of cooking and opening the Spaceships New Zealand van to showed storage. The photographs especially, showing the features of the Spaceships New Zealand van and landscape rather than the customers actual tourism activities. The Stray bus is shown in some videos and photographs; however it is not as prominently shown when compared to the Spaceships New Zealand van. This shows that there are clear differences in the customer videos of both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand, with these being specific and different between the two companies.

5.5 Chapter summary

It can be seen that there were two main communication methods available to customers to communicate to each other before their experience. Customers of both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand communicate the experiences they had while on their travels on the customer comments webpages of both companies. Pre-trip experience and questions are communicated on the companies' Facebook pages, with only a limited amount of post-trip comments being made on the Facebook pages. Twitter is used by the companies to communicate to their followers about events and company information that might interest their followers. The Twitter page only has a flow from the companies and cannot have content placed from customers, which is the nature of Twitter. However, this suits the users of Twitter. The data collected from Stray customer comments related to the experience they had, people they met, places they visited on the tour, and recommendations of the product to others. Spaceships New Zealand content focused on the van and its features, and the places that were visited. This shows that there was a contrast between the content of both companies' customer comments webpages and Facebook webpages. There was a greater focus on the groups on Stray websites, and a more individual focus by Spaceships New Zealand customers. The data also relates to the type of tourists the customer are; with Stray customers being more socially orientated through their comments

relating to backpacker travel (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Maoz, 2007), whereas Spaceships New Zealand customers are more independent in the nature of their travel and comments (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Parr, 1989).

Customers' imagery also differed between both companies. Stray photographs included more groups of people, and activities that were participated in. Spaceships New Zealand photographs focused on the van, with the majority of the photographs including the van. Activities participated in by Spaceships New Zealand customers were not shown, with the van features and scenery being photographed highly. A similar result was found with the customer videos. Stray customer videos contained activities participated in with only one video showing the Stray bus or brand logo. All of Spaceships New Zealand's videos included the van, with the customer showing the features of the van in the video. Scenery is also included in the videos of Spaceships New Zealand's customers with this also being discussed by the customer.

It must also be noted that although the nature of FIT and backpacker travel that is depicted in this communication, and importance that is placed on the sociability between tourists, little of this sociability is seen through the host and guest interaction when examined through this content analysis. A number of photographs and videos do include tourism products being consumed by both types of tourists. However, there is little evidence to show direct interaction with the host or local community of a destination. This evidence is found more through networking communication of customer comments and social networking site content.

It can be seen that combined, all of the social networking site content, customer comments, photographs, and videos depict the type of product and service that both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand offer. Customers who are users of social networking sites and the Internet can easily form an opinion of the companies, activities that they can participate in and people that they will meet through this content. All of the content has been found to positively promote both companies, with customers willing to also promote the company with anticipation pre-trip and recommendations post-trip. This both encourages customers to book

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with the companies and to also gain opinions from other customers and Stray and Spaceships New Zealand which can aid the information collection for decision making.

Chapter 6.0 Findings and discussion

The following chapter will discuss and summarise the findings of the research aim, and provide recommendations at both a managerial and scholarly level.

The research aim of this thesis was to explore how blogs and social networking sites can be used effectively by tourism businesses to support tourists' decision making, and how these behaviours are influenced by the use of blogs and social networking sites. The research was prompted by Pudliner (2007) and Mack, Blose and Pan (2007) who advocate a need for research into the decision making hierarchy and the use of social networking sites and blogs for decision making.

A case study approach was used in the thesis, where in two New Zealand companies were used in order to answer the specific research questions and aims. Quantitative surveys were used to gather data from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customers and qualitative data collected from Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customer comments on the companies' websites, content of the companies Facebook and Twitter social networking sites and customer videos and photographs from the companies' websites. The data provides evidence regarding the use of blogs and social networking sites by Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customers. The data also showed the significance of the use of traditional forms (guide books, brochures, and company information) of tourism information, the reinforcement of socialisation of backpackers and the independence of FITs. Although, given the limitations of the thesis research (Chapter 3.0; section 3.3), and the small sample size of the survey and material, collated, care should be taken in generalising the findings made here.

Considering the first research aim, how blogs and social networking sites can be used effectively by tourism businesses to support tourists' decision making, the following conclusions can be drawn. Tourists have access to a large number of resources to make decisions from (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). The Internet is a commonly used resource which is widely used by both tourists and tourism businesses (Buhalis, 1998). The survey results and content analysis of written material from both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand indicated that respondents

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did have an understanding and were users of social networking sites, web browsing and email. This is an important result that demonstrates that Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customers are active users of these resources; resources which include information for making travel decisions such as destination websites and travel reviews. Further to this, survey respondents indicated that they were users of either one or multiple social networking sites, with the main uses of the social networking sites being communication with other travellers, and thus indicating that communicating with other people and travellers is a major part of these tourists' activities. Blogs, however, did not feature as being highly used by both companies' survey respondents. This would suggest that Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customers do not place a large importance on using blogs as a source of information to make travel decisions from. The wider implications of this are that social networking sites are that blogs are not widely used by tourists as an information source from which decisions are made from, making other websites and travel information sources important for travellers.

From the content analysis of Facebook data from both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand, it can be seen that customers mainly post content on the social networking site when they are in the pre-experience phase of their travel. They commonly cite excitement, anticipation, and where they are going in their comments. Through the use of social networking sites, it can be seen that businesses can aid the decisions of tourists through providing links to other tourists through these networks, enabling socialising before the travel experience takes place, making the tourist feel more comfortable about a purchase decision. It was found through Hunter's (2008) typology results that other content such as customer photographs and videos also depict experiences that tourists have had while travelling, making it easier for other tourists to relate and be comfortable about their purchase decision. Survey results suggested that blogs and social networking sites were important in communicating with other travellers. This aligns with literature from Maoz (2007) and Locker-Murphy & Pearce (1995) which finds that backpackers do socialise with other backpackers as they wish to make connections with other people from their travels, with social networking sites being a facilitator of these connections. This supports the need for

communication during pre-experience in order for the tourist to make more informed purchase decisions, and shows that the use of blogs and social networking sites by tourism businesses can aid tourists' decision making. The content analysis of customer comments and Facebook content also showed that the comments were positive on both websites, through high level of recommendations being made with this contributing to socialisation occurring pre-experience through Facebook content.

The second research aim was to consider how these behaviours are influenced by the use of blogs and social networking sites. Interesting results were found regarding the use of social networking sites and blogs for travel planning and information search. Survey data for both companies indicated that social networking sites and blogs were generally not important sources of information for travellers to make decisions from, with blogs being even less likely to be used than social networking sites. The results indicated that other information sources such as official destination websites, ratings websites, and travel guides were more important information sources. This aligns with information source literature that suggests that external information search is conducted through more formal information sources before other more informal information sources are used (Fodness & Murray, 1997; Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004; Hyde & Lawson, 2003). These results are significant for both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand, showing that a wide range of information sources are regarded as being more important in a tourist's information search than blogs and social networking sites. However, the importance may rather be placed on the opportunity for social networking during and/or after the experience.

The desire of backpackers to interact with other travellers was highlighted in the research, and appeared to affect a customer's decision making. Imagery data and content analysis of customer comment data and Facebook data showed that backpackers (mainly Stray customers) were very social in their interaction while travelling. This aligns with literature by Bell (Bell, 2008), Hyde & Lawson (Hyde & Lawson, 2003) and Loker-Murphy & Pearce (1995), outlining that this is a motivation for their travel and something that they want from travelling (Thyne *et al.*, 2005; Uriely *et al.*, 2002). These findings were made more relevant through

the Stray customer photographs and videos. The imagery data collected showed a major part of the Stray product involved customer interaction or socialisation with tourism products or people. This indicates that Stray customers are generally backpackers and chose Stray products in order to meet people, and thus fill their need for socialisation with other backpackers and form relationships. The socialisation is visible in the Facebook data of Stray customers, as outlined earlier, with comments being made pre-experience and socialising happening before the trip has begun. Such images and communications can be viewed as important content of social forms and communication as they communicate to other potential customers the nature of the experience they seek. Hence, rather than being of use as an information tool, this communication may serve to reaffirm desire to other potential customers.

However, content analysis of the material posted by Spaceships New Zealand customers contradicts the above results. Spaceships New Zealand customers are a more independent type of traveller, shown by their travel to more remote areas, and through natural landscape appearing in their photographs and videos, which aligns with Hyde & Lawson's (2003) research on independent travellers. Their photographs also contained limited tourism products (other than the Spaceships New Zealand van) and limited interaction with hosts, which would suggest that they are a more independent type of traveller. Facebook data reiterated this, with there being little socialisation with other customers, and the survey results showing a lower use of information and socialisation through social networking sites or blogs. Literature on FITs emphasises that they have very little planned itinerary and that FITs tend to visit areas that other tourists might not get to (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Parr, 1989), and their socialising with other tourists is kept to lower levels compared with backpackers. For Spaceships New Zealand, this means that their clients are less likely to interact pre-experience on blogs and social networking sites than other types of travellers may. Social interaction between tourists, through the use of social networking sites, in the pre-experience stage of their travel decision making could both tourists and tourism businesses. Tourists would be able to find information and communicate with others travellers in order to make a more informed decision and enjoy their travel experience more.

Tourism businesses would benefit through learning more about the needs of their customers and through being able to communicate with them more in order further aid the tourists purchase decision. This is how social networking site communication can aid both tourists and tourism businesses through communication.

To conclude, it was evident through this research that the main use of social networking sites by Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customers was to communicate and socialise with friends and family, with information search through social networking sites and blogs not being important to respondents of the survey. However, it was also found that destination websites, travel rating websites, and guide books were preferred as information sources. This shows that Internet resources, such as company websites and ratings websites, are preferred and used in conjunction with social networking sites and blogs as information sources by tourists.

Recommendations which can be made as a result of this research and are hoped will be of assistance to Stray and Spaceships New Zealand are outlined in the following. The timing of comments and descriptive language used on the social networking site Facebook for both companies provides an area and resource which could be capitalised on by both Stray and Spaceships New Zealand to show customers what resources are available to make their decisions from and who they may be possibly travelling with. Because there is this separation in timing of comments, a social network within the Stray or Spaceships New Zealand website could be one way of connecting former customers with one another, and also aiding new customers to both make their decisions, and connect them before they travel with the company. The use of Facebook or Twitter social networking site profiles could assist prospective or returning customers in their decision making through the use of customers' social networking site profiles to customise their connections and decisions. Information could be provided on this site in a form that customers can make informed decisions from, either through website information or shortened information, depending on the time the traveller has available to them. This could also be used as a booking tool or way of researching

what new routes could be provided for Stray bus networks before a tourist has booked with either company.

It was evident from the surveys that there are customers of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand who do not have social networking site profiles and intend on not using blogs for their information search. Because of this, it is important that the management of marketing material is also done in order to cater for this type of tourist. The photographs, videos, and customer comments that are on the companies' websites do promote the company and show the uniqueness and fun that tourists have while using Stray or Spaceships New Zealand products. Other additions to this could be made with Twitter, Facebook or blog news feeds being put on the companies' websites. This would have information directly from Twitter, Facebook, or blogs being shown and automatically updated when new information is found. Doing this may encourage people to join the social networking sites and blogs of the companies and to also post their own information on these sites.

With there being a clear pattern in destinations travelled to before and after visiting New Zealand, Stray and Spaceships New Zealand have the opportunity to capture this market and use it for promotion and new sales. A way in which to target travellers before they reach New Zealand is through getting former customers to promote Stray and Spaceships New Zealand through their social networking sites; this way they will know about the brand before they reach New Zealand. Blogs and Twitter are also a great way in which to do this through getting other users to Tweet updates or links to Stray or Spaceships New Zealand sites and for blog users to provide links to the company websites.

This study has implications for future scholarly research into blogs and social networking site use amongst backpackers and FITs. There is a need for more research to be targeted at the different stages of the decision making hierarchy. Research is needed into the use of social networking sites and blogs both during an experience and post-experience in order to measure the effect of these on tourism businesses. This research targeted customer comments and social networking sites in its methodology, and blogs and social networking sites

through literature review. However, there is still a gap in knowledge in blogs and social networking sites because of the different uses of the resources in the tourism industry (Pudliner, 2007). The research conducted focused on backpackers and FITs, with there potentially being a need for research to be conducted on other types of tourists who are likely to use social networking sites and blogs for pre-experience decision making. This research focused on the pre-experience of travellers and the influence of blogs and social networking sites. This is a critical area for tourism especially for destinations and tourism businesses to develop business from, with their use being combined with other information sources. The use and power of blogs and social networking sites post-experience could be studied in the same capacity.

7.0 References

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8.0 Appendix

Appendix A: Letter from WMS Human Research Ethics Committee

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

MANAGEMENT SCHOOL
Te Raupapa

30th October 2009

Hamish Jenkin
27 Brocas Ave
Hillcrest
Hamilton 3216

Dear Hamish

Ethical Application WMS 09/152
Analysis of weblog communication as a form of promotion by Stray and Spaceships tourism and pre-experience decision making by tourists

As per my earlier email the above research project, as outlined in your application, has been granted Ethical Approval for Research by the Waikato Management School Ethics Committee.

Please note: should you make changes to the project outlined in the approved ethics application, you may need to reapply for ethics approval.

Best wishes for your research

Regards,

Amanda Sircombe
Research Manager

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Appendix B: Stray customer survey

Survey Information – Stray

Hi there, my name is Hamish Jenkin. I am conducting research on blog communication and social networking sites as part of a report to Stray and my Master's Thesis at the University of Waikato.

This survey will ask you questions about your decision to book with Stray. I'm looking at the promotion of Stray through the use of blogs and social networking sites and whether they effect your travel decisions.

The survey:

Can be completed by anyone who has made a travel booking with Stray from December 2009 onwards.

Should take around 10-15 minutes to complete.

Should be completed in full; but you may skip any questions that you don't feel comfortable answering.

Is confidential, so no contact information is required or held.

Please contact me at hjj4@students.waikato.ac.nz or +64 27 289 4618 or the research supervisor Professor Alison McIntosh, mcintosh@mngt.waikato.ac.nz for more information.

It would be great if you could complete the survey for me now.

Thank you very much for your help in completing this study.

Hamish Jenkin BMS (Hons)

Masters student, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management,

University of Waikato,

New Zealand

Section A: Your Trip

1. What is the length of your intended travel with Stray (please state the appropriate number below)

Days		Weeks	

2. Which counties will you be visiting <u>before </u>you reach New Zealand? (please list)

3. Which countries will you be visiting <u>after</u> you visit New Zealand? (please list)

Section B: Use of Travel Information Sources in your General Travel Planning

This section asks you about your general use of websites, including social networking sites and blogging in travel planning and booking.

A blog is a web site usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary and descriptions of events. This is a common method of gathering information or opinions on a subject from previous users.

A social network website focuses on building online communities and groups of people who share interests and/or activities. Social network services are web based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as e-mail and instant messaging services. Some examples are Facebook, Bebo, or Twitter.

4. Are you a member of: (tick as many as appropriate)

Facebook		Twitter	
Flicker		Bebo	
You Tube		Digg	
Stumble Upon		LinkedIn	
MySpace		Other, please	

5. In general, how would you rate yourself as a user of:

Please circle the **one** answer that best explains your usage of the following.

	Extremely Low Usage					Extremely High Usage	
General web browsing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Social networking websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Blogs on the internet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Email communication	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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6. In relation to finding travel information, how important is it to you to use the following information sources:

Please circle the **one** answer that best explains how important the following factors are to you.

1= extremely unimportant, 2 = very unimportant, 3 = unimportant, 4 = neither important or unimportant, 5 = important, 6 = very important, 7 = extremely important, 0 = not applicable

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Social networking sites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Official destination websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
News websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Travel rating websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Blogs of tourism organisations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Travel news websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

The following questions ask you about your use of travel blogs as a particular information source.

7. What do you look for in a personal travel blog?

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Originality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Relevance of information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Personal interest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Travel advice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Review of travel companies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Credibility of the source	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Photos of travel destinations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Other, please state

8. How important to you are the following reasons for blogging?

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Cheap source of information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Accurate information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Ease and convenience	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

To keep family and friends updated

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
To discourage others not to visit								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Its social	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Recommended by others								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
It's the thing to do	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
To encourage others to visit								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
To promote a company/product used								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

9. How important to you are the following reasons for using <u>social networking sites</u>?

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Cheap source of information								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Accurate information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Ease and convenience	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
To keep family and friends updated								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
To discourage others not to visit								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Its social	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Recommended by others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
It's the thing to do	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
To encourage others to use it								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
To promote a company/product used								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

10. Considering blogging, how important is it to you to:

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Use blogs as a means of communicating with other travellers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Participate in blog comments to gain information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Find more information about the travel product	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Find more information about the opinions of the blogger	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Confirm authenticity of the travel experience	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

11. Considering the use of social networking sites, how important is it to you to:

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Use social networking sites as a means of communicating with other travellers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Participate in social networking comments to gain information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Find more information about the travel product	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Confirm authenticity of the travel experience	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

12. After reading a blog that is appealing to you, how important is it to you to follow up by:

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Further researching the tourism experience	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Further researching the tourism organisation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Discussing it with friends/relatives	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Further researching the destination

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Researching the accommodation

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Other, please state

Section C: Your Travel Booking with Stray

13. How important were the following factors in your decision to book your travel with Stray?

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A

Ability to travel free & independently

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Social – ability to meet others

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Price of travel

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Length of your trip

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Recommendations from friends

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Opportunity for adventure travel

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Access to places off the beaten track

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Safety – a good way of travelling on my own

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

See a wide range of attractions

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Experience authentic New Zealand

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Offers travel for backpackers

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

14. Please indicate how important blog material was in your decision to travel with Stray

Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

15. How long (day/weeks/years) have you spent planning for this particular trip?

	Days		Weeks		Years

16. Please describe the process/steps you took in deciding to book your travel with Stray (you might wish to comment on how you heard about Stray's travel products, what information your sourced, what influenced your decision, for example)

17. Before booking with Stray how important was it for you to consult any of the following in helping you to gather information about Stray?

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Travel blog Internet sites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Other company websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Direct marketing from travel companies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Newspapers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Family and friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Tourism New Zealand advertisements	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Social networking sites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Travel books and guides	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Previous travel experience	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Magazines	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
New Zealand I-Site information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Other travellers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Stray traveller comments webpage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

18. Did you access the blogs of other tourists to plan your travel with Stray?

Yes	
No	
Don't Know	

19. Did you consult any of the following particular social networking sites to plan your travel with Stray?

You Tube		Facebook – Stray page	
Stumble Upon		Digg	
Twitter		Other, please	

20. When did you first access that particular social networking site? (please state)

21. Do you want to comment on any other information found on these social networking sites? (please state)

22. In general, how important is it to you to:

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Have travel plans confirmed before leaving	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Make travel purchase decisions while on holiday	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Have travel decisions influenced by others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Have travel decisions influenced by marketing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

23. Have you experienced any problems in finding information to plan your trip with Stray?

Yes	
No	

If yes, please explain the problems you faced:

24. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your decision to travel with, or booking with, Stray? (Please describe)

25. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your use or experience of travel blogs or social networking sites related to travel?

Section D: About You

26. Which age category best describes you? (please tick)

Below 18 years		19-25 years	
26-35 years		36-45 years	
46-56 years		57-65 years	
66 years and over			

27. Gender (please tick)

Male		Female	

28. Country of residence (please state)

29. What is your current (previous) occupation/profession and job title? (please state)

30. Accommodation preferred (e.g. motel, backpackers, camping ground or hotel) (please state)

Backpackers Hostel		Hotel	
Holiday Park		Motel	
Other, please state:			

31. Accommodation type mainly used during this trip (please state)

Backpackers		Hotel	
Holiday Park		Motel	
Other, please state:			

32. How many people (total) in your travel party? (please state the number)

33. Travelling with (please tick as many as appropriate):

Friends		Family	
Relatives		Wife/husband	
Partner		Other, please state	

If you are happy to discuss your travel experience further, please provide your email address below:

Thanks for your time and completing this survey.

Appendix C: Spaceships New Zealand customer survey

Survey Information – Spaceships New Zealand

Hi there, my name is Hamish Jenkin. I am conducting research on blog communication and social networking sites as part of a report to Spaceships New Zealand and my Master's Thesis at the University of Waikato.

This survey will ask you questions about your decision to book with Spaceships New Zealand. I'm looking at the promotion of Spaceships New Zealand through the use of blogs and social networking sites and whether they effect your travel decisions.

The survey:

Can be completed by anyone who has made a travel booking with Spaceships New Zealand from December 2009 onwards.

Should take around 10-15 minutes to complete.

Should be completed in full; but you may skip any questions that you don't feel comfortable answering.

Is confidential, so no contact information is required or held.

Please contact me at hjj4@students.waikato.ac.nz or +64 27 289 4618 or the research supervisor Professor Alison McIntosh, mcintosh@mngt.waikato.ac.nz for more information.

It would be great if you could complete the survey for me now.

Thank you very much for your help in completing this study.

Hamish Jenkin BMS (Hons)

Masters student, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management,

University of Waikato,

New Zealand

Section A: Your Trip

1. What is the length of your intended travel with Spaceships New Zealand (please state the appropriate number below)

	Days		Weeks

2. Which counties will you be visiting <u>before</u> you reach New Zealand? (please list)

3. Which countries will you be visiting <u>after</u> you visit New Zealand? (please list)

Section B: Use of Travel Information Sources in your General Travel Planning

This section asks you about your general use of websites, including social networking sites and blogging in travel planning and booking.

A blog is a web site usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary and descriptions of events. This is a common method of gathering information or opinions on a subject from previous users.

A social network website focuses on building online communities and groups of people who share interests and/or activities. Social network services are web based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as e-mail and instant messaging services. Some examples are Facebook, Bebo, or Twitter.

4. Are you a member of: (tick as many as appropriate)

Facebook		Twitter	
Flicker		Bebo	
You Tube		Digg	
Stumble Upon		LinkedIn	
MySpace		Other, please state:	

5. In general, how would you rate yourself as a user of:
Please circle the <u>**one**</u> answer that best explains your usage of the following.

	Extremely Low Usage						Extremely High Usage
General web browsing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Social networking websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Blogs on the Internet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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Email communication	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. In relation to finding travel information, how important is it to you to use the following information sources:

Please circle the **one** answer that best explains how important the following factors are to you.

1= extremely unimportant, 2 = very unimportant, 3 = unimportant, 4 = neither important or unimportant, 5 = important, 6 = very important, 7 = extremely important, 0 = not applicable

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Social networking sites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Official destination websites								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
News websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Travel rating websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Blogs of tourism organisations								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Travel news websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

The following questions ask you about your use of travel blogs as a particular information source.

7. What do you look for in a personal travel blog?

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Originality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Relevance of information								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Personal interest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Travel advice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Review of travel companies								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Credibility of the source								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Photos of travel destinations								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Other, please state

8. How important to you are the following reasons for <u>blogging</u>?

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Cheap source of information								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Accurate information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Ease and convenience	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
To keep family and friends updated								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
To discourage others not to visit								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Its social	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Recommended by others								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
It's the thing to do	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
To encourage others to visit								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
To promote a company/product used								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

9. How important to you are the following reasons for using <u>social networking sites</u>?

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Cheap source of information								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Accurate information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Ease and convenience	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
To keep family and friends updated								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
To discourage others not to visit								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Its social	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Recommended by others

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

It's the thing to do   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   0

To encourage others to use it

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

To promote a company/product used

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   0

10. Considering blogging, how important is it to you to:

Extremely   Extremely
Unimportant   Important   N/A
Use blogs as a means of
communicating with other travellers

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Participate in blog comments to
gain information   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   0

Find more information about the
travel product   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   0

Find more information about the
opinions of the blogger   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   0

Confirm authenticity of the
travel experience   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   0

11. Considering the use of social networking sites, how important is it to you to:

Extremely   Extremely
Unimportant   Important   N/A
Use social networking sites as a
means of communicating
with other travellers

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Participate in social networking
comments to gain information

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   0

Find more information about the
travel product   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   0

Confirm authenticity of the
travel experience   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   0

12. After reading a blog that is appealing to you, how important is it to you to follow up by:

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Further researching the tourism experience	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Further researching the tourism organisation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Discussing it with friends/relatives	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Further researching the destination	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Researching the accommodation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Other, please state								

Section C: Your Travel Booking with Spaceships New Zealand

13. How important were the following factors in your decision to book your travel with Spaceships New Zealand?

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Ability to travel free & independently	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Social – ability to meet others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Price of travel	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Length of your trip	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Recommendations from friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Opportunity for adventure travel	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Access to places off the beaten track	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Safety – a good way of travelling on my own	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
See a wide range of attractions								

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 0 |

Experience authentic New Zealand

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 0 |

Offers travel for backpackers

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 0 |

14. Please indicate how important blog material was in your decision to travel with Spaceships New Zealand

Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

15. How long (day/weeks/years) have you spent planning for this particular trip?

	Days		Weeks		Years

16. Please describe the process/steps you took in deciding to book your travel with Spaceships New Zealand (you might wish to comment on how you heard about Spaceships New Zealand travel products, what information your sourced, what influenced your decision, for example)

17. Before booking with Spaceships New Zealand how important was it for you to consult any of the following in helping you to gather information about Spaceships New Zealand?

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Travel blog Internet sites								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Other company websites								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Direct marketing from travel companies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Newspapers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Family and friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Tourism New Zealand advertisements								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Social networking sites								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Travel books and guides								

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Previous travel experience

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Magazines

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

New Zealand I-Site information

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Other travellers

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

Spaceships New Zealand
traveller comments webpage

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

18. Did you access the blogs of other tourists to plan your travel with Spaceships New Zealand?

Yes	
No	
Don't Know	

19. Did you consult any of the following particular social networking sites to plan your travel with Spaceships New Zealand?

You Tube		Facebook – Spaceships New Zealand page	
Stumble Upon		Digg	
Twitter		Other, please state:	

20. When did you first access that particular social networking site? (please state)

21. Do you want to comment on any other information found on these social networking sites? (please state)

22. In general, how important is it to you to:

	Extremely Unimportant					Extremely Important		N/A
Have travel plans confirmed before leaving	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Make travel purchase decisions while on holiday	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Have travel decisions influenced by others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Have travel decisions influenced by marketing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

23. Have you experienced any problems in finding information to plan your trip with Spaceships New Zealand?

Yes	
No	

If yes, please explain the problems you faced:

24. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your decision to travel with, or booking with, Spaceships New Zealand? (Please describe)

25. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your use or experience of travel blogs or social networking sites related to travel?

Section D: About You

26. Which age category best describes you? (please tick)

Below 18 years		19-25 years	
26-35 years		36-45 years	
46-56 years		57-65 years	
66 years and over			

27. Gender (please tick)

Male		Female	

28. Country of residence (please state)

29. What is your current (previous) occupation/profession and job title? (please state)

30. Accommodation preferred (e.g. motel, backpackers, camping ground or hotel) (please state)

Backpackers Hostel		Hotel	
Holiday Park		Motel	
Other, please state:			

31. Accommodation type mainly used during this trip (please state)

Backpackers		Hotel	
Holiday Park		Motel	
Other, please state:			

32. How many people (total) in your travel party? (please state the number)

33. Travelling with (please tick as many as appropriate):

Friends		Family	
Relatives		Wife/husband	
Partner		Other, please state	

If you are happy to discuss your travel experience further, please provide your email address below:

Thanks for your time and completing this survey.

Appendix D: Follow up questions for Stray survey participants

Hi,

My name is Hamish Jenkin. You took part in a survey I am conducting on blog communication and social networking sites with Stray. Thanks for partaking in it.

I have a couple more questions to ask you regarding specific use of blog communication and social networking site use that I would like to ask you.

You can reply through either filling in answers to the questions below and email it back to me. OR through filling in answers in the attached word document and emailing it back to me.

This will take approximately 5 minutes.

Please contact me at hjj4@students.waikato.ac.nz or +64 27 289 4618 or my research supervisor Professor Alison McIntosh, mcintosh@mngt.waikato.ac.nz for more information or to answer any queries you may have.

Thank you very much for your help in firstly completing the initial survey and these further questions.

Hamish Jenkin BMS (Hons)

Masters student, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management,

University of Waikato,

New Zealand

Questions

Did you access the blogs of other tourists to plan your travel with Stray/Spaceships New Zealand?

Did you consult any particular social networking sites to plan the rest of your travel in New Zealand?

If so what social networking sites did you use?

When did you access these?

Did you comment or post information on any information found on these social networking sites? (please state)

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your decision to travel with, or booking with, Stray/Spaceships New Zealand? (Please describe)

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your use or experience of travel blogs or related to travel?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your use or experience of social networking sites related to travel?

Did you become a member of Stray/Spaceships New Zealand's Facebook or Twitter social networking sites?

If so, when (before or after travelling with them)?

Why at this time?

Appendix E: Follow up questions for Spaceships New Zealand survey participants

Hi,

My name is Hamish Jenkin. You took part in a survey I am conducting on blog communication and social networking sites with Spaceships New Zealand. Thanks for partaking in it.

I have a couple more questions to ask you regarding specific use of blog communication and social networking site use that I would like to ask you.

You can reply through either filling in answers to the questions below and email it back to me. OR through filling in answers in the attached word document and emailing it back to me.

This will take approximately 5 minutes.

Please contact me at hjj4@students.waikato.ac.nz or +64 27 289 4618 or my research supervisor Professor Alison McIntosh, mcintosh@mngt.waikato.ac.nz for more information or to answer any queries you may have.

Thank you very much for your help in firstly completing the initial survey and these further questions.

Hamish Jenkin BMS (Hons)

Masters student, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management,

University of Waikato,

New Zealand

Questions

Did you access the blogs of other tourists to plan your travel with Stray/Spaceships New Zealand?

Did you consult any particular social networking sites to plan the rest of your travel in New Zealand?

If so what social networking sites did you use?

When did you access these?

Did you comment or post information on any information found on these social networking sites? (please state)

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your decision to travel with, or booking with, Stray/Spaceships New Zealand? (Please describe)

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your use or experience of travel blogs or related to travel?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your use or experience of social networking sites related to travel?

Did you become a member of Stray/Spaceships New Zealand's Facebook or Twitter social networking sites?

If so, when (before or after travelling with them)?

Why at this time?

Appendix F: Content analysis document

Coding categories for Content Analysis of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customer comments on Stray and Spaceships New Zealand websites.

Herring, S., Scheidt, L. A., Wright, E., & Bonus, S. (2005). Weblogs as a bridging genre. Information Technology and People, 18(2), 142-171.

Overall identification

A   Comment #: assigned sequentially to comments as they are retrieved from Stray Travel and Spaceships New Zealand websites (ST# and SNZ#).

B   Acquisition date: date the comments were retrieved for coding.

C   Acquisition time: time the comment was retrieved for coding.

D   URL of comment extract webpage: (give URL).

E   Title in header (include all plausibly-related text): none (0); give title and any associated description.

F   Title in title tag: none (0); give title and any associated description.

Comments author(s)

G   Comment author's name (from first page only): none (0); alias (1); first name (or transparently derived nickname) (2); full name (3); other (4); first name initial (5); initial last name (6).

H   Comment author's – location (code all that apply): no name visible from first page (0); in header (1); in title tag (2); in URL (3); in sidebar (4); in entry header or footer (5); in body of entry (6); other (7).

I   Number of comments authors: (give number).

Code L-Q separately for each comment author

J   Gender (from any available source): unknown (0); male (1); female (2).

K   Age (from any available source): unknown (0); adult (1); teen (aged 13-19) (2); child (3).

L   Geographical location (from any available source): unknown (0); other (give country).

History and activity level of comment

M   Date of current entry (at time of sampling).

N   Time of current entry.

O   Date of next-most-current entry (at time of sampling).

P   Date of previous most current entry (at time of sampling).

Technical features

Q   Comments on entries: not allowed (0); allowed (1).

R   Comments from: company comment (0); other tourist (1).

Overall content

S   Comment type (based on predominant content from entries on first page): unknown (0); personal journal (1); filter (2); log (3); comment (4); other (5).

T   Comments tone: positive (0); negative (1); mixed (2); none (3)

First entry

U   Number of words in comment entry body: (give number).

V   Number of sentences or sentence fragments in entry body (including quotes, etc.): (give number).

W   Number of paragraphs in comment entry body (including quotes, etc.): (give number).

Comments

X   Most recent comment entry: number of comments: none (0); one or more (give number).

Y   Most recent comment entry: number of unique commenters: none (0); one or more (give number).

Z   Most recent comment entry: number of comments by author: none (0); one or more (give number).

AA   Oldest comment entry on page: number of comments: none (0); one or more (give number).

AB   Oldest comment entry on page: number of unique commenters: none (0); one or more (give number).

AC   Other remarks.

Appendix G: Stray Content Analysis codes used for Twitter, Facebook, and customer content coding in ATLAS Ti

great	tour
stray	Zealand
driver	island
time	drivers
trip	awesome
travel	recommend
bus	south
NZ	people
Places:=bar*|cafe|pub|theatre	enjoyed
amazing	fun
north	thanks
experience	fantastic
New	

Appendix H: Spaceships New Zealand Content Analysis codes used for Twitter, Facebook, and customer content coding in ATLAS Ti

great	spaceships
spaceship	van
campervan	Spaceships New Zealand
trip	time
people	travel
NZ	tour
Zealand	island
drive	awesome
recommend	south
Places:=bar*|cafe|pub|theatre	enjoyed
amazing	fun
north	thanks
experience	fantastic
New	hire
North Island	South Island

Appendix I: Typology for Content Analysis of Stray and Spaceships New Zealand customer Videos and Photographs

(A)   Typology of tourism representations by space

Space:

- Natural landscapes

Natural landscapes are open spaces that feature pure and unspoiled mountains, oceans, beaches, forests, lakes, wild animals, fields, or sky.

- Cultivated landscapes

Cultivated landscapes are open spaces that feature the beauty of nature as pruned, gardened or otherwise altered. Such landscapes include gardens and fountains, golf courses and beaches with a few human implements such as a lounge chair or an umbrella.

- Heritage and material culture

Heritage and material culture includes all situations where a specifically ethnic and unique history has made itself evident. Included here are ancient ruins, arts, carvings and relics or their reproductions, temples and shrines and landmarks and cityscapes (alleys and streets) that have typically been gentrified into sites. Ethnic peoples and their costumes and lifestyles are also featured.

- Tourism products (facilities, accommodations and cuisine)

Tourism products include the lobbies, rooms, pools and cuisine that are supposedly waiting for the tourist to consume. They are usually depicted as vacant and expecting, clean and well-lit.

(B)   Typology of tourism representations by subject

Subject:

- No human subject

When there are no human subjects in any of the four spaces described above we are presented with a pristine space that is waiting to be enjoyed, to be consumed as a tourism experience.

- Tourist

When tourists are featured exclusively they are in nature engaged in leisure sports. In cultivated landscapes they are depicted as enjoying the experiences prepared for them. In heritage and material culture spaces they are seen enjoying or consuming sites visually (equipped with a camera and posing). In terms of tourism products they are featured enjoying or consuming services.

- Host

When hosts are featured exclusively they are involved in various apparently indigenous pastimes, the manufacture of local cultural products or local agricultural products. They are also seen involved in daily activities that include the future of preparation before the tourist arrives. They always seem "happy" and "welcoming".

- Tourist and host

When tourists and hosts are depicted together, the tourist is engaged in the same manner as when the tourist is depicted separately, and the host is depicted likewise. However, when they are seen together the essential dynamic is of master and servant. While the tourist enjoys, the host is depicted in the roles of guides, interpreters, and facilitators. They are engaged in service or commercial exchange and at rare moments they are together in leisure, joined together with the gaze they share, looking at each other across an unbreachable culture chasm.

Appendix J: Stray and Spaceship New Zealand company interview questions

What are your major markets in terms of where customers come from and other demographics?

What are your major market segments in terms of types of tourists?

Do you believe your customers are Internet savvy?

What proportion of your customers book online through your website?

What proportion of customers book through other means?

- Booking agents

- Hostel networks

- Other websites

- Package deals

How long do you assign weekly to maintenance of your social networking site profiles?

What is done in this time?

How many staff do you have focusing on this work?

For your Twitter social networking webpage, where do you find the content from? From your followers Twitter posts, or from actively looking for other blogs or webpages including Stray or Spaceships?

What is the main focus or strategy for Stray and Spaceships New Zealand for using social networking sites?

How does the use of social networking sites influence the decision making of your customers?

How long do you assign weekly to maintenance of your company websites?

How does your website influence the decision making of your customers?

What do you currently believe the decision making process is of one of your customers?

How much of a role do you believe social networking site and blogs are playing in the decision making process of your customers?

Is there are time in the decision making process in which a customer would join one of your social networking sites? Before a sale or after the experience? Do you believe they join after visiting your website or before?

Is it a way of staying connected with people after a tourism experience or staying connected with the company?

Do you see a difference in behaviour (writing, comments, tense of comments or content) between the different social networking sites and also the comments that are on Stray and Spaceship New Zealand's websites?

Do you actively pursue to gather feedback from customers on the companies use of social networking sites, blogs and your website?

How is this feedback used?

Do you publicise your social networking sites for your customers to join?

Is there a peak time or seasonality trend in online webpage use by customers?

Do you notice this flowing into bookings, sales, and enquiries?

How do you quantify your web presence in sales?

- Internet sales

- Website hits

- Customer questions when sale is made

What are you views on your customers use of social networking sites and blogs?

Where do you see the market/industry going with this in the future?

Where do you see Stray and Spaceships New Zealand going with this in the future?

Would you include a social networking element to your website as a way of aiding customers' decisions? (not Facebook or Twitter).