Social media has become a major information platform allowing businesses to engage with tourists. Small Tourism Enterprises (STEs) have commenced using social media for tourism purposes by maintaining a brand page on Facebook. The literature on Facebook adoption by STEs is expanding but limited, especially the discussion around building Facebook presence and strategy. Indeed, Facebook use by STEs is at an early stage of uptake hence the early adopters of this relatively new phenomenon can provide important insights regarding their Facebook use and strategy. The article examines separate case studies of eight Australian accommodation STEs and reports insights into Facebook use and implementation. Notably, even with early adopters, a pre-planned Facebook strategy was found to be poorly understood and in many instances had not been developed and implemented appropriately. Although focused on Australia, the findings have the potential to be related to small tourism operators in other countries.

KEYWORDS early adopters, Facebook, marketing, Small Tourism Enterprises (STEs), social media strategy, tourism

INTRODUCTION

The global tourism industry has been noted as being information-intensive, where access to relevant, contextual, and timely information allows people to make meaningful decisions in regard to their travel (Burgess, Sellitto, & Karanasios, 2012). The Internet per se provides a rich set of supporting
technologies such as search engines, email, and video streaming that enables business activities and operations and is a central platform associated with the information search and access processes. These supporting Internet technologies have recently embraced factors known as Web 2.0—reflecting websites that incorporate user-interactivity and advanced functionality, of which social media sites are a representative entity (Bingley, Burgess, Sellitto, Cox, & Buultjens, 2010). Indeed, a growing number of tourism enterprises are expressing interest in the advantages of using social media as a tool to advertise hotels or promote a destination (Dev, Buschman, & Bowen, 2010; Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2012; Leung, Law, Van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Murphy & Nolly, 2012).

One of the main developments associated with Web 2.0 has been the creation of social media, encouraging the production of user generated content (UGC)—a phenomenon that represents the transition between traditional marketing to an open conversation model (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Social media, therefore, has the potential to create new business opportunities, where the engagement of clients tends to be direct and informal. Mangold and Faulds (2009) suggest that the importance of social media as a platform in the information-search process for new business clients should not be ignored, believing that it should be part of an integrated marketing communications structure of a business. However, it is also important for businesses to adopt a social media strategy in order to achieve long-term objectives (Wilson, Guinan, Parise, & Weinberg, 2011).

Despite the wide use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and their benefits to the local tourism industry (Braun, 2005; Sharma, Carson, & DeLacy 2000), Australian Small Tourism Enterprises (STEs), who comprise the majority of all tourism businesses in the country (Davidson, Burgess, & Sellitto, 2006), have traditionally found the adoption of new innovations challenging (Sharma et al., 2000). Arguably, there are several challenges for STEs in the adoption of social media. One central challenge relates to building a strategy that governs social media usage. The purpose of this study is to examine the quality of the STEs’ Facebook presence highlighting some of the strategies they used. This may lead to better implementation of Facebook by STEs who maintain a business presence in the social network but suffer from poor user engagement, as well as encourage non-adopters of Facebook to create a new presence. Hence, the article uses individual case studies of eight Australian accommodation STEs who are early adopters of social media. The early adopters are an important group that can provide pertinent examples for other entities when it comes to a new innovation—where they might emulate adoption, learn from, or even reject the innovation (Rogers, 2003). The study is one of the first in Australia that evaluated the Facebook presence of accommodation STEs who are identified as early adopters of social media.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Definitions

Several authors have suggested different definitions for social media. According to Kim, Kim, and Kim (2010) social media is an information system, in which users disseminate and collect information to and from other users. Shin (2010) describes it as a virtual community space where people with similar interests can exchange information about their hobbies, life achievements or aspirations. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) suggest that the term social media emerged from two other digital phenomena—the increased functionality of the Web 2.0 platform and the subsequent growth of User Generated Content (UGC). They note that the term “social media” reflects a group of media types or channels that range from social networking sites, blogs and reviews that allow people to freely contribute to online discussions. Other authors suggest that social media is a free broadcast arena (Brzozowski, Sandholm, & Hogg, 2009), one that brings to the web consumer-generated content (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The advent of this form of content has been viewed as a significant influence on the transition from ‘push marketing’ to a conversation model, where users decide what to buy following online recommendations from friends, blog posts and tagging (Treadaway & Smith, 2010). Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels (2009) propose that these online word of mouth messages have a longer carryover effect than push marketing, hence their importance in the promotion of products and services in the modern era. Most of the leading private businesses in America are recognising the trend and are already using social media as part of their marketing mix (Larson, 2009).

In the context of this study, the definition suggested by Kim (2010) is the most appropriate as it highlights the value of social media (and Facebook in particular) as an information system, which closely aligns with the information intense nature of the tourism industry.

Facebook, which was launched originally as a closed social network for college students, enables the site’s users to build a network of friends, exchange information, and join brand pages based on personal interests and preferences (Bumgarner, 2007). It was the social media platform selected for this study due to its global reach and popularity in Australia (Sensis, 2012). In addition, Facebook is used as a marketing platform in the tourism industry, aiming to convert online visitors to paying customers (Hsu, 2012; Tse, 2013). For instance, Hsu (2012) claims that large hotels in Taiwan use Facebook regularly for online marketing and managed to successfully interact with the Chinese-speaking market. However, two thirds of their audience could not understand the discussion due to a language barrier. Tse (2013) examined the success of a large Hong Kong based hotel, which was gained by using Facebook as a marketing tool in order to attract new customers and to retain old ones.
Small Businesses and Social Media

The benefits associated with social media adoption are also available to small businesses. Jantsch (2009) suggests that more small U.S. companies are using social media networks, with around 45% of respondents confirming they have a business presence on either Facebook or Twitter. Harris and Rae (2010) emphasize the importance of social media marketing for small and medium size businesses, and argue that it has the potential to assist particularly those businesses with a restricted advertising budget. They suggest that social media per se for a small business is affordable in terms of establishment and maintenance costs, making it a valuable platform for online experiments.

The issue of social media adoption by small entities is significant for the global tourism industry in that the majority of firms are small in size and generally family run (Monday, Banks, Sellitto, & Burgess, 2009; Morrison & King, 2002). Several authors note that the tourism industry is making a growing use in social media as part of its sales and marketing efforts (Dev et al., 2010; Leung et al., 2013; Murphy & Nolly, 2012). Based on their content analysis of social media and tourism articles between 2007 and 2011, Leung (2013) found that social media marketing has made an immense impact on the travel industry, and that its importance to the industry is still growing. Tour operators have been noted to use Facebook as a channel allowing price comparisons of products—however, that alone does not guarantee customer loyalty, but contributes to building closer relationships with users (Senders, Govers, & Neuts, 2013). According to Dev (2010), hotel marketers need to explore the benefits and functions of social media in order to improve their communication with younger tourists. Murphy and Nolly (2012) note that more small hotels are curious about learning how social media can be used as marketing and recruitment tools and that their overall acceptance of social media is usually determined by the general manager and their marketing vision.

STEs: ICT Adoption in Australia and Beyond

Small Tourism Enterprises (STEs) are divided into several industries such as sites of interest, accommodation and active recreation, each with its unique characteristics and differences in its operation methods (Reichel & Haber, 2005). These businesses help with improving the local economy by infusing tourism spending and producing a large array of tourism products (Bastakis, Buhalis, & Butler, 2004). The authors also mentioned that STEs usually adopt a product approach and focus on short-term sales goals, rather than trying to analyze the overall market and its requirements as big tourism enterprises tend to do. Many STEs operators ‘tend to be entrepreneurs, represented by both sole proprietors and families that are drawn to the industry for
lifestyle reasons’ (Sellitto, Burgess, Monday, & Banks, 2010, p. 2). The authors suggest that STEs have their unique organizational patterns and tend to react quicker than large tourism enterprises to changes in operation and industry conditions. There is no distinct definition of STEs in terms of size (Monday et al., 2009). The authors quote previous government statistics, showing that a small business in Australia employs between 1 and 20 workers, whereas the British size of a small business is defined as 1-50 employees. This article examines accommodation STEs, who have similar marketing needs to other STEs but focuses on selling rooms rather than tours or local products. One main difference between accommodation STEs and big hotels is that the latter employ varied pricing techniques and enjoy a relatively easy entry barrier to the market, which makes the hotel industry in Australia a highly competitive one (Mia & Patiar, 2001).

The Australian tourism industry is believed to be one of the country’s leading sectors to benefit from ICT, mainly due to the suitability of its travel products to the nature of eCommerce (Braun, 2005; Sharma et al., 2000). In reality, Australian STEs, which comprise between 90%-95% of all tourism enterprises in the country (Davidson et al., 2006), find it challenging to adopt new technologies. The annual Sensis eBusiness report indicates that only 27% (up from 10% in 2010) of small size businesses used social media for operational purposes, with 86% of them maintaining a brand page on Facebook (Sensis, 2012). Indeed the report identifies that small businesses operatives that had a cultural, personal and recreational focus were more likely to have Facebook presence. Clearly, the adoption of social media by smaller businesses is at an early stage of adoption with relatively low uptake rates compared to larger business counterparts. Therefore, the small businesses presented in this article can be regarded as a group of early adopters of social media. Innovation adoption theory suggests that different levels of innovativeness define the timing and degree to which a person (or business) adopts a new concept or idea. In his theory, Rogers (2003) portrays the early adopters as people who feel more comfortable with new ideas and/or technology, and who look for ways to improve their business. They are usually respected by their industry peers, and are perceived as opinion leaders. According to Rogers, these early adopters assist with reducing the uncertainty of an innovation or a new idea, providing relevant examples of how to use such new innovations.

The Need for a Social Media Strategy

A clear social media strategy is needed to enhance the chances of long-term business success (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Russell, 2010; Wilson et al., 2011). Organizations that maintain a social media presence without a pre-defined strategy may be overlooked by customers or even attract negative comments as in the case of Walmart, after the company neglected the maintenance of
its Facebook page (Beuker, 2009; Owyang, 2007). Qantas, Australia’s largest airline experienced a similar crisis management scenario in 2011 after the grounding of its fleet. The airline’s response on its social media channels was criticized for being impersonal and mechanical, leading to a large amount of negative user interactions (Moses, 2011).

In order to minimize the negative effects of unfavourable comments, Russell (2010) advises to build a strategy of using social media for marketing purposes before launching the actual channels via a SWOT analysis, which is a common hands-on analytical tool for strategic planning (Piercy & Giles, 1989). O’Connor (2010), who analyzed hotel reviews on Trip Advisor, suggests that hotel owners should respond to negative user reviews and to be proactive in continuing the online dialogue with their unsatisfied customers. According to the author, failing to do so might damage the brand image of the hotel. In addition, the social media strategy should include a content plan, given that meaningful content is necessary in order to create a disseminating viral effect that will spread the business message across the social media platform (Novak, 2010; Solis, 2010).

Wilson and colleagues (2011) suggest four different social media strategies that can be adopted by businesses and advises that they should use at least one. The first is termed the “Predictive Practitioner,” which reflects a business that allocates social media projects between specific departments and has a well-defined goal behind each of these projects. The second is “Creative Experimenter,” which reflects a business that wishes to learn and improve by experimenting with social media. The third strategy is having a “Social Media Champion,” where a dedicated social media group or department with a clear social media policy administer and run social media activities. And finally a business might identify a person in the firm noted as the “Social Media Transformer,” who focuses on how social media can transform the business due to market trends.

Measuring the performance of social media is also part of having a strategy, as suggested by Hoffman and Fodor (2010). According to the authors, marketing managers have the option to be in a “Dead End,” where their limited competence of measuring social media affects and their lack of belief in the success of social media will most likely end with a failure. They allude to “Measure and Adjust” as a strategy where the marketer can measure some of his/her actions in regard to social media, with action being taken to improve social media presence and business benefits through learning about client needs. Another measurement strategy is termed “Iterate for Success.” Here the marketer has a good ability to measure his/her social media work, which reflects successful outcomes. The last strategy, and where most marketing managers begin their journey with social media, is called “Naïve Optimist.” In this strategy the marketer has limited competence to measure social media affects, but believes it is worth the work and effort need to achieve success.
From here the manager can move to either “Iterate for Success” or, in the worst-case scenario, to a “Dead End.”

The academic literature associated with strategy planning or action when it comes to the adoption of social media by STEs is somewhat limited. Indeed, like any new innovation, exposing the methods through which Australian accommodation STEs are using social media is desirable. As previously indicated, this article investigates the adoption of Facebook by Australian accommodation STEs in order to gain insights into the quality of their social media marketing strategy prior to launching their Facebook presence. Hence, the overarching research question directing the study is what strategies have been used by small accommodation providers in implementing a Facebook presence.

METHODS

Social media can address different aspects of public relations and marketing, through to social recruitment and corporate social responsibility (Guarda, 2011), hence can be considered a holistic phenomenon. For this reason, case studies were selected as the research approach to allow a holistic investigation (Tellis, 1997). This research adopts a descriptive case study approach, as it depicts the phenomenon (that is social media adoption by STEs) and the situation in which it occurred. In order to provide an overview of the social media strategies used by STEs, a set of multiple case studies were chosen rather than a single case.

Semi-structured interviews with eight STE owners/managers, who also maintain the Facebook page of their business, were conducted by one of the authors in order to identify the marketing strategies that were used by them. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to enjoy a higher degree of freedom and flexibility, as they tend to generalize the process of creating new research ideas and insights, thus encouraging diversion from the planned group of questions so as to understand the important participant issues (Bryman, 2004). Due to Australia’s immense geography, most interviews were conducted over the telephone and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. The questions covered topics related to Facebook strategy, tracking and monitoring of Facebook activity and the development of a content plan, which were noted as important factors in the literature review (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Novak, 2010; Solis, 2010; Wilson et al., 2011). The interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the interviewer. In many instances follow-up communication was arranged in order to further clarify some of the answers given, as well as to collect new information.

In addition to interviewing, the researchers learned about the background of the participating STEs by visiting their official websites, and also reviewing their Facebook pages in order to identify aspects of Facebook
presence so as to inform the questions that could be asked during the interviews with the STE managers. Page features that were examined included the applications present, the types of content that are published and user participation on the page.

Sample Selection

The researchers examined eight STEs in the study, covering the different accommodation types in Australia (hotels, motels, and backpackers). The participating STEs were located by using Facebook’s search engine and were initially identified on the basis of the relative number of Facebook fans they had, which can be associated with the popularity and engagement level of the business reflected by social media. This method of selecting pages with the greater number of fans has been implemented in other Facebook-related studies, such as in the research of Yu, Chen, and Kwok (2011) that examined restaurants using Facebook. The authors selected their sample based on the number of Facebook fans that the restaurant had, as it indicated a higher level of engagement.

The selection process occurred in July 2010, when the majority of Australian accommodation STEs did not have a Facebook presence. Tourism Research Australia (TRA) reports that there were 4279 accommodation providers operating in Australia in 2010 (TRA, 2011). Some 90% of these businesses could be considered as falling into the small accommodation provider category (Davidson et al., 2006). Importantly, the researchers found only 19 Facebook pages of Australian accommodation STEs that had some interactivity (i.e., a page with at least five posts that were published by the business). Finally, eight STEs were selected based on their number of Facebook fans. This relatively low number of active Facebook pages indicated that the chosen STEs were the early adopters of Facebook, which in July 2010 was considered to be an emerging new innovation.

Thematic Analysis of Interview Findings

In order to understand the phenomenon of Australian accommodation STEs and social media usage, data collected for each STE was summarized in a case study structure. Coding the data took place in the beginning of the analysis process, as usually done in thematic analysis. This form of analysis allows the researchers to look for important themes that emerged from the data that are deemed to be important to describing the phenomenon under investigation (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997)—being the implementation of a social media (Facebook) strategy. The study applied theory-driven thematic analysis, where the researchers utilize the current literature and relevant constructs as a basis for development of new themes (Howitt, 2010).
Strategy was one of four areas under which findings were further categorized (the other areas, which are not covered in this article, were business benefits, resources and ICT skills). Overall, each case study produced two tables that summarized findings: one according to main themes that were identified and one according to individual STEs. Comparisons between STE responses across each of the cases allowed various themes/dimensions to emerge enabling researchers to not only identify themes/concepts but also relate them to the way they were used by adopting operators. This process, as suggested by Eisenhardt (2002), involves deciding on the definition of the dimension (or construct), while searching for a solid proof for the presence of that dimension in each case. Lastly, the identified concepts were compared to the literature.

Table 1 summarizes the different STEs that were examined in this study, dividing them by their business type (hotel, motel, or backpackers), the number of full time and casual employees they have and the region in Australia where they are located.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of social media strategy reported in the case studies identified six sub-themes. These sub-themes were:

1. **Motivation to Use Facebook**: This theme reflected the value of social media (and Facebook in particular) for the business and the reasons as to why the STEs used Facebook.

2. **Evaluation of Facebook Presence**: This theme reflected the monitoring and tracking of the Facebook page in order to optimize its performance (for instance, new comments that require a response, the most popular posts or audience demographics).

3. **Facebook Content**: This theme reflected content-related responses, which identified the types of content that the STEs posted, as well as
the overall content strategy. “Content” was found to relate to text, photos and videos that appeared on the Facebook page.

4. **Challenges With Operating Facebook**: This theme reflected the difficulties with understanding the potential use of Facebook. These are the areas in which the STEs admit they required professional assistance with their Facebook presence.

5. **Multi-Channel**: This theme reflected how a business considers other social networks for marketing in addition to Facebook (for instance Twitter, Google+, or LinkedIn).

6. **Social Media Plans**: This theme reflected future initiatives that the STEs had in regard to social media, such as attending a social media workshop for skill improvement or using a new feature on Facebook.

**Motivation to Use Facebook**

There was a strong understanding among all interviewees of how central Facebook is as a platform for business development and marketing. They recognized the transition from push marketing towards a conversation model, and were happy to adapt to this change. Five interviewees mentioned a specific reason for creating a business page on Facebook, with the main reason being cutting down advertising spend. The STEs see Facebook as an affordable alternative to the traditional media, which allows them to communicate with potential guests without struggling with budget limitations (“I couldn’t afford all the newspapers, so I was looking for other ways to advertise . . . connect with the customers without spending thousands on advertising” – Accommodation Provider 2).

While selling rooms was the main business objective reported by these STEs, some of them clearly indicated that they use Facebook as a communication tool with their past and future guests. They view the dialogue with the users as the start of a direct booking process, which allows them to pay less on commission fees to travel agents or other third-party booking providers (“It’s just networking. Everything I can do to attract business to the resort rather than through a travel agent means more money on our pockets” – Accommodation Provider 7).

It is important to note that some STEs even see their Facebook page as a future alternative to the official website of the business, and claim that they want to leverage more from it because of that (“They almost have the potential to replace web pages” – Accommodation Provider 6 expresses his view on the marketing power of Facebook pages). For STEs, this trend can eliminate the burden of developing and maintaining a website, a task some of them conceded was challenging and expensive, due to a lack of technical skills and resources.
Evaluation of Facebook Presence

Tracking, monitoring and moderating the Facebook page and its content were perceived as important by all participating STEs. However, all interviewees identified the communication email from Facebook as the only monitoring system that was used, despite the availability of other third-party tools. Facebook’s free analytics and performance tool, Facebook Insights, was not reported to be in use by most participants. Those who were familiar with these tools mentioned that they use it sporadically and were not guided by it when it came to marketing decisions (“To be quite honest, Facebook Insights wouldn’t direct how I use Facebook. It’s handy to have, but it won’t affect the decisions that we make when updating the Facebook page” – Accommodation Provider 8). This finding explains some of the Facebook-related challenges that were mentioned by the participants, from not knowing if Facebook actually generates direct room bookings to not knowing what fans wanted or how they experienced their visit to the business page.

In the monitoring process, some business managers just browse the comments on the page and this was used in determining the performance of their Facebook posts— the higher the number of comments was a metric that was equated to a successful post outcome (“You can always see what works and what doesn’t by the amount of interaction that you get” – Accommodation Provider 8). Others did not know how to process the information they receive from the monthly Facebook email, with one interviewee (a business employee) indicating that the notifications received were directly passed onto the owners, not knowing how to analyze the data herself. The owners themselves were also non-understanding of how to interpret the Facebook reports. The general responses around this issue revealed a knowledge problem of how to interpret and analyze their Facebook fan data, which made it harder for the STEs to measure the overall performance of their page.

Facebook Content

All but one participant stated that they had a well-documented content plan for their Facebook page. Their responses reveal that they were continually trying to publish a diverse range of content, from updates on special events to guest photos and videos. Most business interviewees indicated that they regularly searched for ways to increase the creativity of their content in order to make it more meaningful for users, which allowed them to maintain an interactive dialogue with users. One participant stated that he believed the main element associated with Facebook marketing was to maintain the content as diverse as possible which facilitated and enhanced user engagement (“... the bigger thing with Facebook is to keep it (the content) as varied as you can, rather than posting the same stuff over and over again. Some hotels are
doing that and you see that their interaction levels are low. Facebook can only be handy if you got the interaction with your customers” – Accommodation Provider 8). This understanding is consistent with some of the content-related practices that were discussed in the literature review, which advised using content that is compelling, relevant and practical for the users (Novak, 2010; Solis 2010).

Despite the participants’ content creation efforts, only one managed to define the target audience of their Facebook page and to adopt content that engaged that group. Other businesses interviewed were unsure of their target audience and aimed at a more general audience in an attempt to achieve a broad reach of fans. Without having at least a general knowledge about the people who visit the page, their interests, geographic locations as well as their age, it can be difficult for these businesses to provide fans with relevant content that is tailored for user’s unique needs and preferences.

Challenges With Operating Facebook

The interviewees highlighted several problems with maintaining the Facebook page, which can be viewed as a weakness of their Facebook presence. The main issue was not knowing whether Facebook had generated room bookings or not (for instance, “I have no real evidence, but I would be very surprised if we didn’t (get bookings)” – Accommodation Provider 1). None of the interviewees could suggest a possible solution for this matter. Some indicated that they are currently searching for one. This lack of initiative for such a central element in the performance of the page further highlights the challenges that these STEs have with developing a Facebook strategy that can lead to increased accommodation bookings—which is a high business goal shared by the participants. Not knowing whether Facebook helps them with this objective suggest that their approach to marketing using this channel is based on intuition rather than a pre-planned strategy.

Multi-Channel

Only two of the participating STEs incorporated other social networks other than Facebook into their social media presence. The first experimented with other options but decided that Facebook would be the platform to focus on, while the second automatically posts everything from their Facebook page into their Twitter feed. Both cases, together with the preference of the other participants to only use Facebook as a social media platform suggest that Australian accommodation STEs may not be ready to expand their social media boundaries by using other social media platforms. This finding reveals the conservative nature of the STEs, who prefer to be cautious with their
marketing activities by limiting the use of new tools before fully utilising the capabilities of social media such as Facebook. At the same time, several of the STEs stated that they were planning to experiment with new tools in the near future, which aligns with their innovative character as early adopters, who feel more comfortable with new ideas and/or products. It also highlights their understanding of the overall shift from push marketing towards a conversation model of engaging their clients and their willingness to become an active part of that shift.

Social Media Plans

Half of the participants were asked about their future social media plans with all able to state exactly what they wanted to do in this field. Expanding their social media presence by using other networks such as Twitter was the most common response, as well as adding new types of content such as video and attending social media workshops to develop their skills. Having a clear vision of future activities is an important part of any marketing strategy, including a social media one.

Based on the analysis of the case studies, it is evident that a social media strategy has not been developed by STEs, whether it be determined using SWOT analysis (Russell, 2010), choosing a strategy type (Wilson et al., 2011), or selecting a measurement strategy (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). Notably, the general idea of how the Facebook page should be maintained was created by STEs through a process of experimentation and discovery.

The participating STEs, as early adopters, witnessed the importance of Facebook as a business tool and started to experiment with it without developing an initial plan. This is evident in their lack of knowledge regarding the target audience of the page, as well as their lack of use of Facebook Insights or other analytical tools in order to measure the performance of the page and how it may contribute to improving room bookings (“Facebook sends you a weekly update to say how active it has been, and apart from that I just check on it. I want to know how to make it better” – Accommodation Provider 7). This situation clearly risks the commercial success of the STEs’ Facebook presence and might attract negative public relations (Beuker, 2009; Owyang, 2007). However, the same spontaneous behavior has led to some creative posts and ideas that helped the STEs maintaining an active discussion with users, as found in all the case studies.

It is important to note that most of the participating STEs indicated that they are either in the process of learning about social media via professional workshops, or wanting to attend such workshops if an opportunity arises. This positive attitude associated with wanting to learn how to improve their social media presence, as shared by the majority of STEs, will assist them with modifying their current marketing strategies and improve their overall Facebook presence.
SUMMARY

After analyzing the eight case studies it is apparent that, while all STEs are aware of the immense influence that Facebook has in the business world, they tend to use it without a clear plan associated with achieving long-term sales and marketing goals. The STEs created a Facebook page mainly because it offered an affordable alternative to the more traditional advertising channels. Facebook presence enabled them to develop an authentic dialogue with their audience, although it did not usually include direct sale offers or result in bookings. STEs claimed they knew what their audience preferred when it comes to content, but could not define their target audience and did not track the performance of the page using the available analytical tools.

As early adopters they identified and incorporated the newly emerging social networks (Facebook) into their marketing mix, setting up Facebook aims for their business, as well as planning future social media directives (including further professional training).

Understanding the experiences of early adopting STEs on why they use Facebook from a strategy point of view is essential for researchers who examine the quality of their social media performance, as well as for hoteliers who wish to optimize their Facebook presence and to offer their guests a positive user experience online, which is strongly connected to service quality. It may also encourage late adopters STEs to use Facebook to achieve their business objectives, as well as lead to improved implementation of social media by those STEs.

This article is an important contribution to the growing tourism literature associated with social media adoption by small business enterprises that compose the major entities in the travel industry. Although limited to a relatively small sample, the study does reveal significant insights and also portrays a representational picture of social media adoption in the tourism domain. Future studies will enrich the findings by investigating a larger number of STEs for their Facebook presence. In addition, future studies should investigate what could assist STEs with improving their Facebook marketing strategy creation process from a resource point of view.

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Building a Facebook Strategy


