The effectiveness of the destination websites in promoting linkages between visitors and the community in Tonga

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ABSTRACT

Whilst tourism has brought Tonga potentially significant prospects for job creation and local business ownership, many tourists lack knowledge about the cultural experiences on offer at their holiday destination. This signifies a lost opportunity to form linkages between foreign tourists and the Tongan community. This study analysed the content of 40 Tongan websites to see how effectively they promoted linkages to community based tourism industries. It found the majority of websites had very weak content on local handicrafts, food and cultural events and were ineffective at promoting linkages between tourists and the community, thereby reducing the potential for local community participation in the tourism industry.

Keywords: *Tonga, community participation, internet, linkages, websites*

INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Tonga is referred to as "the friendly isles," with over 170 islands to explore and plenty of world-class activities and attractions to choose from. Tonga remains one of the Pacific's most attractive holiday destinations (Tonga Visitors Bureau, 2014). Studies have shown that visitors to Tonga have the ability to improve the quality of life for residents and provide significant opportunities for employment and local involvement in business ownership (Hopkins, 2008; Milne, 2009; Milne and Bui, 2005). Tourism has been identified by the Tongan government and NZAID as a priority for the economic development of the country, highlighting the importance of increasing community participation through linkages between tourism and the local community (Ministry of Tourism, 2006; NZAID, 2008).

A lengthy history of research has shown that tourism can have a positive impact on job and income generation in Tonga through both direct and indirect linkages to the community (Connelly-Kirch, 1982; Milne, 1988; Orams, 2002). The positive economic impact on local Tongan communities from indirect participation in the tourism industry appears to be high, and further opportunities exist to facilitate both greater direct participation and to strengthen existing linkages with the industry (Hopkins, 2008; Milne & Bui, 2005). Community based tourism could potentially help alleviate poverty in Tonga, but one of the constraints is the lack of on-line marketing information available (Milne, 2009).

Today, the internet is the major tool tourists use for researching places of interest, planning journeys and booking accommodation and services (Fernández-Cavia, Rovira, Díaz-Luque & Cavaller, 2014). Destination websites attract potential tourists through branding, alluring imagery and quality information (Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012), while articles published on travel blogs are consulted because of their usefulness, reputation and trustworthiness (Ting, Ting & Hsiao, 2014). The content and imagery contained in destination websites and travel blogs has the ability to represent features of a local community in an enticing way to potential travellers, creating vital linkages with community based tourism products, increasing community participation in the industry.

Travel information found on the Internet, which depicts the destination image in a certain light has numerous managerial implications (Ting, Ting & Hsiao, 2014). Tourism websites and blogs that generate a positive perception of the Tongan community and its culture have the ability to connect foreign tourists with the host population and the tourism products and services they offer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN TOURISM

Community participation is a key component of sustainable tourism development (Okazaki, 2008). Arnstein (1969) notes that the goal of participation is power redistribution between stakeholders and to share costs and benefits equally amongst relevant groups. In practice community participation is difficult to achieve, for several reasons, including residents' lack of tourism knowledge, confidence, time and interest (Cole, 2006, p. 631). Scheyvens (2003)

notes limited owner-ship, resources and capital constrain a community's ability to participate in tourism. Iorio and Corsale (2014) add that this situation is more evident in small communities "off the beaten track" who often do not have the ability to acquire the necessary capital needed to attract tourists.

Cole (2006, p. 633) maintains that remote areas of developing nations face additional challenges, such as developers consider local community not to have understanding to be adequately involved in tourism, and limited experience in tourism development. Other obstacles to community participation in developing nations include lack of training of state tourism agency officials, and a need for improved government coordination and education and training for tourism operators (Saufi, O'Brien & Wilkins, 2014). Tourism policy implemented in developing countries is inherently a government-led development exercise,designed to meet their own objectives and large reflect top down decision-making; policies that reduce the prospects for community participation (Wang & Wall, 2007, p. 78). Similarity Dadvar-Khani's (2012, p. 259) study in isolated rural areas of Northwest Iran into host population attitudes towards development, found that tourism was not equipped to facilitate the participation of rural communities in tourism projects, which lead to limited involvement by the local community.

Empowerment is the "top rung" on Arnstein's (1969) "ladder of citizen participation"; at this initial stage the members of the community are active in producing change, have problem solving capacity, make decisions, implement plans and evaluate management (Cole, 2006). Scheyvens (2003), outlines four dimensions of empowerment: economic, psychological, political and social. The financial profits of tourism are evidence of economic empowerment; psychological empowerment results from cultural pride assisted by tourism; and social empowerment comes from improved community cohesion when people group together through tourism enterprises. The concept political empowerment is extended by Sofield (2003), stating that it is a transference of power between the powerful and the powerless. However, often in developing countries communities are subject to internal power struggles (Simpson, 2008) and are not regarded by government or key stakeholders as equal partners, which keeps the power in their hands (Iorio & Wall, 2014).

Knowledge is a key element of empowerment. It is necessary for local communities to have access to a range of quality tourism information resources to fully participate in tourism (Tosun & Timothy, 2003). Local communities effected by tourism that embrace community informatics have increased access to communication and information technologies, which in results in greater empowerment (Milne, Speidel, Goodman & Clark, 2005). Cole (2006, p. 631) notes that the initial phase of empowerment is understanding the tourism industry, which then permits local communities to make knowledgeable decisions concerning tourism development. In poorer regions of developing nations, people often lack the knowledge and capital that are needed for them to produce quality tourism products enabling them to establish their own businesses (Truong, Hall, Garry, 2014).

Communities in developing countries often need to first identify the characteristics of foreign travellers, allowing them to offer services and products that are desired thereby increasing their participation in the industry. Unless external inputs are available to the local communities, it can

be difficult to start tourism initiatives. External exposure plays a key role in acting as a catalyst for community based tourism projects and increasing local participation (Iorio & Wall, 2012).

INTERNET TOURISM RESEARCH

As tourists embrace the internet and other different types of digital technology, their tourism decision-making and motivations have become increasingly influenced by destination marketing websites and informal word-of-mouth travel blogs (Fernández-Cavia, Rovira, Díaz-Luque & Cavaller, 2014; Pai, Xia, Wang, 2014; Ting, Ting, Hsiao, 2014; Wan, 2002). The internet has had a large impact on the tourism market, allowing travellers to access vast amounts of information instantly from the comfort of their own homes. Therefore, the internet has become an increasingly significant and important instrument for destination marketers to promote their products (Brey, So, Kim & Morrison, 2007; Lee, Cai & O'Leary, 2006). The internet allows the promotion of smaller, less accessible tourism sectors, due to its ability to reach audiences around the globe and the relatively low costs involved (Horng & Tsai, 2010).

The main role of a tourism website is to promote a destination by supporting an indirect experience of the tourism product (Bastida & Huan, 2014). The image presented is integral to the traveller's decision-making process as well as bookings and service purchases (Fernández-Cavia, Rovira, Díaz-Luque & Cavaller, 2014). A destination website must be informative and supply potential tourists with accurate information. It must provide a comprehensive picture of the destination, which is ultimately one of the most significant factors in the destination selection process (Choi, Lehto & Morrison, 2007). Horng and Tsai (2010) conclude that effective tourism websites: have user-friendly architecture so travellers can seek information and navigate between pages without problems; have regularly updated content as travellers demand both the latest and most accurate information; must be attractive and eye catching. Research by Bastida and Huan (2014) found that the more attractive and useful destination websites are, the greater likelihood there is to turn a potential tourist into an actual tourist.

Online word-of-mouth communication is commonly referred to as a "blog", (abbreviated from the term "web log") and plays an important role in the decisions of travellers (Ting, Ting & Hsiao, 2014). The emergence of travel blogs has caused a shift in how tourists go about conducting research for their holiday. Travel blogs are often very specific in expressing the experiences of a tourist at a particular destination, and therefore consumers can easily access very up to date and subjective information on their chosen holiday destination (Pan, Mac Laurin & Crotts, 2007). Malleus and Slattery (2014) argue that personal travel blogs are important for studying intercultural interactions which are one the main of objectives of community based tourism.

Web based tourism research has increased dramatically over the last decade along with the ability of the world wide web to greatly influence decisions about visiting destinations (Dion & Woodside, 2010). A large number of more recent studies have investigated the effectiveness of various destination websites, evaluating their different attributes (Bastida & Huan, 2014; Fernández-Cavia, et al. 2013; Fernández-Cavia, Rovira, Díaz-Luque & Cavaller, 2014; Fryc, 2010; Gupta & Utkarsh, 2014; Li, 2011 Pai, Xia & Wang, 2014; Woolsey, 2011). For example Fernández-Cavia, et al., (2014) study on web quality indexes investigated the technical aspects

such as usability and positioning, communicative aspects such as the quality of content, relational aspects such as interactivity and persuasive aspects such as branding. Current research focused on web quality has overlooked the internet's ability to shape positive perceptions towards various features of the host destination's tourism products and the implications this might have in terms of community based tourism and local participation.

CASE STUDY: TONGA

The Kingdom of Tonga is located in the South Pacific Ocean, south of Western Samoa and roughly two-thirds of the way from Hawaii to New Zealand (Figure 1). Its 176 islands many of which are uninhabited, attract tourists for its uncrowded beautiful natural environment and relaxed atmosphere, where visitors can enjoy an authentic mix of centuries-old culture, history and unique wildlife. The tourism industry is Tonga's largest foreign exchange earner, higher than any other productive sector, with an estimated high of T$58 million in 2010 (Reserve Bank of Tonga, 2011). Tourism has also become the largest contributor to GDP, increasing from 6% in 2001 to about 27% in 2011 (Ministry of Finance, 2011).

FIGURE 1: *Map of Tonga.*
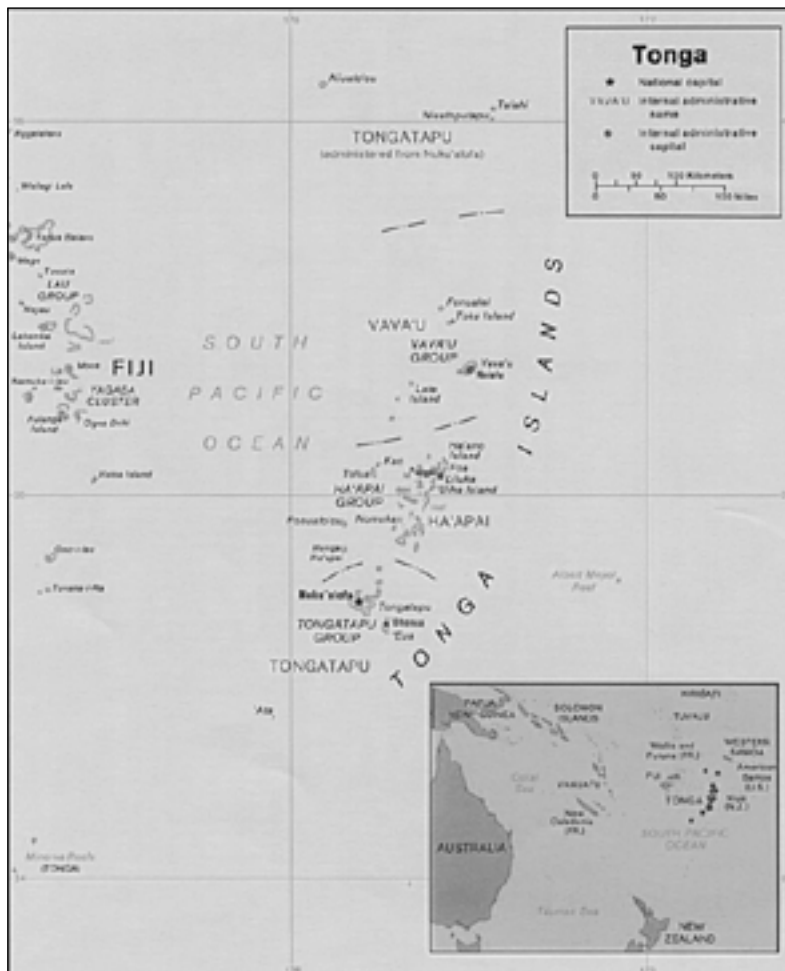
Source: (CIA, 2014)

Approximately two-thirds of Tonga's total international travel market (visitors plus residents) is accounted for by travel to and from Australia and New Zealand. During 2013 Australian and New Zealand residents travelling to Tonga as visitors accounted for around 71% of arriving and departing passengers at Fua'amotu Airport. The remaining 29% of arriving and departing passengers were North American (12%), UK and Europe (7%), other Pacific (5%) and Asia (4%) (Figure 2) (Ministry of Commerce, Tourism and Labour, 2013a). The New Zealand and Australian markets have grown strongly, while the North American market has suffered most from the effects of the Global Financial Crisis. The most recent international visitor survey indicated that 44 percent of visitors spend between seven to ten days in Tonga and that the median age of visitors was 42 years old (Ministry of Commerce, Tourism and Labour, 2013b).

FIGURE 2: *Air visitors by country of residence.*
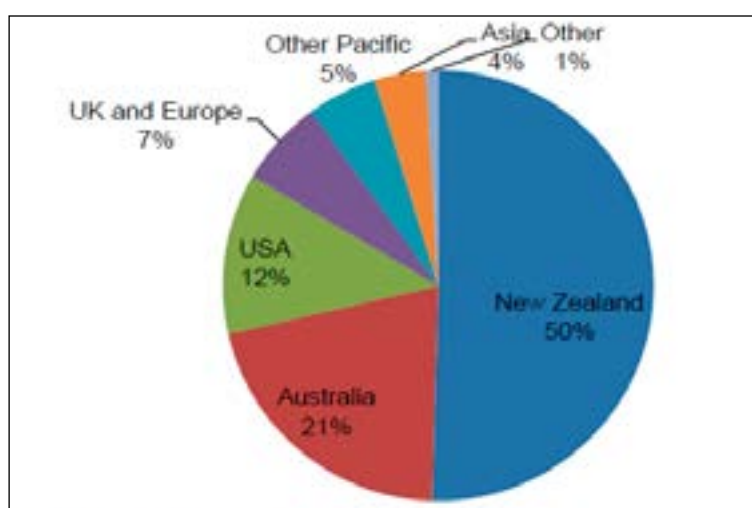
Source: (Ministry of Commerce, Tourism and Labour, 2013)

Australians and New Zealanders take advantage of the warm weather in Tonga and escape the colder southern hemisphere winter (Tonga Tourism Association, 2013). These visitors typically travel to Tonga on holiday packages which are generally restricted to the main island of Tongatapu and its capital city of Nuku'alofa. Other significant niche tourist markets include whale-watching, cruise ships and cruising yachts which provide vital economic benefits for the more isolated island groups of Vava'u and Ha'apai (Orams, 2002). The distribution and patterns of holiday visitors are changing within Tonga. Visitation to Eua Island, for example, has increased from only a few hundred 10 years ago, to around two thousand in 2011. A major obstacle to tourism in Tonga is that visitation is highly seasonal, with two major periods for holiday visitors. The busiest months are June through to October, reflecting the whale watching season and December and January which are the New Zealand and Australian school holidays (Ministry of Commerce, Tourism and Labour, 2013b).

Despite its attractiveness as a tourist destination, Tonga's tourism industry is relatively undeveloped compared to its South Pacific neighbours of Samoa and the Cook Islands, who

each received roughly around two and a halftimes more visitors per year than Tonga (Tonga Tourism Association, 2013). Tonga's international tourist arrivals only increased by 3,000 visitors between the years of 2009 and 2012 (Table 1), however, this growth is comparable to Samoa who experienced a similarly insignificant increase over the same time period (The World Bank, 2014).

TABLE 1: *International Visitor Arrivals 2009-2012*

Country	2009	2010	2011	2012
Tonga	46,000	47,000	46,000	49,000
Samoa	122,000	122,000	121,000	126,000
Fiji	542,000	632,000	675,000	661,000

Source: World Bank, 2014

The international tourist demand for Tonga as a holiday destination has slowed down during the past couple of years, mainly caused by the recent global recession which seems to affect the island economies more than their larger Pacific neighbours like Australia and New Zealand (Ministry of Commerce, Tourism and Labour, 2013a). The overall number of air arrivals remains stagnant at the 50,000 level during the past 3 years (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: *Visitors trends to Pacific nations from 1990-2012.*
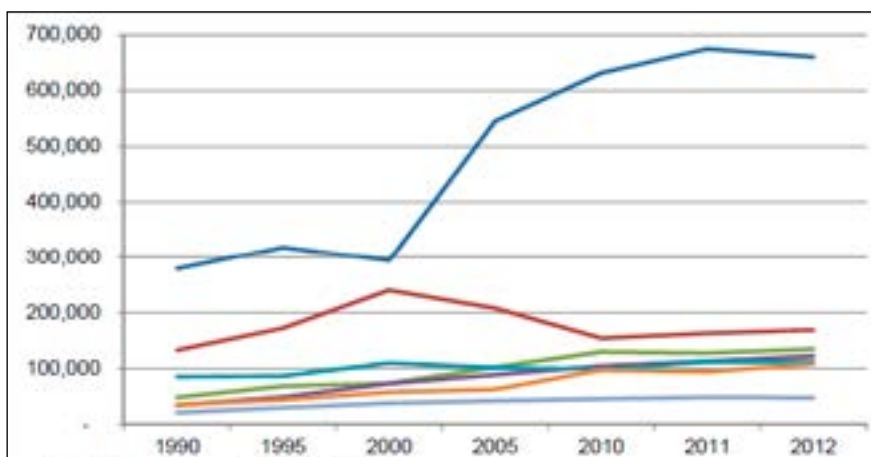
Source: (Ministry of Commerce, Tourism and Labour, 2013)

In 2008, the Tongan government's Strategic Development Plan highlighted the tourism sector as a priority for the economic development of the country and identified the importance of linkages

between tourism and the community (Ministry of Tourism, 2008). Despite these findings there have been few attempts by academic researchers to investigate how these linkages could be enhanced with the objective of increasing local community participation in the tourism industry. Recent studies related to tourism in Tonga have centred on the economic significance (Orams, 2013), managerial implications (Kessler & Harcourt, 2012) and the sustainability (Kessler, Harcourt & Heller, 2013) of the whale watching industry.

METHODOLOGY

In order to examine the effectiveness of destination websites in promoting the linkages between tourism and local communities in Tonga, content analysis was employed. Content analysis is a "research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorf, 2006, p. 18). Cusick, McClure and Cox (2009, p.26) add that content analysis can be applied to written text, images or symbols that communicate meanings of "something to someone." When using content analysis as a data analysis tool, all researchers should come to the same conclusions and inferences must be drawn in the context of the original text (Volkens, 2009).

The first phase of the study was to analyse the content of Tongan tourism websites from both government and non-government sources. Content analysis is commonly used in tourism research (Wan, 2002; Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Kemp & Dywer, 2003), including several studies on tourism and the internet (Wang, Chou, Su & Tsai, 2007; Xiang, Wöber & Fesenmaier, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Analysing the content of tourism websites gives a holistic picture of how both the industry and tourists are promoting linkages between tourism and communities in Tonga.

The sample of Tongan tourism websites was selected through an extensive audit of websites using various Google searches on 11 November 2009. The websites were found using the following keyword searches in order of: 1.Tonga Tourism; 2.Tonga; 3.Tonga Holiday; 4.Tonga accommodation; 5.Tonga Hotels; 6.Tonga Resorts; 7.Tonga Activities; 8.Tonga Attractions; 9.Tonga Whale watching; 10.Tonga Cruise; and 11.Tonga Sailing. Google's Page Rank algorithm lists websites based on popularity (Brin & Page, 1998). The most relevant websites were selected from the first 40 search results. The selected websites were then categorised by their general characteristics into four main categories: General Information; Accommodation; Whale watching/Sailing and Cruises (Table 2).

TABLE 2: *Tongan tourism websites.*

General Information
http://www.tongaholiday.com/
http://www.pacific-travel-guides.com/tonga-islands/tourist-information/index.html
http://www.tonga.islands-travel.com
http://www.tourism.net.nz/international/south-pacific/tonga/tonga-attractions.html
http://www.tongatourism.to/
http://www.infohub.com/travel/sit/sit_pages/tonga.html
http://www.jasons.com/Tonga/
http://www.lonelyplanet.com/tonga
http://www.whl.travel/tonga-hotels
http://www.iexplore.com/dmap/Tonga/Activities
http://gohawaii.about.com/od/tongasites/Tonga_Activities_and_Sightseeing.htm
http://www.iexplore.com/dmap/Tonga/Activities
www.beautifultonga.com
http://www.hideawayholidays.com.au/ASP/Tonga.asp
http://www.tongadeals.com/
http://www.spto.org/spto/export/sites/spto/destinations/tonga/activities.shtml
http://www.1uptravel.com/international/oceaniapacific/tonga/sightseeing.html
http://www.geckogo.com/Guide/Tonga/Explore/Sights-Attractions/
http://www.colonialvoyage.com/oceania/eng/tonga/index.html

Accommodation
http://www.tonga.islands-resorts.com/
http://www.eua-island-tonga.com/accommodationeua.html
www.tongavilla.com/
http://www.wheretostay.com.au/?qr=to
http://www.southtravels.com/pacific/tonga/index.html
http://www.oceansideguesthouse.com/activities.html
http://www.webtourist.net/tonga/
http://www.smoothhound.co.uk/tonga/
http://www.all-hotels.com/oceania/tonga/home.htm
http://www.travbuddy.com/Tonga-hotels-list-c256
http://www.mounuisland.com/
http://www.south-seas-adventures.com/Tonga/Tonga-Resorts-Tonga-Hotels.php
http://www.datelinehotel.com/attractions.html

Whale watching/Sailing
http://www.whales-in-the-wild.com/accommodation.cfm
http://www.sailingsafaris.com/
http://www.whalewatchvavau.com/
http://www.whalediscoveries.com/index.htm
http://www.whaleswim.com/
http://www.naia.com.fj/tonga/index.html
http://www.whalestonga.com/
http://www.tonga-dive.com/
http://www.blue-pacific-whale-watching.com.au/r8/whale-watching-in-tonga.html
http://www.sailingsafaris.com/whale_about.html
http://www.fikco.com/whalewatch.htm
http://www.finsnflukes.com/whalewatching.htm
http://www.tours.com/tours_vacations/tonga/whale_watching.htm
http://www.tongasailing.com/activities_in_tonga.htm

Cruise
http://www.paradiseadventures.com.au/ASP/tonga.asp
http://www.pocruises.co.nz/FindACruise/Destinations/Pages/PacificIslands.aspx
http://www.pacificislandtravel.com/tonga/cruises/oleanda.html
http://www.sailingtonga.com/
http://www.pgcruises.com/destinations/tonga/default.aspx
http://www.cruiseline.co.uk/q-id/pacific-islands-cruises/tonga-cruises/
http://sailing-vacations.gordonsguide.com/tonga.cfm
http://www.princess.com/learn/ports/australia/ports/VAV.html

The websites were then evaluated according to their role in linking tourism with different community dimensions: Tongan Culture; Tongan Handicrafts and Tongan Food. Codes were allocated to significant statements central to community dimensions, with the objective being to produce a large collection of codes. These codes were then assembled into theoretical value clusters, permitting related occurrences of phenomena to be compared and contrasted. Codes that were found to be similar were rechecked to ensure they been coded accurately (Douglas, 2003, p. 47). The constant comparison of codes permitted greater assurance and confidence in the earlier produced codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 24).

Various sub dimensions of Tongan culture, Tongan handicrafts and Tongan food identified during the coding process were then assessed. Each website was evaluated as to whether the website contained an introduction to the community dimension, followed by a detail of the dimension. The imagery displayed on each website was also assessed, as well as the opportunity for tourists to experience the various community dimensions (see Table 3). The Tonga Visitors Bureau and Eua Island websites were separated and assessed individually as they were the two highest performing websites.

TABLE 3: *Dimensions of Tongan culture and tourism website categories.*

Dimensions	Tonga Visitors Bureau (n=1)	Eua Island Website (n=1)	General Information % (n=19)	Accommodation % (n=14)	Whale Watching / Sailing % (n=14)	Cruises % (n=8)
Tongan Culture						
• Introduction to Tongan culture	*	*	53	31	43	38
• Detailed history of Tongan culture	*	*	18	8	21	13
• Cultural Events	*	*	18	8	14	13
• Images	*	*	35	15	36	38
• Diversity of images		*	18	8	21	13
• Cultural tourism experience- Village visit		*	6	15	14	13
Tongan Handicrafts						
• Introduction to Tongan Handicrafts	*	*	6	15	7	25
• Detail on Tongan Handicrafts	*	*	6	15	7	13
• Images	*	*	6	15	14	0
• Diversity of images	*	*	6	15	0	0
• Cultural tourism experience- Handicrafts		*	0	8	0	13
Tongan Food						
• Introduction to Tongan Food		*	0	15	7	25
• Detail on Tongan Food		*	6	8	14	13
• Images		*	0	8	7	13
• Diversity of images		*	0	8	7	13
• Cultural tourism experience- Island Night	*	*	0	8	7	13

The text data from the tourism websites was analysed by word frequency using NVivo (NVivo, 2012), a qualitative data analysis software package. To ensure interpretable results from the word frequency analysis, several grammatical operations were performed: All words commonly used in constructing sentences or stop words such as *is*, *a*, *the*, *of*, were excluded; the spelling of Tongan names such as Tongatapu and Nuku'alofa were made consistent; plural and singular words were combined such as *Tonga* and *Tongan*; and non-travel related text were further excluded from the analysis as they would not add significant information to the results.

RESULTS

Tongan culture was moderately well covered by all sites, with just over 40% of sites giving a brief introduction. The sites providing detailed cultural history and information on cultural events were few. Well under half the sites provided images of Tongan culture, while very few sites displayed a diverse range of imagery. Whale watching/sailing and general information sites were the most informative, while accommodation sites were very weak. Both handicrafts and food were covered poorly across all Tonga travel sites. Cruise sites performed the best with 25% giving brief introductions to handicrafts and food. All sites displayed few images of Tongan food and handicrafts. The number of sites offering tourists the opportunity to participate in Tongan handicraft and food experiences such as Island nights was also very low. General information sites did not offer any opportunities, while only one site in each of whale watching, accommodation and cruises categories offered those opportunities.

www.eua-island-tonga.com is a community based site run by a small group of volunteers on Eua Island. The Eua Island site was the most comprehensive and informative site of all Tongan travel sites, fulfilling all requirements of linking tourism with the community. The site has extensive sections on Tongan culture and details obscure topics such as legends and kava making. As well as informative text, there is a range of brilliant images that are well chosen for the site. The site provides travellers with plenty of opportunities to get involved with Tongan culture as it offers weaving classes, tapa cloth making, dance classes and kava nights.

www.tongaholiday.com is the official website of the Tongan Government run by the Tongan Visitors Bureau. Due to its status, visitors may believe that this is the most comprehensive and informative of all Tonga travel sites. Overall, the site performed only moderately well and lacked several key components. The site had a strong and concise section on Tongan culture, however, it lacked a variety of images and disappointingly, there was no link to a Tongan cultural tourism experience. Handicrafts were covered comprehensively with great images and good detail; however, again, there was no link to a handicraft tourist experience. Tongan food received no attention on the site, which was surprising. There was a link to a Tongan feast, but this was hard to find, as it was located under the tours and guides section.

Table 4 displays the 25 most frequently used words as well as the top 4 cultural words used on the websites. The word *Tonga* was the most frequently used word closely followed by *Island*. Predictably, the majority of the most frequently used words such as *water, fish, beach*, and *boat* are commonly found in the promotional materials of Pacific Island Holiday Destinations (Connell, 2006 and 2007). Interestingly, there are only positive words in the top 25 most frequently used words: *good; great; friendly; beautiful* and *pretty* all featured and no negative words were recorded. *Church* and *Sunday* were both frequently mentioned reflecting the widespread practice of the Christian faith observed on this day, with the result being that most tourism activities shut down on Sunday (Orams, 2002). Linkages formed between community and tourism via websites was poor, as evidenced by the very low frequency of words such as *crafts*, *kava* and *culture*. However *dance* and *food* both featured in the 25 most frequently used words, again these words being commonly associated with Pacific Island holidays.

TABLE 4: *25 most frequently used words.*

Keyword	Frequency
Tonga*	447
island	363
people	125
water	123
boat	117
good	114
fish	97
great	95
beach	87
local	84
church	83
town	73
trip	71
food	68
cave	67
beautiful	65
pretty	60
Tongatapu	60
flight	55
Sunday	53
dance*	53
Nuku'alofa	52
friendly	49
dinner	46
culture*	18
kava	24
crafts	4
handicrafts	0

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to assess the extent to which current web content features promote and enhance the tourism linkages to handicrafts, food and local cultural activities in Tonga. It was found that the majority of Tongan tourism websites had very weak content on local handicrafts, food and local cultural events, and no single tourism sector stood out as performing better than another. Some websites did however offer good information on one particular community dimension. For example, www.tongaholiday.com, the official website of the Tongan Government, provided great insights into local handicrafts but did not mention Tongan food. Only www.eua-island-tonga.com, a community based website, stood out as being a model website that linked tourism with all three of the community dimensions.

Many small nations such as Tonga have government-run tourism websites in the hope that their websites will attract prospective tourists through attractive imagery and credible information (Horng & Tsai, 2010). Dion and Woodside (2010) propose that the government run destination websites have greater levels of detailed information in comparison to privately created websites. www.tongaholiday.com was the second highest performing website, however, it still lacked the key component of Tongan food and did not have high quality images. This was very surprising, as government websites have become prominent advertisers of the local culture and cuisines of a tourist destination (du Rand Heath & Alberts, 2003). Boyne, Hall and Williams (2003) found that the official tourism websites of several countries needed to be improved in relation to their information content.

It must also be noted that the two highest performing websites were government (www.tongaholiday.com) and community-based (www.eua-island-tonga.com) and not tourism operators' websites. The fact that not all websites were run by tourism businesses did introduce bias into the study, as it is not always in the best interests of tourism operators to promote local community as it might lead to tourists spending their money elsewhere and not at the resort, hotel or cruise-ship being advertised (Meyer, 2007; Macpherson, 2008). Tourism operators need to be shown how their websites can easily promote linkages to the local community. This could be

facilitated by the Tongan government providing incentives or subsidies to operators in order to stimulate increased local community participation in tourism.

Many websites had quality information about the Tongan community dimensions but failed to back it up with decent imagery. For example, two whale watching /sailing websites had good introductions to handicrafts but did not have any imagery. Studies by Diaper and Wealend (2000) and Wang, Chou, Su and Tsai (2007) have shown that one of the keys to attracting online tourists and enhancing the marketing opportunities of websites is to provide a large variety of images to reinforce the written text. Horng and Tsai, (2010) add that websites containing only written text fail to build a sense of real presence and do not motivate tourists in the same way photos do. Imagery needs to be truly eye catching and of high quality. Poor quality photos can often leave a negative impression.

The majority of websites wrote that Tonga was an idyllic island holiday destination. The keyword analysis revealed that bloggers associated Tonga with words common to other Pacific Island holiday destinations (Connell, 2006 and 2007), and there was no mention of anything negative. This is a very positive sign for Tongan tourism and corresponds well with the marketing material on the Tonga Visitors Bureau website, which promotes Tonga as the "The Happy Isles" and displays great imagery of all things Pacific (Tourism Visitors Bureau, 2009). One key point arising from the keyword analysis is that websites frequently commented on the Christian faith being observed on Sunday as a day of rest. This is interesting, as it seems that Tonga shuts down on Sundays, and there are very limited opportunities for travellers to participate in tourism activities. This could be a great opportunity to link tourism with community; for example, local communities could offer tourism activities that observe a local church's ceremonies, followed by the afternoon feast.

The keyword analysis clearly identified that Tongan websites had very little to say about local culture. This was most obvious from the lack of Tongan cultural words contained in the websites; for example, the word *handicrafts* was not mentioned in any of the websites. Another indication that had limited connections between travellers and local community was the limited range and use of local terminology used to describe certain objects. For example, the word *food* was commonly used, however, the names of local dishes such as *taro* or the traditional feast of an *umu* were not mentioned.

FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

Future research could examine websites from other Pacific Island nations, not only a single country such as Tonga. This would provide a more comprehensive analysis of the internet's role in promoting the links between tourism and the community in the Pacific region. It would also provide a contrast for the findings of this study, determining if the results found in this study were typical of all Pacific nations or if Tonga is an individual case. It is suggested that future studies also investigate travel blogs and word of mouth sources used by tourists visiting Tonga. Travel blogs and forums such as TripAdvisor, Facebook, ThornTree (Lonely Planet) could potentially provide a more direct link between local Tongan communities and tourists. The method of content analysis is not the only research instrument available, and other techniques

such as focus groups, consumer surveys, Delphi methodology, and interviews with travellers who have browsed Tongan tourism websites may provide deeper understanding.

The findings in this study are subject to inherent bias imbedded in data collection methods. Future research needs to take into consideration the method of sampling; in this study the tourism websites were not collected from a random sample of all internet sites. Using Google as the search engine to find the most popular and relevant Tongan tourism websites and travel blog sites subjects the sample to the Google ranking system. This sampling technique should be replaced with a larger sample size and an automated random sampling method.

CONCLUSION

Tonga's tourism industry is still in its infancy and current indications show that the local community is not receiving many benefits, highlighted by the small number of community members actively participating in the tourism industry and the very limited information available on the internet regarding local community dimensions (Hopkins, 2008 and Milne, 2009). This study highlighted that Tongan destination websites are currently ineffective in promoting linkages between travellers and local community tourism products and services. The information gathered by this study can be used to shape and develop Tongan website content in a way that can stimulate tourism's links to the community dimensions of food, handicrafts and local cultural experiences.

This paper contributes to the growing body of knowledge associated with community participation in developing nations (Cole, 2006; Okazaki, 2008; Saufi, O'Brien & Wilkins, 2014; Scheyvens, 2003; Wang & Wall, 2007) and specifically, the challenges of being geographically isolated (Dadvar-Khani, 2012; Iorio & Corsale, 2014). The research highlighted that that the local community participation in the tourism industry can be negatively influenced when internet exposure of the host population is not promoted on destination websites. In the absence of quality internet content and alluring imagery, local communities face a major obstacle in attracting international tourists to participate in community based tourism.

This paper builds on current tourism destination website assessment (Bastida & Huan, 2014; Fernández-Cavia, et al. 2013; Fernández-Cavia, Rovira, Díaz-Luque & Cavaller, 2014; Fryc, 2010; Gupta & Utkarsh, 2014; Li, 2011; Pai, Xia & Wang, 2014 Woolsey, 2011) by exploring the effectiveness of linking travellers to community based tourism. Extending on previous research, this study highlights that tourism destination websites play a more significant role than just pure promotion. This paper calls for future destination website assessments to look beyond only aesthetic aspects and move towards incorporating community dimensions. It is hoped that this study is the stimulus for future research to examine how destination websites can more effectively promote linkages with tourism and the community.

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