

# **Insights into Social Media Strategies by Small Marine Tourism Operators in Auckland**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

The development of Social Media from its infancy towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to its mass proliferation in recent years has been rapid. Its function as a communication, marketing and distribution tool has influenced the consumer decision making process, especially for intangible, information intensive service industries, such as tourism. As a result of the low start-up costs and its ease of use, Social Media has facilitated new marketing channels for smaller businesses. The aim of this explorative study is to gain an insight into the usage, perception and barriers of using Social Media as a tool by small marine tourism operators in Auckland, New Zealand; to offer recommendations to improve the use of the tool by these businesses; and to add to existing scholarly knowledge in the area. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from twelve marine operators based in Auckland. The exploration of this data was carried out by using a thematic analysis approach. Results indicated that the most popular and most frequently used Social Media channels were the social network Facebook, and the recommendation and review website TripAdvisor.

Findings suggest that Social Media use by participants lacked clear goals and strategies, mainly due to barriers such as lack of resources, lack of time, lack of knowledge, and due to, in a minority of cases, prioritisation of lifestyle choice over business growth. The absence of clear goals, accentuated by an absence of monitoring, led to disillusionment, owing to the perceived lack of return on investment of using Social Media. Findings did indicate that participants felt Social Media did positively enhance the business brand, though again due to the lack of monitoring, there was no way to clearly measure how much of an actual influence Social Media had on positive brand image.

A theoretical framework of barriers faced by the participants was developed. These barriers include a lack of control, operational issues, and a loss of trust in Social Media. With these barriers in mind, recommendations were suggested to improve the effective use of Social Media for the participants of this study and similar businesses. This included carrying out analysis of existing Social Media activities; the development of a clear strategy with measureable and qualitative goals; suggestions of cost free online tools for monitoring and analysis; and proposals for the most effective content to be uploaded. In conclusion, this study highlighted the difficulties of small businesses to keep up with the rapidly evolving nature of Social Media, the challenges of resource deficient operations of adequately utilising this hugely prevalent mass communication tool, and the need for

such businesses to develop communications methods, which lead to personalised and rewarding relationships with consumers.

**Keywords:** Social Media, small businesses, marine tourism, Auckland

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## **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.



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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Characteristics of the tourism industry**

The relentless growth of the global tourism industry over recent decades has been mirrored by the growth of the industry in New Zealand. Global numbers of tourists travelling internationally grew by 4.4% from the previous year, reaching over 1.1 billion in 2015 (UNWTO, n.d.). New Zealand, by the end of 2016, had welcomed almost 3.5 million international visitors, an increase of 11.8% from the year before (Statistics NZ, 2017). In terms of revenue, tourism directly and indirectly contributes 10% to the world's GDP, and directly and indirectly employs over 9% of the global workforce (UNWTO, n.d.). As New Zealand's largest export industry, in terms of foreign exchange earnings, tourism directly employs over 7.5% of the workforce, and directly contributed 5.6% to the nation's GDP for the year ended March 2016 (Tourism NZ, 2016a). These trends are set to continue with international visitor numbers to New Zealand forecast to increase by 5.4% annually until 2022, in line with global international tourism forecasts (MBIE, 2016a).

While the tourism industry has a significant impact on the New Zealand balance sheet, it is important to understand the underlying composition of this sector, both in terms of services offered, and operational characteristics. These include strategic scope, size of cash flow, organizational structure, and employee numbers, among other things. Focussing on the latter, while there are varying figures according to the source, within New Zealand's tourism industry, it is suggested that more than 85% of businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Tourism2025, 2013).

The New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) defines SMEs (or as they call them "small businesses", which will be what they are referred to as throughout this study), as enterprises that have fewer than 20 employees (MBIE, 2016b). These small businesses face various challenges including financial issues, lack of long-term planning, lack of resources, and a lack of strategic management, which will be discussed in this study (Hodgetts & Kuratko, 2008).

Within the tourism industry in New Zealand, the significance of small businesses is clear, however the type of tourism businesses that make up the industry is also important. The focus of this study will be on tourism businesses that operate in a marine setting. Marine tourism operators play a large role in the industry and this will be discussed below.

## **1.2 Marine Tourism**

A large range of classifications are made for the tourism industry in New Zealand. For instance, on a macro-level the tourism satellite account monitors the respective contributions of various services such as accommodation, food and beverage services, passenger transport, cultural and recreational services and so forth. While interesting from a macro-economic point of view, for a concentrated and in-depth understanding of the strategic aspects of a specific tourism product, a more detailed classification is necessary. Such a classification of tourism into multiple categories has enabled specialisation and targetted focus for operators, tourism researchers, and policy makers; as well as provide greater choice for the consumer – the tourists.

Tourism New Zealand's Visitor Market Profiles offer a concise overview of popular activities among different markets, allowing for industry classification based on market demand. Categories include geothermal attractions, botanical gardens, farms, walking and hiking, cultural attractions, boating, museums and bird watching. The majority of these are nature-based activities. Among the nature-based activities, marine-based tourism forms a large part of the New Zealand tourism industry as a whole (MBIE, 2009). In fact, for island and coastal communities such as those in New Zealand, marine tourism is the only category of tourism that they are able to offer, and is often the single most significant economic activity (Orams, 2002; Davenport & Davenport, 2006).

For the purpose of this study, the decision was made to focus the research on marine tourism operators. It is without doubt that marine tourism plays a significant role in the tourism industries of substantial number of destinations. Tourism activities in marine settings offer not only the largest components of the global tourism industry, they also offer the most prevalent of marine economic activities (European Commission, n.d.). With the ubiquitous nature of marine tourism and its rate of growth, within the industry, in New Zealand and globally, there is a need for marine tourism to be focussed on separately from other tourism types.

As the research for this project will be conducted with the cooperation of marine tourism operators, it is important to outline a clear definition of "marine tourism" in order to target the appropriate research participants. Van der Merwe, Slabbert, and Saayman (2010) define marine tourism as "the temporary short-term movement of people to destinations outside their normal environment and activities within a marine setting" (p.457). This definition perhaps fails to take into account the notion of local tourists participating in

marine tourism activities, and is clearly based on the official World Tourism Organisation definition of tourism, “Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited.” (UNWTO, 2011, p.1). Consequently, it is important to discuss the characteristics and the significance of marine tourism, and especially marine tourism in New Zealand, in order to gain a clearer picture of the subjects that will be considered for the study, and the motivations for carrying out the study.

Marine tourism is ultimately nature based (Collins, 2007). It is associated with, and reliant on, the sea and the marine environment, where the water is the biggest asset and the principal element (Papageorgiou, 2016). Marine tourism also covers water-based leisure activities, such as fishing, sailing and cruising in the deep oceans; and coastal and shallow water activities, which include sunbathing and swimming (European Commission, n.d.; Hall, 2001; Papageorgiou, 2016). Orams’ (2002) categorisation also looks at the level of involvement (i.e. direct or indirect), the type of ownership, and the size of the operation, thereby identifying the importance of these characteristics on operational management.

The wide range of marine tourism businesses as categorised by Orams will be discussed further in this study. In such a crowded business landscape, it is also important to consider any tools that may provide a competitive advantage to these operators. Many if not all operators use Social Media in some way, to help with the promotion of their businesses. The following section will provide some background information and definitions of Social Media.

### **1.3 Social Media – definition, background and as a marketing tool**

Understanding the supply-side structure of the tourism industry is only one part of the equation. The previous paragraph already made the link to the supply aspects with tourism demand. Adequate understanding of tourists’ expectations and the decision-making processes of potential consumers are critical for the success of any tourism business. These consumer expectations, knowledge, and decision making processes have been extensively affected by the rapidly developing nature of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into what is commonly known as Social Media (Ferguson, 2008; Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, 2011). Furthermore, the integration of Social Media into the daily lives of people has led to it playing a significant role in their communication methods,

acquisition of information, and purchasing decisions and practices (Constantinidis & Fountain, 2008).

The intangible and perishable nature of the products of service industries such as tourism, are affected a great deal by the outcomes of the development of Social Media due to their information intensive nature (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008; Kotler, Bowen, & Mackens, 2014; Weaver & Lawton, 2014). The rise of Social Media has changed the way companies approach consumers, and have given consumers an open platform to participate in discussions which can make or break the reputation of a business. The humanising effect and the opportunity to use word of mouth marketing to reach a broader audience through Social Media, has been due to user-generated content (Dushinski, 2012; Vinerean, Cetina, Dumitrescu, & Tichindelean, 2013). It is now becoming clear that in order to survive, businesses have to understand and find appropriate strategies and most effective methods of utilising Social Media for their own benefit (Litvin et al., 2008; O'Connor, 2008; Weber, 2009; Minazzi, 2014).

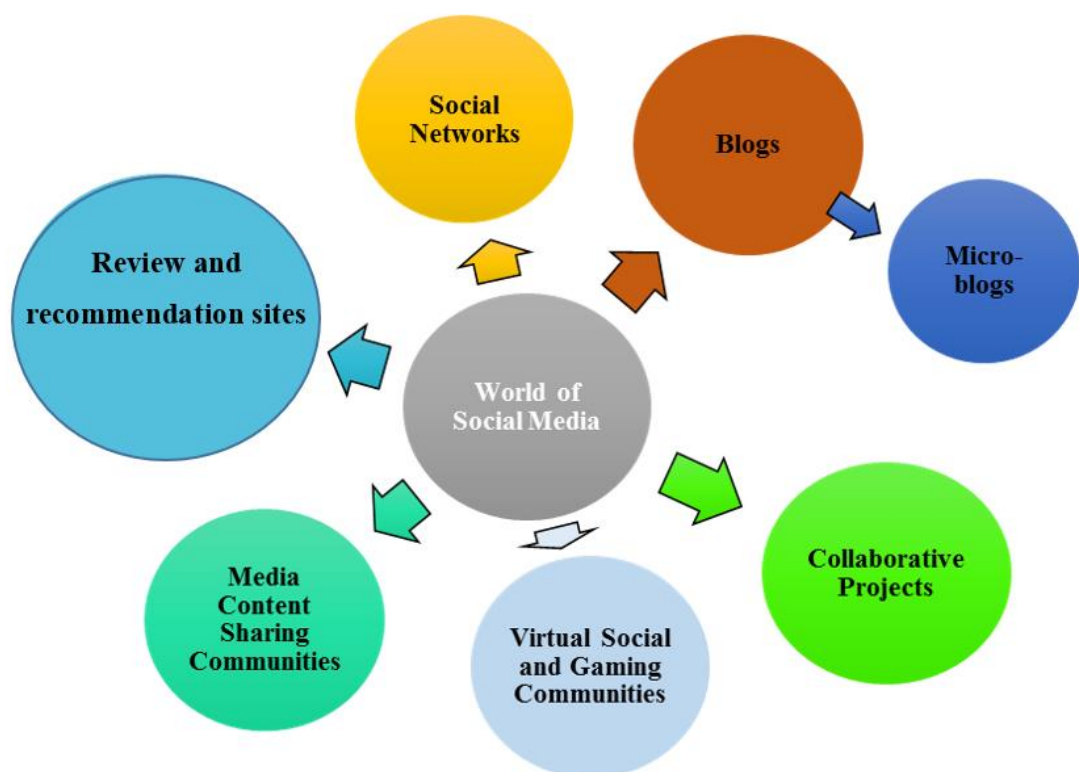
Social Media can be defined as a tool that “employs mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms to enable people to communicate, share, collaborate and modify user-generated content, thereby providing a platform for real time virtual interactions” (Power, 2014, p. 896). In other words, Social Media uses the conceptual and technological fundamentals of Web 2.0, to allow users covering several internet-based applications to create and share consumer-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010). Consumer-generated content is online information that has been created and disseminated by consumers in order to educate other users about brands, services, products, and issues. This content reflects consumer creativity; is produced outside of the professional sphere; and is publicly available online (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2007; OECD, 2007). This definition of Social Media shows how it can offer users a low-cost tool to immediately interact with a global audience.

The general assumption is that Social Media is a recent invention. It can be argued that it has been around before the advent of the 21st century, with blogs, wiki technology, and social networks appearing online from the mid-1990s (Allen, 2013). Despite its history, mass usage and popularity of Social Media has only developed in the last decade (Fuchs, 2014). This increase in Social Media usage, along with the development of internet ready mobile smartphones, has led to a revolution in the communication practices between consumers and businesses, especially in terms of marketing (Sheldon, 2015).

Various aspects to Social Media have led to alterations in traditional marketing practices. These include interactivity, customisation, and social interaction (Hill & Moran, 2011). Social Media offers businesses a free platform to advertise their products and services, to interact with, and specifically target, current and potential customers, who in turn will virtually communicate with their acquaintances about these products and services (Sheldon, 2015).

The wide range of applications that make up Social Media can be grouped into the categories illustrated in Figure 1, and explained below:

*Figure 1: Categories of Social Media*



Adapted from: Constantinides & Fountain, (2008); Kaplan & Haenlein, (2010); Buhalis & Jun, (2011); Wilson, Murphy, & Fierro, (2012); Minazzi, (2015).

- **Social Networks:** Online communities which allow users to create profiles with personal information, enabling them to share content and interact with each other via instant messaging and email (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Bebo).
- **Collaborative Projects:** These are content sites within which the user can add, remove and alter text-based content. Many users can cooperatively and concurrently create the content (e.g. Wikipedia, AboutUs.com, Wikitravel).
- **Blogs:** An abbreviation of **weblog**. Websites that enable users to upload a journal-style personal log of thoughts (e.g. WordPress, Blogger, SquareSpace).

- **Microblogs:** (e.g. Twitter, Tumblr) allow users to publish short and frequent thoughts and messages.
- **Media Content Sharing Communities:** Allows users to share multi-media content such as images, videos, and music (e.g. YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, Pinterest).
- **Review and Recommendation Sites:** Subscribers to these sites can use Web 2.0 techniques to rate, review and recommend services, products, attractions, places and businesses (e.g. TripAdvisor, Zomato, Lonely Planet, Yelp).
- **Virtual Social and Gaming Communities:** Platforms which allow users to create avatars to interact with other online users, and interact and behave in various ways without restriction (e.g. World of Warcraft, The Sims, Second Life).

## 1.4 Problem Discussion

The use of Social Media for marketing, distribution and communication processes by business has created great opportunities. However, the empowerment and development of the sophisticated consumer has altered the rules of traditional marketing practices (Meadows-Klue, 2008; Mizazzi, 2014). The potential of Social Media cannot be truly fulfilled by a simple presence on such digital channels. The potential of Social Media cannot be truly fulfilled by a simple presence on such digital channels. In fact, minimisation of negative outcomes, such as damage to reputation of a business, have to be addressed (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008; Akehurst, 2009). This makes it vital to consider best practices when utilising Social Media as a marketing tool.

The challenges faced by small businesses, especially lack of resources, can have an effect on the efficient and successful implementation of marketing strategies. Many small businesses in tourism are also owned and run by entrepreneurs, who often do not prioritise ultimate business growth and may consider their job as a way of maintaining a certain lifestyle (Di Domenico, 2005). The low initial financial cost of implementing Social Media strategies, and the ease of setting up accounts on Social Media platforms, offers the potential of making it an important marketing tool for small businesses. Therefore, it is vital to consider the barriers that these businesses feel they face when implementing such strategies, and in turn, discover the most efficient and effective ways that they can be implemented. The potential and growing influence of Social Media and the characteristics of the New Zealand tourism industry makes an examination of the



perception and utilisation of Social Media by small marine tourism operators a vital consideration.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated in order to address the issues that have been discussed, and to achieve the objectives of the study:

### **What are the perceptions and experiences of Social Media marketing for small marine tourism operators in Auckland?**

This general research question can be answered through a number of sub-questions:

- **How do these businesses perceive Social Media as a marketing tool; and what barriers and limitations do they face in utilising Social Media?**
- **How is Social Media utilised as a marketing tool by these businesses?**
- **How can Social Media strategies be improved?**

### **Significance and Contribution of this Research**

Despite tourism marketing becoming an important element in tourism research, some imbalances seem to exist. There seems to be too much attention paid to tourist perspectives and behaviours, with far less attention given to organisational marketing practices of small businesses. Much of the research on ICT development within the New Zealand tourism industry, seems to have an overemphasis on quantitative methods (Nodder, Ateljevic, Mason & Milne, 2003). Carrying out qualitative research will provide a deeper understanding of individual social constructed knowledge (Fesenmaier, O’Leary, & Uysal, 1996), offering an opportunity to develop a greater awareness of this area of the industry.

The prominence of small businesses which make up the bulk of the tourism industry in New Zealand, and the challenges they face, makes it imperative that research is conducted to ascertain the most efficient and fruitful methods of marketing. The focal point of this research will be concerned with a case study of Auckland, the most populous city in New Zealand. The geographical nature of Auckland, and New Zealand in general, means tourism businesses operating in a marine setting dominate the industry. There has been minimal research conducted on Social Media practices of tourism operators in New Zealand (Howison, Finger, & Hauschaka, 2015) and virtually no studies on marine

businesses based in Auckland. This study aims to develop a knowledge base on this topic not just for tourism operators in Auckland, but for the whole of New Zealand.

This study's intention is to gain an understanding of Social Media marketing from the perception and experiences of small marine tourism operators in Auckland. As the aim is to gain an interpretive and deeper understanding, a qualitative research method will be utilised (Richards & Morse, 2002). Some quantitative methods will also be used to audit the Social Media platforms that are used by the businesses, so that some background knowledge is developed in terms of the operators' use of the various channels.

## **1.6 Chapter overview**

The following is an overview of the structure of this thesis.

Chapter 2 contains relevant literature that presents background knowledge related to this study. This is extensively compiled and analysed, and will include an overview of ICT and its historical development; an overview of Social Media and its connection to tourism and small businesses; an overview of small businesses and their operational challenges; and an overview of the marine tourism industry.

Chapter 3 focuses on the research design, the methods used to address the research questions, and to achieve the research objectives. It includes information on the paradigm and rationale, participants, data collection methods, ethical consideration, and the trustworthiness and limitations of the qualitative research methods that are utilised.

Chapter 4 includes an analysis of the main finding of the study, commencing with descriptions of the research participants and their businesses. The qualitative data that was gathered from interviewees, which addresses the research questions, is presented in the form of tables, quotes and paragraphs.

Chapter 5 discusses and present the findings and analysis from the previous chapter, which will include detailed comparisons with the themes that came to light in the literature review. The findings in relation to the research questions, including the participants' utilisation and perception of Social Media marketing and barriers and limitations of Social Media marketing, based on the research results are discussed.

Chapter 6 provides recommendations on the most effective ways to use Social Media, including the various stages of an applicable Social Media strategy. These

recommendations will consider findings from the research that was conducted and will be focussed specifically on the participants in this study.

In the final chapter, the research questions are answered, key findings are summarised, and implications of the results on the marine tourism industry are considered. Finally, limitations of the study and further research recommendations are discussed. This chapter will conclude with a reflection of the research study.

# **CHAPTER 2**

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **2. Literature Review**

The aim of this literature review is gain an understanding of the academic literature that already exists in relation to this study. This chapter will begin with a discussion concerning the historical developments of information and communication technology, including its evolution towards Social Media and mobile technology. Further discussions will be concerned with how this technology has impacted the tourism industry, from a consumer and business perspective. Following on from that, there will be an analysis of existing research on small businesses, the challenges they face in an operational environment, and the value of Social Media for such operators. The final section of this chapter will be concerned with the characteristics and categorisation of the marine tourism industry, with a specific focus on its position in New Zealand and Auckland.

### **2.1 Information and communication technology (ICT)**

The ease and rapid exchange of information through telecommunication has come about due the continuous evolutions in technology. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can be defined as “the digital processing and utilization of information by the use of electronic computers. It comprises the storage, retrieval, conversion and transmission of information,” (Bansal, 2016, p.1). ICT also refers to any device that uses communication such as mobile phones, computer hardware and software, television, and associated applications such as video-conferencing and instant messaging services (Rouse, 2005). The development of communications technology and the rapid growth of the tourism industry has been closely associated for several years.

#### **2.1.1 ICT and Tourism**

The early pioneering adaptation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) by the tourism sector, has led to ICT becoming a vital element of global business development (Poon, 1993; Reinders & Baker, 1998; Berné, García-González, García-Uceda, & Múgica, 2015). That is, both from an industry perspective, and from the perspective of the consumer. The operational and strategic practices of the tourism industry are now being continually transformed by the development of communication technologies, from Computer Reservation Systems which appeared in the 1970s; to Global Distribution Systems in the 1980s, and arguably most importantly, the meteoric rise of the Internet from the 1990s (Buhalis & Law, 2008). With an ultimate focus on adapting to the needs of consumers (Bramwell & Lane, 2000), the ICT procedures used

by the tourism industry involve inter-organisation and intra-firm operations systems, as well as the overall management of tourism businesses (Connell & Reynolds, 1999; Berné et al, 2015).

More recently, the abundance of ICTs which are available and are used by the tourism industry has provided new methods of co-operation between different distribution channels. These relationships have been facilitated due to the nature of the tourism industry. These include the interconnection between a range of goods and services; the small size of the majority of tourism operators; and the distance and separation between the home and the holiday location, which necessitates efficient and versatile interconnectedness (Fyall & Garrod, 2004; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007). In addition, the intensification of information exchange between operators on the same distribution channel has led to effective processes at strategic and operational levels (Main, 2002; Berné, et al, 2015).

ICT development in the tourism sector has also influenced consumer perspectives. The proliferation of digital technologies has had a profound effect on the empowerment of consumers (Neuhofer, 2016). ICT technology has affected consumer decision making, beginning with the pre-trip planning and research phase, where consumers can utilise both public and private sources of digital information. After researching information on potential vacation destinations and services, ICT development has enabled the consumer to make bookings and purchases online, without the need to visit travel agents.

In the consumption phase, when the consumer is on holiday, digital technology can be utilised in various ways. This includes communication; booking transportation; during-trip research of activities and services; and the collection and uploading of memories such as photographs, videos and descriptions of experiences, onto Social Media sites. ICT influence on the tourist continues in the post-trip phase with the evaluation and review of services and products, which can include uploading perspectives and experiences onto review websites, blogs and Social Media (Mack, Blose, & Pan, 2008; Minazzi, 2014; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2015; Neuhofer, 2016).

The development of ICTs has bridged the gap between consumers and businesses. Mediation resources for the tourism sector have significantly improved; new management models have been developed and conceptualised; and vital contribution have been made to the development, promotion production, and distribution of tourism to consumers (Buhalis & Jun, 2011; Vázquez, Campo, Fernández, & Fernández, 2016). These

developments have greatly affected the way the overall operation of tourism businesses, especially the way that they promote themselves.

## **2.2 Historical developments: Web 1.0 to Web 2.0**

### **2.2.1 Web 1.0**

Possibly the greatest of all ICT advances has been the development of the internet. Despite difference between the two, the term “internet” and “web” is often used synonymously. The internet is the broad overall connection between computers globally, transferring content, whereas the web relates to software that allows connections between users, allowing them to use the content (“Encyclopedia,” n.d.). The map of the global economy has been completely redrawn due to the internet. The competitive nature of today’s marketplace means that businesses must expand their commercial activities outside their national borders, and with the effect of globalisation of electronic infrastructure, this has played a vital role in this expansion (Sudweeks & Romm, 2012). On the supply side, the internet has entirely changed the way businesses operate, and has become a vital tool in a globally connected, continuously evolving, and consumer emboldened market (Buhalis & Jun, 2011). This technological business revolution is driven not by the technology itself, but by the interaction between customer demand and the technology.

Despite there still being some reluctance to make purchasing decisions online (Suh, Ahn, Lee, & Pedersen, 2015; Massad & Berardelli, 2016), access to the internet has empowered the consumer to learn, communicate and discover information, which enables them to make individualised purchasing decisions (Stewart & Pavlou, 2002; Kim & Johnson, 2016). It is vital that suitable corporate strategy is determined whilst developing the internet as a commercial medium, in order to maximise opportunities that have been created and to minimise potential pitfalls (Sudweeks & Romm, 2012).

### **2.2.2 The interconnected web**

Defining the exact nature of Web 2.0 is a difficult task and opinions vary significantly. Some believe that the development of Web 2.0 is the natural evolution of internet technology. A basic and common explanation when comparing Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 is that Web 1.0 involves the connection between computers making information available; while Web 2.0 has developed from this to facilitate new collaborations between people (Wigand, 2012). However, many including the internet pioneer Tim Berners-Lee believe that there has not been a significant change. He suggests that the original web was always

about interactions and connecting people, and that Web 2.0 is just a development of web standards using the tools provided by Web 1.0 (Laningham, 2006).

There are many that believe that the web has undergone a fundamental change, and that there has been a redefinition of the relationship between web content creators and users. Web 2.0, it is claimed, has come about due to mass migration of business to the internet platform, caused by architectural, social and design features that have led to the blending of technology with the human experience (Governor, Hinchcliffe, & Nickull, 2009). Anderson (2005) referring to Tim O'Reilly's work on the conceptual differences between Web 2.0 potential and Web 1.0 remarks:

- **The Long Tail:** The Long Tail theory has come about due to the cultural and economic shift from focussing on mainstream products and markets towards a much larger number of niche markets and products in the tail of the demand curve. Due to online developments, production and distribution costs have decreased, and it has become economically attractive to target niche markets and products. Consumer self-service and algorithm data is influenced in order to reach the entire web – from the head to the long tail because small sites and slender niches make up the majority of internet content and applications.
- **Data as the next “Intel Inside”:** The data-driven nature of applications necessitates that unique sources of data must be pursued.
- **Users add value:** Competitive advantage for internet applications is gained by providing tools for users to add their own content, which will add value to the application.
- **Users as real-time testers:** Applications connected to the internet are ongoing services that can be used to engage users and discover their habits and views on any new features.
- **Cooperation not control:** Allowing users to take applications and content in new directions with loosely-coupled systems that are open, lets the web advance and develop.
- **Software above the level of a single device:** Applications and services for Web 2.0 are designed not just for the PC, but for multiple devices, improving connectivity and integration.

With Web 2.0, users have become the information providers as well as the information takers, where communication is multi-directional rather than uni-directional. This has led to users developing from uninformed consumers to producer-consumers or “prosumers”.



The term “prosumer” was introduced in the early 1980s and was then defined as “the progressive blurring of the line that separates producer from consumer” (Toffler, 1981, p.267). These developments have steered towards co-creation between producers and consumers, turning the customers into discerning clients who have a lot more power and input. They demand attention, authenticity and swift innovation and furthermore, require to be a part of the process of designing and setting a value for the product or service that they are using (Grinnell, 2009; Fuchs, 2011; Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2013; Potra, Izvercian, & Ivascu, 2014).

Web 2.0 has rapidly developed into a driver of technological and societal change due to the contribution of these basic principles. This has resulted in the possibility of fast and simple future developments due to the creation of technological and structural requirements.

### **2.2.3 The mobile revolution**

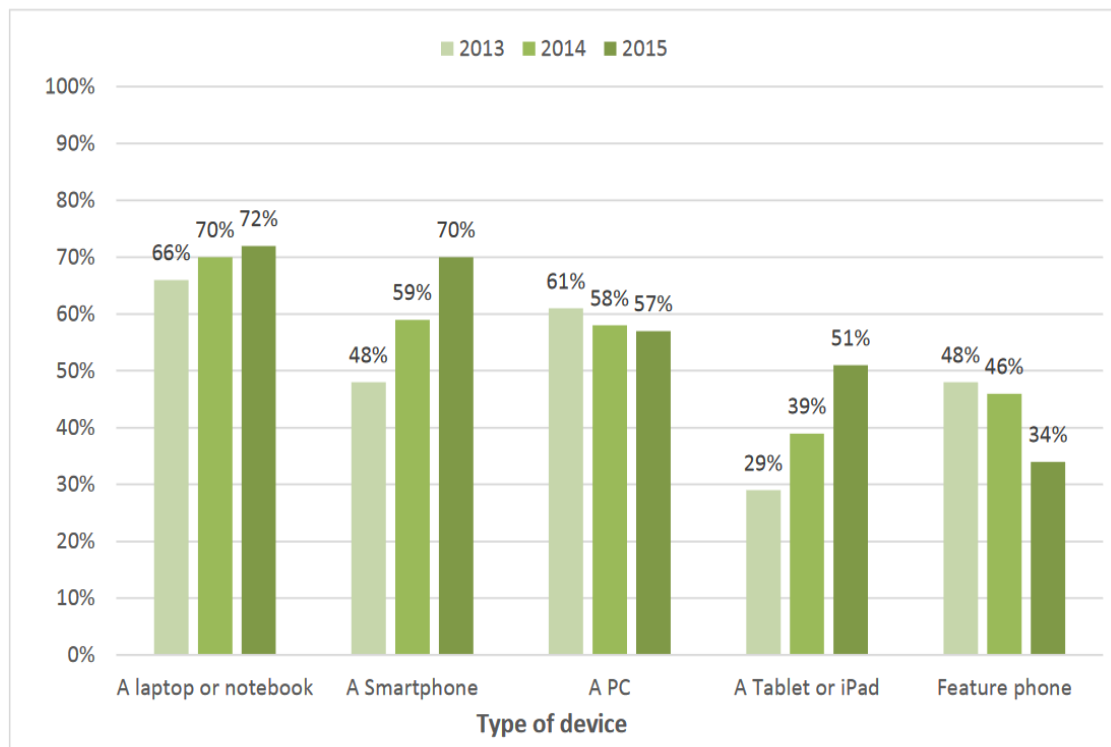
The most significant breakthrough to date, for the multi-directional, social internet, was the introduction of the smartphone. Web 2.0 applications and platforms have developed and established themselves in the past, when computers were stationary with limited connectivity for mobile devices. The proliferation of smartphones has led to these platforms becoming fully established due to the technology advances that could be customised and integrated into the daily lives of users – which are corresponding qualities of the social web (Sauter, 2013; Collins & Ellis, 2015; Newman, Chang, Walters, & Willis, 2016).

First introduced for sale to the public in the 1980s, the original mobile phone was cumbersome, bulky, expensive and unpopular. Smartphones on the market today have evolved drastically from the first generation of mobile phones (Woyke, 2014). The advance of technical specifications and the wholesale change in physical appearance has led to today’s smartphones being used to talk, text, take high quality photographs and videos, connect to the internet, make video calls to the other side of the world, and basically function as an advanced mobile computer (Research NZ, 2015).

Deloitte predicts that 1.6 billion smartphones will be sold in 2016, which amounts to over US\$400 billion in sales. This makes smartphones the primary consumer electronics device by revenue and units (Deloitte, n.d.). As Figure 2 demonstrates, in New Zealand, research conducted in 2015 shows that 70% of the country’s adult population use smartphones, which is a 46% increase in three years. Over those three years, there has

been a reduction in the use of non-mobile devices such as PCs and feature phones, whereas mobile device usage, such as the use of smartphones, laptops, and tablet computers has continued to increase.

**Figure 2: Type of device/s respondents own or have access to (for private use), by year (New Zealand)**



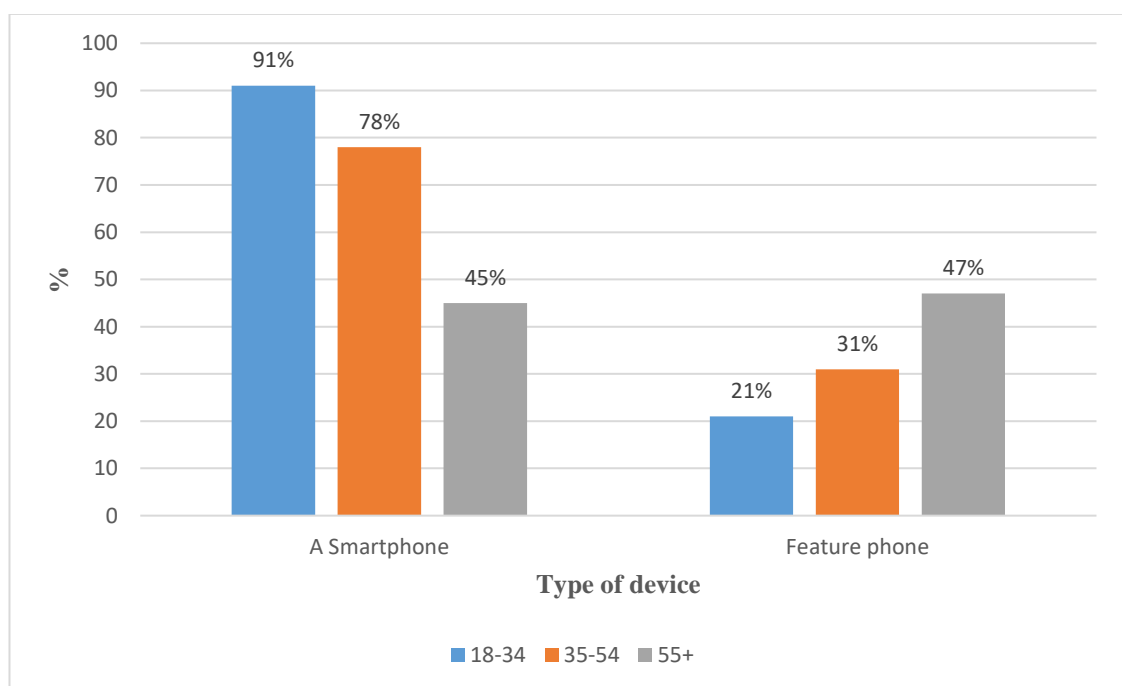
Source: Research NZ, (2015).

There is also a significant variation in ownership of devices depending on age. As Figure 3 shows, in New Zealand in 2015, 91% of the 18-34 age group owned a smartphone, whereas in the over 55 age group this number fell to 45%. In terms of a feature phone (a mobile phone that can access the internet, but lacks the advanced applications and functions of smartphones), 47% of the over 55 age group owned one of these whereas this number fell to only 21% within the younger age group. These statistics show that there is an overwhelming trend towards increased use of smartphones especially among the younger generation.

The pervasiveness of smartphones has led to a switch to a mobile web which has had a profound impact on the tourism industry. The advanced, ubiquitous capabilities of smartphones have led to it being rapidly adopted as a vital travel tool in the industry (Dickinson et al., 2012). Alongside the rapid advancement of the digital landscape, there has been evolution of tourists' travel patterns. The capability to link to previously difficult to attain travel information sources, and the ability to exchange location information

online, has led to the smartphone becoming a powerful multi-dimensional tool for the tourist and an inevitable partner for tourism (Cheverst, Davies, Mitchell, Friday, & Efstratiou, 2000; Dickinson et al, 2012). This is certainly the case for tourists who have visited or are interested in visiting New Zealand. From the number of visitors to the website newzealand.com, which is the official government site of New Zealand tourism business and investment, over 51% accessed the site using their mobile phones in July 2015 (Nelson NZ, 2015). The flexible and convenient nature of mobile technology is also highlighted by 70% of bookings which were made on mobile phones in 2014 being for same-day activities and accommodation (Fraser, 2015a).

**Figure 3: Type of device/s respondents own or have access to for private use, by age (New Zealand)**



Adapted from: Research NZ, (2015).

The relationship between the advancement of mobile phone technology and tourism has led to continually evolving, new approaches and developments. With the growing number of mobile phone users, smartphone applications (apps), are being constantly developed, specifically targetting tourists and the tourism industry for the pre, during and post-holiday phases. These include travel and transport specific apps; social networking apps, and apps for tourism operators to directly target tourists during all phases of their holiday journey (Dickinson et al, 2012; Shaw, 2015). The development of travel related apps and mobile phone technology has greatly influenced travel decisions and behaviour, especially due to the rise of the independent traveller who does not rely on packaged holiday options, but instead will increasingly makes decisions based on person-to-person

connectivity (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Schwanen & Kwan, 2008; Wang, Park, & Fesenmaier, 2011).

## **2.3 Web 2.0 to Social Media**

### **2.3.1 Social media pervasiveness**

It is often difficult to make a distinction between Social Media and Web 2.0 as often, the terms are used as synonyms. However, while Web 2.0 could be described as a phenomenon which developed the Internet's platform, Social Media could be described as the entirety of all communications platforms. Consequently, Social Media can be described as a Web 2.0 based application which provides the means of interactions for people to share, create and exchange ideas and content in online virtual communities (Choi & Kang, 2013).

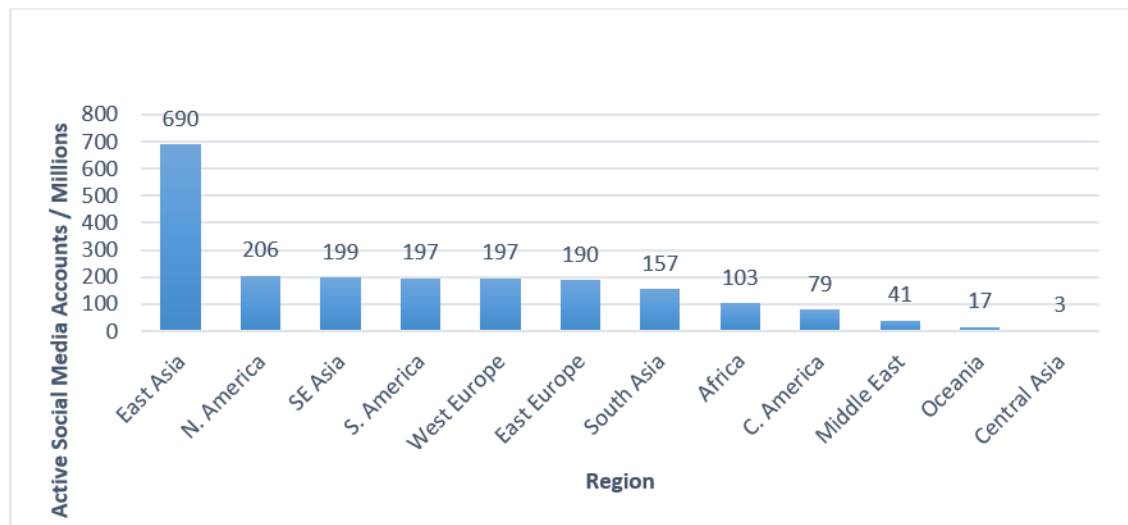
The fundamental change in the way we deal with information and communication due to Social Media is impressive. Consumers have also become the producers (prosumers), by being able to produce and publish their content via Social Media with a touch of a button. As in the real world, social ties in the virtual world arise from interaction and communication with one another. There are variations in the strength of social ties. Some are very closely connected, and others are rather loose (De Meo, Ferrara, Fiumara, & Provetti, 2014; Quinton & Wilson, 2016). The way that these ties are intensified is through the actions taken (e.g. how we keep in touch). Social ties can be intensified by Social Media through communication. For example, if communication is made via a company Facebook page, this can develop into stronger ties between the customers and their 'fan-base'.

Many if not most organisations appear to have come to recognise that Social Media has transformed communication and business. It is not a question of whether companies and organisations should join the Social Media revolution or not, it has become imperative that they do engage in this platform (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2015).

Over 40% of the world's population are active internet users, and almost 30% of the world's population are active Social Media users with over 2 billion active Social Media accounts. In many countries, Social Media has become a fixture of the daily lives for a large section of the population. Figure 4 shows regional active Social Media accounts. Looking at the figures by region, East Asia has the most active Social Media accounts, with over 690 million, clearly due to the population size of the region. North America,

South-east Asia, South America, Western Europe, and Eastern Europe all have around 200 million active Social Media accounts each.

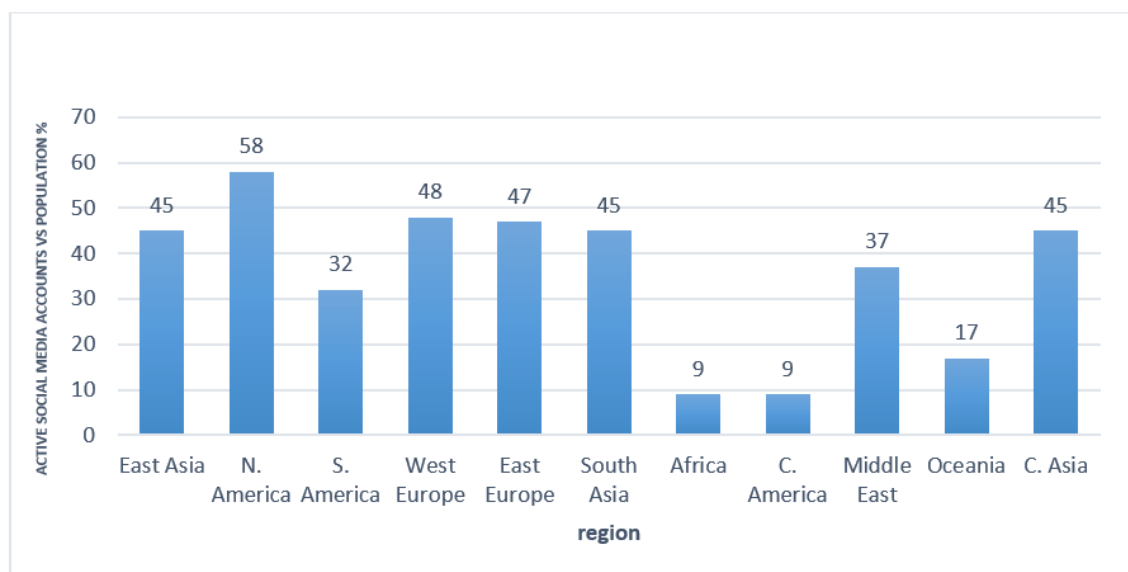
**Figure 4: Regional active Social Media accounts**



Adapted from: “Digital, social & mobile in 2015,” (2015).

Figure 5 shows regional active Social Media accounts as a percentage of the population of that region. In terms of active Social Media users as a percentage of the population of the regions, North America are the leaders, with almost 60% of the population actively using Social Media. The regions of Western, and Eastern Europe, South, East, and Central Asia, all have almost 50% of the population actively using Social Media platforms.

**Figure 5: Regional active Social Media accounts as a percentage of the population**

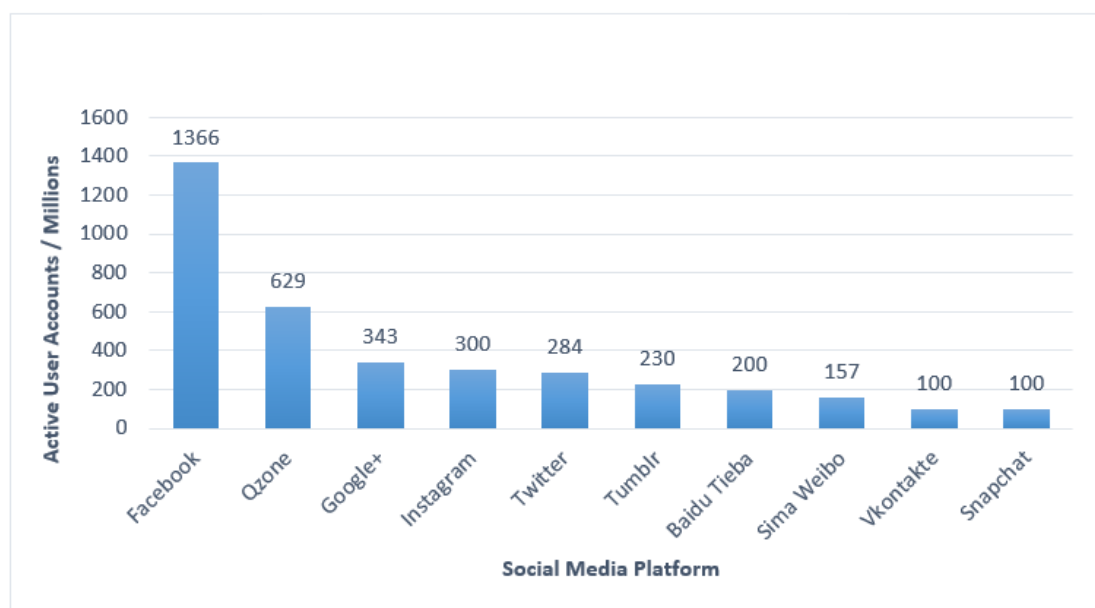


Adapted from: “Digital, social & mobile in 2015,” (2015).

Figure 6 shows which Social Media platforms are the most popular, in terms of active users. Facebook is by far the most popular platform with over 1.3 billion active users worldwide. This is followed by Qzone, a Chinese Social Media platform, which has almost 630 million active users.

The decisive impact on businesses of Social Media due to its radical growth, has led to a point where businesses have to decide on how to adapt and implement their Social Media presence. For consumers, trustworthiness of Social Media has overtaken traditional sources of information such as television, radio and newspapers, with social platforms being used to assess companies for customer service relationships, product quality, and business image (Foux, 2006; Aula, 2010; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2015). A survey conducted in 2012 of businesses managers in 24 different industries and 115 countries, showed that over 50% of respondents recognised the importance of Social Media with almost 90% recognising that Social Media would become a vital part of business operations within the next three years (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012).

**Figure 6: Active Social Media users by platform**



Adapted from: "Digital, social & mobile in 2015," (2015).

Facebook's rapid growth in popularity has been well documented, from its initial role as a Social Network for colleges in America with 200,000 users in the first year and half of starting up, to five million users within a month of it being made available to the general public (Kirkpatrick, 2011). The extraordinary popularity of this social network, as well as its analytic and marketing tools, has enabled businesses to effectively target a specific audience through paid advertisements. This is likely to be the reason for its reputation as

a popular tool for businesses seeking to reach a large audience. Research has shown this form of advertising can significantly affect the brand image amongst users (Dehghani & Tumer, 2015; O'Connor, Cowhey, & O'Leary, 2016), which in turn can contribute to deviations in purchasing behaviour.

Facebook's growth would be hard to match. However, other platforms have also performed well since their initial launch, in terms of user uptake. Instagram, the photo-sharing site, launched in 2010, gained 100,000 users in the first week. In just over two months, this number had multiplied ten-fold, to over a million users. The growth of micro-blogging site Twitter was slow, by comparison, taking one year to reach one million users (Garifova, 2016).

The rapid growth of Instagram has continued, from around 300 million users in 2015, to 600 million users by the end of 2016 (Instagram, 2016). Instagram's popularity as a marketing tool in the business world is set to continue, with estimates suggesting over 70% of United States businesses will be using the platform by 2017, surpassing Twitter's use by businesses ("Number of companies using Instagram to nearly double next year," 2015). Twitter is continuing to grow at slower rate, from over 280 million users in 2015, to just over 310 million active users per month by June 2016 (Twitter, 2016).

### **2.3.2 Social Media and the tourist: The consumer perspective**

#### **Electronic word of mouth**

The information intensive nature of the tourism industry and the products it offers, which are intangible and perishable, leads to it being greatly affected by Social Media (Litvin et al., 2008; Kotler, Bowen, & Mackens, 2014; Weaver & Lawton, 2014). Mangold and Faulds, (2009), suggest that Social Media is combination of traditional marketing communications and word of mouth communications which are magnified due to the voluminous characteristics of electronic communications. Several studies show that word of mouth communication is undeniable in having a greater influence on customer choices than traditional media, especially in intangible dominated, high risk service industries such as tourism (Murray, 1991; Murphy, Mascardo, & Benckendorff, 2007; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009; Boyer, et al., 2015; Virvilaite, Tumasonyte, & Sliburyte, 2015; Baker, Donthu, & Kumar, 2016).

The characteristics and ever-growing trends of Social Media make it possible to define it as a type of electronic word of mouth, especially in the context of Review and Recommendation Sites, such as TripAdvisor (Minazzi, 2014; Hennig-Thurau et al.,

2004). Electronic word of mouth is defined by Hennig-Thurau et al., (2004) as, “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet,” (p. 2).

This form of communication allows customers to gather product-based information and advice from other customers and can be considered even more influential and far-reaching than traditional word of mouth communications (Chatterjee, 2001; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Urban, 2005; Minazzi, 2014; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2015). These studies show that users of Review and Recommendation Sites desire social interaction; show concerns for fellow users, and are searching for the best deals. It is suggested that businesses need to develop strategies that promote and encourage user generated recommendations on such sites.

Several surveys also show the importance of Social Media in the decision making and purchasing process of travellers. A 2014 study discovered that Social Media websites are the most important resource for travel planning in the UK (World Travel Market, 2014). In the Asia-Pacific region, it was found that 44% of travellers used Social Media to inspire and influence their travel decision making (“In Asia-Pacific, Social Media inspires travellers,” 2013). The 2015 white paper study, conducted by the digital consultancy firm E3, discovered that 44% of the 16-24 age bracket used Social Media when deciding where to travel (E3, 2015).

Research conducted by TripAdvisor (2014), the travel review website, found that travel reviews influenced 89% of global tourists when choosing their accommodation. Furthermore, after using Social Media, half of all travellers would alter their travel plans (Bennett, 2012). The 2012 Nielsen report on Social Media found that almost 70% of consumers referred to the experiences of other consumers before making purchases (Nielsen, 2012). Additionally, an empirical study on the influence of user-generated content on traveller behaviour found that a 10% increase in traveller review ratings led to an increase in online bookings by over 5% (Ye et al., 2011).

The widespread connectivity of Social Media has no-doubt had a profound effect on the habits and expectations of travellers. As distrust grows in commercial information sources, there is a trend for consumers to engage with the experiences of other consumers to aid with their purchasing decisions (Mack et al., 2008; Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2012). Relying on other travellers’ feedback, and trusting their information more



than the sales pitch of the supplier, is a way for consumers to reduce perceived product uncertainty (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Litvin et al., 2008).

### **The technology enhanced tourism experience**

When examining purchasing behaviour of tourists, the process can be divided into three phases based on a temporal perspective: the pre-trip or the anticipatory phase; the during-trip or the experiential phase; and the post-trip or the reflective phase (Ryan, 2002; Williams & Buswell, 2003; Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2006; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Minazzi, 2015). For the majority of modern travellers, Social Media and the development of mobile technologies can play a large role in their decision-making processes and activities, during the various phases of their holiday experience.

During pre-trip phase, the potential traveller searches for inspiration, creates expectations and make travel decisions about future tourism experiences, using personal sources such as recommendations from family, friends and colleagues; and non-personal sources such as commercial and third party sources (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2012). ICT development has led to the reduction in cost of seeking information, empowering customers in these decision-making processes.

However, it is not just those with budget restrictions that rely on digital information for travel inspiration. Research conducted by Google (2014a) on affluent travellers (with a yearly household income of US\$250,000), 76% of those surveyed chose the internet as the most important source of travel inspiration, and the findings showed that this group were relying less on offline, traditional sources of information such as travel agents, television and radio, and magazines and newspapers. Further research conducted by the same group on overall leisure and business travellers found that 83% of respondents looked at online social networking, video, or photo sites to search for travel inspiration (Google, 2014b).

Social Media plays a key role in the initial search for information. Actions involving Social Media during this pre-trip phase included reading reviews from fellow travellers, and looking at travel reviews and content by family members. These actions helped to reassure and comfort these consumers, reducing the perceived risk of relying on information provided by suppliers. After consulting rating websites, reading other users' reviews, travellers often relied on Social Media to provide the links for booking services, either directly through the service provider, or through specific travel partner websites (Minazzi, 2015).

The pre-trip phase is perhaps the phase at which Social Media is the most influential on the traveller. Personal reviews and pictures of holiday experiences uploaded by friends and family onto Social Media, and the reviews and ratings of destinations and services from strangers on public review platforms, helped with perceived risk-reduction for consumers.

Social Media is also influential at the during-trip phase, mainly involving holiday planning and instinctive, real time sharing of user generated content. Whilst much of the research and planning of holidays is carried out during the pre-trip phase, Social Media and mobile technology development has meant that many of these activities have moved to the during-trip phase, especially for knowledgeable and experienced travellers (Jun, Vogt, & MacKay, 2007). Those with some knowledge of the destination pre-visit can plan many activities after arrival. Social Media can be used during the trip to give real-time updates on anything from how busy a certain attraction is, the weather, answer customer queries, and offer links to booking channels. Furthermore, with the development of GPS (Global Positioning Systems) technologies, customers can move around their destination with ease, using smart-phone location apps (Minazzi, 2015).

There has been a trend towards activity planning during the trip, with an increasing number of travellers planning things to do after arriving at their destination, due to Social Media pervasiveness and the development of mobile technologies (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Xiang, Wang, O'Leary, & Fesenmaier, 2014).

Social Media has also altered the way that travel memories, in the form of photographs, are collected and shared. Traditionally, photographs of holidays were processed after the tourist returns home. They were then put into a photo album and shared with select audiences such as close family and friends (Walker, 1989). The development of ICT and Social Media has transformed this now 'old fashioned' process into an expeditious and unrestricted practice. The widespread use of smart-phones and the extensively available photo-sharing applications, such as Instagram, allow users to share their experiences, in real-time, with an unlimited number of fellow Social Media users (Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013; Lo & McKercher, 2015; Lyu, 2016).

The influence and reach of Social Media applications such as Instagram are highlighted by Tourism New Zealand (Tourism NZ), the national tourism promotional body. A year after Tourism NZ started using Instagram for promotion, initially with only 150 Instagram posts, New Zealand had been recommended as a holiday destination by 35,000

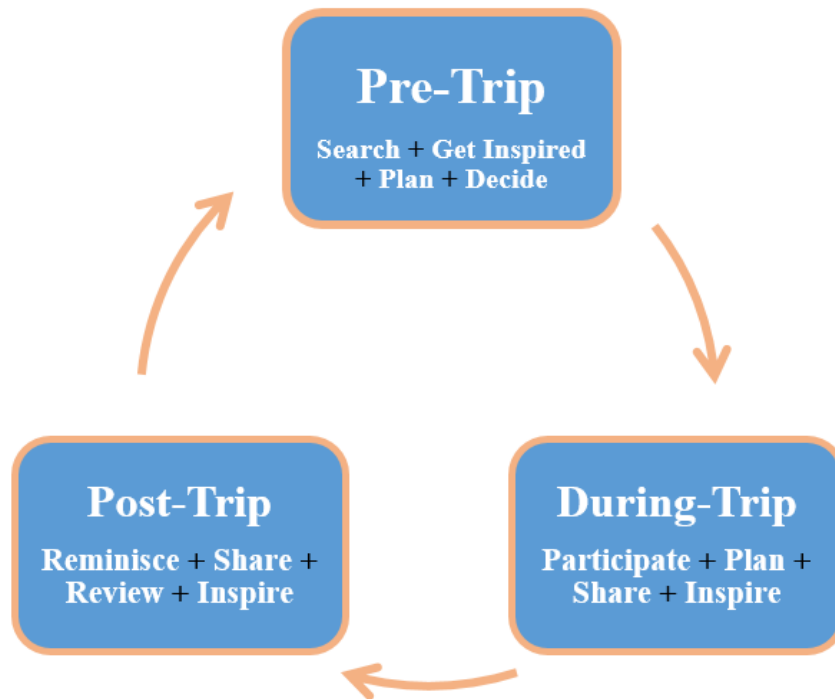
“Instagrammers” (people who use Instagram) using the promotional hashtag #nzmustdo (Fraser, 2015b). A year later, the amount of people following the Tourism NZ Instagram account had increased by 159 per cent, to 500,000 followers, with their images being viewed 70 million times (Tourism NZ, 2016b). The driving force behind this, according to Tourism NZ, is the photographs uploaded by tourists who are encouraged to show off the destination through their eyes, and phone cameras, leading to an organic growth of the account.

Regional tourism bodies within New Zealand, such as Lake Wanaka Tourism, have gone one step further and hired influential “Instagrammers” to promote their region on their accounts. These “influencers”, often with several million followers, post photographs of the region on their accounts whilst visiting, and reach vast audiences. The influencers are seen as more credible and authentic, compared to simple paid advertisements on their own accounts (Mitchell, 2016). Research shows that it would be useful for businesses to harness and use influencers to their benefit, in order to positively influence online conversations, and reduce the opportunities for negative electronic word of mouth (Zhang, 2015).

Social Media plays a large part in the post-trip phase for travellers. Recent studies show that over three quarters of travellers post some sort of vacation content on Social Media once they have returned home (Fotis, Bohalis, & Rossides, 2012). Travellers returning home go through a phase of evaluating their travel experience to form an overall judgment of customer satisfaction (Lopes, 2011; Jani & Nguni, 2016). The evaluation process can of course be stimulated by post-trip correspondence with suppliers who encourage travellers to post comments on travel review sites such as TripAdvisor. Others simply share photos and their travel experience on Social Media and photo sharing websites such as Facebook and Instagram.

Travellers do this to perhaps extend their holiday experience in the form of nostalgic remembrance of their time on the trip (Fotis et al., 2012). Often, if the traveller has had a good experience, they may reward the company by sharing good user generated content, such as a blog post about their positive experience or complimentary interactions with the company’s Social Media accounts (Minazzi, 2015). Adversely, Social Media can also be used by travellers, post-trip to complain about their experience on the company’s Social Media channels. In this situation, it is vital that companies have in place a complaint management procedure that will lead to successful customer care, and improvements in customer loyalty (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011).

**Figure 7: The technology enhanced tourism experience**



The post-trip phase Social Media usage offers travellers opportunities to reflect and review their holiday experience and influence fellow Social Media users in the pre-trip phase. It could be suggested that tourism businesses and destinations must keep up with the interactive nature of information and photograph dissemination by strategically taking part in the process, in order to guide the content and image that is produced. They can do this by utilising photo-sharing Social Media channels, such as Instagram, and interacting with clients, and potential clients, on their Social Media channels, in order to build a trusting relationship (Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013; Lyu, 2016). Figure 7 summarises the circular nature of the Social Media and technology-enhanced tourism experience as discussed above.

### **2.3.3 Social Media and Tourism: The business perspective**

As touched upon previously, the information intensive, perishable and intangible service producing tourism industry, is especially susceptible to this increasingly widespread process of decision making (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Litvin et al., 2008). The significance of Social Media in the customer decision making process cannot be ignored by businesses (Minazzi, 2014). This new marketing environment can make even strong brands vulnerable (Rokka, Karlsson, & Tienari, 2014). The challenges are brought about due to a combination of the power that has been given to the consumer due to Social Media, such as the informed customer, the public nature of Social Media communications and

electronic word of mouth which will spread news rapidly obliging businesses to adapt their resources for successful Social Media implementation.

Social Media has therefore led to the empowerment of the customer, which facilitates the need for dialogue and authenticity and has led to greater transparency, which can leave businesses in a vulnerable environment (Aula, 2010; Cova, & White, 2010; Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010; Rokka et al., 2014). Table 1 outlines some of the challenges faced by businesses due to the use of Social Media. These challenges include businesses having to be transparent and authentic, and deal with customers who are informed and use the power of word of mouth to influence other users.

In order to provide effective customer service, businesses have to visibly react at a much faster rate, by developing appropriate and adequately planned communications with customers. In order to successfully face these challenges, they may need provide extra and new training for current staff, and may require the hiring of staff with appropriate skills.

Along with these challenges, Social Media is constantly evolving. New tools and technologies are developed and made available to users, seemingly every month. From Facebook introducing a “live video” feature (D’onfro, 2015); to live Instagram stories and disappearing photos (Instagram, 2016), to Twitter introducing a 360 degrees’ video feature (Sabatelli, 2016). The rapid digitalisation of marketing methods, through the tools available and the proliferation of mobile technology can be perplexing for businesses managers. Furthermore, there is often a delay between the introduction of new tools and technology, and the academic research that is carried out. Traditional methods are becoming obsolete and business managers, and marketing researchers are struggling to keep up (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016).

There are several other challenges and barriers faced by businesses in using Social Media. Many businesses are reluctant to use or expand their use of the tool due to the lack of clear positive results (Garrido-Moreno & Lockett, 2016). Difficulty in measuring the direct impact that Social Media has on a business and consequently its value and profitability, often means managers are unwilling to develop their use of the tool further (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Garrido-Moreno & Lockett, 2016).

**Table 1: Social Media challenges faced by businesses**

Type of Challenge	Description
<i>Informed and Powerful Customer</i>	Companies need to keep pace with the informed customer and manage the company's reputation. Social Media gives the customer a voice which can be shared with the whole world.
<i>Public</i>	Dialogue with customers is public and visible to all.
<i>Word of Mouth</i>	Each customer has their own social network so word will spread very quickly – companies should try to win customers as advocates for their product/service.
<i>New Customer Service</i>	Social Media is a new channel for customer service which must be utilised correctly.
<i>Relationship Management</i>	Companies must utilise Social Media to develop relationships with customers.
<i>Customer-Centred Philosophy</i>	Customer feedback can be directly collected via Social Media, they must be responded to deal with their needs and wishes.
<i>New Roles in the Company</i>	Employees need to be qualified to use SM correctly and roles and objectives must be outlined clearly.
<i>Speed</i>	Information decimated much faster via Social Media than via classic media.
<i>Transparency</i>	Users can contribute to online content, generating transparency.
<i>Authenticity</i>	Social Media dialogue takes place between people – companies must give a face to their voice.
<i>Dialogue</i>	SM dialogue takes place between people – companies must give a face to their voice.

Adapted from: Aula, (2011); Fournier & Avery, (2011); Kaplan & Haenlein, (2010); Kozinets et al., (2010); Rokka et al., (2014).

For businesses that feel this way about the lack of visible impact, there are suggestions that they should focus on “return on engagement” (Jung, Ineson, & Green, 2013, p.5), rather than a quantifiable measurement of the return in investment. Intangible benefits such as building relationships and creating awareness can be considered a viable goal of Social Media marketing. Another barrier to the successful use of Social Media by businesses is the lack of training and knowledge of the subject which hampers their effective use of Social Media (Jung et al., 2013; Garrido-Moreno, & Lockett, 2016). Inadequate training, the difficulties in keeping up with the technically and functionally

ever evolving nature of Social Media channels, and the lack of technological expertise are a major hindrance for businesses.

## **2.4 Social Media marketing strategies for businesses**

Businesses have no choice but to indulge in Social Media, otherwise they risk being left behind by competitors (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2015). It is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible to control word of mouth and electronic word of mouth. However, effective strategies can be put in place by companies to make Social Media a successful part of their marketing processes, which can help to manage electronic word of mouth, by increasing positive feedback and exposure; and reducing the negative effects on corporate reputation.

Several studies indicate a lack of strategy when it comes to using Social Media as a tool by businesses. One study of small businesses and their use of Social Media found that the majority were not evaluating or monitoring their online social presence. The main method of measuring their Social Media effectiveness was based on the vague notion of the number of participants joining their networks. Furthermore, a majority of participants were not using Social Media to support a specific strategy; and half of the respondents did not have a specific budget for Social Media marketing (Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011). Other research indicates that many considered Social Media as just a “fad”, or just a marketing tool and nothing else (Kryder, 2011; Cheek, Ferguson, & Tanner, 2013), and so a specific strategy was not deemed necessary.

Social Media strategies should begin with an analysis of the company’s online visibility, even before goals are set. Current, if any, Social Media usage should be scrutinised to discover how consumers see the brand, and whether the appropriate target group is interacting with companies online. In order to most efficiently target a certain group (Effing & Spil, 2016; Thackery et al., 2008), the descriptions of the target group should be compared against Social Media platforms to determine which are the most effective for reaching users in that category (Dutta, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Effing & Spil, 2016).

Once the company’s target groups have been identified, the goals for Social Media can be determined. Attracting new customers; communicating the brand online; developing relationships; and receiving feedback are often the goals for small businesses using Social Media (Michaelidou et al., 2011). Studies suggest that these goals should be unambiguous

and clearly defined in order to make sure resources are not wasted. The goals should also be coordinated with the specific goals associated with the company, such as increasing customer loyalty, improving the company's online reputation, and increasing bookings (Thackeray et al., 2008; Dutta, 2010; Bottles & Sherlock, 2011; Klang & Nolin, 2011; Larson & Watson, 2011; Effing & Spil, 2016).

After identifying the goals, the next step would be to look at the resources that are available to use for Social Media (Thackery et al., 2008; Dutta, 2010; Effing & Spal, 2016). This include calculating the costs. Potential costs could include internal costs such as salaries and continued training; technology costs such as devices (e.g. smartphones); and Social Media campaign costs such as advertising campaigns and prizes for competitions. These resources may include training and educating employees to make sure that they can acquire the appropriate skills for operating on Social Media platforms (Burkhalter, Wood, & Tryce, 2014).

In order to successfully accomplish these goals, certain activities need to be planned and carried out. These activities can include creation of content and participation of Social Media (Thackeray et al., 2008; Klang & Nolin, 2011; Barnes, 2014; Effing & Spal, 2016). After thorough planning, Social Media can be implemented, with goals in sight and target groups specified. The success of a Social Media strategy depends on many factors. but it is important to measure and monitor the strategy, and optimise and adjust it accordingly (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012; DiStaso & McCorkindale, 2013).

Implementing and carrying out a Social Media strategy such as the one outlined above, can be extremely beneficial for businesses. This is especially true in the case of resource-light small businesses, as the initial costs of starting up Social Media channels are low. The challenges faced by small businesses, including the lack of finances, resources, strategic management, and long-term planning (Hodgetts & Kuratko, 2008) means that these companies must utilise all the necessary low-cost options in order to become, and stay, economically and operationally successful.

## **2.5 Small businesses**

Small businesses play a unique role in the global economy. They are often considered the powerhouses and the backbone of economies of individual countries. Employing most of the world's workforce, and generating almost a half of global economic output, small businesses are often part of the extended supply line for multinational companies (Cohen,



McKay, & Wolfe, 2014). Within Europe over 20 million small business firms make up 98% of all businesses, employing over two thirds of Europe's working population. In China, there are over 40 million small businesses operating, and in the USA, small businesses employ over a million workers and produce sales revenues of over US\$11 billion. In the Asia-Pacific region, 90% of companies are small businesses, employing 60% of the workforce, and have been the key to removing trade barriers and encouraging entrepreneurial start-up ventures (Cohen, McKay, & Wolfe, 2014). The difficulty in defining small businesses will be discussed below. These figures correlate with the various definitions of small businesses within those regions and countries.

The diverse nature of small businesses makes it difficult to generalise, but most of them are strongly driven by the owner-operator, who usually take a very hands-on approach to running the business, and with family members involved in running and continuing the business when the owner feel their time is up. Although exceptions do exist, most small businesses remain a similar size to when they began throughout their lifecycle. Owners are entrepreneurs who are often driven by their desire to offer a service that will benefit and change the society in which they operate in. This outlook, despite their primary motivation which is to earn a living, often makes the desire for profit less important than sticking to their values and offering a contribution to society (Ye & Leipnik, 2013; Cohen et al., 2014; Belas & Kljucnikov, 2016).

As most owners of small businesses operate their businesses with strong ties to family and community, their entrepreneurial spirit is also often tied in with a value-based desire to contribute to their society while doing something that they love, which often relegates the desire for profit from the top of their priority list (Cohen et al., 2014). These values conflict with traditional models of business development. It is important, therefore, to consider the relevance of lifestyle orientation for operators of small businesses, and this is relevant to this study of tourism and small businesses (Di Domenico, 2005).

Most definitions of entrepreneurship relate to the concept of growing a business. However, business growth is not the only factor for launching an operation. Many operators decide to start a business in order to "escape from the control of others," (Scase & Goffee, 1987, p.33). The yearning for independence, and the desire to improve their lifestyle, and contribute to society are important factors for many small business owners when they initiate their operations (Di Domenico, 2005). Lifestyle factors related to entrepreneurs of small businesses, specifically within the tourism industry, will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **2.5.1 Defining small businesses**

The difficulty in conducting a study of small businesses is that there is a significant variation in the definition of what a small business is across the world. Different characteristics are chosen to define these businesses, including the name, the number of full time employees, annual turnover, investment capital, and ownership details. For example, the US National Chamber of Commerce defines a small business as one with fewer than 250 employees (Noel & Luckett, 2013); whereas European Union defines a small enterprise as having less than 50 employees and less than €10 million in total assets (Perera & Chand, 2015). This is perhaps a reflection on the variations of cultural, social as well as economic characteristics of the country that these businesses are based in. As this study is based on New Zealand businesses, the government definition will be used to characterise the small businesses that will be considered for the research.

New Zealand's Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, define a small business, as a business with less than 20 full-time employees. Such businesses dominate New Zealand's industrial landscape. Some 97% of all enterprises in the country have fewer than 20 employees, adding up to almost half a million businesses; 29% of New Zealand's workforce are employed by these businesses; and over a quarter of New Zealand's GDP is produced by such businesses (MBIE, 2016b).

### **2.5.2 Challenges for small businesses**

Small businesses face many operational challenges. This includes growth, restricting financial limitations and the competition they face against large businesses, with seemingly endless resources, compared to small businesses. Another typical problem faced by small businesses is in the marketing area. The lack of resources and employees means that many small businesses lack a targetted marketing strategy and many even fail to employ specialised marketing managers, leading to little or no marketing activity being put into place (Bozkurt & Kalkan, 2014; Elmahgop, Wahab, Elzein, & Edrees, 2015). The nature of small businesses and the resources available to owners and managers means that often they can be left behind, and successful, efficient progress may be limited. Hood (2013), outlines several pitfalls that small businesses operators fall into when attempting to run their business successfully:

***Sticking with the status quo:*** Small businesses operators can become too content with their core product and may miss out on the opportunities to develop and foster WOM marketing, which can increase customer benefits and produce additional revenue pathways. Furthermore, it is important to evolve in order to deliver the product the market

wants rather than delivering the same old product because it is easier to stick with the status quo. Delivering new and more products can help to attract new customers, as opposed to just keeping the limited number of old customers happy.

***Lack of market awareness:*** Failure to link marketing to market awareness can lead to missing out on profitable schemes that could appeal to existing and new customers.

***Lack of self-awareness:*** Small businesses are often better placed than larger corporations in understanding their customers due to their flexibility in catering for their needs. If small businesses are aware of this, they can get an advantage over larger corporations in attracting customers. Furthermore, it is important to capitalise on the intimacy and personality that small businesses can create by “telling their story”.

***Lack of focus:*** The stresses on owners and managers of small businesses can lead to them attempting too much and trying to improve in all departments. It would be more efficient and stress-reducing to focus on targetted improvements of certain areas where competitive advantages can be enhanced and problems reduced instead of attempting to improve everything at the same time.

***Fail to acknowledge consumer control:*** The new business landscape includes self-organising and knowledgeable customers who increasingly have more power to influence and control the brand. New technologies such as Social Media have empowered customers and small businesses must look to influence projections of their trustworthiness through the consumer.

### **2.5.3 Small businesses and Social Media**

In the first couple of years since its inception, small businesses use of Social Media almost doubled. A study conducted as early as 2009 found that 75% of small businesses had a page on a social networking site. This rapid growth of the platform was due to managers’ and owners’ identifying that Social Media can positively affect the companies’ brand image; can target and attract new customers; and increase visibility and awareness of the companies’ brand (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Another study conducted in 2011 showed that 70% of small businesses utilised Facebook and almost 40% could be found on Twitter (Miller & Washington, 2013).

A further study conducted by Constant Contact, of small businesses in 2011 found that 73% used Social Media for their business, with the majority of those that were not using it, expecting to join in the new future (Eddy, 2011). A study by the same company carried

out in 2013 found that use of Social Media by small businesses had increased to 82% of those surveyed. Amongst these, 85% used Facebook; 59% used Twitter and Instagram; and 47% used YouTube. Of those using Facebook, 82% found it was an effective tool for their business; around 25% of Instagram and Twitter users found it an effective tool; and only 15% of YouTube users found it was effective (Constant Contact, 2013).

**Table 2: Small businesses: Social Media application in business areas and ease of application**

<b>Business Area</b>	<b>Description of Social Media application in this area</b>	<b>Ease of Application in order of difficulty (easiest to most difficult)</b>
<i>Internal Communications</i>	Internal coordination and cooperation e.g. forums, blogs, internal social network	Easy and quick to set up and communicate in-house.
<i>Human Resource Recruiting</i>	Uncomplicated contact via social networks, job offers, up to date contact data, open, efficient exchange between candidates and companies, viral-like, speedy distribution of job advertisements.	Easy to upload job offers and search for and communicate with employees.
<i>Innovation Management</i>	Harness the knowledge of the Social Media crowd. Actively ask for opinions and ideas from users.	Initially easy to put a question out there for users. Also many users are keen to provide feedback and opinions.
<i>Sales</i>	Mainly as a contributor for sales support, also with some direct verifiable sales.	Direct users to booking services. Make sales directly on Social Media while communicating with users.
<i>Overall Marketing and PR</i>	Increasing brand awareness, improve company image by putting up content such as blogs, pictures, videos.	Initially uploading content is easy and hassle free. Most Social Media platforms provide quick and easy uploading procedures.
<i>Social Intelligence Collecting</i>	Associated with innovation management. Can lead to innovations and ideas of product weakness.	Evaluating and interpreting data from Social Media. Analytics tools are available free from some platforms. Other evaluating needs to be carried out manually.
<i>Social CRM; Service and Support</i>	Managing customer relationships via Social Media; and providing customer service and support.	A fairly difficult task as relationships with customers could prove to be difficult on such open, visual platforms, especially in cases of dissatisfaction. Customer support must be prompt and could be time-consuming.

Adapted from: Hay, (2011); Safko, (2012); Bondarouk & Olivás-Lujan, (2013); Lardi & Fuchs, (2013); Karimi & Naghibi, (2015).

It is clear to see that Social Media is a popular tool for small businesses. Various academic studies suggest that in order to maximise the potential of the resources available to small businesses, all low-cost opportunities must be looked at (Hodgetts & Kuratko, 2008; Bozkurt & Kalkan, 2014; Cohen et al., 2014; Elmahgop et al., 2015). Appropriate and beneficial, and initially low-cost Social Media strategies which relate to various business areas within small businesses, are found within academic literature and are outlined below. Table 2 offers a summary of potential areas of the small businesses within which Social Media can be utilised, and the ease of application in each case.

In terms of implementing Social Media in these business areas, small businesses must consider their resources and the structure of the business, and then consider which areas are achievable financially and logistically. As Table 2 shows, perhaps the business areas of a small business where Social Media application is the easiest are the internal areas such as internal communications and human resource recruitment where there is no interaction with customers. This is due to the limited risk of using Social Media in these areas.

In contrast, business areas where there is interaction with customers, such as customer service and support, Social Media strategies must be planned and put in place with great caution. In order to reduce the risk of customer dissatisfaction, which can lead to the brand image being damaged, appropriate content must be produced on such an open platform, and customer support must be prompt and helpful.

#### **2.5.4 Value of Social Media for small businesses**

Studies have shown that small businesses, who often have limited resources, can make use of Social Media which offer them the opportunity to communicate and foster relationships with customers. It can be a source of transparency which encourages relationships, leading to the build-up of trust. Through developing a relationship with clients Social Media can be a useful tool for marketing and can generate exposure and awareness of the business leading to an increase in customer numbers. Additionally, several studies suggest Social Media offers a tool which is less time-intensive than other marketing strategies (Michaelidou et al., 2011; Stelzner, 2011; Cheek et al., 2013; Humphreys & Wilken, 2014; Schaupp & Belanger, 2014; Jones, Borgman, & Ulusoy, 2015).

### **2.5.5 Barriers and challenges of Social Media for small businesses**

Along with the previously mentioned challenges of using Social Media facing any business, such as the difficulty in measuring impact, and the lack of knowledge and skill (Jung et al., 2013; Chan & Guillet, 2011; Garrido-Moreno & Lockett, 2016), these and other barriers are magnified, when faced by small businesses in particular (Dahnil et al, 2014).

Owners of small businesses, with limited resources and employees, have to juggle several roles at the same time. Therefore, the lack of time is a factor when it comes to accomplishing any task for owners of small businesses. As well as this, the lack of financial resources, and the low number of employees, is a hindrance when it comes to utilising Social Media as a tool (Dahnil et al., 2014; Hassan, Nadzim, & Shiratuddinc, 2015; Rugova & Prenaj, 2016). However, the empowerment of consumers through Social Media requiring one-to-one communications can be risky; and there is the risk of damaging rumours or misinformation going viral (being spread rapidly online) which are challenges faced by small businesses using Social Media (Cheek et al., 2013).

### **2.5.6 Small businesses in tourism**

Most tourism destinations have welcomed large global brands to operate within the tourism landscape of their regions. Despite this, the backbone of the tourism industry across the globe is made up of a large number of privately owned and operated small businesses, often with fewer than 10-20 employees (Jones & Haven-Tang, 2005). The service oriented tourism industry, with consumers that seek a personal experience tailored to their specific needs, makes for a good fit with small businesses, which are perhaps more flexible than large corporations in catering to the specific needs of tourists (Novelli, Schmitz, & Spencer, 2006; Martínez-Román, Tamayo, Gamero, & Romero, 2015). Small businesses in tourism are unique because they have the flexibility to offer these tailor-made, personal experiences, which in turn creates specific customer-service orientated challenges.

Tourism products are also interdependent – they are usually bought from different suppliers and are a combination of different products. This is because most tourists want the flexibility and freedom that may not come with a package deal. They want the freedom to stay in one place, eat from somewhere different, and perhaps travel to different attractions (O'Connor, 1999). The fragmented nature of the tourism sector opens the door for participation of many privately owned, often family-run small business, who can cater

to tourists needs by offering these specific products and services (Getz, Carlsen, & Morrison, 2005).

### **Small businesses in tourism and lifestyle entrepreneurship**

Small businesses in the tourism industry, while sharing some characteristics, are different to similar sized businesses in other sectors. The growth potential of small businesses in tourism can be somewhat restricted, due to various factors such as location, the catchment area, and the product on offer which is often very niche and aimed at a market which may be limited. This negates the need or option of adopting a strategy which is orientated wholly towards business growth. Many small businesses in the tourism industry are family run, often by couples and retirees, as a part time activity as a way of participating in their hobby, supplementing their income, and being in control of their lifestyles (Di Domenico, 2005; Getz et al., 2005).

The flexibility on offer with operating some tourism small businesses with often seasonal operational periods; sometimes on a low level of capital investment; and the lack of barriers to enter and exit the industry, are all factors which are associated with small businesses in the hospitality and tourism sector (Williams, Shaw, & Greenwood, 1989; Morrison, Andrews, & Baum, 2001; Morrison, & King, 2002; Hjalager, 2005). Although profit is obviously desired by lifestyle entrepreneurs, there can be more of a focus on survival while improving quality of life and being in control. A study of small tourism businesses in New Zealand showed that these intangible benefits are more attractive than pursuing business growth opportunities, and that time-consuming and financially challenging projects are not a priority (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000).

## **2.6 Marine Tourism**

### **2.6.1 The marine environment as a tourism product**

Travel to marine settings for recreational purposes has existed since ancient times. Going back centuries, the elite of ancient Greek and Roman societies often spent their leisure time at the seaside (Smith & Puczkó, 2009). With over 70% of the earth covered by oceans, it is unsurprising that the sea has always been a strong attraction for humans, with its importance as a source of food and transportation. With these observations in mind, it is no coincidence that much of the world's population lives along coastal areas, and that the majority of tourists choose to visit coastal destinations (Miller, 1993; Moreno & Amelung, 2009).

Despite the difficulty in identifying and standardising marine tourism statistics (Miller & Auyong, 1991; Miller, 1993; Hall, 2001; Orams, 2002), this form of tourism plays a major role in the economies of a large number of countries (Hall, 2001; Moreno & Amelung, 2009), and offers opportunities for continued development (Hall, 2001; Orams, 2002).

### **2.6.2 Marine Tourism position in New Zealand and Auckland**

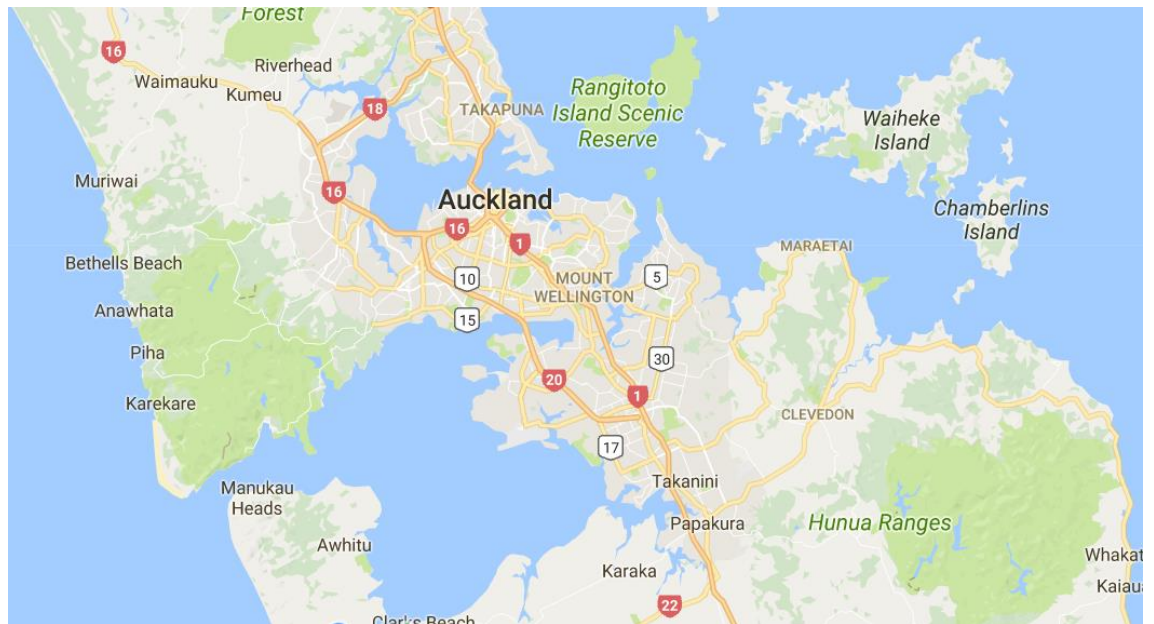
Arguably, the major attraction of New Zealand for many visitors to the country is the diverse natural scenery and environment on offer, from rainforests to beaches, and volcanoes to glaciers. A comparatively small nation made up of two main islands, it is surrounded by the ocean. With nowhere in the country that is more than 130km from the sea, and with a coastline which stretches for over 15,000 kilometres, the importance of the sea for most of the country is significant (Walrond, 2005). For work and for leisure, many New Zealanders spend a significant amount of their time in marine environments.

The abundance of marine settings also plays an important role in the country's tourism industry. The diverse range of marine tourism operators in New Zealand include water-sports activity operators including sea kayaking, fishing and surfing; as well as more passive activity providers such as small sea cruises and marine wildlife observation operators.

Auckland is the most populated city in New Zealand, with almost a third of country's population living in the city. Considered the gateway to New Zealand, with over 70% of all visitors to the country arriving in the city, Auckland is the country's most visited location (ATEED, n.d.). Lying on a two-kilometre wide isthmus (a narrow piece of land connecting two larger areas of land with water both sides), situated between two harbours, the city, often nicknamed "The City of Sails" (New Zealand, n.d.), is surrounded by the ocean, as is illustrated in the map below (Figure 8). With the Tasman Sea on one side and the South Pacific Ocean on the other, Auckland's coastline stretches for over 3000 kilometres (Auckland Council, n.d.). A quick glance at the TripAdvisor website shows that there are over forty attractions in the "Boat Tours and Water Sports" section (TripAdvisor, n.d.). The coastal location and the diverse ecology of Auckland, provides the perfect setting for marine tourism to flourish.



**Figure 8: Map of Auckland**



Source: Google, (n.d.).

### **2.6.3 Categorisation of the Marine Tourism Industry**

Orams (2002), categorises the marine tourism industry to include:

*Small to one-person operations:*

- Charter fishing-boat operators
- Sea-kayak tour guides
- Scuba-diving instructors

*Moderate-sized private companies:*

- Whale-watch cruise operators
- Charter-yacht companies

*Large, multinational co-operations:*

- Cruise-ship companies

*Indirectly-associated businesses:*

- Boat maintenance shops
- Coastal resorts
- Water sports and fishing equipment suppliers
- Island ferry services

*Associated government agencies for monitoring and management:*

- Marine park management agencies
- Tourism marketing and promotional bodies
- Law enforcement agencies

*Non-profit groups:*

- Water sport clubs
- Surf-life saving

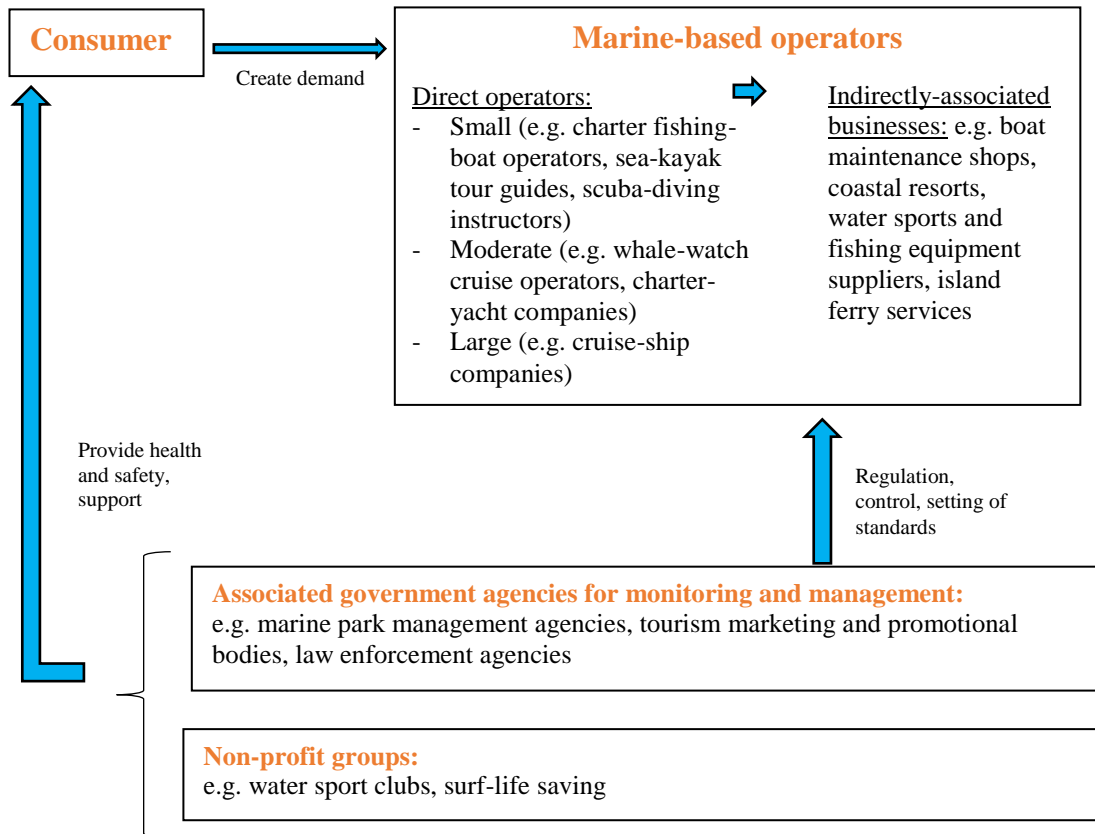
Orams (2002) utilises several variables to categorise the marine tourism industry. The most significant variable for categorisation is the operational environment. All marine tourism operations are nature based and operate in a marine environment, which can be defined as “waters that are saline and tide-affected,” (Orams, 1999, p. 9). The next variable used by Orams for categorisation includes the size of the operation – small to one person operators, moderate-sized operators, and large, multinational operators. Another variable used by Orams for categorisation is whether the operation is directly or indirectly associated. For instance, directly involved operators include those that offer a service for tourists to participate in activities, such as kayak guides and fishing boat operators.

The indirect operators are involved in order to make these services accessible to tourists; to supplement the operational capabilities of the service providers; to protect the environment that these service providers operate in; and to ensure that safety and security measures are dealt with. The indirectly involved operators include transportation services, maintenance facilities, and law enforcement agencies. The final variable used by Orams for categorisation is the ownership status of the marine operator. These include operations which are owned and run privately, such as fishing boat operators; those that are publicly owned and operated, such as marine park management agencies and law enforcement agencies, and finally non-profit organisations such as surf-life saving operations.

Each one of these operators and indirectly related agencies play a significant part in the running of the marine tourism industry. Of these variables, this focus of this study will target operations that:

- *operate in a marine environment*
- *are directly involved*
- *are privately owned*
- *are small to moderate sized* (referred to as “small” in this study)

**Figure 9: Variable, characteristics and links between marine tourism categories**



Adapted from: Orams, (2002).

Figure 9 outlines the links between the different categories of marine tourism operators as suggested by Orams, (2002), and the consumer. The tourists create the demand for marine-based operations by choosing to participate in marine tourism activities. The businesses which offer such marine tourism activities are the direct operators which include fishing boat operators, and whale-watching boat operators. These operators are supported by indirectly associated businesses, such as equipment suppliers and repair services.

The consumers, and direct and indirect marine-based operators are supported and facilitated by government monitoring and management agencies. These include marine park management agencies, law enforcement authorities, and national tourism marketing and promotional bodies. These monitoring and management agencies provide health and safety and support for tourists, and set controls for regulation and standards for the operators. Combined, each category helps to make up the marine tourism industry.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The analysis of previous research and academic literature in this chapter reveals that ICT developments have transformed the strategic and operational practices of the tourism industry. The rapid evolution of ICT has led to efficiency of processes at all levels associated with the management of tourism businesses. The interconnected nature of the various facets of the tourism industry makes the utilisation of efficient ICT procedures a must. Further developments of the internet and perhaps most importantly, Social Media, has led to the intensification of communications between the operator and the consumer. The consumer - the tourist, has been empowered by these developments at all phases of the tourism cycle, especially during the decision-making process. This has led to businesses needing to adapt and adopt Social Media as a tool for their operations. These developments and adaptations are magnified in the case of small businesses, due to their lack of resources and strategic management.

Small businesses in tourism are especially affected by the advance of Social Media, due to the nature of industry which involves close relations between producer and consumer, and the influence of consumer generated online content on purchasing behaviour of fellow tourists. This chapter has also analysed the importance of marine tourism businesses, to the tourism industry as a whole, and particularly to destinations with the geographical characteristics which lend themselves to the dominance of marine operations, such as in Auckland, New Zealand. The following chapter is a presentation of the methodological approach that was used in this study, and includes outlines of the research questions, as well as the summation of the research design, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations.

# **CHAPTER 3**

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **3. Methodology**

This chapter will discuss the general methodology that was used in the research. This includes discussions concerning the research paradigm, the sample selection and the processes that were used in data collection and analysis. The final part of this chapter will consider issues to do with research trustworthiness and ethics.

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the use and perception of Social Media as a marketing tool by small marine tourism operators based in Auckland. Tourism research is a complex area of study. To study the Social Media phenomenon and its use as a marketing tool by marine tourism operators, it is important to understand the perceptions and methods of individual stakeholders within this sector.

The initial discussion will focus on the theoretical approach or paradigm that is adopted for this study. Within academic research that has been conducted on the subject of tourism marketing, there seems to be an overemphasis on quantitative methods (Nodder et al., 2003). Nonetheless qualitative research methods have their place and will it is hoped lead to gaining a deeper understanding of socially constructed knowledge on the subject (Fesenmaier et al., 1996). While there is a dearth of studies that focus on Social Media usage by tourism businesses in New Zealand, virtually no studies have had a focus on Auckland (Howison et al., 2015).

As the intended research requires an interpretive understanding of the Social Media marketing phenomenon, from the viewpoint of the participants in the organisational context, a qualitative research method will be employed (Richards & Morse, 2007). This approach and how it is embedded in the methodological framework will be presented. Following this, the research tools for data collection and how they were developed will be presented. Next, the techniques used for data collection and data analysis will be discussed. The final part of this chapter will examine the ethical considerations that were taken into account whilst conducting the study.

#### **3.1 Research paradigm**

According to Guba (1990), a paradigm is, “a basic set of beliefs that guide actions,” (p.17). It is a set of beliefs that shape the philosophical worldview of a researcher and influences the manner in which research is conducted (Cresswell, 2009; Jennings, 2010). It is appropriate to define the paradigm that is used by this researcher as a basis for this study.

As its philosophical base, this study adopts an interpretivist paradigm in order to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions and usage of Social Media as a marketing tool by marine tourism operators. For social science research, which often uses qualitative research methods, an interpretivist paradigm is commonly employed (Andrade, 2009; Heppner & Heppner, 2004; Tracy, 2013; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). An interpretivist paradigm asserts that:

- a phenomenon can be explained by multiple realities, rather than just one theory;
- the whole research process is subjective;
- data collection occurs from the perspective of an insider, rather than an outside perspective;
- natural or real world settings are used to collect data, rather than in a controlled or experimental setting.

(Klein & Myers, 1999; Jennings, 2005)

The subjective nature of the researcher's views on the research topic plays a major role in the entire research process. For instance, the researcher's knowledge and familiarity with Social Media, and his perception of its usefulness as a marketing tool, has led to his decision to further develop this knowledge by undertaking this particular research. The researcher's subjective perception is that, perhaps due to the potential generational gap between himself and the participants of the research, he has a more familiar understanding of Social Media and its peculiarities, than the participants. Most participants of this study are "baby boomers" – those born between 1946 and 1964, or "Generation Xers" – those born between 1965 and 1976. The researcher was born after these dates, and is considered a part of "Generation Y" or as a part of the "Net Generation", who was born and grew up in an environment where exposure to computer-based technologies was common-place (Leung, 2013). Various studies have shown that older generations' relative unfamiliarity with computer-based communication technologies leads to less enthusiastic use of Social Media (Tapscott, 1988; Livingstone, 2002; Chou, Lai, & Liu, 2013, Leung, 2013).

While the researcher acknowledges that he seeks to understand his subjective experience, he reiterates that interpretive openness paves the way for knowledge creation, by tapping into the understandings and perceptions of the participants of the research.

Taking an interpretivist approach to research leads to understanding "the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it," (Schwandt, 1994, p.118) and leads to the researcher becoming a vehicle in revealing that reality is socially

constructed (Andrade, 2009). For this study, the researcher collected data from insiders, i.e. marine tourism operators who reflected on their Social Media usage in their narratives, their perceptions, understandings, and experiences. The research was conducted in a natural setting, with interviews taking place on the premises of the marine operators or a location chosen by the participants, such as a café.

**Table 3: Characteristics of the interpretivist paradigm used for this study**

Issue	Interpretivism
<i>Ontology</i>	Socially constructed, multiple realities.
<i>Epistemology</i>	Researcher and participant are inseparable and relationship is subjective; knowledge created is interwoven with the interactive dialogue.
<i>Method</i>	Qualitative method utilised; semi-structured, face-to-face interviews.

Adapted from: Tadjewski, (2006); Jennings, (2010).

In order to create knowledge from gaining deep understandings of the narratives and perceptions of the research subjects, the researcher must identify and engage in three proponents of a paradigm: **ontology, epistemology and methodology** (Guba, 1990). Table 3 outlines the different characteristics of the interpretivist paradigm used for this study. Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality. Followers of an interpretivist paradigm strongly stress that there are multiple truths and realities; an inductive approach to the research is followed; and knowledge is acquired whilst beginning the research from an empirical viewpoint (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Heppner & Heppner, 2004; Jennings, 2010).

In terms of this study, the researcher believes that an interpretivist paradigm is the most appropriate, and that each research participant will offer their version of reality in order to answer the questions posed to them. An inductive approach is most appropriate for this study as clear links can be established between findings from the collected data and the research objectives. Organised procedures in analysing the qualitative data can produce binding and reliable findings which will help to develop a framework which highlights processes and experience from the raw data (Thomas, 2006).

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of the relationship between the researcher and research subjects. The researcher is intrinsically connected to the research and the research subjects. The knowledge that the researcher acquires and creates is interwoven with the interactive dialogue that is created with research participants (Guba & Lincoln,



1994; Heppner & Heppner, 2004; Jennings, 2010). The researcher in this study will bring his own empathetic values to the interview process, and together with the participants, knowledge and conclusions will be created and identified.

The methodological basis is concerned with the set of guidelines that are adhered to when inquiring and gaining knowledge. These guidelines are formulated with reference to the two previous concepts. In order to gain knowledge from an empirical viewpoint, a qualitative method is used during the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Jennings, 2010). Using qualitative research methods within an interpretivist paradigm presents the opportunity to gather rich and fruitful explanations of a complex phenomenon (Silverman, 2011; Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is characterised by its aims (Richards & Morse, 2002; Merriam, 2009; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2009), in this case to gain an interpretive understanding of the perception and experiences of Social Media marketing from the point of view of small marine tourism operators in Auckland.

Qualitative methods will be used to enable collection of data which will lead to understanding the behaviour, drive, motivations, and barriers which in turn lead to actions, perceptions and processes (Decrop, 2004). An interpretivist form of inquiry will be adopted in order to inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings throughout the research period (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). A semi-structured questioning technique will be used to allow the interviewee to open-up. Adopting a semi-structured interview format can lead to interviews taking an unexpected direction and may uncover previously unconsidered areas (Kvale & Brickman, 2009), making it particularly useful in an inductive scientific approach. This method of interviewing will help the researcher to gain an in-depth, insider perspective to understand the phenomenon of the use of Social Media for marketing purposes by the participants.

### **3.2 Case study**

The researcher believes that this lack of knowledge leads to difficulty in creating a conceptual model through existing literature. With this in mind, along with the purpose of this study, an exploratory case study approach is deemed to be the most suitable for this research. A case study can be described as an enquiry which empirically examines a contemporary phenomenon, in this case, Social Media as a marketing tool for marine tourism businesses, within a certain context, which for this study is the city of Auckland (Yin, 2014).

There is some academic debate on the appropriateness of a case study approach. As the research focus may not be clearly stated from the outset, the emergent nature of the study focus (Stake, 1995), may lead to an increase in the amount of resources that are required for the study. Furthermore, with case studies, the process of research is subjective, and findings of the study cannot be generalised as they are specific to the study. However, the case study approach allows for the collection of in-depth data, with evidence that is substantiated in the social setting that is being examined (Stake, 1995; Jennings, 2010). An exploratory case study approach is most appropriate in this study due to its inductive nature and the lack of previous research on the specific topic (Stake, 1995).

### **3.3 Sample selection**

Various criteria were followed in the sample selection process. Firstly, the participants had to offer a tourism activity that operated in a marine environment. Next, they must be located in a certain geographic area (Auckland). The next criterion was that the operators employed less than 20 full time employees, in order to be considered as a small business. Finally, the participants had to participate on two or more Social Media channels. In order to acquire an appropriate sample, a non-random, purposive sampling technique was used. This technique involved the researcher's judgement and criteria to select members for a sample that were considered to be most representative of a population or group, and could be said to provide a richer depth of information than random samples (Brown, 2012; Patton, 2002).

The sample of marine tourism operators in Auckland was selected from the travel website TripAdvisor's list of "Boat Tours & Water Sports in Auckland" (TripAdvisor, n.d.). This list is seen to be comprehensive as it is assumed that most tourism businesses in the area would be present on TripAdvisor. The list consisted of forty operators, of which approximately ten were large companies and ferry operators. They were excluded from the sample frame as the research was targetting small businesses, and specifically tourism operators and not transportation services.

Three businesses on the list were deemed to be no longer operating, due to a combination of broken links to the business' websites, and lack of visible recent activity on their Social Media channels. This left just over twenty-five businesses that were targetted for the research. An online audit was conducted on the remaining businesses on the list, and those operators that were not active on corporate Social Media channels that they manage

themselves, were excluded from the study, leaving a total of twenty businesses that were targetted for this study. Ultimately, 12 of these businesses agreed to participate in this study.

### **3.4 Research instrument**

The exploratory nature of this study was due to the limited theoretical framework on the subject. Semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews was the instrument used as this method has been shown to provide rich and potentially meaningful information, in the limited time period available to complete this research (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2010). An interview can be defined as a conversation which has a purpose, and is established on a personal and mutually trusting relationship between the interviewer and interviewee (Dexter, 2006; Oakley, 1981).

Semi-structured interviews such as the ones carried out for this research are associated with the epistemological and ontological perspectives of an interpretivist paradigm (Jennings, 2010). This type of interview provides multiple realities; are subjective; are in-depth; and the open-ended questions point the interviewee in the appropriate direction, providing a fluid and usually meaningful interaction between the participants. During a semi-structured interview, rapport can be established; queries can be clarified on the spot; follow-up questions can provide deeper understanding of the phenomenon; and the researcher can guide the interviewee in an appropriate and focussed direction (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Jennings, 2010).

The interview questions for this research were based around the main research question:

**What are the perceptions and experiences of Social Media marketing for small marine tourism operators in Auckland?**

and the sub-questions;

**How do these businesses perceive Social Media as a marketing tool, and what barriers and limitations do they face in utilising Social Media?**

**How is Social Media utilised as a marketing tool by these businesses?**

**How can Social Media strategies be improved?**

The above questions were derived from the aims of this study. Several topics were chosen as a background to guide the semi-structured interview process. The topics stemmed from

a combination of the researcher's own thinking and from the theoretical framework which was researched for this study. The topics are outlined in Table 4.

**Table 4: Topics covered during the interview process**

Research question topics	Motive for choosing the topic	Literature that the topics are derived from
<i>Background</i>	To gain an understanding of how the business operates, especially from marketing sense.	Hassan et al, (2015); Hood, (2013).
<i>Initial Social Media starting point</i>	To discover the reasons for initial Social Media utilisation.	Bondarouk & Olivas-Lujan, (2013); Lardi & Fuchs, (2013); Safko, (2012).
<i>Experiences of using Social Media</i>	To discover how Social Media is utilised by the business.	Researcher's personal enquiries.
<i>Perceptions of Social Media, and Social Media as a marketing tool.</i>	To understand the thoughts of the participants on the usefulness of Social Media, and its usefulness as a marketing tool.	Researcher's personal enquiries.
<i>Barriers and limitations</i>	To discover what prevents these businesses from utilising Social Media effectively.	Dahnil et al, (2014); Hassan, Nadzim & Shiratuddinc, (2015); Rugova & Prenaj, (2016).
<i>Strategies</i>	To discover if the businesses have an ultimate goal in the utilisation of Social Media.	Bondarouk & Olivas-Lujan, (2013); Lardi & Fuchs, (2013); Safko, (2012).

### 3.5 Data collection process

#### 3.5.1 Data sources

Semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were carried out to gather data from small marine tourism operators in Auckland. Initially, to investigate the theoretical framework for this study, and to evaluate the operating environment of the participant operators, secondary sources of data which had a relevance to this research topic, were analysed. This included books, peer-reviewed journal articles, various statistics, and the internet.

#### 3.5.2 Primary data collection process

The primary data collection process began with contacting the potential participants by email with a brief introduction to the researcher and a description of the research project. If the participant showed an interest in participating, an official invitation was sent by

email (see Appendix A) to provide further information on the purpose and procedure of the research project and process. Fifteen potential participants did not reply to the initial email and were contacted again, either by telephone or in person.

All participants that responded positively to the request for participation were provided with a Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix B) with procedural information, and were clearly informed of their roles and rights throughout the process. After agreeing on date and times, participants were interviewed either at their workplaces or at a designated place of their choice. All interviews were audio recorded, as well the researcher taking notes throughout the process. Ten interviews took place between March and September 2016 in Auckland and each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. Two participants, who initially were not able to participate in the initial interview process, were contacted again in August to see if they were available. They agreed to take part in the research and the interviews were carried out in September, leading to a total of 12 interviews.

Table 5 on page 61 in the next chapter provides a summary of the participant and business characteristics of all those that partook in this study. All the participants were given pseudonyms and the reason for this is explained in the next chapter.

Several of the participants were contacted again in October 2016 to see if they were available for a further interview, to discuss some topics that arose after analysis of the initial primary data. Only one participant obliged, and a further ten-minute recorded interview was carried out in November.

The various Social Media channels of the businesses were audited. The information that was collected consisted of the number of “followers” and “likes” that the operators have on their various Social Media channels; as well as how often there was interaction between the businesses and the general public. This information was collected so that the researcher had some idea of the Social Media practices of the operators before the process, and it was used to try to gain a background to understanding the perceptions and motivations of the participants.

At the start of the interview, the research topic and purpose was repeated to the participants. The participants were reminded of the details of the consent form (see Appendix C) and final permission was sought to continue with the interview. The interview began with some background questions, which concentrated on demographics and personal information. The main interview questions, based around the research questions (see Appendix D) were then asked.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

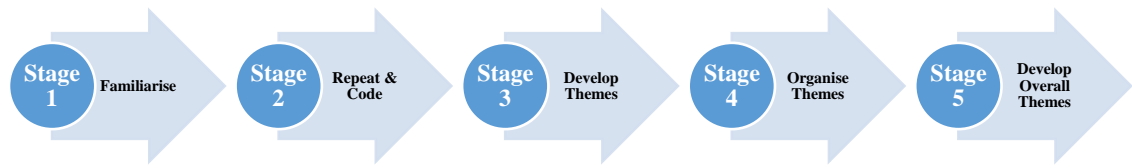
Data analysis is a process that brings structure and order to, and interprets a mass of data. This process enables content to be identified and knowledge to be developed by searching for and developing statements concerning relationships between data categories (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Proper and thorough analysis of qualitative data, with words that are structured into stories and statements, can have the quality of being undeniable. The vivid and rich depth of meaningful, organised, and concrete words can be far more convincing to the reader than pages of numbers, which is often the outcome when analysing quantitative data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

The primary data that was collected from the participants in the interview process was analysed using thematic analysis. This method supported the inductive nature of the qualitative methodology that was used in this study. It involves reading and re-reading text in order to recognise patterns and emerging themes (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 1999; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Thematic analysis is concerned with the identification and description of explicit and implicit ideas or themes from within qualitative data, to develop codes that represent these themes. These codes can in turn be further analysed to produce knowledge and conclusions that capture complex meanings within a textual data set (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012).

Within tourism research, thematic analysis is most frequently used to interpret written documents, for example interview transcripts, which is the case in this study (Walters, 2016). There are some concerns about the validity and rigorousness of this form of analysis, due to the lack of details about the methods used in some tourism research studies. However, thematic analysis can be seen to be demonstrably suitable in situations where concepts are linguistically ambiguous, and can be deemed to be academically rigorous if data is dealt with correctly and thoroughly (Decrop, 2004; Walters, 2016).

To guarantee that analysis of data in this study was rigorous and reliable as possible, a detailed process of thematic analysis was carried out over five stages. Figure 10 demonstrates the process of thematic analysis that was carried out to assure rigorousness and reliability. These stages are summarised below:

**Figure 10: Stages of thematic analysis**



Adapted from: Attride-Stirling, (2001); Braun & Clarke, (2006).

#### Stage 1: *Familiarise*

The first stage in the data analysis process is carried out to make sure that the researcher is familiar with the content of the data. This involved fully transcribing all the interviews. To become fully familiarised with the data, the transcripts were initially read holistically in order to gain an overall understanding of the data (Strauss, 1987). During the initial readings, recurring words and phrases, and words and phrases that seemed significant were highlighted. Further readings led to the development of initial ideas which were noted down. When developing these ideas and themes, special attention was paid to links with tourism and Social Media literature.

#### Stage 2: *Repeat and code*

Following this, the transcripts were read and re-read several times with the highlighted words and phrases and initial ideas in mind. These words and phrases, such as “*free advertising*”, “*time*”, “*share photos*”, and initial ideas (e.g. lack of resources, initial ease of setting up Social Media), were noted. Each word/phrase and theme was categorised according to descriptors derived from the initial research question, such as “*perceived*”, “*beliefs*”, “*utilisation*”, “*limitations*”. With these categories in mind, further reading followed with any additional phrases or ideas that were picked up being placed within the table.

The phrases and ideas were also categorised in to two other coding categories – descriptive and analytical (Strauss, 1987). Specific words and phrases that were noted from the data were included in the descriptive category. This collection of text from the data via descriptive coding, forms a summary description of the transcript. Ideas and themes that were developed from the specific text during the coding process become part of the analytical coding process (Saldana, 2016). For example, words from the text such as “*doing something I love*”, and “*no time*” led to themes being developed such as “*passiveness*” or “*low expectations*”. This process was continued until no further codes

could be developed and thematic saturation – data analysed until no further ideas or themes emerge (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012) – had occurred.

#### Stage 3 – *Develop themes*

The third stage of the analytical process involved constructing, developing, and merging themes. With phrases being placed in categories which were derived from the initial research question, as well as descriptive and analytical categories, several themes and ideas began to emerge. Careful consideration and analysis led to the development of these themes, which were often merged with other themes to create and develop new themes. An example of this during this study included the development of “*doing something I love*” and “*low expectation*” and “*passiveness*”, into the new theme of “*entrepreneurial lifestyle*”.

#### Stage 4 – *Organise themes*

The themes that were developed and constructed were then organised. This was done by again categorising them into concepts from the original theoretical questions. The themes were placed in each category in order of perceived importance. An example of this is the theme of “*entrepreneurial lifestyle*” which was placed in the “*limitations*” category. Some of themes emerged in multiple categories.

#### Stage 5 – *Develop overall themes*

The final stage of the data analysis process was the development of overall or “global” themes. These global themes help to tell the researcher and reader what the data is about in the context of the research study. The development of global themes helps to summarise main themes and reveal an overall interpretation of the collected data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The original themes that were discovered were condensed to create a global theme, though there may be more than one global theme that arises, as in this study. The global themes that are developed are the main conclusions of the findings of the research data.

### **3.7 Trustworthiness of research**

The flexible nature of qualitative research with multiple methodological approaches and lack of generalisations due to the relatively small sample size of most studies, ought to lead to rich collected data and in-depth interpretations. In order to take a rigorous



approach to qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that four conditions; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, are followed.

#### *Credibility*

Credibility is concerned with internal validity. It examines the researcher's ability to design the study and the methodical practices of the researcher (Gray, 2009). With this study, collected information was filed and accurately reproduced, especially within the transcribing process. Furthermore, research participants voluntarily took part and they were assured of anonymity with the option to withdraw during any stage of the research process. In order to avoid misunderstandings or misinterpretations, participants were offered the opportunity to view the transcribed interview manuscripts. The detailed process of thematic data analysis, which included extensive coding procedures and thorough and detailed development of concepts, guarantees that other researchers can understand the analytical procedures.

#### *Transferability*

Transferability is concerned with external validity, which looks at whether the practices in this study can be transferred to other similar research studies (Gray, 2009). To allow this, details of the study are provided, such as information on location, participants, data collection methods, data analysis and limitations of the study.

#### *Dependability and confirmability*

Dependability is concerned with reliability of the study, and confirmability is concerned with objectivity (Shenton, 2004). To make sure this study is dependable, all processes have been reported in detail which can lead to enabling future replications of the study. Though the study will be impossible to exactly replicate, the details of the procedures are recorded and replication in part can be carried using the boundaries and methods of this study.

Absolute objectivity is difficult to ensure in a study such as this. It is impossible to guarantee 100% objectivity in a study of this nature. To counter this, by citing evidence from the literature and by the equal treatment of all participants' data, and the unbiased analysing of data, confirmability can be maximised (Shenton, 2004).

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

There is no specific ethical focus of the research and the research can be considered low-risk. Despite this, ethical considerations will be accounted for which incorporate the Treaty of Waitangi's three key principles of *partnership, participation and protection* (AUT, 2016). Permission to carry out the research was sought from AUT Ethics Committee (AUTEC). An ethics approval form was completed and submitted to AUTEC. The research was approved by AUTEC on the 28th January 2016. When contacting the participants in regards to participating in the research, they were informed of their rights. This included their privacy being fully protected, with full anonymity offered to each participant. They were also informed that they could review any information that they gave and that their participation in the study could be withdrawn at any time.

After agreeing to these points, all participants signed a consent form containing this information and were again verbally informed of their right before the interviews commenced. In analysing, the data obtained from the participants, every effort was made to value the information and report it as accurately and unbiased as possible, which should lead to benefits for them and the researcher. Finally, participants were offered a final report which summarised the findings, and offered recommendations that could help their operations.

### **3.9 Summary**

This chapter offered an outline of the methodology that was used for this study. This includes a summary of the research design and the rationale for the qualitative study of the use of Social Media for marketing by small marine tourism operators based in Auckland. The chapter aimed to describe the various research steps taken when carrying out this including the sample selection, and data collection and analysis process. This has been done in order to provide the reader with an extensive understanding of the context of the research, which will enable them to comprehend the following chapters which summarise and discuss the findings from the data that was collected.

# CHAPTER 4

## FINDINGS

## **4. Findings**

After following the research steps that were summarised in the previous chapter, the aim of this chapter is to provide an extensive summary of the data that was collected by in the semi-structured interviews with the selected study participants. The findings from the collected data, relates to the research questions which are presented here in the form of relevant quotations from the interviews, and brief explanations of the themes that arose.

Prior to the interview process, all the operators were offered anonymity. Several of the operators requested anonymity before participating. Many of the participants were in direct competition with each other, offering similar products, and all operated in close proximity to each other. It was decided that all interviewees' names, and their business names, would be kept anonymous to protect the identity of those requesting anonymity. The names used for the participants in this study are pseudonyms. In the following discussions, the participants will be referred to as "participants", "interviewees", and "operators".

The first section of this chapter will provide a summary of the characteristics of the participants and their businesses. It will include a discussion of the findings, which relate to how the participants utilised Social Media, and will focus discussion on the characteristics of the operators; the business' advertising methods; and the adoption and the use of the various Social Media channels. The second part of this chapter will concentrate on Social Media adoption and management by the participants in this study. The final section of this chapter will discuss the perceptions of the participants in relation to their use of Social Media as a marketing tool for their business. This will include discussion of their motivation for using this tool, and the barriers and limitations that they face when adopting and utilising Social Media.

### **4.1 Participant and business characteristics**

Table 5 provides an outline of the background information of the interviewees and their businesses, including a summary of the type of advertising channels that they utilise to promote their operations. Out of the twelve participants of this study, all but one were male, with over half being over the age of 45. Only two of the participants were in the youngest age group of 25-34 years. All the participants employ less than 20 full time staff (FTS) and hence fit into the category of small businesses that was considered for this research. Significantly, none of the businesses employed more than six full-time staff,

highlighting the very small scale of the operations in question. The businesses were grouped depending on the type of activity that they offered. The four categories being:

***Fishing:*** These businesses offer off-shore fishing trips for customers.

***Water Sports:*** These businesses offer water-based sports such as, specifically in this study, sea-kayaking tours and rentals, and stand-up paddle boarding.

***Sailing & Cruising:*** These businesses offer cruises and sailing trips on yachts, sailing boats, and small cruise boats.

***Sightseeing & Wildlife Watching:*** These businesses offer aerial sightseeing tours using small sea-planes, and marine wildlife observation tours.

#### **4.1.1 Participant characteristics: lifestyle choice and influence**

The businesses that participated in this study offer recreational activities as their main product. As explored in the previous chapter, many SMBs, especially tourism SMBs are operated by owners that tend to have some focus in maintaining a certain type lifestyle through their jobs, in the place of ultimately seeking profit and business growth as a priority. Participants were questioned as to how much influence their lifestyle choices had on the way they ran their businesses. Most participants indicated that their choice of work was influenced by their choice of lifestyle:

*“Oh yea. I wouldn’t wanna be doing anything else. I grew up on the water and I get to spend half the year on the water, doing what I love” - Callum*

*“It’s definitely one of the reasons. It’s definitely a hobby as well as a job,” – John.*

There was strong urge to maintain their lifestyles amongst the participants. Several participants indicated that lifestyle choice was a factor in the way they operated their business, and this had an influence in the way the business was run, including the way used their Social Media channels.

At the outset several interviewees stated that it was vital that their businesses performed, and so they had to make sure that they were fully committed to promoting and running their operations at a profitable level:

**Table 5: Participant and business characteristics; and main advertising focus**

Participant	Type of marine business	Role	Sex	Age Group	F T S	Target Market	Advertising Channels
<b>1. James</b>	Fishing	Owner-operator	Male	55+	2	International & domestic	Website, Social Media, Print, Destination marketing companies, Online discounting channels, Review sites.
<b>2. Richard</b>	Water Sports	Owner	Male	35-44	2	Young International & domestic	Website, Internet, Social Media, Destination marketing comps, Online discounting channels, Review sites.
<b>3. Jane</b>	Water Sports	Owner-operator	Female	45-54	1	Domestic female	Website, Social Media, Word of mouth.
<b>4. Bob</b>	Water Sports	Owner-operator	Male	25-34	3	International & domestic	Website, Internet, Social Media, Print, Inbound tour operators, Destination marketing companies, Online discounting channels, Commission based Online booking agents. Review sites.
<b>5. Phil</b>	Fishing	Owner	Male	55+	2	Older domestic	Website, Social Media, Word of mouth
<b>6. Sam</b>	Sailing & Cruises	Owner / Manager	Male	55+	2	Not defined	Website, Social Media, Online discounting channels, Commission based online booking agents. Review websites.
<b>7. Peter</b>	Sailing & Cruising	Owner	Male	35-44	1	International & domestic	Website, Internet, Social Media, Print, Inbound tour operators, Destination marketing companies, Online discounting channels.
<b>8. Joe</b>	Sailing & Cruising / Fishing	Owner-operator	Male	55+	4	International & domestic	Website, Social Media, Radio, Word of mouth. Review sites.
<b>9. Callum</b>	Water Sports	Owner-operator	Male	35-44	6	Young, international & domestic	Website, Internet, Social Media, Print, Inbound tour operators, Destination marketing comps, Online discounting channels. Review sites, Commission based online booking agents.
<b>10. Matt</b>	Fishing	Owner-operator	Male	55+	2	Older domestic	Website, Social Media, Word of mouth
<b>11. Brian</b>	Sightseeing & Wildlife Watching	General Manager	Male	25-34	4	International & domestic	Website, Internet, Social Media, Print, Inbound tour operators, Destination marketing comps, Online discounting channels, Commission based online booking agents. Review sites.
<b>12. John</b>	Sightseeing & Wildlife Watching	Chief Exec.	Male	45-54	5	International & domestic	Website, Internet, Social Media, Print, Inbound tour operators, Destination marketing comps, Online discounting channels, Commission based online booking agents. Review sites.

*“Everything I own is in the business and if this business goes down I have nothing. It is super important for me that the business is successful otherwise I have nothing. That's why I have to be on Social Media, have to promote myself, I have to work when the business is here. I cannot fail, that makes sense? That puts huge amounts of pressure on me. That's when it becomes a job,” – Bob.*

*“Oh my job is great. But it's really hard work. I am working continuously. 15 hours a day some days. Whether I'm out on the water or in the office sorting out bookings, marketing, Social Media stuff or other things. I can't afford not to be,” – Richard.*

*“This company needs to be self-sustaining and profitable. We need be able to grow and invest continuously so it's not just a lifestyle choice but on the other hand it's not pure profit maximisation because I have other interests, other objectives as well for this business,” – John.*

For many participants, the only way to continue doing a job that was also a lifestyle, realistically meant the need to keep the business growing. This was the reality for these operators. The only way to be self-sustainable and to keep the business operating, and work in a job that was also a lifestyle choice, meant a lot of hard work, sacrifice, and pressure.

Three of the participants were semi-retirees who had previously worked in industries that were totally unrelated to what they were doing now. There were indications that this affected the way they ran their businesses, including marketing aspects, such as Social Media:

*“For me, it's not all about making lots of money and being really busy. I'm doing what I enjoy and I'll go out on trips even if we don't have any clients,” – Phil.*

*“We don't have a lot of money for advertising and stuff. It's more word of mouth between friends,” – Jane.*

*“No I don't think I'm going to spend any more time on Social Media than I do. I'd rather be out on the water,” – Matt.*

For these participants, their choice of profession was heavily influenced by the lifestyle choice associated with it. Furthermore, some of the ways they operated their businesses corresponded to this, such as the targeting of only domestic customers, and the lack of advertising channels.

#### **4.1.2 Target Market**

In terms of the target market for the businesses involved, a majority, eight out of twelve, looked to attract both international and domestic customers. Four of the operators targetted specified age groups (younger or older), and three of the interviewees stated that they only target domestic tourists. When questioned as to why they limited themselves to only targetting domestic clientele, the main reason they gave was that they felt domestic customers were easier to deal with:

*“We’ve got a regular group of locals that come with us. It’s just easier dealing with them,”* – Matt.

*“We’ve had a few tourists but it’s hard to communicate with them with the language issues. And we have plenty of locals that come so we try to get them,”* – Phil.

The reluctance to target every potential customer market available indicates a lack of priority towards business growth, and ties in with entrepreneurial lifestyle aspect mentioned previously.

Only one business was owned and operated by a female. When asked about her target market, she stated that she only targets domestic female clients. In this case, there seemed to be a reluctance to expand and develop her business. Asked as to why this was the case, she explained that her whole business actually started off as a weekly meeting with her female friends, and that she wanted to continue to run the business in that type of environment:

*“We started going out together as a group of friends every weekend. You know, as a catch up, and to have some wine afterwards. And then after I stopped working full-time, I thought why not expand it a bit?.. So we just have a regular group of friends, who sometimes bring along their friends and its gone on a bit from there,”*  
– Jane.

Once more, the indication here is that there is a tendency towards maintenance of a lifestyle, rather than a full focus on targetted business growth.

#### **4.1.3 Advertising channels**

With regards to approaches that were used for advertising, there was a wide range of methods that were utilised. All the participants promoted their businesses using their website and other forms of internet related advertising methods, such as the use of Social



Media. Most of the participants also made use of destination marketing companies, such as the Auckland i-SITE Visitor Information Centres. They used i-SITES to promote their businesses by providing them with brochures and information to assist potential customers. This was the main form of print advertising that the participants utilised. The brochures were also distributed around the city of Auckland. Several interviewees felt that print media had very little value except if their businesses were participating in a tourism fair or a show:

*“I only really use brochures if I’m at some tourism show or for the i-SITES. I printed lots in the past and have a huge load at home,” – James.*

*“We definitely don’t bother with magazines or newspapers. It’s a waste of money I reckon,” – Richard.*

This corresponds with the views of the majority of participants, in that they felt print advertising was in general an outdated and wasteful form of promotion.

Two of the interviewees felt that advertising in magazines was worthwhile in certain circumstances, and to specific demographics. They also made clear that the promotions included not just the adverts, they also made sure that there was an article included, which promoted their business by describing in detail, the product that they provided:

*“We also do some advertising in magazines but this is largely not adverts, largely features, which provides much more efficient self-exposure,” – John.*

*Most of our clientele come from the more affluent areas, because it’s an expensive thing to do. And it’s only really people with a good disposable income that can afford it. So this magazine here, it’s a lifestyle magazine that’s sent to the central suburbs. And for example we paid for this advert down here, and in return we got a two-page spread on page 18 and 19. We can’t afford to just have an advert. We need to get a little more for it. You know we paid for that to get this,” – Bob.*

The category of print advertising utilised by Bob and John is not in the tradition form of a basic advertisement with a photograph and perhaps some contact information. Instead, they preferred feature articles to be included, which perhaps tells a story of what they offer, as they felt that this would provide a more powerful way of promoting their business. Phil, Matt, and Jane stated that they only targetted the domestic market, and they were also amongst the participants who did not utilise print advertising at all. This could be due to the fact that they felt that brochures are only useful for targetting the

international market, though there is no evidence of this. In these cases, the reason for the lack of print advertising is more likely due to the cost, as Richard indicates above.

Bob also mentioned that another way his business utilised print advertising, targetting those that do not use the internet:

*“We also advertise leading up to holidays in the Central Leader and in the East & Bays Courier. And that is really to attract people that don't use Social Media or internet because not everyone uses it. We get a little bit of the older clientele. People looking for gift vouchers or those looking to do something, that aren't always on the internet.”*

It is important to note that these two businesses that make use of print advertising the most, also offered a product that were among the most expensive amongst all the participants of this study. This conceivably, was due to the category of clientele that they wished to reach with this type of advertising; who are perhaps older, have a large disposable income, and do not use the internet or Social Media as much as other demographics.

It is also worth noting that the target market for two of the interviewees that did not utilise print advertising (Phil and Matt), was the older demographic. This contradicts the statement from Bob that he uses print advertising to target the older generation who perhaps do not use the internet regularly. There may be a miscalculation in Phil's and Matt's strategy of targetting the older segment of the market, without utilising print advertising. We can again refer this back to their possible lack of priority towards pure business growth.

Despite the anomalies of significant utilisation of print advertising with Bob's and John's businesses, the majority of participants favoured online methods to advertise their business. Other forms of online advertising that were preferred included the use of online discounting channels and commission-based online booking agents.

#### **4.1.4 Review and Recommendation Sites and electronic word of mouth**

Several interviewees also stated that most of their clientele discovered them on Review and Recommendation Sites (RRSs). TripAdvisor, from which the sample frame was obtained for this study; is the preferred RRS for the participants. This electronic word of mouth advertising channel was found to be extremely useful. The significance of TripAdvisor for acquiring customers was highlighted by several participants:

*“I reckon nearly all the clients we get check out TripAdvisor beforehand. Especially the international ones,” – Callum.*

*“TripAdvisor is by far the most useful to get customers. Everyone looks at TripAdvisor. It’s the 2nd to word of mouth,” – Bob.*

*“A lot of them mention that they found us on TripAdvisor,” – Richard.*

TripAdvisor’s cost free set up, far-reaching nature, and requirement for minimal management, especially if the business’ main aim is to garner reviews for potential clients to consult, makes it a popular choice of Social Media channel for the participants.

A large majority of participants indicated that most of their advertising focus would continue to be online and this included their websites, online discounting channels, commission based online booking agents and RRSs. With the various Social Media channels that they were using, most interviewees stated that despite certain barriers, and lack of knowledge, and future planning, they wished to expand their use of this form of advertising. This will be discussed further in the following section.

## **4.2 Social Media adoption and management**

Table 6 provides an overview of the types of Social Media channels used by each participating business; the date of their earliest use of Social Media; the type of content that is uploaded; and information with regards to feedback from customers. These areas will be discussed further in the following sections.

### **4.2.1 Uptake and Types of Social Media.**

All participants were originally selected after reviewing “Boat Tours & Water Sports in Auckland,” (TripAdvisor, n.d.) list. The participants that were chosen for this study had to be active on two or more Social Media channels. All the Social Media channels are divided into the previously stated categories: *Social Networks (SNs)*; *Micro-Blogs (MBs)*; *Media Content Sharing Communities (MSCs)*; and *Review and Recommendation Sites (RRSs)*. As the sample frame was chosen from TripAdvisor, all participants appeared on RRSs. All the businesses were part of SNs, with every one of them utilising Facebook, and half appearing on Google +. All but two of the businesses appeared on Twitter (MBs), and a small majority utilised MSCs, such as YouTube and Instagram.

**Table 6: Participants' Social Media usage**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Social Media (SM) Types</b>	<b>Earliest use of SM</b>	<b>Type of Content</b>	<b>Feedback encouragement</b>	<b>Feedback Response</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>1. James</b>	SNs (FB, G+) MBs (Tw) MSCs (YT) RRSs (TA)	September 2010	Media content of tours.	Asks for reviews on TA via email.	Acknowledgement within a few hours.	FB – main platform with regular posts. Little to no activity on other accounts.
<b>2. Richard</b>	SNs (FB) MBs (Tw) RRSs (TA)	July 2013	Media content of tours.	Asks for reviews on TA via email.	Acknowledgement within 2-3 days.	FB - main platform with regular posts.
<b>3. Jane</b>	SNs (FB) MSCs (YT) RRSs (TA)	January 2015	Media content of tours. Tour info. Related external links	Asks for media of tours on FB	Acknowledgement within 1 day.	FB – regular content uploaded.
<b>4. Bob</b>	SNs (FB, G+) MBs (Tw) MSCs (YT, In) RRSs (TA)	April 2011	Media content of tours. Some related external content.	Asks for reviews on TA via email.	Acknowledgement within 2-3 days	Regular FB, In content. Irregular on other platforms.
<b>5. Phil</b>	SNs (FB) MBs (Tw) RRSs (TA)	March 2014	Media content of tours.	No.	No interaction.	Content on FB uploaded about once a month or less.
<b>6. Sam</b>	SNs (FB) MBs (Tw) RRSs (TA)	December 2011	Media content of tours.	No.	Little to no interaction.	Content on FB uploaded about once a month or less.
<b>7. Peter</b>	SNs (FB) MBs (Tw) RRSs (TA)	September 2012	Media content of tours. Tour info. Related external links	Asks for media of tours on FB. Asks for reviews on TA via email.	Acknowledgement within 1 day	Regular content uploaded on FB and Twitter.
<b>8. Joe</b>	SNs (FB, G+) MBs (Tw) RRSs (TA)	September 2008	Media content of tours. Tour info.	No.	Little to no interaction. Bad reviews ignored.	Regular content uploaded on FB only.
<b>9. Callum</b>	SNs (FB, G+) MBs (Tw) MSCs (In) RRSs (TA)	August 2013	Media content of tours. Related external links.	Asks for TA reviews on the tours.	Acknowledgement within a few hours.	Regular content uploaded on FB and In. FB linked to Tw.
<b>10. Matt</b>	SNs (FB) MSCs (YT) RRSs (TA)	January 2016	Media content of tours.	No.	Little to no interaction.	Regular content uploaded on FB.
<b>11. Brian</b>	SNs (FB, G+) MBs (Tw) MSCs (YT, In) RRSs (TA)	May 2014	Media content of tours. Tour info. Related external links.	Asks for reviews on TA & G+ via email. Asks for media content from tours.	Acknowledgement within a few hours. Regular interaction.	Regular content uploaded on FB, Tw, In. Uses external company to manage SM.
<b>12. John</b>	SNs (FB, G+) MBs (Tw) MSCs (YT, In) RRSs (TA)	November 2015	Media content of tours. Tour info.	Asks for reviews on TA via email.	Acknowledgement within 2-3 days.	Regular content uploaded on FB and In. Very irregular on other platforms.

Abbreviations: **SNs:** Social Networks; **MBs:** Micro-Blogs; **MSCs:** Media Content Sharing Communities; **RRSs:** Recommendation and Review Sites; **FB:** Facebook; **G+:** Google+; **Tw:** Twitter; **YT:** YouTube; **In:** Instagram; **TA:** TripAdvisor.

#### 4.2.2 Social Media Usage – Monitoring and Frequency of Uploads

Approximately half of participants stated that they checked their Social Media channels regularly, either every day or every other day. According to most participants, these channels were connected to their personal electronic devices and they were checked whenever they got a notification of activity on their accounts. This was especially the case with RRSs:

*“The thing I check the most is TripAdvisor. Whenever I get a review I go and have a look,” - Joe.*

*“I check my accounts every day. Without fail,” – Bob.*

With the proliferation of smart phones with Social Media applications, and the almost constant access to, and use of, Social Media by a significant proportion of the population in their daily lives, it is perhaps slightly surprising that more participants did not monitor their Social Media channels constantly. This could be due to there being several participants in the older age groups who perhaps were not familiar with such constant use of Social Media.

There were two participants who rarely checked their channels. When questioned as to why this was the case, the reasons they gave varied from being dis-interested, to not having enough time:

*“I usually only check Facebook when I post something. Which is usually once or twice a month. I really don’t have the time to check it every day,” – Sam.*

*“To be honest, I find Social Media quite boring, and I always forget to check it,” – Phil.*

Others had a fairly laissez-faire attitude towards checking the performance of their Social Media accounts:

*“I don’t really look at the analytics. I keep an eye on the actual numbers of followers and likes overall,” – James.*

Sam, Phil, and James’ lack of enthusiasm and the lack of monitoring of their channels could also be due to them being in the older age group of participants (55+) who do not use Social Media in their daily lives; and because, again, there may be a lifestyle factor which may negatively influence their desire for business growth.

Stringent monitoring of the actual performance of Social Media channels was not a priority for most participants. Only one of the participants regularly looked at an analytics report for their accounts:

*“They send us through a report I think it's every month of how our overall communities are performing and our engagement levels and what posts have performed particularly well. I guess just the basic information,” – Brian.*

Brian's business unlike the other participants, as will be discussed further in this chapter, utilised an intermediary company to manage their Social Media accounts, and this was a far more stringent monitoring of their channels, compared to all the other businesses.

For the majority of businesses in the study, upload of content intensified during the peak summer season. For some businesses, especially those that did not, or rarely, operated for the rest of the year, for example water sports operators, Social Media activity was minimal during the winter season. The following observations on the frequency of uploads are mainly concerned with the peak tourist season in New Zealand, approximately between October and March.

Only three participants uploaded content three or more times a week (Bob, Callum, and Brian). The reasons they gave for the regularity of the uploads, ranged from practicality, to keeping their followers engaged:

*“We put pictures of all our tours up on Facebook. We tell the clients they can find their pictures on there. It's easier that way,” – Bob.*

*“We definitely try to post something every day. Pictures of the trips or other content. You have to keep the followers interested,” – Callum.*

Bob's and Callum's regular uploads of content from tours and trips is a valuable approach, which entices customers onto their channels to look at their photographs, which could increase electronic word of mouth and help promote the business, especially if these customers share those pictures with their Social Media friends.

The majority of operators uploaded content fairly regularly, once or twice weekly or fortnightly. Two of the participants uploaded content less often. For these two businesses (Phil and Sam), timings of uploads ranged from once a month to once every few months. Phil's and Sam's lack of monitoring of their Social Media channels, as well as the other factors such as age and lifestyle, as mentioned above, corresponded with the sporadic nature of their uploads.

#### 4.2.3 Social Media Usage - Content

In terms of what was uploaded on to the participants' Social Media accounts, the main content was media related. This was typically pictures, and some videos, of the various tours that they offered. Almost half of all the businesses uploaded information related to the tours, such as changes to timings, cancellations and weather related information. Again, almost half of all participants posted external links and content that was related to their business activities, such as news items and articles related to environmental issues. All participants had links to the business' websites on their Social Media channels.

#### 4.2.4 Social Media Usage - Channels

For all participants, by far the most utilised Social Media channel was Facebook. Personal knowledge and familiarity, and popularity of the network was given as the main reason for Facebook as a Social Media channel of choice:

*"When I was resetting up the business it was a platform that I use, so I just wacked a page on and went from there,"* – Brian.

*"Everyone uses Facebook. It's the most popular one, right?"* – James.

*"I use Facebook personally. So I know what it's about and how to use it,"* – Jane.

*"I'm no expert, but I know from my kids that everyone uses Facebook. Especially the youngsters,"* – Sam.

*"We use Facebook the most because the guy that helps out with our Social Media uses Facebook the most,"* – Bob.

This corresponds with the popularity of Facebook as the most used Social Media channel in the world.

One participant indicated that they utilise Facebook because it gives them the ability to target a specific demographic through their targetted advertisements:

*"So currently we have two Facebook adverts going at the moment. One is a video of ours and we've only targetted women. Most of our advertising is targetted towards women we get majority females and so we've tried to direct our marketing towards women. So with that its 35 to 65. Woman that are in to leisure and all those type of things. That have a university degree or higher. So that's the advantage of Facebook - that you can target specific markets,"* – Bob.

This form of targetted advertising on Facebook shows some form of strategy and organisation in Bob's Social Media marketing practices, and seems to be in contrast to the way the majority of participating businesses operated their channels.

The other social network that was employed by some of the participants was Google +. However, most of the users of this platform, rarely used it and for the majority, the network remained dormant since they had initially set it up. Only one user of Google + recognised the importance of the platform in improving the ranking of their business in the Google listings:

*"We're also pushing towards Google + in terms of leaving reviews there, as it impacts your Google listing," – Brian.*

The popularity of Google+, though rarely used, by participants is perhaps to do with its association with other Google services, such as the search engine. However, the inactive nature of the Google+ accounts suggests a lack of interest or knowledge of how to utilise it properly, compared to Facebook.

The second most popular Social Media platform was the micro-blogging network Twitter with all but two of the participants appearing on it. However, only two of these businesses uploaded regular, specific, content to this platform. Several others had Facebook and YouTube accounts that were linked to Twitter – anything posted on those platforms also appeared as a link on their Twitter accounts. Other users of this platform seemed to use it irregularly, going through phases of a few weeks when regular content uploaded. For most though, there was minimal activity on Twitter, after the opening first few weeks when the accounts were initially set-up:

*"I set up a Twitter account because everyone else seemed to be doing it. I really have no idea how to use it," – Joe.*

*"I don't see the point in Twitter to be honest. I think I need to spend a lot of time on it to make it effective," – Sam.*

*"I don't think Twitter is really useful for this type of business. I don't see how I can advertise my business on there," – James.*

*"I just have it connected to my Facebook. That's all I really use it for," – Peter.*

For most of the participants on Twitter, this lack of activity was due to lack of knowledge, and questions concerning the platform's usefulness.



Just over half of the participants appeared on Media Content Sharing Communities (MSCs). All but one of these businesses had a channel on the video-sharing site YouTube, and four out of the seven were on the photo-sharing site Instagram. Those businesses with a YouTube account uploaded content sporadically. Many had remained without activity for months, some even for over a year or more. Two of the YouTube channels, which were discovered due to links on the companies' website, were the personal channels of the operators, and did not even have the name of the business associated with it. Businesses with Instagram accounts however, uploaded content regularly, with photographs being posted once a week, at the least. Instagram has recently made it possible for users to upload short videos on to their pages and a minority of users have made use of this function by occasionally uploading videos of their tours. For the participants that used Instagram, there appeared to be an eagerness towards developing their use of it, compared to platforms such as YouTube and Twitter:

*"Instagram is a good way to show off what we're doing. You just have to post pictures up, and use a few hashtags, and you get a quite a bit of exposure,"* – Callum.

*"It doesn't require a lot of work. That's what I like about it. It's pretty easy to use, and photos are a good way of getting people's attention"* – John.

This enthusiasm towards utilising Instagram as a Social Media channel of choice, was due to its simplicity, its reach, and assumed powerful nature of using photographs as a tool to advertise their product.

#### **4.2.5 Social Media experience and training; and management of accounts**

The majority of participants' Social Media experience was limited to their personal use of social networks such as Facebook. A few participants, especially the older ones, had minimal to no experience of using Social Media at all before they had set up various channels for their businesses, and had to acquire help from younger relatives and the internet for help:

*"I've never used any Social Media personally, so all this was completely new to me. I just Googled "How to use Social Media for your business",*" – Phil.

*"Like I said, I only know really about Facebook, and that's through my kids. They're on it all the time and I've got them to help me out occasionally. They were the ones that helped me set up it up,"* – Sam.

*“I’m slowly getting the hang of Facebook. I know I have to post regularly. I’ve read some blogs and guides online which have been pretty useful,” – Matt.*

This shows perhaps the difficulty for small business managers, who are of the older generation, to adapt to the constantly evolving technology and consumer tendencies, who have not grown up with daily use of this type technology which younger age groups have done.

There was a significant lack of any professional Social Media training amongst the interviewees. Only one of the participants had an employee with any type of training helping to run their Social Media accounts, and even in that case, the training was negligible:

*“They’ve had some training, you know some online courses, but not very expansive,” – John.*

*“We have a German intern from Interns NZ. He doesn’t do Instagram stuff. He uploads photos from tours onto Facebook... He doesn’t have any training but I think I’d be very surprised to find someone that’s 18 years old, and doesn’t know how to use Social Media. It’s like using an e-mail address. That’s how common it is,” – Bob.*

Bob’s statement and the lack of Social Media training mentioned overall, suggests participants may believe that Social Media is a tool that does not require much knowledge to operate, or that they do not have the resources to hire or train a professional Social Media manager, as suggested below.

For the majority of the participants, the various Social Media platforms were managed by the owner-operator. The main reason for this was that they simply did not have the resources, in terms of employees; or finances to pay employees, or a third party manager, to operate the platforms any other way. Other participants allowed and encouraged their full-time and part-time employees to upload content:

*“I can’t afford to pay someone to run the accounts. No way. So I just do it myself,” – Jane.*

*“The other guides don’t really have the time to do it. I can’t pay them any extra for it. But I try to get them to put photos up. I tend to do most of it,” – Callum.*

*“If they get any nice pictures, I tell them to stick it on there. Saves me doing it,”*  
– Joe.

There is a theme running through much of the findings from the interviews, that the lack of resources, or the lack of importance towards allocating resources for Social Media correspondingly affects the way the tool is utilised. Perhaps as an answer to this barrier for effective Social Media use, the fact that some participants urge their employees to upload content onto the channels, is a way to overcome the lack of resources. Employees, in this instance, will no need to be paid extra, and can provide content, directly from tours and trips. There are certain inconsistency issues with letting employees upload content, as will be mentioned below.

One business did use a professional third-party Social Media management company to run their accounts. This operation, as it turned out, posted content most regularly. The manager of this business uploaded content himself, and encouraged uploads from his employees, as well as using the third-party Social Media manager:

*“We have a shared folder and we’re using Dropbox at the moment. We update that with ongoing content, images, videos that sort of thing, and so they kind of use a combination of their own research material that they found online, and stuff that we give them. On top of that.. content straight from the crew, so if they’re on a trip and they see something amazing, and they’ve taken a photo, then they have the opportunity to jump on there and upload it themselves,”* – Brian.

However, it was acknowledged that this did cause some issues, such as repetition of content, and erroneous posts by staff mistaking their work Social Media accounts, with their personal accounts.

#### **4.2.6 Future plans for Social Media, and current strategy**

All the participants were questioned about their future plans for the use of Social Media as a tool for their business; and were asked if they planned to expand their use of Social Media to platforms from what they were using at the present time. They were also queried on the current strategy, if any, they had for using Social Media as a marketing tool for their business. About a quarter of the participants were fairly dismissive of the idea of devoting more resources to Social Media activities, and there was a lack of enthusiasm concerning the expansion of Social Media towards any new platforms. The majority indicated that they wished to remain with the platforms they already used and several

stated they would focus on developing their existing channels, even reducing some lesser used ones, in the place of expansion:

*“I don’t think I’m going to do a lot more than I do now. I’ll just keep posting a nice picture if I get one,” – Richard.*

*“I don’t think we’ll be expanding on it. We’re already on Facebook, Twitter and others. And we only really have time for Facebook posts. So I don’t think we’ve got the resources to do anymore,” – James.*

*“I forgot I’d even set up a Twitter account! So I might get rid of it,” – Phil.*

This reluctance to expand their Social Media usage could indicate a lack of enthusiasm due to no priority towards business growth, and a lack of resources, which could be impeding any plans for further expansion.

One business did state that they were expanding their Social Media channels to target the Chinese market:

*“We’re moving into the Chinese market. “Becoming China Ready” is what the call is in tourism circles and so Weibo and WeChat.. again we’ve got a third party company that does it for us,” – Brian.*

Again this is Brian’s business, who again demonstrates a commitment towards development of their Social Media activities which are in contrast to the majority of the participants. This and the business’ other activities, such as hiring an intermediary company to manage their Social Media channels, could indicate resources are more accessible to Brian’s business, compared to the other participants. This participant’s strategy though, does seem to be content related, rather than corresponding with actual business goals, such as growth in exposure and sales.

A minority of participants stated that they aimed to develop their Social Media activities by devoting more time and resources to Social Media. This included making sure they respond to all feedback, and by developing some form of Social media strategy. Some of these participants did state that their willingness to expand their Social Media strategy was resource dependant, and would only go ahead if there was a clear indication of a possible return on investment:

*“We’re definitely trying to use it more. This year we’ve posted a lot more than the last few years. I’m trying to develop a plan so I can make sure the stuff I do is worth it, otherwise there’s no point,” – Peter.*

*“I mean we’ve gained more followers. I don’t know how effective it really is. But I have definitely made more of a conscious effort to try and be more active on there, and we’ll continue to do that” – Callum.*

*“I’m quite willing to try anything, as long as it doesn’t require a huge amount of cash to start, and something where you get some results that you can make sure we can assess, which is one of the things I don’t like with print media because you have no feedback on what it’s producing,” – John.*

Despite the intention of developing their Social Media channels, these businesses did not indicate that they had any firm, measurable strategies. This was due to a lack of resources, and also the fact that there was no clear indication of how useful Social Media was for their business, most likely due to that lack of monitoring that was being carried out.

Only three of the participants mentioned that they had any real strategy or plan with regards to their Social Media. The most regular content uploader stated that the third-party company that managed their accounts, had a basic brief on what was required of them:

*“Their main job is to lay down a base level of content, basically anything that’s relevant to us... They have sort of an open book really, to chuck up what they think is relevant,” – Brian.*

This business also planned to utilise rapidly developing technology by exploiting live streaming tools on Social Media:

*“We are one of the first people to start using drones so people love that content, then we moved on to 360 video, people are loving that and we’ll soon move to live streaming. I know Facebook sort of love pushing that live content ... so that would be pretty awesome,” – Brian.*

The most comprehensive use of Social Media by Brian’s business is again apparent here. The willingness to adapt and utilise the ever changing technological landscape associated with Social Media again shows Brian’s commitment to the tool, and as suggested previously, an indication of available resources.

The other two participants with a plan for their Social Media usage, had somewhat quantifiable strategies, with one including a competition for those that participated with their Social Media platforms:

*“We did do a campaign last year when we reached a thousand likes, send us your photos and the best picture will get the free trip. And we are looking to do something similar again for our third anniversary. Show your pictures from the trips and get another trip, or something like that,” – John.*

*“We had a strategy for Facebook and Instagram - to reach a thousand likes before the end of 2016,” – Bob.*

Bob’s and John’s strategies, though not as comprehensive as Brian’s Social Media activities, indicates there is some commitment to utilising and developing their Social Media channels for business growth and exposure.

Several participants reported that they wished spend more time on their Social Media activities in order to make it a more effective tool, but many also acknowledged that this would not be possible:

*“I would love to be able to spend a couple of hours a day going through my accounts but I just don’t have the time,” - Matt.*

*“There just isn’t enough time in the day to keep updating and checking it. I try to get my guides involved but I can’t pay them anymore to do it so I don’t force them to help. I want to do it properly. You have to do it regularly to get results. But it’s tough,” – Callum.*

The largest barrier here seems to be the lack of time available. This is often the case for small businesses where managers often have to multi-task, and lack the resources to hire other employees.

#### **4.2.7 Feedback and responsiveness and engaging with customers**

The majority of participants encouraged feedback from their customers. This was done mainly by sending their customers an email, post-trip, encouraging or requesting a review, mainly on TripAdvisor:

*“I tell them to go on TripAdvisor and leave a review if they had a good time. We send them all an email. We don’t have a lot of money for advertising and this type*

*of word of mouth stuff is great for us. It doesn't cost us anything. And mostly it's good reviews," – Richard.*

*"We have a policy, after trips we contact them and ask them to send some feedback on TripAdvisor by email. We have 115 feedbacks in a year, which is quite a lot for the number of guests we get," – John.*

*"So what we do is, we send out a post-trip email that says, "hey, we're a small business; word of mouth is the best way you can help us; there's our Social Media platforms; and if you want to jump on there and tell us how you went..." TripAdvisor is obviously the main one there," – Brian.*

The requests for reviews on TripAdvisor were due to the website's important role in helping the businesses attract customers, and suggests that participants recognised the importance of electronic word of mouth.

Three of the participants asked their clients to upload photographs onto Facebook, onto the companies' pages:

*"I always encourage them to take photos and put them on our Social Media. I'll always leave a comment if they do that. It's great when people do that. It shows what we do," – Jane.*

*"We get a few clients who upload their pictures with a nice comment onto our Facebook page. That's always good. And we encourage that," – Peter.*

By asking customers to upload photographs, these participants are utilising a valuable means of publishing new content, without any extra cost. The form of interaction should help to develop relationships between businesses and customers and provide more exposure for the business, through the customers and their online connections.

Four of the participants did not request any feedback at all, and two of these stated that they were reluctant to encourage feedback due to the chance that there would be a negative reaction, which they felt could do a lot of damage to the business' reputation:

*"To be honest, if they come on the trip and had fun, that's great. But if they didn't I can't do much about that. I can tell if they've had a good time. I'd rather they didn't go online and tell everyone they didn't enjoy it," – Phil.*

*“I’ve seen some negative stuff on Social Media and it’s not nice for anyone. We use our Facebook mainly to show off what we do and hopefully that’s enough to attract some clients,” – Matt.*

It can be suggested that Matt and Phil, and the other participants who do not encourage feedback, are missing the opportunities with Social Media of developing relationships with customers with positive interactions, and increasing their business’ exposure.

When questioned on how they reacted to positive and negative feedback, and if there were any differences in the way they responded, the majority stated that they did not usually receive negative comments or reviews. For those that had, most would attempt to contact and deal with the customers by sending them a private email. If there was a negative review on TripAdvisor, they would respond by apologising publicly, try to explain themselves and the situation, and then contact the person privately, to attempt to take the conversation out of the public spotlight:

*So we have a system where basically it says if you're comfortable with giving us a good review on TripAdvisor, then here's the link. If there's anything you think we can improve on, I have a Google form set up so that they can do a short survey, and it gets sent to me. So obviously that's trying to encourage positive reviews in the public eye and possibly any negative feedback to go straight through to me so I can do something about it. With any negative TripAdvisor reviews, you will notice we will say we're sorry to hear that this is what we're doing about it and will trying to explain the situation,” – Brian.*

*“I think I went privately with them. Generally, if people give bad feedback, I don't want to slag them off and don't want to get into a shouting match,” – John.*

The consensus for most, when dealing with feedback, was to encourage positive comments to be highlighted in the public eye, and negative reviews or comments to be dealt with privately. This perhaps is not the ideal strategy. Other Social Media users that may observe the complaint will not see if there was a positive outcome to the situation, and will only see the negative interaction. James acknowledges this below.

James had strong views about dealing with any negative feedback. They felt that it needed to be dealt with in public in order for other potential customers to see that they had done everything possible to deal with any issues:



*“Look it’s got to be dealt with. We have to show we care and there’d be no further problems. People decide on where to spend their money by looking at these things,” - James.*

There was one participant who’s views on negative feedback completely differed from the above view. They felt the best thing to do was to ignore it, due to the possible damage further correspondence could cause:

*“I try to ignore it. It’s too risky. I don’t want to get into an argument with someone online. It’ll just make things worse. We do what we do and if they don’t like it, then there’s not much we can do. If you reply it just encourages them to argue back. So I just leave it,” – Joe.*

This reluctance to avoid negative situations on Social Media is understandable. Interactions can reach a far greater number of people, at a much faster rate on Social Media, compared to traditional word of mouth. Consequently, there is a much greater chance for the reputation of a business to be irrecoverably damaged due to negative Social Media interactions, compared to traditional customer relationship management methods. When observing some of Joe’s previous Social Media activity, it is clear to see why he avoids interacting with customers. There were instances where customers have complained and he has replied fairly defensively, leading to inflammation of the situations.

### **4.3 Perceptions, barriers and limitations of Social Media**

This section will be a continuation of discussion of the findings from the semi-structured interviews that were carried out. It will concern the perceptions of the interview participants on the usefulness of Social Media as a marketing tool for their business. Other findings regarding the thoughts and views of the participants concerning the barriers and limitations of using Social Media for small businesses, will also be considered.

#### **4.3.1 Adoption, motivation, and goals**

Participants were questioned on their motivations for initial adoption of Social Media, and the original goals that they wished to achieve when they first started using the different platforms. The initial motivations and goals were wide ranging. Several participants stated that they originally set it up because they felt it was a tool that did not require a lot of skill, that they had previous knowledge of Social Media, and there were low barriers to entry:

*“Social Media is pretty idiot proof I thought. For something to be that successful it has to be idiot proof. No-ones gonna use something that complicated,” – Bob.*

*“I knew how to use Facebook. I had an account for a while so I just set one up for the business and it went from there,” – Jane.*

*“Well it was free. That was the main thing,” – Peter.*

The majority of participants used Social Media in their daily lives, and along with this perceived knowledge, and the absence of costs for setting up accounts, generally, the perception was that Social Media would be an easy and free way to promote their business.

There were large discrepancies between the perceptions about the ease of use, and the lack of barriers to use, compared with the reality of using Social Media, and this will be discussed later in this chapter.

Another motivation that arose was the fact that the participants noticed that similar businesses were using Social Media:

*“I just noticed everyone else was using it. I use TripAdvisor quiet a lot and check out the businesses on there for reviews, and on Facebook,” – Peter.*

The proximity of the participating businesses and the similarities of some of the products on offer exemplified the competitive nature between the businesses. The need for keeping up with the competitors was highlighted by Bob, who was asked if he looked at other business’ Social Media channels:

*“Yeah probably twice a week. Constantly. Because I'm competitive and I look at other options and other tourism businesses and see what we can do. For example, I saw one tourism business that promoted a video. I didn't even know you could do that on Social Media. So 10 minutes later, bang! Promoted video. So I'm always looking around and looking at ideas,” – Bob.*

Despite the wide-ranging answers for reasons for initial setup of Social Media, three predominant objectives were identified. Firstly, several of the participants wanted to increase awareness of their business:

*“Awareness was our number one problem. If people know about us and still don't come, then that's a real issue, but if people don't know about us then with the likes of Facebook and Social Media we thought can get our message in front of them*

*so that's really cool. So the number one thing was that we needed to increase our awareness," – Brian.*

*"We wanted people to know about us. Facebook is great because everyone is on it and I think most young people first look on Facebook when they're doing research on a business. You know to look at the photos of what we do," – Sam.*

*"We wanted to get some good reviews. Everyone checks TripAdvisor for reviews. It's like word of mouth. I think most of our clients check that before they book with us," – Peter.*

These businesses felt that Social Media could be used to promote and enhance the reputation of their business.

Secondly, several participants felt that use of Social Media was very common amongst the younger generation, and that it was something that was indicative of changing consumer behaviour:

*"People look online for information. They don't go to travel agents. They don't watch a lot of adverts on TV or read newspapers. Everything they do is online. Look at the way you can compare prices of flights and accommodation online. It's so easy to do. Everyone does it. That's how they choose," – Richard.*

*"I think all youngsters use Social Media. It's like meeting someone that's not on Social Media, it's like meeting someone without an email address. I've got some friends they don't use Facebook, but it's a pretty big novelty that they don't," – Bob.*

These businesses felt that by using Social Media, they were keeping up with the current marketing trends which are customer focussed, and communication intensive.

Finally, it was felt that Social Media could be used as an inexpensive marketing tool:

*"Just as a marketing tool. That was the main thing," – John.*

*"Marketing. Definitely. It was free to set up. I don't have a big budget for marketing. So it seemed to be a perfect fit," – Jane.*

These businesses felt that Social Media would add another dimension to their marketing strategies. In terms of it being an inexpensive tool though, many were disappointed, as outlined below.

#### 4.3.2 Reality of actual values and benefits

Despite the initial expectations when setting up Social Media for their businesses, there was wide ranging dissatisfaction in terms of actual value that Social Media had added to their operation. As referred to previously, several participants indicated that out of all the channels, TripAdvisor was the most beneficial for them in terms of attracting clients. In terms of actual influence on business performance, most participants felt that Social Media influence was minimal:

*“It’s hard to tell, you know. I really don’t know how much benefit we get from it,”*  
– James.

*“I doubt if it brings a lot of business our way. Most of our clients are repeat customers who tell their friends about us. I don’t think they use Social Media much,”* – Matt.

*“Maybe I should do more monitoring. You should do this and that but then you gotta hire someone to do that and it cost money. So you kinda just get a pretty good feeling that something is working or not, there's not a strategy but you have a quick look and see if it's how many people have liked the video, and how many people have viewed it, and if you feel that that's acceptable for the cost that is costing,”* – Bob.

There was acknowledgement that due to the lack of stringent monitoring, and the lack of quantifiable goals at the start, most participants were simply unsure or doubtful about how much Social Media actually influenced their business performance. These statements are fairly contradictory as none of the businesses stated that their initial goal was to increase business value and performance by using Social Media, but in these statements, they are dissatisfied with the lack of influence on actual business performance.

With reference to the initial goals, several participants indicated that Social Media was valuable for raising awareness of their business, and using Social Media as a marketing tool was still amongst the foremost objectives of the participants. Many also still felt Social Media was a good way to attract young people:

*“Definitely people are more aware of us because of Facebook and Instagram. I think that’s the most useful aspect of it,”* – John.

*“All the youngsters are on Facebook. So it’s a good place for them to find us and see what we do. Tourists especially have probably seen us in a brochure or*

*something, and then they can look us up on Facebook and see what we do. It's good for that you know?" – Sam.*

*"I can't say exactly how much business it actually brings. But we have to be on there. Facebook, TripAdvisor, it's where they look. We can't ignore it. Young people don't go to travel agents. They check TripAdvisor. Or Facebook," – Matt.*

However, due to the lack of monitoring, there is no really accurate indication of how much awareness and exposure has been created by using Social Media.

One participant believed that delivering quality content, directly from the tours was a great benefit and a powerful tool:

*"The real gold is the content straight from the crew, so if they're on a trip and they see something amazing, and they've taking a photo, then they have the opportunity to jump on there and upload it themselves," – Brian.*

This type of content from the crew, which shows exactly what happens on the tours, can be a powerful way to encourage interaction and reach, and is also resource efficient.

Some participants indicated that the ability to interact, and directly communicate with clients helped to build up trust between both parties:

*"Ok, perhaps we don't do it as much as we'd like to, but it's a great way to build a sort of relationship with clients. I think if you do it properly, it's like you're becoming friends and they will come back regularly or recommend us to their friends," – Peter.*

*"It's great for us to be able to directly interact with to our clients. If they leave a message on Facebook, we try to reply as soon as possible. I think it breaks down the barriers," – James.*

Social Media, and in fact tourism as a whole, is focussed on interaction and communication between the service provider and the customer. This type of interaction can lead to repeat customers, and generous endorsements towards their peers in the form of influential personal recommendations.

#### **4.3.3 Actual time and skills required**

After setting up their accounts, the participants soon realised the difficulties and realities of using Social Media for business promotion. Several of them felt that they had

underestimated the time and resources that it would take to run the various Social Media platforms:

*“I found that it was difficult to continuously keep updating the different accounts. I just don’t have time to put something up every day, on all the accounts,” – Joe.*

*“At the beginning I was quite good, the first few weeks. Then I started to forget to do it,” – Phil.*

*“At the start it was really difficult. Because you started with no followers and you have to try to build that up. And that’s the hard bit,” – Jane.*

*“I started with Facebook and Twitter and I would upload pictures and information quite regularly. But that slowed down. I basically stopped using Twitter because I didn’t really see how it can be useful. Now I just use Facebook, and that’s just for uploading pictures. I got into a habit of sitting down and uploading pictures straight after every trip. That’s the only way I’d remember to do it,” – Peter.*

The issues here ranged from the difficulties in initial set-up, to lack of motivation and time to keep Social Media productivity and momentum going.

Others indicated that they needed to devote more time to running and monitoring their various channels:

*“You gotta have a plan in place to see if it’s successful. So I could be more organised and do that. I could be a lot more proactive I could sit down and do a lot more plans and so forth but that would take me away from other things. For the amount of time I’ve spent on it I think we do a good job, but it can be better if I’ve spent more time on it, but I’m not willing to,” – Bob.*

*“We’re trying to be more proactive in general. In the busy season we will try to have a post every two days or something, to keep people interested. But we’ve been very busy so we haven’t done much recently. It’s probably something where you probably need to set some time aside every week for an hour, or Monday and Friday for an hour, and do certain things to make sure something is posted. It’s probably something to become more organised about and is probably the core to getting really good results. If you only do a post every 2 or 3 weeks, it’s not really engaging and you won’t get good results. I feel that will you need to be regular post for it to be effective,” – John.*

Some participants, like John and Bob, understood some of what needs to be done to maintain effective use of Social Media for their businesses, such as the need for planning, and continuous activity and engagement. However, in most cases they were either unwilling to do it, or simply did not have the time to do it. As stated previously, small business owners usually have a multitude of roles in the business, and devoting more time to Social Media means that they would have to sacrifice the time spent on something equally as, or more, important.

#### **4.3.4 Barriers to using Social Media**

Interviewees were questioned as to what their thoughts were on the barriers to using Social Media as a tool for their operations, and for other similar small sized businesses. The main barriers that were suggested by the participants were the lack of time, lack of resources – financial and employees, and the lack of skill and knowledge.

##### **Lack of time**

Due to the busy nature of operating a small business, the majority of participants suggested that they lacked the time to successfully implement a thorough Social Media strategy:

*“I don’t have the time, simply. I’m either out on tours, or getting the equipment ready for the next day. I also have to deal with the bookings, eat, sleep. I get online when I can. But there’s no set time,”* – Callum.

As mentioned throughout this chapter, the operating nature of small businesses, with often the owner/operator taking responsibility for several, if not the majority of tasks, meant that they had very little time to commit to operating their Social Media accounts.

##### **Lack of resources**

The majority of participants also cited the lack of resources available to them, and this was mentioned regularly throughout the interviews:

*“We don’t have the money to hire an outside company to do it. And I can’t afford to hire more staff just to work on that. My staff help out when they can,”* – Richard.

Running a small business is a constant balancing act. Owners have to carefully choose which areas to invest their limited resources. This is due to the limited amount of money available and not being able to employ someone specifically for the task of operating their Social Media accounts.

## **Lack of knowledge**

Another barrier to using Social Media that arose during the interviews was the lack of knowledge and skill concerned with how to use Social Media effectively. Most of the participants stated that they had no official training on how to use the tools, and around half stated that this was hindrance for them when it came to Social Media. Two of the participants stated that they had never used Social Media before they set up accounts for their business. Many were confused as to workings of the Micro-blogging site Twitter and the different functions that were available to them on the Social Networks, such as the live video tool, which allows them to broadcast live videos from their Facebook pages. Others pointed out the rapidly evolving nature of Social Media and found difficulty in keeping up to date with the changes:

*"I'm not very knowledgeable. I don't Facebook, I don't use it," – John.*

*"Live videos? Not a bad idea. Never thought of that. On our tours maybe. It's easy to do isn't it?" – Bob.*

*"I have no idea about Twitter. What's the deal with that? I tried at the start but I don't think I've posted anything for a year," – James.*

*"There's always new things popping up. New channels and new ways to use it. It's hard to keep up for someone like me," – Phil.*

Various factors contributed to this barrier. The deficiency in knowledge stemmed from the lack of training and previous knowledge of Social Media; the confusion over the different purposes of certain Social Media channels; and the struggle to keep up with constantly and rapidly evolving nature of Social Media technologies.

The barriers to operating Social Media in a beneficial way for the businesses in the study stemmed from the various issues that are common problems with small businesses in tourism, and small businesses in general. These include the lifestyle factor, where the owners, as well as trying to operate a profitable business, are also trying to maintain a certain type of lifestyle. This in turn can have detrimental effects on business operations, due to the reluctance to focus ultimately on business growth. Another major barrier stems from the characteristics of small businesses and their owners, whereby resources are lacking, and the managers are often a combination of, for example, the manager, booking agent, marketing manager, and tour guide. This leaves them with very little time to develop certain areas of the business, such as Social Media marketing.



## **4.4 Conclusion**

The findings from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted for this study offer an analysis of the characteristics of the participants and their businesses, and delved into their adoption of Social Media as a tool for their operations. The vast majority of participants were male and over the age of 45, and included only one female participant and only two below the age of 35. The interviews suggested that for some participants, lifestyle choice was a major reason behind why they operated their business, and indications were that this affected the way they ran their business, where perhaps the priority was not wholly concerned with business growth. In terms of the ways that they marketed their businesses, several participants indicated that traditional marketing methods such as the use of print media were becoming obsolete, and that one of the main reasons for using Social Media was to keep up to date with the changing consumer trends of the younger generation.

In terms of the uptake of Social Media, the most popular channels were Facebook and TripAdvisor. Several participants felt that TripAdvisor helped to increase bookings and many asked their customers to rate the business on the review website. Facebook was by far the most popular channel, mainly due to previously gained knowledge of using the site in their private lives. This contrasted with the use of other channels, such as Twitter, which the majority of participants appeared on, but in most cases the accounts were under-utilised mainly due to the lack of knowledge in how to use the site. A quarter of the participants used Instagram and they all used this channel regularly and felt it provided a powerful way to promote their business, by the use of photographs. The uploading of photographs was the most popular type of content that the participants favoured.

The indications from the interviews were that participants lacked a clear Social Media strategy for their businesses, which included the absence of measurable goals. Many of the participants offered up vague goals such as aiming to increase brand awareness, and several stated that they aimed to use Social Media as a marketing tool. However, without clear goals, and the lack of monitoring, most participants were unsure of how successful their goals were, and many became dissatisfied with Social Media and the actual value it was to their business.

The lack of strategy stemmed from not using Social Media effectively due to the barriers that the participants faced. Most participants indicated that they lacked resources, as is the case with many small businesses. Budgets for marketing were scarce and most

participants felt that they could not afford to invest in hiring resources specifically to operate their Social Media accounts. Only one business used a third-party Social Media specialist company to operate their accounts, and as it turned out, this business posted the most regular and varied content. Another barrier was the lack of knowledge of how to use Social Media effectively, mainly due to an absence of specific Social Media training. Participants also indicated they lacked the time which was needed to effectively operate all their Social Media channels, due to multitude of tasks that they had to do when running their businesses.

These findings are wide ranging and offer insights that will lead to answering the original research questions. The next chapter will be a discussion of the various themes that arose from these findings, and will relate them to the previously discussed academic research on the areas of this study.

# **CHAPTER 5**

## **DISCUSSION**

## **5. Discussion**

This chapter will discuss the key findings of the research from the previous chapter. The discussion will address the themes that emerged from the qualitative data, which were collected through the interviews with the participants. The findings will be compared to previous academic literature on Social Media and its link to small tourism businesses. This chapter explores theoretical and practical assessments of the findings in relation to perceptions and use of, and barriers for small businesses, when using Social Media as a marketing tool.

### **5.1 Marine tourism operators in Auckland, and target markets**

The significance of the tourism industry, and especially small tourism operators, in the business landscape of New Zealand has been discussed in the previous chapters. The participants of this study are part of the 85% of small businesses that make up the tourism industry in New Zealand, and this study aims to contribute to the research of the tourism industry in New Zealand.

Almost 3.5 million international tourists had visited New Zealand by the end of 2016 (Statistics NZ, 2017). A large majority of these international visitors to New Zealand arrived in Auckland, and almost a third of the country's population live in the city (ATEED, n.d.). This highlights the vital role that visitors from overseas, along with a large proportion of domestic tourists, play in the New Zealand tourism industry. These statistics also demonstrate the importance of businesses in this study targetting both international and domestic customers, as the vast majority do. The reasons for not targetting international visitors by some of the businesses, was mainly due to perceived foreign language issues and the preference for domestic customers.

The indications were that the owners of these businesses, perhaps did not prioritise business growth due to a strong urge to maintain a certain lifestyle. This ties in with previous studies which have shown that many owners of small businesses, and tourism small businesses, are focussed on a flexible lifestyle, where being in control and improving their quality of life is perhaps more important than making a profit (Cohen et al., 2014; Di Domenico, 2005; Scase & Goffee, 1987; Burgess et al., 2015; Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000)

The significance of marine tourism within the global tourism industry has been previously discussed. Orams (2002) defines marine tourism as including “those recreational

activities which involve travel away from one's place of residence which have as their host or focus the marine environment," (p. 9). In general terms, all the participants in this study can be categorised within Orams' definition as they are all operators which offer marine based recreational activities such as fishing, kayaking, sailing, and marine wildlife observation, in a marine setting. Three of the participants stated that they only targetted the domestic market, and therefore they could be considered to be marine leisure and recreation providers, as Orams' definition of marine tourism operators is not completely appropriate. However, they did not turn away international customers, and therefore they are suitable to be included in this study.

Orams (2002) also categorised marine tourism operators using various variable. This included business size; direct or indirect involvement; and private or public ownership. When relating to Orams' categorisation, the businesses in this study are "small to one person operators"; are directly involved; and are privately owned. Surrounded by the sea, New Zealand, and particularly Auckland, provides the ideal setting for the type of marine-based, recreational activities that are offered by the participants of this study.

## **5.2 The use of Social Media**

For the businesses that participated in this study, one of the core criteria of eligibility was that they appeared on at least two or more Social Media channels. The initial list of forty operators from TripAdvisor's list of "Boat Tours & Water Sports in Auckland" (TripAdvisor, n.d.), were reduced to twenty owing to the variety of criteria for participation, such as business size; exclusion of large transportation services; and the fact that some were no longer operating.

The final twenty businesses that were eligible for this study all appeared on at least two or more Social Media channels. The vast proliferation of Social Media usage in business is supported by academic literature. Research carried out in 2012 by MIT Sloan Management Review and the global professional service firm Deloitte, which surveyed business managers in over a hundred countries and almost twenty-four different industries, found that almost 90% of participants acknowledged that Social Media would play a significant part in business operations within the proceeding few years (Kiron, et al, 2012).

When exploring tourism businesses' use of Social Media, there is no doubt that the majority are utilising the platforms, to varying degrees. Simply by looking at any tourism

operators' website, it is, in the vast majority of cases, possible to see links to their various Social Media channels. Academic literature also purports to this abundance of Social Media usage by tourism businesses, such as is the case for participants of this study. However, there does seem to be a lack of recent, specific quantitative research conducted on the actual number of tourism businesses that use Social Media. A 2013 study conducted on small businesses, but not specifically small businesses in the tourism industry, found that 70% of the businesses surveyed used Facebook, with 82% of these users acknowledging that it was an effective tool for their business (Constant Contact, 2013).

Most of the available academic literature focuses on the methods and reasons for why Social Media is a useful tool for such businesses (Minazzi, 2014; Kaul, & Chaudhri, 2015; Kotler, et al., 2014; Litvin et al., 2008; Weaver, & Lawton, 2014). It is clear though that Social Media use is extremely common for the vast majority of tourism operators. Various studies indicate that Social Media, and its characteristics of swift proliferator of online communications and information, is specifically significant to the tourism landscape, due to the industry's information intensive nature (Kotler, et al., 2014; Litvin et al, 2008; Mangold, & Faulds, 2009; Weaver, & Lawton, 2014). Furthermore, for the high risk tourism industry, which offers intangible and perishable products, with the intimacy of relationships between the suppliers and customers, it is vital that tourism businesses, not only participate, but effectively manage their Social Media activities (Baker et al., 2016; Chatterjee, 2001; Urban, 2005; Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2015; Minazzi, 2014).

### **5.1.1 Facebook**

The findings from the interviews for this study concluded that, amongst all the Social Media channels that were available, Facebook was the most popular. This correlates with previously cited data from We Are Social ("Digital, social & mobile in 2015," 2015) which states that Facebook has almost 1.4 billion global users, more than double the amount of the next most popular Social Media channel Qzone, a Chinese Social Media platform. Tourism New Zealand states that 95 per cent of travellers use Facebook for travel related activities before they depart for their holidays (Fraser, 2015b).

Academic literature suggests that the popularity of Facebook for companies is due to its analytic tools which offer businesses the ability to target specific demographics and markets (Dehghani & Tumer, 2015; O'Connor et al., 2016). However, only one out of the twelve participants indicated that this was the reason that they use Facebook as tool for

their business. The vast majority of interviewees stated that they use Facebook due to personal knowledge of the network, and preference for it due to this personal use. These factors, compared to the global popularity of Facebook among tourists and the general public, indicate a lack of marketing awareness, focus, and strategy, which according to previous studies, are amongst the major pitfalls of small businesses (Hood, 2013; Hassan et al., 2015).

### **5.1.2 Twitter**

Twitter, the micro-blogging site, also offers similar analytic and targetting tools for its users (O'Connor et al., 2016). Despite ten out of the twelve participants using the platform, their activity on it was minimal, mainly due to lack of understanding of how to utilise the site effectively. There is also a lack of research that has been conducted on the actual amount of Twitter users within tourism small businesses. According to research conducted in 2013, conducted on small businesses, but again, not specifically tourism small businesses, almost 49% used Twitter. This number is lower than the amount of Twitter users amongst the operators that participated in this study (83%) (Constant Contact, 2013).

This higher rate of users among the participants for this study, compared to the use of Twitter by small businesses overall, could due to the fact tourism, as a unique service industry, is extremely dependent on word of mouth, in this case electronic word of mouth, for their marketing, targetting customers, and raising brand awareness (Minazzi, 2014; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2015). This ties in with the previously mentioned relationship of tourism and Social Media, with the intimate relationship between the service providers and the tourists, and Social Media's nature as a swift disseminator of information. In the same survey as above, only 25% of those who had accounts, found Twitter useful as a tool for their business. This is over double the percentage of Twitter users in this study, that used the platform regularly.

The main grievance, amongst Twitter users in this study, was that there were reservations about its usefulness as a marketing tool; and that the participants lacked knowledge on how to use it. Again, similar to not utilising the potential of Facebook, these factors correspond with previous research showing perception of difficulties in operating small businesses, which include a lack of marketing awareness, focus, and strategy, which is a key finding from this research (Hood, 2013; Hassan et al., 2015).

### **5.1.3 Media Content Sharing Communities**

Another category of Social Media that featured in this study was Media Content Sharing Communities (MSCs). Of the two platforms that were used by participants, YouTube and Instagram, YouTube had the most users. The amount of YouTube users among the participants (50%) was higher than the survey of small businesses (39%) (Constant Contact, 2013).

None of the businesses from this study used YouTube regularly. No specific answers were given as to why participants did not use their YouTube channels. Several participants did however, indicate they had difficulty, due to time and resources, in operating multiple platforms, and so this is most likely to be the reason that YouTube utilisation was scarce. Furthermore, as YouTube is a video sharing site, it can be assumed that the content needed for it would take longer to produce, and therefore the lack of time and resources are again a factor in its irregular use.

Instagram, meanwhile, is generally used for photo-sharing. This type of content takes less time to produce and upload. A survey of small businesses revealed almost half used this platform for their business, with 25% of the respondents indicating it was a useful tool (Constant Contact, 2013). In this study, only four of the participants utilised Instagram. All four businesses regularly uploaded content onto this platform. This much higher rate of use among those who had Instagram accounts in this study, compared to the survey of general small businesses, and may be an indication of the way the tourism industry can use photographs in a powerful way to attract customers and build relationships, as suggested by study participants and corroborated by recent studies (Lo & McKercher, 2015; Lyu, 2016; Kim, & Tussyadiah, 2013).

This also corresponds with the popularity of Instagram among Social Media users (Instagram, 2016) and businesses who use it for marketing (eMarketer, 2015). Furthermore, the powerful nature and the vast reach of Instagram is highlighted by Tourism NZ, whose account is more popular than that of much larger destinations such as USA and United Kingdom, and who put this down to organically growing the account using the exposure from tourists' photographs (Tourism NZ, 2016b).

### **5.1.4 Review and Recommendation Sites**

As stated previously, all participants of this study appeared on TripAdvisor. The popularity of TripAdvisor, the most prevalent RRSs within the tourism industry, was due to the participants' perception that a large number of their clients would refer to the site



before making bookings with them. The influential nature, compared to traditional marketing methods, of word of mouth promotion, for high risk, intangible-dominant, service industries such as tourism has been thoroughly researched and established (Murray, 1991; Trusovet et al., 2009; Boyer et al., 2015; Virvilaite et al., 2015; Baker et al., 2016).

RRSs such as TripAdvisor are considered to be purveyors of digitalised word of mouth or electronic word of mouth promotion (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004; Minazzi, 2014). User recommendations and reviews are referred to by those that are exploring holiday options, and provide a more authentic and genuine view of the destination or tourism business, compared to traditional adverts used by the suppliers. The interviewees' perception of the usefulness of TripAdvisor, in assimilating user-to-user information at a much higher rate than traditional marketing methods, and for attracting new customers, is supported by numerous academic studies (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004; Minazzi, 2014; Chatterjee, 2001; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2015; Taneja & Toombs, 2014).

An empirical study by Ye, et al., (2011), shows that an increase in positive online reviews by 10%, led to an increase in booking by over 5%. These studies indicate that there is a strong desire between users of sites like TripAdvisor to develop relationships online by helping out fellow consumers and encouraging interaction that could also benefit themselves economically. These studies suggest that due to these websites, there is a need for businesses to develop associations and communities that encourage trusting relationships, leading to genuine and positive recommendations that are referred to by other users.

## **5.2 Monitoring**

Several participants indicated that the main method of monitoring their Social Media channels, was through their smart-phones. There were two types of monitoring that were specified. The majority of participants that indicated that they monitored their Social media activity fairly superficially, by simply checking for likes, and the number of users. Only one participant reported that they used more in-depth monitoring by referring to analytical statistics of their Social Media activities. As for several of them their Social Media channels were connected to their phones, and they found it an easy way to monitor any activity, due to notifications that they would receive. Their multi-directional nature; their proliferation in society as a whole; and the influence they have had on the tourism

industry, directly affecting both suppliers and tourists, has been examined in previous research (Dickinson et al., 2012; Cheverst et al., 2000).

The findings in this study revealed a lack of evaluation and monitoring of Social Media channels and their effectiveness among the participants. As discussed, only one participant evaluated analytics reports of their Social Media channels, and this was the business that used a third party Social Media manager, and had a specific budget for Social Media usage. The majority did check their Social Media channels regularly but there was a lack of stringent analytical evaluation.

Participants specified that the only way they monitored their channels was by looking at the number of “likes” on their content, or the number of followers, and they felt that this was doing enough. They also pointed out they felt that stringent monitoring would require more resources and time, due to the fact that they simply did not have these resources. As previous academic studies show, these factors are often the case with small businesses (Cheek et al., 2013; Michaelidou et al., 2011). These studies suggest that small businesses lack the resources and time to effectively monitor customer responses, and even if they do collect data, there is a lack of business strategy to take advantage of the data that they have collected.

### **5.3 Strategy**

The findings from the interviews indicate an absence of clear strategies or definitive goals. This may stem from the lack of a general marketing strategy which is common in the case of small businesses (Bozkurt & Kalkan, 2014; Elmahgop et al., 2015). There was a clear lack of enthusiasm in terms of expanding the participants’ Social Media channels to new platforms and develop distinct strategies that would be beneficial for their business. For the few businesses that did have some type of strategy, there was no thorough plan developed for the use of Social Media. The few strategies that were used were mainly based on receiving more likes and followers. For the majority, use of Social Media was limited to uploading photographs of the various activities and tours.

Despite the abundance of academic literature which stresses the importance of a carefully planned, well managed, targetted Social Media strategy (Effing & Spil, 2016; Thackery et al., 2008; Dutta, 2010; Li & Bernoff, 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010); there appears to be a disparity between this advice and actual application by businesses such as the ones that the participated in this study. Studies indicate that the lack of a Social Media strategy

is often the case with small businesses. This was due to various reasons such as deficiency of resources, absence of skills and knowledge and lack of confidence (Michaelidou et al., 2011). It seems that businesses collect data from Social Media but fail to use it to their advantage due to the lack of a strategy; and a tendency towards not taking Social Media seriously, because of the thinking that it is just a fad that will pass, and not a vital business tool (Cheek et al., 2013; Kryder, 2011).

## **5.4 Goals and motivations**

Various goals and initial motivations were identified by the interviewees. According to other reports, the identifying of goals is vital when developing a Social Media strategy (Dutta, 2010; Effing & Spil, 2016; Klang & Nolin, 2011; Michaelidou et al., 2011). These studies suggest that goals should be specific, relevant and in line with the overall business strategy. Participants of this study identified several goals and motivations for taking part in Social Media. Many felt it was a useful marketing tool, and wished to increase awareness of the business, using Social Media to promote and enhance their business' reputation. However, in relation to the studies mentioned, these goals are perhaps not specific enough due to the lack of measurable goals.

Participants also perceived that Social Media was a low-cost tool, and that it was easy to use, mainly due to their personal use outside the business. Although initial costs are considered to be low, this perhaps indicates that they did not consider future costs such as time and resources that they need to maintain their Social Media usage. They also indicated they felt Social Media was useful in attracting customers, especially through TripAdvisor. Academic literature on small businesses and Social Media adoption confirms that the mentioned goals and motivations are often the reason for Social Media adoption by small businesses (Michaelidou et al., 2011; Schaupp & Belanger, 2014; Jones et al., 2015); from it being a useful tool for marketing and increasing brand awareness, to perceived nature as a low cost and straightforwardness as a tool, and one that was less time-intensive than other marketing tools.

### **5.4.1 Motivations – the evolving consumer perspective**

Another motivation for Social Media use by the participants was that they perceived it to be a way of keeping up with changing consumer behaviour. Several participants mentioned that young people are increasingly and regularly using Social Media to share and seek information, and to make consumer related decisions. TripAdvisor especially,

the interviewees felt, was very influential in customer decisions on choosing what activities to do and where to go.

Studies show personal recommendations between users of Social Media and reviews of businesses on sites such as TripAdvisor are undoubtedly influential, as perceived by the study participants, in the decision-making process of potential clients (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2015; Minazzi, 2014). Previous findings show the development of ICT and specifically Social Media, has significantly altered consumer perspectives, especially in the tourism industry. Traditional marketing methods are by-passed, as the gap between tourists and providers draw closer, and this has had the effect of empowering consumers before, during, and after, the tourist experience (Neuhofer, 2016; Minazzi, 2014; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2015; Mack et al., 2008).

Customers are empowered before the trip because technology allows them to search for the best deals, by referring to consumer generated recommendations. During the trip, technology allows immediacy and swift choice options, enabling customers to choose their experiences after they arrive at the destination. Also during, and after, the trip technology and especially Social Media empowers customers by allowing them to become a journalistic style creator, a critic, and influencer of other tourists in the pre-trip stage of the travel journey.

## **5.5 Perception of actual benefits**

In line with the above observations, the participants in this study felt that Social Media was a good way to directly communicate with customers, and potentially develop a relationship. Traditional marketing methods such as newspapers, radio, and television have been surpassed by Social Media as sources of trustworthy information. This was the case with the study participants, who all favoured online advertising approaches such their website, Social Media, online discounting channels, and commission-based online booking agents. For those that still used print advertising, most only printed brochures, and only two participants advertised in magazines.

Many businesses, such as those in this study, are increasingly turning to Social Media for customer relations, communication and trust enhancement (Cheek et al., 2013; Dutta, 2010; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2015; Pekka, 2010), and research shows that this can be achieved through Social Media (Humphreys & Wilken, 2014). Studies show that consumers now trust Social Media more than television or other sources of information (Kaul & Chaudhri,

2015; Faux, 2006). By using Social Media to promote their product, businesses show transparency, due to the direct, non-hierarchical interaction between brands and customers, and consequently, interactive relationships can be fostered.

Several participants also felt that the use of Social Media raised brand awareness, helped to increase customers, and that it was a useful marketing tool, in line with some of their initial goals and motivations, despite not being able to prove this accurately due to the lack of monitoring. Previous studies support this, showing that the tools can be useful to generate exposure, create awareness of the business and increase sales (Jones et al., 2015; Schaupp & Belanger, 2014).

## **5.6 Engagement and feedback**

The majority of participants encouraged feedback through the form of reviews on TripAdvisor, as they felt that this channel was an extremely useful way of attracting more business. The usefulness of RRSs such as TripAdvisor, for customer interaction and attracting new customers, has previously been discussed. It was also apparent from viewing the participating businesses' Social Media channels, that the majority would react in some way to comments on their platforms within two or three days, usually by replying to the comment or interacting with it in another way, such as "liking" the comment on Facebook.

It is clear to see that most participants felt it was important to acknowledge any user interaction, with an interaction of their own, in order to develop a relationship. This corresponds with previous research which denotes the importance of constructing a relationship with customers, by interactions and engagement, in order to build trust (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011; Kozinets et al., 2010; Rokka et al., 2014).

Two of the participants indicated that they were reluctant to ask for feedback due to the possibility of receiving negative reviews, and one participant stated that they ignored negative feedback because of the risk of undesirable reaction. Negative reviews and interaction can cause great damage to a brand's reputation and credibility (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Rokka et al., 2014). It is vital therefore, for businesses to ensure that they have strategies in place to deal with any potentially damaging feedback in a procedural fashion in order to minimise negative impacts (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011; Kozinets et al., 2010; Fournier & Avery, 2011).

There was a tendency for the participants to react to negative feedback from customers by attempting to make the conversation private, in order to reduce the spread of negative association with their business. One participant rejected this strategy and stated that they felt it was best to deal with any negative issues in public, so that other users can see that the problem had been dealt with. Academic literature suggests that the best way to deal with negative feedback is to deal with it in public. It gives a chance for the public that have been exposed to the negative complaints, a chance to see that the situation has been dealt with (Fournier & Avery, 2011).

## **5.7 Actual barriers and challenges**

### **5.7.1 Lack of time**

The findings show that out of all the businesses that participated in this study, none employed more than six full-time staff. The small number of employees is frequently the case with tourism small businesses, and owners are often charged with multi-tasking and doing the all the various tasks that have to be done (Schaupp & Belanger, 2014). Many of the participants in this study reported that one of the main barriers to them utilising Social Media to its fullest potential, was that they simply did not have the time. Academic studies support this view. To produce regular content, and to continuously respond to customer feedback and complaints on Social Media, can prove to be extremely time-consuming (Karimi & Naghibi, 2015).

Some academic literature contradicts this however. Schaupp and Belanger (2014), in their study investigating the value of Social Media for small businesses, they felt that the lack of time available for small business owners meant that Social Media was a good reason for utilising the tool due its efficient nature.

### **5.7.2 Lack of knowledge and training**

One of the main barriers facing participants in this study was using Social Media as a tool owing to their lack of knowledge and skill. The lack of training, and the absence of any previous knowledge of Social Media through personal use, affected the majority of participants' use of the tool. Only one business was participating in the use of new tools and technology in addition to their Social Media channels. They were using new technologies such as drones and 360 degrees' videos to enhance their Social Media content. Otherwise, there was a reluctance to expand their use of Social Media to new channels, or use the new tools that were available to them, partly due to lack of knowledge and skill.

This reluctance or inability towards development is supported by previous inquiries, which suggest small businesses suffer from the lack of training in how to use the rapidly evolving channels, and the lack of technical expertise available to them (Garrido-Moreno & Lockett, 2016; Dahnil et al, 2014). Those studies are related to hotel operators and small businesses in general, and there seems to be a lack academic literature on the barriers to using Social Media for small marine tourism businesses. However, as this study has shown, the issues mentioned in those previous inquiries are likely to affect small marine tourism businesses in the same way.

### **5.7.3 Lack of resources**

Several participants indicated that a major barrier to their use of Social Media was the lack of resources available to them. This included the low number of full-time employees, and limited money to hire more staff specifically for Social Media. Various studies indicate that small businesses are often reluctant or unable to hire marketing managers, due to lack of resources (Cetinkaya & Kalhan, 2014; Elmahgop et al., 2015); and this leads the inability to focus strategically, due to the lack of market awareness, reluctance to develop from the status quo, and failure to acknowledge and react to the technology-enhanced powerful consumer (Hood, 2013).

### **5.7.4 Lack of impact**

The findings from this study show that many participants felt that despite the ease in setting up Social Media, the lack of direct, visible, impact on profits and business performance, led to dissatisfaction and reluctance to develop their Social Media strategy further. Previous studies found that some businesses using Social Media found it difficult to quantify the actual value that it brought to their company, and this led to disenchantment as to the effectiveness of the tool (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Garrido-Moreno & Lockett, 2016). However, none of the businesses specifically stated in their initial aims that they wished to see a direct improvement on business performance due to Social Media. Along with the lack of monitoring of Social Media performance, there was a disconnect between the initial goals, and the feeling of disappointment with the impact that Social Media had on their business.

### **5.7.5 Lifestyle entrepreneurship**

The findings indicate that many of the participants are involved in running their businesses because it gives them an opportunity to be self-sufficient, in control, and because it offers them the prospect of being employed in a job which they also consider to be their hobby. For three participants, who had retired from previous jobs, this was

certainly the case. The desire for significant profit and business growth was lacking, and the priority for them was associated with being in control, and involved in something that enhanced their lifestyle. This unquestionably had an influence on business operations. The urgency to invest in a significant marketing strategy, including Social Media, was not a priority.

Two of these operators uploaded content the most irregularly out of all the participants of this study, and had a lax attitude towards online interaction with customers and dealing with feedback. Several studies show that this is often the case with tourism small businesses. Lifestyle choice, being in control, and profitability not being a priority were often strong factors with such businesses (Cohen et al., 2014; Di Domenico, 2005; Burgess et al., 2015). A previous study specifically focussed on tourism small businesses in New Zealand also backed these findings (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000).

Some academic literature also states that small tourism businesses operators are lifestyle entrepreneurs due to the fact that barriers to entry are low, and not a lot of capital investment is needed to start the business (Williams et al., 1989; Morrison et al., 2001; Morrison & King, 2002; Hjalager, 2005). One study participant contradicted this, stating that they had invested everything into the business, and that business performance was vital, in order for them to survive and keep operating every year. They stated that they had to make a profit to keep their operations viable, and that they had several employees, who relied on their business being in operation.

For most participants, the lifestyle aspect was a major reason for them being involved in their business. For the majority however, despite the various lifestyle factors which attracted them towards starting up these types of businesses, such as the one in this study, there was realisation that in order to keep that lifestyle, their businesses must also perform and make a profit. There is a need for the owners to keep growing their business, with the help of successful marketing strategies, such as the use of Social Media, in order to maintain the lifestyle, and an operationally profitable business.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

The discussions focussed on carrying out comparative analysis of the findings from the interviews with previous academic research on the themes that arose from conducting this study. The discussion of the findings suggests that the use of Social Media by small businesses is extensive and thoroughly researched in academia. However, there is a lack



of research conducted into the use of Social Media as a marketing tool by small tourism businesses, and especially small marine tourism businesses.

The findings also suggest that there was a lack of a clear strategy when utilising Social Media, as well as a tendency to not set definitive goals for a Social Media strategy. This conflicted with several academic studies that promoted the importance of a well-planned and lucid strategy, as well as the setting of clear and measurable goals. The absence of an incisive strategy and clear goals, along with a lack of motivation, and deficiency of resources, meant that many of the participants were left disappointed and underwhelmed with the perceived lack of real positive results stemming from the use of Social Media. `

Overall, the discussions revealed that there were areas that needed further research. Further revelations included, that due to a combination of factors, including the influence of lifestyle choice on business operations, the use of Social Media as a marketing strategy was inefficient and inadequately carried out by participants in this study. The next chapter will offer some recommendations for Social Media use by the participants in this study, stemming from the findings from the interviews and the discussions above.

# **CHAPTER 6**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

## 6. Recommendations

Small business owners must overcome a multitude of hurdles if they are to operate a viable and profitable business, many of which have been outlined in the previous chapters, both from academic literature, and from the findings in this study. These include, the lack of an overall marketing strategy; often a reluctance to prioritise business growth due to lifestyle factors; and a lack of awareness of the ever-changing business environment, where the technology enhanced consumer has a lot of influence and power, which can impact on business reputations.

The findings from this study suggest that along with these difficulties and others, small businesses face the challenge of operating in a sector where time and resources are scarce. Using Social Media effectively as a tool for their business can help to overcome or reduce some of these challenges. In order to accomplish this, a well-planned Social Media strategy has to be put in place. The lack of barriers to entry means that Social Media can be started at minimal initial cost. Effective Social Media use can help to create exposure, generate awareness, and can be used as a communication tool between the business and consumers, transmitting brand information to a vast audience, and at a rapid rate, compared to traditional forms of advertising.

This chapter provides recommendations on the most effective ways to use social media and aims to answer part of the research question which asks:

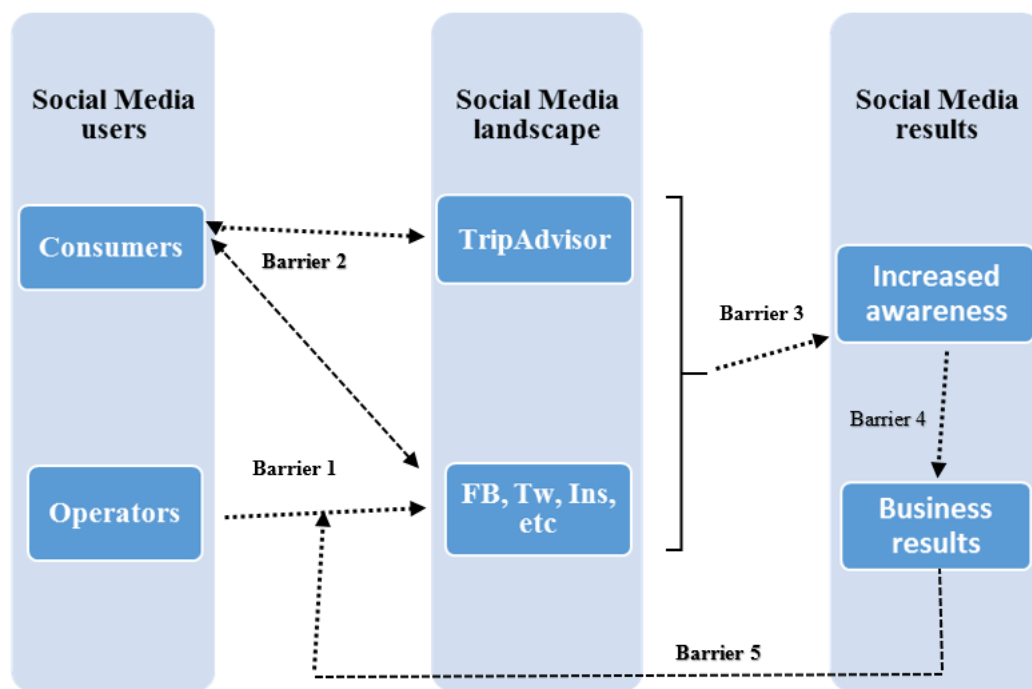
*How can Social Media strategies be improved by small marine tourism operators?*

The findings of this study identified that there was a lack of strategy in the participants' use of Social Media. With reference to the research findings and discussions from the previous chapters, especially with reference to the perceived barriers of using Social Media, these recommendations have been developed in order to maximise the potential of utilising Social Media as a marketing tool by such businesses as those involved in this study.

When setting out recommendations, it is important to highlight the various barriers faced by participants in this study when attempting to utilise Social Media for their businesses. The findings from the interviews in Chapter 4 and the discussions that followed in Chapter 5, indicate several barriers. Figure 16 illustrates the theoretical framework of the barriers from this study, displaying the relationship between the Social Media users – Consumers and Operators; the Social Media landscape - Social Networks, Microblogs,

Media Content Sharing Communities on the one hand, and Review and Recommendation Sites on the other hand; and Social Media results. It ought to be noted that in this framework, the Review and Recommendation Site, TripAdvisor, is separated from the other forms of Social Media. This is because TripAdvisor like other review sites, is mainly consumer driven (though operators can reply to consumer reviews), whereas with other categories of Social Media operators have a much higher level of content control. The theoretical framework is summarised below:

**Figure 16: Theoretical framework of the barriers faced by operators using Social Media**



**Barrier 1:** *Lack of trust* - Due to inexperience with Social Media, and the lack of knowledge and belief in its usefulness, operators may decide against setting up Social Media accounts. This was not the case with participants in this study, though some interviewees did indicate that they lacked knowledge in how to use Social Media due to them not using it in their personal lives. However, this did not stop them from setting up Social Media for their businesses.

**Barrier 2:** *Lack of Control* - The multi-directional nature of Social media, with consumers being able to post content, comments, and ratings on the business' Social Media platforms, could lead to fear of not being able to control the content that is posted, and therefore possible damage to the business' reputation. This was highlighted by some participants.

**Barrier 3: *Operational Issues*** - Most participants stated that they wished to increase brand awareness with their use of Social Media. However, due to barriers such as lack of resources, knowledge, and time, leading to a lack of quality content creation, the businesses failed to maximise the potential benefits of Social media. This was the case with the majority of participants.

**Barrier 4: *Measurement Issues*** - Ultimately, by using Social Media as a tool for their businesses, operators wish to see real results in terms of business performance, such as increase in customers. However, for the vast majority of participants, due to the lack of monitoring, the effect of Social Media and increased brand awareness, on business performance was not clear.

**Barrier 5: *Loss of Trust*** - The lack of clear results could lead to the perception that there was no return in investment by utilising Social Media. This could lead operators failing to invest and develop their Social Media usage, gradually leading to inactivity on their channels. This feeds into Barrier 1 – the lack of control. This was the case for many of the participants in this study.

After recognising certain barriers and issues in social media marketing, recommendations can be made to attempt to overcome these barriers and increase marketing efficiency. It ought to be mentioned that these recommendations are specifically for those businesses that wished to improve their use of Social Media as a marketing tool. Some participants in the study showed a lack of motivation and interest in using and further developing their Social Media use. The risks and potential pitfalls of Social Media are too great for businesses that are not genuinely motivated to increase their understanding of the tool for their businesses. Therefore, it is suggested that such businesses do not participate in Social Media, or at the very least, keep interactions and engagements with the public at a minimum, in order to reduce the risks associated with Social Media.

For the majority of the businesses that participated in this study a lack of resources, time, and knowledge were factors which limited the usefulness of Social Media as tool for them. The strategies put forward in this chapter may not be possible to accomplish for all of the participants, due to these barriers, and the development and utilisation of some of the stages may have to be limited. It is suggested that if they are genuinely interested in developing their Social Media strategy, even with such barriers that may hinder them, there are useful aspects that can be used.

## 6.1 Profiles of Social Media users

Social Media is used in various ways by every demographic of the population. Some users are passive users, who just observe while others upload content regularly. Some may use it as a source of information, whether it be as a news source, or a source for consumer recommendations of goods or services. Therefore, it is possible to identify and separate Social Media users into groups, which are dependent on how they use Social Media. Table 7 is an example of different types of Social Media users. It identifies United States adult online consumer groups and separates them into profiles of target groups. These target groups are divided into a “participation ladder” according to “social technological profiles” which reveal how the internet is utilised by such groups.

Tourism related Social Media users fit into these profiles. There are various groups from this example that are important to identify for the businesses in this study. The largest group are the *Spectators* (73%), This group are information seekers and make up the majority of potential customers. In terms of Social Media content, they will be the users that read travel blogs and forums; look at content such as tweets, videos, photos, and articles that are posted by businesses and other users. Spectators will also consult rating sites such as TripAdvisor, and explore and discover other users’ travel experiences. This information that they consult, discover and absorb, will influence their travel decisions.

**Table 7: Social Media user profiles**

Social Technological Profiles of Users	Description
<i>Creators (24%)</i>	The top level who publish different types of online content including websites, blogposts, videos and articles.
<i>Conversationalists (36%)</i>	Post a Social Network status update at least once a week
<i>Critics (36%)</i>	Rate products and services, comment on other blogs, discuss in forums and edit articles in Wikis.
<i>Collectors (23%)</i>	Recommend websites and add keywords to photos on photo portals to make them easier to find.
<i>Joiners (68%)</i>	Have their own profiles in social networks and visit these sites.
<i>Spectators (73%)</i>	Read blogs, forums, ratings, tweets, they watch other users’ videos and listen to podcasts.
<i>Inactives (14%)</i>	Inactive on Social Media

Source: Fleming, (2012).

Other important groups in these categories, for tourism businesses, are the influencers. These groups provide content and opinions that help to influence information seekers into making travel decisions. They include the *Creators* (24%) who publish blogs, articles and videos. The straightforward and low-cost nature of setting up a blog has resulted in an abundance of travel bloggers. Although there is some difference of opinion on the influential nature of bloggers, many of them are experts in leveraging the web and using Social Media. It can be hugely beneficial for travel suppliers to develop a relationship with this group. In fact, many hoteliers, and tourism operators will treat certain bloggers as VIP guests in order to garner positive reviews from them (Mogelonsky, 2012).

Another group with a lot of influence are the *Critics* (36%). This group are also important in the travel industry. They rate services and products, on sites such as TripAdvisor and can also influence the purchasing decisions of *Spectators*. This group is very important for businesses in this study. As indicated, many of the businesses suggested that TripAdvisor was extremely influential in influencing customers to make bookings with them. *Critics* are usually just normal customers who like to critique their experiences online. The majority of the businesses in this study state that they encourage their customers to leave reviews on TripAdvisor. This is an important and useful strategy. Increasing the number of *Critics* who have good experiences, and then post positive reviews and recommendations online, would positively influence other Social Media users, such as the Spectators. Creators also update their Social Media channels in real-time while they are on holiday, by posting photographs of destinations and activities, with added commentary (Lo & McKercher, 2015). The significance of this user-generated democratisation of destination and tourism business development has been mentioned previously.

## **6.2 Preliminary analysis of existing strategies and online conversations**

The first step in a successful Social Media strategy is to carry out a preliminary analysis of the business' current Social Media use. Before developing any goals or targets for using Social Media, a business ought to analyse its previous Social Media activities. The world of Social Media is an unorganised mass of tangled data, in the form of text, images and videos (Injadat, Salo, & Nassif, 2016). It would be impossible to analyse everything that appears on the various platforms. There are various third-party companies that can help to analyse this data for businesses (Kennedy, 2016). For the majority of small

businesses that participated in this study, the limited financial portfolio would negate the hiring of an intermediary company to carry out this task.

As discovered, only one of the businesses use a third-party company to manage Social Media activities. For the other businesses that lack the resources to hire an outside specialist, there are various stages of self-analysis of Social Media that can be carried out. Analysis should include discussions by potential customers and other parties about the company online. The business' Social Media usage on each channel should be compiled and this should include the interactions, feedback, and any other activities.

After analysing the business' own Social Media channels, it is also important to expand this search, and examine whether the business is being talked about on the social web. Analysis should aim to discover what the conversation is, and where the communication is taking place. Identified discussions should be sorted into *positive, negative, and neutral* categories (Berger, 2016; Gaspar, Pedro, Panagiotopoulos, & Seibt, 2016). In order to carry this out, search terms such as the company name, the brand, and the product, need to be put into search engines of the various Social Media networks, which will enable identification of the conversations that are taking place.

There are different ways of achieving this. Simply inputting phrases into the search engines is one way. Many Social Media channels now utilise "hashtags" (#) to aid with categorisation of content. According to Twitter, who initially popularised the use of this tool, the use of the hashtag symbol (#) together with a relevant keyword or phrase enables the word or phrase to be more visible on the network. When a user clicks on the "hashtagged" word, Twitter, and other Social Media channels, will show every instance of that word being used in a tweet. Popular words or phrases that have been "hashtagged" will also appear in the Twitter "Trending Topics" which is a list that is visible in a sidebar on any Twitter page (Twitter, n.d.). Instagram also uses hashtags in this way. Photographs and videos are tagged using the same process and can be searched for in the same way.

Facebook have also added this feature, making it possible to search Facebook posts in this way. Hashtags make for searching a word or phrase easier on Social Media, and correspondingly for users of the tool, it makes them and their Social Media activity more visible to other users. Table 8 identifies hashtags that can be used by businesses in this study. It identifies examples of specific hashtags that could be useful for each group of participants of this study, when analysing their Social Media channels. These hashtags can also be for Social Media monitoring and this will be discussed further on in this



chapter. Furthermore, Table 9 provides examples of free online analytics tools that could be useful during the preliminary analysis. These tools will also be discussed later in this chapter.

This type of analysis is useful for businesses such as those in this study as they do not take up financial resources. The analysed discussions will help to give an idea of the type of conversation that is ongoing concerning the business and instances where feedback to users was, or should have been, given will be revealed. A certain amount of time will need to be set aside for this task and this may prove difficult in some instances. This is an important stage in developing a Social Media strategy and provides the basis for developing such a strategy further.

### **6.3 Choosing a target market and developing goals and objectives**

Several businesses that participated in this study have developed some advertising strategies for their other marketing channels, in terms of segmentation, and defining which types of markets to target. In order to maximise the potential of Social Media, these strategies should be merged into a Social Media marketing strategy. Without a clear strategy, it will be arduous to identify measurable objectives, which in turn will lead to difficulties in identifying the appropriate channels that should be used. The initial analysis should aim to define a definitive target market or markets, that should be specifically targetted by a Social Media marketing campaign (Thackery et al., 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Effing, & Spal, 2016).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Social Media users can fit into different categories depending on how they use Social Media. Analysis of the Social Media and how they interact with the business should reveal the type of users that are participating and what influence they have, such as in Table 7. The findings of the interviews indicate the categories of target markets that the businesses have been targetting, at varying levels, with their various advertising strategies, such as international, domestic, young, old, female and male.

The next step for the strategy should be the development of goals and objectives. Consideration of the goals and clear decisions on a strategy are needed in order for companies to benefit from using Social Media. If these goals are to be met, the correct strategy needs to be formulated, in order for Social Media activities to be implemented in a focussed way which makes them sustainable and well-anchored within the company.

This does not rule out spontaneous Social Media activities, as they can be a positive, but the important thing is to have focussed goals and a clear strategy.

The research conducted for this study suggests that Social Media marketing has either a very limited role or is only a part of the overall marketing strategy for the businesses interviewed. It is vital that Social Media goals are integrated with, and are consistent with all other marketing channels. Moreover, the goals should be realistic in terms of the monetary and knowledge resources that are available to the business. These goals should also be coordinated with the broader marketing strategy and vision for the company (Harlow, 2015). Social Media goals should be unambiguous and clearly defined in order to make sure that the limited resources are not wasted. The goals will fall into two categories – qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative goals are ones that cannot be expressed in clear figures. These could include (Barker, Barker, Bormann, & Neher, 2013; Robinson et al, 2015; Badshah, 2014; O'Leary, Sheehan, & Lentz, 2011):

- *Communication*: Improve Social Media relations and online reputation – electronic word of mouth;
- *Customer loyalty*: Increase customer loyalty and satisfaction, and improve customer interaction;
- *Brand awareness*: Improve brand awareness and target new markets;
- *Market Research*: Acquiring customer and competitor information and recognise trends.

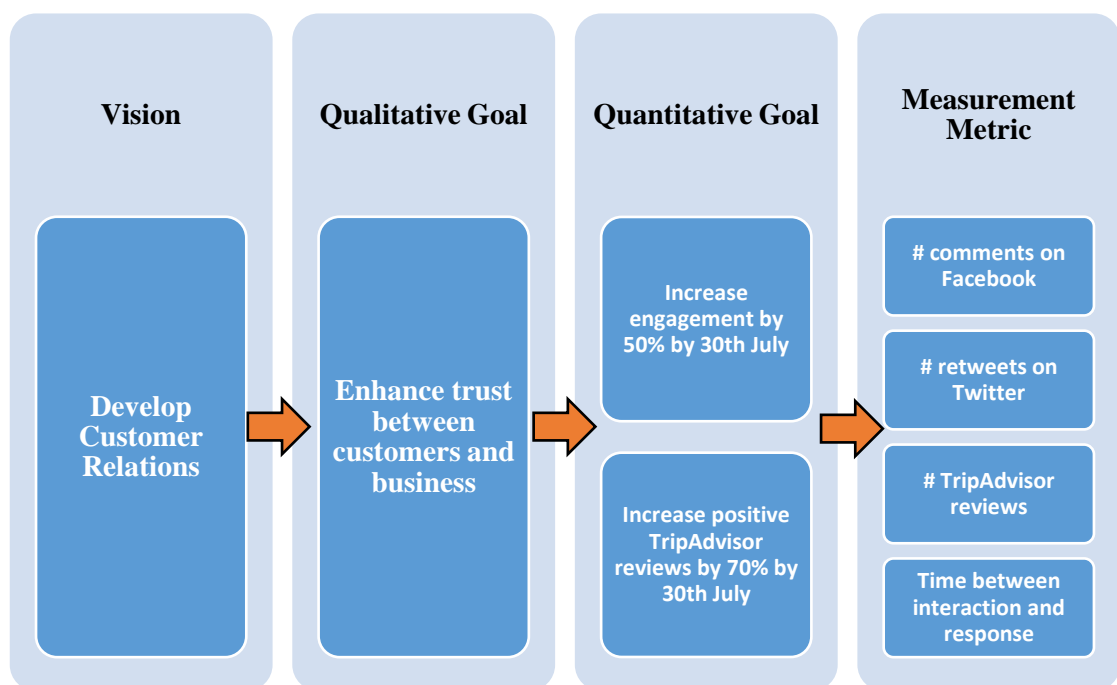
Quantitative goals on the other hand, are measurable by means of key figures and values (Badshah, 2014; O'Leary, Sheehan, & Lentz, 2011). These goals can be a specification of the qualitative goals mentioned previously. For example, a quantitative goal could be to enhance the company image on Twitter by decreasing number of negative tweets on twitter by 15% by a certain date. This could be measured by comparing the number of positive and negative tweets in that time period. This is a specification of the qualitative goal of *Communication*. If there have been 15% less negative tweets in that time period, then Social Media relations and the business' online reputation has improved, fulfilling the *Communication* goal.

Another example of a quantitative goal could be to enhance brand recognition by expanding the reach on Facebook by 10% by a certain date. This could be measured by the increase in the amount of Likes on the business' Facebook page. This is a specification of the qualitative goal of *Brand awareness*. If there has been an increase in the number of

Likes by 10% in that time period, then more people have become aware of the brand and possible new markets have been targetted, fulfilling the *Brand awareness* goal.

The optimal Social Media strategy would include an overall marketing strategy or vision for the business, combined with qualitative goals and measurable quantitative goals. Figure 11 shows an example of this. In this example, the overall vision of the business is to develop customer relationships. The qualitative goal is to enhance trust between customers and the business. The quantitative goals are to increase positive reviews on TripAdvisor, and to increase interactions on social networks, both by a certain amount, within a specific time period. Finally, the metrics are mapped out to measure the success of this overall vision.

**Figure 11: An example of combining business strategies with Social Media goals**



Quantification of goals is often difficult, especially when attempting to relate it to sales numbers. Certain factors can be measured, such as the number of times customers interact, or the number of followers. Other goals are difficult to quantify, such as what effect a goal has had on volume of sales.

When analysing the findings of this study, it is clear to see that the goals for the participating businesses when they started to use Social Media were a combination of qualitative and quantitative goals. For example, the *use of Social Media as a marketing tool*, and the *use of Social Media to increase brand awareness*, are qualitative goals. Whereas goals such as *increasing positive recommendations*, and *increasing customer interactions*, can be considered to be quantitative goals. However, due to the lack of

monitoring and specification of quantitative goals, there is no way to measure if the goals are successful. Specification of quantitative goals, followed up with monitoring and measurement will lead to clear indication to the success of these goals. After identifying target markets, and the goals of a Social Media strategy, the next step is to choose the most appropriate Social Media channels for your business.

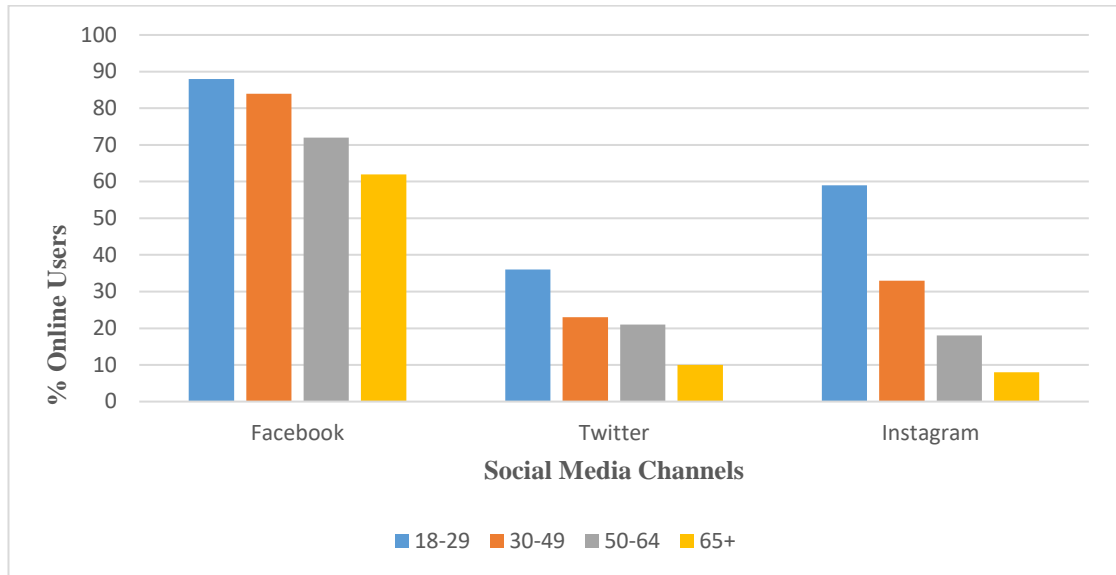
#### **6.4 Choosing the right Social Media channel(s)**

As various studies have shown, and this study suggests, Social Media can be increasingly influential in the way it impacts on businesses that utilises them. Direct interaction with consumers has become a vital way to communicate and influence customers' decisions. Despite this, as suggested in terms of resource availability, a full-time commitment to Social Media does not mean being active on every single Social Media platform possible. In fact, it could be suggested that it is more worthwhile to focus on a limited number of Social Media accounts that can be given full attention, instead of attempting to operate Social Media accounts on every single channel.

The abundance of Social Media channels has led to significant variations of user demographics and functionalities. It is vital that after identifying a target market, a strategic decision be made on which Social Media channels to participate in. The analysed discussions can be combined with evaluations of the type of users of individual Social Media channels in order to determine each platforms' relevance to the business and the target market.

Figures 12 and 13 show the percentage of online adult users of Social Media channels per age-group, and the percentage of male and female online adult users of the Social Media channels Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These channels were chosen for this representation as they are amongst the most popular platforms used by participants of this study. User demographic information for TripAdvisor is not readily available as a large majority of users post anonymously on the site. This gives an idea of the different demographics and which Social Media channels that they are using. The figures show that Facebook is by far the most popular Social Media channel amongst the males and females, and all the age groups. There are more female users of Facebook than males, and significantly more female Instagram users than male users.

**Figure 12: Percentage of online adult users of Social Media channels per age-group**



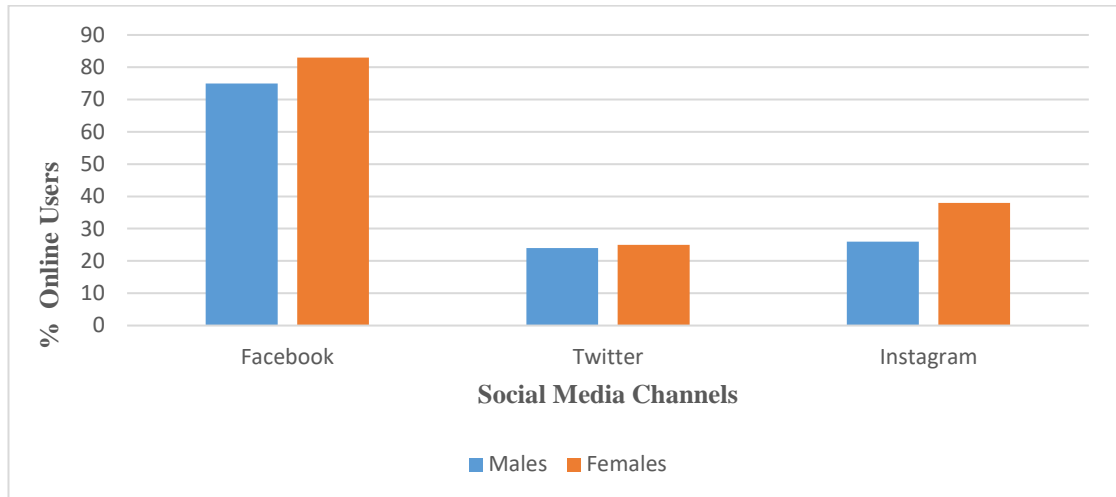
Adapted from: Greenwood, Perrin, & Dugan, (2016).

For the participants of the study, the most popular Social Media platforms are Facebook and TripAdvisor. These figures indicate that they are correct in using Facebook, as it is the most popular platform, globally. The graphs also show that Instagram is more popular than Twitter. In terms of tourism businesses such as the ones in this study, Instagram can be identified as more appropriate than Twitter as a platform to use, due to its characteristic as a photo-sharing platform.

It is important to consider engagement of channels as well as the absolute numbers of users. The use of Instagram by tourists and by tourism providers, has been discussed throughout the earlier chapters. Instagram is a platform that is used not only by tourism providers, and destination marketing companies, such as Tourism NZ, but it is also popular with tourists during all travel phases. During the pre-trip phase, potential travellers could look at friends' Instagram accounts for inspiration. During and after the holiday, travellers will use Instagram to post pictures of their experiences.

Twitter, the micro-blogging site, is perhaps not as relevant to tourists during all travel phases. Businesses can use it to provide information and links to business related content. Tourists may use it to search for information and make queries, as it provides a more appropriate line of communication to providers, than a photo-sharing site such as Instagram. However, only the most ardent "Tweeters" (a person that posts on Twitter) will constantly use this channel throughout all the travel phases. Instagram can be considered to be more appropriate for tourism businesses to use, rather than Twitter, due to its characteristics as a popular platform during all phases of the travel experience.

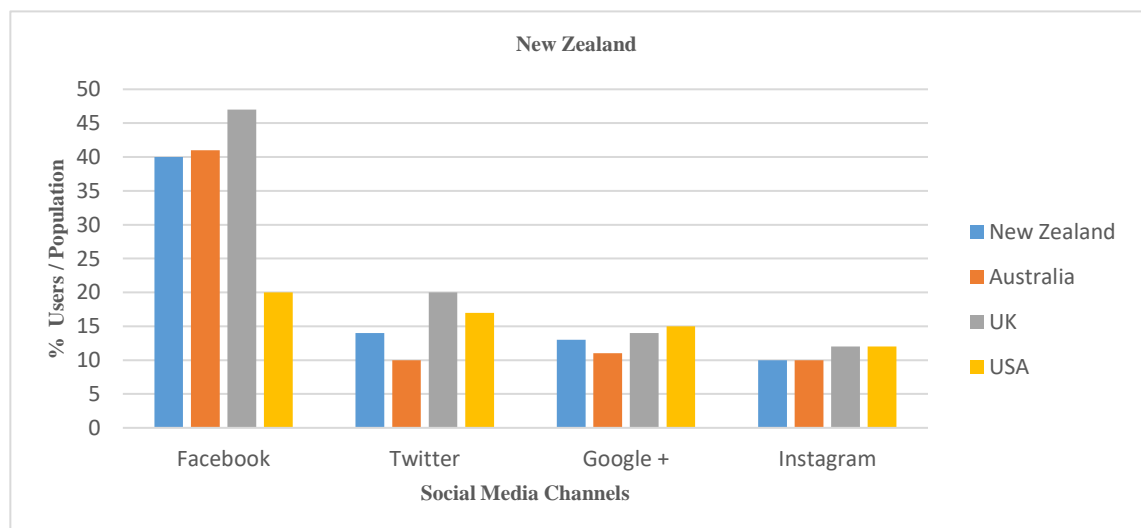
**Figure 13: Percentage of male and female online adult users of Social Media Channels**



Adapted from: Greenwood, Perrin, & Dugan, (2016).

Figures 14 and 15 show which Social Media channels are the most popular in a certain group of countries. These countries were chosen because the majority of tourists that visit New Zealand, come from them (MBIE, 2017), and alongside the New Zealand market, would be in the target markets for the businesses in this study. Once again, for all but one of the countries in this study, Facebook is significantly the most popular platform. The next most popular platforms for the majority of the countries selected are Twitter, Instagram, and Google+. Again, these are amongst the popular platforms for the participants in this study.

**Figure 14: Most popular Social Media channels for target market countries**



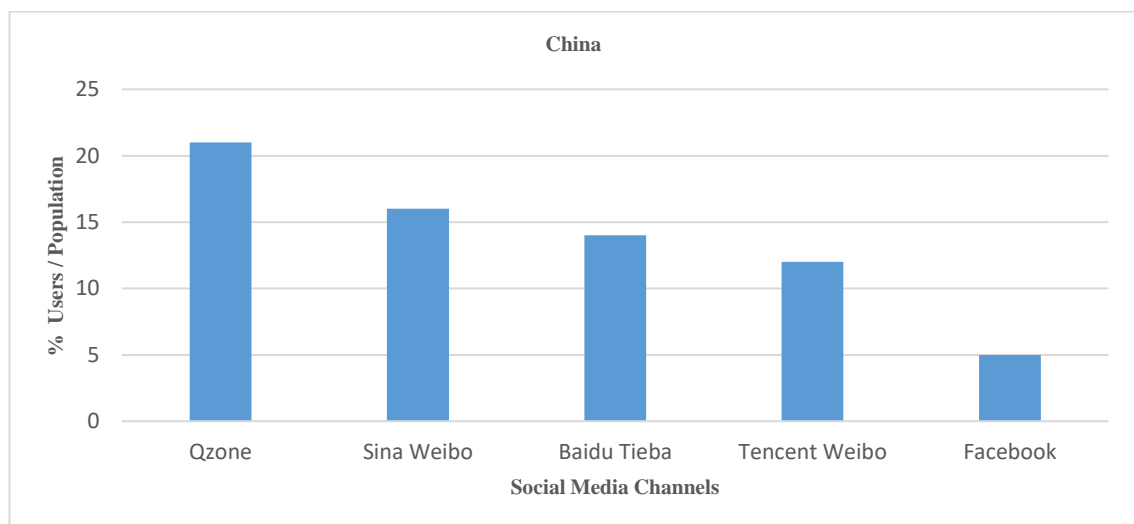
Adapted from: Chafey, (2016); "Digital, social & mobile in 2015," (2015).

The characteristics of these travel markets must also be take into consideration. For example, Social Media is a more suitable platform to target tourists who travel on their own or in small groups of two, three or four. These travellers, referred to as Free

Independent Travellers (FITs), usually book their own itinerary and are not part of a guided tour. FITs are more likely to make travel decisions after they arrive at a destination, and are more likely to use Social Media for research and to help make such decisions.

The Chinese travel market has long been considered to be made up mainly of pre-organised tour packages. In fact, when analysing data concerning Chinese travellers to New Zealand, 61% arrive on organised group tours, and only 39% are FITs (Tourism NZ, 2016c). Consequently, the majority of the Chinese market to New Zealand are unlikely to be making travel decisions by referring to Social Media, as group travel decisions would already have been made.

**Figure 15: Most popular Social Media channels in China**



Adapted from: Chafey, (2016).

There are certain points that need to be made about the Social Media habits of Chinese nationals. As Figure 15 shows, for China, the most popular Social Media channels have not so far been mentioned in detail in this study. Access to popular Social Media channels such as Facebook and Twitter is banned in China. The majority of users use country specific platforms such as Qzone and Sina Weibo. It would be appropriate for the businesses of this study to, if possible, look into participating in these channels, especially if they are targetting Chinese tourists. This could prove to be too costly for the majority of these businesses as they would require time and resources which would possibly be needed for translation and hiring of specialist Chinese language Social Media intermediaries. Only one of the businesses that participated in this study mentioned that they were doing that (Brian), and they were the only business that were using a third party Social Media manager.

When choosing the right Social Media channels, looking at demographics and the popularity of each platform amongst the target platform is essential. It is also important to look at the functions of the different channels so we can combine the goals of the business and the demographics, and then consider which channels are the most appropriate for the businesses in this study. As previously discussed with reference to previous research, the technology influenced, purchasing behaviour of tourists can be divided into three phases, based on a temporal perspective - the pre-trip or anticipatory phase; the during-trip or experiential phase; and post-trip or the reflective phase (Minazzi, 2015; Neuhofer, 2016; Sharpley, & Stone, 2012).

To target customers during each stage, businesses must utilise the most appropriate channels. However, as indicated throughout this study, the fluid nature of the different Social Media means that the majority of channels mentioned, are utilised by tourists during all phases. The pre-trip phase, consisting of “dreaming” about holidays and researching for inspiration and ideas, makes use of all the different categories of Social Media. During the actual holiday, tourists will utilise SNs, MBs, and MSCs in order to share their experiences in real time. The use of technology and smart phones has also enabled tourists to make purchasing during trips, and RRSs are also referred to at this stage. The post trip phase of sharing experiences, and inspiring the next cycle of tourists also makes use of most Social Media channels.

## **6.5 Content**

After choosing the most appropriate channels for the business, it is important to consider what content needs to be uploaded. Content which may be suitable for one platform, may be inappropriate for other platforms. Despite this, the majority of channels now overlap and offer users the option of uploading content which previously would have been only suitable for other channels. For example, Instagram, traditionally known as a photo sharing application, now offers the option of uploading videos, and the option to live stream video content (Tumbokon, 2016). Facebook, multi-tool social network started offering live video streaming to its users a few months before Instagram (Ashok, 2016).

All Social Media is about interaction between people. The use of Social Media for developing brands and building relationships with customers has been discussed in detail throughout this study. The different channels offer various ways of doing this. Some useful ways to encourage engagement and brand proliferation are discussed below



((Mogelonsky, 2012; Moritz, 2014; Cisnero, 2014; Panda, Dehuri, & Wang, 2014 Wishpond, n.d.; Hemley, 2013; “Social Media Influencers”, 2015; Mitchell, 2016):

- *Customer-centric photos*

Using content which has been generated by or includes the customers is a useful and resource-efficient way of increasing engagement. Photos can be posted of the customers, while they are participating in the activities provided by the business. The customers are then encouraged to engage with business’ channels and could help to spread the brand name by sharing the photos. Another way to do this is by sharing photographs of tours and activities, that have been posted by the customer. The business can promote this by notifying the customer to use a certain hashtag, for example #(Business slogan), with their photographs, thereby giving approval to the business to share the photo. This is a useful way to advertise the brand for free and increase engagement, as the customer will keep checking the business’ Social Media page to see if their photograph has been featured.

- *Listen and engage*

Social Media is about interactions and engagements with users. Businesses can encourage customers to mark any type of posts about the business by using a certain hashtag. This way the business owner will be able to find the posts easier, and consequently can engage more efficiently. This can be useful, not only for brand promotion, but for dealing with customer complaints and queries efficiently.

- *Employee-centric posts*

In order to build relationships with customers, it may be useful to show off the brand personalities. The interactive nature of tourism and Social Media provides a suitable backdrop to put real faces of people to the business name, by the sharing of photographs and information about employees. Photographs of happy and well treated employees encourage interaction, adding credibility and appeal to the brand. Links on Social Media to the company website with blogs profiling the employees is a useful way to provide a personal connection, and a “behind the scenes” look at the business with help develop a more authentic relationship.

- *Competitions*

A good way of encouraging customer engagement on Social Media is through competitions and prizes. One way to do this is by initiating a photograph contest. By

asking users to submit their best photograph, featuring the business product or location, can encourage engagement and increase reach. Another example of a competition would be to offer a prize for 1000<sup>th</sup> follower (or something similar) on a certain platform. This should encourage an increase in users engaging with the platform. Prizes do not need to be expensive. The business can offer as a prize, a free or discounted tour or activity.

- *Product-centric posts*

By posting photographs and videos of the business product, the Social Media user is able to see exactly what the business offers. This can be a very powerful tool, especially during the pre-trip inspiration phase, and at the during-trip phase when potential customers are making travel decisions.

- *Using Influencers*

Utilising influential Social Media users is an effective way to increase reach and promote the brand. It would be useful for businesses to attempt to build relationships with influencers so that they can help the business build relationships with their audience. Social Media influencers fit into the *Creators* category identified in Table 7 above. They are people who have established credibility in a certain industry or area; have access to a large and/or relevant audience; and can have a big impact on the rapid spread of information. Tourism authorities in New Zealand have utilised influential “Instagrammers” to aid with promoting their region (Mitchell, 2016), and various hotel and tourism operators have used popular bloggers to promote their brands.

Influencers should initially be identified and vetted, to make sure their content is a suitable fit for the business’ target market, and that the level of quality of their Social Media output and values are suitable for the business. The next step would be to engage with them, either in private, or on their Social Media channels, and propose the opportunity to develop partnership with the business. A good way to encourage influencer engagement would be to offer them compensation in return for promotion of the business. For example, if the business is a kayaking operator, the influencer could be offered a free kayak trip, and in return, they could post pictures or videos on their Social Media channels, or write a blog post about the experience. This would mutually benefit both parties, and for the business, provides a powerful way to promote their brand and content.

## 6.6 Monitoring

One of the biggest challenges for any business using Social Media, as is the case for participants of this study, is the difficulties in effectively monitoring the Social Media channels and measuring their effectiveness. This study found that many owners felt that it was difficult to see the real benefits fully participating in Social Media due to the lack of real visible returns on investment. However, it is not possible to identify any success without scrutinising the Social Media activity, and this study identified a real dearth in analysing and monitoring of channels. The lack of resources – financial, time, and manpower, is again a real issue here. Nevertheless, in order to really identify the effectiveness of Social Media, and develop the strategy further, some form of monitoring has to be carried out.

**Table 8: Hashtags for Social Media analysis and business promotion for the participants of this study**

General Hashtags	Fishing Hashtags	Watersports Hashtags	Sailing & Cruising Hashtags	Sightseeing & Wildlife Watching Hashtags
#Auckland	#(Business Name)	#(Business Name)	#(Business Name)	#(Business Name)
#NZMustDo	#(Business Slogan)	#(Business Slogan)	#(Business Slogan)	#(Business Slogan)
#VisitAuckland	#Fishing	#Kayak	#Sailing	#WhaleWatching
#PureNewZealand	#FishingLife	#SeaKayak	#SailingBoat	#Wildlife
#NZ	#Fish	#PaddleBoard	#SailingTrip	#Whales
#LoveAKL	#FishingTrip	#SUP	#SailingShip	#Dolphins
#Aotearoa	#FishingPicoftheDay	#Paddle	#SailingYacht	#Safari
#CityofSails	#FishingBoat	#WaterSports	#SailingAway	#DolphinWatching
#Sea			#Boat	#Seaplanes
#Adventure			#Cruise	#Aviation
#Tourism			#Cruising	#Planes
#Travel			#CruiseShip	
#Nature				
#Sunset				

One way to monitor the various Social Media channels is to do it manually. Hashtags can be used by businesses to increase the reach of their content, and for analysing Social Media. In the same way as mentioned, Hashtags, along with use of the search functions

on Social Media platforms, can be used to monitor the conversations regarding the business. Table 8 identifies hashtags that would be useful for promotion, as well as monitoring. The table also shows a “General Hashtags” column which is related to Auckland, New Zealand, and the marine tourism setting that their business operates in, and are appropriate for use alongside hashtags corresponding to the category of operation. The anticipation would be that Social Media users start using the same Hashtags, business related content can be spread, and the brand will be promoted. Using hashtags and search functions are useful for qualitative sentiment analysis and monitoring, in order to get a general idea of the feelings of users of Social Media, concerning the business. In order to carry out quantifiable monitoring, there are a variety of free Social Media analytics tools available.

These tools can help track how Social Media channels are performing and can aggregate user-generated content into a more efficient stream of information. Many of them also offer guides and tips to improving Social Media performance. These tools can be useful when monitoring Social Media channels, after a strategy has been put in place. Table 9 provides some examples of the free analytics tools that are available to users, and also a brief description of their functions. Using these tools will help to provide insights into users and their activities and preferences; provide in-depth analysis of the business’ Social Media activity; and provide suggestions for audience growth and strategical improvements. It would be extremely worthwhile for these businesses to make use of the available monitoring tools if they would like to fully develop their Social Media strategy.

## **6.7 Risks of using Social Media for business**

As mentioned in this chapter, and from the findings from the participants of this study, there are various risks associated with using Social Media as a tool for businesses. These risks could involve legal issues, employee issues, customer-related issues, and technological issues. Legal problems could include issues with privacy laws and content ownership. Technology related issues can include malware attacks and risk of viruses. Employee issues could include human resource issues such as harassment and discrimination, and human error issues such as posting inappropriate content which could damage the business’ reputation. Customer issues could stem from the dissatisfaction of the business leading to the customer publicly criticising the company and giving poor reviews. This can have an extremely damaging effect on the brand and reputation of the business, as these criticisms are public and can spread online at a rapid rate.

**Table 9: Free Social Media analytics tools**

<b>Analytic Tool</b>	<b>Function</b>
<i>Facebook Insights</i>	Demographic data on Facebook audience and their responses to posts. Identifies reach.
<i>Twitter Analytics</i>	Quick statistics on Twitter activity, including impressions, mentions, followers. Offers suggestions for audience growth.
<i>Instagram Insights</i>	Information on Instagram posts and followers, including when they are online. Insights into number of followers that have clicked on external links.
<i>Google Trends</i>	Google search trends related information, across various regions.
<i>Google Alerts</i>	Get alerts when something about the business is posted. Also create alerts for relevant topics.
<i>Google+ Insights</i>	Breakdown of information on online visibility, posts, and audience.
<i>HootSuite</i>	Overview of Facebook & Twitter activity. Reports on profile performance & response to posts. Create reports.
<i>Cyfe</i>	All-in-one dashboard app to monitor Social Media.
<i>Audiense</i>	A tool for analysing twitter followers.
<i>Followerwonk</i>	A tool for in-depth analysis of Twitter followers.
<i>LikeAlyzer</i>	Analysis of Facebook pages & provides tips to improve performance.
<i>Mentionmapp</i>	Monitor & track Twitter trends.
<i>Quintly</i>	Track & analyse Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, & Google.
<i>Twitonomy</i>	Visual analytics & actionable insights for Twitter.
<i>SocialOomph</i>	Monitor activity Twitter, Facebook, & blogs,
<i>Buffer</i>	Tool for analysing, and scheduling Social Media posts. Provides weekly reports on performance.
<i>Social Mention</i>	Aggregates and analyses user-generated content on multiple platforms.

Adapted from: Ueland (2016)

There are ways to reduce the chance of these risks occurring. With legal issues, businesses must be careful to not post personal information of customers. It is important to let the customers know photographs of them are going to be shared. In terms of content

ownership, content on most Social Media, such as photographs, that is available to be viewed by the public, can be used without risk of legal implications. With technological issues, free antivirus software can be installed. In terms of negating issues concerning employees, a Social Media code of conduct could be drawn up, ensuring that employees know what activities are appropriate (Milbrath, 2016; Belby, 2015).

Dealing with customer issues can be the most difficult. If a customer leaves a bad review, it is there online for the public to see. The best way to negotiate this would be to acknowledge the grievances, apologise, and try to compensate. As previously discussed, several participants in this study preferred to take complaints into a private forum in order to reduce exposure of the issue. However, as the literature shows (Fournier, & Avery, 2011), the best solution would be to deal with the issue in public, in order show the complainants' peers that the problem has been dealt with, and the risk of damaging the brand can be minimised.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter has been to offer some recommendations to improve the use of Social Media as a marketing tool for the businesses in this study. The findings and discussions from the interviews led to the discovery of the underlying barriers that the participants faced when trying to effectively use Social Media as a tool for their business. The theoretical framework of these barriers are highlighted in Figure 16. The inability to control user generated content, led to participants feeling a lack of control when using Social Media. By determining the nature of the online conversation about the business, and by posting suitable and interesting content as suggested in this chapter, can help the business to target any negative issues, and control the conversations, thereby reducing this barrier. This chapter highlights the risks that businesses face when using Social media. These risks can also lead to negative online conversations about the business. By countering these challenges, as suggested, operators can look to minimise damage to the reputation of the business.

Another barrier faced by businesses in this study, was concerned with operational issues. The lack of resources, time and knowledge often led to a lack of content. The recommendations in this chapter suggests effective content which can uploaded. Useful content such as photos of customers using the business' product, does not require a lot of resources, or knowledge to produce. This chapter also suggests using influencers to promote the business. Developing mutually beneficial relationships with influential

Social Media users, is a powerful and resource efficient way to promote the business brand.

Several participants of this study felt disheartened by the lack of clear positive results when using Social Media. This stemmed from the lack of measurable goals, and an absence of monitoring of results. The recommendations in this chapter suggest ways to combat this. This includes setting appropriate measurable goals, in line with the overall business strategy, and following this up by using cost free online tools to measure and monitor the outcomes of these goals. This will lead to being able to clearly see the outcomes of Social Media usage. With positive results, managers can be confident that their work is not a waste of time, and therefore they will avoid losing trust in Social Media.

It is impossible to provide recommendations for every single participant specifically due the variety in the methods and scope of utilising Social Media for these businesses. The recommendations in this case offer overall suggestions to improve Social Media usage, such as ways to develop a suitable strategy; how to decide what markets to target; tools for analysing and monitoring Social Media; what type of content should be posted on various channels; and possible risks that these businesses may face when using Social Media. The final chapter will synthesise the findings from this study, will discuss their implications, and will include answers to the research questions. Finally, some concluding remarks will be offered on the various topics that arose during the research, and will consider some future trends related to the use of Social Media.

# CHAPTER 7

## CONCLUSIONS



## 7. Conclusions

This study aimed to enquire about the experience, perception and potential of Social Media as a marketing tool for small marine tourism businesses in Auckland. During this process, the researcher interviewed owners of marine tourism operators in order to gain specific insights into how they used Social Media; how they felt about the use of Social Media; and what they could do to maximise the potential of Social Media, as a tool for their business. This chapter will offer a summary of the key findings in relation to the research questions; and will explain the implications of this knowledge to relevant groups, such as managers of small marine tourism operators and the tourism industry. The limitations of this study will be discussed and recommendations will be made for further research. The chapter ends with some concluding reflections about this study, including implications for the future of Social Media as a marketing tool for tourism businesses.

### 7.1 Summary of Key Findings

During this qualitative study, primary data was collected by conducting in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with participants. This data was analysed and key findings are summarised under the original research questions below:

*How do these businesses perceive Social Media as a marketing tool; and what barriers and limitations do they face in utilising Social Media?*

#### **Goals and motivations for Social Media use**

Several initial goals and motivations were identified for the use of Social Media by the participants of this study:

- To use Social Media as a tool for marketing;
- To use Social Media to increase brand awareness of the business and improve the business' reputation;
- To keep up with changing consumer and marketing trends;
- Lack of barriers to entry and perception of Social Media as a low-cost tool for their business;
- To increase customer interactions and develop relationships;
- To increase positive recommendations and improve electronic word of mouth coverage.

### **Perceptions of realities of actual values and benefits**

Participants' perceptions of the actual values and benefits of Social Media are summarised below:

- Review and recommendation site TripAdvisor was perceived to be the only channel that increased customers, and consequently the only channel that had a visible positive effect on business growth;
- The perception that Social Media did help to raise awareness about the business
- The perception that using Social Media did help to keep up with changing consumer trends, and provided a communication tool, especially with younger people;
- The perception that the ability to interact, and directly communicate with customers did help to build up trust and develop a relationship.

### **Perceptions of barriers and challenges of using Social Media**

Participants' perceptions of barriers and challenges they faced when using Social Media are summarised below:

- The acknowledgement of the lack of time available to utilise Social Media to its full potential;
- The lack of resources (capital, employees) to help develop the use Social Media to its full potential;
- The lack of knowledge and training available to use Social Media effectively;
- In the main, the lack actual visible positive results of using Social Media;
- Perception and acknowledgement that the lack of stringent monitoring, and the lack of quantifiable goals at the beginning, meant that participants had no idea how much Social Media actually influenced their business performance;
- The view by several participants that their business is also a lifestyle choice, and for some this affected the way the business was run in that maximising business growth was not a priority.

*How is Social Media utilised as a marketing tool by these businesses?*

Findings from this study indicating the ways that Social Media was used by participants is summarised below:

- Social Networks (Facebook, Google+), Review and Recommendation Sites (TripAdvisor), Micro-blogging sites (Twitter), and Media content Sharing Communities (Instagram, YouTube) were the most commonly used of all the Social Media channels among participants;
- Out of these, Facebook and Instagram were the channels that participants were most active on;
- After initial set-up, for the majority, Twitter and YouTube use was sporadic and for many, these channels remained inactive for long periods;
- No real strategy to effectively use Social Media amongst the vast majority of participants;
- Only one participant used a third-party company to manage their Social Media use and they used the channels most regularly and effectively, and wished to make use of new technologies associated with the tool;
- Apart from the above, no real plans to expand the use of Social Media, mainly due to perception of the lack of results;
- Feedback was encouraged by the majority, and most acknowledged positive feedback;
- For several participants, negative feedback was dealt with privately, or ignored;
- Lack of monitoring of Social Media activities, and a lack of monitoring of results.

*How can Social Media strategies be improved?*

Ways in which Social Media strategies could be improved by participants in this study are summarised below:

- Develop a Social Media strategy that is resource and time viable for the specific business;
- Begin by analysing existing Social Media use and online conversations surrounding the business;
- Be aware of the different types of Social Media users – some are more influential than others;
- Choose a market to target – focus on targetting Social Media users which are potential customers, and those that are the most influential;
- Develop goals and objectives;
- Pick both qualitative and quantitative goals and combine them if possible;

- Pick goals that fit in with the overall business strategy and current marketing strategy of the business;
- Choose the right Social Media channels – based on business goals; Social media goals; popularity with the target demographics; functions of the channels;
- Understand that Social Media is used through all phases of the travel experience and offer content and communications that targets travellers pre-trip, during-trip, and post-trip;
- Listen to online conversations and post relevant content that are customer-centric and authentic;
- Utilise Social Media influencers to reach more people and spread content faster;
- Monitor channels, measure results - utilise free online Social Media monitoring tools;
- Utilise available resources efficiently – utilise free online Social Media guides;
- Embrace and keep up to date with evolving technology;
- Be aware of, and manage the risks.

## **7.2 Implications of this study**

### **7.2.1 Implications for the tourism industry**

The continuous and relentless growth of the tourism industry, globally, and in New Zealand does not look to be slowing down. Forecasts are being met and being passed, and the importance of the tourism industry to the overall economy is significant. Within the industry, small operators make up a vast majority of the total number of businesses. It is vital that these operators, the backbone of the industry, are given every chance to succeed. Marine tourism businesses also make up a significant part of tourism industry in New Zealand, and especially Auckland, due to the geographical nature of the country.

Social Media is a tool with low barriers to entry, and is available to these businesses, which face operational difficulties due to their size, lack of resources, and lack of vision for future growth. This research study concludes that Social Media use as a marketing tool, among Auckland small marine tourism businesses is inadequate and poorly executed. Its potential as an effective tool is vast. However, due to the described barriers, utilisation is fairly ineffectual.

It is in the interest of tourism promotional organisations, government organisations, tourism industry associations and others, to offer tools, recommendations, and research

that enables small businesses to effectively maximise their use of Social Media as a marketing tool. This will help with the growth of these type of businesses which are vital clog in the heart of the tourism industry in New Zealand.

### **7.2.2 Implications for small marine tourism business owners**

This study shows that for several tourism operators, lifestyle choice has influenced the way that they run their business. A major reason for owners choosing these categories of businesses was to develop or continue a type of personal lifestyle. This, as previous research and this study suggests, is the case with many tourism operators, and many small business owners. Despite this, as some participants of this study indicated, despite the attractiveness of maintaining a certain lifestyle, the business has to keep performing to survive. In order to maintain this lifestyle, the business owners have to overcome the potential difficulties by utilising every available tool. With no business growth, the likelihood is that the survival of some of these operations is in danger.

This research study has highlighted Social Media as an increasingly influential tool which affects the behaviour of tourists, impacting decision making and purchasing behaviour through all the phases of the travel cycle. Sites such as TripAdvisor are increasingly influencing consumer purchasing behaviour; and this and other Social Media channels have led to the distance between the consumer and the provider to close significantly. Direct, immediate communication; accessibility of different options; and the rapid rate that communications are shared, affect the way businesses and customers interact. This has led to the need for businesses to attempt to develop close trusting relationships with customers, in order to influence purchasing behaviour.

It is essential for businesses to understand this ever-changing consumer landscape. Social Media offers a tool which closes the gap between the business and consumer. It is therefore vital that Social Media is utilised to its fullest potential. This research has shown that many small businesses feel overwhelmed with the functionalities of Social Media. It is perhaps important to take a step back and build from a smaller more focussed foundation. Businesses do not need to be on every channel available. For these operators, with limited resources, developing a strategy that targets the use of the most appropriate channels is more important than trying and failing to be visible on all channels. A strategy with quantifiable goals, which fit the overall business goals, followed up with adequate monitoring will help to add value to business performance. An inadequate strategy, or the lack of one, minimises effectiveness and could perhaps lead to a competitive disadvantage.

### **7.3 Limitations of this study**

As with all research there are limitations to this study. The scope of the research was limited to Auckland, only focussed on a specific sector of the tourism industry, and only focussed on a certain size of business due to time and location constraints. The scope of the study was also limited because it only focussed on those businesses that appeared on TripAdvisor, and only included businesses that appeared on two or more Social Media channels.

There were also restrictions on this research due to the limited previous academic research available on the specific subject area – Social Media use by small marine tourism businesses, and also due to the lack of research available on the topic for the specified location of New Zealand, and more specifically, Auckland. Limitations also stemmed from the ever-evolving nature of Social Media technology, which rendered previous research to be dated almost as quickly as it was published. Therefore, the research results reflect the specific time period that the study was carried out.

Finally, there are limitations on the recommendations made in this study. Again, with the ever-changing nature of Social Media technology, it is not possible to provide a complete up to date recommendation of strategies and tools to use. The recommendations are limited because it was not possible to give specific recommendations for each business, and for each platform, due to time constraints and the variety of issues faced. Instead general recommendations have been made which ought to provide an overall foundation to develop a business specific Social Media strategy.

### **7.4 Recommendations for further research**

Due the limited scope of this study and its specific nature, it is suggested that, for comparison, parallel research is carried out on comparable businesses in different regions of New Zealand, and even in different destinations which offer similar marine based tourism products. Furthermore, it would be useful to compare findings of similar research on different categories of tourism businesses, such as land-based, heritage, or indigenous tourism, in New Zealand. By conducting that research, it would provide a view of the use of Social Media by the overall tourism industry in New Zealand.

This inquiry found that there was limited academic research on specific areas of study – Social Media use by small marine tourism businesses, being one. It is recommended that similar research is conducted concerning these specific sectors. It is also important to note

that due to the constantly evolving nature of Social Media and its technologies, it is important to continuously and regularly conduct research on this topic, as current research will very rapidly become outdated due to technological changes.

Another interesting area of future research would be to conduct a quantitative study on the aspect of effectiveness of Social Media in relation to business performance. This potential research could cover areas such as discovering the actual numbers of bookings made for a business due to Social Media activity; and perhaps research on the impact of Social Media on brand awareness. If these research areas provide positive answers as to the effectiveness of Social Media, then small business owners might be less reluctant to develop their Social Media strategies.

## **7.5 Concluding remarks**

The technological evolution of Social Media occurs at an almost daily rate. From the emergence of new platforms, to the development of new features, it is difficult to keep up with the changes. Social Media will continue to evolve, alongside the advancement of technology. This includes the addition of live video features on multiple platforms, together with the development of video technology alongside the use of drones and 360-degree video capabilities. The recent developments of virtual reality and augmented reality technologies, with personal headsets which are connected to smartphones, are set to transform not only the social gaming world, but also a multitude of sectors such as the tourism industry, and academia, and military operations.

Inevitably this is bound to leave behind some of those that utilise Social Media as a business marketing tool. The most vulnerable to these changes are resource deficient small businesses, whose entrepreneurial owners must juggle multiple roles, and their lifestyle, in order to maximise efficiency. Small businesses make up the backbone of the ever-expanding tourism industry. This is true for marine tourism dominated destination of Auckland, New Zealand, and the industry as a whole. The profusion of marine operators within the tourism industry makes them a worthwhile category to scrutinise. Therefore, it is important to evaluate and consider the perceptions, and use of Social Media as a marketing tool by such businesses.

The discoveries from this study may be considered to be a snapshot in time of the current situation, due to the rapidly evolving nature of technology and online communications. Nevertheless, this research is valuable as it has revealed that, despite a sizable presence

online, Social Media marketing strategies are inadequate and in many cases, non-existent, for the participants in this study. The obvious reasons for this are mainly related to the lack of resources available for these businesses, to develop and carry out an appropriate Social Media marketing plan. Yet it is clear to see that often there seems to be a lack of enthusiasm towards maximising the potential of Social Media, due to lifestyle factors, and perhaps the generational aspects of technological unfamiliarity and deficiency.

Business owners, especially in the information intensive, technologically advanced, tourism industry have little choice but to participate in Social Media, if they want to keep up. As Richard stated:

*“People look online for information. They don’t go to travel agents. They don’t watch a lot of adverts on TV or read newspapers. Everything they do is online. Look at the way you can compare prices of flights and accommodation online. It’s so easy to do. Everyone does it. That’s how they choose.”*

Operators such as Richard have the appropriate outlook. They realise that changing consumer trends has led to a tourist who is empowered, well informed, individualistic and technically skilled, especially due to proliferation of multi-purpose smartphones. The abrupt rise of the multi-platform smartphone has allowed functionality to become mobile and easily accessible. Despite the difficulties in maintaining pace with the changing consumer trends, the modern tourist can be influenced with the right content. With the resource independent tools available, it is possible to develop a Social Media strategy that is specifically viable for each business. Along with these tools, the face-to-face communication skills developed over several years in the tourism industry, for many of these business owners, must be transferred towards their online communications.

These owners must recognise that Social Media is about fashioning dialogue in order to influence. They must get into the frame of mind that Social Media is less about technology, and more about psychology and sociology. It is more about prioritising and embracing people, their feelings, thoughts and relationships, more than understanding technological intricacies. Fundamentally, Social Media is about connecting people to an experience. In order to effectively influence, connections must be made and meaningful relationships have to be developed.



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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Invitation letter

### **Social Media Marketing – A Research Study Proposal**

#### **Project Title**

*An insight into experiences, perception, and potential of social media marketing by small to medium sized marine-based tourist activity operators in Auckland.*

I would like to invite you to participate in a study concerning the potential and current value of Social Media as a marketing tool for marine based, small to medium sized tourism activity operators in Auckland.

My name is Mohamed Shenaan, and I am conducting this research as part of my Master of International Tourism Management degree, which I am studying for at Auckland University of Technology (AUT).

You have been identified as someone who could provide a valuable perspective on the use of Social Media for marketing purposes within the tourism industry in Auckland. The potential interviews will be audio recorded and will be conducted via a face-to-face meeting with yourself and I, which will last approximately 30-40 minutes. The interviews will be conducted at a location of your choosing, and at a time when is suitable for both parties.

Findings and practical recommendations from the research will be provided to you and may be beneficial for your marketing activities by increasing the profitable use of social media.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and no personal or commercially sensitive information will be requested. Furthermore, you may withdraw from the research study at any time prior to and after the completion of the interview process, up until the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2016, if you so wish to. This date has been set due to the fact that I aim to complete a large part of the research project by that date.

If you are interested in taking part in this research, and would like further information, I would be very grateful if you could email me or contact me by telephone of this interest (see below for contact details). I will follow this up by sending you a detailed participant information sheet will provide further in-depth information on the research that will be

carried out, and a participant Consent Form, which will need to be signed by yourself prior to the interview process.

The follow up information will also contain detailed outline of your rights during the whole process, and the measures that will be taken to alleviate any discomfort or risk that you may face, and to protect your privacy.

I would be extremely grateful if you could consider this invitation.

Kind Regards,

**Mohamed Shenaan**

Email: **mff7265@autuni.ac.nz**

Telephone: **+64211166286**

**Project Supervisors:**

Dr Bart Neuts

Faculty of Culture and Society

Lecturer of International Tourism Management

Tel: +64 9 921 9999 ext 6692

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## **Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet**

# **Participant Information Sheet**

### **Project Title:**

*An insight into experiences, perception, and potential of social media marketing by small to medium sized marine-based tourist activity operators in Auckland.*

### **An Invitation**

I would like to invite you to participate in a study concerning the potential and current value of Social Media as a marketing tool for marine based, small to medium sized tourism activity operators in Auckland.

My name is Mo Shenaan, and I am conducting this research as part of my Master of International Tourism Management degree.

You have been identified as someone who could provide a valuable perspective on the use of Social Media for marketing purposes. The research will involve interviews with approximately 15 Social Media practitioners in the tourism industry in Auckland.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and no personal or commercially sensitive information will be asked. Furthermore, you may withdraw from the research study at any time prior to and after the completion of the interview process, if you wish to.

I would be very grateful if you would consider this invitation.

### **What is the purpose of this research?**

The rapid rise of Social Media networks has led to the growing power of customers in terms of identifying, customising, and purchasing of service products, such as the service you offer. These changes present great opportunities for service providers, but at the same time they also present various challenges and risks.

Therefore, the overall objective of this study is to gain an understanding of the potential value and the perceived value of Social Media as a marketing tool for small to medium sized tourism activity operators based in Auckland. There will also be an examination of the barriers that exist when using Social Media, and how these barriers can be potentially overcome, for a business such as yours.



**How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?**

Your business has been identified as an Auckland-based small to medium sized tourism activity operator that is independently owned and operated. Furthermore, as a business that utilises Social Media as a marketing tool, you are someone that can provide a valuable contribution to this research.

**What will happen next?**

I will be contacting you in the next few days to follow up on this invitation, also giving you the opportunity to ask me any further questions that you may have about the study. We will then arrange a meeting time and location for the interview that is suitable for both parties. Before the interview commences, I will ask you to sign a consent form to ensure that you agree to take part in the research. I will then ask you about your experiences, perceptions of the use of Social Media as a marketing tool for your company. I would also like, with your consent, to audiotape the interview to ensure that I have an accurate record of it. During the interview process, or afterwards, you have the right to withdraw from the research process, at any time you wish. I will transcribe the interview and delete it from the recorder.

**What are the discomforts and risks and how will these be alleviated?**

I do not anticipate any discomfort or risk arising from your participation in this study. However, you may feel uncomfortable telling me about problems or challenges you have faced. Please be assured that I (the researcher) will do everything possible to alleviate any potential discomforts and risks, such as:

- You will be given the opportunity to view the partial transcription of the interview to avoid any potential misinterpretations of your information and guarantee its accuracy.
- You will have the possibility to access, modify or withdraw information given at any stage.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

1. All information, your name and that of your business will remain confidential and will be used for the purpose of the academic research only

2. All potential identifiers of individual participants will be removed from the reporting data
3. No data will be provided to a third party
4. All data will be kept in a secure location, with access given only to the researcher and the participants upon request.

**What are the benefits?**

The outcome of this research will be a greater understanding of the potential and perceived value of social media as a marketing tool for small to medium sized, marine based, tourism activity operators. Findings and practical recommendations will be provided to you and may be beneficial for your marketing activities by increasing the profitable use of social media. This research will also provide an important contribution to the limited academic knowledge regarding Social Media marketing for small and medium sized tourism operators in New Zealand's tourism industry.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

There is no costs to participate in this research apart from approximately 30-40 minutes of your time.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

Please take a few days to consider this invitation. If, during that time, you would like further information or clarification about any aspect of the research, please contact me, Mo Shenaan, or my supervisor Dr Bart Neuts (contact details are listed at the end of the document). Your participation would be very much appreciated. Please remember that your participation is voluntary and you will be free to withdraw from the research at any time. I would be grateful for your consideration of this invitation and hope to hear back from you.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

You will need to read and sign the consent form to indicate your informed consent.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

Should you wish to receive a summary of the findings of this research, you will be able to make a request on the consent form or of course directly to me, Mo Shenaan.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified to the Project Supervisors, Dr Bart Neuts, [bneuts@aut.ac.nz](mailto:bneuts@aut.ac.nz), +64 9 921 9999 ext 6692; and Dr Heike Schänzel, +64 9 921 9999 ext 6923.

Concerns regarding the conduct of this research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, Kate O'Connor, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

**Researcher Contact Details:**

**Mo Shenaan**

Faculty of Culture and Society

Tel: +64211166286

Email: [mo\\_s1@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:mo_s1@hotmail.co.uk)

**Project Supervisors Contact Details:**

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## **Appendix C: Consent Form**

### **Consent Form**

**Project title:**

*An insight into experiences, perception, and potential of social media marketing by small to medium sized marine-based tourist activity operators in Auckland.*

**Project Supervisors:** *Dr Bart Neuts; Dr Heike Schänzel*

**Researcher:** *Mohamed Shenaan*

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.

☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐  
No ☐

Participant's signature:

.....  
.....

Participant's name:

.....  
.....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Date:

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 28/01/2016*

*AUTEC Reference number: 15/424*

## **Appendix D: Interview Guide**

### **Indicative questions for marine tourism businesses**

#### **Background**

What is your role in the business?

Age range? a)18-24 b)25-34 c)35-54 d)55+

How long has the business been operating?

Do you have a main target market? If so, what is it?

What market segments or groups make up your customer base?

Do you have a current specific marketing strategy? If so, what is it?

Which promotional channels do you currently use? And which channels do you plan on using on the future? (social media, online advertising, magazines, radio, newspapers, mail, television, etc)

#### **What Social Media Channels are used?**

Please give an outline of your Social Media usage, and your experiences with it:

- which social media channels you use;
- when you first started using them – did you have a specific strategy when you initially set it up?
- which social media channels you use the most;
- if you plan on expanding your social media usage to different channels?

#### **How is Social Media utilised?**

Please could you give a summary of how social media is utilised by your business, including:

- who is in charge of managing social media channels for your business; what other roles does this perform in the business; and what is their experience and knowledge of social media?

Please describe how your business uses social media channels in terms of:

- frequency of use;

- coordination (if any) with other marketing strategies

How do you feel about customer feedback on your social media channels? Do you encourage feedback? Why? Why not?

### **Social Media perceptions as a marketing tool**

Why did you initially consider using social media for your business?

Do your initial perceptions match the results? If so how? And if not why?

Please give a summary of the resources that you use for social media, for the initial set-up and for maintaining the social media channels, including:

- time, knowledge and financial resources

How has social media use benefited your company? Please give some examples.

What are your thoughts on the potential of social media marketing as a tool for small to medium sized businesses such as yours?

How do you feel businesses such as yours can utilise social media successfully? Please give some details.

What do you think are the disadvantages and/or drawbacks of using social media for a business such as yours? Please give some examples where possible.

Please tell me your thoughts on social media marketing as a marketing tool compared to traditional marketing mediums.

Do you believe there is a difference in the effectiveness of social media as a marketing tool for domestic and international customers? Please elaborate.

In your opinion, do you feel you can improve your social media strategy? Please give details on how you feel you can do this.

### **Lifestyle questions**

Has lifestyle choice got anything to do with what you do as a job? In what ways?

Does this affect the way you run your business? Please expand.