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The importance of social media in the information sourcing phase during the decision-making process of the South African traveller.

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Abstract

The Internet and the emergence of social media have a significant effect on the tourism industry world-wide. Tourists can search for advice online from strangers and friends who have visited the destination in the past. Research indicates that this information source is perceived as more credible than traditional marketing material such as Web sites, brochures or other forms of advertisements. More specifically, information sources on social media assist the tourist in evaluating alternatives in order to make an informed purchasing-decision. Destination marketing organisations and tourism enterprises need to understand the role that social media plays in the decision-making process in order to create effective marketing strategies online.

This research paper places the focus on the South African traveller and which online sources s/he uses to search for travel information before going on holiday. Social media sources in particularly will be under investigation. There has been a dearth of research conducted in this area on emerging markets such as South Africa and this paper will fill an important gap in the academic literature. The database for this research was acquired from Travelstart; a leading digital travel agency in South Africa.

This research establishes that South African travellers prefer rich social media content in the form of images or video formats. In addition, the advice of strangers on social media is favoured over the advice by friends on social media. This high influence of online recommendations on travel decision-making follows global trends on social media.

The majority of general social networks identified prior to the research (Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest, LinkedIn and YouTube) were found to have be significant information sources during the decision-making process of South African travellers. Of the travel communities identified, only TripAdvisor and Lonely Planet played a significant role in the information sourcing behaviour of South African travellers. These are the social media channels that the South African tourist might use to search for travel-information.

Each social network was analysed further by personal factors namely: age, race and gender to identify segments in the sample that display similar information sourcing behaviour. These findings are of vital importance to tourism and destination marketing organisations that specifically target the segments identified. This information will allow destination marketing organisations and tourism enterprises to understand the role social media plays for specific

traveller segments and, as a result, create more effective marketing strategies to reach these segments.

While each travel organisation should have a website; it has been established that this is not sufficient. The current research indicates that the majority of travel Web sites have integrated social media plug-ins that offer an interactive user-experience. It can be concluded, that Internet users prefer an interactive experience over static Web sites.

Furthermore, travel organisations need to be active on the social networks identified in order to interact with their current customers and possibly reach new customers in the process. Smaller tourism enterprises (SMTE) that have limited resources should at least focus on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest to reach their target audience.

It is imperative that the importance of social media in the holiday decision-making process is communicated to tourism business managers, as social media has been identified as an important information source. Social media can be a strategic tool that allows destination marketing organisations and tourism enterprises to effectively market to their target audiences.

Keywords: tourism; social media; Internet; decision-making; South Africa.

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List of Abbreviations

- EMs – Emerging markets
- EWOM – Electronic word of mouth
- DMOs – Destination marketing organisation
- PCS - Purchase Consumption System
- SN – Social networks
- UNWTO – World Tourism Organisation
- WOM – Word of mouth

1. Introduction

The number of South Africans who went on holiday in 2012 grew, while a larger percentage of the population has travelled with the specific purpose of going on holiday; either on a local or international level (Domestic Tourism Growth Strategy, 2012). In addition, a higher percentage of people travelled in 2011 than in any of the previous recorded years (Domestic Tourism Growth Strategy, 2012). However, those who have been travelling are now taking fewer trips resulting in an overall decline in domestic tourism numbers (Domestic Tourism Growth Strategy, 2012). This was largely due to the economic climate.

South African tourism was not spared of the impact of the recent global financial crisis, and, despite the continued overall annual growth, some of the key overseas tourism markets showed a slight overall decline in 2011 (Domestic Tourism Growth Strategy, 2012). This upward trend in the tourism growth rate is also confirmed by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). The tourism numbers globally have improved significantly: International tourist arrivals grew by 5% in 2013, reaching a record 1,087 million arrivals world-wide, according to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer (2013). Travelling has become an even more popular leisure-activity even with the impact of the financial crisis.

Despite global economic challenges, international tourism results were well above expectations, with an additional 52 million international tourists travelling the world in 2013 (UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, 2013). For 2014, UNWTO forecasts 4% to 4.5% growth (UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, 2013). Despite this upward trend, global tourism destinations increased their levels of focus on domestic tourism in response to the global meltdown and changing consumer needs, and, in so doing, cushioned the performance of tourism (Domestic Tourism Growth Strategy, 2012).

This research study focuses on the South African tourist and will aid South African and international destination marketing organisations (DMOs) targeting South African travellers. DMOs need to be able to target their audience using the right channels while the tourist is actively looking for travel information. These information sources on social media will be analysed to assist DMOs in creating effective marketing strategies.

In order to successfully market a travel product, it is important to understand information sourcing behaviour of travellers. The consumer decision-making process begins, once a potential traveller recognises a need for a holiday; he begins to actively search for

information on suitable travel destinations (George, 2011). Traditionally, travellers have preferred to receive information on travel destinations through travel agencies, brochures, magazines and the Internet – among others sources (Bieger & Laesser, 2004). These have been direct marketing messages from tourism operators aimed at potential customers. However, recent years have seen a transformation in the type of content available on the Internet for travellers (Agichtein, Castillo, Donato, Gionis & Mishne, 2008). There has been a shift from static Web pages to user-generated content called social media, which has also had a major influence on the tourism industry in terms of what kind of information travellers consume or create, and the ways to market travel products. As social media is easy to share among friends and strangers alike, user-generated content has the ability to go viral in the form of electronic word-of-mouth (TNS Digital Life, 2011). Web pages have the ability to receive millions of visitors through the introduction of social sharing – a concept that facilitates word-of-mouth on the Internet – also known as "Word of Mouse". This has attracted the attention of marketers as a perfect opportunity to create brand awareness and loyalty.

While the importance of social media has been identified by marketing professionals, there has been little academic research conducted to explore its importance in a tourism context especially with a focus on the South African tourist. Thus, this thesis will fill an important gap in academic literature by focusing on important social media information sources such as blogs, online communities, social networks, and forums and the impact the emergence of these types of social media have had on the decision-making process for travellers; especially during the information searching phase. The findings of this research study will enable DMOs and tourism enterprises to concentrate their marketing efforts on the right social media channels in order to maximise their efficiency and results of marketing campaigns on the social web.

1.1 Research Problem

There is limited research available analysing which online and social media sources South African tourists make use of when searching for travel information before going on holiday. As such, DMOs are working with insufficient information when creating digital marketing campaigns, which could result in ineffective campaigns. This research thesis aims to fill this gap by determining which social media sources South African tourists use during the information sourcing phase of the holiday decision-making process. As a result, DMOs will be able to create more effective digital marketing campaigns by using the right channels targeting the right market segment.

The primary research objectives are to:

- analyse which social networks are being used during the information sourcing stage of the holiday decision-making process
- analyse which travel communities are being used during the information sourcing stage of the holiday decision-making process

The secondary research objectives are to:

- form segments to ascertain how various demographics use social media and travel communities differently from each other.

1.2 Scope

The increased rate of globalisation and the consequent international competition has led to the testing of theoretical concepts in emerging markets (EMs). Many developed countries, including the USA and EU are trading with less developed countries where input resources are relatively cheaper. The same is true of the tourism industry: Many tourists wish to travel to more underdeveloped nations to explore their sights and experience a different culture. This increased interest in emerging markets has led to the growth and necessitating research into these countries (Schianetz, Kavanagh & Lockington, 2007) as Burgess and Steenkamp (2006) found significant differences in the application and generalisability of marketing theories in these new environments. As South Africa can be classified as an EM and social media as a marketing tool is a relatively new concept, a gap in the academic literature has been identified.

This thesis examines the information sourcing behaviour of the South African traveller on social media. Several behavioural aspects are analysed on which social media channels are used when searching for travel information while social networks are also analysed to ascertain which play an important role during the holiday decision-making process of South African travellers. Two types of social networks were identified: 1) general social networks such as Facebook and Twitter and 2) travel communities such as TripAdvisor and WAYN. Ultimately, segments were formed according to race, gender and age to identify groups of travellers that use social media similarly. The results of this research will give DMOs and tourism enterprises relevant insights on which social media channels to concentrate their digital marketing efforts on in order to reach their specific target market more effectively.

Before the results of this research paper are presented, a detailed analysis of previous academic literature is analysed in the form of a literature review. This will explore general consumer behaviour, consumer behaviour in tourism as well as an overview of popular social networks, travel communities and other types of social media. Afterwards, the methodology of this research thesis is discussed including the sampling technique and statistical techniques implemented. This is followed by the findings and conclusions, where significant information sources on social media will be presented, while market segments are formed of travellers that use similar social media sources to search for travel information. To conclude, recommendations to the industry are made that will allow them to create more effective marketing strategies on social media.

2. Literature Review

The review of academic literature discusses theory on general marketing consumer behaviour, as well as consumer behaviour in tourism. It introduces various types of social media and the impact they have had on travellers and the tourism industry as a whole. Understanding this past research will be vital to conduct a successful research study.

2.1 Theory of Consumer Behaviour

The field of consumer behaviour is rooted in the marketing concept (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009). It is a business orientation that evolved in the 1950s through several alternative approaches towards doing business: the production concept, the product concept and the selling concept (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009). Marketers began to realise that they could sell more goods if they produced only those goods they had already determined that consumers would buy instead of trying to persuade customers to buy what they had produced (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009). The early theories that concerned the study of consumer behaviour were based on economic theory based on the notion that an individual always acts rationally to maximise his utility. However, researchers soon discovered that consumers are also likely to purchase impulsively; while also being influenced by outside sources (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009).

The majority of consumer's buying behaviour is more or less repetitive in nature and the consumer establishes a purchasing cycle of various products which determines how often he will buy (Howard & Sheth, 1969). These purchasing cycles vary in their frequency as most appliances are only replaced after several years. On the other hand, fast-moving consumer goods are bought nearly every week (Howard & Sheth, 1969). As consumers are faced by many brands, the consumer simplifies his/her task by storing relevant information and establishing a routine in his/her decision-making process (Howard & Sheth, 1969). The elements of a consumer's brand-choice decision are: 1) a set of motives; 2) alternative actions; and 3) decision mediators by which the motives are matched with the alternatives (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Motives are specific to a product class and reflect the underlying needs of a buyer (Howard & Sheth, 1969). The alternatives are the various brands that have the possibility of satisfying the buyer's motives. Furthermore, the brands which are alternatives of the buyer's choice decision are generally small in numbers which are called their *evoked set* (Howard & Sheth, 1969). The evoked set is only a fraction of the total number of brands that are actually on the market. It should also be noted that any two consumers can have very different alternatives in their evoked sets (Howard & Sheth, 1969).

Decision mediators are the set of rules that the consumer employs to match his/her motives and the means of satisfying those motives (Howard & Sheth, 1969). These evolve by the consumer's process of learning about the buying situation (Howard & Sheth, 1969). They are, therefore, influenced by the information from the buyer's environment and even more importantly by the actual experience of purchasing and consuming the brand (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Narayana and Markin (1975) redefine the evoked set and included all brands that maybe in the buyer's awareness set. Narayana and Markin (1975) introduced the concepts of *inert* and *inept sets*. An inert set is made up of the brands that the consumer has given a neutral evaluation while the inept set encompasses the brands that the buyer has rejected from his purchase consideration (Narayana & Markin, 1975). This conceptualisation of consumer behaviour and product performance is illustrated in Figure 1.

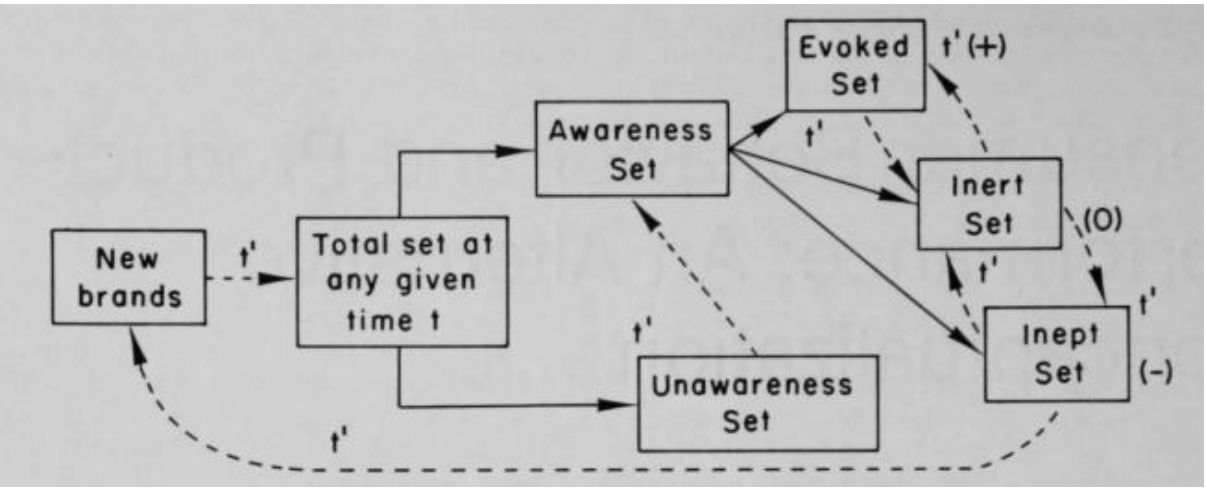

Figure 1: An alternative conceptualisation of consumer behaviour and product performance (Narayana & Markin, 1975).

In addition, Spiggle and Sewall (1987) contribute an important extension to the concept of choice sets. They present a model for retail decision-making that builds upon and extended the evoked-set concept developed by Howard and Sheth (1969). Spiggle and Sewall's model includes five new choice sets, which were hypothesised as being the subsets of an evoked set. The new sets include the (1) action set; (2) interaction set; (3) inaction set; (4) quiet set; and (5) reject set (Spiggle & Sewall, 1987). The *action set* was defined as all stores toward which a consumer takes some action (Spiggle & Sewall, 1987). The interaction set includes all of the stores in which a consumer allowed himself or herself to be exposed to personal selling (Spiggle & Sewall, 1987). The *inaction set* comprises of all the stores in the evoked set that a consumer does not visit (Spiggle & Sewall, 1987). The *quiet set* composes of stores that consumers visit and leave before interacting with a sales clerk, while the *rejection set* is made

up of the stores that are originally in the evoked, action or interaction sets and toward which a consumer's evaluation is transformed from positive to negative during purchase deliberation (Spiggle & Sewall, 1987).

2.1.1 Levels of Consumer Decision-Making

However, not all consumer decision-making situations require the same degree of information search; there are several differences in the level of consumer decision-making (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009). If individuals need to be involved in extensive problem solving for the smallest decisions then one would have little time for anything else in life. As such, academics have investigated different levels of consumer decision-making: 1) extensive problem-solving; 2) limited problem solving; and 3) routinised response behaviour. These types of decision-making will be discussed extensively below.

2.1.1.1 Extensive Problem Solving

When consumers have no established criteria for evaluating a product category or specific brands in that category or have not narrowed the number of brands they will consider to a small manageable subset, their decision-making efforts can be classified as extensive problem solving (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009). Extensive problem solving occurs when the consumer is just beginning to purchase an item in a product class that she/he lacks experience while also not having a set of decision mediators for that product class (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Woodside and Davenport (1974) also concur that the consumer has not yet developed well-defined and structured choice criteria. In order to develop these decision mediators, the consumer actively seeks information from his commercial and social environments (Howard & Sheth, 1969). The information he actively seeks or accidentally receives is subjected to perceptual processes which not only limit his intake of information but modify it to suit his frame of reference (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Thus, the consumer needs a large amount of information to make an educated decision on which product or service to purchase to solve his problem and satisfy his motives (Howard & Sheth, 1969).

Along with his active search for information, the consumer will have to generalise from similar past experience (Howard & Sheth, 1969). This generalisation may occur due to the physical similarity of a new product class to an old product class (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Generalisation can also occur when two product classes are physically dissimilar but have a common meaning deriving from a trusted company brand name (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Only once the consumer has developed sufficient decision mediators to allow him to choose a brand which seems to have the best perceived potential to satisfy his motives, the purchase

decision is made (Howard & Sheth, 1969). If the brand proves satisfactory, the potential of the brand to satisfy his motives for subsequent purchases increases and the probability of buying the same brand again has likewise increased (Howard & Sheth, 1969). However, marketers can actively participate in continuous product innovation which would cause the consumer to engage in extensive problem-solving on a more regular basis (Woodside & Davenport, 1974) and as such, not adopt routinised response behaviour.

2.1.1.2 Limited Problem Solving

When the predisposition towards a brand is moderate, the consumer's decision process is one of limited problem-solving (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Brand ambiguity still exists since the consumers are not able to discriminate and compare brands to develop a preference for one brand over the others (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Schiffman and Kanuk (2009) concur that during limited problem solving, the consumer has already established the basic criteria for evaluating the product category and the various brands in the category. However, consumers have not fully established preferences concerning a select group of brands. The consumer is likely to search for information but not to the extent that he does for extensive problem solving (Howard & Sheth, 1969). The consumer's search for additional information can be categorised as fine-tuning; the consumer must gather additional brand information to discriminate among the various brands (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009). More importantly, the consumer seeks information to compare and discriminate various brands more on a relative basis than to compare them absolutely (Howard & Sheth, 1969). In addition, the consumer thinks and deliberates, since his predispositions are only tentatively defined. To summarise, the consumer's evoked set consists of a small number of brands and he has about the same degree of preference to each of them (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Therefore, he needs to compare information on the brands in his evoked set until he can make a purchasing decision that satisfies his motives.

2.1.1.3 Routinised Response Behaviour

With repeated satisfactory purchases of one or more brands, the consumer is likely to manifest a routine decision-making process in which sequential steps in the buying are so well structured that an event which triggers the process may also simultaneously complete it (Howard & Sheth, 1969). In this instance, the consumer has experience with the product category and has a well-established set of criteria with which to evaluate the brands he is considering (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009). In addition, routine purchasing implies that decision mediators are well established and the buyer has a strong brand preference (Howard & Sheth,

1969). However, consumers may still search for a small amount of information or simply review what they already know (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009).

2.1.2 Model of Consumer Behaviour

Consumers are constantly making decisions regarding the choice, purchase and use of products and services (Bettman, Johnson & Payne, 1991). They are faced with a large number of alternatives which are constantly changing due to new technologies and competition (Bettman *et al.*, 1991). In addition, the consumer is often faced with difficult value trade-offs (Bettman *et al.*, 1991). This multifaceted nature of the decision-making process has generated continuous interest within the academic fields of marketing, psychology and economics.

John Dewey (1925) introduced the theory of the decision-making process. He described two schools of decision-making. The one being, where an individual acts with a minimum of foresight as well as without examination of what they are doing and of the probable consequences (Dewey, 1925). The second kind of decision-making involves a specific action resulting from a decision, an inquiry, comparison of alternatives, weighing of facts, deliberation and thinking (Dewey, 1925). This concept of decision-making has been the foundation for modern decision-making theory.

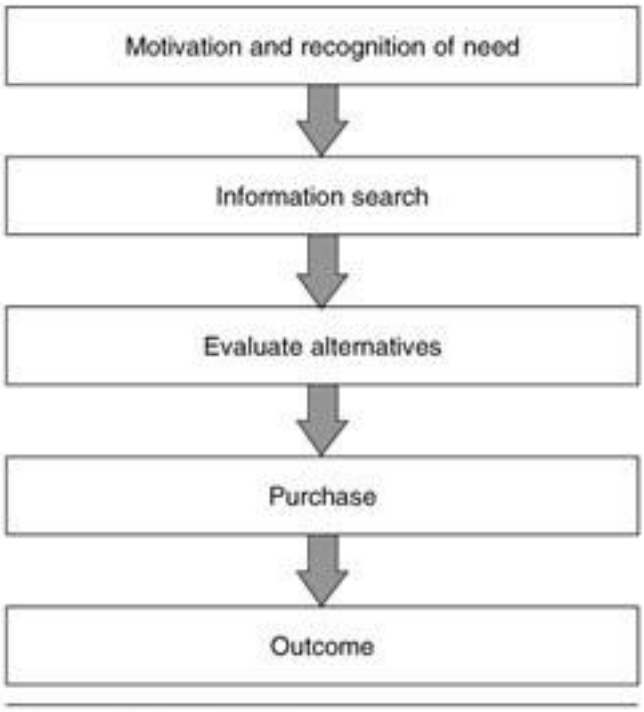

Figure 2: The Consumer Decision-Making Process (Engel, Blackwell and Kollat, 1978)

Engel, Blackwell, and Kollat (1978) based an elaborate stage model on five steps as:

1. problem recognition
2. search
3. alternative evaluation
4. choice
5. outcomes

The concept of routinised response behaviour, proposed by Howard and Sheth (1969), assumes that even simplified, habitual behaviour reflects the earlier application of choice criteria to alternative brands. The buying process starts long before the actual purchase and has consequences long afterward (Howard & Sheth, 1969). In addition, consumers do not always pass through every stage; sometimes they skip stages altogether. As discussed earlier, repeated satisfactory purchases of one or more brands, the buyer is likely to manifest a routine decision process in which sequential steps in the buying are so well structured that an event which triggers the process may also complete it (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Figure 4 shows the exogenous and endogenous variables that affect the consumer decision-making process.

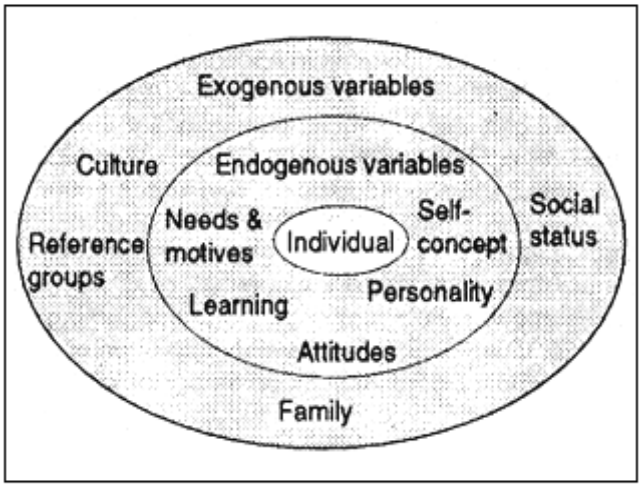

Figure 3: Variables affecting the Consumer Decision-Making Process (adapted from Schiffman and Kanuk, 2009)

2.1.2.1 Problem recognition

The buying process commences when the buyer recognises a problem or need (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009). It has been established that there are two different styles of problem recognition. Some consumers are *actual state* types, who perceive that they have a problem when a product fails to perform satisfactorily (Gordon, 1987). In contrast, other consumers

are *desired state* types, for whom the desire for something new may trigger the decision-making process (Gordon, 1987).

2.1.2.2 Information search

Pre-purchase search begins when a consumer perceives a need that might be satisfied by the purchase and consumption of a product (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009). An aroused consumer will be inclined to search for more information to solve the problem (Kotler & Keller, 2011). Two levels of arousal have been identified. The milder search state is called *heightened attention*. Here, the person becomes more receptive to information about a product. However, at the next level, the person may enter an *active information search* looking for reading material, telephoning friends, going online and visiting stores to learn more about the product the consumer wishes to purchase (Kotler & Keller, 2011).

The Internet has changed the process of information search. Rather than visiting a store to find out about a product or calling the manufacturer and asking for a brochure, a manufacturer's Web site can provide consumers with much of the information they need about the products and services they are considering to purchase (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009). There are four stages when searching for information online: i) formulation of the demand and preparation of the search; ii) performance of the search and access to resources; iii) information processing and assessment; and finally iv) the presentation of results or communication of the research (Badilla-Quintana, Cortada-Pujol & Riera-Romaní, 2011). However, this process can be interrupted as the average user searching the Internet gets frustrated within about 12 minutes (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009). This can occur when he does not have the necessary computer literacy skills or if the information is not easily available.

2.1.2.3 Evaluation of Alternatives and Purchase Decision

Once the consumer has all the information he requires, he needs to evaluate the alternatives. No single process is used by all consumers or by one consumer in all buying situations (Kotler & Keller, 2011). There are several processes, the most current models of which see the process as cognitively-oriented (Kotler & Keller, 2011). As such, consumers are forming judgements largely on a conscious and rational basis (Kotler & Keller, 2011). Before consumers can decide their product preferences, they must determine what criteria to use to make this judgment. For comparable alternatives, the judgment criteria are likely to be well established, at least for consumers who have prior experience with the product class. However, consumers make many different types of choices (Bettman & Sujan, 1987).

In other situations, a consumer may choose between highly dissimilar or no comparable alternatives from different product categories (Bettman & Sujan, 1987).

Two primary aspects of the consumer choice environment are: (1) there is usually a great deal of product information available; and (2) consumers often have prior experience with products (Bettman & Park, 1980). Russo and Johnson (1980) pointed out that much experience is brand based-advertising, point-of-purchased displays and usage experience amongst others. This may lead to a memory structure that tends to be more and more organised around brands as one accumulates experience. Hence, brand processing may be more likely for consumers with the most experience (Bettman & Park, 1980). Bettman and Park (1980) argue that consumers with less experience use attribute processing to a greater extent, perhaps reflecting the ease of attribute-based comparisons. Consumers tend to start with attribute-based evaluations and comparisons, turning to brand processing as the choice process unfolds (Bettman & Park, 1980). Consumers also tend to use comparisons to standards as elements to eliminate alternatives in the middle phases of the choice process, with trade-offs and comparisons of alternatives being made in a later phase (Bettman & Park, 1980).

However, although it is said that there is much product information available (Bettman & Park, 1980), too much information will inhibit the consumer's ability to evaluate alternatives correctly. The fundamental premise on which the information-load paradigm is based is that consumers have finite limits to absorb and process information during a specific amount of time (Jacoby, 1977). Thus, if consumers are provided with too much information so that it exceeds their processing limits of the consumer, overload occurs which will lead to poorer decision-making and dysfunctional performance (Malhotra, 1982). It is well accepted that the processing capacity of the human memory is limited (Malhotra, 1982). In fact, the different models of memory that have been proposed, such as the multiple-store concept (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968), level of processing (Craik & Lockart, 1972), and the activation model (Collins & Loftus, 1975) are all consistent with the idea of limited processing capacity (Bettman, 1979a; b). The attempt to empirically investigate the effect of information load on consumers was pioneered by Jacoby, Speller, and Kohn (1974). Based on their investigations, these authors concluded that consumers actually make poorer purchase decisions with more information. However, critics have since raised several disagreements (Russo, 1974). Later, in reviewing this discussion, Jacoby (1977) acknowledged that his investigations did not generate unambiguous results.

In the empirical investigation by Malhotra (1982) revealed dysfunctional effects of information overload if the respondents were provided with ten or more alternatives in the choice set or with information on 15 or more attributes. The empirical studies of Streufert (1970), Streufert and Driver (1965), Streufert, Driver, and Haun (1967) have all revealed that information-processing levels decreased beyond the information load of ten items (attributes). Streufert, Driver, and Haun (1967) concluded that as information load increases, integrated decision-making first increases, reaches an optimum (at information load ten), and then decreases. The consistency with which this result has been obtained by Streufert, Driver and Haun (1967) across different investigations is remarkable. Thus, it is argued that individuals cannot optimally handle more than ten items (attributes) of information simultaneously.

In addition, there exists some evidence to suggest that individuals can optimally process a maximum of only six alternatives (Bettman, 1979a; Wright, 1975). Hayes (1962) consistently found that decision quality, measured in terms of mean grade of decisions, was significantly higher for the four-alternative problem types as compared to the eight-alternative problem types. In designing his study, Wright (1975) stated that six alternatives were expected to represent maximum comfortable load and that ten options represented definite overload. Further research has shown that consumers are less likely to purchase a product when a store offers an extensive selection of that product than when the selection is reduced (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). Thus, even though the Internet allows for unlimited shelf-space (Häubl & Trifts, 2000), it is not advisable to offer more alternatives than customers can cope with, as they will simply choose not to purchase anything. Bettman (1979a) has also suggested that consumers are likely to adopt simplifying information-processing strategies when the number of choice alternative exceeds five.

Thus, it brings about one of the main objectives facing marketers: Presenting consumers with information on which to base their decisions (Bettman, 1975). This is no simple task and it contains an interesting dilemma. On the one hand, a vast amount of information could be relevant to some consumers. On the other hand, presenting superfluous information might impede consumers' ability to make good decisions (Malhotra, 1982).

2.1.2.4 Post-purchase behaviour

After a consumer has evaluated the alternatives and completed the purchase of an item, the last stage of the decision-making process occurs: The post-purchase behaviour of the consumer. Post-purchase behaviour is viewed as a series of steps in which consumers

compare their expectations to perceived reality, experience consequent satisfaction/dissatisfaction and then act in a way influenced by that satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Andreasen, 1976). As described by Hunt (1977), satisfaction is not the pleasurableness of the consumption experience; it is the evaluation rendered that the experience was at least as good as it was supposed to be.

Satisfaction appraisal is believed to occur as a two-stage process (Oliver 1980). In the first stage, post-usage beliefs about product attributes that have been noted are compared with pre-purchase expectations, yielding a new belief about the extent of expectancy disconfirmation (Oliver, 1980). Expectancy disconfirmation can range from positive (obtained outcomes exceed those expected to neutral (obtained outcomes exactly meet those expected) to negative (obtained outcomes fall short of those expected) (Oliver, 1980). In the second stage, expectancy disconfirmation beliefs and initial expectation beliefs are combined additively to produce the satisfaction evaluation (Oliver, 1980).

In addition, post-purchase complaining behaviour comprises consumer-initiated communications to marketers, their channel members, or public agencies to obtain remedy or restitution for purchase- or usage-related problems in particular market transactions (Westbrook, 1987). Research has shown complaint behaviour to be mainly the result of judged dissatisfaction with the product or its consumption (Bearden & Teel, 1983), that is, to be related inversely to satisfaction appraisal (Westbrook, 1987). Day (1984) proposed, however, that the actual source of complaint motivation is not the judgment of dissatisfaction, but rather the original negative emotional state produced by the appraisal of unfavourable product/consumption outcomes.

2.1.3 Rejecting the Theory of the Decision-Making Process

The consumer decision-making process has been extensively discussed above. However, there are academics, who reject the notion of a decision-making process in certain instances. The concept of decision-making was suggested as early as 1924 by John Dewey as one of the two schools for decision-making. Fifty years later, in the presidential address to the Association for Consumer Research (USA), Kassarjian (1978) raised the possibility that academics and marketers may be attributing choice processes to consumers when no choice processes occur.

Kassarjian (1978) was not stating that decision-making processes often are routinised or habitual rather than extended, but that in some cases no pre-purchase process exists.

However, Kassarjian (1978) only raised the issue; he presented no supporting evidence. Olshavsky and Granbois (1979) agreed with Kassarian (1978) that a significant proportion of purchases may not be preceded by a decision-making process. For many purchases a decision-making process never occurs, not even on the first purchase (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979). Even when purchase behaviour is preceded by a choice process, it is likely to be very limited (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979). It typically involves the evaluation of few alternatives, little external search, few evaluative criteria, and simple evaluation process models (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979). There is little evidence that consumers engage in the extended type of search and evaluation a product testing organisation such as Consumers Union performs routinely (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979). It would be an oversimplification, however, to characterise purchasing behaviour as either involving pre-decision processes or not (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979). The issue of information overload must be interpreted quite differently if a significant percentage of consumers of particular products or services do not engage in pre-purchase activities.

If it is suggested that many common product decisions may not be that important or involving to consumers (Kassarjian, 1978), one must therefore question whether the present models are accurate representations of how decisions are made for a variety of decision contexts. Wright (1975) states that certain decision strategies require a considerable degree of cognitive effort, which the consumer may be unwilling to expend. Thus, when examining these decision contexts, a driving issue is the extent to which consumers engage in processing that is consistent with traditional models of consumer choice, or whether some other form of processing occurs. In addition, much of the research on consumer decision-making has focused on cognitive processing that occurs immediately prior to the act of purchase. Yet many decisions are made repeatedly or frequently over time and thus involve continuous, as opposed to discrete-processing (Hogarth, 1981). In these instances, consumers may rely not only on previously acquired product information stored in memory, but also on judgments of brand satisfaction or dissatisfaction which occur in the post-purchase evaluation stage of the decision process (Hoyer, 1984).

In light of these two issues, Deshpande, Hoyer and Jeffries (1982) proposed a view which attempted to describe consumer decision-making in situations that involve repeated purchases over time and that can be typically considered as low in importance or involvement. This perspective is based on the notion that when purchase behaviour is preceded by a choice process, it is likely to be very limited (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979). It assumes that the

major goal in repetitive and relatively unimportant decisions is not to make an optimal choice, but to make a satisfactory choice while minimising cognitive effort (Hoyer, 1984). It, therefore, suggests that consumers optimise time and effort as opposed to consequences (Einhorn & Hogarth, 1981).

It should also be mentioned that two familiar concepts in the consumer behaviour literature – habitual purchase and brand loyalty – are easily incorporated into this framework (Hoyer, 1984). Habitual purchase would consist of the continued use of the tactic "buy the same brand I bought last time". As Jacoby and Kyner (1973) point out habitual purchase is not necessarily the result of a strong positive brand evaluation. The habitual purchaser does not engage in repeat purchase because of a strong preference for the brand; rather, repeat purchasing represents a convenient way of reducing cognitive effort (Hoyer, 1984). Brand loyalty involves a preference for the brand (Hoyer, 1984). This preference probably results from a post-purchase evaluation of product performance in which the consumer perceives that the brand satisfies needs better than do existing alternatives (Hoyer, 1984). Thus, habitual and brand loyal consumers possess different motivations for the same behaviour, and any effort to change these behaviours would involve a different strategy (Hoyer, 1984).

More recently, researchers confirmed that many consumers undertake little or no pre-purchase information search and undertake limited planning prior to entering retail stores (Solomon, 1996). It became clear that consumers possess and implement a repertoire of consumer decision-making strategies depending on the product, situation, context and previous experience (Solomon, 1996). It is argued that consumers do not typically apply analytical decision rules to optimise decisions but rely on price or brand name that would lead to satisfying decisions instead (Solomon, 1996).

2.2 Consumer Behaviour in Tourism

While consumer goods typically comprise of a range of tangible attributes, travel is a complex bundles of experiences with only a small set of tangible components (Wöber, Frew & Hitz, 2002). Thus, tourism is inherently experiential (Williams, 2006). Consumers learn about products prior to the actual purchase mainly to assess what consumption experience the product can offer and how well it can meet the expectations of the anticipated experience (Hoch & Deighton, 1989). Due to the complex experiential nature of a tourism product and substantial geographical distances, inspection or trial prior to the purchase decision is almost impossible (Fesenmaier, Wöber & Werthner, 2006).

Although not designed to explain service purchase decisions, the grand consumer behaviour models were used by tourism scholars as a starting point for explaining the process used to purchase tourism services. In general, the literature reports that tourists follow a funnel-like procedure of narrowing down choices among alternate destinations (George, 2011). However, due to the diversity and interdependent characteristics of tourism, the process of buying offerings is more complex (George, 2011). There are far more decisions consumers have to make when choosing a holiday such as the type of destination, transport, accommodation, duration, timing and payment among others (George, 2011).

2.2.1 Decision-Making Models in Tourism

Wahab, Cromton and Rothfield (1976) proposed a model that delineated tourists' decision-making processes based on the realisation that tourist behaviour is a rational decision activity. It assumes that a potential traveller assesses the costs and benefits of his/her actions before committing themselves to a purchase. In addition, this model asserts that tourism services have unique characteristics that differentiate them from other products (Wahab et al., 1976). As with the economic models discussed, it has already been pointed out that consumers do not act rationally most of the time as several factors influence the decision-making process at any given time which cannot be assessed in order to make a perfect purchasing decision.

A second model worthy of discussion is the model which is proposed by Van Raaij and Francken (1984) called the *vacation-sequence model.* A distinguishing feature of this model is its emphasis on the importance of family member influence on the decision-making process for tourism service purchases. The decision process for the purchase and consumption of a tourism service is composed not only of individual factors but also household-related factors. The major premise is that in every sequence of the decision process, the behaviour and role of different family members might differ (Van Raaij &

Francken, 1984). A significant contribution of this model is its recognition of the interaction of household-related variables such as lifestyle, power structure, role and decision-making style with individual-related factors like attitudes and aspirations. The impact of family dynamics on the travel purchasing decision will be discussed in more detail on page 23.

The third model reviewed was developed by Woodside and Lysonski (1989). Based on an extensive review of several social science disciplines, the authors proposed a model that presented the decision-making process of a traveller as a categorisation process of destinations from which the preferences, intentions and the final choice result. Before being able to form preferences, a traveller will place all destinations familiar to him in to the first of a series of four mental sets. This process is influenced by marketing and personal variables. Afterwards, from these mental sets, final preferences emerge through the possible influence of affective associations which are positive or negative feelings associated with a destination. Finally, the choice is a function of intention to visit a destination where situational variables act more as moderators between intentions and the choice (Woodside and Lysonski, 1989).

Woodside and Lysonski's original model (1989) and the extension (Woodside & MacDonald, 1994) are two of the more influential models in the tourism literature. A general systems framework of consumer choice decisions by Woodside and MacDonald (1994) emphasises the interactions between members of a travel party, activities and travel decisions. Woodside and King (2001) present a general *purchase consumption system* (PCS) framework, which they describe as useful for mapping travellers' choice decisions before and during a trip; while also evaluating their actual experiences that may influence future trip choices. The PCS is a sequence of mental and observable steps a consumer undertakes to buy and use several related service offerings whereby some of the services purchased lead to a purchase sequence involving further purchases. Woodside and King (2001) support the view that travellers' decision-making behaviours are based on many variables in relationships that are interactive rather than being linear. The studies by Bansal and Eiselt (2004) and Lue, Crompton, and Stewart (1996) support this complementary, multidimensional view of travel planning and behaviour.

A final behavioural model included in this discussion is the theory of planned behaviour as applied to leisure choice situations (Ajzen & Driver, 1992). Although not every leisure activity is considered a tourism activity, the application of the theory of planned behaviour proves to be useful for destination choice situations (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). The

theory of planned behaviour is the extension of Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action. This theory asserts that human behaviour is the function of intentions and perceived behavioural control over behaviour (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). Attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control interact with each other; while also influencing intention formation (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). These three constructs summarise many essential elements contained in most tourism decision models, namely the traveller attitudes, family and friend influences and the role of past experience and constraints. Ajzen and Driver (1992) applied this model to predict leisure activity choices and were able to prove the usefulness of this theory in understanding leisure choice behaviour by relating tourist intention to actual choice behaviours.

Travel-related decisions involve high risks (time, monetary, safety, among others) due to the very nature of tourism services and thus require risk reduction strategies such as extensive information search strategies (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). So far, the assumptions throughout the models have been that decision-makers exhibit rationalistic behaviour in their choices among alternative destinations (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). They will select a destination, which offers the greatest utility subject to individual or social constraints. The selection process is a funnel-like one, in that travellers narrow down choices among alternatives (George, 2011) and are influenced both by socio-psychological and non-psychological factors (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). A synthesis of variables used in explaining choice decisions and the formation of choice sets can be categorised into four groups: (1) internal variables (2) external variables (3) the nature of the intended trip and (4) trip experiences (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). The ultimate choice of a destination will depend on the nature of interaction among these variables (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005).

2.2.2 Evaluation of Alternatives by Travellers

The tourism industry is not well defined as it involves an amalgam of heterogeneous businesses services such as transport, accommodation, restaurant and retailing (Carlsen, 1996). At a broad level, travel products can be classified based on complexity. Flights, accommodation, and car rentals can be categorised as products of low complexity, whereas land-based vacations, cruises and tours can be considered products of high complexity (Tsaur & Yen, 2011). Most tourism service purchases are considered to be high-involvement, extensive decision-making purchases, because of the relatively high costs, both monetary and non-monetary (time, safety, etc.), involved in these decisions (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). For example, planning a pleasure trip to another country involves a relatively high perceived

risk of making a bad decision, investing a significant amount of time searching for information, and a considerable monetary outlay. However, low involvement is likely when decision-makers have prior experience about the service (Teare, 1992). Prior experience leads to a more cursory in formation search, more confidence in the decision choice, and less perceived risk (Woodside, MacDonald & Trappey, 1997). Thus, the evaluation of high complexity travel products will be more difficult than evaluating travel products of low complexity.

Economics of information theory categorised products into search, experience and credence types based on how consumers evaluate them (Nelson, 1970). Products with search qualities can be fully evaluated prior to purchase, whereas experience based products must be first purchased and consumed before the consumer is able to evaluate. Bringing the realm of travel products within this categorisation provides cues on the nature of search and purchase in the online medium. On the Internet, travel suppliers can provide greater detail on features of products using a wide array of tools. Depending on the type of product, these may be comparison charts, virtual tours, video as well as still image formats. Flights, accommodations and car rentals are standardised services that can be placed within the easier to evaluate context as there are more known parameters of tangibility (Zeithaml, 1981). In contrast, complex travel products such as cruises, land-based vacations, tours, activities and attractions arguably can be placed in the difficult-to-evaluate context. Research also indicates a linear relationship between perceived risk in a service and the extent of detail of search in services (Murray & Schlacter, 1990).

The factors investigated when studying these aspects of travel decision-making are fairly similar and two main categories of destination characteristics are distinguished in the literature: The possibility to undertake certain activities at the destination and the attributes of the destination itself (Dellaert, Ettema & Lindh, 1998). Traveller characteristics can also influence tourists' travel choices. They include elements such as the number of people travelling as a group, traveller income, age and possible relationships to people in certain destinations (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). People consider five to six alternatives up to five to six months before their trip. Two months before departure, the number of alternatives considered is decreased to two to three (Crompton, 1992) as individuals can only optimally process six alternatives (Bettman, 1979a; Wright, 1975). This is consistent with the theory on information overload discussed earlier (Streufert, 1970; Streufert and Driver, 1965; Streufert, Driver, and Haun, 1967; Bettman, 1979a; Wright, 1975). To decrease cognitive effort and to

make the optimal decision, travellers consider fewer alternatives as time moves closer to the actual travel date (Dellaert, Ettema & Lindh, 1998). Thus, travellers can spend more time evaluating attributes of fewer travel destinations, then focusing on a large number of destination alternatives.

2.2.3 Impacting the Decision-Making Process for Travellers

There are several variables impacting the decision-making process of consumers. However, the current section will mainly focus on reference groups and family dynamics while analysing how these impact the online tourism domain.

2.2.3.1 Reference Groups

Research on peer influence and its effect on pleasure travel patterns are important as peers have a strong influence on travel decisions (Burch, 1965). Peers influence the attitudes and norms of behaviour acceptable to individuals; therefore, individuals often comply to group decisions and ideals in order to gain acceptance (McNeil, 1969). Furthermore, Crutchfield (1955) argues that, there are two types of people within a given group: there are those who lead and there are those who follow. Those who follow have less self-insight, less spontaneity and productive originality (Dalton, 1961). Those persons or groups that serve as a point of reference and are influential in individuals' attitudes, choices and beliefs are called a reference group (Moutinho, 1987). Some examples of reference groups include family, peers, work colleagues, friends, religious and ethnic groups, formal social and leisure groups, trade unions, neighbourhoods, teachers, and sports and entertainment figures (Khan & Khan, 2005; Moutinho, 1987).

For the purpose of this study, generalisations on reference groups as a whole will be made while taking a closer look at family dynamics during the decision-making process. Lastly, theory on word-of-mouth (WOM) which is closely related to the concept of reference groups will also be discussed as well.

Khan and Khan (2005) noted that the credibility, attractiveness, and expertise of the reference group and product conspicuousness are well-documented determinants of reference group influence. Referents are valuable sources of information perceived as instrumental to the solution of a problem, or to reinforce established beliefs (Khan & Khan, 2005). Reasons why individuals comply with a peer reference group is the pressure of unanimity. Single individuals will often join the majority to avoid ridicule and rejection (Ajzen & Driver, 1991). This is especially true for those who have a low self-esteem or may not feel accepted

within the group. Individuals who become involved in new reference groups are often prepared to comply to group decisions and ideals in order to gain acceptance (McNeil, 1969). Burch (1965) states expressiveness by its transitory nature is dependent upon immediate recognition by a jury of peers. If individuals want to maintain their position among peers, they must abide by the codes and norms of the group (Currie, Wesley & Sutherland, 2008). If individuals do not respond to the demands of peers, the individuals may feel removed and distant from the group because of their non-compliance (Currie, Wesley & Sutherland, 2008).

Considering the remarkable power of informal information channels in search and purchase behaviour, marketers in the tourism industry could assume that some people may choose to replicate holiday experiences enjoyed previously by friends or peers because they would rather follow the advice and opinions of others than adopt a more independent approach or risk making a wrong decision (Currie, Wesley & Sutherland, 2008). Peer groups greatly affect travel influences through direct social interaction often becoming the primary and second hand sources of information (Ajzen & Driver, 1991). Mieczkowski (1990) states that travellers establish their images of destination on the basis of less biased sources such as opinions of friends and relatives who visited these destinations. Once friends and relatives have visited a destination, information is passed on to individuals through word-of-mouth (WOM) (Mieczkowski, 1990). Friends also provide a more realistic understanding of a destination than the tourist-marketing literature, which can seem inaccurate or misleading compared to the perceived unbiased opinion of the peer group (Mieczkowski, 1990). This is more likely in a service product such as tourism, which can be difficult to evaluate (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). Moutinho (1987) further states that for tourism, reference groups influence individuals' destination choice by bringing awareness of a particular destination or service and through direct communication of experiences.

In addition, Mitchell and Greatorex (1993) note that the high-perceived risk factors of service purchasing stem from the heightened uncertainty in service purchasing. One risk reliever would be the positive feedback from trusted referents such as friends and colleagues (Mitchell & Greatorex, 1993). The impact of peer experience on control beliefs demonstrates that the influence of peers can affect the decisions individuals make involving pleasure travel destinations. However, Schul and Crompton (1983) argue that a travel destination is often chosen because of its unfamiliarity with the general public. They further state that there is little desire by some travellers to return to a previously visited destination; no matter; how successful a previous vacation at that destination may have been.

With the rising popularity of the Internet, users are able to find many reference groups online such as travel-related blogs and travel community Web sites. Users learn about the attributes of a product in various ways: through advertisements, WOM, price, and sale quantity (Vettas, 1997). However, a tourism product is in essence an experience good meaning that the product is based upon a bundle of services and experiences by their very nature that are hard to assess prior to purchase (McIntosh, 1972). Through the Internet, individuals can make their thoughts and opinions easily available to a global community of Internet users (Dellarocas, 2003) and a growing number of users actively take advantage of this opportunity. The advice from other consumers who have prior experience with the tourist destination and who are interpersonally available will no doubt rank as not only the preferred source of pre-purchase information but the most influential in travel decision-making (Crotts, 1999). With the advancement of the Internet, consumers now are able to access not only opinions from close friends, family members, and co-workers, but also strangers from all around the world who may have used the product, visited a certain destination or stayed at a specific accommodation. Searching and reading others' opinions about a product can help a consumer save decision-making time and also make better decisions (Hennig-Thurau & Wals, 2003).

- Family Dynamics

Since 1970, there has been a particularly strong revival of interest in family buying behaviour in the consumer research literature. This revival of interest can be traced most directly to a series of research articles by Davis (1970; 1971; 1976). These studies made the major contribution of identifying the specific elements of a number of purchase decision processes, and measuring the structure of shared influence between husbands and wives for each of the elements.

The Learner Marketing Research and Development report (1968) is an in-depth view of family-member involvement when new or different brands are brought into the home. Even though wives did most of the shopping, they did so with an awareness of the products and brands that their families liked. This purchasing behaviour takes into the theory of the satisficing criterion (Simon, 1955), which predicts that the group will engage in problem-solving and will continue to search for alternatives until one is found that satisfies the minimum level of expectations of all members with respect to the value or values perceived as being relevant.

However, it is not always possible to reach the minimum level of expectations when making decisions affecting an entire group. While the research evidence is limited, some authors (Blood, 1960; Sprey, 1969) suggest that groups, and particularly families, quite often bargain, compromise, and coerce rather than problem-solve in arriving at decisions. Blood (1960) argues that the involuntary and diffuse character of family relationships and the family's small size and changing developmental tasks lead to a high degree of conflict. Sprey (1969) maintains that treating the family as though the normal state were one of agreement and stability is inadequate, since decisions are frequently an on-going confrontation between members having different interests in a common situation. It is important, according to Sprey (1969), to understand how conflict management is possible through a set of mutually agreed-on rules. Furthermore, Davies (1976) suggested that families, more than other groups, are likely to make poor decisions. This is due to the environment in which families decide. Elements affecting family decision-making include: 1) the environment of family decision-making; 2) the maintenance needs of families; and 3) the inter-relatedness of family decisions (Davis, 1976). Thus, some members of the family are likely to accept a decision they may not prefer.

Research conducted by Filiatrault and Ritchi (1980) contributed significantly to the literature of family decision-making. While most of the literature agreed that decision-making is a joint-effort by husband and wife, they concluded that several factors will increase the influence of one family member. Husbands tended to dominate decision-making more in family than in those where no children were present, while joint decision-making was more prevalent in an unmarried couple (Filiatrault & Ritchi, 1980). Furthermore, consensus on decisions appeared higher in couples than in families (Filiatrault & Ritchi, 1980). The relative influence of husbands and wives across different elements of the decision process varied to a greater extent for families than it did for couples (Filiatrault & Ritchi, 1980). Within families, children exerted relatively little influence on the overall decision process, though the extent of their influence varied substantially across different elements of the decision process (Filiatrault & Ritchi, 1980). Nevertheless, children may have the potential to influence family decisions by forming alliances with either the father or mother to produce a majority position (Filiatrault & Ritchi, 1980).

The changes that have occurred in the modern family as a result of dual working relationships have also been reflected in changes in the family decision-making process (Belch & Willis, 2006). Overall, women have gained more influence in most of the decision-making areas,

gaining significantly more influence in the initiation stage, and increased influence regarding search and evaluation and the final decision (Belch & Willis, 2006). The husband's influence in all decision areas regarding this purchase has significantly decreased (Belch & Willis, 2006). In contrast, the husband has also lost influence in all stages of decisions regarding vacations, while the wife has gained substantial influence in all of these decision-making stages (Belch & Willis, 2006). Women have gained independence and importance in almost every area of the family decision-making process (Belch & Willis, 2006).

From a theoretical perspective, two possible explanations as to these changes might be offered. Blood and Wolfe (1960) argued that the spouse with the greater amount of resources would have the most power in the decision-making process. At that time, men generally had more power due to their greater resource contribution to the household. By the end of the 1960s, however, studies found that wives gained power when they were working, as their occupational status relative to the husband's increased, and as their contribution to household income increased (Lupri, 1969). Thus, these findings may be the result of the fact that women are contributing more to the income of a household and, thus, have gained power within that household. For what might be considered major expenditure decisions, as well for how much to spend for appliances and televisions, the female now has more influence, likely reflecting her increased resource contribution. The same would certainly seem to hold true for decisions regarding holiday-decisions, as the woman has gained the *right* to decide based on her increased resource contribution (Belch & Willis, 2006).

- Family Dynamics in Travel

Jenkins (1978) was the pioneer in family holiday decision-making studies by asking his respondents to allocate the decision-making influence of the partners. The data allowed Jenkins to classify each sub-decision as either 'husband-dominated', 'wife-dominated' or 'joint decision-making'. Twenty five years later, Litvin, Xu and Kang (2004) used the same procedure in a study. Their results show that over time most sub-decisions became more jointly made.

More recently, Bronner and Hoog (2008) agree with Litvin *et al.* (2004) that the family is affected by the changing roles of male and female partners, where a more equal division of paid labour and household duties is present, as compared with the situation 20 to 30 years ago. This general trend has consequences for the decision-making process at the specific level of choosing a car, a savings account, daily goods or a holiday. Bronner and Hoog's (2008)

main conclusion was that holiday choice has evolved over the last 30 years into being much more a joint decision, in which family members discuss, seek out information to use in the discussion, employ disagreement-resolution strategies and come finally to a joint choice.

- Family Dynamics: The Internet

In addition, there have been even more changes to the nature of the family decision-making process due to the impact of the Internet. With its ability to provide easily accessible information and purchase options, the Internet has altered the decision-making roles of family members based on their interest in and expertise with the Internet (Belch, Krentler & Willis-Flurry, 2005). The adoption of the Internet is perhaps most evident among children and teens, with over 70 per cent of all teens using the Internet regularly (Greenspan, 2002) and 49 per cent of online teens using the Internet more than once a day (Lenhart, Rainie & Lewis, 2001). Research further indicates that teens have more rapidly adopted the Internet and have embraced it to a greater degree than have their parents (Lenhart *et al.*, 2001), have developed a deeper understanding of the Internet than their elders (Curtis, 2000), and prefer the Internet over other media for data collection for transactions (Lenhart *et al.*, 2001). Both generations agree that teens know more about the Internet than their parents do (Lenhart *et al.*, 2001). John Geraci, Vice President of youth research at Harris Interactive, states, "the interesting thing about the Internet is that it is not so unusual for a parent to ask his child to research an adult purchase, such as a car or a holiday. Holton (2000) argues that the introduction of technology such as the Internet has given children more influence over purchasing decisions.

Belch, Krentler and Willis-Flurry (2005) investigated what impact this might have on the teen's influence in family decision-making. They dubbed those teenagers with significant influence with the term *Internet mavens*, as the domain specific, online parallel to the broader concept of market mavens. Just as the market maven has more knowledge of and interest in the overall marketplace, it is logical that some teenagers, relative to others online, may have developed similar characteristics in the virtual world and as a result are likely to be perceived as *Internet mavens* (Lenhart *et al*., 2001). As such, they would be expected to exhibit greater knowledge of the virtual marketplace, greater interest in and enjoyment of using the Internet for a variety of purposes, have higher levels of usage of the Internet, and have acquired more information on products/services from this medium (Lenhart *et al.*, 2001). Thus, those teenagers who are recognised *Internet mavens* might have more influence in the decision-making process than earlier suggested by Foxman, Tansuhaj & Ekstrom (1989) who noted

that children overstate their relative influence. This provides evidence of the evolution of family dynamics in the decision-making process over the past two decades.

Evidence also suggests that the Internet has become an important source of information for family decision-making. A study conducted by the Round Group and Opinion Research Corp. International indicated that it is not unusual for parents to ask their children to research information that will be used for adult or family purchases (Holton, 2000). In a study performed by NFO WorldGroup, 74 per cent of U.S. parents who purchased online stated that they allowed their children to participate in the process (Belch *et al.*, 2005). These studies would seem to indicate that the teen, given his or her relative expertise, would be increasingly relied upon for product information, particularly at early stages (problem recognition /information search) of the family decision-making process. The more the teens are perceived to be *Internet mavens*, the more influence they will have in the family decision-making process (Belch *et al.*, 2005).

As technology continues to evolve and dual working families become the norm, the decision-making process within the family is also likely to change (Belch *et al.*, 2005). By virtue of the greater time pressures felt by parents and teens' virtual market expertise, teen *Internet mavens* are likely to be integral participants in family decision-making (Belch *et al.*, 2005). Further support for this eventuality is evidenced by the finding that parents who are heavy Internet users are more likely to recognise and accept teens as mavens than are parents who are light internet users (Belch *et al.*, 2005). Hence, teen *Internet mavens* are not simply the answer for net-impoverished parents. Rather, the teen *Internet mavens* only supplement the contributions of Internet-savvy parents.

2.2.3.2 Word-of-Mouth

Marketing research on word-of-mouth (WOM) dates to the 1960s (Arndt 1967; Dichter 1966), and over time WOM definitions have evolved. In the early years, WOM was defined as face-to-face communication about products or companies between those people who were not commercial entities (Arndt, 1967). Later, Westbrook (1987) described WOM more broadly to include all informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers. While Westbrook (1987) did not specifically define what constituted informal communications, his research clearly indicated that these are the communications of interpersonal relationships, as

opposed to those through mass-media channels that pass product knowledge from producers/providers to consumers (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008).

In addition, Buttle (1998) argued that WOM can be mediated by electronic means as well. He noted that informal communications might not be all inclusive arguing the fact that more and more companies had adopted viral marketing practices which blurred the boundary between commercial messages and WOM.

Thus, the key defining characteristic of WOM is the perceived independence of the source of the message (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). This definitional evolution indicates, with information technology today ubiquitous, that WOM is becoming both more pervasive and amorphous (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan (2008) accept the broadest of definitions: WOM is the communication between consumers about a product, service, or a company in which the sources are considered independent of commercial influence. This process allows consumers to share information and opinions that direct buyers towards and away from specific products, brands, and services (Hawkins, Best & Coney 2004).

In a post-purchase context, consumer WOM transmissions consist of informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristic of particular goods and services and/or their sellers. Theory on WOM suggests these communications are the result of consumer involvement in the product/use situation (Dichter, 1966). Three different states of involvement have been identified: (1) product involvement in which the user desires to talk about the purchase and the gratifications it affords; (2) self-involvement in which the user seeks to gain attention, recognition or status in telling others about the purchase; and (3) other-involvement, where the user seeks to help other consumers by sharing his or her knowledge or experiences (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2009).

Interpersonal influence and WOM are ranked the most important information source when a consumer is making a purchase decision (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). These influences may be especially important in the hospitality and tourism industry, whose intangible products are difficult to evaluate prior to their consumption (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). Considering the considerable power of informal information channels in search and purchase behaviour, marketers in the tourism industry could assume that some people may choose to replicate holiday experiences enjoyed previously by friends or peers because they would

rather follow the advice and opinions of others than adopt a more independent approach or risk making a wrong decision (Currie, Wesley & Sutherland, 2008). Peer groups greatly affect travel influences through direct social interaction often becoming the primary and second hand sources of information (Ajzen & Driver, 1991). Mieczkowski (1990) states that tourists establish their images of destination on the basis of less biased sources such as the opinions of friends and relatives who visited these destinations. Once friends and relatives have visited a destination, information is passed on to individuals through WOM communication (Mieczkowski, 1990).

The assumption, of course, is that the satisfied buyer will tell others about his or her experience and thereby support a destination's promotional activities. King and Summers (1967) found, that nearly two-thirds of those interviewed told someone else about new products they had purchased or tried. But marketers need to ask the underlying reason of this behaviour: Why do people feel the need to communicate their product or service experience to others?

Concern for others may precipitate talk by the innovator because he can thereby share his satisfactions resulting from use of the product or service (Dichter, 1966). Especially when deciding on a holiday, friends provide a more realistic understanding of a destination than tourism brochures, which can seem inaccurate or misleading, compared to the perceived unbiased opinion of the peer group (Mieczkowski, 1990). Moutinho (1987) further states that for tourism, reference groups influence individuals' destination choices by bringing awareness of a particular destination or service and through direct communication of experiences. In addition, Mitchell and Greatorex (1993) note that the high-perceived risk factors of service purchasing stem from the heightened uncertainty in service purchasing. One risk reliever would be the positive feedback from trusted referents, such as friends and colleagues. The impact of peer experience on control beliefs demonstrates that the influence of peers can affect the decisions individuals make involving pleasure travel destinations. Ajzen and Driver (1991) confirm the assumption that peer influence has an effect on individuals' activity choices. However, Schul and Crompton (1983) argue that, a travel destination is often chosen because of its unfamiliarity with the general public. They further state that in many cases there is little desire to return to a previously visited destination, no matter how successful a previous vacation at that destination may have been.

WOM has long been recognised as influential in the tourism industry. In fact, travel and tourism theories such as Cohen's (1972) *drifter, explorer, mass tourist* typology, Plog's (1974) *typology of allocentric and psychocentric travellers*, and Butler's (1980) *tourist area life cycle model* are each based upon the observation that it is the innovative and adventurous tourists that discover new destinations or tourism products, who then, acting as opinion leaders, share their experiences with others (Dearden & Harron 1992); thus creating diffusion and marketing momentum for new destinations and innovative travel products.

Research in the tourism field has demonstrated the influence of both positive and negative WOM upon tourism products, in studies across a broad range of nations. Among these, Morgan, Pritchard, and Piggott's (2003) New Zealand-based research noted that negative WOM can have an overwhelming impact upon a destination's image as dissatisfied visitors spread unflattering comments related to their experiences. Crick's (2003) Caribbean study similarly warned that when locals display hostile feelings towards tourists, the result is negative WOM and a likely downturn in the industry. O'Neill, Palmer and Charters (2002) studied wine tourism in Australia, and found that visitors' WOM recommendations boost wine sales when vacationing opinion leaders return home and tell others of their experiences; Shanka, Ali-Knight and Pope's (2002) study of destination selection methods found that a majority of Western Australia travel decisions were based upon WOM communications; and Díaz-Martín, Iglesias, Vázquez, and Ruiz (2000) found, in their study of Spanish tourists, that while positive WOM increases expectations, it also makes it that much more difficult to satisfy these expectations. This creates an interesting dichotomy.

Another term often linked with WOM marketing is *buzz marketing*. Interpersonal influence flows from opinion leaders to followers, but also spreads as a result of relationships among followers. Marketers hoping to harness these relationships seek to create buzz, defined by Thomas (2004) as the amplification of initial marketing efforts by third parties through their passive or active influence. This can be accomplished through stimulation strategies (Hawkins, Best & Coney 2004). As mentioned earlier, Buttle (1998) recognised this and argued that more and more companies had adopted viral marketing practices which blurred the boundary between commercial messages and WOM.

Traditional WOM normally indicates one-to-one communication; as such, only a few people will hear about your experience. However, when WOM becomes digital, the large-scale, anonymous and ephemeral nature of the Internet induces new ways of capturing, analysing,

interpreting and managing electronic WOM (eWOM) (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). With the introduction of the Internet, WOM has the ability to reach many thousands of people that have the same interests but have never met or might not even live in the same geographic region.

- ❖ eWOM

Based on the definition of WOM by Westbrook (1987), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can be defined as all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers. This includes communication between producers and consumers as well as those between consumers themselves – both integral parts of the WOM flow – and both distinctly differentiated from communications through mass media (Goldsmith, 2006).

With the advancements of Internet technology, increasing numbers of travellers are using the Internet to seek destination information and to conduct transactions online. The Internet has enabled new forms of communication platforms which have the ability to further empower both providers and consumers allowing a vehicle for the sharing of information and opinions both from business-to-consumer, and from consumer-to-consumer.

One aspect of the Internet is the phenomenon of online interpersonal influence (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). Because a fundamental principle of consumer behaviour is that consumers have the ability to exert powerful influences upon each other, it is only natural that marketers seek to manage interpersonal influence (Dichter 1966), and with the spread of electronic technologies, it is not surprising that virtual interactions among consumers have proliferated (Goldsmith, 2006). A good example of consumers sharing their hospitality and tourism opinions is the Web site TripAdvisor.com – touted (by the company) as: "The largest site for unbiased travel reviews which gives you the real story about hotels, attractions and restaurants around the world". TripAdvisor hosts over 125 million user-generated travel reviews and opinions, which are used by more than 260 million Web site visitors per month (TripAdvisor Fact Sheet, 2013).

Marketers, who have long sought to harness and manage interactions such as these to their own advantage, have recently begun to consider and devise strategies to manage online interpersonal influence (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). Tourism marketers find the issue of critical importance: i) Hospitality and tourism product-offerings are intangible services and

cannot be evaluated before their consumption, thus elevating the importance of interpersonal influence (Lewis & Chambers 2000); ii) Many hospitality and tourism product-offerings are seen as high-risk purchases, for which the emotional risk of reference group evaluation is an important aspect of the decision-making process (Lewis & Chambers 2000); iii) Hospitality and tourism products are both seasonal and perishable, raising marketing stress levels for providers (Rao & Singhapakdi 1997) and; iv) The tourism industry is intensely competitive, suggesting that the use of online interpersonal influence may provide important competitive advantages for early adopters (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008).

With the rising popularity of the Internet, consumers are also able to find many reference groups online such as travel-related blogs and by joining travel communities such as TripAdvisor. Consumers learn about the attributes of a product through advertisements, WOM, price, and sale quantity (Vettas, 1997). However, a tourism product is an "experience good" meaning that the product is based upon a bundle of services and experiences by their very nature that are hard to assess prior to purchase (McIntosh, 1972). Through the Internet, individuals can make their thoughts and opinions easily available to a global community of Internet users and a growing number of users actively take advantage of this opportunity (Dellarocas, 2003). The advice from other consumers who have prior experience with the tourist destination and who are interpersonally available will rank as not only the preferred source of pre-purchase information but the most influential in travel decision-making (Crotts, 1999).

WOM has been defined as informal communication between consumers regarding the characteristics, ownership, and usage of a service or product (Westbrook, 1987). Different from marketing information and from mass media, personal communication or WOM is viewed as a more credible source of consumer information. With the advancement of the Internet, consumers are able to access not only opinions from close friends, family members, and co-workers, but also strangers from all around the world who may have used the product or visited a certain destination. More consumers are relying on online opinions for their purchase decisions; for example, from which movies to watch, which stocks to buy, (Guernsey, 2000) and where to spend the next holiday. Searching and reading other's opinions about a product can help a consumer save decision-making time and also make better (informed) decisions (Hennig-Thurau & Wals, 2003).

WOM information search is often greater in circumstances when a consumer is unfamiliar with a service provider (Chatterjee, 2001), which is often the case for travel-related decisions. WOM has long been recognised as one of the most important external information sources for travel planning (Crotts, 1999; Hwang, Gretzel, Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2006). As the use of the Internet for travel planning becomes more prevalent, travel decision-making processes are expected to become increasingly influenced by eWOM (O'Conor, 2008). eWOM differs significantly from its offline form in that in includes many-to-many communication between communicators who do not necessarily share any social ties and that it is much more voluminous (Chatterjee, 2001) and thus, able to reach a far greater audience.

Bronner and Hoog (2011) identified five categories as motivations for travellers to contribute towards eWOM: (1) self-directed, (2) helping other travellers, (3) social benefits, (4) consumer empowerment, and (5) helping companies. Travellers who post reviews and are largely motivated to help others prefer consumer-generated sites, comment on more aspects of a holiday, post mainly positive reviews and contribute more to sites accessible to other travellers (Bronner & Hoog, 2011). Travellers in this category wish to help others make the best decisions and are being seen as a credible information source. Travellers who post and are having a largely self-directed motivation, prefer marketer-generated sites, comment mainly on a limited number of aspects of a vacation, post more negative reviews, and contribute more to sites not accessible to other vacationers (Bronner & Hoog, 2011). These travellers do not want their reviews to be seen by other travellers, but rather by the management where the facilities were below standard either with the intention of trying improving the situation or possibly getting some form of compensation for their bad experience.

At the moment of decision-making, the consumer acts on impressions of the product's attributes gathered from often imperfect sources of information. Thus, WOM and eWOM aids in the decision-making process (Crotts, 1999) to make an informed decision – taking into account the recommendations of other travellers.

2.3. The Internet

Searching for travel-related information is one of the most popular online activities for Internet users (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Thus, travellers are expected to increasingly take advantage of online content. The growing use of online travel referrals for the purpose of travel-planning has been reported (Bonn, Furr & Susskind, 1999). As online search engines are one of the main drivers to find new information (Xiang & Gretzel, 2009), they have become a powerful interface that serves as the gateway to travel-related information as well as an important marketing channel through which destinations and tourism enterprises can reach and persuade potential visitors (Xiang, Wöber & Fesenmaier, 2008). Tourism is an information-intense industry (Sheldon, 1997); therefore, it is critical to understand changes in technologies and consumer behaviour that impact the distribution and accessibility of travel related information. In particular, it has been argued that understanding the nature of the online tourism domain, provides an important stepping-stone for the development of successful marketing programs and better management systems in tourism (Xiang *et al.*, 2008).

Digital Life is a comprehensive study which was conducted by TNS – a global marketing research agency – to understand people's attitudes and behaviours online (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). The *Digital Life* study is the most recent study on online consumer behaviour; while also having the largest sample size of any study that has recently been published. The findings of this study will be discussed in the next section. Following this, the different types of social media will be listed which will also include discussions on how they have impacted the tourism industry as well as the online tourism domain.

2.3.1 Online Consumer Behaviour

Digital Life provides recommendations for companies on how to use digital and social media channels to grow business through a precise understanding of human behaviours and attitudes online (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). Based on research with over 72,000 people in 60 countries, Digital Life's size, scale and detail make it one of the most comprehensive views of consumer attitudes and behaviour online, on a global and local level (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). For the purpose of this study, the results of *Digital Life* on a global level will be presented in sections 2.3.1.1 – 2.3.1.3. As the functionality and the level of interactivity on the Internet are always evolving, the way in which individuals use the Internet changes constantly as well. As such, researchers need to be careful not to present out-dated information on online behaviour.

2.3.1.1 The Role of the Consumer Voice

The explosive growth of the Internet and the adaptation of social media have created new ways for individuals to express their opinions online (Bansal & Koudas, 2007). The Internet and social media allow Internet users to share their experiences with a brand or product as well as give their opinion on them. The TNS *Digital Life* (2011) study found that 47 per cent of Internet users comment online while 31 per cent of those indicated that their reason to comment was the ability to share their experience they had. Furthermore, 46 per cent of Internet users add comments to Web sites in order to help others making a purchasing decision (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). Those people who write comments online wish to share and learn more than they want to praise or complain about a brand (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). In addition, people trust in what is said online whether it is from friends or strangers (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). Recommendations from friends and family still has the most significant influence on what consumers choose to purchase; however, people are also willing to listen to the recommendations of strangers (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). What consumers buy, or what they think about a brand, can be influenced by a stranger living on the other side of the world (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). Lastly, the TNS *Digital Life* (2011) study found that, the closer consumers get to a buying decision and the more knowledge and confidence they gain through their research, the more likely they are to comment.

2.3.1.2 Brands as Friends

Through social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Google+, brands can interact with their fan-base at a personal level. Brands can share their latest marketing material, post news and updates from within the company, and allow the company to be perceived as a person rather than an organisation. The TNS *Digital Life* (2011) study concludes that fast-growing markets are more open to brands on social networks than developed markets. Developed markets show resistance to both buying and engaging with brands in these spaces (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). Social networks can, therefore, put brands at risk of damaging their image in developed markets, and must be carefully approached (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011).

Furthermore, Internet users are much more resistant to buying products than they are to learning about them on social networks (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). The study also found that social networks alone are not ideal spaces for retail, but that the popularity of group buying sites has opened up new opportunities (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). Group buying sites allow multiple buyers to buy goods and services at a reduced price once a certain number of buyers have been identified. Web-based variants of group buying have recently received a lot of

attention as part of the wave of innovative online market-based mechanisms such as auctions, reverse auctions, and "name-your-own- price" scheme (Anand & Aron,2003). Localising and personalising what brands offer consumers, allows them to sell more overtly and unapologetically than they might on social networks (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011).

2.3.1.3 Evaluating Alternatives Online

At whichever stage consumers are at in the decision-making process, people will research more touch points online than offline (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). The digital world empowers consumers to shop. Thus, researching and purchasing can now be done all the time: at home, at work, and on-the-go (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). Due to this development, brands need to pinpoint the most influential touch points online and offline to ensure that they maximise their presence and impact across the different media (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011).

A characteristic feature of electronic shopping environments is the lack of physical constraints with respect to product display (Häubl & Trifts, 2000). The virtually infinite shelf space available in online stores allows a vendor to offer an extremely large number of alternatives within a product category (Häubl & Trifts, 2000). Furthermore, from a consumer perspective, having access to a very large number of products is highly desirable (Häubl & Trifts, 2000). At the same time, however, consumers have limited cognitive resources and may simply be unable to process the potentially vast amounts of information about these alternatives (Streufert, Driver & Haun, 1967).

It must be noted, that the quantity of information the consumer receives from brands does not replace the quality of a personal recommendation from someone we trust (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). Throughout the decision-making process, every consumer examines many sources of information – including those from brands and retailers – but recommendations from friends and family still have the most significant influence on what we choose to purchase (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011).

2.3.2 Social Media

It seems that while social media are becoming increasingly important in the online tourism domain, there is a lack of empirical data to describe and explain the role of social media in the context of online travel information search (Xiang & Gretzel, 2009)**.** While there is a lack of a formal definition, social media can be generally understood as Internet-based applications that carry consumer-generated content which encompass media impressions created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experience, and archived or shared

online for easy access by other impressionable consumers (Blackshaw, 2006). The content generated by these social media include a variety of new and emerging sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated, and used by consumers with the intent of educating each other about products, brands, services and issues (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006). In contrast to content provided by marketers and suppliers, social media is produced by consumers to be shared among themselves (Xiang & Gretzel, 2009). Increasingly travellers seem to tap into this *collective intelligence* available on the Web (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008); and this will challenge the established marketing practices of many tourism enterprises and DMOs (Xiang & Gretzel, 2009).

Social media exist in a variety of forms and serve numerous purposes. Consumer-generated content supported through social media is a mixture of fact and opinion, impression and sentiment, founded and unfounded titbits, experiences, and even rumour (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006). Virtual travel communities such as LonelyPlanet, where tourists can exchange opinions and experiences on topics of common interests, have been around since their inceptions in the late 1990s, and have been investigated to determine their roles and impacts in the context of travel (Xiang & Gretzel, 2009).

In addition, new online applications have emerged that add substantially to the information exchange among consumers. Today, Web 2.0, also referred to as "Travel 2.0" in tourism, includes a range of new technological applications such as media and content syndication, mash-ups, AJAX, tagging, wikis, web forums and message boards, customer ratings and evaluation systems, virtual worlds (e.g., Second Life), podcasting, blogs, and online videos (vlogs) (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). Consumer blogs have emerged as one of the most prominent themes in research on social media in travel and tourism (Pan, McLaurin & Crotts, 2007; Pudliner, 2007). Pudliner's research underscores the interest in understanding the functions of blogs in creating and sharing new experiences as well as its trustworthiness to online travellers (Mack, Blose & Pan, 2008). As evidenced by the success of Web sites such as Tripadvisor, online travel-related consumer reviews also represent a significant amount of social media for travel purposes (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). The studies on this type of social media focus on its use as well as its impact on travel decision-making. Multimedia sharing (such as video, photos, podcasting, etc.), represented by Web sites such as YouTube and Flickr, have attracted tourism researchers by generating interests in understanding the role of this type of social media content in transforming travel experiences (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).

According to Forrester Research, 75 per cent of Internet surfers are exposed to types of social media by joining social networks, reading blogs, or contributing reviews to shopping sites (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The growth is not limited to teenagers either; members of Generation X, now 35 to 44 years old, increasingly populate the ranks of joiners, spectators, and critics (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It is, therefore, reasonable to say that social media represent a revolutionary new trend that should be of interest to companies operating in the online space. As such, the structure of the tourism domain has changed drastically owing to the appearance of social media in the decision-making process of travellers. Given the potential impact of social media in the online tourism domain, knowledge about the role of social media in travel information search is considered essential to better inform tourism marketing practices (Fesenmaier, 2007; Gretzel, 2006).

Many travel and tourism operations have also recognised the importance of including consumer-generated content on their Web sites, usually in the form of edited testimonials (e.g.,VisitPA.com and Sheraton.com). Marketing researchers often use the label eWOM to describe the impact of such media content (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). Schmallegger and Carson (2008) suggested that strategies of using blogs as an information channel encompass communication, promotion, product distribution, management, and research. As such, current tourism marketing practice focuses attention on utilising social media to create positive image and WOM for tourist destinations and businesses.

Given their important role in facilitating travellers' access to the online tourism domain, search engines directly and indirectly promote social media to travel information searchers. Findings of a study by Xiang and Gretzel (2009) indicate that social media, indeed, constitute a substantial part of the online tourism domain and, thus, play an important role within the context of trip planning using an online search engine. Social media appears on the first few search results pages in Google, instead of being buried somewhere less likely to be accessed by online travellers (Xiang & Gretzel, 2009). This suggests that these social media sites are quite substantial in terms of the size of their sites, the up to-date nature and relevance of their contents, and the level of connectivity with other sites on the Internet, considering the specific ranking algorithms – a code that defines how Web sites are ranked on search engines – used by Google (Xiang & Gretzel, 2009).

Bansal and Koudas (2007) argue that information discovery is not necessarily query driven. Implying that, individuals are not always exposed to information after searching for a specific

travel-keyword. They may be exposed to it, simply by visiting their regular blogs or logging in to social networking sites. Thus, the research by Xiang and Gretzel (2009) is only relevant for individuals who already have a preferred travel destination in mind and are actively searching for travel information via online search engines. However, as stated, searching for travel-related information is still one of the most popular online activities (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Furthermore, with regard to experiential products such as travel and tourism, travellers are involved in an on-going search for information (Leemans, 1994).

2.3.2.1 Blogs

The explosive growth of the Internet and the massive adoption of social media have created new ways for individuals to express their opinions online (Bansal & Koudas, 2007). The word "blog" is a shortened word originating from "web log" (Chow, 2005). The form is familiar, frequently updated, reverse-chronological entries on a single Web page (Blood, 2004). Recently, audio and video blogging (vlog) from mobile devices is also possible (Baker and Green, 2005).

The report "State of the Blogosphere 2011" by the popular blog aggregator Technorati (2011) has identified that sharing content and expressing one's opinion are the main reason why individuals start writing a blog. The report stated that most bloggers are between the ages of 25 and 44 while more than 50 per cent of bloggers reside in the United States of America (Technorati, 2011).Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht and Swartz (2004) also examined the motivations for the reason people blog in more detail. Their findings show that blogs are used to share daily experiences, opinions and commentary.

It is reported by Nielsen (2012) that over 180 million blogs exist and around a hundred thousand new blogs are created every day. Publishers of blogs write about diverse topics such as political opinions, technology trends, sports events, their personal lives, product reviews and tourism experiences (Bansal & Koudas, 2007). As an important format of eWOM, blogs are gaining more and more popularity. These trends will grow and persist as our lives become more heavily dependent on Internet technologies (Bansal & Koudas, 2007).

Lento, Welser, Gu and Smith (2006) examined the importance of social relationships within the blogosphere. Their findings show that users' retention and interest in blogging can be predicted by the comments received and continued relationships with other active members of the blogging community. Thus, the growth of the blogosphere is dependent on the interactive participation of other members within blogosphere.

Table 1: Summary of the Blogosphere & Impact on Tourism

Blogosphere	Definition	Impact on Tourism	Sources
Blogs	Web Log: frequently updated, reverse-chronological entries on a single Web page.	Online entries of travel experiences as well as the anticipation, planning, packing, departure, driving, flying; marketing tool for DMOs; monitoring the competitiveness of a travel destination.	(Bansal & Koudas, 2007); (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008); (Pan, McLaurin & Crotts, 2007).
Micro-blogging	A form of blogging that lets you write brief text updates (usually less than 200 characters) about your life on the go and send them to friends and interested observers via text messaging, instant messaging, email or the web.	Similar to blogs; real-time & on-the-go updates. DMOs can use Twitter as a marketing tool to connect with travellers from all over the world.	(Java, Finin, Song & Tseng, 2007).

Travel blogs express the experiences of the visitor at a specific destination (Pan, McLaurin & Crotts, 2007). At the moment of decision-making, the consumer must act on impressions of the product's attributes gathered from often imperfect sources of information (Pan, McLaurin & Crotts, 2007). Travel blogs qualitatively cover every aspect of a visitor's trip – from the overall experience of traveling, the anticipation, planning, packing, departure, driving, flying and delays en route – were all reflected in the travel blogs (Pan, McLaurin & Crotts, 2007). Furthermore, travel blogs can also be a useful tool in monitoring the competitive environment of a destination and provide valuable customer feedback that is richer and more detailed than

traditional Likert response survey measurements (Pan, McLaurin & Crotts, 2007). The blogosphere in tourism, however, does not solely contain travel blogs as a form of consumer to consumer (C2C) communication (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). It allows for a much wider range of possible applications, including business-to-business (B2B), business-to-consumer (B2C) or government-to-consumer (G2C) blogs, all of which may have important implications for tourism and destination marketing (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008).

However, not all blogs can be categorised as social media. It is reported that half of the blogs on the Internet are reported as spam (Bansal & Koudas, 2007). These pages exist in order to benefit other commercial sites and are not seen as useful for Internet users (Bansal & Koudas, 2007). Thus, the actual growth rate of the blogosphere is difficult to establish.

- Mircoblogs

Micro-blogging is a relatively new phenomenon defined as "a form of blogging that lets you write brief text updates (usually less than 200 characters) about your life on the go and send them to friends and interested observes via text messaging, instant messaging, email or the web" (Java, Finin, Song & Tseng, 2007). Mirco-blogging is provided by several services but the most popular of them is the platform Twitter. According to ComScore (2007), within eight months of its launch, Twitter had 94,000 users as of April 2007 showing that there was a basic need for people to share updates about their lives and their daily experiences. More recent statistics show 645,750,000 active users with 58 million tweets sent per day world-wide (StatisticsBrain, 2013b).

Compared to regular blogging, micro-blogging fulfils a need for an even faster mode of communication (Java *et al.*, 2007). That is, a blogger might update his/her blog once every few days, while a micro-blogger might post several updates on the very same day (Java *et al*., 2007). Findings by Nardi *et al.* (2004) indicate that bloggers want to share their experiences online. Micro-blogging gives users a fast and easy way to share information in real time (Nardi *et al*., 2004). As someone is experiencing a travel product, the user can immediately post a comment on a micro-blogging platform and express their opinion (Nardi *et al.*, 2004).

According to Java *et al.* (2007) there are four main types of micro-bloggers: i) Daily chatter; ii) conversations; iii) sharing information; and iv) reporting news are their main motivations. Furthermore, users also play different roles while using Twitter. Daily chatter is the largest and most common use of Twitter (Java *et al.*, 2007). These include messages about their daily

routine or what users are currently doing (Java *et al.*, 2007). This would also include updates by users describing travel experiences and posting opinions on travel products and travel services. As some customers are experiencing the travel product, they can – with the means of a micro-blogging platform such as Twitter – share information about their experience online and in real time (Java *et al.*, 2007). Other Twitter users ("tweeters") might be searching for information in that category. Depending on the authority of the Twitter user who shared the information, the "information searcher" is influenced during his/her decision-making process (Java *et al.*, 2007). Users can further be classified as an information source, a friend or an information seeker (Java *et al.*, 2007). These roles are not mutually exclusive.

2.3.2.2 Social Networks

A social networking service is an online service, platform, or site that focuses on building and reflecting of social networks or social relations among people, who share similar interests or activities (Mashable.com, 2013). A social network service consists of a representation of each user (often a profile), his/her social links, and a variety of additional services. Most social network services are web-based and provide means for users to interact over the Internet, such as e-mail and instant messaging. Online community services are sometimes considered as a social network service, though in a broader sense, social network service usually means an individual-centred service whereas online community services are group-centred. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, activities, events, and interests within their individual networks. The social networks Facebook, Twitter, Google+ as well as several travel communities will be introduced in this section while also discussing their role on the tourism industry. A summary of the impact social networks have on the travel industry can be found on Table 2 on page 42.

Table 2: Summary of Social Networks & Impact on Tourism

Social Networks	**Definition**	**Impact on Tourism**	**Sources**
Facebook	Most widely used social network on the Internet.	DMOs can create brand pages to establish an online presence on Facebook and communicate with their fans; spread of	(Facebook Statistics, 2011); (Svensson, 2011).

		eWOM.	
Twitter	Micro-blogging Platform.	Real-time & on-the-go updates; DMOs can use Twitter as a marketing tool to connect with travellers from all over the world; spread of eWOM.	(Mao, Shuai and Kapadia, 2011).
Google+	Biggest and newest attempt to rival Facebook.	Similar to Facebook above.	(New York Times, 2011).
Travel Communities	Combination of social networks, blogs and other type of social media intended for travellers.	Marketing opportunities for DMOs; members are travel enthusiasts looking to explore the world.	

- Facebook

When Mark Zuckerberg first launched Facebook in 2004, he intended it exclusively as a site for college students to interact with and find friends (McClard & Anderson, 2008). In 2005, membership opened to high school students, and, amid considerable controversy, non-college-affiliated adults were permitted to sign up (McClard & Anderson, 2008). Today, Facebook has more than 1,11 billion active users of which 50% log on to the network every day (StatisticBrain, 2013a**)**. The average user has 130 friends and is connected to an average of 80 community pages or groups (StatisticBrain, 2013a). Furthermore, 680 million active users currently access Facebook through their mobile devices (StatisticBrain, 2013a). Facebook users can share stories and pictures on mobile; making content available to friends instantly.

With regards to how Facebook impacts the tourism industry, one only has to look at the possibilities for eWOM via the social network. Firstly, the profile-based user accounts make Facebook non-anonymous (Keenan & Shiri, 2009). As such, users can be identified by their

real name whenever they post something on Facebook. Secondly, although eWOM on Facebook does not have access to all Internet users since it is a closed network, it reaches more "real" friends than what one can communicate with in actual life. Opinion-passing behaviour is also more likely to occur in an online social context such as Facebook suggesting that once eWOM is set in motion, it can easily be spread from one friend's network to another (Svensson, 2011). It is common for consumers to engage in social interactions by commenting, liking or passing along eWOM to their social connection (Svensson, 2011).

Due to the functionality of groups and pages, Facebook users also have the ability to share content outside of their friend-network with like-minded people who are looking for holiday opinions, reviews and recommendations. The TNS *Digital Life* (2011) study reported that Internet users trust recommendations even if they are written by strangers. For example, Cape Town Tourism – a regional tourism organisation – is managing a Facebook page called 'I love Cape Town' which has over 300,000 members who are all passionate about Cape Town as a city and destination. Members of the page are encouraged to share stories and pictures of Cape Town. As such, many people will have access to this content promoting the city of Cape Town as a tourism destination.

- Twitter

Twitter, a micro-blogging service, has emerged as a new medium in spotlight through global events, such as an American student jailed in Egypt and the US Airways plane crash on the Hudson River as well as the recent public uprisings in Egypt and Libya. These news stories broke first on Twitter before major news agencies had picked up on it. As a micro-blogging service, Twitter has become one of the most popular social networking tools today (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010**).** Current Twitter statistics show 645,750,000 active users with 58 million tweets sent per day (StatisticsBrain, 2013b).

Twitter users follow others or are followed. Unlike most online social networking sites, such as Facebook, the relationship of following and being followed requires no reciprocation. A user can follow any other user, and the user being followed need not follow back. Being a follower on Twitter means that the user receives all the messages (called tweets) from those the user follows. Common practice of responding to a tweet has evolved into well-defined mark-up culture: RT stands for retweet, '@' followed by a user identifier address the user, and '#' followed by a word represents a hashtag. This well-defined mark-up vocabulary

combined with a strict limit of 140 characters per posting, conveniences users with brevity in expression. The retweet mechanism empowers users to spread information of their choice beyond the reach of the original tweet's followers.

Research was conducted by Mao, Shuai and Kapadia in 2011 on privacy issues regarding this social network. As part of their study, they searched for travel-related keywords on Twitter such as "vacation", "holiday", "travel", "trip", "leave for" and "fly to". The total number of vacation tweets in their dataset reached a total of 575,689, and a summary of the daily number of tweets is shown in Figure 5: Vacation Messages on Twitter on page 45. When analysing the standard deviation, one is able to see that during the months of January, June, July and September the number of travel related messages on Twitter were above the normal average. In the study conducted by Moa *et al.* (2011) these findings were seen as negative as they pointed out several privacy concerns for Twitter users. However, for the purpose of this study, it can be noted that Twitter users do share holiday information and can be found easily by others searching relevant keywords. Thus, people can search for a prospective travel destination and find short messages, opinions, pictures and videos of other destination-experienced travellers who have added these to their Twitter account.

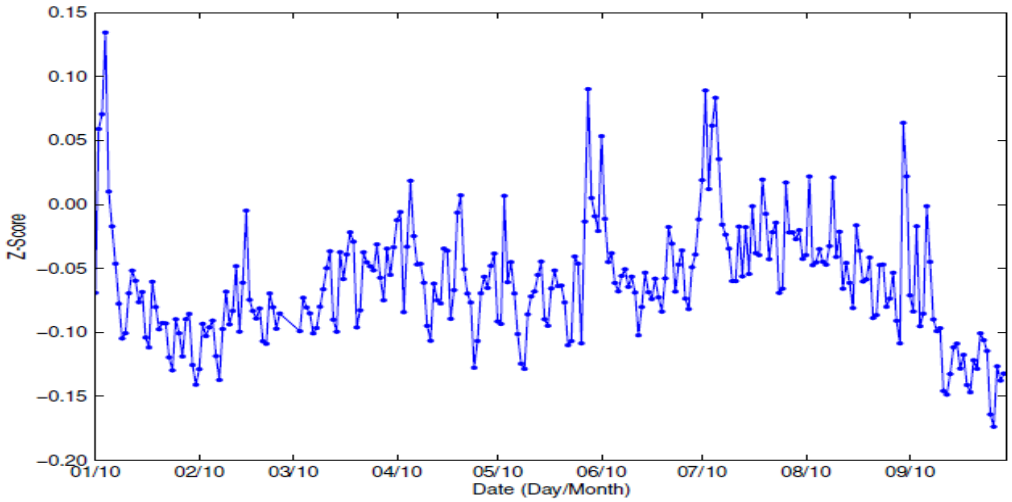

Figure 4: Vacation Messages on Twitter (Moa, Shuai & Kapadia, 2011)

- Google+

Google+ was launched in June 2011 and as such very little academic literature relevant to the tourism industry can be found. However, several reputable news and social media sites have reported on its launch and implication in the social media environment.

The New York Times (2011) reported that Google+ is the biggest attempt to rival the social network Facebook, which currently has more than 540 million active users (Vlogg, 2013). More than 10 million people had signed up to Google+ in July 2010 even though the service was still in its limited trial phase (CNNMoney, 2011). The social network was officially launched in September 2011. After four weeks in operation, it had reached 25 million unique visitors (Mashable, 2011). Facebook and Twitter both took more than two years to hit the 10 million user milestone (Mashable, 2011).

Google+ integrates social services such as Google Profiles and Google Buzz, and introduces new services identified as Circles, Hangouts and Sparks. According to Larry Page (2011), CEO of Google, early adopters of Google+ have been mostly male (71.24%). The dominant age bracket (35%) is between 25 and 34 (Page, 2011). Furthermore, surveys estimate that 13% of U.S. adults have joined Google+ (Page, 2011). In addition, over 1.5 Billion photos uploaded every week to Google+ photos (Vlogg, 2013).

On November 7, 2011, Google launched, Google+ Pages, which allows businesses to connect with fans in a manner similar to Facebook Pages (Khan, 2011). These businesses receive corporate accounts to start sharing information and invite others to join in on the conversation. Tourism organisations and DMOs such as “Cape Town Tourism” have started using Google+ pages to promote travel destinations on this new social network.

However, Google has already faced criticism from industry leaders who denounce that the network is a failure. Forbes (2011) published "A Eulogy for Google Plus", while Slate (2011) declared simply: "Google+ is dead". Web analytics firm Chitika reported in October 2011 that excitement appeared to have waned for Google+ one month after its public launch, with traffic down 60% after spiking to 1,200% of pre-launch levels (BBC News, 2011). In contrast, though, social media news blog “Mashable” claim the new service may still emerge as a significant force in the online world (BBC News, 2011).

2.3.2.3 Travel Communities

Since their inception in 1997, virtual communities began to be depicted as central to models of commercial Internet development as well as to the future of narrow casting and mass customisation in the wider world of marketing and advertising (Werry, 1999). Amstrong and Hagel (1997) argue that traditional business functions, especially those in direct contact with customers such as marketing and sales will be significantly transformed in a community environment. This fluid and dynamic revolution is also true in the travel and tourism industry

when it is becoming easier than ever before to *travel* the world and stay in touch with people who live far away. In the travel industry the Internet is becoming a collective *travel square* as more and more travellers are turning to online travel communities to full-fill their travel-related tasks, ranging from seeking travel information and tips, making travel transactions, fostering relationships with people from far away, finding travel companions, or simply playing games for entertainment purposes (Wang, Yu & Fesenmaier, 2001). At the same time, travel organisations are beginning to realise the importance of utilising the power of virtual communities in their endeavour of relationship marketing (Wang, Yu & Fesenmaier, 2001).

TripAdvisor is one of those online travel communities. TripAdvisor is a Web site based on the idea that travellers rely on other travellers' reviews to plan their trips, or at least can be satisfactorily helped in their decisions by them. It hosts over 30 million user-generated reviews and opinions, which are used by more than 25 million Web site visitors per month (TripAdvisor Fact Sheet, 2013). Another popular travel community is called WAYN. WAYN.com (Where Are You Now?) is the world's largest travel and lifestyle-focused social networking community Web site (Wayn, 2013). The site operates in 193 countries and membership has grown from 45,000 users in March 2005 to over 22.3 million users in 2013 (Wayn, 2013). WAYN.com allows its members to keep track of their friends' whereabouts and make new friends based on where they are now, where they have been and where they're going (Wayn, 2013). Services on WAYN.com include travel guide and trip planning tools, unlimited photo and video storage; interaction tools such as email, SMS and instant messenger, forums and travel-related tools and products (Wayn, 2013).

Other online travel communities include Lonely Planet, I-go-you-go, Virtual Tourist, Dopplr and Trip Wolf among others. As an evidence of the growing importance of online search and influence on travel behaviours, a survey of the hotel and restaurant industry in Europe in 2007 concluded that 80 per cent of UK consumers are researching online before booking a hotel and half of them maintained to have refrained from booking a specific hotel as a consequence of a negative review on TripAdvisor-like Web sites (Miguéns, Baggio & Costa, 2008). Content on virtual communities is autonomously generated by its users. Users post reviews, comments and ratings on a destination, a hotel, an attraction or any other tourism-related 'object' or service (Miguéns, Baggio & Costa, 2008). Furthermore, it is possible to add multimedia elements (photos and videos) or travel maps of previous trips or take part in

discussion forums, web-based applications that allow users to post some material and discuss some specific topic (Miguéns, Baggio & Costa, 2008).

2.3.2.4 Content Communities

The main objective of content communities is the sharing of media content between Internet users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Content communities exist for a wide range of different media types such as photos (e.g., Flickr, Pinterest) and videos (e.g., YouTube) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Users on content communities are not required to create a personal profile page; if they do, these pages usually only contain basic information, such as the date they joined the community and the number of videos shared (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The high popularity of content communities makes them a very attractive contact channel for many organisations (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). A summary of their impact on the online tourism domain can be found on Table 3 on page 48.

Table 3: Summary of Content Communities & Impact on Tourism

Content Communities	Definition	Impact on Tourism	Sources
YouTube	Upload, share and watch videos	Offers travellers the opportunity to search for specific activities, watch review and to seek help and advice about their travel destination.	(Reino & Hay, 2011).
Flickr	Image & video hosting Web site	Geo-tagging of pictures/videos indirectly promotes the location where the picture/video was taken.	(Torniai, Battle & Cayzer, 2007).
Pinterest	Image hosting and categorising Web site/social network.	Users are creating lists of destinations and attractions they want to visit in the future.	(Samiljan, 2012)

- YouTube

YouTube is a site where users can upload, share and watch videos, and is the global leader in the video streaming market, with over a billion videos viewed every day. YouTube went public in December 2005 (Gstatic, 2009) and has since experienced an astounding level of growth. The company's internal data from February 2013 indicate that YouTube generates 1 billion visitors per month with over 100 hours of video are uploaded every minute (YouTube, 2013). As Burgess and Green (2009) note, YouTube is simultaneously a high-volume Web site, a broadcast platform, a media archive and a social network. The astonishing amount of content produced for and distributed through the site, the hundreds of millions of videos viewed each day, and its visible uses in distributing messages means that YouTube is an important hub of media production and consumption (Burgess & Green, 2009).

As such, it is no surprise that tourism marketers are now investigating the use of YouTube as a tourism-marketing tool. It is increasingly playing an important role in both shaping a tourism destination's image and in counteracting any negative perceptions, by connecting directly with the tourist (Reino and Hay, 2011). Unlike traditional marketing methods, Web sites such as YouTube facilitate a two-way flow of information, allowing the consumer to speak not only to the tourism business, but also to other consumers (Reino & Hay, 2011).

However, as Reinhard (2009) argues, success for companies on this platform has been limited. Most brands have been left behind and not fully realising the true potential of YouTube. Reinhard (2009) continues that to achieve long-term success on YouTube, marketers have to consistently and frequently publish refreshing content that has intrinsic value for audiences online. This failure to update and refresh their online images is one of the most frequent criticisms by consumers of online tourism information (Reinhard, 2009).

Furthermore, tourists are not looking to be passively entertained, they wish to control and to determine what happens on their holiday, and YouTube offers them the opportunity to search for very specific activities, watch reviews, and to seek help and advice about their destination (Reino & Hay, 2011). While, tourism organisations are still trying to understand how they can apply traditional campaigns to these new channels, what they fail to understand is that the market place has changed, placing existing TV and cinema content on YouTube, is not good enough (Reino & Hay, 2011). As tourists make more use of social media sharing sites such as YouTube, they are increasingly cynical about any attempt to pass of something created or fake, as something *real* (Reino & Hay, 2011). This cynicism and scepticism has forced

tourism organisations to think of new ways to sell their products without arousing the suspicions of their consumers (Reino & Hay, 2011).

- Podcasts & Videocasts

The term "podcasting" was first introduced in print in February 2004, and was derived from the word iPod, a brand of portable digital audio players made by Apple Computer (Hammersley, 2004). The Oxford Dictionary chose "podcast" as Word of the Year for 2005 and defined it as a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar program, made available on the internet for downloading to a personal audio player (BBC News, 2005). Podcasting is a relatively simple and easy way of sharing audio content to multiple users. A podcast is an audio file, typically in MP3 format, that uses an RSS (Real Simple Syndication) file for distribution to listeners. Users can then copy the file to an MP3 player, such as an iPod, or listen to the file on their computer (Feifan Xie & Lew, 2008). Alternatively, listeners can use their computer to go to a Web site to listen to the audio file without downloading it first (Feifan Xie & Lew, 2008). Furthermore, most podcasts are provided free of charge to listeners (Feifan Xie & Lew, 2008). By April 2005, it was estimated more than 6 million American iPod owners have listened to a podcast (Hotels Magazine, 2006). According to a recent Edison Research Study (2012) on the Podcast Consumer, awareness of podcasting has grown 105 per cent since 2006 from 22 per cent in 2006 to 45 per cent in 2012. Likewise, the percentage of consumers indicating they have listened to an audio podcast has grown 163 per cent from 11 per cent in 2006 to 29 per cent in 2012.

Travel-related podcasting has become a popular and growing sub-genre in podcasting (Lew, 2006). As of August 2007, Apple's iTunes service lists 105 podcasts in its Places and Travel category, while the IdiotVox (2007) directory lists 173 podcasts in its Travel category, while the Yahoo Podcasts directory lists 6042 podcast series that are tagged with the word "travel". Any registered user can add a tag to a podcast listed in Yahoo Podcasts, so the diversity of topics with the travel tag is considerable. Because the delivery system is digital, podcasting expands the horizon of the information sharing. Viral distributions (sharing and linking among listeners) can even allow the smallest market podcast to grow in influence with the right conditions.

Lastly, the different types of travel podcasts will be discussed. They can be generalised into the following three basic types: (1) Destination podcasts. These may be sponsored by DMOs, but are more likely to comprise the insights and experiences of an avid booster who lives in,

or often frequents, a place. (2) Travel Experience podcasts. These podcasts relate the experience of travel, typically from a personal perspective. They may focus on the logistics of travel, such as trip planning, the flight experience, hotels and meals, or descriptions and experiences of a variety of different places. (3) Travel and Tourism Industry and Education podcasts. These podcasts are more focused on special areas of travel and tourism. They are less oriented towards the general travel consumer, though they may still generate popular interest (Feifan Xie & Lew, 2008).

- Flickr

Flickr is a popular image and video hosting Web site and online community created by Ludicorp and later acquired by Yahoo!. Close to 50 million images are uploaded to Flickr every month (Flickr, 2013). This social network enables users to organise images using tags, which enable searchers to find images related to particular topics, such as place names or subject matter. Flickr was also an early Web site to implement tag clouds, which provide access to images tagged with the most popular keywords.

Online photo sharing systems, with Flickr being the most popular, are strongly contributing in the growing enthusiasm for personal "location-awareness" (Torniai, Battle & Cayzer, 2007). The value, as in the case of Flickr, is in text tags being applied to objects that were not findable using traditional search engines or other text-related tools that comprise much of how users find information on the Internet today. Usually in the online photo collections, the users can geo-tag their photos. Thus, meaning that they can annotate the geographical place where the photos were taken, but also they can annotate them by using textual keywords with the aim of creating a short description of their photos. In January 2011, it was announced that there were 190 million available geo-tagged photos on the Flickr network (Flickr Blog, 2011).

If the assumption can be made that by taking a photograph at a visited location and posting it on a content community such as Flickr is an indication that the user likes that location, Flickr users indirectly promote their current location. This location can be their home town or a holiday destination. Therefore, it can also be stated that users who use Flickr on their holiday inadvertently approve of and promote the holiday destination. As such, Internet users looking for information on a travel destination can gain much knowledge by searching relevant geo-tags on Flickr and evaluate whether they would enjoy a holiday at a specific location as well.

- Pinterest

Pinterest became the fastest social network to reach 10 million users, growing 4000% in 2011 alone (Sloan, 2013). Pinterest revolves around the metaphor of a "pin board:" users "pin" photos they find on the Web and organise them into topical collections, such as hobbies, sports, fashion and travel amongst others. Pinterest users – called pinners – can follow one another and also "re-pin", "like", and comment on other pins. In Pinterest's own words, the site's goal is to "connect everyone in the world through the 'things' they find interesting" (Pinterest, 2013).

There is a dearth of academic research on this social network and its impact on the travel industry. However, Web sites focused on social media add useful insights for the purpose of this discussion. According to analytics firms such as Curalate and Pinfluencer, travel is one of the most popular categories with the site's users (O'Neill, S. 2013). As the social network is about being in a place where users can save images of things they find of interest, travel images are a perfect example of things users like to share.

For travellers, Pinterest can be useful in two ways. Firstly, it's a fun and easy way to create a life list of the monuments, beaches, and works of art users want to see on their travels (Samiljan, 2012). Secondly, browsing the thousands of travel-themed boards on Pinterest which are devoted to everything from London restaurants to architecture and quirky maps, is a rich source of inspiration that could also play a big part in the holiday decision-making process (Samiljan, 2012).

2.3.2.5 User Reviews

As a new type of WOM information, online consumer product reviews are an emerging market phenomena that is playing an increasingly important role in consumers' purchase decisions (Chen & Xie, 2008). In a 2009 shareholders letter, it was stated that approximately 7 million customer reviews were added to the retailer's Web site worldwide (Factbrowser, 2010). These reviews are regarded as one of the most popular and successful features of Amazon (New York Times, 2004). In recent years, an increasing number of online sellers have adopted a similar strategy. Further evidence suggests that consumer reviews have become very important for consumer purchase decisions and product sales (Chen & Xie, 2008). A study by Forrester Research finds that half of those who visited the retailer sites with consumer postings reported that consumer reviews are important or extremely important in their buying decisions (Los Angeles Times, 1999). Recommendations from friends and

family have great influence on what consumers choose to purchase; however, people are also willing to listen to the recommendations of strangers (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). What consumers buy can be influenced by a stranger living on the other side of the world posting a user review (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011).

Over 30 per cent of Internet users have rated products online in the past (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2006). Research by Park, Lee and Han (2007) suggests that consumer reviews serve two distinct roles: 1) they provide information about products and services; and, 2) they serve as recommendations.

Based on the data from Amazon.com and BN.com, Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) find that online book reviews have a significant impact on book sales. Liu (2006) also shows that consumer reviews at the Yahoo Movies Web site has had a significant effect on box office revenue. Regarding travel, O'Conor (2008) argues that travellers seek out reviews of travel destinations in order to help reduce risk by making it easier to imagine the reality of a travel destination. Reviews are also perceived as helping with making the decision-making process more efficient in that they make decisions easier as they reduce the likelihood of later regretting the decision (O'Conor, 2008).

Online travel review readers use reviews during different stages of their pleasure trip planning. Most travellers look for user reviews in the beginning and the middle of the holiday planning process as a means to narrow down choices (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). In addition Gretzel & Yoo (2008) also conducted research into the importance of travel reviews as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Importance of Travel Reviews, shows that travel reviews have the biggest impact on the choice of accommodation (where to stay) during the holiday (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Positive reviews increase confidence and help reduce risk by making it easier to tangibilise the destination (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Furthermore, reviews are also perceived as helping with making the decision process more efficient in that they make decisions easier because they reduce the likelihood of later regretting a decision (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Thus, one can conclude that travel reviews by Internet users have a significant impact on the decision-making process of a traveller.

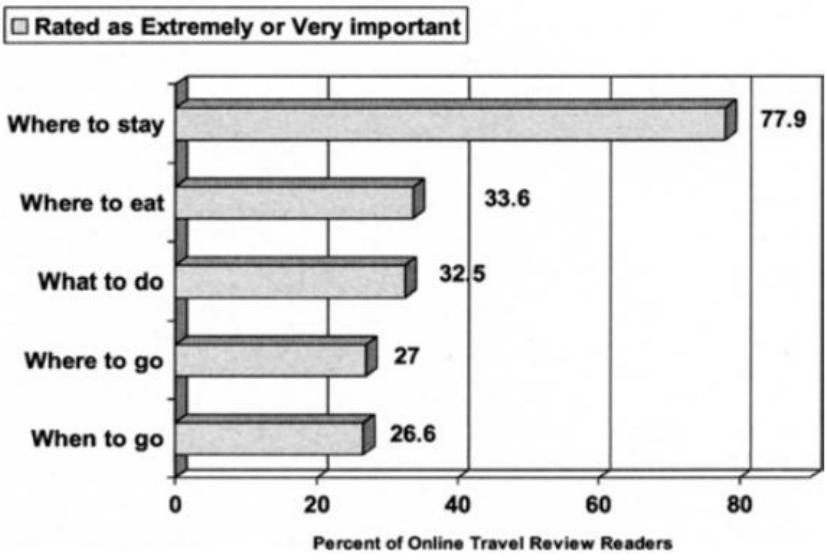

Figure 5: Importance of Travel Reviews (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008)

2.3.2.6 Forums

An online forum is a Web application for holding discussions and posting user-generated content in a specific domain, such as sports, recreation, techniques as well as travel (Cong, Wang, Lin, Son & Sun, 2008). Online forums contain a large amount of valuable user-generated content and also create a means for sharing and learning from personal stories, experience, and knowledge in preparation for future events (Palen, Hiltz & Liu, 2007). Furthermore, consumers like to network with people who have interests and desires that are similar to their own. As such, they often look to forums to meet like-minded people and form online relationships (Cong et al., 2008).

One of the few travel-related research studies taking online forums into account, Cong *et al.* (2008) addressed the problem of extracting question-answer pairs from forums. They extracted approximately 3,000,000 travel-related questions from six online travel forums for their research. For the purpose of this research study, taking into account the vast number of travel questions posted on online forums, one can conclude that online forums are extensively used in the decision-making process of travellers.

Table 4: Other Types of Social Media & Impact on Tourism

Other Types of Social Media	Definition	Impact on Tourism	Sources
User Reviews	Type of eWOM hosted on forums, social networks, blogs, etc.	Travel review readers use reviews during different stages of their pleasure trip planning; Positive reviews increase confidence and help reduce risk; accommodation reviews play the most important role for travellers.	(Gretzel & Yoo, 2008).
Forums	Web application for holding discussions and posting user generated content in a specific domain	A means for sharing and learning from personal stories, experience, and knowledge in preparation for future events; forum members have interests and desires; networking tool.	(Cong, Wang, Lin, Son & Sun, 2008).

2.4. Summary

As part of the literature review, it has been established that individuals participate on the social Web to share their travel experiences with friends and strangers. These opinions are seen as credible sources of information (TNS Digital Life, 2011). This has several implications for the travel and tourism industry; in particular for DMOs. Due to the complex experiential nature of tourism products and substantial geographical distances, inspection or trial prior to the purchase decision is almost impossible (Fesenmaier, Wöber & Werthner,

2006). Thus, travellers seek the advice of others (friends and strangers) during the holiday planning phase to find information about potential travel destinations.

It has become very easy for Internet users to share their experiences on blogs, social networks and content communities which have all been identified in this review of academic literature. Social media exist in a variety of forms and serve numerous purposes. Consumer-generated content supported through social media is a mixture of fact and opinion, impression and sentiment, founded and unfounded titbits, experiences, and even rumour (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006). Many travel and tourism operations have recognised the importance of social media and have integrated consumer-generated content on their Web sites. As such, current tourism marketing practice focuses attention on utilising social media to create positive image and eWOM for tourist destinations and travel enterprises. However, Reinhard (2009) argues that success for companies on some social media platforms has been limited. Most brands have been left behind and not fully realising its true potential.

Traditional consumer behaviour, consumer behaviour in tourism, behaviour of Internet users and types of social media have been discussed in detail in this chapter. This information will be of importance throughout the research process of this study as it is necessary to understand the decision-making process of travellers for any type of research in the online tourism domain. Furthermore, social media channels have been identified and were listed in the questionnaire which was sent out to South African travellers. Respondents were inquired regarding the importance and role of these social media channels during their information search before their holiday.

The purpose of this research is to determine which social media channels play an important role during the decision-making process of South African travellers trying to find information on their domestic or international travel destinations. Furthermore, market segments will be identified who use social media differently to other travellers. Once this information is available, marketing organisations can focus their marketing efforts on specific types of social media channels that are aligned with their specific target market. This will make their marketing efforts more efficient while also increasing the return-on-investment on their marketing budget.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the procedure that was followed to complete the objectives of this research study. First, the sampling method of selecting respondents is discussed while the statistical techniques used in this research are also presented.

3.1.1 Research Design

The research design was comprised of two phases:

1. Explorative: Literature Review
2. Descriptive: Questionnaire Survey

The research design in process as shown in Figure 7 was followed in order to achieve accurate and reliable results.

The Research Design Process

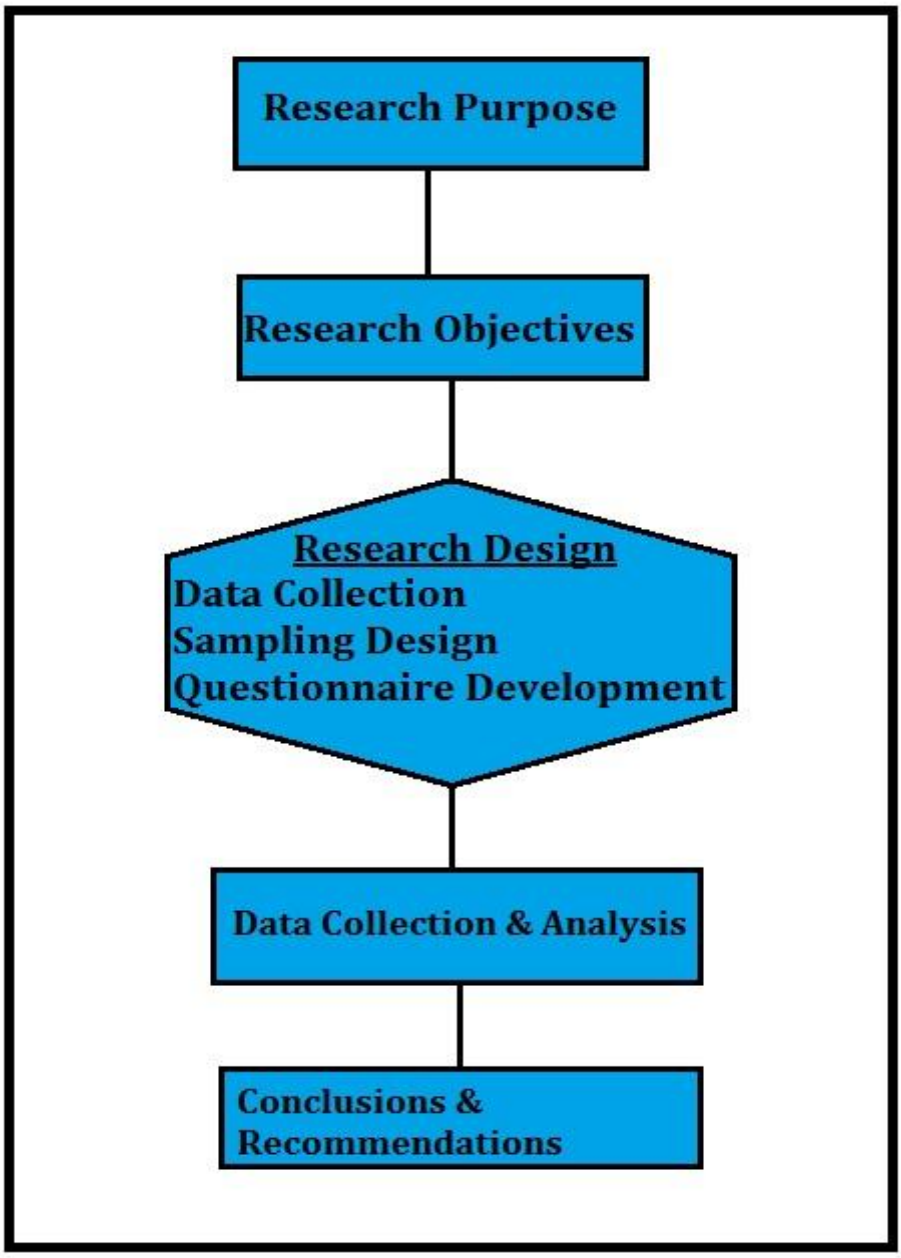

Figure 6: The Research Design Process (adapted from Aaker, Kumar & Day, 2012)

3.2 Research Problem and Objectives

The research problem and the objectives of this research has been discussed on page 4, but will be recapped here again as it forms a vital part of the research methodology. The purpose of this study is to examine to what extend the South African tourist uses social media during the information sourcing stage of the holiday decision-making process. The results of this study will give tourism organisations and DMOs further insights into the target market which allows them to create more effective marketing strategies.

Research problem: Determine how South African tourists use social media during the information sourcing phase of the holiday decision-making process.

The primary research objectives are to:

- analyse which social networks are being used during the information sourcing stage of the holiday decision-making process
- analyse which travel communities are being used during the information sourcing stage of the holiday decision-making process

The secondary research objectives are to:

- form segments to ascertain how various demographics use social media and travel communities differently from each other.

3.3 Sample Design

The budget of most research studies often dictates the quality of the sample. It is mostly not possible to replicate a sample that reflects the true nature of the population. The academic literature states that if samples are carefully chosen the deviation between the results of the study and the actual behaviour of the population can be minimal (Zigmund, 2003).

Figure 8 shows the steps that guided the sampling process of this research study:

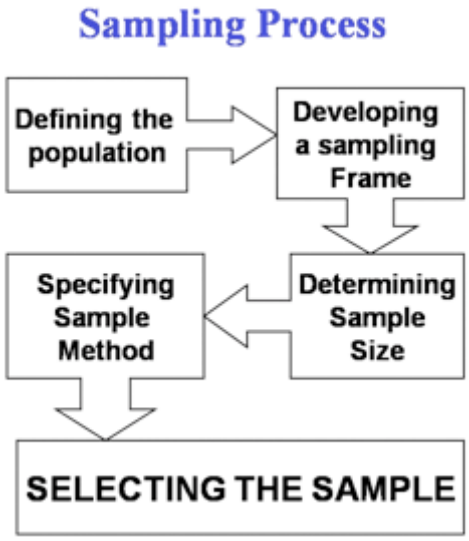

Figure 7: The sampling process (adapted from Aaker, Kumar & Day, 2012)

3.3.1 Defining the Population

The target population for this research study were South African tourists who are active on social media. The research findings are thus limited to South Africa and cannot be applied to other countries. However, countries comparable to South Africa can also find useful insights. This would indicate that the findings presented in this study are possibly applicable to the Southern African region and of value to other developing nations, taking country-specific differences into account.

3.3.2 Identifying the Sample Frame

Once the survey population was identified, the sampling frame was decided upon. The sample frame can be defined as: “a list of all the elements from which the final sample was drawn (Zigmund, 2003). For the purpose of this study, the sample frame comprised of the Travelstart newsletter database as well as the fans and followers of the Travelstart Facebook and Twitter communities. At the time of identifying the sample frame, it consisted of 100,000 members. It has to be noted that not all of these members were reached. It is very common

for newsletters to be identified as spam while the reach per message on social networks can be as low as 2% of the total fan-base (Business2community, 2013).

3.3.3 Selecting the Sampling Method

From the sample frame a final sample needed to be drawn. Cooper and Schindler (2006) describe two main sampling techniques that can be used: 1) probability sampling and 2) non-probability sampling. Given that the questionnaire was distributed online, every person exposed to the message had an equal chance of responding to the survey. The probability of being selected can therefore be calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Probability of being selected} = \frac{\text{sample size}}{\text{population size}}$$

This simple random sampling technique is one of the purest forms of probability sampling and has allowed for accurate analysis of the data.

3.4 The Questionnaire

The proposed questionnaire was submitted to Dr Richard George as well as the UCT Ethics Committee. Travelstart granted access to the database with the condition that a section on mobile usage during purchase is included and that they themselves distribute the online questionnaire (see Appendix A) to their past customers. The questionnaire was hosted online with supersimplesurvey.com. During the month of January 2013, the questionnaire was sent out via the Travelstart newsletter as well as to their online community on Facebook and Twitter. The items included on the questionnaire relate back to the social media sources identified in the literature review.

3.5 The Final Sample

Zigmund (2003) states, that large sample are generally more precise when the data is analysed. It can therefore be concluded that the size of the sample is related to the accuracy of the findings.

A response rate could not be calculated as the open rate for newsletter e-mails as well as the reach of the Facebook and Twitter messages was not made available by Travelstart. After one week, 403 respondents had clicked on the link of the questionnaire. After deleting unusable questionnaires, 318 respondents made up the total size of the database which could be used for the data analysis in this research study.

3.6 Data Collection Design

Exploratory as well as descriptive research was conducted for this research study. The exploratory research helped define the objectives of this study by completing a review of past academic literature. Quantitative research methods were implemented in the second stage of the research to complete the objectives of this study.

Table 5: Summary of Data Collection Design

Exploratory Research	Descriptive Research
Secondary Research: Literature Review	Quantitative Research: Questionnaire

3.7 Secondary Research

Cooper and Schindler (2006) argue that the majority of research studies contain elements of exploratory research. The purpose of this stage of the research process is to investigate the topic that is being researched while also exploring whether potential gaps in the literature exist. Furthermore, exploratory research aims in prioritising amongst research questions and considers all the practical problems associated with the proposed research (Aaker, Kumar & Day, 2012).

The literature suggested that there was a considerable lack of prior research into the information sourcing behaviour of South African travellers; especially taking into account the digital domain. It was, therefore, necessary to conduct a thorough analysis of the academic and independent research studies in order to define the research objectives for this study.

3.7.1 Literature Review

The funnel approach taken to complete the literature review is visualised by Figure 9 and Figure 10 on page 63.

The literature review begins with a discussion on general consumer behaviour introducing concepts from the economics and marketing literature. It then continues to concentrate on the decision-making process of the general consumer and how s/he evaluates alternatives to ultimately make a purchase. Next, the focus shifts towards tourism, discussing the consumer behaviour in tourism and how tourists evaluate all possible travel destination and tourism products. This section of the literature review concludes by analysing the elements that can impact the holiday decision-making process of a traveller.

Figure 8: Funnel approach for the literature review: Consumer Behaviour

The second part of the literature review focuses on the Internet, discussing online consumer behaviour before going into the influence that the consumer has over brands online contrasting it with the role of brands in this digital space. The evaluation of alternatives with a focus on the Internet is discussed before concluding this section with an overview of current popular social networks and travel communities.

Figure 9: Funnel approach for the literature review: The Internet

3.8 Quantitative Research

The quantitative research phase was the final step in the data collection process. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the characteristics of the sample while more advanced techniques were used to make statements about sample segments and significant information sources on social media.

3.8.1 Survey Method

The most common method of generating primary data is with the use of a survey or questionnaire (Zigmund, 2003). The three data collection methods identified are: 1) interview or telephone conversations; 2) self-administered questionnaires sent via mail, left in convenient locations or transmitted digitally; and 3) instruments presented before and/or after a stimulus condition in an experiment (Cooper & Schindler, 2006).

For the purpose of this study, it was decided to host a questionnaire online using a newsletter and social media as the distribution method. The significant growth of the Internet as a research tool provides robust arguments for the use of this method (Roth, 2005). In addition, numerous studies have successfully compared the results of traditional research methods with using the Internet (Brennan, Rae & Parackal, 1999; Morris, Fenton & Mercer, 2004; Roth, 2005).

3.8.2 Timing of Method

The tourism industry is highly seasonal and as such, the timing of the distribution of the questionnaire was an important consideration (George, 2011). In order to improve response rates, the questionnaire was distributed in January. It was predicted that respondents would have more time during this period than during the festive season while it was also the possibility that they had just returned from a holiday and the issue of recall could be minimised.

3.9 Data Collection and Analysis

3.9.1 Coding

After exporting the results of the questionnaire from supersimplesurveys.com, where the online questionnaire was hosted, all results had to be coded. All binary items where coded as 0 when the answer was negative, while a 1 was used if the answer was positive. All items related to the demographics were coded from 1 to *n* as required. Likert scale items received values ranging from 1 to 5 where 1 was defined as *strongly disagree* and 5 was defined as *strongly agree* with 3 being *neutral.* Items number 6, 8, 9, 12 and 15 were reverse-coded as the items included a negative statement.

Respondents that did not complete the questionnaire fully were excluded while exceptions were made where only one item per respondent was not recorded properly. In this case, the overall average of that item was substituted.

During the coding process, item number 19 was also identified as a screening question and set as a requirement to partake in the survey as some respondents indicated that they had not been on holiday for the past 5 years. This could have opened up this research to criticism because of issues with recall about their past behaviour while searching for information before going on holiday. This issue is further discussed when highlighting the limitations of this study on page 94.

While conducting Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), cluster analysis and computing multiple regression analysis standardised data was used to make up for the different scales that have been used in the completion of the questionnaire.

3.9.2 Statistical Techniques

Initially, descriptive statistics will be presented to give an overview of the sample as well as highlighting simple trends in information sourcing behaviour. These ***descriptive statistics*** will include mode scores as this will give a confirmation of which answers have been selected most frequently. Modes have been chosen over mean-scores after consultation with the statistics department at the University of Cape Town. It was explained that mean-scores will present ambiguous results as the gaps between Likert scales can be heterogeneous. Mode scores will indicate the most popular answer and as such, offer a better representation of the results.

ANOVAs will be run afterwards to find differences in how various demographics have answered the questionnaire differently. To generate further insights, cross-tabulations were created.

Respondents were asked which social networks they have used in the past to search for travel information. This data was used to conduct two ***multiple regressions*** models: One taking into account traditional social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google+, Mxit, LinkedIn), while the second multiple regression model will focus on travel communities (WAYN, Lonely Planet, Trip Advisor, I-go-you-go, Virtual Tourist, Dopplr, Wikitravel). The results of this analysis indicated which social networks are significant information sources during the travel decision-making process of the South African traveller.

Assumption: In order to use ANOVAs and multiple regressions for this research, the assumption has to be made that Likert scale items provide continuous variables.

There has been much discussion in the academic literature regarding the validity of this assumption. It is argued that as ordered categories, the intervals between the scale values are not equal. Any mean, correlation, or other numerical operation applied to them is invalid (Jamieson, 2004). Only non-parametic statistics should be used on Likert scale data (Jamieson, 2004). Other researchers maintain that while technically the Likert scale item is ordered, using it in parametric tests is valid. For example, Glass, Peckham, and Sanders (1972) found that F-tests in ANOVA could return accurate p-values on Likert items. For the purpose of this study, the opinions of Glass *et al*. (1972) have been accepted.

Several ***correspondence analyses*** were conducted in order to ascertain how the use of social networks when searching for information varied among respondents. Social networks were again divided into two groups: 1) traditional social networks, and 2) travel communities. The results were then compared against the output from the ANOVAs.

Lastly, a ***cluster analysis*** was conducted on items 5 to 13 to group similar types of information sourcing behaviour on social media among respondents. Prior to running the analysis two clusters were expected: 1) significant search behaviour on social media 2) non-significant search behaviour on social media.

The output from the statistical analyses mentioned above formed the base for further recommendations intended for destination marketing organisations that target South African

travellers. Furthermore, segments will be identified that use social media differently compared to the general sample.

3.10 Summary

This chapter outlines the methods that were employed to generate valid and accurate data as well as the statistical findings. The limitations of certain methodology decisions have been discussed on page 94.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Sample Profile

The original sample consisted of 403 respondents; however 72 respondents did not complete the questionnaire fully and were excluded. Another 13 respondents did not meet the inclusion criteria; either not being South African or not being active on social media. Upon further analysis, item number 19 has also been used as a screening question to avoid issues with recall. Ultimately, 318 respondents were included in this research study.

4.1.1 Gender

The sample was made up of 64 per cent female respondents with 36 per cent of respondents being male.

4.1.2 Race

The majority of the sample included Caucasians (66%) while the further categories have a fairly even distribution of Black Africans (8%), Coloured/Mixed (13%) and Asian/Indians (10%). Three per cent of the sample did not want to indicate their race.

4.1.3 Age

61 per cent of the sample was made up of people aged between the ages of 22 to 39. 33% were between the ages of 40 to 59. At the end of the age spectrum, respondents below the age of 22 make up 5 per cent of the sample, while respondents aged 60 and above only make up 1 per cent of the sample. In order to run some of the statistical techniques (correspondence analysis), respondents aged below 22 and 60+ have been excluded as they only comprised 6 per cent of the sample.

4.2 Statistics

4.2.1 Item-Reliability Analysis

Before any statistical analyses were performed, an item-reliability analysis was conducted on all twelve Likert scales to ensure the overall accuracy of the current research. The Cronbach alpha resulted in 0.72775 which allowed the research to carry on without making any further changes to the data (i.e.: deleting items to improve the Cronbach alpha). The results of the item-reliabitlity analysis can be found on Table 6. Item 17 (prefer Internet over traditional sources) could have been deleted to improve the Cronbach alpha; however, this was decided against, as it forms an important part of this research.

Table 6: Item Reliability Analysis

Summary for scale: Mean=45.6289 Std.Dv.=7.86644 Valid N:318 Cronbach alpha: .727750 Standardized alpha: .724237 Average inter-item corr.: .171964					
	Mean if - deleted	**Var. if - deleted**	**StDv. if - deleted**	**Itm-Totl - Correl.**	**Alpha if - deleted**
Blogs	42.07233	51.51992	7.177738	0.466912	0.696573
Blog Comments	42.04088	55.45430	7.446764	0.268536	0.720873
Social Networks	41.80503	54.42110	7.377066	0.328892	0.713917
Image Search on Social Networks	41.83648	51.08647	7.147480	0.510301	0.691469
Advice Social Media	42.22641	50.20660	7.085661	0.493676	0.691860
Advice from Friends on Social Media	42.19811	51.94503	7.207290	0.421535	0.702144
Wikipedias	42.23270	53.95843	7.345640	0.300037	0.718055
Video on Social Media	42.31132	52.93767	7.275828	0.339372	0.713124
Audio Podcasts	43.47170	55.11713	7.424091	0.266576	0.721541
Enjoy sharing on Social Networks	41.85849	53.01457	7.281110	0.484648	0.697710
Social Media Integration on Web sites	41.79560	56.92363	7.544775	0.239957	0.723019
Member of Travel Community	42.00000	52.57862	7.251112	0.366096	0.709454
Prefer Internet over Traditional Sources	41.69811	59.63214	7.722185	0.048273	0.742969

4.2.2 Descriptive Statistics

The following section will include modes of all items under consideration. The items have been grouped slightly differently to the questionnaire in order to give a better overview of relationships between these items.

Table 7: Modes – Online and Mobile Purchases

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mode
Book Holiday Online	318	1.0	5.0	5
Book Holiday on Mobile	318	1.0	5.0	1
MxIt	318	.0	1.0	0

Although respondents indicated that they have booked previous holidays via an online agency (mode: 5), this trend does not transcend on to online mobile purchases (mode: 1). As such, South Africa is still lagging behind international consumer trends, which is seeing a significant increase in mobile purchasing behaviour (PerceptionSystem, 2013). When investigating further, respondents also do not search for information on South Africa's largest

mobile social network: MxIt (mode: 0). This might indicate that this mobile social network is confined to a younger market or does not play an active role in the decision-making.

Table 8: Modes – Search Behaviour

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mode
Read Blogs	318	1.0	5.0	4
Read User Comments	318	1.0	5.0	4
Use Social Networks (SN)	318	1.0	5.0	4
Search Images on SN	318	1.0	5.0	5
Ask Advice of strangers on social media	318	1.0	5.0	5
Ask Advice of friends on social media	318	1.0	5.0	4
Read Wikipedias	318	1.0	5.0	4
Watch Videos on SN	318	1.0	5.0	5
Listen to Audio Podcasts	318	1.0	5.0	1
Average				4

Items related to how respondents have used social media to find information on their travel destination before their last holiday were all answered very positively with an average mode of 4 as recorded on Table 8. The only item that scored low mode was *listening to Audio Podcasts*. Consequently, it can be concluded that the majority of identified activities on social media designed to help finding information on travel are being used by South African travellers.

Another finding that is of possible interest to DMOs includes the source of travel advice. Reading user comments and asking advice on social media received a mode of 4 and 5 respectively while asking friends for advice on social media received a mode of 4. Thus, this corresponds to the findings of previous research on social media which found that the opinions of strangers on the Internet have as much of a significant impact on the decision-making process of travellers as the opinions of their friends or families (Crotts, 1999).

Table 9: Mode-Scores – Behaviour on Social Media

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mode
Enjoy sharing on SN	318	1.0	5.0	4
Social Media Integration	318	1.0	5.0	4
Prefer Internet	318	1.0	5.0	5

Table 9 shows that the respondents in this study made use of social media on the Internet, and has become the accepted and expected way to browse the Internet. Respondents indicated that they prefer finding travel-information on the Internet over more traditional sources such as travel brochures or magazines (mode = 5) while they also enjoy sharing information that they find online (mode = 4). As discussed in the literature review, this has been generally accepted for a long time and as such, Web sites are making use of social media to transform static Web sites into dynamic Web sites. Several social media buttons, to make sharing on social media easier, have been introduced to most Web sites, while comment sections can also easily be added to any Web site. This has also been confirmed by the respondents who indicated that the majority of the travel sites they visit, do have integrated social media (mode = 4).

Table 10: Mode-Scores - Usage of Travel Networks

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mode
Use Travel SN	318	1	5	4
Facebook	318	0	1	1
Twitter	318	0	1	0
Google+	318	0	1	0
Pinterest	318	0	1	0
LinkedIn	318	0	1	0
MxIt	318	0	1	0
YouTube	318	0	1	0
TripAdvisor	318	0	1	1
WAYN	318	0	1	0
LonelyPlanet	318	0	1	0
Igougo	318	0	1	0
VirtualTourist	318	0	1	0
Dopplr	318	0	1	0
WikiTravel	318	0	1	0

Table 10 indicates that the majority of respondents use online travel communities to search for travel information (mode = 4). As seen on Figure 11, the most popular travel community being TripAdvisor (count: 201) followed by Wikitravel (count: 144), Lonely Planet (count: 102), Virtual Tourist (count: 33), WAYN (count: 8), I go u go (count: 3) and Dopplr (count: 1). The questionnaire also included a section to add further social networks should an option not be available as a choice. A minority of respondents added *Google* as another option. As *Google* is a search engine and not a social network, the answers were excluded from the research.

When looking at the more general social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest, LinkedIn and Mxit, only Facebook acquired a mode of 1; while all other social networks had a mode of 0. From all social networks identified, Facebook is being used the most (count: 238), followed by Pinterest (count: 159), Twitter (count: 116), Youtube (count: 80), Google+ (count: 41), LinkedIn (count: 24) and MxIt (count: 5).

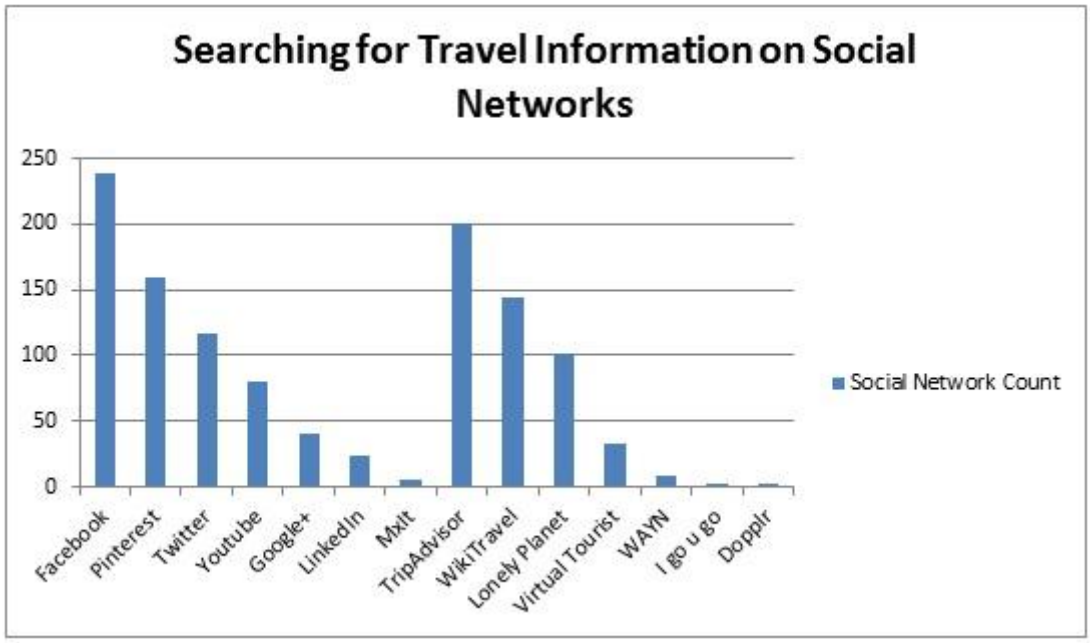

Figure 10: Searching for Travel Information on Social Networks

The results of this section were later used when conducting a correspondence analysis placing social media usage against the demographic characteristics of the sample to identify relevant associations.

4.2.3 Analysis of Variance

Analysis of Variance was conducted to identify differences in search behaviours among the demographic characteristics of the sample. The confidence limits were set at .095 and the significance level at 0.05. Standardised data was used.

All output of the ANOVAs conducted can be found in Appendix E with those indicating a significant difference have been included in the main report. These can be found in Table 11 – Table 21. Frequency tables showing the mean-scores for each item have been created to identify the source of the variance.

ANOVA output showing no significant differences indicates that behaviour across different demographic characteristics is similar in the entire sample.

4.2.3.1 Race

Variation in mean-scores has been found when testing items 6, 8, 9, 12 & 16 against the race of respondents. These results can be found in the ANOVA tables below.

Table 11: ANOVA - Race & Blog Comments

Univariate Tests of Significance for Blog Comments (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition					
	SS	**Degr. of - Freedom**	**MS**	**F**	**p**
Intercept	1202.117	1	1202.117	878.8758	0.000000
Race	28.916	4	7.229	5.2852	0.000394
Error	428.118	313	1.368		

Table 12: ANOVA - Race & Image Search

Univariate Tests of Significance for Image Search on Social Networks (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition					
	SS	**Degr. of - Freedom**	**MS**	**F**	**p**
Intercept	1693.103	1	1693.103	1117.609	0.000000
Race	16.128	4	4.032	2.661	0.032768
Error	474.174	313	1.515		

Table 13: ANOVA - Race & Advice on Social Media (Friends)

Univariate Tests of Significance for Advice Social Media (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition					
	SS	**Degr. of - Freedom**	**MS**	**F**	**p**
Intercept	1124.754	1	1124.754	619.2445	0.000000
Race	29.966	4	7.491	4.1245	0.002851
Error	568.512	313	1.816		

Table 14: ANOVA - Race & Video

Univariate Tests of Significance for Video on Social Media (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition					
	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1297.621	1	1297.621	694.3334	0.000000
Race	23.964	4	5.991	3.2057	0.013365
Error	584.957	313	1.869		

Table 15: ANOVA - Race & Search on Travel Communities

Univariate Tests of Significance for Search on Travel Community (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition					
	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1199.594	1	1199.594	673.8667	0.000000
Race	35.022	4	8.755	4.9183	0.000738
Error	557.192	313	1.780		

Table 16: Mean Scores of Race Demographic

Item	White	Black/African	Coloured/Mixed	Asian/Indian
6	**3.69**	3.40	3.05	3.25
8	3.79	**4.37**	3.4	3.75
9	3.51	3.89	**2.5**	**3.19**
12	3.11	**4.41**	3.13	2.88
16	**3.84**	3.07	3.1	**3.7**

The Caucasian respondents have a significantly higher tendency to read through the user comments of travel blogs (item 6) than any other type of race group. In addition, this group also has a high propensity to search for information on travel communities (item 16). This is also the case for the Asian/Indian race group. As travel communities are based on user comments, this makes intuitive sense that these two items will bring about similar results.

The Black African demographic group has a higher tendency to search for travel-related images (item 8) while also reading travel-related wikipedias (item 12) than the other race groups in this study.

Finally, the coloured/mixed and Asian/Indian race group has a lower tendency to ask strangers for advice on social media (item 9) compared to the White & Black African respondents.

4.2.3.2 Gender

Table 17: ANOVA - Gender & Video

Univariate Tests of Significance for Video on Social Media (Data in coding sheet v2 changes v6) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition					
	SS	**Degr. of - Freedom**	**MS**	**F**	**p**
Intercept	3343.337	1	3343.337	1784.622	0.000000
Gender	16.922	1	16.922	9.033	0.002864
Error	591.999	316	1.873		

Table 18: Mean-Scores of Gender Demographic

Item	Male	Female
12	3.63	**3.15**

When focusing on gender, only one item showed significant variation between the behaviour of males and females. Male respondents have a higher tendency to view travel-related video content (item: 12) compared to their female counterparts as seen on Table 18.

4.2.3.3 Age

Lastly, regarding age of respondents; as the respondents aged 21 or below only make up five per cent of the sample and respondents aged 60+ only make up one per cent, both groups will be ignored for the purpose of this section. A summary of all findings can be found on Table 22 on page 76.

Table 19: ANOVA - Age & Image Search

Univariate Tests of Significance for Image Search on Social Networks (Data in coding sheet v2 changes v6) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition					
	SS	**Degr. of - Freedom**	**MS**	**F**	**p**
Intercept	625.7711	1	625.7711	413.3639	0.000000
Age	19.4945	6	3.2491	2.1462	0.048079
Error	470.8074	311	1.5139		

Table 20: ANOVA - Age & Advice on Social Media (Friends)

Univariate Tests of Significance for Advice from Friends on Social Media (Data in coding sheet v2 changes v6) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition					
	SS	**Degr. of - Freedom**	**MS**	**F**	**p**
Intercept	471.0166	1	471.0166	284.8913	0.000000
Age	37.7953	6	6.2992	3.8100	0.001114
Error	514.1827	311	1.6533		

Table 21: ANOVA - Age & Enjoy Sharing on SN

Univariate Tests of Significance for Enjoy sharing on Social Networks (Data in coding sheet v2 changes v6) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition					
	SS	**Degr. of - Freedom**	**MS**	**F**	**p**
Intercept	708.7588	1	708.7588	633.7808	0.000000
Age	14.4500	6	2.4083	2.1536	0.047336
Error	347.7921	311	1.1183		

Table 22: Mean-Scores of Age Demographic

Item	**<21**	**22-29**	**30-39**	**40-49**	**50-59**	**60+**
8	3.5	3.62	**4.02**	3.58	3.64	3.87
10	2.5	**4.08**	3.55	3.49	3.27	3.26
14	**2.5**	4.15	3.66	3.82	3.64	4.18

Respondents aged between the ages of 30 to 39 have a higher tendency to search for travel-related images on social media (item 8), while respondents aged between the ages of 22 to 29 have a higher tendency to ask friends for advice on travel using social media (item 10).

The results from item 14 (enjoy sharing on social networks) have been excluded as respondents aged 21 and below only make up 5 per cent of the sample.

4.2.4 Multiple Regression

Multiple Regression analysis was conducted to identify significant information sources for South African travellers searching for travel information on social media sites. The information sources have been split into two main categories which make up the independent variables: 1) general social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest, Mxit, LinkedIn, & YouTube) and 2) travel communities (TripAdvisor, WAYN, Lonely Planet, I go you go, Wikitravel, Dopplr & Virtual Tourist). The dependent variable for the first category is item 7 (I searched for travel information on social networks). The dependent variable for the second category is item 16 (I searched for travel information on travel communities). Standardised data has been used.

4.2.4.1 General Social Networks

Respondents were asked to select the general social networks they had used to find travel information before their last holiday. These general social networks included Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest, LinkedIn, YouTube and MxIt.

Table 23: Regression Summary – Social Networks (1)

Regression Summary for Dependent Variable: Social Networks (Data in standardized.stw) R= .52610113 R^2= .27678240 Adjusted R^2= .26282964 F(6,311)=19.837 p

	b*	Std.Err. - of b*	b	Std.Err. - of b	t(311)	p-value
Intercept			0.000000	0.048147	0.00000	1.000000
Facebook	0.421837	0.050280	0.421837	0.050280	8.38978	0.000000
Twitter	0.126544	0.051330	0.126544	0.051330	2.46528	0.014231
Google+	-0.113154	0.049851	-0.113154	0.049851	-2.26984	0.023901
Pinterest	0.119763	0.048776	0.119763	0.048776	2.45538	0.014621
LinkedIn	-0.101074	0.049040	-0.101074	0.049040	-2.06105	0.040129
YouTube	0.111410	0.052198	0.111410	0.052198	2.13435	0.033596

Table 24: Regression Summary – Social Networks (2)

Summary Statistics; DV: Social Networks

	Value
Multiple R	0.526101127
Multiple R^2	0.276782396
Adjusted R^2	0.262829645
F(6,311)	19.8371197
p	1.27604875E-19
Std.Err. of Estimate	0.858586254

All information sources except MxIt (South Africa's largest mobile social network) have been identified as significant ($p<0.05$) when searching for travel information on social networks with Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and YouTube having a positive association with the dependent variable while Google+ and LinkedIn showing a negative association.

Multiple R^2 = 0.277 which indicates that the above model explains 28 per cent of the variation within the data.

4.2.4.2 Travel Communities

Regarding travel communities, TripAdvisor and Lonely Planet have been identified as significant information sources ($p<0.05$), both having a positive association with the dependent variable. WAYN, I-go-you-go, Dopplr, Virtual Tourist and Wikitravel did not prove to be significant information sources during the decision-making process for South African travellers.

Table 25: Regression Summary – Travel Communities (1)

Summary Statistics; DV: Travel Community)	
	Value
Multiple R	0.443826404
Multiple R²	0.196981877
Adjusted R²	0.19188335
F(2,315)	38.6350504
p	9.86828430E-16
Std.Err. of Estimate	0.898953086

Table 26: Regression Summary – Travel Communities (2)

Regression Summary for Dependent Variable: Member of Travel Community (Data in standardized.stw) R= .44382640 R²= .19698188 Adjusted R²= .19188335 F(2,315)=38.635 p						
	b*	**Std.Err. - of b***	**b**	**Std.Err. - of b**	**t(315)**	**p-value**
Intercept			-0.000000	0.050411	-0.000000	1.000000
TripAdvisor	0.378926	0.052272	0.378926	0.052272	7.249156	0.000000
Lonely Planet	0.152948	0.052272	0.152948	0.052272	2.926023	0.003683

R^2 = 0.197, which indicates that the model explains 20 per cent of the variation within the data-set. Appendix C shows the step-by-step output of the regression models. These also show the excluded variables.

4.2.5 Correspondence Analysis

When conducting correspondence analysis only the information sources that have been identified as significant in the multiple regression models were used. The analysis was conducted to identify statistical associations between demographics of the sample and the information sources that respondents have used to obtain travel information. Initially, a frequency table was created which was used for the individual correspondence analyses.

Table 27 shows the variables that have been tested for associations. The significant results will be discussed further, while the other results as well as frequency tables can be found in Appendix D.

Table 27: Summary of Correspondence Analysis

Significant Associations Found	No Significant Associations Found
Social Networks and Gender	Travel Communities and Race
Social Networks and Race	Travel Communities and Age
Social Networks and Age	
Travel Communities and Gender	

4.2.5.1 Social Networks and Gender

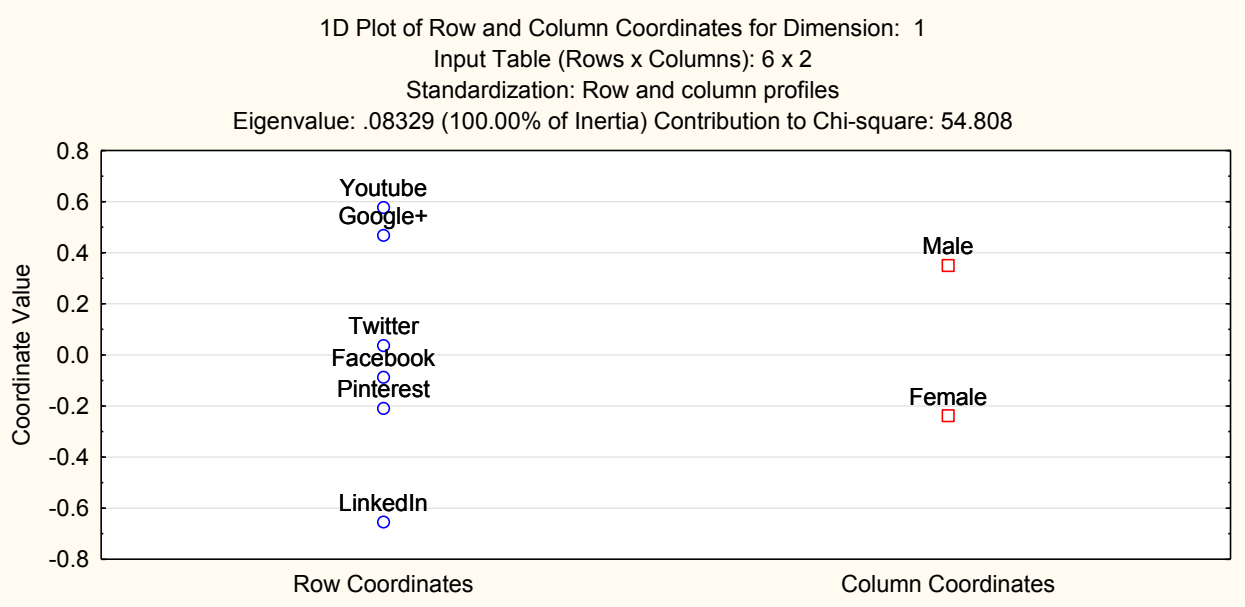

Figure 11: Correspondence Map – Social Networks & Gender

While the descriptive statistics showed that Facebook & Pinterest were the most popular information sources, the correspondence map identified further insights. Males were highly associated with Google+ and YouTube, while the female demographic were more likely to

use Pinterest during their search for travel information. No conclusions about Twitter and Facebook can be drawn as they are too close to the centre (±0.20), while LinkedIn has no close column coordinates.

As the correspondence map only has 1 dimension, it accounts for 100 per cent of inertia with an Eigenvalue of 0.08.

4.2.5.2 Social Networks and Race

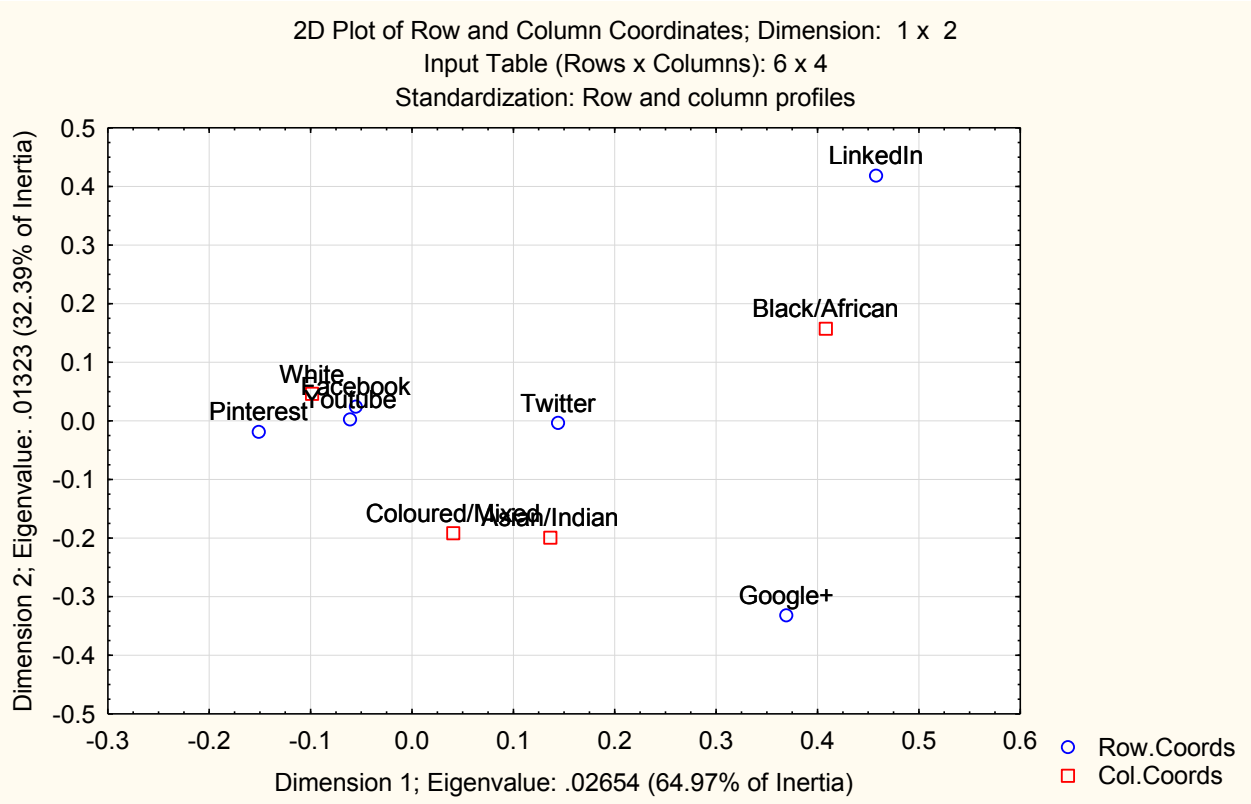

Figure 12: Correspondence Map - Social Networks & Race

No associations from dimensions 2 can be identified as the majority of the coordinates were between the 0.2 and -0.2 threshold.

Dimension 1 explains 64 per cent of inertia with an Eigenvalue of 0.03. On this dimension the Black/African demographic was identified to have an association with LinkedIn as well as Google+. Both of these social networks had a negative association to the dependent variable according to the multiple regression model in section 4.2.4.1 (page 77).

4.2.5.3 Travel Communities and Gender

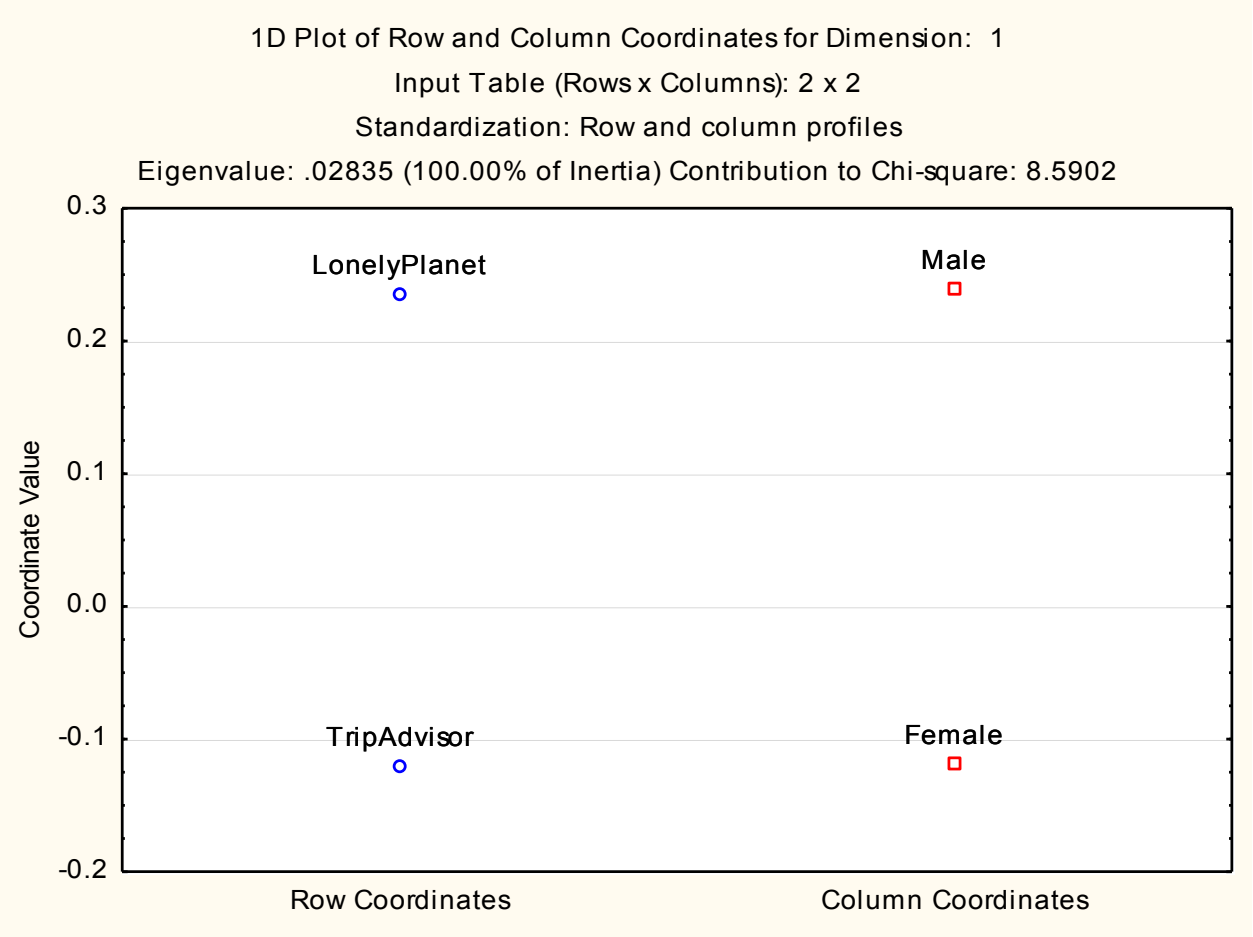

Figure 13: Correspondence Map – Travel Communities & Gender

Figure 14 shows that the male demographic was highly associated with Lonely Planet while female respondents were highly associated with TripAdvisor. In this instance, the +-0.2 threshold was changed to +-0.1 as the range of the scale started at -0.2 and ended at 0.3. This is perfectly acceptable as the +-0.2 threshold is only a guideline.

The dimension explains 100 per cent of the inertia as there is only one dimension. The Eigenvalue equals 0.03.

4.2.5.4 Social Networks and Age

For this section, two aspects need to be considered. Firstly, the group of respondents aged below 22 has been removed, as only one respondent was in that category. This skewed the output considerably which made the analysis impossible (see Appendix D). Secondly, the +-0.2 threshold has been decrease to +-0.1 in order to be able to interpret the output. Because of the low range of the x-scale (Dimension 1) and y-scale (Dimension 2), this is perfectly in order.

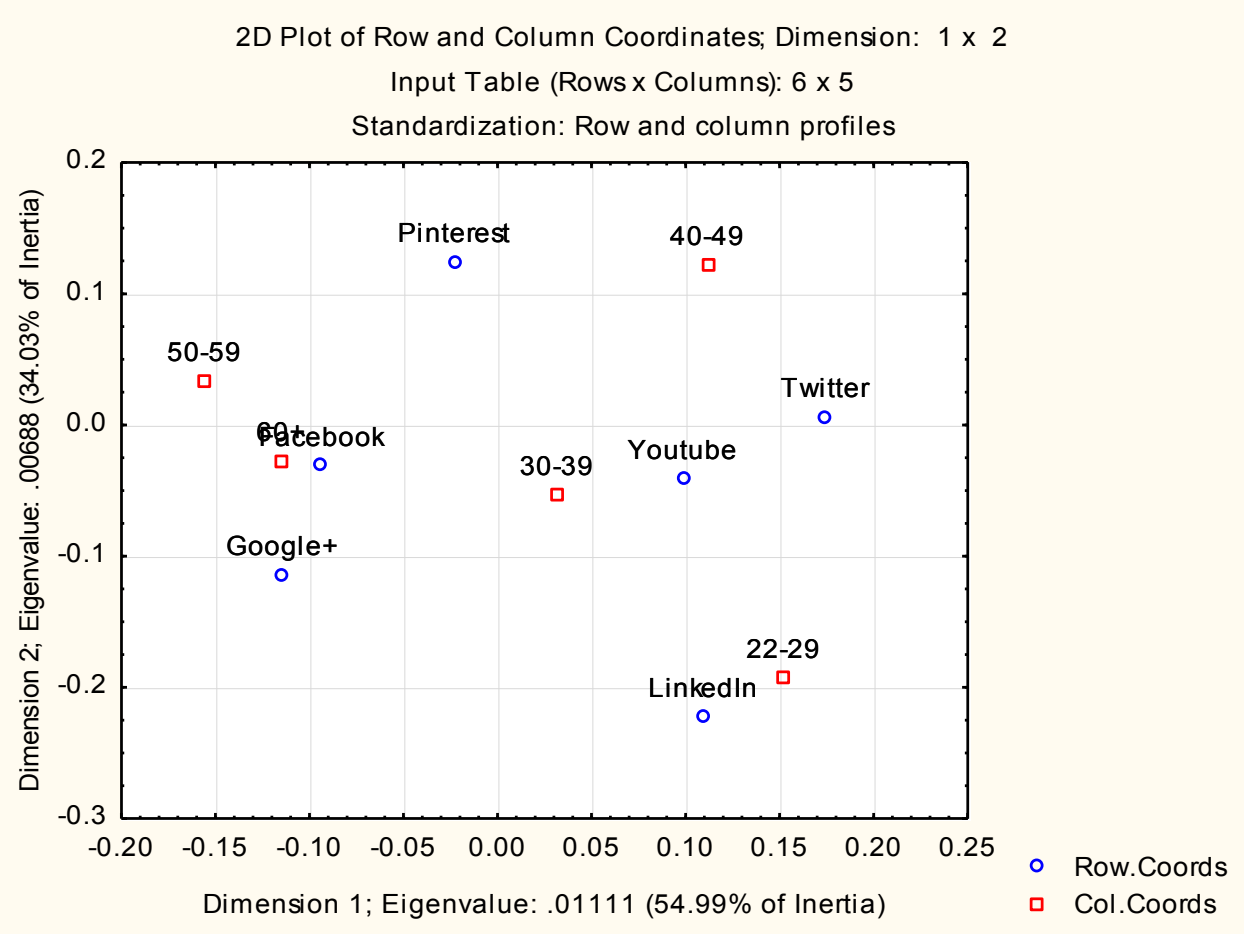

Figure 14: Correspondence Map – Social Networks & Gender

Dimension 1 explains 55 per cent of the inertia with an Eigenvalue of 0.01. From the output in Figure 15, it can be concluded that Facebook and Google+ are highly associated with respondents who are older than 50 years while YouTube and LinkedIn are associated with respondents aged 40 to 49. Respondents aged 22 to 29 were highly associated with the micro-blogging platform Twitter.

Dimension 2 explains 34 per cent of the inertia with an Eigenvalue of 0.007. Pinterest was highly associated with respondents aged 40-49; while LinkedIn was highly associated with respondents 22-29.

4.2.6 Cluster Analysis

When analysing search behaviour on social media using a cluster analysis, two clusters were identified. As expected, one cluster formed behaviour on social media that was popular; while the second cluster included behaviour that not many travellers participate in.

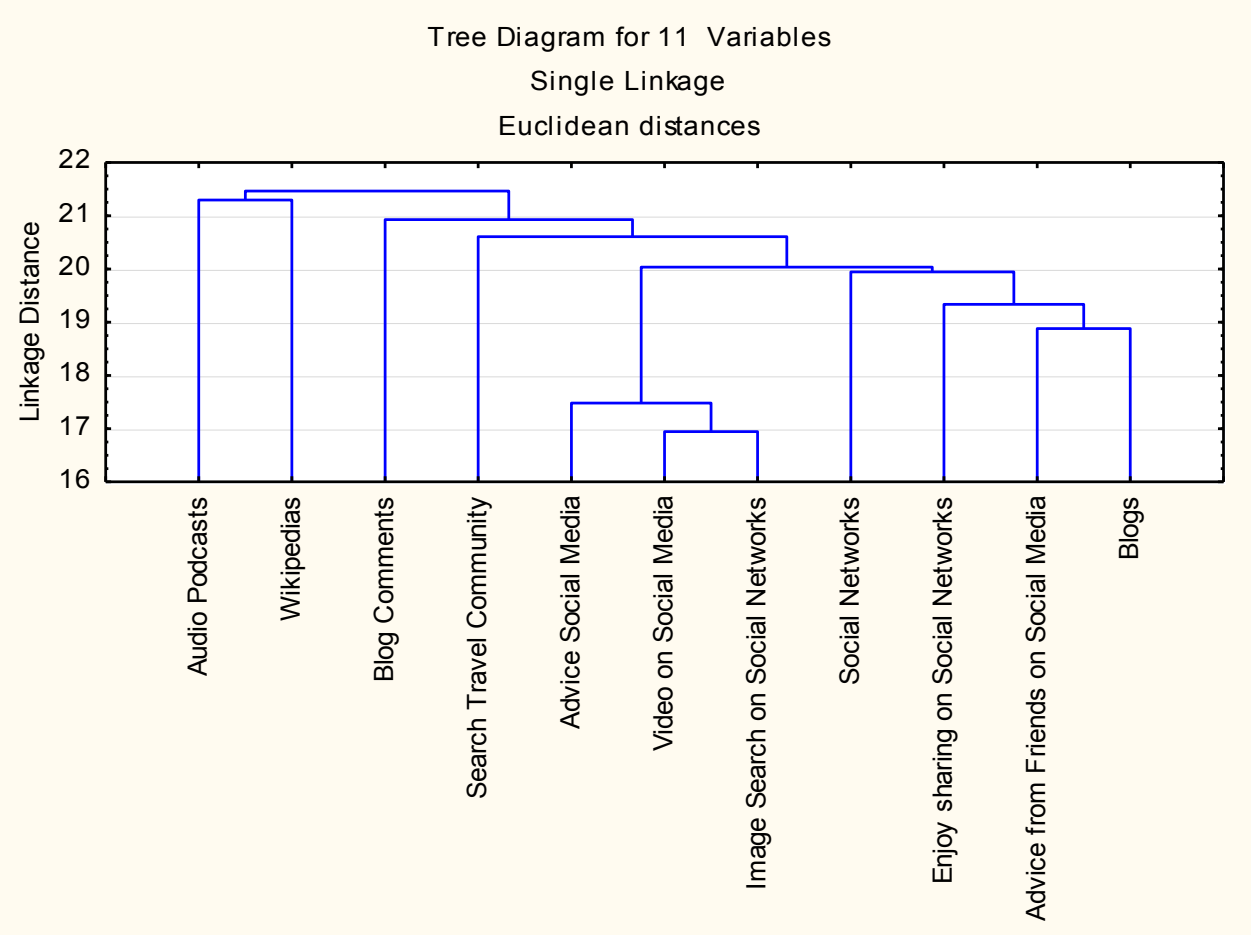

Figure 15: Cluster Analysis Tree Diagram

Cluster 1

- Audio Podcasts, Wikipedias

Cluster 2

- Blogs, Advice from Friends on Social Media, Search Social Networks, Image Search on Social Networks, Enjoy sharing on Social Networks, Video on Social Media, Advice from Social Media. Blog Comments, Search Travel Communities

Starting with Cluster 2, many travel communities encourage user interaction in terms of reviews or asking users to comment on activities. As such, it is logical that these two behaviours have been grouped together. Cluster 2 also includes reading blogs showing that

the people who read blogs also value the comments of other readers; these being strangers. However, the opinions of friends were also valued. Images & Video were also included in this cluster while people in this cluster have a tendency to share content that they had found on their private social media account. From the descriptive statistics in section 4.2.2, these are all activities that were found to be used to source information during the decision-making process of travellers.

Cluster 1 includes Wikipedia-like pages and audio podcasts. Audio podcasts received a mode of 1 when conducting the descriptive statistics while travel-related wikipedias were not found to be a significant information source as shown by the regression analysis. As such, this cluster includes activities that are not used during the sourcing of travel information on social media.

Find the amalgamation schedule of this cluster analysis in Appendix E.

5. Conclusion & Recommendations

The structure of the online tourism domain has changed drastically since the emergence of social media on the Internet. Seventy-five per cent of Internet users are exposed to types of social media by joining social networks, reading blogs or contributing to review sites (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Internet users trust what is said online on social media whether these opinions are from friends or posted by strangers (*TNS Digital Life*, 2011). Fesenmaier (2007) and Gretzel (2006) argued that knowledge about the role of social media in the travel information search process is considered essential to improving tourism marketing practices.

The current research set out to identify the role that social media plays in the holiday decision-making of South African travellers represented by the current sample. The conclusions of this research are presented in section 5.1 and 5.2, which will give tourism organisations and DMOs guidelines on how to target specific South African travellers by using social media.

5.1 Importance of Social Media

Social media has been well accepted by South African travellers that took part in this research thesis and social media plays an integral part in their decision-making and information sourcing process. The Internet is the preferred medium of choice when searching for travel information (mode = 5) indicating a possible decline in traditional travel information sources (brochures, travel agencies, magazines, etc.). This possible impact of social media on traditional information sources is discussed in further detail in areas for future research (section 5.5)

Reading blogs (mode = 4) and blog comments (mode = 4), searching for information on social networks (mode = 4) as well as searching for images on social media (mode = 5) are amongst popular activities of how this sample of South African travellers search for travel information online. This is further validated by the fact that respondents in this study enjoy sharing travel content on social media (mode = 4). The global *TNS Digital Life* (2011) research study claimed that Internet users want to share their experiences with strangers in order to help others make an informed purchasing decision. Consequently, it can be argued that South African travellers are following a global trend of embracing social media to share their travel experiences.

Following this global trend, South African travellers also ask advice from friends (mode = 4) and strangers (mode = 5) using social media. Globally, recommendations from friends and

family still has the most influence on what consumers choose to purchase; but people are also willing to listen to the recommendations from strangers (*TNS Digital Life*, 2011). In the case of the current research, the opinions on social media of strangers have a higher weight that those of friends as indicated by the modes.

Viewing videos on content communities (mode = 5) such as YouTube ranked amongst the highest ranked information sources. More and more travellers search for travel information on online video platforms (Reinhard, 2009). The current research as well as the finding by Reinhard (2009) indicates that online video platforms are a highly important information sources used by travellers. However, Reinhard (2009) argues that success for travel enterprises has been limited on online video platforms as travel enterprises do not fully realise the true potential of this medium.

The current research clearly shows that travellers prefer rich media content in the form of images (mode = 5) or video formats (mode = 5). In addition, the advice of strangers (mode = 5) is favoured over the advice by friends (mode = 4) on social media. The high influence of online recommendations on travel decision–making follows global trends as identified by *TNS Digital Life* (2011).

As stated, the current research showed that the sample enjoyed sharing travel content with their friends on social networks (mode = 4). These will be the recommendations that travellers are looking for. Facebook is the most dominant player, with 75 per cent of the sample indicating that they used this platform during their travel planning. This was followed by Pinterest (50%) and Twitter (36%). Google+ and LinkedIn proved to have a negative association when it comes to information sourcing, indicating that these two networks do not play a big role for the South African traveller.

When shifting focus on travel communities, only TripAdvisor and Lonely Planet proved to be important information sources. 63 per cent of the sample used TripAdvisor during their past travel planning; while Lonely Planet was used by 32 per cent of the sample. Wang, Yu & Fesenmaier (2001) presented an argument for a collective *travel square* as more travellers are turning to online travel communities to fulfil their travel–related tasks (i.e. information search, asking for advice, etc.). With regards to the current research, it can be concluded that TripAdvisor and Lonely Planet form the *travel square* for South African tourists.

In addition to these findings, further conclusions can be drawn analysing the characteristics of various segments of the sample with regards to gender, race and age. Tourism enterprises and DMOs that target specific gender, race and age groups can draw important knowledge about the role of social media for these segments. As argued by Fesenmaier (2007) and Gretzel (2006), this is essential to improve their tourism marketing practices on social media.

5.2 Differences in Demographics

Tourism enterprises and DMOs might only want to target certain segments of the South African travel population. The current research identified differences in behaviour and preferences on social media with regards to gender, race and age groups. The conclusions are presented in section 5.2.1, 5.2.2 and 5.2.3.

5.2.1 Targeting Gender Groups

YouTube was identified as one of the most popular information sources for travel planning for the entire sample. However, this is an information source dominantly used by male respondents with 48 per cent of males indicated that they used it during previous travel planning. In contrast, only 12 per cent of female respondents stated that YouTube played a role in their travel information search behaviour. While TripAdvisor was favoured by the general sample (63%); males were more associated with Lonely Planet while females were more associated with TripAdvisor.

Female respondents were highly associated with the social network Pinterest which is predominantly focused on images. Pinterest is very popular amongst members who add their *bucket list* of places to visit before they die. TripAdvisor was also highly associated with female respondents. As a result, this social network also lends itself to searching for travel information and gives the marketer many opportunities to reach potential customers.

Table 28: Conclusion: Gender

Male	Female
Lonely Planet	TripAdvisor
YouTube	Pinterest

Tourism organisations and DMOs targeting males should focus on creating remarkable video content that they can post on YouTube; while further advertising budget would be best spend on video advertisements on YouTube or on the travel community Lonely Planet. Both of these platforms rely heavily on video content, which male respondents have shown to prefer.

On the other hand, the female demographic favour photographs, as shown in their interest in platforms such as TripAdvisor and Pinterest. Pinterest is purely image–based; while TripAdvisor offers travel information with a combination of text and images. Tourism organisations and DMOs targeting female travellers should focus creating an online presence on Pinterest, while looking at advertising options on TripAdvisor.

A summary of these conclusions can be found on Table 28, but these are not limited to the social networks identified; generalisations can be made about what content to post on other social media channels. Tourism enterprises and DMOs that are active on other social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, Twitter) can post images to engage with their female fans; while posting video content to receive more feedback from their male fans.

5.2.2 Targeting Race Groups

The findings provided further insights into the information sourcing behaviour of the Caucasian and Black African demographic as shown in Table 29. Black African respondents had a higher tendency to search for travel-related images on social media while also reading travel-related wikipedias. White respondents showed a higher tendency to read through the *user comments of travel blogs* than any other type of demographic. In addition, the same conclusion can be drawn for Caucasian travellers searching for information on travel communities. As travel communities are mainly based on user comments it makes intuitive sense that these two social media activities are grouped together.

Table 29: Conclusion: Race

Caucasians	Black African
User Comments	Wikipedia-like Web sites
Travel Communities	Image Search

When targeting the Caucasian market, travel organisations and DMOs should look to advertise with Web sites that allow for user comments as this is an information source highly valued by this market segment. These could be privately run blogs, corporate blogs or travel communities. Further banner advertising to target the Caucasian market can be placed on travel communities such as Lonely Planet or TripAdvisor.

Tourism organisations and DMOs targeting the Black African market in South Africa should focus their marketing activities on channels that are image-friendly: Pinterest, Facebook, and

blogs; while marketing spend could be used to place advertising on travel–wikipedias such as WikiTravel.

5.2.3 Targeting Age Groups

Further findings regarding the behaviour on social media by various age groups are presented in Table 30.

Table 30: Conclusion: Age

22–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+
LinkedIn	Image Search	Pinterest	Facebook	Facebook
Twitter		Youtube	Google+	Google+
		LinkedIn		

South African travellers between the ages of 30 to 39 had a higher tendency to search for travel-related images on social media (see Table 30). As a result, DMOs should focus on the social media channels that are image-friendly: Pinterest is the most image-driven marketing channel on social media that can be utilised to reach this age group.

According to the current research and taking into account the final sample, when targeting South African travellers above the age of 50, tourism organisations' marketing spend should focus on Google+ and Facebook (see Table 30). Google+ and Facebook are very similar in terms of functionality, where companies can create brand pages in order to interact with travel-enthusiasts.

LinkedIn and Twitter was favoured by young professionals (22 to 29 years old). Tourism organisations and DMOs should create an online presence on these social networks to communicate with this market segment on social media.

Pinterest, YouTube and LinkedIn were highly associated with respondents aged 40 to 49. Pinterest and YouTube offer very rich content in the form of images and video, while LinkedIn caters to professionals. These professionals are looking for high quality content on social media while searching for travel information.

5.3 Summary

The findings of this research study provide invaluable knowledge about the role of social media for tech-savvy South African travellers in their information search. This knowledge is

considered essential to improve marketing practices of tourism enterprises and DMOs (Fesenmaier, 2007; Gretzel, 2006).

South African travellers that were part of the sample enjoy sharing their past travel experience with other users on social media in order to help them with their holiday planning. Images and videos are the preferred information medium by South African travellers while opinions of strangers who have visited the destination in the past are highly valued. Furthermore, tourism enterprises and DMOs can use the conclusions given in this report to tailor their marketing messages to specific market segments using relevant channels on social media.

No research has been conducted to analyse the information-sourcing behaviour of South African travellers on social media in the past. As a result, there was no concrete information available analysing how South African travellers use social media as part of their decision-making process. This research fills an important gap in academic literature that will be of great value for tourism enterprises and DMOs targeting South African travellers. The findings of this research will allow travel organisations to create effective and efficient marketing strategies on social media.

5.4 Recommendations to the Industry

In light of these conclusions, DMOs as well as travel and tourism organisations should partake in the following digital marketing activities on social media:

5.4.1 Online Presence

Respondents indicated that they prefer searching for travel information on the Internet rather than looking for it using more traditional offline sources. Consequently, it is imperative that travel organisations have at minimum their own company Web site on which all the important travel information and their products are presented.

5.4.2 Integrate Social Media

The respondents in this study indicated that they prefer to share information with their friends and family on social networks. Thus, tourism companies should make it easier for visitors to the Web site to share those pages. Most major social networks make social plug-ins available that allows for simple social media integration. These can include comment sections, share buttons and like boxes. Once the page is shared by a visitor, it has the potential to reach a much larger audience.

5.4.3 Build a Social Media Presence

Researching and purchasing can now be done all the time: at home, at work, and on-the-go (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011). Due to this development, brands need to pinpoint the most influential touch points online and offline to ensure that they maximise their presence and impact across the different media (TNS *Digital Life*, 2011).

The majority of the social networks identified proved to be an important information source when travellers search for travel-information. As a result, travel companies should look into expanding their social media presence online. Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter proved to be the most popular social networks amongst the respondents when searching for travel-information. Every company that understands the importance of social media needs to have business pages on these three networks. Depending on the resources of the company, further opportunities can be found on YouTube, Google+ and LinkedIn.

Respondents indicated that they enjoy sharing interesting travel information, while travellers also look for advice online from friends and strangers. Companies are able to search for these conversations online and then join them offering advice to travellers and potential customers. Even though some social networks have strict privacy settings (Facebook), other social networks such as Twitter, Google+ or Pinterest are fairly transparent. Specific keywords can be monitored which are relevant to the travel product being offered; and when someone starts a discussion, the travel organisation can join the conversation to offer their travel products and services.

The company can also start the conversation on their own Web site or social media pages by posting interesting travel information, questions and encouraging discussion. Monitoring the conversation on their own social media pages is much easier, and users appreciate interacting with a brand they chose to follow on social media.

This way the travel organisation can become an active part during the holiday decision-making process while the potential customer is evaluating all the alternative choices.

5.4.4 Advertise using the Right Channels

Marketing messages sent out from business pages on social networks only reach those users that are already connected with the page. At times, the company will want to reach a far greater audience. Several advertising options are available on most social networks offering options to target specific demographics of users. Specific gender, age and race groups should be targeted on various social networks as identified in this research. Further advertising can

be placed on private blogs and travel communities also taking into account the segments identified in this research.

Following these recommendations, travel enterprises and DMOs will maximise their exposure on social media reaching travellers on the most effective social media channels. In turn, their tourism marketing practices on social media will be improved because of the knowledge that they have gained about the role of social media in the travel information search (Fesenmaier, 2007; Gretzel, 2006).

5.5 Areas for Future Research

5.5.1 Longitudinal Study

Jaworski & Kohli (1993) note, that their research should be replicated over an extended period of time in order to gain further insights into their research topic. The same can be achieved for this research to ascertain whether the current sample continues to use social media the same way. This kind of longitudinal study would generate insights into trends and changes in the online domain of the tourism industry in South Africa.

5.5.2 Broader Sample

Similar research can be conducted with a broader final sample (i.e. income, education, race groups) to determine how behaviour changes across different demographic groups. One way to expand on the sample would be to focus on a specific country. The results can then be compared to this South African study to identify differences in behaviour. If the study be replicated in more than a defined number of regions, generalisations about the information sourcing behaviour on social media by *the global tourists* can be ascertained.

5.5.3 A different Approach: The DMO

The focus of this research paper has been on the South African traveller. Similar research can be conducted to examine whether DMOs targeting South African travellers are active on the social networks that were identified in the current research. This would provide useful information about the state of the tourism industry and whether they truly understand their target market. It would also be interesting to discover whether those DMOs and tourism organisations active on the identified social media channels, experience financial benefits in terms of additional profits by participating in those social media channels.

5.5.4 Updating Social Networks & Travel Communities

Social media is forever changing with current networks decreasing in popularity and new ones taking their place. During the past few months there has been an incredible increase in

the usage of mobile social networks in more developed nations. In 2013, Snapchat – a mobile social network, that is mainly used as a chat-service was created and currently has more than 400 million messages received each day (AllthingsD.com, 2014). Once mobile is perceived as more secure and developed medium in South Africa, these social networks will also be adapted by mobile users and become more relevant to the South African traveller. Research could be undertaken whether these will play an active role in holiday decision-making.

5.5.5 Traditional Information Sources

While this study has only focussed on social media, it would be interesting to analyse whether certain segments of the South African travel market still prefer to use traditional sources (offline) to find information on their holiday-destination instead of searching for information online. This research can also be conducted over a defined number of years to examine whether there is a trend towards digital information sources on social media by South African travellers.

6. Limitations of this Research

6.1 Sampling Method

The Internet was used as the distribution channel for the questionnaire. As already stated, numerous studies have successfully compared the results of traditional research methods (i.e. questionnaire interviews) with using the Internet (Brennan, Rae & Parackal, 1999; Morris, Fenton & Mercer, 2004; Roth, 2005).

The decision to use self-administered questionnaires that were distributed via e-mail and social media was justified by the following reasons:

- Reduction in cost

As this research focused on South Africa, it would not have been possible with the current budget to travel to all major cities of the country. Telephone interviews would also have proved to be too expensive. As such, an Internet survey was the ideal distribution method to keep costs at a minimum.

Once the questionnaire was submitted by the respondent, it was automatically entered into a database hosted on supersimplesurveys.com. This ensured accuracy in data capturing as well as anonymity of the respondent.

- Decreased response time

Roth (2005) argued that the time it takes respondents to reply to an e-mail questionnaire is usually much quicker than traditional surveys distributed by mail as the time in the mailing system is eliminated. However, this was disputed by Brennan, Rae & Parackal (1999) who argued that this is only the case if incentives were offered. During the course of this research, no issues with response time were recorded. After only one week, the final sample was chosen.

- Larger sample

As already discussed regarding the budget, it was possible to acquire a much larger sample because of the reduction in cost. Initially, 403 respondents started the questionnaire and after unusable respondents were deleted, the final sample constituted 318 respondents.

- Increased response rates

Morris, Fenton & Mercer (2004) noted that the visually attractive appearance of a questionnaire contributes to an increase in the response rate and completion of a survey. Supersimplesurveys.com offers a very user-friendly interface which makes the questionnaire easy to complete.

- Honesty

Wharton, Hampl, Hall & Winham (2003) pointed out that a higher degree of honesty by the respondent can be achieved if the researcher is not present. However, this can also lead to a higher dropout rate as the respondent will not be able to ask for assistance when s/he does not understand the meaning of a question.

This can be classified as one of the disadvantages of self-administered online questionnaire. Further disadvantages are:

- Dropout

Further reasons for a high dropout rate can be the length of a questionnaire. Brennan *et al*. (1999) found that almost thirty per cent of their respondents failed to complete their three-page online questionnaire. Academic literature has no conclusive answer about the average response or dropout rate for online questionnaires with findings differing from six per cent to sixty-eight per cent. Factors such as e-mails landing in a respondents "spam-box" can also lead to a decrease in the response rate (Brennan *et al*., 1999).

- Response bias

The questionnaire was distributed via social media channels. Since this is a research paper that focuses on how people use social media, there might be an inherent bias towards social media channels in this sample. This fact is also argued by Aaker, Kumar & Day (2012) who state that with Internet surveys, there is an inherent response bias towards those who own and understand the Internet and computer technology and results might not be projected onto the wider population. In light of this, conclusions drawn from this research are only relevant to people already using social media and generalisations about the South African population as a whole cannot be made.

- Uncontrollable environment

As the researcher was not present when the questionnaire completed, there could be several short-comings in this research. 1) The researcher cannot be sure that the questionnaire was completed by the person sampled; and 2) The researcher could not ensure that a respondent was fully concentrating on the questionnaire or make sure that there were no disruptions while the questionnaire was completed.

Table 31: Advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet as a distribution method

Advantages	Disadvantages
Reduction in cost	Response bias
Decreased response time	Dropout
Larger sample	Uncontrollable environment
Increased response rates	
Honesty	

The disadvantages mentioned in this section could all have contributed to a negative impact on the accuracy of the data collected for this research. As such, the findings, conclusions and recommendations might be flawed. However, this is extremely unlikely.

6.2 Recall

There is also an issue with recall by the respondents. Respondents might not remember how they have searched for information if their last holiday was a long time ago. Respondents may also not remember by what degree social media actually impacted on their overall decision-making. In order to minimise this risk, respondents were excluded from this research if they were not on holiday during the past five years.

6.3 Innovation

Lastly, social media is ever-changing with many social media platforms that are highly popular today, were not around a few years ago. As a result, respondents might not have had the opportunity to make use of these platforms at the time of their last holiday. This is explored further on page 92 where the areas for future research are discussed.

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Questionnaire Number

Location

South Africans searching for Travel Information on Social Media

The University of Cape Town is conducting research into information sourcing and decision-making behaviour of South African travellers. The following questions relate to your time on the Internet and how you search for travel information online. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey. Your identity will be held in strict confidence.

1. Are you South African?

☐1 Yes ☐2 No

2. Do you use social media (blogs, comment forums) or log in to social networks (Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor) at least once a month?

☐1 Yes ☐2 No

3. Have you ever used Travelstart to book a previous holiday?

☐1 Yes ☐2 No

4. Are you planning to use Travelstart to book your next holiday?

☐1 Yes ☐2 No

When you booked your last domestic or international holiday how did you search for travel information online?

☑ *the box that that describes how much you disagree or agree with each statement.*

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
5.	I read blogs to find information on holiday destinations.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
6.	I did not read the comment sections of blog posts to find opinions of other travellers.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
7.	I searched on travel information on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
8.	I did not search for images on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, TripAdvisor, WAYN.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
9.	I did not ask for advice from strangers on social media regarding my travels.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
10.	I asked friends for advice regarding my travels using social media.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
11.	I read travel-related wikipedias (e.g. WikiTravel) to find information on travel destinations.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
12.	I did not view videos on social media to find information on holiday destinations.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
13.	I listened to audio podcasts on YouTube or other Web sites that host videos to find information on travel.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5

How do you interact with travel Web sites online?

☑ *the box that that describes how much you disagree or agree with each statement.*

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
14.	I enjoy sharing travel-related content on social networks.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
15.	The travel Web sites I visit did not have elements of social media integrated into them (comment sections, social sharing).	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
16.	I searched for travel information on travel communities such as TripAdvisor, WAYN, Lonely Planet, Virtual Tourist, etc.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
17.	I prefer finding information about travel on the Internet over more traditional sources such as travel magazines & brochures, travel agents and TV programs on travel.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5

18. I actively search for information about travel on the following social networks:

☑ *the relevant boxes.*

☐ **Facebook**	☐ **MXIt**	☐ **Lonely Planet**
☐ **Twitter**	☐ **YouTube**	☐**I-go-you-go**
☐ **Google+**	☐ **TripAdvisor**	☐**Virtual Tourist**
☐ **Pinterest**	☐ **WAYN**	☐**Dopplr**
☐ **LinkedIn**		☐ **Wikitravel**

Indicate additional social networks not listed above that you were active on when searching for travel information:_____

19. Approximately how many times have you been on an international holiday during the last 5 years? _____ times.

20. What is your race?

☐ **White**	☐ **Black African**	☐ **Coloured/Mixed**
☐ **Indian or Asian**	☐ **Other:**	☐ **Prefer not to Answer**

21. What is your gender?

☐ **Male** ☐ **Female**

22. What is your age?

☐ **< 21**	☐ **22 – 29**	☐ **30 – 39**	☐ **40 – 49**
☐ **50 – 59**	☐ **60+**		

Appendix B: References

*as stipulated by the Harvard Referencing Guide available on the UCT Library (2014) Web site.

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Appendix C: Multiple Regression

As part of this research, two multiple regression analyses were performed. One was relevant to general social networks, while the second was relevant to travel communities. The final regression output can be found in the report; below you can find the first step of each regression analysis that still includes all information sources identified in the literature review.

Social Networks

Regression Summary for Dependent Variable: Social Networks (Data in standardized.stw) R= .52638284 R^2= .27707889 Adjusted R^2= .26075487 F(7,310)=16.974 p

	b*	Std.Err. - of b*	b	Std.Err. - of b	t(310)	p-value
Intercept			0.000000	0.048215	0.00000	1.000000
Facebook	0.420942	0.050413	0.420942	0.050413	8.34988	0.000000
Twitter	0.125942	0.051430	0.125942	0.051430	2.44879	0.014887
Google+	-0.113436	0.049927	-0.113436	0.049927	-2.27202	0.023770
Pinterest	0.118638	0.048946	0.118638	0.048946	2.42383	0.015930
LinkedIn	-0.101819	0.049153	-0.101819	0.049153	-2.07146	0.039143
MxIt	0.017346	0.048646	0.017346	0.048646	0.35657	0.721655
YouTube	0.111125	0.052278	0.111125	0.052278	2.12566	0.034322

Summary Statistics; DV: Social Networks (Data in standardized.stw)

	Value
Multiple R	0.52638284
Multiple R^2	0.277078894
Adjusted R^2	0.260754869
F(7,310)	16.9736872
p	5.62675601E-19
Std.Err. of Estimate	0.859793656

Travel Communities

Regression Summary for Dependent Variable: Member of Travel Community (Data in standardized.stw) R= .46242119 R²= .21383336 Adjusted R²= .19608121 F(7,310)=12.045 p						
	b*	**Std.Err. - of b***	**b**	**Std.Err. - of b**	**t(310)**	**p-value**
Intercept			-0.000000	0.050280	-0.00000	1.000000
TripAdvisor	0.374333	0.052712	0.374333	0.052712	7.10143	0.000000
WAYN	0.077117	0.054763	0.077117	0.054763	1.40818	0.160080
Lonely Planet	0.130291	0.056192	0.130291	0.056192	2.31866	0.021064
I go u go	0.070370	0.062200	0.070370	0.062200	1.13135	0.258784
WikiTravel	0.085054	0.052315	0.085054	0.052315	1.62579	0.105011
Dopplr	-0.083270	0.064914	-0.083270	0.064914	-1.28278	0.200528
Virtual Tourist	-0.005211	0.053890	-0.005211	0.053890	-0.09669	0.923034

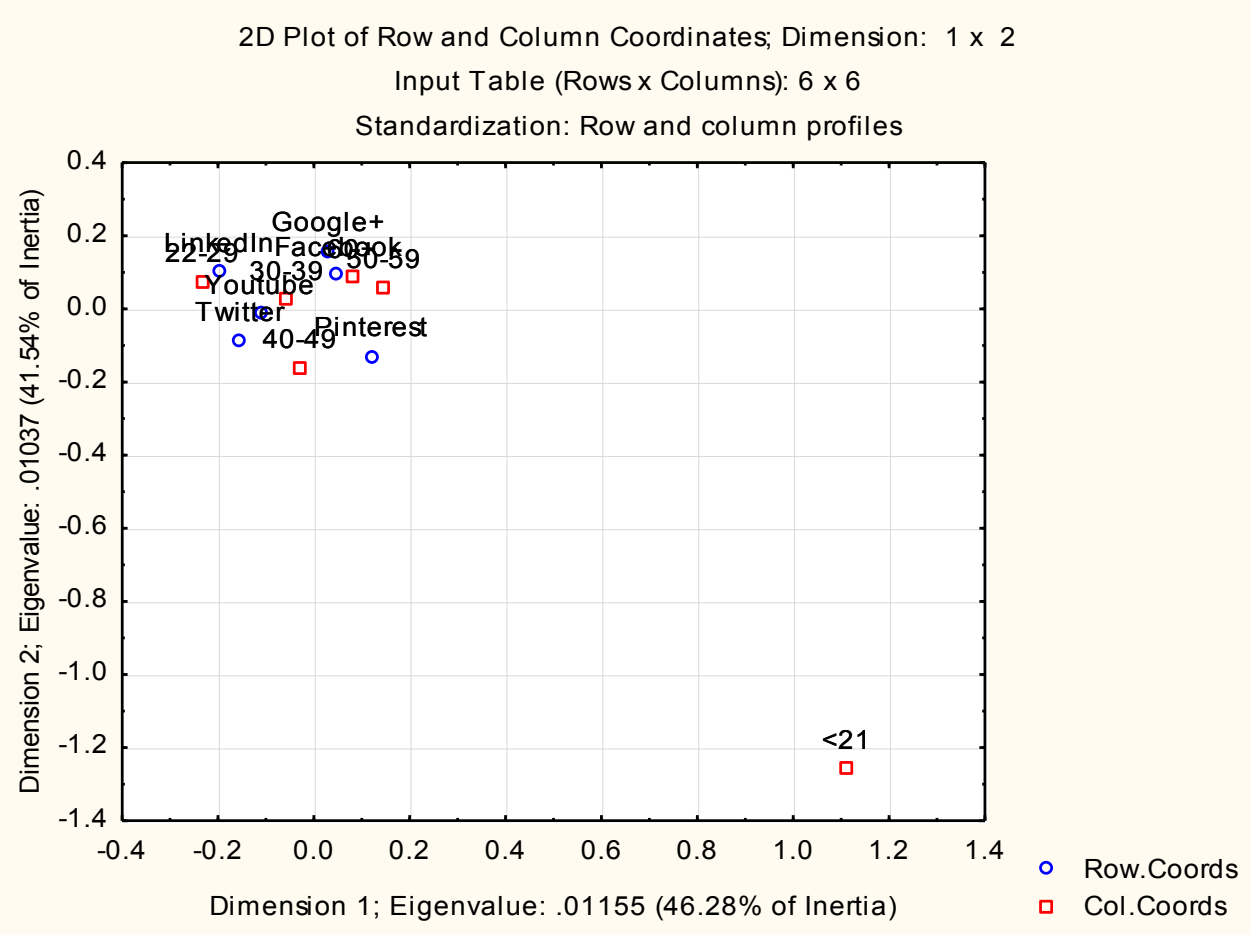
Summary Statistics; DV: Member of Travel Community (Data in standardized.stw)	
	Value
Multiple R	0.462421193
Multiple R²	0.21383336
Adjusted R²	0.19608121
F(7,310)	12.0454908
p	0.00000000000132466602
Std.Err. of Estimate	0.896615185

Appendix D: Correspondance Analysis

This report made use of several correspondance maps in order to visualise associations between race, gender and age groups and significant information sources on social media. The significant associations have been included in the report. This section includes further output which proved to have no significant bearing on the research.

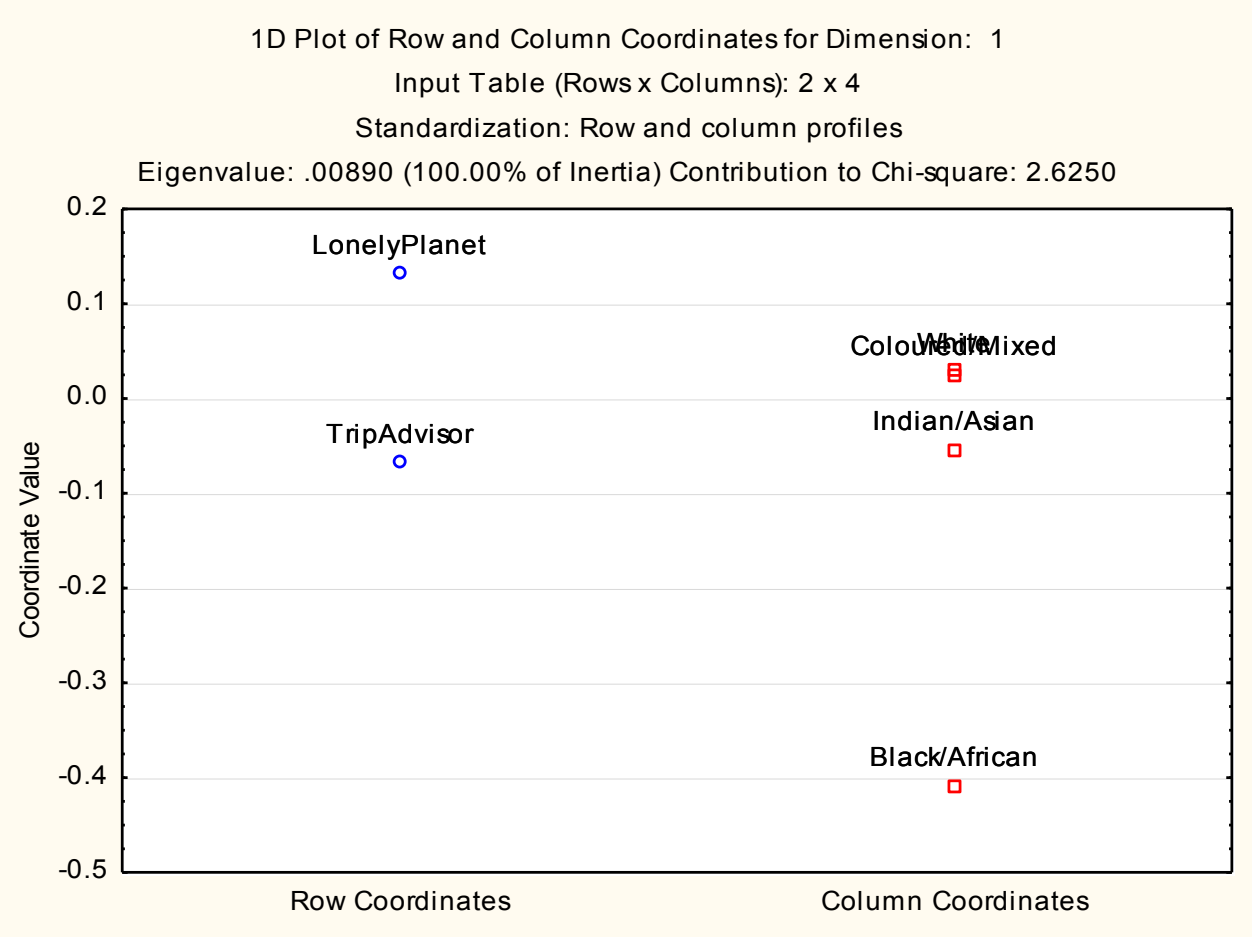
Social Networks & Age

	<21	22-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Facebook	0	12	95	45	57	29
Twitter	0	8	48	31	18	11
Google+	0	3	15	7	9	7
Pinterest	1	6	57	41	36	18
LinkedIn	0	2	12	4	4	2
Youtube	0	6	32	19	14	9



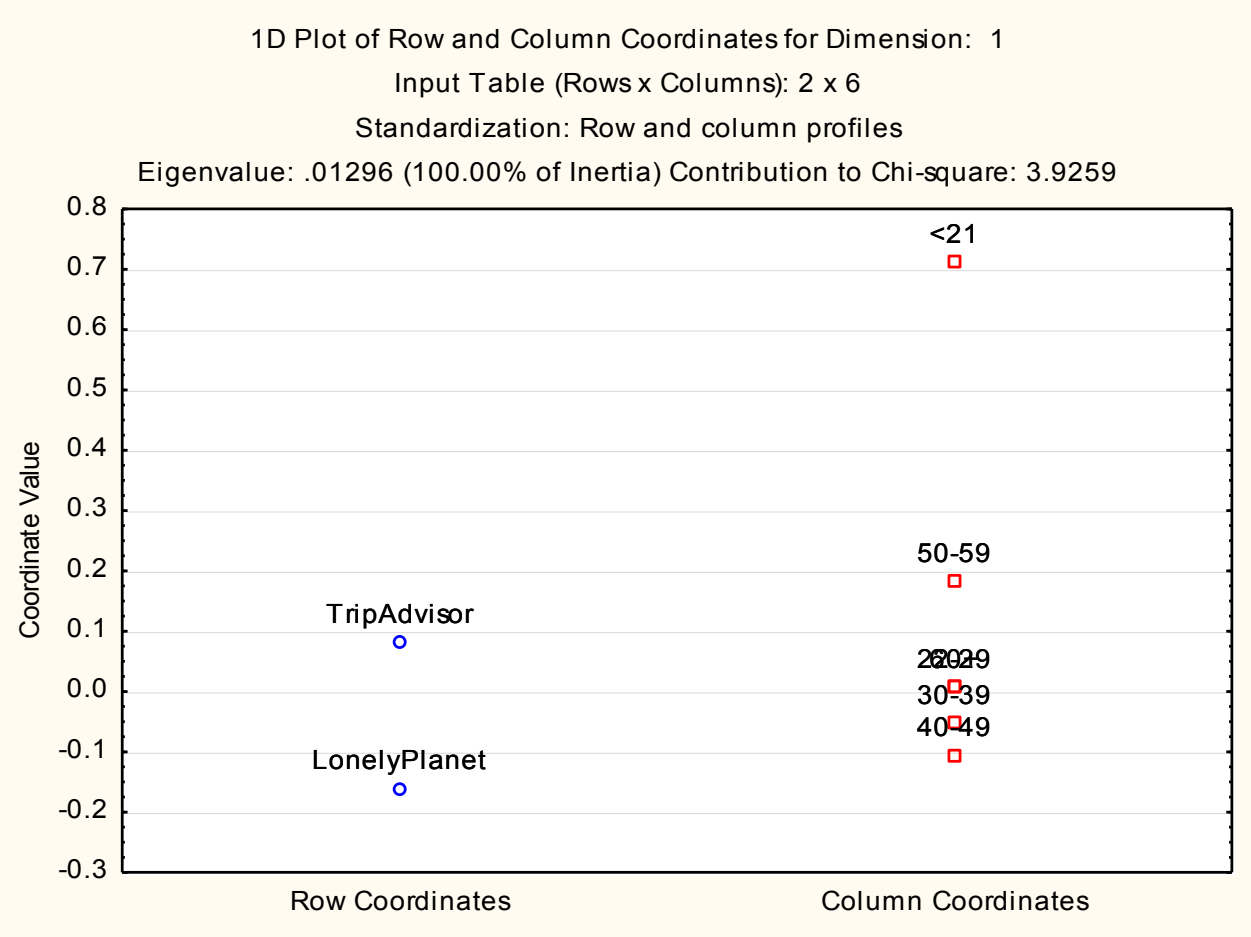
Travel Communities & Race

	White	Black/African	Coloured/Mixed	Indian/Asian
TripAdvisor	149	12	15	20
Lonely Planet	80	2	8	9



Travel Communities &. Age

	<21	22-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
TripAdvisor	1	4	69	46	51	30
Lonely Planet	0	2	39	29	17	15



Appendix E: Cluster Analysis

A cluster analysis has been performed as part of this research; the findings can be found in section 4.2.6. Below, the amalgamation schedule can be found, which was used to form both segments identified.

Amalgamation Schedule (Data in standardized.stw) Single Linkage Euclidean distances											
	Obj. No. - 1	**Obj. No. - 2**	**Obj. No. - 3**	**Obj. No. - 4**	**Obj. No. - 5**	**Obj. No. - 6**	**Obj. No. - 7**	**Obj. No. - 8**	**Obj. No. - 9**	**Obj. No. - 10**	**Obj. No. - 11**
16.944 29	Image Search on Social Networks	Video on Social Media									
17.482 17	Image Search on Social Networks	Video on Social Media	Advice Social Media								
18.879 84	Blogs	Advice from Friends on Social Media									
19.336 41	Blogs	Advice from Friends on Social Media	Enjoy sharing on Social Networks								
19.946 70	Blogs	Advice from Friends on Social Media	Enjoy sharing on Social Networks	Social Networks							
20.035 25	Blogs	Advice from Friends on Social Media	Enjoy sharing on Social Networks	Social Networks	Image Search on Social Networks	Video on Social Media	Advice Social Media				
20.607 98	Blogs	Advice from Friends on Social Media	Enjoy sharing on Social Networks	Social Networks	Image Search on Social Networks	Video on Social Media	Advice Social Media	Search Travel Community			
20.927 11	Blogs	Advice from Friends on Social Media	Enjoy sharing on Social Networks	Social Networks	Image Search on Social Networks	Video on Social Media	Advice Social Media	Search Travel Community	Blog Comments		
21.294 77	Wikipedias	Audio Podcasts									
21.463 73	Blogs	Advice from Friends on Social Media	Enjoy sharing on Social Networks	Social Networks	Image Search on Social Networks	Video on Social Media	Advice Social Media	Search Travel Community	Blog Comments	Wikipedias	Audio Podcasts

Appendix F: Analysis of Variance

This section includes all the output generated when conducting analysis of variance. The first category includes all output tables relevant to race. These are then followed by gender and age. The significant findings have been included in the report.

Race

Univariate Tests of Significance for Blogs (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1316.617	1	1316.617	814.3669	0.000000
Race	10.443	4	2.611	1.6148	0.170314
Error	506.039	313	1.617		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Blog Comments (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1202.117	1	1202.117	878.8758	0.000000
Race	28.916	4	7.229	5.2852	0.000394
Error	428.118	313	1.368		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Social Networks (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1611.081	1	1611.081	1117.731	0.000000
Race	6.985	4	1.746	1.211	0.305821
Error	451.153	313	1.441		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Image Search on Social Networks (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1693.103	1	1693.103	1117.609	0.000000
Race	16.128	4	4.032	2.661	0.032768
Error	474.174	313	1.515		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Advice Social Media (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1124.754	1	1124.754	619.2445	0.000000
Race	29.966	4	7.491	4.1245	0.002851
Error	568.512	313	1.816		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Advice from Friends on Social Media (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1388.679	1	1388.679	805.2182	0.000000
Race	12.178	4	3.045	1.7654	0.135613
Error	539.800	313	1.725		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Wikipedias (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1322.714	1	1322.714	735.1998	0.000000
Race	10.950	4	2.738	1.5216	0.195644
Error	563.125	313	1.799		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Video on Social Media (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1297.621	1	1297.621	694.3334	0.000000
Race	23.964	4	5.991	3.2057	0.013365
Error	584.957	313	1.869		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Audio Podcasts (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	483.7004	1	483.7004	302.1032	0.000000
Race	2.9910	4	0.7477	0.4670	0.759938
Error	501.1474	313	1.6011		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Enjoy sharing on Social Networks (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1538.234	1	1538.234	1346.057	0.000000
Race	4.555	4	1.139	0.996	0.409613
Error	357.687	313	1.143		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Social Media Integration on Web sites (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1628.747	1	1628.747	1537.729	0.000000
Race	2.640	4	0.660	0.623	0.646267

Error	331.526	313	1.059		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Member of Travel Community (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1199.594	1	1199.594	673.8667	0.000000
Race	35.022	4	8.755	4.9183	0.000738
Error	557.192	313	1.780		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Prefer Internet over Traditional Sources (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1663.412	1	1663.412	1342.585	0.000000
Race	2.683	4	0.671	0.541	0.705478
Error	387.795	313	1.239		

Gender

Univariate Tests of Significance for Blogs (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	3637.037	1	3637.037	2233.660	0.000000
Gender	1.943	1	1.943	1.193	0.275534
Error	514.538	316	1.628		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Blog Comments (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	3753.589	1	3753.589	2595.307	0.000000
Gender	0.004	1	0.004	0.003	0.957276
Error	457.030	316	1.446		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Social Networks (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	4264.653	1	4264.653	2941.607	0.000000
Gender	0.011	1	0.011	0.008	0.930317
Error	458.127	316	1.450		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Image Search on Social Networks (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	4192.871	1	4192.871	2702.324	0.000000
Gender	0.003	1	0.003	0.002	0.966052
Error	490.299	316	1.552		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Advice Social Media (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	3395.135	1	3395.135	1793.903	0.000000
Gender	0.418	1	0.418	0.221	0.638854
Error	598.060	316	1.893		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Advice from Friends on Social Media (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	3482.812	1	3482.812	2002.697	0.000000
Gender	2.435	1	2.435	1.400	0.237611
Error	549.543	316	1.739		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Wikipedias (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	3421.032	1	3421.032	1893.606	0.000000
Gender	3.183	1	3.183	1.762	0.185375
Error	570.893	316	1.807		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Video on Social Media (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	3343.337	1	3343.337	1784.622	0.000000
Gender	16.922	1	16.922	9.033	0.002864
Error	591.999	316	1.873		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Audio Podcasts (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	1354.084	1	1354.084	848.7695	0.000000
Gender	0.008	1	0.008	0.0051	0.943303
Error	504.130	316	1.595		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Enjoy sharing on Social Networks (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	4115.976	1	4115.976	3595.553	0.000000
Gender	0.504	1	0.504	0.440	0.507438
Error	361.738	316	1.145		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Social Media Integration on Web sites (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	4289.857	1	4289.857	4057.203	0.000000
Gender	0.046	1	0.046	0.044	0.834664
Error	334.121	316	1.057		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Member of Travel Community (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	3753.454	1	3753.454	2021.684	0.000000
Gender	5.529	1	5.529	2.978	0.085377
Error	586.685	316	1.857		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Prefer Internet over Traditional Sources (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	4537.896	1	4537.896	3680.265	0.000000
Gender	0.839	1	0.839	0.680	0.410070
Error	389.639	316	1.233		

Age

Univariate Tests of Significance for Blogs (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	583.6665	1	583.6665	362.4626	0.000000
Age	15.6838	6	2.6140	1.6233	0.140103
Error	500.7973	311	1.6103		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Blog Comments (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	574.0919	1	574.0919	405.5790	0.000000
Age	16.8180	6	2.8030	1.9802	0.068156
Error	440.2166	311	1.4155		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Social Networks (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	642.0710	1	642.0710	449.5693	0.000000
Age	13.9708	6	2.3285	1.6304	0.138183
Error	444.1675	311	1.4282		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Image Search on Social Networks (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	625.7711	1	625.7711	413.3639	0.000000
Age	19.4945	6	3.2491	2.1462	0.048079
Error	470.8074	311	1.5139		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Advice Social Media (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	536.0656	1	536.0656	281.7242	0.000000
Age	6.7063	6	1.1177	0.5874	0.740366
Error	591.7717	311	1.9028		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Advice from Friends on Social Media (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	471.0166	1	471.0166	284.8913	0.000000
Age	37.7953	6	6.2992	3.8100	0.001114
Error	514.1827	311	1.6533		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Wikipedias (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	549.1035	1	549.1035	307.2670	0.000000
Age	18.3009	6	3.0502	1.7068	0.118867
Error	555.7746	311	1.7871		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Video on Social Media (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	459.1410	1	459.1410	237.2567	0.000000
Age	7.0717	6	1.1786	0.6090	0.723084
Error	601.8497	311	1.9352		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Audio Podcasts (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	255.9347	1	255.9347	159.5075	0.000000
Age	5.1293	6	0.8549	0.5328	0.783254
Error	499.0091	311	1.6045		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Enjoy sharing on Social Networks (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	708.7588	1	708.7588	633.7808	0.000000
Age	14.4500	6	2.4083	2.1536	0.047336
Error	347.7921	311	1.1183		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Social Media Integration on Web sites (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	685.4029	1	685.4029	645.9655	0.000000
Age	4.1795	6	0.6966	0.6565	0.684882
Error	329.9872	311	1.0611		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Member of Travel Community (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	682.3463	1	682.3463	367.5230	0.000000
Age	14.8086	6	2.4681	1.3294	0.243572
Error	577.4052	311	1.8566		

Univariate Tests of Significance for Prefer Internet over Traditional Sources (Data in coding sheet v2) Sigma-restricted parameterization Effective hypothesis decomposition

	SS	Degr. of - Freedom	MS	F	p
Intercept	746.8765	1	746.8765	599.3665	0.000000
Age	2.9378	6	0.4896	0.3929	0.883393
Error	387.5402	311	1.2461		