THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

The Domestication of ICTs - the case of the online practices of Scottish serviced accommodation providers

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Edinburgh

2009

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ABSTRACT

The new possibilities offered by information & communication technologies (ICTs) within the work-place and elsewhere have attracted wide attention by economic and social actors. One outcome is the institutional 'push' for all businesses to embrace these technologies and 'get online'. However, it is evident that take-up amongst businesses has been highly uneven with some cautious in their adoption and, thus, many have not fully exploited the possibilities offered. To understand this variety in the adoption and use of online technologies (which in some cases includes their non-adoption and non-use) it is necessary to examine practices and establish underlying dynamics surrounding new forms of ICTs.

This thesis will investigate the practices associated with the adoption and use of ICTs in the hotel industry. Three basic questions are addressed. The first relates the online practices of hoteliers, including the use of online intermediary services, the nature of uptake and the implications for both practices and relations with customers. The second relates to any externalities which condition a hotelier's practices. The third is concerned with how to conceptual explain observations – findings.

Investigation of these questions has resulted in an empirically rich study. This has involved a multi-method approach that allows online practices to be viewed through different lenses and from an adapted Social Shaping of Technology perspective. The population of Scottish serviced accommodation providers was compiled and used to determine the uptake of online practice. Interviews revealed specific practices. Published material provided insight into contextual issues, particularly those relating to institutional developments.

The research shows that there were three principle strategies for the adoption of the new technologies. First, they were embedded by the users themselves ('internalisation') – often through much effort and processes of configuration – into their 'busy day'. The process of 'learning' (or learning by trying) was found to be an integral feature of uptake. Secondly, some users opted for an alternative solution where, rather than design their own website, they adopted the offerings of online intermediaries (such as online booking facilities) ('intermediation'). However, the appropriation of online intermediation was found to be both costly and fraught with new kinds of risks (e.g. double bookings) and uncertainty (e.g. no guarantees of bookings). Thirdly, a further option ('localisation') was for local groups of hoteliers to collectively produce an online presence that promotes the locality and thereby indirectly provides benefits to their businesses.

The analysis was performed using a modified version of Silverstone's (1992) 'domestication' framework. However, 'localisation' questioned the assumptions

underpinning 'domestication', suggesting the need for a more sophisticated analytical device, such as offered by the metaphor of 'tailoring'.

It is concluded that the apparently deterministic institutional view of the benefit of online technologies and the imperative that they are fully exploited to give competitive advantage, can be at odds with the locally contingent and diverse nature of online practices. The research found that the new online practices did not entirely replace traditional ones, but emerged as complementary to them.

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, a progressive and successful hotelier, an

inspiration and a truly remarkable person. May her memory live on.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself. To the best of my knowledge and belief it contains no material previously published or written by another person. It does not contain material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university, except where due acknowledgement has been made.

Date   8th November 2009   Stephen Allan Harwood

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people to acknowledge and to thank and I know that, in writing this, it is inevitable that I will overlook someone, for which I apologise.

First and foremost is Elaine, the 'PhD widow', who spent many, many and many more hours with my absence, whilst I had 'fun' as a PhD postgraduate, fanatically writing away on laptops, deep in thought about someone's paper or lost in the "reading room" in debate, or …. thank you, Elaine, from the depth of my heart, and God Bless you.

To my two supervisors, Neil Pollock and Jamie Fleck, for their patience, time, guidance and critical appraisal and, most importantly, for their support, particularly during the darker hours. I am most appreciative. Thank you, Neil. Thank you, Jamie.

Special thanks must go to all the people with whom I talked during the course of my research. Without you there would be no thesis:

> To the many accommodation providers who responded to my enquiries and patiently answered my questions. I appreciate your help, hope that your voice is clearly heard in my account and thank you for sparing me your time. To the many other people who have given me their time in discussion to help me understand what has been going on in their locality. Thank you.

Thanks must also be given to the following:

> To those who have given me their time for the rich discussions that allowed me to improve my understanding of the many different aspects of the tourism industry. In alphabetical order:
> Donald Anderson (Edinburgh City Council), Gilbert Archdale, Raoul Barbier (Edinburgh City Council), Graham Birse (Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce), Eddie Byers (VisitScotland), Dr Roger Carter (TEAM), Prof. Andrew Frew

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FIGURES

(for technical reasons, both tables and diagrams are referred to as 'figures')

ACRONYMS

ACDM	Aviemore and the Cairngorms Destination Management Organisation Ltd
ADGAP	Association of Dumfries & Galloway Accommodation Providers
AGM	Annual General Meeting
AIE	Argyll and the Islands Enterprise
AILLST	Argyll, the Isles, Loch Lomond, Stirling and the Trossachs
ANT	Actor Network Theory
ASSC	Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers
ATB	Area Tourist Board
ATP	Area Tourist Partnership
B&B	Bed and Breakfast
CAPM	Computer Aided Production Management
CEC	Commission of the European Communities
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CNC	Computer Numerical Controlled
CRS	Central Reservation Systems
DEMA	Destination Edinburgh Marketing Alliance
DIY	Do-It-Yourself
DMgO	Destination Management Organisation
DMkO	Destination Marketing Organisation
DMO	Destination Marketing/Management Organisation
DMS	Destination Management System
EDI	Electronic Data Interchange
EDS	Electronic Distribution System
EETC	Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee
EHGHA	Edinburgh Hotel and Guest House Association
EPOS	Electronic Point of Sale
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning
ERPII	Enterprise Resource Planning II
ETAG	Edinburgh Tourism Action Group
GDS	Global Distribution Systems

GH	Guest House
GVA	Gross Value Added
HIDB	Highlands and Islands Development Board
HIE	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IGHT	Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust
IJMG	Islay & Jura Marketing Group
IS	Information Systems
IT	Information Technology
MoT	Management of Technology
MRP	Material Requirements Planning
MRPII	Manufacturing Resource Planning
NITB	Northern Irish Tourist Board
NTA	National Tourism Administration
NTO	National Tourism Organisation
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
OTG	Orkney Tourism Group
PC	Personal Computer
PMS	Property Management Systems
QA	Quality Assurance
RTO	Regional Tourism Organisation
s.a.ps	serviced accommodation providers
SCOT	Social Construction of Technology
SE	Scottish Enterprise
SLM	Skye and Lochalsh Marketing Ltd
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprise
SMHO	Small and Medium Sized Hospitality Organisation
SSK	Sociology of Scientific Knowledge
SST	Social Shaping of Technology
STA	Shetland Tourism Association
STB	Scottish Tourist Board
STF	Scottish Tourism Forum

STS   Science and Technology Studies

TIC   Tourist Information Centre

TSA   Tourism Satellite Account

UKAPAS United Kingdom Accommodation Providers Alert Scheme

VABV   Voluntary Action Barra and Vatersay

VAT   Value Added Tax

WTO   World Tourism Organisation

Chapter 1   INTRODUCTION

easy answer - human nature
(Response from a Scottish Islander to a question about different factions each
collectively doing their own thing online irrespective of the activities of others, 26th
July 2008)

1.1   Introduction

On the 14th March 1997, the EU launched "A European Initiative in Electronic Commerce" (CEC, 1997). Perhaps one of the first European Initiatives directly concerned with the application of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) to business, its aim was "to encourage the vigorous growth of electronic commerce in Europe" (CEC, 1997: 4). The reason given was that

> electronic commerce will have a considerable impact on Europe's competitiveness in global markets. ... Electronic commerce presents enormous potential opportunities for consumers and for businesses in Europe, particularly for SMEs[Small Medium sized Enterprises]. (CEC, 1997: 4).

The economic importance of e-commerce was such that it was seen as imperative that businesses urgently took up e-commerce. Furthermore, to encourage uptake it was considered critical that there was some form of institutional intervention to create favourable conditions to encourage uptake:

> Its rapid implementation is an urgent challenge for commerce, industry and governments in Europe. ...Thus there is an urgent need to engage in an early political debate with the aim to provide a stimulus to electronic commerce and to avoid a fragmentation of this promising market. (CEC, 1997: 4).

This would require the development of appropriate legislation and generation of awareness about e-commerce. It aimed to promote technology, infrastructure and skills development and to provide a coherent regulatory framework.

Since then, there has been a succession of initiatives within the EU, the UK and Scotland to promote uptake. However, despite all this, there still appears to be resistance to uptake, with small businesses in particular, viewing them as unnecessary or too costly (Buick, 2003). This raises the question of why in our highly technological and competitive economy, are new ICTs not being fully embraced by all actors? This basic question is the starting point for this thesis.

This current chapter introduces the thesis. It commences with an overview of how technology is viewed, in particular ICTs. Then, the underlying aims of the research are set out. This is unpacked to reveal the research questions and a brief statement on why these questions are important. This chapter concludes with an outline of the remaining thesis structure.

1.2   The domestication of ICTs

Whilst technology is a ubiquitous feature of everyday life, if people are asked to define it, they have difficulty and perhaps make reference to some object used to achieve some outcome. To many, it is a black-box created in a laboratory, mass-produced in factories and rolled-out for people to use. Further, this view can surface when people have difficulty in adopting and using new technologies. If it does not work the way we expect it to, then there is something wrong with the technology. ICTs are perhaps a good example of this. Uptake is variable with some refusing to engage with ICTs. Indeed, the view presented here is perhaps widely held, including by those who engage in the analysis and conceptualisation of technology.

An examination of empirical research (0) into the uptake of ICTs and online technologies is suggestive that this view does exist. Much attention focuses upon measuring levels and types of uptake and benefits (e.g. Main, 1995; Daniel & Grimshaw, 2002; Daniel & Wilson, 2002a, b; Lituchy & Rail, 2000; Buhalis & Deimezi, 2004), perhaps identifying different categories of users (e.g. Martin, 2005) or establishing changes in use over time (e.g. Cooper & Burges, 2000; Rao et al, 2003; Daniel, Wilson & Myers, 2002). There may be an attempt to establish reasons for non-adoption or uptake (e.g. Whitaker, 1987; Main, 1995; Corrocher, 2002). A few may examine contextual issues such as the role of the public sector to support and encourage uptake (e.g. Fuller & Southern, 1999). The technology itself is almost rendered invisible as attention focuses upon the user. Indeed, the descriptive nature of much of this research has been commented upon by its reviewers (e.g. Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991; O'Connor & Murphy, 2004). There has been little attempt to open up the black box and examine the complex relations between the technology and the user. Moreover, early deterministic views of technology have been criticised for their attention to the social impact of the black box rather than investigating how the black box comes into being and works (Edge, 1995: 14). Opening up the black box becomes important if the relationship between people and technology and also the problems of development, uptake and use, are to be understood.

A variety of approaches to examine the black box have emerged under the Science and Technology Studies umbrella. The underlying tenet is that technology is not a self-determining entity detached from the social processes in which it is created and

used. Instead, meaning is given to a technology, through its design and use. Pinch & Bijker's (1984) Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) is illustrative. The flexibility in the interpretation of a technology leads to various social groups emerging, each holding their own views about the problems and their solutions. This emerging re-conceptualisation of technology recognises the interplay between the material artefact and people, thus requiring a more sophisticated description of technology (e.g. Fleck & Howell's 'Technology Complex', 2001). The notion that they are configured has led to their depiction as heterogeneous assemblages (Larkin, 1969; Landstrom, 2000) socio-technical ensembles (Bijker (1995: 269), sociotechnical constituencies (Molina, 1990, 1997) and sociomaterial assemblages (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008a, b).

With this re-conceptualisation of technology has emerged a deeper understanding of how technologies come into being, are adopted, used and change over time. The distinction between the active producer of a technology and the passive user is challenged. Technology does not merely diffuse from producer to user as suggested by Rogers' diffusion model (1995). Nevertheless, Rogers (1995) recognised that the user is an active innovator, which has been examined by Fleck ('innofusion', 1998) and von Hippel (2005). Indeed, interest in the user has focused attention upon a particular category of user, the end-user or 'consumer' and how these users embed or 'domesticate' (Silverstone et al, 1992) technology into their daily lives. Use is locally situated and conditioned, though entails a variety of social processes, which include negotiating about possibilities and learning to make the technology work. This is captured within the notion of 'social learning' (Williams et al, 2005).

One specific view of technology is the notion that the intent of designers is inscripted into the technology, which users read and interpreted, perhaps in ways other than intended (Woolgar, 1991; Grint & Woolgar, 1997). This contrasts with the view that a technology has both material properties and designed properties, both of which 'afford' possibilities for use (Winner, 1999). This view of technology as text offers a means to examine the specific group of technologies embraced by the term ICT. Attention is drawn attention to their symbolic dimensions (Yoneyama, 1997: 105) and the generation of meaning. Indeed, when the online technologies are examined, attention focuses upon the interface, in particular, the screen. Described by Thrift (2004) as kinetic surfaces, these screens are designed to be read.

One final theme to be raised is the relationship between technology and space. The exclusivity of each point in space (Simmel, 1908[1997]: 138) raises the question of whether technologies are appropriate for all locations. Use takes place locally and users widely vary in their experiences, knowledge and attitudes to technology. This elevates the importance of accommodating local social context in the uptake and use of technologies (cf. Woolgar, 2002: 14). This suggests that an understanding of use needs to focus upon the detail of actual practice.

Whilst this synthesis oversimplifies how technology has been examined and conceptualised, it reveals the limitations of empirical enquiries into the uptake and use of new forms of technologies. It also reveals that there have been developments in the manner in which technologies, in particular ICTs have been conceptualised.

However, it is apparent that there is still a limited understanding about the uneven and incomplete adoption of new forms of ICTs.

1.3   Overall Aims

The aim of this research is to build an understanding of the uneven and incomplete adoption of new forms of ICTs among certain communities of users. Such an endeavour, it has been shown, should be a fine grained study of actual practice.

There are one group of users, according to policy makers (Scottish Executive, 2006) and other commentators (Buhalis, 1998; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006), who are often perceived to benefit more than many others from the exploitation of online technologies. These are serviced accommodation providers, a group which comprises of 'bed and breakfasts', guest houses and hotels. This group are referred to throughout this thesis as 'hoteliers'.

A hotelier is conceptualised for the purpose of this study as a business in which the home has a presence, though this can be in one of two ways. First is the business with the home-space attached as a 'semi-detached' area, typified by small hotels. Second is the home which opens its doors to the visitor, as typified by the smaller B&Bs – the 'B&B culture'. Irrespective, this draws attention to the boundaries between public and private, home and work, though these boundaries may be very blurred.

Hoteliers have a need to engage with people at a distance. Online technologies provide a powerful promotional medium, allowing people to gaze into distant locations from the convenience of their arm-chair and explore potential destinations, becoming familiar with the targeted destination prior to a visit. It also provides a means of engagement with providers of tourism products so that they can book any aspects of their visit prior to arrival at their chosen destination. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity to hoteliers as to how they can best exploit these online developments. Despite the growth in the number of people buying online, in particular tourism related services (e.g. flights), the impact of this upon hoteliers varies considerably (Lituchy & Rail, 2000; Nysveen & Lexhagen, 2001; Buick, 2003; Langvogt, 2004).

This community provides an attractive study group in contrast to more general studies of e-commerce. It offers a large heterogeneous population comprising both international corporate organisations and much smaller family businesses and with a range of intermediate sized businesses between. It is a spatially distributed group, allowing potential digital divide issues to be revealed. It has been a relatively stable community over time, offering the opportunity to provide insight into longer-term use. The location of the study, Scotland, can be considered to have a relatively well developed telecommunications infrastructure (Scottish Enterprise, 2000). Tourism in Scotland is of sufficient economic importance both locally and nationally, to attract institutional interest and support.

1.4   Research Questions

The basic concern is with smaller businesses and how they exploit online technologies. Online technologies are viewed here simply as email, online booking facilities and a website or web-page. A number of questions arise about their exploitation, with the central actor being the hotelier.

The first main question relates to the hotelier and how the hotelier exploits online technologies. This unpacks to reveal two further questions:

- How do hoteliers take ownership of their own online presence (e.g. email and own website)? Are their different approaches and practices, with some hoteliers being more innovative than others? Can different adopter characteristics be identified? What are the difficulties experienced during this process?

- How do hoteliers to exploit the services of online intermediaries? This raises questions about the different forms of intermediaries. What are these different forms? Do intermediaries exhibit different levels of interest by hoteliers, with some being more attractive to hoteliers than others? Why might this be so? Do intermediaries make different demands upon the hotelier, thus shaping how the hotelier takes up and uses their services? What are these demands and how do hoteliers handle these demands? What problems might a hotelier face using the services of intermediaries?

The second main question concerns any externalities (e.g. institutional policies and rhetoric, industry developments) which may condition how hoteliers take up and use online technologies. What are these externalities and how do they affect hoteliers? What problems might they cause a hotelier?

The third main question is how to conceptually explain observations – findings. What analytical device will provide an understanding of hotelier online practices? Are there any circumstances in which the assumptions underlying this device are challenged?

In each of the questions, the hotelier's role is primarily that of a user of online technologies, but may also be that of an innovator.

Discussions about the issues raised are to be found distributed throughout the four empirical chapters, since they are not mutually exclusive. Whilst all these issues have been addressed, some issues have been examined in much more detail than others.

1.5   Importance of these questions

The importance of these questions is perhaps captured in the comment received from VisitScotland's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) on the 15th January 2007:

> we would like to better understand…. Why do so few businesses adopt "innovative online practices" (presumably booking/selling on-line, blogging, social networking etc.) given that this is clearly the future for tourism. We would indeed like all businesses to have web sites and create/use as many channels as is consistent with their marketing objectives to promote themselves.

The imperative to exploit online technologies that is raised in this chapter's opening paragraph is repeated here. Clearly, businesses are not exploiting online technologies and this is viewed as a practical concern within the industry.

However, perhaps the question is not "Why do so few businesses adopt "innovative online practices", but why is "innovative online practices" not an issue for these businesses. By answering this and other related questions, then it may be possible to understand why some technologies are more readily taken up than others. This aims to penetrate and reveal the underlying dynamics relating to the adoption and use of online technologies (or in some cases their non-adoption and non-use).

1.6 Structure of Thesis

The thesis is organised into nine chapters, with three appendices providing supplementary material. .The structure is outlined in Figure 1.

The research aims and questions are outlined in chapter one.

Chapter two presents an outline of salient aspects about tourism. It draws upon a historical perspective of tourism in Scotland to reveal the legacy of the era of resorts and 'touring', this being the positioning of hoteliers so that they can be 'found'. However, tourism is an ever changing landscape and online technologies form part of this changing landscape, with being found online being a feature of this. Hoteliers are reconfiguring themselves to cater for these changes. Other developments include the

demise of the membership based Area Tourist Boards in 2005, the publication of the

fifth national tourism strategy in 2006 and the provision of a national tourism portal

(vistscotand.com) in 2002.
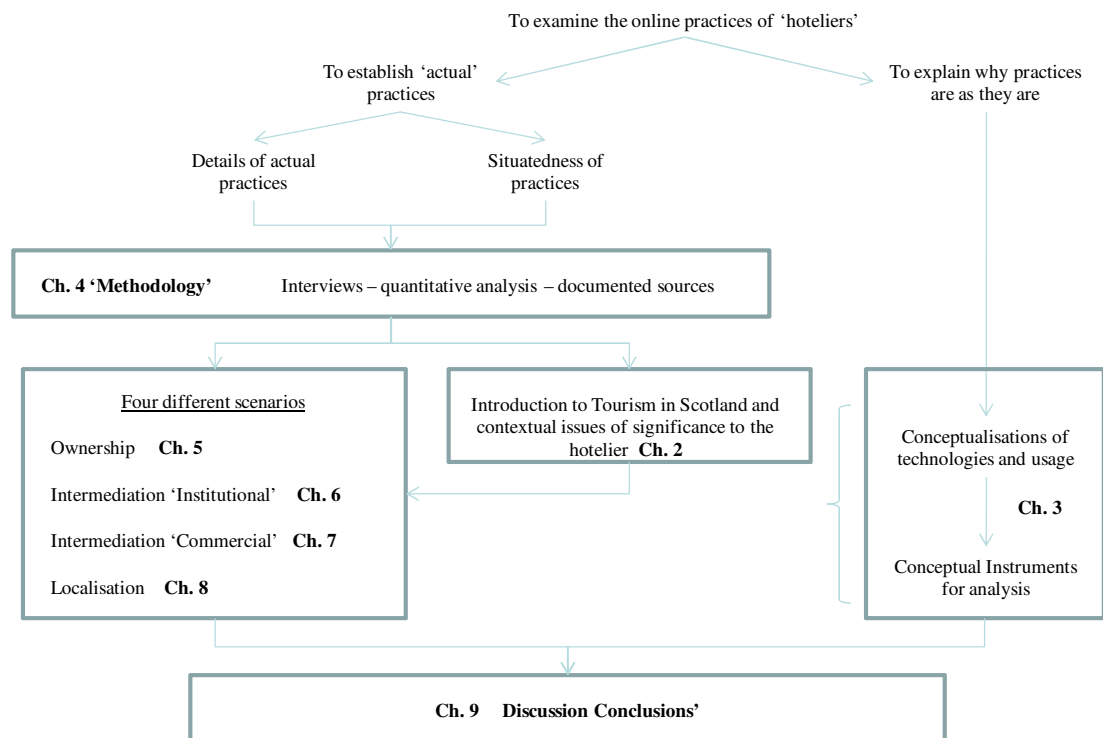
Figure 1   Diagram of thesis structure

Chapter three outlines different conceptualisation of technology, making the

distinction between the more conventional deterministic view and the counter-view

emphasising the social elements. ICTs are singled out due to their privileging the

symbolic domain in use, whilst the material aspects are rendered invisible. When

attention focuses upon innovation and use, different conceptualisations are available,

of which 'domestication' offers itself as an attractive analytical device for this study

due to the attention it gives to the user. This forms the main analytical device of the

analytical framework, which is presented in the closing section of this chapter. This

introduces the concept of 'the busy day', two forms of intermediation and two contrasting idealisations of the ethos underpinning hotelier practices.

The methodology is presented in chapter four. This chapter commences with an outline of the research strategy. The research is conducted from an interpretivistic perspective, which adopts a mixed methodology in order to generate a rich insight into online practices, recognising the importance of different lenses to achieve this. The abductive emphasis of interviews aims to understand why users are conducting themselves in the way they are. The inductive emphasis of the quantitative and historical analyses is to identify any features or patterns in the bigger picture. The detail of the methodology is presented in the second section. The chapter concludes with an overview of the analytical approach, drawing upon the analytical framework developed in the preceding chapter.

Chapters five to eight present the empirical details and their analysis. Each chapter presents a scenario which a hoteliers can enact in isolation or in combination with any of the others. Chapter five focuses upon the "simple" and mundane act of booking accommodation, not from the visitor's perspective, but from the accommodation provider's perspective. Attention is paid to those practices that relate to the use of email for bookings and the development of an own website to promote the business. The sixth and seventh chapters examine the use of intermediary websites and issues relating to their domestication. Intermediation offers accommodation providers with online promotion and, in specific cases, allow them to receive enquiries by the traditional modes of telephone or fax without the need for

computing facilities. Chapter six focuses upon the use of the 'official' national tourism website and issues relating to remotely located online booking facilities. This emphasises the configuration – incorporation aspects of domestication. Chapter seven examines commercial online intermediation, which places emphasis upon appropriation-conversion. Chapter eight examines the local online promotion of localities, their appropriation by hoteliers and also the local collective efforts of local businesses including hoteliers to promote their locality online. The analysis of this collective activity challenges the domestication framework, calling for a more sophisticate analytical tool.

The final chapter (nine) comprises eight sections. It commences with a brief statement outlining the problem and the research questions (section 9.3), establishes the analytical perspective from which the questions are being examined (section 9.4), provides a brief account of the research journey and modifications to the route (section 9.5), proposes the contribution of this research (section 9.6) presents a summary of the empirical findings (section 9.7), discusses the conceptual insights revealed from the study (section 9.8), considers the implications from the study for both practice and future research (section 9.9) and concludes with a summing-up of what has been learnt from this study (section 9.10).

Three appendices are also presented. The first provides an empirical review of what is known about online practices. It provides material which substantiates claims in section 3.2 of the descriptive nature of much of this research. The second appendix provides a more complete insight into the conceptualisation of technologies than that

presented in chapter three, from which much of the content of chapter three is drawn. The third appendix presents the metaphor of tailoring to conceptually explain the dynamics of local collective behaviour. This is referenced in section 8.4.7, where it is claimed that a more sophisticated approach than provided by domestication is required, with the metaphor of tailoring being offered.

Chapter 2   TOURISM IN SCOTLAND

I had for many years felt a strong desire to visit Scotland: its wild and romantic scenery; its many monuments of rude and barbarous ages; the marvellous events of its ancient and modern history; and the spirit of liberty which still lingers among its mountains, and breathes in its native poetry, had long operated, as so many talismans, to allure me to its soil

(Bowman, J.R., 1826-7 [1986])

2.1   Aim

The aim of this chapter is to outline the broader contextual landscape that serves as a backdrop to the domestication of online technologies by hoteliers.

2.2   Introduction

Tourism in Scotland, in contrast to other industries, is a multi-faceted industry that comprises a range of different sectors and embraces the public, voluntary and private domains. These sectors not only include tourism attractions and accommodation, but also food/drink, recreation, retail and transport. Within the private sector, many businesses tend to be small and, not unusually, family businesses. In the public domain, the role of Local Authorities should not be under-estimated as it has responsibility for local services and infrastructure.

The following account provides an overview of tourism in Scotland, focusing upon serviced accommodation provision. The aim is to provide an insight into how the industry has emerged into its current state and thereby understand the main influences that have shaped it and identify some arguably key issues affecting today's hotelier. The chapter is structured into three parts.

The first (section 2.3) presents a historical insight into developments. It reveals a shifting landscape in which new technologies (e.g. the car) emerge to allow different types of visitors to access different types of locations. For a hotelier, this highlights the importance of 'being found', with the current composition and distribution of hoteliers throughout Scotland being a legacy of the need to be found by the respective types of visitor (e.g. the 'tourist').

The second part (section 2.4) reveals that Scottish tourism, as elsewhere, is undergoing change. A new landscape is emerging as new types of visitors seek new types of experience and the new online technologies assume a role in shaping the visitor's experience. For a hotelier this presents the dilemma of how to respond, in particular, how to be found in the new domain of the 'virtual'..

The third part (section 2.5) presents an insight into institutional developments and how these attempt to influence both the visitor and the tourism product provider (e.g. the hotelier). Three specific developments are perhaps significant for today's hotelier. The first is development and provision of a national online tourism portal which provides a service for both those seeking and providing tourism services. However, this is not as enthusiastically embraced by hoteliers as might be assumed. Second, is the publication of a national tourism strategy in 2006 (Scottish Tourism: The Next Decade - a framework for change" (Scottish Executive, 2006)), with its goals for industry participants, particularly hoteliers, in their utilisation of online technologies. Thirdly, is the changing structure of tourism resulting from the demise

of the ATBs in 2005. Concern about local visibility to potential visitors world-wide has given rise to local collaborative efforts.

2.3   Historical perspective

The Scottish tourism industry emerged as a distinctive activity in the latter part of the 18th Century (Durie, 2003). Indeed, the long history of Scottish tourism has been characterised by a range of developments over time. Whilst these have allowed various authors to distinguish different phases (Seaton, 1998), perhaps the key characteristic underlying these developments is improved accessibility and the development of different modes of transport. With growth in tourism, word-of-mouth, travel guides and newspaper articles supplanted the early "explorer" travel accounts to raise awareness of Scottish localities. Whilst royal patronage (e.g. Queen Victoria) popularised Highland culture during the 19th Century (Seaton, 1998), the steamship and railway contributed to the growth in tourism throughout the 19th Century. This gave rise to the emergence of resorts in many parts of accessible Scotland. These resorts fed of daily excursionists, the longer stay 'residencies' of the wealthier classes and the granting of trade holidays to the working-classes. As localities developed, through the exploitation of fashions (e.g. water cures) and the 'construction' of attractions (e.g. golf courses and dance halls), competition between them intensified. Towards the end of the 19th Century, town councils realised the importance of promoting their location, previously done by private sector interests, resulting in the setting up of "publicity committees" (Durie, 2003: 131).

However, perhaps a turning point was the introduction of the bicycle in the 1870s and the motorcar in the 1890s (Durie, 2003). Rather than being confined to the beaten track and specific 'destinations', people could access hitherto less known areas throughout Scotland. The tourist 'toured', stopping off for one or more nights here and there. Duffield (1977, 'xx') reports that in 1973, "half the visits to the Highlands and Islands were touring holidays" with 'private cars' being the dominant mode of transport. Between May to October around 80% of all holiday trips in the Highlands and Islands were "main holidays". Furthermore, over 50% of trips in the Highlands and Islands lasted 14 nights or more during June to August, though not all this time was necessarily spent within the Highlands and Islands (Duffield, 1977). However, in part owing to the short duration of the tourist 'season' (traditionally June to September), one of the less pleasant aspects of Scottish tourism throughout its history including the present, has been the not uncommon discovery that there is a shortage of accommodation, particularly in popular locations. This exposes the majority of tourists, i.e. those who do not forward-book a room, to the potential experience of an uncomfortable night. Whilst new hotels have been built, particularly in resorts, the excess demand has continuously offered opportunities for people to open up their house to the overnight stay, particularly alongside roadside locations. This has elevated the importance of location for these lodging houses so that they can be 'found'.

2.3.1 **The legacy of 'being found'**

The legacy of this age is the manner of distribution of serviced accommodation throughout Scotland (Figure 2). The distinction is made between end destinations (e.g. resorts) with their clusters of accommodation and touring routes with accommodation aligned along these routes. Both attract particular types of accommodation as illustrated visually in Figure 3. The numerous small hoteliers (B&Bs) appear to be aligned along the main roadways of Scotland, whereas guest houses tend to be located in towns. Hotels are distributed throughout Scotland, though cluster in towns and cities. A clearer demonstration is provided in Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4. These diagrams detail the distribution of hoteliers within the City of Edinburgh. Figure 3 reveals visually both linear and cluster patterns. When the main roads are super-imposed on this map (Figure 4), this reveals clustering in the city centre, in the old seaside resort of Portobello and in the Newington area. It also reveals the alignment along the major roads. Indeed a linear pattern linking the centre to Leith marks the main road between the centre and Leith. This pattern perhaps reflects a traditional dependence upon 'passing trade', where, if a tourist likes the locality being driven through, then the tourist will seek out accommodation in that locality, driving past hoteliers and selecting one that appears attractive. If full, then an accommodation provider would pass the tourist on to a friend providing serviced accommodation, perhaps not in such an advantageous position. Accommodation providers, where possible, exploit their position to capture this passing trade. The presence of a linear alignment of hoteliers is perhaps a trace of a former behaviour, when passing trade was an important means to capture custom.
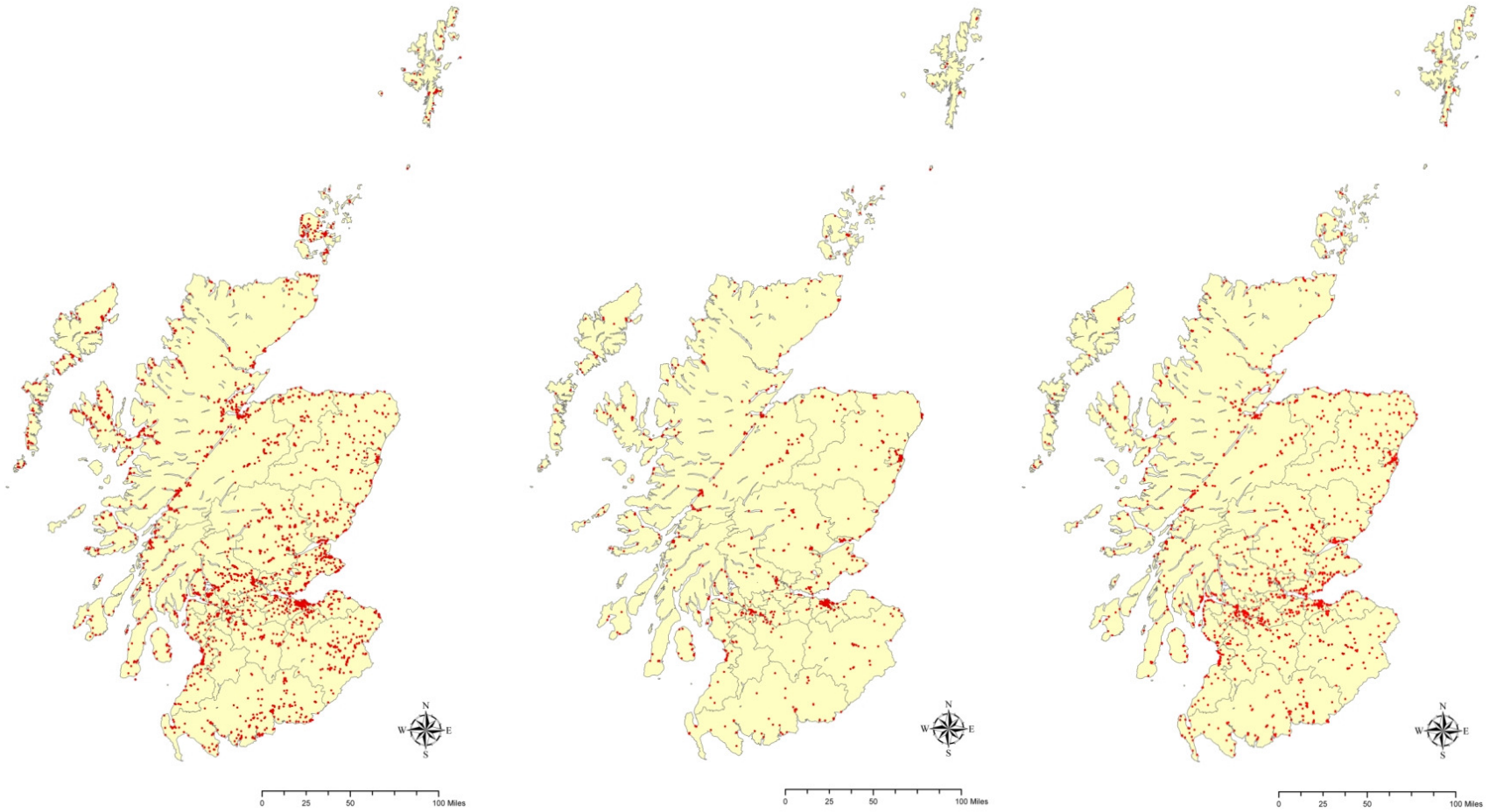
Figure 2   Distribution of   a) B&Bs,   b) Guest Houses and   c) Hotels for 2005
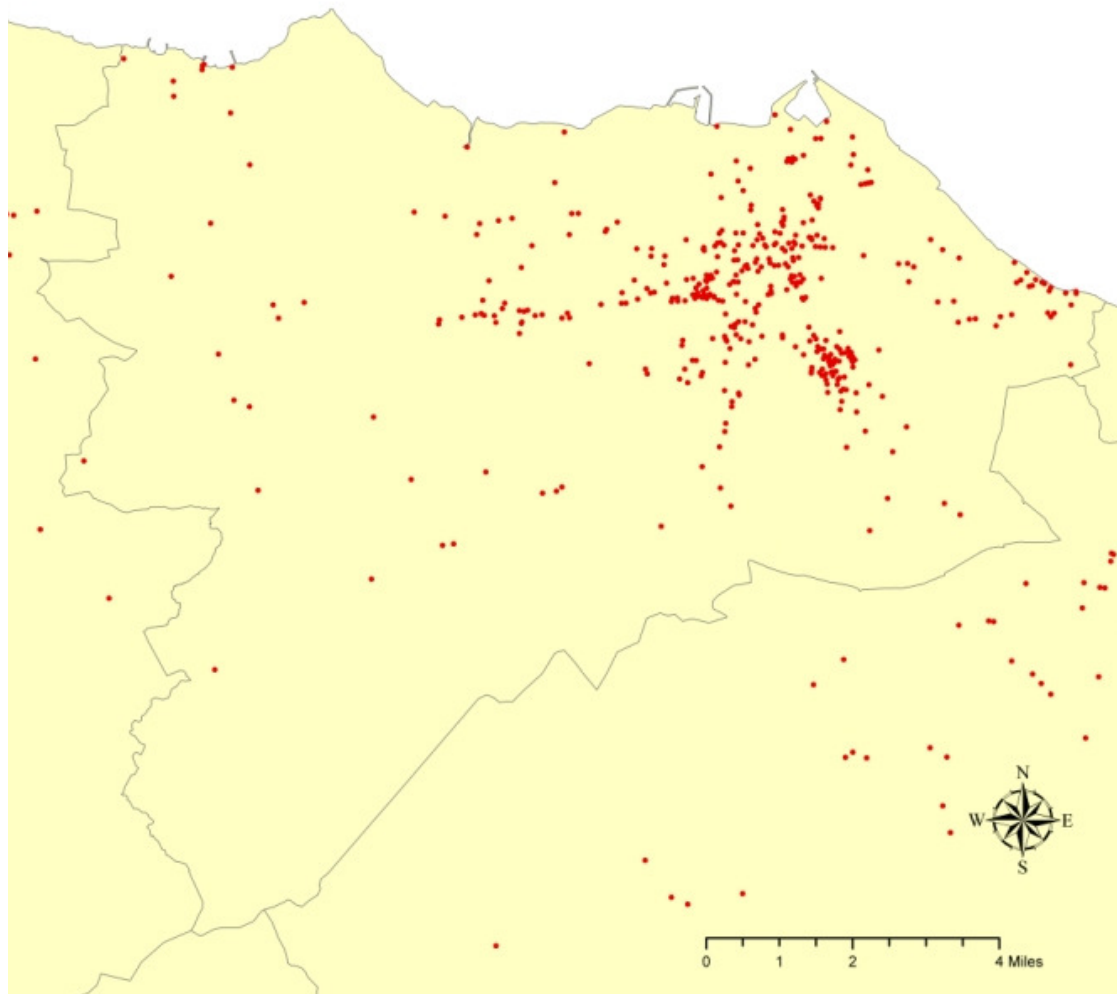
Figure 3   The location of hoteliers in the City of Edinburgh for 2005
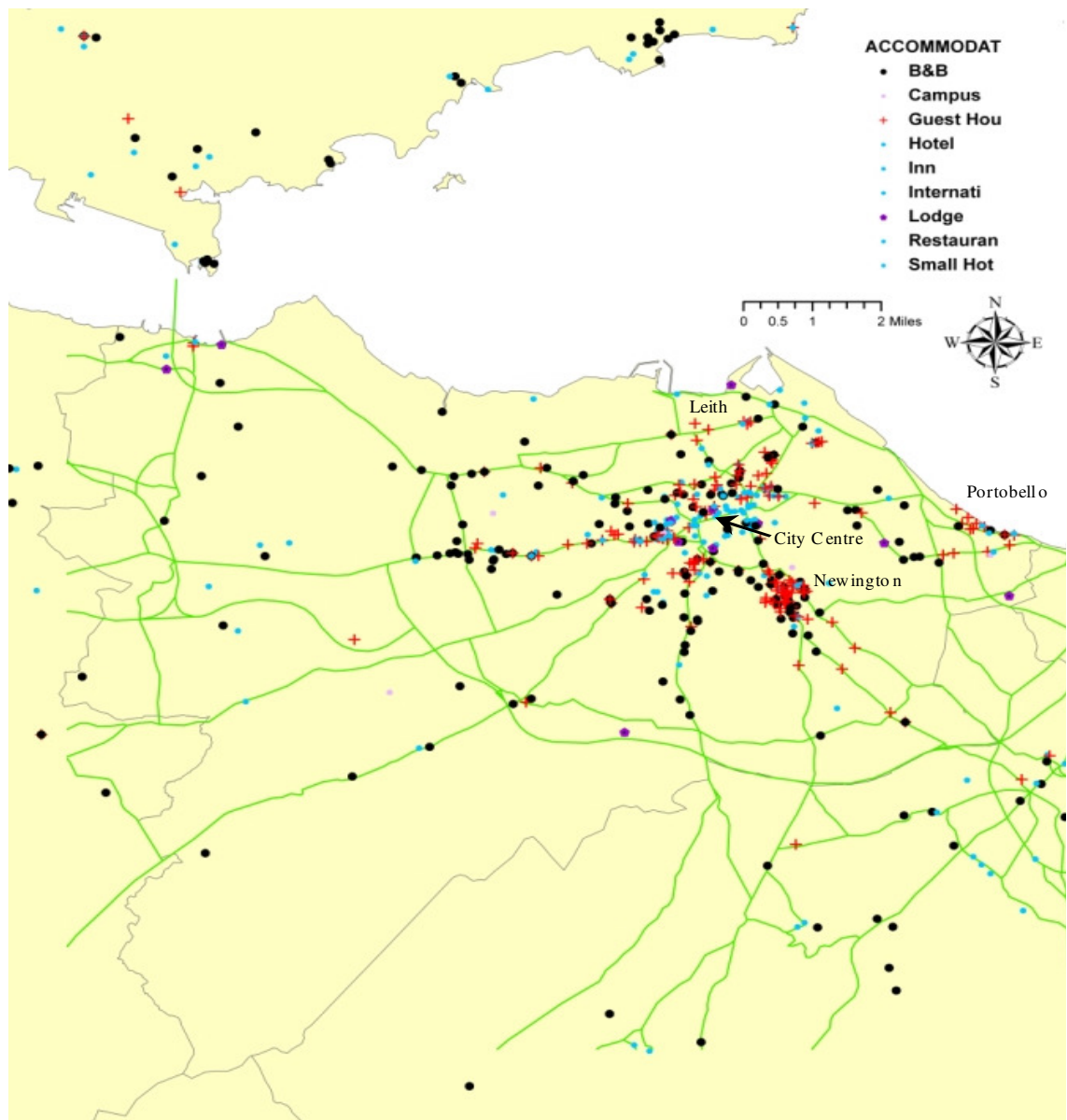
**Figure 4   Map of the distribution of hoteliers in the City of Edinburgh
for 2005, by type and with main roads (green) superimposed**

This depiction however needs to acknowledge the impact of local planning
authorities upon location. Prior to 1947 anyone could let out rooms to visitors. The
Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1947, together with The Town and
Country Planning (Use Classes) (Scotland) Order (1997) established criteria defining
whether planning permission was required if letting rooms in domestic properties.

Local authorities, who, by the end of the 19th Century, started to recognise the benefits of providing amenities to support the opportunities of tourism (Heeley, 1981), particularly in the resorts, were empowered to set their own policies as to where hoteliers could trade. Edinburgh City Council established planning guidelines in 1987 to take into account local amenities and residents. These attempted to confine new serviced accommodation to the main tourism traffic routes and adjacent areas, though established businesses were primarily unaffected. Nevertheless, from an accommodation provider's perspective this would not necessarily be a major issue as the need to capture passing trade would imply the desirability of a good location on these main tourism traffic routes.

Examination of the composition of these clusters and alignments in terms of type of accommodation (Figure 4, with an enlargement of the central area presented in Figure 5) reveals further distinctions. Hotels appear to be located predominantly in the centre, though isolated hotels are scattered throughout the locality. Guesthouses appear to dominate in the two other clusters of Newington and Portobello as well as the area to the north of the centre. Bed and breakfasts are more distributed, though appear aligned with major roads. Each portrays a possibly different way of capturing the visitor, perhaps highlighting the distinction between the passing trade of the tourist and those visitors who have pre-chosen their end destination. This suggests two contrasting idealised types or models of hoteliers based upon how "found".
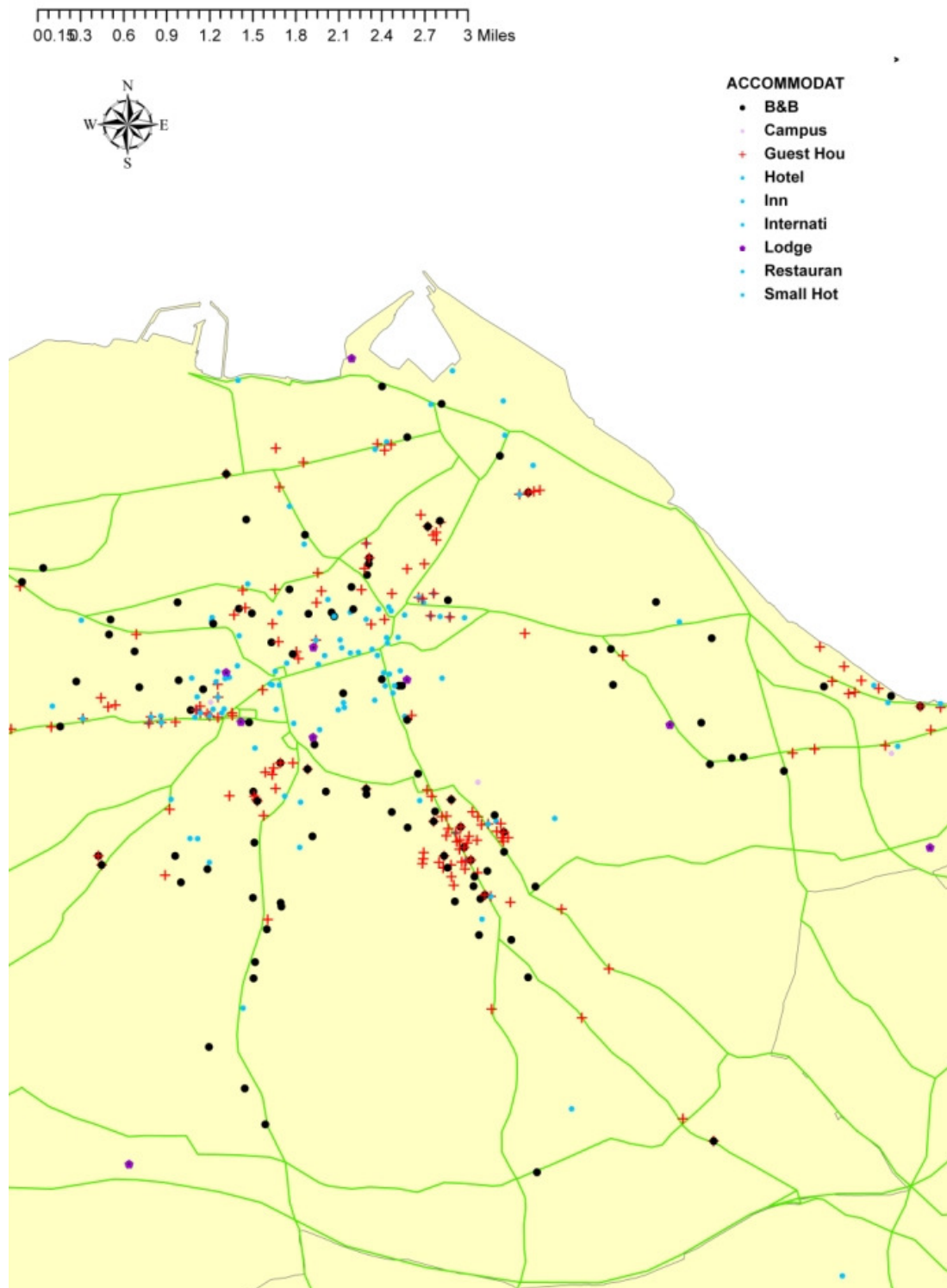
Figure 5 **Map of the distribution of hoteliers in the City of Edinburgh for 2005, by type and with main roads (green) superimposed**

The idealised models revealed by the distinction between the visitor travelling to an end-destination and the touring visitor passing-by is presented in Figure 6.

	End destination	Touring
Location of accommodation	Location of interest (e.g. resort, city)	Roadside en-route
Type of accommodation	Guest House, Hotel	Bed and Breakfast
Congregation of accommodation	Cluster	Isolated
Manner of being found	Promotion (e.g. brochure)	Found 'in-transit'
Manner of securing accommodation	Pre-booked	Passing or local Tourist Information Centre (TIC) (on the day)
Duration of stay	Week, Fortnight	One night
Access to accommodation	Train, Other (non-car)	Car

Figure 6   Contrasting idealised models of hoteliers based on how 'found' in the spatial domain

However, it is postulated that this is a traditional view of tourism, which is being displaced by a number of developments that characterise this period in Scotland as one of transition. It is suggested that these developments are giving rise to a new idealised model, which is revealed by examining these developments in the next section.

2.4   Scottish Tourism in a period of transition

An examination of tourism in Scotland today is a snapshot of an ever-changing landscape, which also needs to be considered within a global context. Tourism is regarded as "one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world" (WTO[1]).

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[1] WTO website www.unwto.org/aboutwto/why/en/why.php?op=1 [accessed 24th April 2008]

Over the period 1995 to 2007 the international industry[2] has grown by an average of over 4% in terms of international tourism arrivals with it growing by 5.6% in 2007 over 2006 (WTO, 2008: 1). However, the WTO forecasts the rate to slow "due to the uncertainties posed by the global economy affecting consumer confidence and constraining disposable income" (WTO, 2008:1). This sustained growth has facilitated by various factors including an increase in leisure time, greater disposal income, favourable exchange rates and ease of access to an increasing number of international destinations. A critical trend that possibly underpins the overall pattern of change in favour of cities is a change in the duration of stay, reflecting the changed lifestyle of today's visitor.

> One of the most important trends in world tourism over the past decade has been the rise in short-break trips… Scottish tourism has been particularly affected by this trend with figures for 2000 showing that 91% of trips to Scotland were for 7 days or less. This pattern can be part explained by changes in lifestyle over recent years.
>
> (Scottish Parliament, 2002: 2)

With over 200 countries promoting tourism, Scotland faces increasing competition from these other destinations (Scottish Executive, 2006). However, the stimulation of demand is offset by the danger of supply inertia; the reluctance to change to the changing demands for quality, authenticity or value.

Nevertheless, within Scotland, as elsewhere, change is endemic to the offerings of destinations, the manner destinations are found and accessed, the popularity of destinations, the type of visitor frequenting specific destinations and the duration of stay. These changes appear to be, in-part, facilitated through the exploitation of online technologies. Moreover, more online technology facilitated change appears to

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[2] This excludes domestic tourism, i.e. residents holidaying in their own county, which in Scotland's case is significant (see section **Error! Reference source not found.** for details)

be on the horizon (Yeoman, 2006). Indeed there may be a vicious interplay between change and the exploitation of online technologies, each fuelling the other. However, whilst attention may unconsciously focus upon consumer exploitation of on-line technologies, what are the implications with regard to providers of tourism products, in particular, hoteliers?

If tourists are tending to congregate in central locations this suggests that peripheral city locations are under threat. There is anecdotal evidence that this is happening, with the former resort of Portobello (Figure 4) being an example of a tourism locality within the periphery of the city of Edinburgh in decline.

If tourists are shifting towards central city locations or point-destinations, then the threat extends beyond peripheral city locations to rural locations. This is exacerbated with the assumed decline in the traditional touring holiday and 'passing-trade' and a correspondingly assumed move towards planned trips and forward booking. This concern has seen expression at a Parliamentary level and how tourists can be 'dispersed' to rural areas.

> Throughout the inquiry the Committee heard evidence on the importance of dispersal in order to ensure tourism growth in all areas of Scotland. 'Dispersal' means encouraging tourists travelling to Scotland to visit different areas of the country, from the Highlands and Islands to the Borders, thereby distributing the economic benefits of tourism to all areas of Scotland.
> (Scottish Parliament, 2003: col 183).

The dispersal of overseas tourists is perhaps an increasingly significant issue due to the possible long-term decline in domestic tourism and the corresponding increase in overseas tourists. One of the difficulties with corroborating this is due to methodological changes in the data collection by official sources. Nevertheless, the

STB report "Tourism in Scotland 1981" reported that domestic tourists stayed 54-70 million nights over the period 1973 to 1981, with the number declining over time. The corresponding number of nights for overseas tourists ranged from 10 to 13.5 million nights. These figures contrast with the 47.2 million nights and 26.4 million nights respectively for domestic and overseas tourists in 2006. Support for the argument that there is long-term decline in domestic bed-nights is perhaps reflected in the shift away from the long-stay and touring holiday in Scotland, towards the short-break (Scottish Executive, 2006), against a backdrop of strong competition from low cost and accessible overseas locations. Furthermore, as has been noted, travel modes and, hence, access to city locations, differs from rural locations. Moreover, 'budget' services (e.g. airlines and hotels) are stimulating demand for city 'breaks'[3]. To further undermine this issue of dispersal, specific rural locations are perhaps being lost, as bypass roads navigate around towns and villages and allow faster travel and encourage more point-to-point journeys with fewer stop-offs. Thus, the importance of location to capture passing trade is being challenged by the declining importance of these traditional through-routes. Traditional capture points become a legacy of a by-gone age with occupancy declining over time and leading to a reduction in accommodation stock. The challenge facing hoteliers is no longer how to capture passing trade, but how to get trade to pass through in the first place.

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[3] Brian Hay, Visiting Professor, Strathclyde University, personal communication, 1st May 2008

2.4.1 <u>Reconfiguring the hotelier</u>

The preceding, perhaps oversimplified, analysis hints at the changing manner in which hoteliers are being found. More importantly, it suggests that hoteliers need to reconsider the manner in which they are being found. The development of online technologies has created a new "virtual" domain for being found. The online tourist travels through the locality via the browser and search engine. Just as physical location was important for the tourist driving past, location on a search engine is important for the tourist browsing or searching online.

These technologies and the act of pre-booking has perhaps diminished the importance of physical locations with regard to 'passing through' and 'passing trade'. At the same time, it has perhaps elevated the location as a pre-booked end-point destination. It reflects a shift in the way the tourist tours: from tours in the spatial domain to tours in the virtual domain. In doing so, it creates the challenge for hoteliers of how to exploit these online technologies, to be found in this new domain.

Indeed, this translation from physical location to online location introduces an interesting issue. If physical location has become less of an issue from the point of view of the accommodation provider for getting passing trade, then this suggests that the accommodation provider needs to establish how to position online both the locality to attract visitors and the property to attract the booking. This is perhaps not easily achieved by individual properties, lending support to the argument for the use

of intermediaries or for collective action. This will be explored in subsequent chapters.

It has been suggested that the developments that make this a period of transition, have implications for serviced accommodation provision and are likely to give rise to a new idealised model. The preceding analysis suggests that there are two contrasting new idealised models of hoteliers based upon how they are 'found' (Figure 7). Whilst these are not necessarily replacements for the old models, they reflect the shift from being found in the spatial domain to being found in the virtual domain. The fundamental change is a shift away from passing trade towards being found online and booked ahead.

	City	Indeterminate
Location of accommodation	City Centre	Location of specific attraction
Type of accommodation	Standardised Brand or Speciality	Authentic and Quality (but not necessarily graded by the QA scheme)
Congregation of accommodation	Cluster	Isolated
Manner of being found	ONLINE	
Manner of securing accommodation	Pre-booked [online]	Pre-booked [telephone or email]
Duration of stay	Several nights	Several nights to a week
Access to accommodation	Train-plane	Car

Figure 7   Contrasting idealised models of new style accommodation providers based upon how 'found' in the virtual domain

For the city based hotelier, a particular type of visitor (e.g. short-break affluent and time conscious) will seek a short-break stay in an affordable standardised and

branded accommodation, centrally located in a city destination with easy access by train or plane.

In contrast, the indeterminate hotelier can be found anywhere. It may offer a specific service and has proximate locational advantages. It is likely to attract a discerning visitor with a specific interest. There is emphasis upon authenticity and quality, but quality in a manner that does not fit within prescribed quality schemes (e.g. does not offer technology based services such as television). This accommodation is likely to be provided by the smaller provider.

The common denominator for both is their being found online. However, whilst online booking may typify the city based hotelier, booking the indeterminate accommodation provider may be by phone or email, with the booking process perhaps involving a discussion about the visit.

The value of these four different idealised models is that they perhaps highlight issues that the more traditional hotelier needs to be alert to within the changing landscape of Scottish tourism. In view of the importance of tourism to Scotland, which is discussed in the next section, it can be argued that these businesses need to be alert to the opportunities offered by online technologies to compensate for the decline in the traditional holidaymaker.

2.5   Institutional involvement in Scottish tourism

The importance of tourism to Scotland has been recognised at a national level by the government and associated institutions, against a backdrop of increasing international competition (WTO, 2008). Indeed, the structure and practices of the tourism industry has in part been shaped by institutional developments[4]. Furthermore, Scotland is the only country to have a single government agency covering all aspects of tourism (e.g. regional and national marketing, local tourism information centres and national accommodation booking facilities[5]). The creation the Scottish Tourist Board (STB) in 1969 (renamed VisitScotland in 2000) and the formation of regional membership organisations (Area Tourist Boards (ATBs)) in 1982, suggests the desire to co-ordinate the development of the industry and improve its performance. The objectives of VisitScotland, "the national tourism organisation for Scotland"[6], include the provision of "strategic direction to the industry", the marketing of "Scotland as a must-visit, must-return destination" and the addition of "value to the visitor experience through the operation and development of our quality assurance schemes"[7].

The status of tourism was elevated in November 2001, when tourism was explicitly assigned ministerial status within the Scottish Parliament through the role of "Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport", this, in 2007, being replaced by the "Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism", supported by the "Economy, Energy

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[4] For details of this refer to Harwood (2008)
[5] Brian Hay, Visiting Professor, Strathclyde University, personal communication, 1st May 2008
[6] Available from the tourism trade website www.visitscotland.org [accessed 25th April 2008]
[7] Available from the tourism trade website www.visitscotland.org [accessed 25th April 2008]

and Tourism Committee" (EETC). Within the Scottish Government, formerly The Scottish Executive and renamed in 2007, there is a Tourism Team within the "Economy, Energy and Tourism Directorate".

Two other agencies also have an interest in tourism. The Enterprise Agencies (Scottish Enterprise (SE) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)) following their reorganisation on the 1st April 2008 now focus their activities upon supporting business growth and innovation. Other public bodies active within tourism include Historic Scotland, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Tourism and Environment Forum, all of which reflect the broad range of interests within tourism. At a local level, 32 Local Authorities throughout Scotland have, to varying degrees, a vested interest in tourism and the provision and maintenance of infrastructure and services, including local attractions (e.g. museums).

In sum, government bodies have tended to adopt relatively non-interventionist roles, emphasising their promotional and support roles, against a backdrop of trying to provide direction.

2.5.1 Developments

The structural dynamics of Scottish tourism is not static, but is in an on ongoing state of transformation (examined in Harwood, 2008; 2009a). Whilst events have been traced back to the 19th Century (section 2.3), since 1969, institutional[8] developments

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[8] The term 'institutional' is used to denote government bodies (e.g. the Scottish Government, VisitScotland) and not in the sense implied by institutional theory

include a succession of national tourism strategies, governmental reviews and re-organisations (examined in Harwood, 2008; 2009a). Structurally there has been a trend towards increasing centralisation of tourism services provided by both the STB / VisitScotland and the ATBs (Harwood, 2008). Indeed, there are perhaps three key events which have perhaps shaped the current situation. The first is the demise on the 1st April 2005, of the membership based ATBs and the vacuum that it left for expression from tourism businesses. The second relates specifically to the tourism strategy "Scottish Tourism: the next decade – a tourism framework for change" (Scottish Executive, 2006), published in March, 2006, with its vision of growth for tourism in Scotland. The third concerns the commercial provision of an online website (visitscotland.com) to promote Scotland and Scottish tourism businesses, and the opposition this has received, manifesting in a petition to the Scottish Parliament's "Petitions Committee".

The demise of the ATB

Prior to their disbandment in 1st April 2005, there were 14 Area Tourist Boards (ATBs). These were membership organisations open to anyone active within tourism, though members were required to have a VisitScotland Quality Assurance grading. Many members were accommodation providers. The activities of these ATBs included promotion of the locality, the provision of local information through positioned Tourist Information Centres (TICs) and lobbying as the voice of it members. Since the 1st April 2005, promotional activities were subsumed within VisitScotland, with services provided on a transaction basis rather than a membership basis.

A Ministerial announcement of the dissolution of the ATB on the 11th March 2004, outlined the proposed replacement structure:

> We have decided that this should be done by replacing the ATBs with an integrated VisitScotland network. This Scotland-wide network will consist of local tourism hubs and will have responsibility for the delivery of the national tourism strategy in its area. But the hubs will also have the ability to respond to circumstances in their areas, and will link with the growing number of private sector tourism action groups across Scotland. Unlike the ATBs, the new VisitScotland tourism network will not be a membership organisation, but will charge for all services to tourism businesses, as indeed VisitScotland does at present for membership of its QA scheme….
> ….we propose that the system of local authority grants to ATBs should be replaced by service level agreements which each local authority would negotiate with VisitScotland for the tourism services they require in their areas. This will enable authorities to see exactly what they are receiving for their money.   (McAveety, 2004)

The hubs were to be up and running by April 2005, with a further year allowed for improvement.

However, whether the changes have been effective in achieving improved engagement is open to question (Harwood, 2009a). Further, the changes do not appear to be universally welcomed, as reported on the 3rd August 2007 in The Scotsman (Donald, 2007b) about one local response to dissatisfaction with VisitScotland, the new 'service' model and the dissolution of the 'membership' based ATBs. The Borders Tourist Board (www.borderstouristboard.com) was launched on the 7th June 2007 to provide cost-effective marketing for members and to promote the locality of the Scottish Borders[9].

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[9] www.borderstouristboard.com, accessed 27th March 2008

Indeed, the demise of the ATBs appears to have triggered the creation of local tourism groups (e.g. Orkney Tourism Group) comprising tourism related businesses. Although this is not a new phenomena (one of the earliest groups (HolidayMull) was formed on the island of Mull in 1977 and the Association of Dumfries and Galloway Accommodation Providers (ADGAP) was formed in 2002 in response to the setting up of visitscotland.com.) there is a perception that these groups are now proliferating[10]. Their emergence is restoring the structural disequilibrium created with the demise of the ATB (Harwood, 2009a). Whilst these groups have not replaced the ATB, they address tourism issues, but at a more local level which can include the promotion of both local businesses and the locality. They vary in their organisation, activities and how they are recognised by Local Authorities and VisitScotland, with some (e.g. The Skye and Lochalsh Marketing Group) receiving Challenge Funding from VisitScotland. Further, the formation of local groups appears to moving into a new phase, with local councils taking a greater interest in the management and promotion of local tourism, exemplified by events on Shetland.

The Shetland Tourism Association was established in response the dissolution of the ATBs in 2005 in order provide a membership based organisation to represent the interests of Shetland's tourism stakeholders (Shetland Islands Council, 2008). Further, during March and April, 2009, the online Shetland Times reported about local concern over the restructuring of the VisitScotland run tourist office in Lerwick and the shift of local tourism related decisions to the Scottish mainland. On the 6th June, 2008, it was reported that the Shetland Islands Council had decided to award "a

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[10] VisitScotland Board meeting minutes, 22nd September 2006, www.visitscotland.org/22_sept_minutes__2_.pdf, accessed 26th December 2008]

grant of £330,000 for a "destination marketing organisation", with a service-level agreement to be drawn up with VisitScotland to keep the promotion of the isles under local control" (Riddell, 2008). Furthermore, several members of Shetland Tourism Association were reported to have stated that "it was vital that the council takes control of its own destiny in marketing Shetland as an attractive place for tourists to visit" (Riddell, 2008). Shetland Tourism Association itself had been established in response to the dissolution of the ATBs in 2005, in order to provide a membership based organisation, which represents the interests of Shetland's tourism stakeholders, though VisitScotland did retain the right to promote Shetland through www.visitshetland.com (Shetland Islands Council, 2008). On the 20th February 2009, Thomason (2009), for the online Shetland Times, reported that a new body, "Promoting Shetland", was to be established taking over the role hitherto the responsibility of VisitScotland Furthermore it would receive funding, hitherto given to VisitScotland, from Shetland Islands Council.

"Scottish Tourism: the next decade – a tourism framework for change" (Scottish Executive, 2006)

The national tourism strategy published by the Scottish Executive in 2006 was the fifth national strategy since 1975 (Harwood 2008). It set a target of 50% growth in tourism revenue by 2015 and outlined a framework to achieve this. It included statements about the need to embrace online technologies the need for "easy booking" (Scottish Executive, 2006: 11). It states that "we need to harness new technology to deliver those products and services effectively" (ibid, 16) and:

> We will need to have an integrated marketing effort bringing the destination marketing activities of VisitScotland and VisitBritain and those of the private sector in line behind a common brand. A key component of this will be

effective use of the Internet as an information and sales channel for the industry (ibid, 17)

At the local level, 'Area Tourism Partnerships' are to be set up: "Area Tourism Partnerships will play a key role in driving and supporting change at local levels" (ibid, 45). Fourteen targets were set covering a range of issues which included participation within the QA scheme, development of skills and exploitation of online technologies.

A national tourism portal: visitscotland.com

The role of the public sector as an active intermediary is not a new phenomenon within Scotland. Traditionally, many hoteliers have relied upon promotion both through the accommodation brochure produced by their local Area Tourist Board (ATB) and through the Tourist Information Centres (TICs) run by the ATBs. The TIC would act as a point of contact between the accommodation provider and seeker, which involved phoning around accommodation providers until accommodation was sought. However, since 1984, there have been several attempts to develop an automated booking facility for use by the TICs, thereby reducing the time taken to make a booking within a TIC. Indeed, the attraction of facilitating bookings has led to expensive systems and, more recently, to online systems. There have been four successive phases of development: Hi-Line system (1984-1992), Integra system (1992-1996), "Ossian" (1996-2002), visitscotland.com (2002 – present). The first three were relatively short-lived, but each has been surrounded by controversy.

The desire to get online gave rise to the STB's launch in 1995 of its first promotional website, www.scotourist.org.uk. This was followed in August, 1996 by

www.holiday.scotland.net, which later provided details of hoteliers registered with the STB Quality Assurance (QA) scheme. This was evidence of the WTO's (1999: 67) observation, that "from 1996 onwards, a lot of DMOs started taking the Web seriously", which reflected the shift from the Internet being viewed as a peripheral ICT issue to becoming a key element of marketing.

One of the most notable projects during this period was "Ossian". Project Ossian was launched in 1996 by the Scottish Tourist Board (STB) to develop a sophisticated Scottish online presence. This website, which provided an online booking facility, went live in July, 2000, though it has had an eventful and troubled life. For example, it quickly became the victim of media attack. The Sunday Herald, 6th August 2000, reported:

> After the launch of a website geared to pulling in bookings and promoting Scotland on the net, surely things could not get any worse? It has and the industry is now facing the prospect of fighting for its life.... It was launched in a blaze of publicity by enterprise and lifelong learning minister Henry McLeish on July 24 and expectations were high that this would be the panacea that would solve all the problems which had beset the tourist trade in recent years. After just three weeks of life, visitscotland.com features 20,000 tourism-related products, including resort hotels, wilderness walks and weekend breaks. But already questions have been raised over whether it will ever be able to deliver the growth which, after a series of poor seasons, the Scottish tourist industry so desperately needs.
>
> (Smith & Fraser, 2000).

On the one-hand, a 'cutting-edge' technology had been launched; whilst on the other, impatience for the anticipated benefits and the issue of public ownership undermined its viability. Project Ossian was transferred into the private domain (visitcotland.com) on the 11th January 2002 through a Public Private Partnership

(PPP). Underpinning this most recent endeavour by the STB/VisitScotland is the belief that:

> tourists increasingly want to find out about trips and activities online, and to book them online in real time.. we therefore need to ensure that tourism businesses… are able to provide this service.
>
> (Scottish Executive, 2006: 30).

However, like its predecessor, this also became embroiled in trouble, with only a few fully exploiting its technological offerings. For example, an outcry soon emerged relating to a variety of issues concerning both this PPP and the website, now hosted under the domain name www.visitscotland.com, which included the charging structure, the manner of displaying accommodation providers contact details on the website and the fact that a private organisation was benefiting from these charges. Actions by disaffected tourism businesses included withdrawal from the ATBs and the development of competitive websites (e.g. www.visitsouthernscotland.com, Oldham, 2003). This culminated in a petition with approximately 695 signatories, being submitted on the 15th November 2006 to the Petition's Committee of the Scottish Parliament "to urge the Scottish Executive to return the national tourism website, call centre and booking system to public ownership" (Scottish Parliament, 2006c: 1). On the 6th November 2008, there was an announcement that visitscotland.com, would revert back into the public domain (VisitScotland, 2008).

Both Ossian and visitscotland.com highlight two issues. First, is the controversy/drama associated with each and the emergence of dissenters. Second and partly explaining this controversy/drama, is the nature of the relationship between this type of intermediary and its hotelier users, which extends beyond that of a simple

economic transaction (i.e. is not simply a matter of paying a fee and supplying contact details as with other intermediaries). Issues relating to the operation, impact, management and ownership of the DMS, in particular, those concerning commissions and booking fees are contentious, particularly for smaller hoteliers.

2.6   Summary

Scottish tourism is a multi-faceted, heterogeneous and ever-changing industry, now operating within a global market place. A brief historical reflection (section 2.3) reveals the nature of this ever-changing industry over the last three centuries, particularly at a local level. Different phases have been identified reflecting specific configurations of developments particular to the period. The growth of resorts exploited developments in transport, notably the railways. The advent of the motorcar enhanced the opportunity to "tour" around Scotland. Whilst promotion has been important for the destination to be found, to be found by the passer-by on the tour requires positioning at the 'right' location on the route. The legacy (section 2.3.1) of this is the profusion of strategically located hoteliers throughout Scotland. Now, the industry is perhaps in a period of transition (section 2.4) into a new phase.

This new phase is perhaps characterised by changes in customer holidaying behaviour (e.g. the 'short-break'), the emergence of national and international 'branded' accommodation providers and widespread access to online technologies. Passing trade appears to be in decline. Traditional resorts appear to no longer have their former popularity. Cities are in the ascendancy. Today, transport still play an

important role, with the 'budget' services (e.g. airlines and hotels) stimulating demand for city 'breaks'. However, perhaps the most significant change is the shift from hoteliers being found in the spatial domain by the 'passer-by', to one of increasingly being found online. The changes are possibly destabilising influences, particularly for these hoteliers. Indeed, being found perhaps has become more challenging. However, the challenges are not the same for all hoteliers. There are perhaps two contrasting idealised models of hoteliers, one being the larger, standardised and branded accommodation provider located in city centres and the other being the smaller specialist accommodation provider offering an authentic experience frequenting other locations. Whilst both providers are found online, the former exploits online booking, whilst the latter uses email and the telephone to receive bookings.

At the institutional level, a variety of governmental bodies have a stakehold in tourism, with VisitScotland taking a leadership role. Whilst the institutional landscape has undergone ongoing change, three specific developments are perhaps significant for today's hotelier: the development and provision of a national online tourism portal, the publication of a national tourism strategy in 2006, with targets for online use by hoteliers, and the demise of the ATBs in 2005. Concern about local visibility to potential visitors world-wide has given rise to local collaborative efforts to complement the individual exploitation of online technologies.

Chapter 3   CONCEPTUALISING TECHNOLOGY

information... is a difference which makes a difference

(Bateson, G., 1972: 459)

3.1   Aim

The aim of this chapter is to briefly review pertinent conceptualisations of technology and derive an analytical framework for use in this study.

3.2   Introduction

New technology is typically characterised by uncertainty, despite efforts to make it predictable. The reason for uncertainty is due to the multitude of possibilities that may arise about the way it develops, diffuses or is used, whether deliberate or otherwise. Furthermore, new technology may have consequences other than those intended. Indeed, the factors affecting decisions about development, diffusion or use may have little to do with the technology itself. Instead, these decisions may be based upon unrelated issues such as for commercial, political or emotional reasons. This highlights the social context of technology and suggests that technology, no matter how we consider it, is not clearly understood.

This argument has particular relevance to the specific group of technologies of interest here – Information and Communication Technologies (ICTS) - within the context of the smaller business as revealed in the VisitScotland's CEO's comment in section 1.5. This is despite the various studies that have been undertaken into ICT implementations within SMEs (see 0 for an overview of these studies). Indeed, these

studies are criticised for their descriptive nature (e.g. Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991; Lynn, 2002) (see Appendix 1.6 for more detail). However, when the horizon is scanned for a useful body of knowledge to guide a deeper understanding then one can look to Economics, Politics and Anthropology from within the Social Sciences, and Geography from within both the Sciences and Social Sciences. One particularly rich domain is that of Science and Technology Studies. Through these alternative lenses, is becomes possible to establish basic tenets to guide a deeper understanding of technologies and from this, identify an appropriate analytical framework and set of conceptual instruments (Scott, 1990: 84-85).

This aim of this chapter is to establish an appropriate analytical framework and set of conceptual instruments. It is structured in three parts. The first (section 3.3) outlines the different tenets or lenses through which technology can be viewed, within which a specific repertoire of frameworks is identified (this is more fully examined in Appendix 2), from which 'domestication' is selected. The second part (section 3.4) reviews examines the framework of 'domestication' and its different interpretations. A critique is then offered. The third part (section 3.5) draws upon this critique and also insights from the data to develop a set of conceptual instruments.

3.3   The tenets of technology

The concept of 'technology' is nebulous, with some pointing to a discrete entity, whilst the more discerning may identify other features such as software, knowledge and organisation (e.g. Fleck & Howells, 2001 and the 'Technology Complex').

Underpinning this is the distinction between the technology and the individual and their relationship.

3.3.1 <u>Technology determinism</u>

This conventional deterministic view of technology considers technology as a black box (Edge, 1995: 14). The technology itself is not questioned; there is little consideration of how the technology comes into being and 'works'. Instead, attention focuses upon its effect or social impact. People adapt to technology rather than shape it (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999: 5). It is neutral, it does not take sides, it is benign[11]; "all that matters is the way societies choose to use them" (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999: 4). It is as if technology resides outside society (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999: 5), that technology is independent of humans. Furthermore, the development of technology is viewed as unproblematic. It is a sequential or linear process with 'inevitable' outcomes that follow a "largely pre-determined technical 'trajectory'" (Edge, 1995: 14[12]) or an "internal technical logic" (Russell & Williams, 1988: 1) and that "particular paths of technical change were inevitable" (the 'technological imperative') (Williams & Edge, 1992: 4). This deterministic view of technology is exemplified in the following examination of the latest Scottish tourism policy document.

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[11] The online Oxford English Dictionary (visited 23rd Feb. 2009) offers a variety of definitions of the word 'neutral of which two have particular relevance here: 1. "not taking sides in a controversy, dispute, disagreement, etc.",   2. "having no strongly marked effects, characteristics, etc.; undefined, indefinite, vague". [http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.webfeat.lib.ed.ac.uk]

[12] Originally published as EDGE, D. (1987) The Social Shaping of Technology. Edinburgh PICT Working Paper No. 1, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University.

3.3.2 <u>A response to technology determinism</u>

Opposition to the deterministic view of technology has led to efforts to open up the black box and reveal its workings in terms of "social actors, processes and images" (Winner, 1993) i.e. to breakdown the barrier and restore human participation within the development and use of technology.

These efforts have emerged under the umbrella of Science and Technology Studies (STS) in a variety of forms, for example, Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK), Social Construction of Technology (SCOT), Actor Network Theory (ANT), Social Shaping of Technology (SST), Socio-technical Systems, Innovation-Diffusion Studies and the Management of Technology (MoT). These studies are conceptually rich and embrace different, but not exclusive, views of technology. Underpinning each is the notion of 'social', which embraces "organisational, political, economic and cultural" factors (Williams & Edge, 1996). It is beyond the scope here to pay anything other than lip-service to them in terms of giving account of them, of which there are a number (e.g. Grint & Woolgar, 1997: 6-38; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999: 3-27; Cutcliffe & Mitcham, 2001: 1-64; Russell & Williams, 2002: 37-132).

Opening the black box
The call to open up the black box of 'technology' to reveal its workings exposes the elements that it comprises, at the most generic level, people (social) and the artefact (technology). This has given rise to a variety of conceptualisations of the interplay between the social and technology: 'socio-technical systems' (Trist, 1981), 'seamless web' (Hughes, 1986), heterogeneous assemblages' (Larkin, 1969, Landstrom, 2000),

'socio-technical ensembles' (Bijker (1995: 269), 'sociotechnical constituencies' (Molina, 1990, 1997) or 'sociomaterial assemblages' (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008a, b). Underpinning these are the notions of configuration (Fleck, 1994), co-production (Russell & Williams, 2002: 50-52) or co-evolution (Sellen & Harper, 2001: 186).

The nature of this interplay has been much debated, with different streams of thought emerging in response to such questions as: What effects do the artefact and human have upon each other? Is the artefact real or a social construct (SCOT)? Is the artefact immutable or malleable? Is the artefact the outcome of being shaped by social processes (SST)? Is the relationship between artefact and human symmetrical, with either having an effect upon the other (ANT)? Whilst these questions simplify complex issues, attempts to answer them reveal that technology is open to different valid interpretations.

Essentialism – Anti-essentialism

One specific debate which has relevance here, concerns whether artefacts have properties and how these act upon or are interpreted by humans. There are two contrasting positions, that of the essentialist and the anti-essentialist.

In simple terms the distinction is based upon whether material properties constrain / determine design options and thereby possibilities for action (essentialist view), or whether there is no influence (anti-essentialist view); influence is a construct of interpretation (Grint & Woolgar, 1997: 10). The anti-essentialist view problematises the focus on properties. The meaning and value of the artefact is highlighted; the artefact is a symbol. Conflict and competition arises between different social groups

and their interpretations, with different development paths arising. The interpretative flexibility of the artefact tends towards stability within the social group (intra-group) and closure between different social groups (inter-group), when, through the process of solving problems related to design and action relating to the artefact, there is convergence about the possibilities for design and action (Bijker, 1995). Nevertheless, the interpretivist view sustains possibilities for action, allowing use which includes that unintended by its designer.

However, whether anyone adopts a polarised stance on either is an open question. Indeed, MacKenzie & Wajcman (1999) introduce the phrase 'social shaping' rather than 'social construction' to overcome the perception associated with the latter that there is "nothing real and obdurate about what was constructed" (ibid, 1999: 18), viewing "technology and society" as "mutually constitutive (ibid, 1999: 23). Further, Fleck & Howells (2001) contrast the development of robots with aircraft; whereas the design and development of aircraft is fundamentally determined by the physical laws of nature, robotic design is driven by usage and thereby reflects the social and political conditions (e.g. work practices and government policy). They conclude that "different technologies appear to vary in the degree to which they are 'socially shaped' or technologically-determined'" (ibid, 2001: 530).

This debate highlights that there are different possible and conflictual explanations relating to the artefact-human interplay. This is brought to the fore by Hutchby (2001) who presents Gibson's (1979) concept of 'affordances': "affordances are properties taken with reference to the observer. They are neither physical nor

phenomenal" (Gibson, 1979: 143). However, a few pages earlier, Gibson (1979: 139) states "the object offers what it does because it is what it is". Simply put, objects, things, artefacts, they afford or offer users possibilities for action, whether perceived or not, but in their perception, give rise to action.

The anti-essentialist focus on the symbolic meaning of the artefact takes on a significance which is elevated with regard to a specific type of artefact – the ICT.

3.3.3 Specifically ICTs

ICTs offer a particular conceptual challenge for researchers that is perhaps illustrated with the example of the laptop computer. The attention of the laptop user tends to focus upon the imagery contained within the interface (e.g. the screen and key-board) rather than the physical package within which it is embedded. Indeed, it is perhaps in the domain of media studies and the television that the distinction between the physical object (television) and the message contained (television programme) surfaces (Silverstone et al, 1992). The distinction Silverstone and co-authors make between object and medium, draws attention to the particular feature of the artefact whereby its interface is a conduit for the transmission of messages. In their study of the appropriateness of different communications media (e.g. telephone, email and memo), Trevino et al (1990) highlight the equivocality or uncertainty contained within the message as a determining feature for the particular medium chosen. Indeed, the greater the need to discuss issues or be emotionally expressive, the more likely is the move towards richer media that allow multiple cues (e.g. body language,

tone and inflexion of voice) to be used. This emphasis upon the topics of interest or discussion, introduces the notion developed by Bowker (1994) of 'infrastructure inversion' whereby the infrastructure over which messages are transmitted becomes invisible. In other words, the television (the object) is rendered invisible to the programme (the medium).

The computer, a computational technology, can be viewed in a similar manner, again with the interface being the focus of the user's attention. The operational domain is language (Winograd & Flores, 1986), which suggests that the metaphor of the 'text' is an appropriate device to examine ICTs. Indeed, Lytje (1996) in their study of the development of computer software, distinguish between systems development "as a kind of writing" and systems use "as a kind of reading" computers (Lytje, 1996: 143). Yoneyama (1997: 105) states that "the symbolic dimensions of computer systems may be addressed as if they were texts". For Yoneyama, the text metaphor focuses attention upon the dynamics of the computer system use and the associated production of meaning; computer systems become "spaces of action possibilities". This is reminiscent of Winograd & Flores (1986: 7) whose basic argument is that new technologies can shape practices which, in turn, can shape language (e.g. new terms), which, in turn, "generates the space of possibilities for action" (e.g. new practices). Attention is upon the generation of meaning.

Technology and Virtuality: the paradox of the invisible material and visible virtual

Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily….

(Gibson, W., 1984: 67)

The emergence and widespread use of online technologies has led to a new vocabulary and set of concepts which have assumed an everyday usage (e.g. 'virtuality', 'virtual reality', 'virtual worlds' and 'virtual space'). Other words arise prefixed with 'cyber-' (e.g. cyberspace). These reflect a distinction that has become common-place between practices that are off-line and on-line.

Off-line practices are associated with the notion of 'materiality', which the OED defines as: "of or relating to matter or substance". In contrast is the notion of 'virtuality': "Essential nature or being, apart from external form or embodiment". The key distinction between 'material' and 'virtual' is perhaps captured in the notions of substance and embodiment. However, in making this distinction, it should not disguise that the boundary between 'material' and 'virtual' is ill-defined and unavoidably blurred (Interrogate the Internet, 1996).

In the virtual domain there is no substance or embodiment. Furthermore, we may convince ourselves that we have transported ourselves into this virtual domain and engage in 'virtual worlds', 'social networks' and other online activities, creating and experimenting with new self's and exploring new experiences, perhaps denied or 'forbidden' in the real (Turkle, 1996). However, as Turkle reveals, this ability to recreate oneself, change gender, age, ethnicity, personality, appearance, being… reveals the illusionary nature of the virtual domain. Furthermore, we are exposed to the potential threat inherent in that we do not know how authentic the person we are

engaging with is. This becomes important when we distinguish between the virtual as a realm of fantasy, with its own, perhaps 'unrestricted', conventions or as an extension of the real, where the conventions of the real world still hold.

Any substance associated with online technologies, i.e. the wires and boxes that constitute the infrastructure, is perhaps invisible to users (cf. Bowker, 1994). This invisibility has been interpreted by Thrift (2004: 584) as "imputed background whose content is rarely questioned". He suggests that this background can be viewed as a paratext: "invisible forms which structure how we write the world, but which generally no longer receive attention because of their utter familiarity" (Thrift, 2004: 585). Visibility returns when something goes wrong (Graham, 2004: 13), which case someone is contacted who can deal with it. Most end-users are unable to enter the black box of online technologies and 'fix it'.

When the black box labelled 'online technologies' is opened, its complexity is revealed. It can be presented as a stratified model, distinguishing between the material artefacts of the apparatus and infrastructure and their non-material counterparts, the 'programming' that provides the functionality that users exploit in their daily practices, whether in maintaining the 'system' or using the 'system' to support what they are doing. The programming is also responsible for the amassing of libraries of webpages, images etc, each of which is catalogued and listed in a directory to be found - online. Whereas, user attention focuses upon the non-material and being able to find, for Thrift (2004) the invisibility of the material implies that it has no meaning; it exists "outside the realm of meanings, being known only in their

performance" (Thrift, 2004: 585). Nevertheless, it functions globally, with every point of contact having its unique address.

However, as a 'system' it offers no clear development trajectory, is spatially uneven in its distribution and is in a state of on-going change as new innovations (e.g. the 'semantic web') introduce new possibilities. Demand is ubiquitous, but not evenly distributed and not everywhere. Supply is open to all (e.g. anyone can load content), though the large corporations perhaps control many aspects of the technology (e.g. the telecommunications infrastructure, operating systems, software applications and search engines) (Graham, 2004). However, some sense or order is introduced by efforts to regulate both design and use through standards (technical, legislative or codes of behaviour) that allow interoperability between the configured elements (e.g. users). However, the uneven nature of this regulation has enabled, on the one hand, government censorship (e.g. China) (Zittrain & Edelman, 2003) and on the other, the unrestrained distribution of 'unacceptable' materials (e.g. child porn). It is far from being a homogenous 'system' and that its internal complexity is reinforced by externalities which disturb its smooth roll-out (e.g. fears and inaccessibility) and by the seemingly infinite possibilities for its use.

There appears to be no limit to the possible applications of this 'system': communication, informing, learning, shopping, meeting people, play, propaganda, gambling, sex, fraud, deception… In the mid 1990s, its underlying principle was viewed as dissemination, not control (Interrogate the Internet, 1996). However, a decade later, the question can be asked whether this principle holds.

'End-users', one of many types of users, are predominantly interested in the interface itself. The pre-occupation with the interface, whether a computer keyboard and monitor or the mobile phone, draws attention to the screen and the manner of interacting with it. Thrift (2004: 585) drawing upon Parks (2003), refers to how these screens are kinetic surfaces "along and across which things run… and which demand certain kinds of structured engagement". The screen presents an image, which comprises of colour, icons and text, and perhaps also of sound. This appeals to our visual and hearing senses, requires touch to interact with, though may also be voice activated, but does not cater for our senses of taste or smell. Meaning may rest in the symbolism of having the latest devices or old technology, but for most, meaning lies in the content of the image. The images tend to be designed to be 'read' in particular ways, constraining how we may interpret and interact with what is presented. However, this does not preclude new readings, but may preclude any reading at all if presented in an unfamiliar manner (e.g. Chinese characters to a mono-lingual English speaker). More significantly, Thrift (2004: 585) suggests that they may change the way we understand "space, time and movement".

Use of the Internet requires 'literary' skills, the ability to read and write in this new medium, with implications for how people learn these 'literary' skills. More sophisticated engagement (e.g. online discussions) may require learning the acceptable conventions for participation. Indeed, even something basic (e.g. e-mail) requires knowledge about how to use the email software, raising the question of how one acquires this knowledge; perhaps not formally by going on a course in some

distant college, but perhaps informally within the home, by being shown by one's children. This example reveals one further issue to be considered in relation to technology, the interplay between technology and the human use of space.

The spatial dimension: locally unique

Simmel (1908 [1997: 138]) highlighted the exclusivity of space: "every portion of space possesses a kind of uniqueness". If each portion of space or location is unique then this suggests that it possesses contingencies which are unique to that location. This implies that if a technology is to be adequately implemented in that location it needs to be embedded in such a way as to deal with these contingencies. Successful technological implementations are thus, locally contingent processes. This is demonstrated in the examples presented by Gamser et al (1990) of innovative activity within poor communities in the world's poorer countries (e.g. Kenyan residue stoves).

Graham's (2004) examination of the spatial aspects relating to technology and, specifically digital technologies, highlights the locally contingent nature of implementations and the importance of local embodied experiences. These undermine deterministic arguments relating to technology. In his examination of digital technologies, Further, Graham draws attention to the situated material presence of its underlying infrastructure and its uneven distribution. This has implications when examining the notion of a digital divide to shift attention away from polarised have/have-not approaches, to richer approaches which distinguish between different types of use (e.g. episodic versus pervasive).

3.3.4 <u>Innovation and the user</u>

One of the enduring debates about technology relates to the interplay between technology innovation and use. One of the earliest views was that producers innovated and these innovations diffused to user-consumers, who passively used them. Rogers (1962, 1971, 1983, 1995, 2003) presented this process as a simple linear model, identifying different types of 'adopters', though he differentiated these adopters based on their timing of uptake after innovation release. Since then a number of alternative views have emerged which have challenged the passive nature of the user of which several are prominent.

Fleck presented the concept of 'innofusion' (1998) drawing attention to the active role of users in the context of implementing configurational technologies. Fleck makes the distinction between local practical knowledge and supplier generic technology knowledge (1992).

Von Hippel (2005) also recognises the capacity of the user to innovate, a state he calls "democratised innovation". Whilst users may feed-back to producers, they also distribute their innovations freely to others (e.g. open source software).

A third user-centric view, developed initially by Silverstone et al (1992), is that of 'domestication', which presents a conceptual explanation of how users bring innovations or technologies into their household. In invoking the metaphor of 'taming' it conjures up the notion of something 'wild' or 'unfamiliar' being brought

from 'outside', 'inside' into the familiar. Whilst this does not necessarily involve innovation, innovation may arise during the attempt to make things work or as new uses are found.

The final view considered here examines the emerging spectrum of innovation-usage possibilities involving both producers and users in a 'social learning' context. Social learning as developed by Williams and co-authors "is not restricted to the pedagogic notion of a group of persons learning from others, but is conceived more broadly to include processes of negotiation and alignment of views within and between groups" (Jaeger et al, 2000: 278). It dismisses the notion of a linear mechanical innovation-diffusion process, favouring an iterative, interactionist dynamic and cyclical process, which can be conceptualised both with the innofusion-domestication models and with an evolutionary model involving on-going experimentation, which incorporates innofusion-domestication (Williams et al, 2005).

The conceptualisation of the uptake and use of online technologies by smaller business raises the more general question of how a technology is internalised within an organisation. The preceding analysis suggest that a useful way of conceiving this is that of 'domestication', the bringing of unfamiliar from outside, inside into the familiar.

3.4   Domestication

Various accounts reveal how the concept of domestication has developed over time (Berker et al, 2006; Silverstone, 2006; Sorensen, 2006; Haddon, 2006, 2007). Two specific developmental streams have emerged, that from within Media Studies and the other from Technology Studies.

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3.4.1 <u>Media Studies origins</u>

The first, within the domain of media studies, originates in the work of Silverstone and co-workers in the 1990s (Haddon, 2006), who derive insights from anthropology (Berker et al, 2006), with its emphasis upon the symbolic dimensions (Morley, 2006). Domestication, presented as a 'framework' to understand the internalisation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) (e.g. television, radio, telephone, personal computer) within the household (Silverstone et al, 1992), reveals how these technologies (e.g. a television) becomes part of the daily life of the household.

Domestication describes a process which is perhaps most clearly articulated by Silverstone & Haddon (1996: 60) that it involves "quite literally a taming of the wild and a cultivation[13] of the tame". In other words, it is a process in which a technology becomes embedded within a local context of use. This process unpacks to reveal "four non-discrete elements or phases" (Silverstone et al, 1992: 20): appropriation,

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[13] Developed and changed

objectification, incorporation and conversion. During the process of domestication within a household, technologies are "appropriated" (transferred into ownership), "objectified" (through use, display and, thereby, embedding within the household, the technology portrays the household's identity, values etc.), "incorporated" (focuses upon the functionality of the technology and it's role-fit within the daily routine, i.e. its usage) and give rise to "conversion" (technologies both facilitate conversion and provide the content of conversion of household members, thereby establishing their status in their respective communities. The technology becomes an outward symbol to the community of the household's status). Conversion defines "the relationship between the household and the outside world" (Silverstone et al, 1992: 25).

However, rather than view this embedding as the end of all that happens with this technology Silverstone et al (1992) draw up the notion developed by Kopytoff that "things have biographies" (Kopytoff, 1986: 66). In other words, an object (technology) has its own life-cycle. It comes into being and undergoes changes (e.g. change in use or being passed into a new household) with these changes revealing "the changing qualities of the shaping environments through which they pass" (Silverstone et al, 1992: 17).

Moreover, Silverstone et al (1992) characterize ICTs as particularly problematic because they are 'doubly articulated'; they serve as both object, located within a specific "spatio-temporal setting" and medium, as "texts or symbolic messages located within the flows of particular socio-cultural discourses" (Livingstone, 2007:

18). This has presented and remains an ongoing analytical challenge (Livingstone, 2007). With regard to studies of the internet, Livingston states that "the challenge remains to sustain a subtle analysis of both the domestic context of use and the semiotic richness of the online world that people engage in" (Livingstone, 2007: 19).

3.4.2 <u>The Technology Studies lens</u>

The second stream was developed from a Technology Studies perspective, but drew upon the work of Silverstone et al (1992) as well as Actor Network Theory (Sorensen, 2006). For Sorensen "domestication ... is a co-production of the social and the technical" (Sorensen, 2006: 46), which is revealed during the analysis of use. Further, Sorensen (2006) states that whilst both perspectives are compatible there are important dissimilarities. First, the emphasis had expanded beyond the household to consider technologies in everyday use at other sites. Second, it explicitly distinguishes three dimensions: the practical (i.e. usage), symbolic (i.e. constructing meaning) and cognitive (i.e. learning about practice and meaning).

Sorensen elaborates about learning within the context of social learning: "domestication is a way of describing social learning about technologies" (Sorensen, 2006: 14). He recognises different learning strategies (e.g. 'learning by doing' (Arrow, 1962); 'learning by using' (Rosenberg, 1982)), drawing attention to the different interactions between user and producer in the process of making a technology work ('learning by interacting' (Lundvall, 1998)). Fleck (1994) makes the important distinction between Rosenberg's users 'using' a working technology

and users trying to get the technology to work in the first place. Learning is about the "struggle" to make configurational technologies work (Fleck, 1994: 638), which involves improving/modifying the component elements to enable the configuration to "work as an integrated entity" (Fleck, 1994: 638). Furthermore, this act of trying to get the technology to work may involve innovation and lead to "new viable configurations" (Fleck, 1994: 649), though without necessarily achieving the working solution. Furthermore, 'failure' to make work is itself a learning opportunity (Leonard-Barton, 1988).

The Technology Studies view of domestication, described as a "multidimensional process" (Sorensen et al, 2000: 240), unpacks to reveal into four activities: acquisition ("made accessible" (ibid, 2000: 240)), placement ("situated in a physical, symbolic and mental space" (ibid, 2000: 240)), interpretation ("to be given meaning within the household... symbolic value to the outside world" (ibid, 2000: 240)) and integration ("into social practices of action" (ibid, 2000: 240)).

3.4.3 <u>Domestication and Innovation</u>

One central issue relates to the relationship between the user and innovation.

Silverstone and Haddon (1996) in their model of the "dynamics of innovation" (ibid, 1996: 44) examine the interplay between design and domestication, which they describe as "two sides of the innovation coin. Domestication is anticipated in design and design is completed in domestication" (ibid, 1996: 46). They state that "the

innovation process... is a process of domestication" (ibid, 1996: 60); that the consumer experience then feeds back into the innovation process. In this way users can both shape and be shaped by the technologies that they domesticate. A similar argument had been earlier developed by Mackay & Gillespie (1992) who had drawn attention to the role of markets in which design and appropriation are intertwined through the activity of marketing from which consumption or "demand is socially constructed" (ibid, 1992: 698). Marketing may create the notion of 'lifestyles' in which specific products are embedded, whilst users can identify unexpected uses. Both authors are concerned not only with the use of technologies but also the meaning attached to technologies.

Conceptually, domestication can be viewed as "fundamentally a conservative process" (Silverstone & Haddon, 1996: 60) or as a "conservative response to the challenge of technological change" (Silverstone, 2006: 246). It preserves the stability of the everyday. The 'wild' and 'strange' is tamed and embedded within the familiar, becoming familiar. It is cultivated, developing and changing (Silverstone & Haddon, 1996). However, Silverstone notes that domestication may neutralise "the potential for real change and real engagements" (Silverstone, 2006: 246). It may stifle user innovation during the attempt to make things work or as new uses are found. This view interestingly contrasts with Leonard-Barton's (1988) statement that "implementation is innovation", a view also expressed by Cragg & Zinatelli (1995) and Graham et al (1996). Leonard-Barton (1988: 265) argues that "technology will never exactly fit user environment" and thus, adjustments (large-scale or minor) will be required: "that change in both technology and user environment is more beneficial

than holding one constant and changing the other" (Leonard-Barton, 1988: 265). From a technology studies perspective, the notion of user innovation is perhaps encapsulated in the view that "domestication... is a co-production of the social and the technical" (Sorensen, 2006: 46), tacitly invoking that during co-production new possibilities may arise.

3.4.4 <u>Domestication as a 'messy process' of 'fitting' into the 'everyday'</u>

Aune (1996) has examined the manner in which the personal computer (PC) is embedded within the 'everyday life' of the household, distinguishing between individual usage and usage within the context of the household. Whilst her study identifies three ideal types of user, it highlights that the PC is adapted to the everyday, whilst the everyday is adjusted to the PC. The introduction of the PC has not prescribed specific changes; rather change is a consequence of its use in a social context.

Domestication is not the solitary act of one person trying to use a technology. Aune (1996) distinguishes between individual and collective (negotiated) strategies for domestication in the household. Likewise, Sorensen et al (2000: 240) state that "to domesticate an artefact is to negotiate its meaning and practice in a dynamic and interactive manner". Bakardjieva (2004: 63) reveals that negotiations (e.g. establishing "rules of mutual engagement" with others) can be difficult. Tensions and conflict can arise (Silverstone & Haddon, 1996). Sorensen et al (2000) suggest that reasons for conflicts which can arise include differences between local interests/roles and differences between the inscription and use of technologies.

Furthermore, Sorensen (2006) notes that, whilst non-use indicates that people have choice in whether to use a technology, their integral place within the everyday as "part of 'normal' behaviour"(Sorensen, 2006: 41) may preclude non-use due to the effort involved. Alternatively, non-use may be attributed to technophobia, lack of perceived benefit or active resistance. Thus, Sorensen notes that 'choice' is countered by enforcement or 'discipline' and enthusiasm by resistance. Sorensen concludes that the norms that emerge regarding use (e.g. accepted use of the mobile phone) arise as a collective feature of domestication; they "may be understood as contested, fluid, emergent properties of developing technologies" (Sorensen, 2006: 56-57).

Bakardjieva (2004) replaces the notion of household with that of 'home' to denote "a protected space... the container of interpersonal relationships" (Bakardjieva, 2004: 68), a location in which there is "a feeling of safety, trust, freedom and control over one's own affairs" (ibid). This allows the "dynamic of a constantly changing relationship between exterior and interior to be adequately considered" (ibid: 69). Bakardjieva critiques domestication research for its preoccupation with the mechanics of taming technologies, instead states that attention should also focus upon "how these micro patches of social fabric could be woven into a large whole" (ibid: 71).

Ward's (2006) study of the home-worker draws attention to the 'boundary work' required to maintain the 'work and 'home' distinction, focusing upon computer use. Domestication need not be "smooth, frictionless and precise" (ibid: 152), nor

"necessarily harmonious, linear or complete" (ibid: 150), instead is a 'struggle' with stages melting together and is "sometimes unsuccessful" (Ward, 2006: 149). Moreover, domestication process is not a one-off event, but is "continuous and dynamic" (Aune, 1996: 118), perhaps involving re-domestication, where new uses are found, until the time of dis-domestication, whereby the artefact is disposed (Lie & Sorensen, 1996: 10-11), though its "traces" may remain (Sorensen, 2006: 48). Illustrating this, Haddon (2006: 115) reveals how "changes in people's circumstances" (e.g. children growing up) can alter use and likewise how new related technologies can alter use.

Pierson (2006), in her study of the uptake of ICT in very small businesses[14], draws attention to the blurred boundary between public and private usage. She reveals the importance of need, fit and usefulness for (non)-adoption, though "something too innovative" would more likely be rejected (Pierson, 2006: 220). The boundary over which appropriated items must cross for the small business is likened with that of the household, in contrast to large organisations. The boundary demarks the transition from an open public to a closed private context, though in the context of the micro-business, with its informal mode of operating, the boundary becomes blurred as the home-work, private-public demarcation dissolves. This argument, extended to larger organisations, suggests that these are characterised by an open formal operating mode, with a relatively clear demarcation between work and home, where home is viewed as intrusive though not inescapable. Furthermore, it introduces the notion that differences can exist between the privately held meanings of the home and micro-

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[14] Less than 10 employees

business and those in the public domain. Silverstone (2006) also examines the public-private domains in terms of how digital technologies are redefining the boundaries between private and public. A change has occurred, whereby the private viewing of public performances has been complemented with the rise of private conversations in public spaces (e.g. blogs, mobile phones).

3.4.5 <u>Critique</u>

This brief review reveals that the concept of domestication has developed over time as different analysts explore its application from different perspectives (e.g. media studies, STS). The application of this concept to the household (Silverstone et al 1992) and the very small business (Pierson, 2006) suggests that domestication takes place within organisationally closed social contexts. Indeed, the notion of closure is re-enforced by the attention given to the boundary between exterior and interior (Bakardjieva, 2006), work and home (Ward (2006), public and private (Pierson, 2006), though this boundary is not solid and fixed, instead is blurred and requires management. However, what is inside is local, inherently unique to that local space and relatively stable. A technology that crosses the boundary will be made to fit, though there may be a struggle to embed the technology within this closed space. Underpinning this is the view of technology and the social as constitutive of each other (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999); they are co-produced (Sorensen, 2006). The domestication of a technology is a process which is both socially and locally contingent, which suggests that domestication is inherently unpredictable, is potentially messy and may be unsuccessful.

Indeed, the attraction of domestication is its emphasis upon 'bringing within' of something outside and 'getting it to work' in the 'way we [the user] do things around here'. The notion of 'inside' invites domestication to be applied to any bounded social space, extending beyond the household into other environments. Further, it problematises uptake; it is a struggle. It raises issues relating to learning, the nature of the space of embedding, the learning associated with the struggle, the sense of identity and its portrayal, as well as the impact of what is going on inside upon those outside. Additionally, it draws attention to a feature of ICT that is perhaps particular to ICTs, it's double articulation. This highlights the distinction between the actor (designer) who produces the ICT and the actor (writer) who creates the symbolic content that is of interest to the ICT user.

However, there a variety of issues which are not particularly well developed. First, it fails to adequately clarify the notion of user innovation, despite its emphasis upon the active role of the user. What is internal is relatively stable and thus familiar, thus the notion of change is problematic. Secondly, analysts appear to treat technologies (e.g. the PC) as discrete entities. Whilst the PC might be acquired as a kit for assembly, the problematic nature of this appears ignored, particularly the configuring to specific needs and tastes. Thirdly, whilst the notion of 'everyday life' is raised, this fails to capture the tensions of the daily juggle of things to do, places to go and people to meet within the constraint of time. This invites other conceptualisations of what is, in effect, Bakardjieva's 'large whole' (previous section). A further issue concerns the relationship between outside and inside. Appropriation highlights the

relationship between the producer-supplier and the user-consumer. Conversion highlights the relationship of the household within the local community. However, there are other actors (e.g. the intermediary, the business customer, the local expert) with whom there is a relationship. These actors need to be identified and their relationship clarified. Fifth, the household is a site that exists for reasons other than the use of technology. Indeed, it pre-exists the appropriation of the technology. In the specific case of a site which comes into being for the exploitation of technologies, then how does domestication handle the explanation of this dynamic?

3.5   A framework for analysis

The issues raised in the preceding section invite questions about how the exploitation of online technologies can be conceptually explained. An analytical framework is presented (Figure 8) which identifies three sets of conceptual instruments which, together, provide an analytical framework to examine how an actor, in this case a hotelier, takes up online technologies. It recognises that the hotelier's uptake takes place within a context – that of a 'busy day'. Further, the phrase 'takes up' invokes a process, which is conceptually explained using the notion of domestication. However, domestication, as presented by Silverstone, Sorensen and others, draws attention to the relationship between the innovator-producer and the consumer-user. Another actor needs to be considered within the act of domestication – the intermediary. Different types of intermediary can be recognised in the domain of the hotelier: public sector, commercial and local, the latter, when unpacked, revealing further forms, in particular one in which the hotelier is a stakeholder. Furthermore,

there is an additional dimension, that of the institutional view of how users take-up technology. This more general view is important as it contrasts with an alternative conceptualisation both of which are argued to
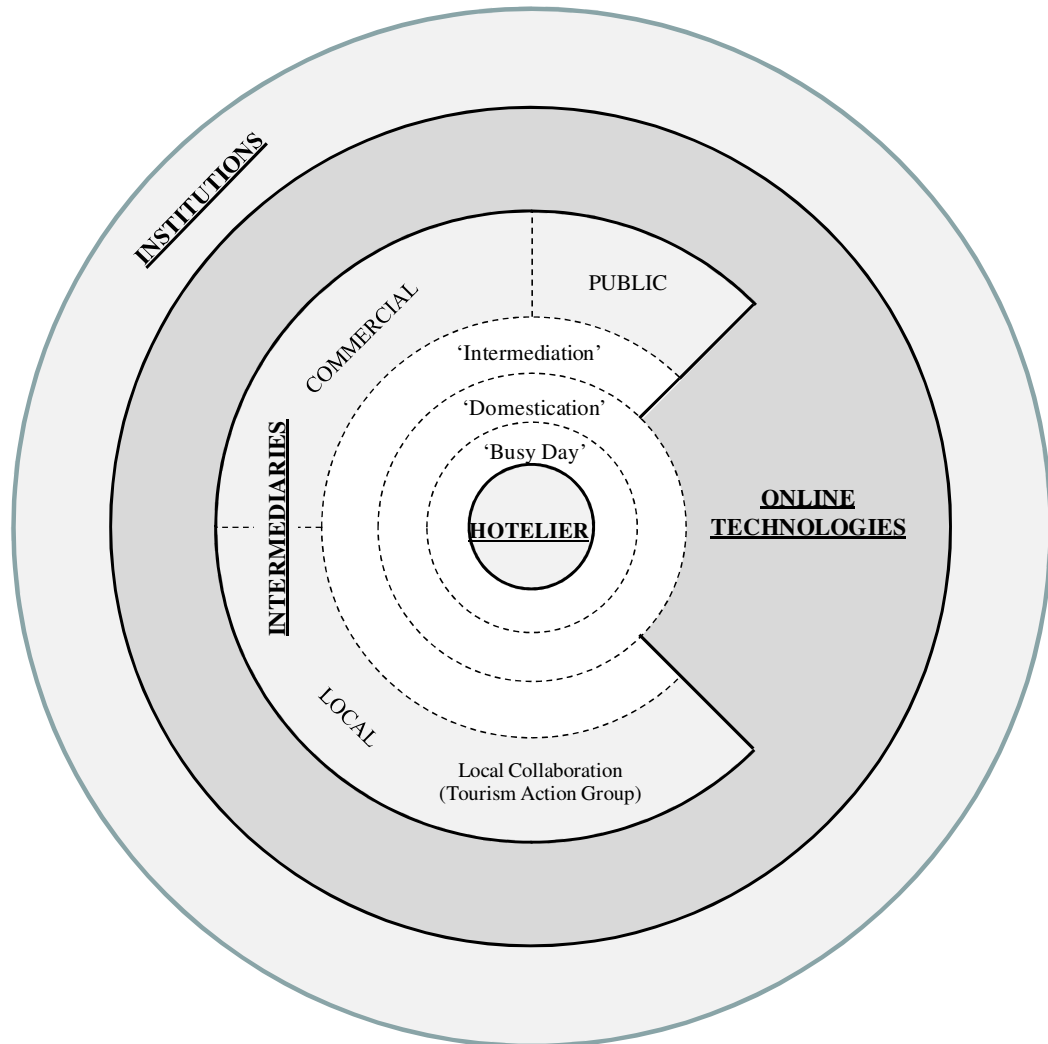
Figure 8   A framework for the analysis of the exploitation of online technologies by hoteliers

This framework is examined in more detail in the following sections, within which the conceptual instruments used in the subsequent analysis are developed. It

commences with 'domestication', follows with the 'busy day' then with 'intermediation' and concludes with 'institutions'.

3.5.1 <u>Domestication</u>

Domestication, whether presented by Silverstone et al (1992) or Sorensen et al (2000), offers a useful device to examine the uptake of online technologies, though raises the issue of how it can be used.

Domestication whether presented by Silverstone et al (1992) or Sorensen et al (2000) is depicted as a four phase dynamic in which the artefact is acquired, integrated into daily usage and given symbolic status. However, whilst both conceptually explain the nature of this dynamic, Sorensen's explicit depiction about the act of interpretation is, from an observer's perspective, problematic in terms of how to recognise and make explicit. Indeed, interpretation can be argued to be an intrinsic feature of acquisition, placement and placement: meaning manifests in their enactment. Nevertheless, Sorensen's technology studies perspective, expands the notion of domestication to make explicit the learning associated with making the artefact work and the meaning ascribed to the artefact by those within the household as well as those outside, for example, in the local community. In contrast, the Silverstone's depiction places emphasis upon this enactment, which is inviting from an instrumentality perspective. Thus, Silverstone's four phases provide a set of conceptual instruments (Scott, 1990).

However, the non-material/non-physical nature of online technologies does not fit easily with this interpretation. The symbolic value and meaning of online technologies pertains to their functionality and content. The functionality affords possibilities for action, whilst the reading of the content presents opportunities for action. The material aspect of online technologies tends to be invisible, as long as they function. Unlike an artefact which can be placed into and integrated with a social setting, an online presence involves configuration and embedding, though this may be an integrated, iterative and evolving process. Content and functionality are an outcome of the specific configuration of the online technologies and its evolution over time. This configuration is embedded in practices, but practice is only one aspect of the embedment, positioning or placement. Silverstone's 'objectification' reveals how the artefact takes on and portrays the household's identity. Identity is an important feature of an online presence, but results from the configuration of the online presence. Likewise 'conversion' concerns "the relationship between the household and the outside world" (Silverstone et al, 1992: 25). This translates into a more focused definition relating to the manner in which people engage with the hotelier's online presence, in particular, how online visitors are converted into actual visitors. The visible evidence from an hotelier's perspective is the impact this presence has in terms of enquiries, bookings and feedback about the website. This amendment to the framework retains four elements, but substitutes 'configuration' for 'objectification' and modifies the emphasis of the others:

- appropriation – acquisition of configurational technologies – services; involves establishing need and how need is to be met, identifying the right suppliers and going about sourcing each element;

- configuration – involves the configuration of hardware, software, content and services, perhaps in unique ways; configurational technologies are ascribed value, purpose, role and identity (website image) to meet intentions and are configured accordingly;

- incorporation – less to do with the physical and symbolic domains than placement within the domain of existing practice as a complement to or substitute for existing practice; involves the development of routines; and

- conversion – this more focused emphasis is upon how online visitors are converted into actual visitors and how this is assessed.

These four elements provide the conceptual instruments with which to examine the domestication of online technologies by hoteliers.

However, they are coarse and invite refinement. One source for this is the consumer behaviour literature within the marketing discipline. A variety of models of the acquisition process can be found[15], each tending to have three common features. First are the 'antecedents' from which follows the 'act of acquisition', then 'post-acquisition reflection'. Antecedents define the state prior to the act of acquisition and include the reasons or motives for acquisition (e.g. relevance, cost (Buick, 2003)). Antecedents also relates to the availability of offerings and "the promise" of satisfaction. The act of acquisition involves the decision making process of 'accepting' one offer over another. Together these comprise the 'appropriation' phase. The 'configuration' and 'incorporation' phases relate to the struggle or 'learning' involved in configuring online technologies in a manner which reflects the

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[15] Schiffman and Kanuk (1994) outline six models.

idiosyncrasies of the actor ('identity') and allows their embedding into the disparate "locations" of the spatial, temporal and cognitive domains. Conversion can relate to the manner in which the embedded online technologies meet expectations with regard to engagement with the outside (e.g. the conversion of visitors to a website into accommodation bookings) leading to a decision to retain or dispose of their use. This very simplistic model of the domestication process is illustrated in Figure 9, though the invoked linearity disguises its inherent messiness.
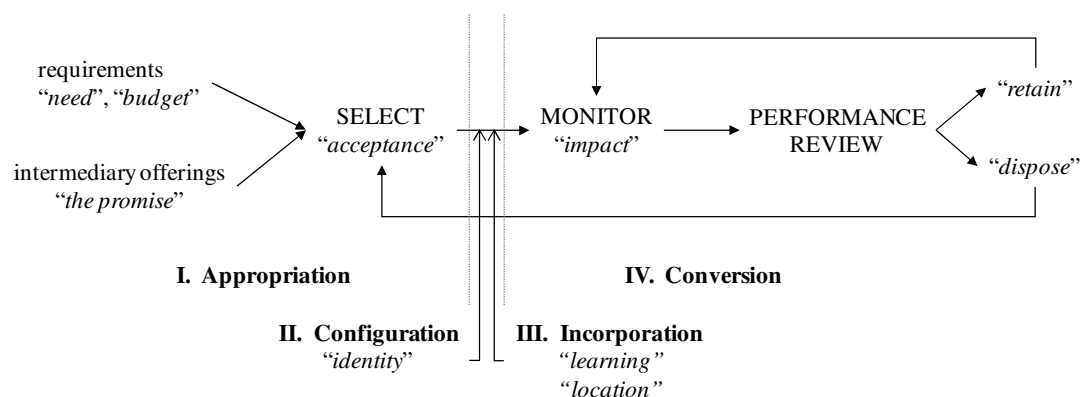
Figure 9   A simple model of domestication of online technologies

3.5.2 The 'richer fabric' (Bakardjieva, 2006)

The attention drawn by Bakardjieva (2006: 71) to the weave between the "micro patches of social fabric" and "a large whole", highlights the implicit nature of context in analyses of ICTs using not only domestication, but also more generally. Suchman in 1987 introduced the notion of 'situated action' to draw attention to the 'circumstances' in which an action takes place, "but which our accounts of action routinely ignore" (Suchman,, 1987: 109). Kling et al (2000) exemplify the need for

situated studies in their account of the varied uptake of Lotus Notes by different types of users within a major US consultancy. Likewise, Avgerou and Madon (2004) argue the need for a situated perspective in which assumptions about specific circumstances are made explicit. However, they make the criticism that "most situated studies of information systems limit analysis to the immediate environment" (ibid, 165), appearing to assume that the reader is familiar with the wider context, such as the institutional structures and historical antecedents. This debate has been developed by Kallinikos who calls for "wider reflection that captures the complex web of dependencies, interoperabilities, and institutional relations that sustain the embeddedness of technology in local contexts...and involves the mediation of history and culture..." (Kallinikos, 2004: 141). Attention is drawn to the technical and institutional factors which constrain discretion at the local level. This is developed further by Pollock and Williams (2009) who recognise a "complex space" (ibid, 2009: 86) comprising multiple actors, sites and timescales. This calls for multiple methods to 'zoom' into the different settings at the requisite resolution of detail (e.g. from the general to the fine grained).

Drawing upon this insight, this study recognises the need to extend the boundaries beyond the immediate micro-practices of user-computer interplay, particularly in the context of the smaller business. This introduces a more complex arrangement of boundaries. Temporally, time is expanded beyond that required in the user-computer interaction to that of the day. Spatially the site is expanded beyond the immediate vicinity of the user-computer to the spaces visited in the everyday. The simple act of the user interacting with the computer is extended to consider the juggle of all that

takes place during the day, both the routine and the unexpected. This increases the range of interactions beyond that of the user-computer, introducing a variety of actors and technologies. Other boundaries relate to the distinction between home-life and work-life (Ward (2006) and the private and the public (Pierson, 2006).

The 'Busy Day'

The outcome of extending these boundaries is the realisation of Bakardjieva's 'large whole', which can be conceptualised in the notion of the 'busy day'. The notion of the 'busy day' draws attention to the myriad of possibilities that can fill it. There are routines and as well as events, the new and also the unexpected. There are conversations with people, both local and distant. Relationships are made and also severed. Places, both near and far, are visited. Transactions take place. Embedded within the 'busy day' is a tool-kit of tools, techniques and devices, each serving some purpose, if not a variety of purposes. Indeed, the uptake and use (i.e. the domestication) of ICTs takes place within this busy day, alongside everything else that needs to be done.

When the actor is given the identity of both family person and business person, this introduces boundaries between the public and private and also home-life and work-life, though these boundaries become blurred as each intrudes into the other. With all the aforementioned possibilities, as well as all the demands, this creates tensions, the need to prioritise, negotiate, reschedule or not do. There is also the need to deal with the unexpected and the need to reorganise. The 'busy day' also introduces the emotional dimension, whereby, personal feelings and moods interfere with the

reasoned organisation of the 'busy day'. The inconvenient is postponed whilst the convenient is dealt with. The challenge is to get through the day.

This notion of the 'busy day' is a concept which contextualises the usage of an ICT. It provides an insight into the inherent complexity of the day and the challenge of how a technology is embedded into usage.

Intermediation

Domestication invokes that whatever it is that crosses the boundary into the familiar has a supplier and thus draws attention to the relationship with this supplier. Furthermore, new ICTs (i.e. online technologies) allow new connections. Indeed, these new connections allow consumers to make direct contact with producers – a process of ''dis-intermediation' (Wigand, 1997) and have led to futuristic visions forecasting the 'death of the intermediary' (e.g. Benjamin & Wigrand, 1995, using transaction cost theory), since producers and consumers are able to make direct contact with each other.

However, this does not appear to be happening. Although the traditional intermediary is threatened by the new online technologies, the value of the intermediary does not appear to have been diminished. The Internet is not only transforming the traditional intermediary, but is also enabling new forms of online intermediation - 'cybermediation (Sarkar et al, 1996) or 're-intermediation' (Wigand, 1997). Anderson & Anderson (2002: 54) argue that intermediaries "solve customer's

problems", they add value through these solutions[16]. Further, they argue that the Internet "actually boosts intermediation" (ibid), though presents new problems. Indeed, Sarkar et al (1996) identifies a wide range of online intermediary forms as well as a wide range of intermediation functions that benefit both producers and consumers. Online technologies, whilst perhaps making some traditional practices redundant, are at the same time creating new intermediation opportunities between customers / buyers and producers / sellers.

A more conceptual view drawing upon Actor Network Theory (ANT) is presented by Callon (1994), who likens an intermediary to both a 'boundary object' (Star and Griesemer, 1989) and 'mediator' in that an intermediary is both entity and network an offers networking opportunities to unconnected 'local collectives', thereby allowing new discussions to arise between different collectives.

Stewart & Hyysalo (2008: 296) recognise a "huge range of intermediary actors" in their examination of the role of intermediation in the development, diffusion and uptake of technologies, proposing three 'distinct' and 'salient' roles: facilitation (provision of opportunities to others by creating spaces), configuration and brokerage.. Furthermore, they argue that 'appropriate intermediaries' arise to exploit new technologies and attempt "to bridge the 'market gap'" from suppliers to user and vice versa" (ibid, 2008: 313).

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[16] Anderson & Anderson (2002: 54) claim that, rather than foster direct contact between manufactures and consumers, the Internet changes the way intermediaries add value in nine generic functions. These functions include the provision of information about buyers, sellers and goods /services; the enablement of economies of scale, scope and the convenient arrangement of time – location; and the reduction in uncertainty about quality through their own brand, preserved anonymity and tailored offerings. Whilst the provision of information will diminish, tailored offerings and guaranteed quality "will become the new cornerstone of intermediaries' business models" (Anderson & Anderson, 2002: 56).

Hennion (1989) presents the intermediary in an active role (the artistic director or producer) as the spokesperson for the consumer, shaping the product of the musical 'artist' to his/her view of what the public wants, but, in turn, 'little by little', shaping the public.

From a user's perspective, the proliferation and variety of online intermediaries presents the perplexing challenge of how to utilise them. Moreover, drawing upon two readily apparent yet distinct forms from the preceding account (the 'broker' and the 'producer') this invites questions about whether and how online intermediation shapes the domestication process and vice versa.

3.5.3 <u>The institutional (policy makers) perspective</u>

Whilst the hotelier gets on with all that fills the 'busy day', there is an institutional view as to how the hotelier *should* be conducting its business, particularly with regard to the handling of the customer and the use of online technologies. By examining this institutional view it is possible to idealise this view and contrast it with an ideal of actual practices. These two ideal models are useful as they establish the underlying ethos guiding the manner in which online technologies are viewed both institutionally and by the different forms of hoteliers.

Institutional determinism: I-Model

In 1908, César Ritz is quoted as saying "*Le client n'a jamais tor*" [The customer is never wrong][17]. That a hotelier should be the source of this quotation highlights the importance of the customer within the tourism industry. Indeed, this consumer orientation underpins the Scottish institutional view of tourism as evident in the latest tourism policy document "Scottish Tourism: The Next Decade - a framework for change" (Scottish Executive, 2006). Resounding messages about the consumer and the need to meet ('exceed') their changing requirements permeate this document (Figure 10). Words characterising the institutional view include "experience" (mentioned x52 times), "expectations" (x24) and "exceed" (x19). These invoke the message that producers must extend beyond ("exceed") the mere meeting of customer requirements, which manifest both as conceptualisations ("expectations") of the visit and as the actualisation ("experience") of the visit. Furthermore, the word "authentic(ity)" has been used six times to qualify the word "experience" though undefined, may invoke the notion of a "genuine" and not contrived experience, though this itself raises questions about what is "genuine".

Likewise, claims are made about customer use of online technologies (Figure 11). Indeed a subsequent document published by Tourism Intelligence Scotland (2007) states under the heading "New Technology":

> It is predicted that within five years 10% of the world, (600 million people),will have access to the internet. With the increase in digital and interactive television coupled with mobile phone advances, new technology will enable the consumer to source better deals and expect much more customised tourist information. Already in the UK 13% of all adults use the

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[17] "The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations", Partington, A. (ed.) (4th ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press

internet to book holidays and this is expected to rise to 25% by 2009 and to continue growing into the future.

Inevitability is invoked about online technologies and the way they are/will be used for online booking and the benefits they proffer to both consumers and businesses. Online technologies enable automation of the booking process ("24-hour"), which is an advancement upon the use of email. The impact is universal. It is argued that this reflects a deterministic view of technology. This institutional view, espousing both a consumer focus and technology determinism is designated the I-model.

"Competition for visitors will be stiff, and visitors will expect a warm welcome and can-do attitude everywhere they go. They are likely to be increasingly time-pressured with expectations that their experience will be smooth and any problems sorted quickly. The vast majority of visitors will live within a 3 hour travelling distance of their final destination in Scotland. Easy booking and good access will be crucial. Visitors will want self-discovery and chances to try new things, and will be ever better travelled and more sophisticated, with an interest in culture and the arts, high and low brow. They will be looking for rich opportunities to experience authentic Scotland, and will be turned off by any hint of a tourist trap."

"the authenticity of the 'experience' is vital to all visitors"

"Our enduring philosophy must be to exceed our visitors' expectations. We must manage the quality of the overall visitor experience, including the quality of our food and accommodation, the quality of the service that is provided to our visitors, and the quality of the environment. Key to this will be attracting and developing the skills to deliver this quality"

"We need to exceed our customers' expectations so that they have a great time in Scotland and want to come back – and recommend us to their friends. In order to do that, we need to know who our customers are and what they'll want from us. We're in a fast-changing and competitive consumer marketplace, though, and consumer expectations are continually changing. We therefore need to stay ahead of the game, keep on top of market trends and new developments and be quick to respond with development and enhancement of our own products and services. Only then can we ensure we're always ready to exceed our customers' expectations, however they may change, and so build our reputation as a must-visit, must-return destination"

"The central themes are business entrepreneurship and innovation, business leadership, and a focus on the customer, with the public sector strongly supporting business and industry bodies to grow the sector"

Figure 10   Statements about the consumer extracted from "Scottish Tourism: The Next Decade - a framework for change" (Scottish Executive, 2006)

"Tourists increasingly want to find out about trips and activities online, and to book them online in real time. If we can't provide this service, visitors are likely to go elsewhere, regardless of the quality product we have to offer them. We therefore need to ensure that tourism businesses, local authorities and culture and heritage organisations are able to provide this service, either themselves or through visitscotland.com, perhaps by using the latter's "web-in-a-box""

"But it's not just about information and booking. Technology today is like electricity 100 years ago – it provides countless opportunities for tourism businesses to change the way they work – whether it's creating a customer feedback system providing visitors with hand-held electronic guides to your visitor attraction, or texting visitors on their arrival to let them know about events likely to interest them, suggesting a restaurant for dinner and providing tonight's menu. Better use of technology could also allow tourism businesses to work smarter, thus leaving them with more time to enhance their product or spend valuable time with their guests, and it will allow businesses to communicate more effectively with each other – a vital part of collaborative working"

"The first rung is to have a computer and email address for your business. From 2007 VisitScotland industry engagement will be done predominantly on an e-basis. Every tourism business wishing to work with VisitScotland will therefore have to have an email address, although we would hope that most businesses would have made much more progress by then in using e-technology. The ultimate aim is for businesses to provide 24-hour online booking facilities, as well as making use of other technology which will meet the needs of their particular customers. The Scottish Tourism Forum, the Enterprise Agencies, visitscotland.com and VisitScotland's area office network will work together to support tourism operators in becoming e-enabled and improving their use of e-business by ensuring access to training and advice. A series of e-commerce roadshows will be piloted by the above partners. They will look at how these can be built upon to spread good e-business practice"

Figure 11   Statements about technology extracted from "Scottish Tourism: The Next Decade - a framework for change" (Scottish Executive, 2006)

The 'authentic' experience: U-Model

A fresh conceptualisation of tourism is presented by Urry (1990) from the stance of the tourist's or consumer's "gaze". Whilst the tourist enjoys a privileged position, Urry exposes a number of issues, which elevates the status of the tourism provider (producer). He notes (Urry, 1990: 38) that the service consumed or 'experience' is 'spatially fixed' with both consumers and producers in (intimate) proximity. It is a spatially localised package or 'construct', which caters to consumer expectations, these expectation in part created through the imagery promoting the locale. The

'experience' includes a 'moment of delivery' which entails engagement or 'emotional work' typified by a smile, and pleasantries (Urry, 1990: 62-63). This personal element (e.g. the satisfaction from "walking into a hotel and seeing a familiar face") is an integral feature of the experience (Urry, 1990: 64). Urry makes the distinction between the collective and the romantic, with their respective emphasis upon producer led mass-consumption of a commoditised product and personally differentiated consumption of the authentic. However, the notion authenticity is cast into doubt due to the socially constructed nature of what is experienced in terms of the locale and the moment of delivery. Tourists are instructed about what to gaze upon. This particular interpretation of selected features of Urry's view, which espouses both a producer focus and local emphasis underpinned by social construction, is designated the U-model.

The I-model and U-model encapsulate two dichotomous views that embody debate about the use of technology or technology-enabled practices both within tourism and more generally. The I-model encapsulates a deterministic view which can be associated with the commodification of the tourism product, the mass consumed experience and the ubiquitous use of online technologies to support this consumption. In contrast, is the notion of the personal 'authentic' experience and the use of online technologies appropriate to maintaining this personal experience which, from both hotelier and visitor perspectives, commences with the online search for a place to visit and stay.

3.6 Summary

The foregoing account has briefly reviewed pertinent conceptualisations of technology and derived an appropriate analytical framework for use in this study. It commences by introducing the conventional deterministic view of technology and its counter-response which manifests loosely under the social shaping umbrella. It draws attention to both the materiality of the artefact as well as the symbolic. This becomes important in the context of ICTS in that the symbolic tends to be privileged during use, with the material being rendered invisible. Furthermore, the manner of usage is locally contingent.

In deriving the framework, attention has focused upon conceptualisations of the interplay between innovator-producer and user-consumer and the concept of user's domesticating technologies selected. Its examination has led to the development of a set of conceptual instruments. Domestication is unpacked to reveal 'appropriation', configuration', incorporation' and 'conversion'. The 'busy day' is presented as an instrument to denote the context of online practices. Online intermediation recognises two specific forms: the 'broker' and the producer'. The ethos underpinning hotelier practices and the institutional view of how hoteliers should be conducting themselves is presented in the conceptual instruments: the I-model and the U-model. Collectively this defines the analytical framework used in this thesis.

Chapter 4   RESEARCH STRATEGY – METHODOLOGY

if we want to understand social life then we need to follow the actors wherever they may lead us

(Law, J. & Callon, M., 1988: 284)

4.1   Aim

This chapter aims to explain the research strategy and methodology used in this study.

4.2   Introduction

This research examines the online practices of hoteliers and, thus, fits broadly within the domain of the Social Study of Technology, from which it draws its methodology. It has been assumed that people will take up and use new technologies according to how these are perceived as appropriate or relevant to the task at hand. This suggests that practices will vary and that, overall, there is perhaps preference for particular types of practices over others. Thus, the aim has not simply been to establish levels of uptake, but also to understand the variety and nature of the practices which have developed as well as the reasons given for the development of such patterns of usage. Whilst the former attempts to measure the variety and scale of practices, the latter seeks descriptions and explanations from users. This presents the challenge of selecting an appropriate methodology.

This chapter presents an account which explains why the methodology presented was used and how it was used. The chapter is organised into three parts. The first outlines the research strategy. This provides an overview of the approach to the research. The second presents an overview of the methodology and details about the methods used. The third part outlines the analytical framework.

4.3   Research Strategy

One useful framework to help think about approaches to research is proffered by Blaikie (2000: 100-127). He presents four research strategies. In simplistic terms, these are: 1) deriving theories about observed patterns (inductive strategy); 2) testing hypotheses about some theory (deductive); 3) establishing underlying principles/mechanisms (retroductive); and 4) providing detailed insights into the 'motives' underpinning social situations (abductive).

The latter (abductive) strategy perhaps relates most closely to the aims of this research: to understand from the users themselves what they are doing and why. In contrast to the natural world[18] which exists external to and independent of its observers, in the strategy chosen for this thesis, observers are viewed as participants within the social world. The study of the Natural World has given rise to the 'sciences' which embrace approaches (i.e. induction, deduction and retroduction) to identify causal relations, establish underlying mechanisms and thereby describe and explain phenomena. This is viewed here as inappropriate in the social world since the

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[18] The distinction between the social and natural world is drawn from Schutz, A. (1963) and Hughes, J.A. & Sharrock, W.W. (1997: 124)

social world comprises of people (actors) who, through their actions and interactions, 'construct' their 'social' realities. An observer can observe social behaviour and describe patterns of behaviour, but will not be able to establish underlying mechanisms, since these exist solely within the actor's cognitive domain. Observers can identify 'mechanisms' in the form of routines and conventions, but these occur as long as they hold meaning, though the meaning need not be apparent. 'Underlying mechanisms' are observer' suppositions which through their conceptualisation are used to explain behaviour, but these need not relate to the meaning that underpins the observed behaviour. Meaning can only be sought from the actors, hence the emphasis upon listening to the users. Reflecting this sensitivity, various quotations can be found within the empirical chapters.

By listening to users about how and why they take up and use online technologies it is possible to provide 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973: 7) about the routines and practices of these actors. Geertz presents the concept of 'thick descriptions' to denote "a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which ... are produced, perceived and interpreted, and without which they would not... in fact exist". In other words, rather than 'thinly' describing the observed act, it is desirable to provide a thick description of the context within which the act is given meaning. Furthermore, the analysis of these descriptions allows the derivation of categories and concepts (Blaikie, 2000: 117) and the generation of models of 'ideal types' (Blaikie, 2000: 167, 181) of users. Furthermore, and perhaps departing from the rigour of Blaikie's abductive strategy, it is proposed that these descriptions can reveal a common thread

that allows the conceptualisation of an underlying dynamic which explains these practices.

Since meaning is context dependent, this presents the challenge of how to make sense of the context of local practices. This may invoke the notion of the micro- and macro- levels, a dichotomy which can reveal a tension between the insights of 'average tendencies' at the macro-level and micro-level 'uniqueness'. Karagozoglu & Brown (1986) attempt to overcome this by suggesting a multilevel approach, which distinguishes five levels: government, industry, organisation, subunit and individual. They highlight the need to understand the interaction "among all... levels" in order to have "a full understanding of any one level" (Karagozoglu & Brown, 1986: 27). Molina (1993) critiques the macro-/micro- distinction, that it lacks "any systematic conceptualisation" for both the identification of 'micro'/'macro' relationships and their analysis (Molina, 1993: 482). He develops the analytical concept of a 'sociotechnical constituency' in the context of the analysis of the development of technology. Each constituency is contained within and contains a constituency. Each constituency is a system. A constituency may be "subsumed into a broader constituency" or "aggregate constituency", which is in interaction with "other broader constituencies" (Molina, 1993: 486). However, the systemic view invites questions about how to define a 'social' system and establish its dynamics in terms of its constituent elements.

Rather than adopt a systems view, the metaphor of the countryside (context) is introduced to distinguish between the immediate vicinity in which a unique plant

grows by the side of a river and the distant mountains from which the water the plant feeds upon is drawn. An adjacent observer of the plant may scan the horizon to identify the course of the river, and thereby identifying possible locations for other occurrences of the plant. The observer may follow the course of the river to investigate its source and establish why the water contains a high mineral content upon which the plant appears to thrive. This notion of observing the countryside allows the metaphor of the zoom lens (Pollock & Williams, 2009: 278) to be used to highlight the desirability of multiple views to gain a more complete picture of what is happening within the locus-of-practice. The lens zooms in to reveal the fine detail of individual online practices within the immediate vicinity, this designating the 'locus-of-practice'[19]. It also zooms out to capture the bird's eye view of the countryside, to locate features of interest (e.g. other occurrences of online practices and overall trends) and distant influences (e.g. institutional developments).

This regard for the bigger picture of the countryside introduces another thread to the research strategy, which perhaps relates to the aforementioned inductive strategy. The aim here is to scan the landscape (e.g. the Scottish Tourism industry) and identify any features or patterns that appear relevant at the level of the locus-of-practice. Are there any features which offer direction (e.g. the national tourism strategy) or opportunities for exploitation (e.g. the availability of intermediary services) or alternatively constrain uptake (e.g. the terms for taking up the services of visitscotland.com)? Furthermore, is it possible to identify other loci-of-practice and establish the nature of each practice to gauge the popularity of specific practices over

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[19] The OED definition of locus is "Place in which something is situated, locality" [OED online, http://dictionary.oed.com]. The term 'locus-of-practice' can be found in other disciplines, e.g. Social Work (Timms, N., 1983: 11) and Psychology (Pashler, H. & Baylis, G., 1991)

others? This introduces a quantitative element to the research, which contrasts with the predominantly qualitative nature of this research.

However, the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches has been subject to much debate as discussed by Blaike (2000: 243-247). Elucidated by Bryman (1984: 75), one difficulty within this debate arises "from a tendency for philosophical [epistemological] issues and technical [method] issues to be treated simultaneously and occasionally to be confused". This appears in attempts to validate research practice (i.e. methods) epistemologically; that specific methods are linked to specific epistemological traditions. Bryman reveals three occasions when this linkage break downs. The first concerns the selection of the most appropriate method for the problem under investigation. The second is when using qualitative methods as a preliminary to quantitative study. The third arises when 'triangulating' using a quantitative and qualitative mix of methods. The arguments to support each usage tend to be pragmatic rather than epistemological. Indeed, Blaikie concurs with Bryman's conclusion, stating "There is no necessary connection between approaches to social enquiry (paradigms), research strategies and methods of data collection and analysis" (Blaikie, 2000: 273). Revisiting this debate in 2008, Hanson presents "an argument for the idea that the quantitative/qualitative divide is without theoretical foundation. It is sustained by political rather than theoretical distinction" (Hanson, 2008: 106). In other words, there is no valid theoretical reason to avoid combining quantitative and qualitative approaches

In contrast to the big picture and local views an intermediate field of view was revealed during interviews - the 'locality'. Again, in a manner consistent with the abductive strategy, the views of actors in a variety of localities were sought to produce 'thick descriptions' in the form of case-studies. Views from actors comprised not only of interview responses, but also accounts presented on websites and in newspapers. Furthermore, it was questioned whether it would be possible to establish an underlying dynamic which related to the phenomena observed at the level of the localities.

In summary, the overall research strategy has been developed to provide detailed views of both the locus-of-practice and the locality and also an overview of the countryside (a 'contexted view' of practice[20]). In doing so, it necessarily draws upon a variety of methods. However, this mixed method approach does not equate with that of 'triangulation' (Blaikie, 2000: 262-270). Blaikie highlights that triangulation "has usually been concerned with reducing error or bias rather than simply establishing the existence of some phenomenon or the value of some variable" (Blaikie, 2000: 263). Bias reduction through convergence resulting from the different methods has not been intended. Instead the emphasis is upon the generation of different views in a manner akin to a geologist beside a rock exposure examining the surrounding countryside to identify possibly relevant topographical features.

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[20] This is consistent with the view expressed by Morrison (2002: 4) "of the value of contextualised interpretations" when understanding ICTs due to the far from simple relations between ICTs and people.

4.4   Methodology[21]

A mixed method approach has been adopted in order to examine different data sources and thereby acquire the multi-lens view. Three threads were followed. The first involved the use of documented sources to paint a bird's-eye view of institutional developments. The second was the compilation of a database to identify and examine the population of hoteliers in Scotland. The third was the use of interviews to develop an understanding of individual online practices.

4.4.1 <u>Documentary sources</u>

Documentary sources offer the potential to generate a rich insight into situations, otherwise inaccessible due to the inability to make contact with those involved in these situations, for whatever reasons. They are 'social artefacts' (Blaike, 2000: 188), a legacy of past and current conversations[22]. Indeed, the new phenomenon of online discussion forums allows access to topical issues and concerns that otherwise might be hidden. Moreover, government policy and the desire of companies, newspapers and individuals to provide material online, has allowed material to be readily accessed online. However, aside from authenticity issues, online sources present a major problem. Online content can change or disappear with no record surviving of previous material. This makes it necessary to retain 'hard copy' for reference at a

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[21] Mingers (2003b: 559) recognises that the word 'methodology' can have different meanings. The meaning that he adopts is "a structured set of methods or techniques to assist people in undertaking research or intervention" and that definition is adopted here.

[22] The notion of 'conversation' is perhaps encapsulated with a definition offered by the online OED: "**6.** Manner of conducting oneself in the world or in society; behaviour, mode or course of life", [http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.webfeat.lib.ed.ac.uk/cgi/entry/50049167, accessed 22nd January 2009]

later date. Whilst the website www.archive.org provided by Internet Archive

provided a useful online archive source, sought pages could be absent.

Sources	Contribution to understanding
Legislation	Defines the rules and boundaries that govern behaviour
Official reports of Parliamentary debates, Committee inquiries, Written questions	Highlight issues of public concern that can affect views that shape government policy and initiatives
Government White Papers and Policy Statements	Provide statements of the 'official' view, though do not necessary reveal whose view and how this view has developed
Government briefing papers (e.g. SPICe)	Provides the institutional view of specific situations based upon 'research'
Commissioned surveys	Provide structured insight into issues of interest to the sponsor
Annual Reports	Presents a 'positive' perspective on the past year's activities, perhaps to the detriment of negative issues
Strategic Plans, Operating Plans	Provides insight into intent and its justification
Meeting minutes	Is a filtered record of issues raised in meetings
Trade online forums	Allows expression of concerns in a closed environment
Newspaper reports	Allows expression of concerns in a open environment which includes the noise of un-informed expressionists

Figure 12   Documented sources used

Nevertheless, the wealth of accessible sources available (Figure 12), particularly

concerning institutional debates, policies and initiatives, has allowed several

narratives to be developed charting events and views. One narrative has examined

developments within tourism since the Development of Tourism Act 1969,

particularly at an institutional level (Harwood, 2008). Similarly, the development of

institutional policies, initiatives and legislation relating to e-Commerce within the

European Union, the UK and specifically Scotland has also been narrated (Harwood,

2009). Together they provide a rich contextual insight into institutional support for

both tourism and the uptake of online technologies and provide a reference for the material examined here.

4.4.2 <u>A database of the population of Scottish hoteliers and online practices</u>

The measurement of different occurrences of online practices allows their variety and scale to be assessed. This requires identification of the target objects (i.e. hoteliers) and the categorisation of features of interest regarding the objects (e.g. accommodation types, quality grade). The resultant 'facts' about each object constitutes the data, which is compiled in a database and analysed to reveal any patterns or anomalies.

The database was originally envisaged to be the keystone of this research. Its initial purpose was to establish the uptake of emails and websites by hoteliers based upon the assumption that if an hotelier had either, then this information would be provided in an accommodation directory provided by the official promotional channel of the ATB. This would then allow the uptake of online technologies to be mapped out both in the spatial and temporal domain and thus provide a base for a more detailed study of online practices. It was later realised through detected omissions, that this was a false assumption and that there was no consistency in the ATB publication of these details. Nevertheless, it was recognised that the database would allow the profiling of the population of hoteliers.

The database was manually compiled between 2004 and 2007. It built upon a database provided by visitscotland.com for October, 2004, but rapidly evolved as new questions arose and opportunities for collecting 'useful' data were recognised. A variety of hard copy and online directories were used in its compilation:

- ATB accommodation brochures for the years 2003, 2005 and 2007 (submission deadline is the end of April of preceding year)

- Yellow Pages Directories published closest to October 2004 for entries under the headings of "Bed & Breakfast", Guest Houses" and "Hotels & Inns".

- the inventory visible on the SmoothHound website (15th April 2005 and 27th May 2007), the Undiscovered Scotland website (29th May 2007) and the Expedia website (13th July 2007)

- the inventory visible on the visitscotland.com website in February, 2006, February, 2007 and May, 2007

The database was spreadsheet-based. The advantage of the spreadsheet is its capability to easily handle the manipulation of data using the embedded pivot-table tool. Underpinning its development has been the core decision about which data fields to collect. It had been early recognised that early choices about specific fields, which had to be selective due to data entry demands, could hinder latter analysis, thus creating the challenge of getting this 'right', though there was a need to return at a later date to input missing fields.

A key concern about the development of the database was manual data entry error. A variety of 'cross-checks' were built into the spreadsheet to verify that new entries correlated with source data and with previously entered data (e.g. cell-counters, and

regular version updates). Cell-counters were used to ensure that the number of entries matched the number of records in sources and that changes in overall record numbers could be accounted for. Version updates allowed cross-reference with earlier datasets to enable a check for un-noticed accidental changes. Postcode and telephone number details were used to resolve data conflicts, particularly for name changes of businesses, and thereby establish consistency. This also allowed the initial database to be 'cleaned', as a variety of errors were encountered including duplicated entries. The final analysis also revealed errors, which were changed accordingly though these were few. The Royal Mail's postcode finder (www.royalmail.com) was used to identify missing post-codes. Look-up tables provided by UKBORDERS (http://borders.edina.ac.uk/html/) allowed post-codes to be used to establish Council Area and National Grid Reference co-ordinates.

The database's rich detail provided a bird's eye view of the heterogeneous nature of serviced accommodation provision in Scotland and the geographical distribution and temporal changes in this composition over a five-year period (2003-7) (Harwood, 2007). In addition to its quantitative insights it allowed, using post-codes and ArcGIS software[23], the generation of spatial visualisations of the distribution of hoteliers. More importantly, it provided the base data from which to select respondents for interview as well as to examine online booking practices both nationally and within localities.

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[23] Software supplied by ESRI (www.esri.com),

4.4.3 <u>Interviews</u>

Interviews emerged to become the dominant data source for this study. The interviews provided a rich insight into individual and collective practices.

Selection of Respondents

One early decision was to differentiate hoteliers into corporate providers and small businesses on the basis that the corporations, particularly the global chains, would exploit online technologies as an integral feature of their implementation and use of information and communication technologies. It has been assumed that these corporate developments would represent state-of-the-art implementations and exploit formal project management approaches involving the requisite technical expertise in a manner not dissimilar to that of ERP implementations. Furthermore, the number of properties in Scotland that could be classified as corporate in comparison to small businesses was small (less than 6%) (Harwood, 2007). This focused attention upon the non-corporate players in anticipation that their approach to the uptake and use of online technologies would be different to corporate practices.

The interviews were conducted with hoteliers from a limited number of localities. These localities, selected on the basis of their contrasting nature, are visually identified in Figure 13 and included the City of Edinburgh and the islands of Gigha, Islay, Arran, Mull, Skye, Barra, Orkney and Shetland. Whilst Edinburgh represents a high-density urban tourism location, the Scottish islands are remote rural locations. The two larger areas (Edinburgh, Dumfries & Galloway) were broken down on a post code basis and locations selected within, to target respondents.
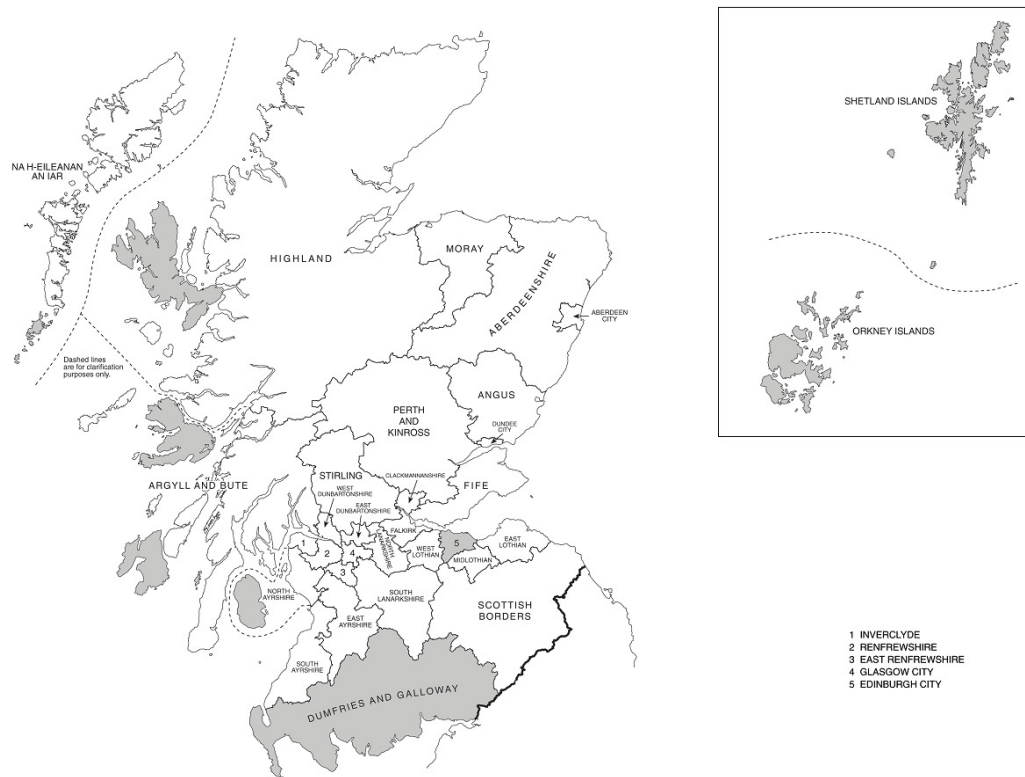
Reproduced from Ordnance Survey map data by permission of the Ordnance Survey © Crown copyright 2001.

Figure 13   Locations of interview respondents

Contact and Response Rates

The population of hoteliers for each locality was compiled, their email addresses sought and all with emails contacted. Interviewees were contacted by email, though this was managed in a controlled manner due to the uncertainty about how potential respondents would react to this. The first batch of 51 emails was sent on the 29th May 2006 with the "display confirmation" flagged to provide a message when the email had been displayed. Messages were received revealing that ten emails had been displayed. However, personal circumstances on the 31st May 2006 prevented further

follow-up. Nevertheless, there were no positive responses. Emails were resumed in July.

Initially a small group was targeted to gauge response, which was expanded as confidence grew about response levels. It was quickly realised that the timing of interviews was important since hoteliers would ignore emails or be unwilling to give time when busy, such as during the summer months or school holidays. To maximise response rates for a locality, emails were re-sent to non-respondents three to four times at intervals of not less than two weeks to avoid creating the perception of spamming. Response rates varied from locality to locality, with Arran generating a 35% response (Figure 14). The interviews with hoteliers continued into 2007. There were a total of 95 interviews, plus nine replies by email.

Location	Population (initial)	Population (after search)	Date of search	Number of e-mail addresses	Dates of contact	Strategy	Interviews (as % of those with email addresses)
Edinburgh			-			First contact	
EH22	-	-	-	-	15th Feb '06	pilot	1
EH9		-	-		(orig. 29th May '06) 21st July '06 – 30th Oct '06		5
EH16		-	-		1st July '06 – 31st Aug '06		5
EH15		-	-		27th Sep '06 -14th Oct '06		2
Mull	-	133	Oct-'06	84	(11th Jul '06) 9th Oct '06 – 19th Jan 07 (7th Mar '07)	Initial island – exploratory to establish penetration to as many as possible	19 (22.6%)
Dumfries & Galloway		-	-		21st Jul '06 – 20th Dec '07 (2nd Apr '07)		10
Shetlands	-	89	Nov'06	45	1st Aug '06 – 14th April '07		9 (20%)
Eyemouth	-	-	-	-	12th Sep '06	Opportunist interview due to chance meeting	1
Arran	-	69	Nov'06	43	4th Oct '06 - 13th Mar '07	Exploratory to establish penetration to as many respondents as possible	15 (34.8%)
Skye	-	256	Mar'07	214	12th Oct '06 – 11th Apr '07		11 (5.1%)
Ardnamurchan	11	-	-	5	13th Oct '06	Spin off from a comment raised by Mull respondent	1
S Uist		-	-		2nd Nov '06		1
Barra	-	18	Nov'06	15	16th Nov '06 – 4th Mar '07		3 (20%)
Orkney	125	-	Apr'07	96	16th Jan '07 – 19th Apr '07		4 (4.2%)
Islay	-	57	Mar'07	30	9th Mar '07 12th Apr '07	Attempt to establish manner of use of local third party and nature of collective effort	4
Gigha	-	4	-	4	27th Mar '07 – 20th Apr '07	Exploratory to examine collective effort	3
Black Isle	-	-	-	-	26th Jul '07	Opportunist interview based on newspaper report	1

Figure 14   Details of response rates of interviewed respondents

Profile of Respondents

The profile of respondents is presented in the following tables (Figure 15 to Figure 18). Larger multi-site properties were neglected for reasons previously mentioned. Figure 15 reveals that the profile of respondents by accommodation type, when compared to the profile of accommodation type for Scotland, is not significantly different. There is perhaps over-representation of B&Bs which account for 54% of all respondents in comparison to 41% of the total population (Harwood, 2007). Hotels are clearly under-represented with only 6% of respondents in contrast to 21%

of the population. However, this may reflect the exclusion of the multi-site hotels. Analysis of the 2005 population for which there is capacity information, reveals that around 37% of hotels have 50 or more rooms, of which around 75% belong to multi-site organisations.

Location	B&B	Guest House	Small Hotel	Hotel	Lodge	Restaurant	Total
Ardnamurchan		1					1
Arran	5	2	6	2			15
Barra	1		1	1			3
Black Isle	1						1
D&G	4	3	1 (1e)	1 (1e)	1		10
Edinburgh	4	7 (4e)	2				13
Eyemouth	1						1
Gigha	2		1				3
Islay	1	2		1			4
Mull	15 (2e)	2	2				19
Orkney	4						4
S Uist			1				1
Shetlands	7 (1e)	2					9
Skye	8		1	1		1	11
Number of respondents	53	19	15	6	1	1	95
	56%	20%	16%	6%	1%	1%	100%
Scotland (2005)*	2643	1475	733	1363	85	29	6522
	41%	23%	11%	21%	1%	0%	100%

Figure 15 The profile of respondents according to accommodation type (*the profile is based upon a calculation of the population of hoteliers (Harwood, 2007); 'e' denotes an email response)

Figure 16 profiles respondents by the number of rooms and reveals that 54% of respondents had 3 or less rooms, 24% had between 4 and 7 rooms, whilst 21% had over 7 rooms. Figure 17 reveals that respondents spanned the grading scale of 2 to 5, with the only omissions being grade 1 businesses. However, grade 1 businesses comprised only 2% of graded hoteliers in 2005 (Harwood, 2007). Furthermore, 27 respondents (28%) were not VisitScotland quality graded, thereby unable to use the online services of VisitScotland (visitscotland.com). Figure 18 identifies

respondents' use of visitscotland.com in February 2007. Whilst 27 respondents were precluded from a presence on visitscotland.com, one business had opted not to be present, despite qualifying for a presence. Only eleven respondents were using the online booking facilities ('bo/'green'). Seasonal businesses (open between 7 and 9 months of the year) represented 13% (12) of respondents.

	number of rooms																		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	18	23	32	38	Total
Number of respondents	6	19	27	7	6	5	5	4	1	5	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	95

Figure 16   The profile of interviewed respondents according to number of rooms

Location	not part of the grading scheme	QA await	QA BB2	QA BB3	QA BB4	QA BB5	QA GH3	QA GH4	QA H2	QA I2	QA I3	QA RR5	QA SH2	QA SH3	QA SH5	Total
Number of respondents	27	4	2	13	12	4	11	4	1	1	2	1	2	10	1	95

Figure 17   The profile of interviewed respondents according to quality grade

location	be	bo				c			not on the vs.com website	total
		blue	green	green blue grey	green grey	blue	blue grey	grey		
Number of respondents	29	2	1	4	6	16	7	2	28	95

Figure 18   The profile of interviewed respondents according to use of visitscotland's online booking facilities

(be = book by email; bo = book online; c = call to book; blue = call or mail (using enquiry form) to book; green = available to book online;   grey = unavailable)

Manner of Interaction

Initial interviews were conducted face-to-face, by telephone and by email. An interview protocol was developed to standardise the manner of approach (e.g. manner of introduction), a spreadsheet used to record contact details and a log kept of any issues arising. It was soon recognised that telephone interviews were more informative than face-to-face interviews, with far greater accessibility to respondents. Use of the telephone allowed simultaneous online access to the business website and a Google search engine, thereby allowing questions about specific features of their website or their selection of intermediaries. Emails, with one exception, were disappointing and were quickly discontinued. The duration of interviews varied from 20 minutes to a couple of hours depending upon the respondent's willingness to talk. All respondents with only a few exceptions agreed to interviews being tape recorded.

Interviews with hoteliers tended to be semi-structured, guided by a prepared list of 20 issues (Figure 19). This list was generated conceptually using the metaphor of a 'black box' which was acquired then modified over time by a user. This reasoning was considered to be an effective approach to generate a relatively comprehensive view of the issues affecting practice. It was trialled in a face-to-face interview with a local hotelier. Item 11 on the list was expanded to explore online purchasing in more detail. For those respondents who preferred to reply by email, the list was transformed into the document presented in Figure 19, which was emailed. Responses tended to be one word or brief statements relating to the questions, and lacked any richness. Thus, this mode of contact was quickly discontinued.

Since each business I talk to is unique, I have not designed a set questionnaire but have proposed a range of open questions. As such, if a question is inappropriate but it provokes another question, then I am interested in this.

IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES:

ADOPTION:
1. What is the history of Internet/e-mail use?
2. How and when was the decision made to adopt the Internet/e-mail?
3. What factors affected this decision?
4. Who has influenced this decision (e.g. friends, family)?

CHANGES IN USE OVER TIME:
5. What expectations did you initially have, have these been realised and /or have these changed over time?
6. What problems have been experienced?
7. What factors have affected any changes in your use of the Internet /e-mail (e.g. cheaper service provider)?
8. Have any organisations been approached for support/service provision – if so who and why?
9. Have any organisations approached you offering support/service provision – if so what was your response and why?

CURRENT PRACTICE
10. Have there been any changes to the way the business is run due to the Internet/e-mail?
11. Is the Internet used to purchase anything online? *If so, why, what kind of products - services do you purchase (business use only) and how do you go about selecting a supplier?*
12. What are the perceived advantages/disadvantage of the Internet/e-mail?
13. Have anticipated benefits been achieved?
14. What advice would you suggest to other businesses thinking about adopting the Internet/e-mail?

CITY/RURAL DISTINCTION:
15. Do you consider that your location has provided any advantage /disadvantage regarding take-up/use of the Internet/e-mail. Could you please explain your why you given this response?

THE ROLE OF INTERMEDIARY WEBSITES/WEB-SERVICES:
16. If any institutions such as the Scottish Parliament, Scottish Enterprise and VisitScotland, have affected your attitude/practices towards the use of the Internet/e-mail, what is it that they have said/done to influence this?

INSTITUTIONAL /TRADE ASSOCIATION INFLUENCES:
17. Do you use any third party service provision (e.g. SmoothHound, community websites, visitscotland.com, ISPs and web-designers)?
18. Who have you used and why?
19. Have you discontinued use of any third party and if so, who, when and why?
20. What are the benefits and problems/concerns with any named providers?

I am also interested in any other issues that may be considered important which I have not identified.

Figure 19   A template of issues covered in conversations with hoteliers
(The italics highlight the change)

The semi-structured nature of interviews encouraged their free flow and, with

prompts being used, appropriately to allow new issues to be raised by the

respondents and then explored. A range of issues were explored during interviews, including online purchasing behaviour and the role of the institutions in informing or supporting online activities. Due to the wealth of data gathered, the topic of online purchasing is to be examined elsewhere.

When issues relating to local tourism groups were revealed, a snow-ball approach was used to gain access to people with key roles within these groups. Unlike the systematic approach with hoteliers, interviews relating to the groups tended to take place when the opportunity arose and spanned the years 2006 to 2008. Interviews were unstructured and probing, guided by notes taken during the interview. This allowed the narrative about developments within each locality to concurrently unfold over time. This provided insight into how and why these groups formed, how they developed over time and the manner in which their online promotional presence emerged and has been sustained.

In addition to 104 interviews with hoteliers (face-to-face, by telephone and e-mail), over 25 interviews were held with representatives of a variety of stakeholders, which included trade organisations, local tourism action groups, local Internet service providers and government organisations. Interviews were also conducted with UK personnel of two international hotel chains to establish benchmarks for practices. Collectively, they provided an insight into many aspects of the tourism industry. These interviews took place during 2007 and 2008 and tended to be unstructured.

4.5 Analytical framework

Analysing such large amounts of data has presented an analytical challenge. The analysis of the database used basic statistical techniques to establish the frequency of occurrence of variables (fields), which was facilitated by the pivot table tool embedded in the spreadsheet database.

Documents lacked a theoretical basis for their analysis. Attention focused upon the dating of documentation, thereby establishing a chronological sequence of publication events, and identifying the intent of the document and the key messages contained therein that are perceived as relevant to the uptake of online technologies, though this introduces analytical bias regarding interpretation and what to include-exclude.

The main challenge has been the analysis of interview material. As the interviews progressed it became apparent that there were three distinct themes: internalisation, intermediation and localisation (Figure 20). Each offers scenarios relating to the manner of uptake particular to the theme. This has shaped both the analysis and the structure of the empirical chapters. Each scenario is analysed using the framework developed in section 3.5.

The initial scenario (internalisation) focuses upon the efforts of individual businesses to get online in terms of email and their own website (Chapter 5). The second theme concerns the use of third parties ('intermediation') to get an online promotional

presence. Two distinct scenarios are identified, 'public sector' (i.e. VisitScotland) (Chapter 6) and 'commercial' (Chapter 7). The emphasis in each from a domestication perspective is different: 'public sector' intermediation places emphasis upon the configuration and incorporation aspects of domestication, whilst 'commercial' intermediation emphasises the appropriation and conversion aspects. The discovery of local collective effort to promote both localities and businesses online suggested the process of 'localisation' (Chapter 8). This is used to explore the boundaries of domestication drawing upon the metaphor of 'tailoring'. In the background are institutional forces, of which, the more significant have been outlined in Chapter 2, section 2.5.
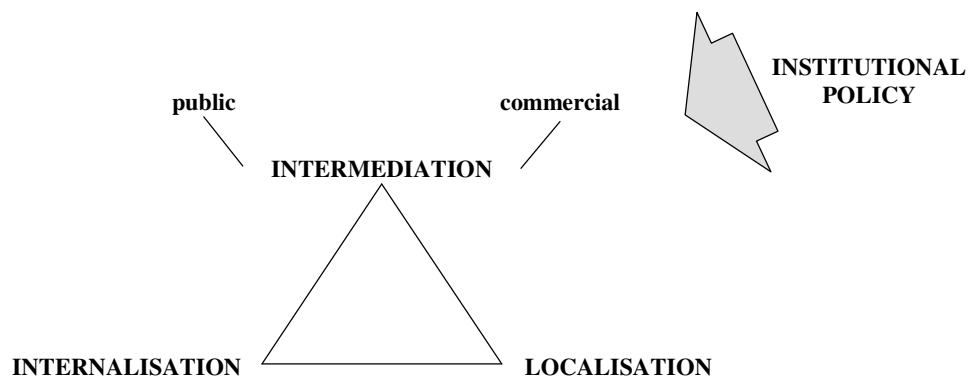
Figure 20   Structuring the analysis of the exploitation of online technologies

The analysis of the interviews required the processing of the interview data. Because there were 85 taped interviews and there was much repetition in the interviews, only the more interesting interviews were selected for the transcription. Nevertheless, this led to 30 complete transcriptions, whilst notes were made from the rest. The large amount of text generated was codified according to the themes presented in Figure 20, using the software tool NVivo7. The resultant text was organised by theme then

manually examined with coloured highlighters to identify issues of interest, controversy or as exemplars of practice. Quotes were selected accordingly. The polyphonic style of the empirical chapters in which selected quotes are embedded, whilst decontextualising the quotes, also recontextualises these quotes (Czarniawska, 2002). The aim is to let the voice of the respondents be heard, rather than be filtered through re-interpretation.

Issues raised under the 'localisation' theme, together with notes taken during the respective interviews and the use of relevant online sources (e.g. tourism group websites) allowed narratives about each locality to unfold over time. By updating each narrative on an on-going basis it allowed questions to arise which could be explored in subsequent interviews. The narratives have been translated into the five case-studies presented in section 8.4. A further case-study was compiled solely through the use of online materials, which included media reports and a Director's presentation. The media material was used on the assumption that it would not misrepresent the situation, although was likely to be biased. The decision to compile and use this case-study was based upon its message, which contrasted to the other cases. Whilst the design and use of case-studies has been extensively addressed by Yin (1994, 2003), the opportunistic, exploratory and concurrent nature of the study of each locality precluded the formation of theory and research questions to provide a framework to guide case-study selection, focus, coherent description and generalisation (Yin, 2003: 5). Indeed, these interviews equate with Yin's 'pilot case study' (Yin, 1994: 74-76).

4.6   Summary

There is no ideal research approach. However, the research strategy adopted appears to fit the intent: to examine the local uptake and use of online technologies taking into consideration the bigger picture of what is happening elsewhere. Using the metaphor of the countryside, locality and the local, it has been possible to juxtapose the different views to present a multi-lens perspective of the uptake of online technologies. This has required the adoption of a multi-method approach of data collection and analysis, with attention focusing upon documents and a compiled statistical database, which have both provided a view of the countryside, and also upon respondent views, which has provided a local view. All three have contributed to the view of the locality.

Each method has provided its own challenge. Indeed, the use of all three reflects an underestimation of the magnitude of the intended research. The demand upon time of each has been the major factor affecting progress. Nevertheless, this has provided a learning experience about the practical difficulties of each method and in combining their use.

Chapter 5   INTERNALISATION: taking ownership

Throughout the world, information and communications technologies are generating a new industrial revolution already as significant and far-reaching as those of the past… The first countries to enter the information society will reap the greatest rewards

(Bangemann Report, 1994: 5)

5.1   Aim

This chapter is the first empirical chapter and uses domestication to examine how hoteliers take ownership for and develop their online practices.

5.2   Introduction

It is 'imperative' for the success of a nation's economy that online technologies are embraced. If businesses are to succeed in the Digital Age they must go online. This is the message that has been propagated following the publication of the Bangemann Report in 1994 for the European Council. Online technologies are viewed as having universal application. Thus, the 'imperative' has become an intrinsic feature of ICT policies in a wide range of actors (e.g. education and government). Within the business domain, it forms part of the advice given by government funded business advisors to businesses (though this advice is often without detailed consideration of its consequences or costs). Going online is universally seen to be a good thing.

One problem with this imperative is that it disguises the heterogeneous nature of the economy. Sectors vary considerably in their structure and operation.   Specific

sectoral and organisational needs vary considerably. To illustrate, the specific actors that comprise the hotelier sector are characterised by their diversity (Harwood, 2007). Its structure comprises of mainly differentiated small/micro businesses[24]. This diversity suggests that each business has different online requirements (with a variety of solutions implemented and a variety of approaches used for the implementation). These different 'adopter needs' conflict with the standardised offerings of generic technologies. This has led to problems and, importantly, as in the case of configured technologies, uneven development. Whilst larger multi-site organisations have successfully made the online transition, smaller single-site businesses have been less enthusiastic about this transition, with a number making little or no use of the Internet.

This chapter is the first of four empirical chapters that examines practices. It focuses upon the hotelier's own efforts to develop an online presence. Subsequent chapters examine the important roles of third party intermediaries and local/national destination marketing intermediaries and consider the "appropriateness" of these solutions, particularly the 'official' solution provided.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the process used by smaller businesses, to develop their own 'appropriate' online presence. The word 'own' denotes ownership, which lends itself to the view that, in taking ownership, businesses 'internalise' an online presence – that is, there is a process that can be described as 'domestication'. In order to demonstrate the adoption of technology by these actors a hybrid version

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[24] This variety can be specified in a number of ways: number of rooms and bed-types, seasonality, grading, en-suite facilities, geographical location and the number of managed/owned sites.

of Silverstone et al's (1992) and Williams et al's (2005) frameworks is deployed. This allows the internalisation process to be systematically examined from four distinct viewpoints, ('appropriation', 'configuration', 'placement' and 'impact') to reveal the different possibilities afforded by each viewpoint.

Rather than attempt to explore all online practices, particular attention will be given to the mundane and routine activity of booking accommodation, and use this to examine the implications for online practices. Examination of the detail provides insight into the role of online technologies within daily practices.

The first section of this chapter provides a preliminary insight into booking practices, contrasting pre-online practices with online practices within the context of the 'busy' day. The second section examines the evidence from the four distinct viewpoints associated with the domestication process. This provides an analysis of actual practices. The third section discusses key issues arising from the analysis. In addition to issues arising from the domestication of online technologies, the domestication framework itself is reviewed to identify its merits and limitations. The fourth section presents the conclusions.

The analysis reveals that the uptake and use of online technologies is a complex activity allowing many different possibilities for appropriation, configuration, incorporation and conversion. Online practices vary considerably and are a function of both the background and character of the individual and the nature of the situation. Specific issues identified and examined include:

- whether newer technologies are a substitute or complement for existing technologies;

- the intrinsic nature of learning within the domestication process;

- how the online identity translates into the online experience of the visitor;

- the range of locations in both real and virtual domains that can be considered for the placement of online technologies;

- the nature of visitor engagement, which, rather than being an anonymous online transaction, tends to be by email and/or telephone thereby creating a more personal experience.

Two contrasting implementation approaches can be distinguished: DIY or third party appropriation.

5.3   Context of online practices

This first section provides a preliminary insight into booking practices, contrasting pre-online practices with online practices and within the context of the 'busy' day. The 'busy' day is a concept developed in 3.5.2 and used to reflect that an hotelier engages in a full day of both routine and non-routine activity, involving both private and business (public) matters. It sets the scene so that, during the subsequent analysis and discussion, the issues raised can be positioned within this scene.

5.3.1 <u>Practice – old and new ways of doing things</u>

The booking process traditionally involves a customer making contact with the hotelier, establishing whether requirements can be met, and negotiating the terms of the visit and closing it with a payment, often at the end of the stay. Deposits can be taken by cheque or by credit card if the hotelier has acquired these facilities from its bank. Contact would be by telephone, letter or, if in the locality, by 'calling in' (face-to-face). The hotelier's main device for handling this process is the 'reservations book' (Figure 21). This image is that of the reservations book of a six bedroom Guest House from the east coast of Scotland.
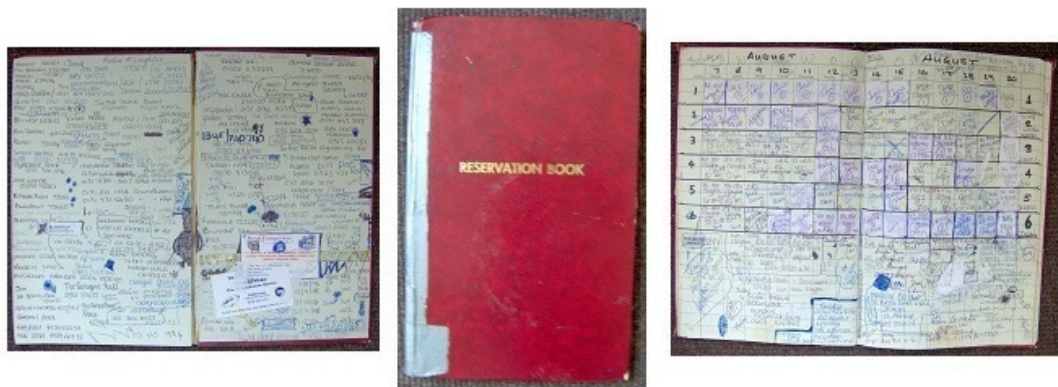
Figure 21   The 'Reservations Book': inside back cover, front cover and sample bookings page [this has been presented as a slightly out of focus image to preserve anonymity]

The importance of the reservations book is that it acts as an inventory management system. The inventory comprises the rooms and beds. The reservations book

provides the record of bookings highlighting unsold stock (rooms and beds). Any other records need to be reconciled with this "master" record. The 'reservations book' is an off-the-shelf item, acquired from a well-stocked stationers. Its pages are marked with a standard template suitable for smaller hoteliers. The image reveals both the manner of its use and the wealth of data contained. Heavy duty tape binds it together suggesting wear and tear which has come from sustained use. Opening up the front cover reveals a mosaic of 'useful' information including rates, contact details and also a variety of small doodles. The inside of the back cover contains an even more cluttered mosaic of contact details, including two business cards. Opening up a bookings page reveals the experience based reconfiguration of the layout to meet requirements, in this case for six rooms. In addition to the allocation of names/numbers to the rooms, we can identify the liberal application of white marker to blank out details and allow new details to be entered. Below the room details is space to record booking details; names, contact details, arrival times, deposits received calculations and other notes, as well as the ubiquitous small doodles. These doodles suggest a protracted discussion over the telephone involving more than the exchange of basic booking details. It can be noted that the reservations book offers a variety of "affordances" (Sellen and Harper, 2002: 17) which allow different uses (e.g. to have things written on it, to "hold" letters between its pages or to be carried about).

Discussions have revealed that ICT potentially transforms this rather archaic way of taking bookings by providing a substitute for the brochure, letter and telephone. Now, people can gather information from the property's website and make contact

by email. It potentially offers, through online booking facilities, a substitute for the reservations book, with availability and rates visible on the hotelier's website and all booking details being captured faithfully and stored electronically on a local internet connected computer. Deposits or full payment can be mediated using a third party online payment facility (e.g. PayPal). Associated with this are administrative issues (e.g. content management, record keeping - analysis, verification of transaction status and process performance). Furthermore, the transaction will take place within a regulatory environment (e.g. Disability Discrimination Act 1995), which the hotelier needs to be aware of. Other issues will include security of stored and transmitted data and the terms relating to using a third party online payment facility (e.g. fees/charges, delay before actual receipt of payment and the handling of fraudulent transactions).

This contrast between the old and new suggests that the new can make the booking process far easier for both the hotelier and the customer. The hotelier no longer needs to interact directly, instead consults, when convenient, the electronic records to find out who is arriving and when, so that everything is ready. The customer has access to details about the hotelier and can book accommodation around the clock. In principle, this idealised image of online technologies offers an enhanced means to make a booking.

The seeming advantages and the rhetoric of the 'imperative' appear to be at odds with practice. The actual online booking process embraces a lot of' 'taken-for-granted' or 'invisible' detail. This is not visible in the 'imperative' related rhetoric

about online booking or in decontextualised and abstracted descriptions of the process. The invisible has a bearing upon how we take-up new technologies, assuming their availability. This invisible detail is embedded in the 'busy' day. The following section provides an insight into what constitutes a 'busy' day.

5.3.2 The 'busy' day

The 'busy' day is a concept introduced to reflect that an hotelier engages in a full day of both routine and non-routine activity involving both private and business (public) matters. An insight into the 'busy' day is provided by the response from the wife of a couple who runs a seven roomed guest house [EH9-1] to an invitation to discuss her online practices. "I honestly have no information I can give you". There is the perception here that there is nothing to contribute to discussions on online practices, despite the property having its own website, an email address and utilising the visitscotland.com online booking engine. This reveals a high degree of engagement with online technologies, but which have been successfully embedded or domesticated. They are part and parcel of daily life; they have been "tamed". Her response provides a unique insight into what might be a common feature of a family run business:

> at this time of year [early August] I barely have time to think - running guest house (a 24/7 job in itself), 2 young children off school, cooking, cleaning, ironing, etc.,etc.,etc!

Her distancing between online technologies and the running of the business is revealed in the absence of activities relating to their effective exploitation:

I don't keep records of who I advertise with, its always a surprise to me when I get an invoice for advertising! I don't ask my guests where they heard about us. I am totally disorganised when it comes to the computer, I have 3 standard signatures set up for my email enquiries, nothing else. I don't know how many enquiries I get or where they come from or how many turn into actual business, I don't ask my enquirers why they decided not to book with me, I don't ask guests why they have chosen me over someone else etc, etc…. I have no interest in computers or the internet and I'm quite happy pottering about as I am.   I don't start getting much free time until the end of November/beginning of December.

Whilst no information was provided about what was done to support online practices one gets a sense that whatever online related activity was pursued, it had become almost invisible within the context of the day-to-day routine, this being exacerbated by the total absence ("no") of an "interest in computers or the internet". Indeed, it could be argued that online technologies had the same status as, say, a hoover or washing machine within the domesticated world of this business. Domestication of online technologies takes place within this 'busy day'.

5.4   Examining the internalisation of online technologies

The internalisation or domestication of online technologies is investigated from each of the four viewpoints. Within each viewpoint, issues raised by respondents are presented and examined. In this manner the complexity associated with each viewpoint is revealed. The key issues raised are then discussed in the "Discussion" (section 5.5).

5.4.1 <u>Appropriation</u>

Appropriation involves all the activities involved with the acquisition of the requisite configurational technologies and services. It involves establishing what is required, how this need is to be met, identifying the right suppliers, as well as the actual act of acquiring each element. It is an interactive process involving the hotelier and those providing the requisite configurational technologies and services, though it may involve others in terms of suggesting possibilities and providing advice or support.

The Motivation

The process of securing access to or ownership of the resources required to go online may commence with the decision: "I realised that the Internet really was the way to go" [EH16-7]. Aligned with the dogmatic 'imperative', this reveals a blind faith in the power of the Internet. The faith is reinforced through reflective comparison with the online efforts of competitors. A Guest House owner with ten rooms, comments:

> I did a bit of marketing research. I went around all the Guest Houses here, and I realised that that was one thing that was lacking with them was… they were far too old-fashioned to look at the use of the Internet. Most of them were websites that were purely informative. None of them had booking engines or booking forms and all that. They found it all too complicated. A lot of them are run by people who are used to an old form of guest house running which is, wait until the customer arrives on the door…and, you know, things would be hunky dory [EH16-7].

The respondent has observed and learnt what the competition is doing. However, the respondent appears to have some conception of what is possible, as the comments suggest an almost contemptuous view of local competitors, that they are "old-fashioned" because they do not do more online. They are entrenched in an old way of doing business, of tourists passing by and dropping in. This is ascribed to a lack of

understanding of online technologies and their benefits. They fail to appreciate that the Internet is the future for tourism. The respondent is "modern" and by embracing online technologies, will have a successful business in what is a changing tourism climate.

However, one of these competitors [EH16-6], who had only three rooms, revealed a completely contrasting view. Online technologies are viewed as "the logical extension for marketing", a view which had been pursued, with a website presence dating back four years and more recent exploitation of an online booking functionality through a third party website, incidentally not visible to the former respondent. Moreover there is a practical focus revealed in the comment: "its just not viable for me to spend huge amounts of time and money developing". Online technologies offer benefits, but there is a cost-benefit aspect that cannot be ignored.

This pragmatic view is further illustrated with the comments from the owner of a 14-bedroom small hotel who has established an online presence.

> Our only major problem at present is tying up a hotel management system with our current EPOS [Electronic Point of Sale] system and this would in turn involve a booking online system…
> Unfortunately a booking system that is incorporated into and immediately updates a hotel management system would cost a large sum of money and our size of hotel does not warrant that kind of expenditure. However we are looking into it and will mostly likely come up with a solution [DG2].

The key issue for this larger hotelier is an integrated information facility, of which the online presence is just one element. However the cost of an off-the-shelf integrated system is not justifiable. The pressure of the 'imperative' is absent. There

is no sense of urgency; that the business will falter because there is no online booking system. Instead, there is an expectation that a solution will be found.

The decision is likely to be a pragmatic decision based upon the needs of the business which, in the case of smaller hoteliers, is expected to be underpinned by considerations of cost and fit within existing practices than integration within existing information systems. These considerations may also affect how an online presence is acquired.

The Approach: Use of Third Parties or Do-It-Yourself (DIY)

Acquiring an online presence is captured by the comment from an elderly respondent

> when we bought the hotel in 1996, there were a couple of directories at that time SmoothHound and Milford… they provided me with a page… they did it all for me at that time….
> almost immediately then I began to think that I would rather like one of my own… it took me a wee while to learn how to do it .. and then when I felt confident enough to do I then found out how you actually got it online got in touch with a company called VVVV who provided the web hosting and got my website up and running… that was probably about… 1999 [AR4].

This reveals two contrasting approaches to getting online.

The first is to use a third party to provide an online presence. A rather inexpensive option, the third party directory presence is possible without the hotelier having any computer equipment, as long as they have a fax or telephone to receive enquiries. The fundamental question of how one goes about the task of becoming aware of these third parties, whom to select and how to manage them will be dealt with in 0. This reflects that this is not just a straight forward transaction between third party and hotelier as exemplified: the third party contacts the hotelier with an attractively

priced offer to advertise the hotelier on the third party's website, including provision of contact details or an enquiry service; the hotelier makes a payment, provides details and forgets about it, perhaps receiving enquiries during the year, which may or not be recognised as coming via the third party and which may or may not convert into bookings; a year later the hotelier receives an invoice for another year's subscription.

The second approach of "do-it yourself" (DIY) transcends organisational size. Depending upon the background of the individual, this can be a learning exercise, particularly for those who are IT illiterate. In addition to a general awareness of the Internet and its alleged benefits, there are the practical and specific issues of what actions are required to get online and how does one go about this. There are three aspects. The first relates to establishing what is required and what is available. The second relates to the activity of acquiring or accessing the required products or services. The third concerns the use of these products or services, which involves both the configuration and placement of the respective elements (e.g. web-site generation and routines for email handling), which will be dealt with in the subsequent sections.

The elderly respondent, who was not familiar with online technologies, reveals a more proactive approach than that encountered by others:

> I used to take {computer} magazines, but I found that after a while that I didn't have time to read them and I simply just watch what's going and try to understand as much as possible about the new possibilities but obviously there are an awful lot of gimmicky things there that might look terribly attractive but at the end of the day are not necessarily going to add to the bottom line... Magazines... computer magazines... they're talking a language

that I can no longer keep up with… the terminology is becoming more and more difficult for me to understand and I'm not sure that I want to spend that amount of time... if what I am doing is bringing in business then I am happy .. if maybe not bringing in as much business as it might do if I was more clued up and could do more.. but given the nature of our business which is a wee bit laid back, I think I am quite happy with what we are doing [AR4].

This reveals a complex dynamic. The hotelier is running a busy business. Online technologies are constantly changing and, more importantly, the language describing – explaining these developments is becoming more complex and distant from day-to-day language. Whilst these newer technologies "look terribly attractive", their appraisal is based upon the criteria "to add to the bottom line". The lack of perceived business benefit of the newer technologies is perhaps diminishing interest in technological developments. The initial goal of getting a presence to meet a business need has been "satisfactorily" met. The way the business is run determines the need, "is a wee bit laid back". There is no desire to optimise the business and thus, there is no requirement to optimise the online presence. This is exacerbated by the growing gap between the language about new technologies and the capable level of knowledge of the hotelier. Thus, even if the newer technologies can offer relatively effortless benefit, the hotelier has no way of knowing this – there is a language barrier. As the language barrier grew, the communication channel became less interesting and eventually was severed. This reveals the growing gap between the constantly developing domain of specialist knowledge and what can be understood by the amateur, which creates a role for a third party expert who can be consulted.

External Expertise

There is a balancing act in which online technologies are only one element:

> it is like everything else you have got to be up to speed on being an accountant and dealing with VAT, being up to speed on food hygiene… there is not enough time in the day to be an expert in everything [EH22].

The small business owner-manager has the difficult task of balancing involvement in day-to-day operations and problems with ongoing developments in a wide range of externalities. This implies that knowledge sought out and gained is of a practical nature. The emphasis is upon actions taken within the context of what is relevant to, and good for, the business. This suggests that there is a need for specialist expertise. However, third party specialist expertise may be sought, but is not necessarily trusted as revealed by the attitude of the same hotelier about a web-designer:

> consultants who come in and who want to keep you in…. and they don't do the job completely , and you can't do it because you don't know how, then they get busy, then there are questions you want to ask… and they are not there and they are making money doing something else and… nothing is happening to your website [EH22].

Whilst this view is expressed about a web-designer, it is potentially applicable to any out-sourced activity. The selection of the right supplier, particularly for knowledge-based services is difficult. How much technical knowledge is required to know whether the expert service that is being sought is being delivered? Furthermore, dependency upon these experts creates frustration when there are delays.

An island based hotelier reveals the power of word-of-mouth recommendation for seeking out and acquiring third-part services:

> I had a website developed for me… I provided a lot of the information… it was [XXXX] at Fort William… I asked about… everybody knows somebody that really good at doing these things but nobody could deliver in the time-scale that I wanted… I cannot remember.. I think I got in touch with them in November and it went live shortly after the New Year… by the middle of

2005... I provided all the information to them and they put it together… the same with photographs… I let them do it [B1].

"Asking about" draws upon the hotelier's network of contacts to learn about the performance of third party service providers, without the need to penetrate the complexity of the technicalities of what is being sought. Distance is not an issue as water separated the island based hotelier and the mainland based third party. Other peoples' experiences provide a benchmark and raise the confidence to "let them do it".

The role of the public sector to advise about acquiring or accessing online related products or services appears limited, with few respondents acknowledging any useful assistance.

VisitScotland will advise what to do with their marketing and the different options that are available. I have to admit they are actually very good and that is definitely the best way to do it… because I am a small outfit I cannot spend more time on it so I limit myself… you could register with about fifty different places if you wanted and spend a lot of money, but the returns are just… particularly at this scale, so it's just not worth it [EH16-6].

This city based hotelier clearly had no issue regarding access to advice, but the financial benefit or "returns" governed both time and cost spent. For an islander access was an issue. Commenting about training:

I'd love to… but anything I do I would have to come of the island or alternatively, I'd have to be doing it in the winter… and I value the little bit of free time that I have fortunately [AR4].

It is inferred that training is at a distant location from the island, with this distance translating into time. Similarly, implementation is an issue

my concern is that is all very well to go off on workshops… but you got to have time to implement it… so it is a waste of time picking it up in the first place [EH22].

In all three cases, time is an issue. The hoteliers are busy people with demands upon their time and value for free time.

Summary

This examination of the appropriation of online technologies highlights several issues. First is the motivation to go online. Whilst the 'imperative', "it's the way to go" may be the motivation, it is suggested that there are perhaps more pragmatic reasons, "it's there and it can supplement" existing practices. An online presence can be acquired through a third party intermediary. Alternatively, one's own presence may be preferred, which involves deciding what this presence is to be and how it is to come about through one's own actions on a DIY basis. However, factors such as time and lack of knowledge may lead to the use of third party expertise to effect the desired result.

A key feature of appropriation is the learning that is associated with acquiring or accessing the products or resources. Learning is about the language, availability, technicalities and applications of the technologies, their potential benefits, the suppliers of the technologies and the rules governing how to engage with these suppliers. However, as commented by the hotelier above, acquisition and access needs to be followed by implementation, which introduces more complexity. Implementation entails two mutually dependent and intertwined activities – configuration and incorporation. Configuration concerns the conversion of ideas into a functionally fitting and aesthetically pleasing technological outcome – made-to-function. This contrasts with incorporation whereby the technological outcome is made to work – is embedded into daily practice.

5.4.2 <u>Configuration</u>

Configuration concerns the arranging of the different elements in such a way that they operate together to produce the desired result. This involves the configuration of hardware, software, content and services, perhaps in unique ways. Configurational technologies are ascribed value, purpose, role and identity (website image) to meet intentions and are configured accordingly. The level of configuration will reflect the perceived benefit or value of its application.

The configuration of online technologies requires the selection and arrangement of the necessary discrete elements that will achieve a specific objective or set of objectives. Whether this is to engage with customers by email, provide information about the property/location or to facilitate around-the-clock online booking, this goal will have significance in terms of the expectation of how it will help the business. The configurable elements relate to five aspects of the whole solution:

1. platform (hardware, software and interfaces);

2. content (text, image, and sound) and identity;

3. interactivity involving:

    - in-built technical facilities (hyperlinks, file downloads, enquiry forms and web-cams); and

    - third party enabled technical services (e-mail, online booking, payment);

4. tools (web-design application, file transfer application, digital camera); and

5. practices associated with use and the daily routine.

These five levels of configuration each have their own challenges.

Five Levels of Configuration

The platform relates to the configuration of hardware, software and interfaces, which provide the equipment that the user will access. Configuration is by following the instructions. This platform may already be present within the property and be used in other activities (e.g. by family members for playing games, browsing on the Internet and chatting online with friends).

Content is found on the website. Examination of websites reveals the diversity of content. Content comprises of a configuration of text, image and sound, which not only provides information about the hotelier and the locality, but also presents a constructed image or identity which is designed to attract visitors to the property:

> people still come for The [XXXX] experience just based on the pictures. I spent a lot of money getting the photographs done right [EH16-7].

The photographs provide composed images that are calculated to interest the viewer and that include positioned snapshots of rooms, property exterior, proprietors, views from bedrooms and the locality. The attention given to photographs, 'spending a lot of money', reveals the value attached to these photographs in creating this image. The use of a professional photographer underlines this need to get it right: "we got a photographer to take proper photographs last Autumn…" [BI1].

Alternatively, the view might be held that others cannot take photographs 'as I want it'; it can only be done by 'myself'. 'This is the gaze I want others to see.'

Acquisition of a digital camera opens up the opportunity for the hotelier to capture this gaze:

> I want to get some new photographs on there because I have recently got a digital camera so I can take photographs of my own to replace some of the older ones that are on there and some of the ones I am not happy with... and maybe change or add to some of the text [SK10].

The digital camera offers the opportunity to take an unlimited number of snapshots, which can be downloaded onto the computer and edited or 'made-over', creating the desired view or image. Furthermore, these photographs are organised alongside other images (e.g. maps, icons), carefully formulated text and various interactive devices within a laid-out web-page or website. The visual impact, includes the use of colour which may be aligned to the current fashion: "the colours that are in at the moment are this and this" [M16]. This may be complemented with the use of sound, perhaps a thematic piece of music in the background, which starts when the web-page is displayed on the viewer's screen. This construction or design tends to be viewed as important and may entail the services of a web-designer.

The completed website assumes an online image or identity which, it could be argued, should reflect the off-line image of the hotelier. The danger arises when there is a mismatch. An island hotelier contrasted his website with that of a mainland hotelier, having stayed there the previous night:

> on the Internet it has got a really slick site… once we got in there, it was actually needing … lets put it this way, it was needing a bit of a make-over… the photographs he had put in on the Website gave it the make-over, but that is dangerous. I never do that [M16].

For the visitor, the outcome may be a disappointing stay. The image creates or elevates expectations. Likewise, a slow loading site can impair the visitor's shaping of the desired image:

> there was a big concern that I was putting too many photographs on and not enough people were on a speedy computer, but now, with Broadband and good computers [M16].

The temptation to have numerous photographs needs to be complemented by an appreciation of how visitors are to perceive the identity presented. The barrier is a technological one, which is being overcome as people acquired access to more powerful technologies. However, this does suggest that the image or identity is necessarily an incomplete one, constrained by the limitations of available technologies. It may also be conceived as static or stuck-in-time.

However, as newer online technologies become available, this raises the opportunity to develop a stronger sense of identity. The exploitation of these newer online technologies allows the online presence to become more dynamic and interactive.

Interactivity is enabled by two types of mechanism. The first, internal to the website, is built into the website (e.g. hyperlinks, video, file downloads, enquiry forms and web-cams), whilst the second is provided by a third party services provider and is accessed using a link embedded within the website (e.g. e-mail, online booking, payment). In addition to enriching the identity of the hotelier this allows active engagement between the (potential) visitor and hotelier. It is suggested that a 'pick-and-mix' approach is applicable within this suite of online technological offerings. However, some elements are more likely to be used than others (e.g. hyperlinks and

email). Each element provides specific functional benefits, though some facilities will only be selected if others are being used (e.g. a third party payment facility would be required if an in-house online booking facility was being used). The configuration and incorporation of each element varies considerably in terms of effort.

Configuration, for those who develop their online presence themselves, requires tools, to take and edit photographs, to create text, to lay-out a website and to up-/down-load files from/onto the server hosting the website. Few have prior IT experience of depth or relevance that allows them to pick up these tools and use them. This suggests that for many, tool use is a learning process. However, it does not appear to be a formalised process typified by attendance on a training course.

> we have taken advantage of various training courses and one-day Seminars that have been promoted and funded by the local enterprise company over the years [I2].

Indeed, access to appropriate courses is questionable, particularly in rural remoter areas. Instead, learning is informal, unstructured and unsupported.

Finally, there are the practices that are developed with regard to the configurational activities (e.g. the use of tools, the updating of websites).

An enthusiast, who has got some relevant past experience and who has since developed his own online booking engine, even though he only offers one room, provides an insight into this

> I used to do the same thing for my business in England before we came up here… but I've learnt a lot since .. I wasn't into running online databases and

stuff before I started this so I've learnt as I've gone along… I've had to learn the technology… I am entirely self-taught and I buy books and read them… I've never done a days course on that sort on thing in my life… if isn't in the book it is on the web somewhere and that is my approach to solving my problems [M13].

both my sons work in computing, as they say, so occasionally I pick their brains, but most of what I do is, as I have said before, by reading books and seeing what other people do on the internet [M13].

Books, a traditional self-learning medium, are complemented by immediate and convenient access to online 'answers' to questions, with occasional recourse to knowledgeable family members. Learning is on-going, informal and problem solving in orientation, in other words, practical.

An elderly hotelier recounts

I just went through the manual and learned as I was doing it… I used MicroSoft FrontPage which is quite a simple programme.. I didn't really find any problems... I have to say that I've forgotten a lot of what I learned at that time.. I'm not sure that I could actually do it again [AR4].

This suggests that learning was by following the instructions. Again, learning appears to be practical in orientation – to solve a problem, the problem of how to create a website. Once the main task was accomplished, learning ceased and, over time, it was assumed that the knowledge gained was forgotten and that the task could not be repeated.

The complexity involved in configuring an online presence has been recognised by suppliers of online services. The complexity in setting up email is diminished due to the provision of a set-up "Wizard". This leads the hotelier through the configuration process prompting for answers to questions. This establishes a basic default configuration compliant to both the hotelier's platform and the email services

provider's basic technical specifications. This allows hoteliers to not be deterred by

set-up issues when seeking the solution to their needs, possibly on the basis of cost.

Figure 22 identifies 136 email services providers available to hoteliers. It disguises,

through the use of own domain names in their email addresses, the full uptake of

email services providers.

Email services provider	number of subscribers	cumulative percentage	percentage
AOL	454	12%	12%
BT	386	22%	10%
Wanadoo	356	32%	9%
Hotmail	176	36%	5%
Tiscali	111	39%	3%
Virgin	92	42%	2%
Yahoo	65	44%	2%
Amserve	40	45%	1%
Supanet	36	46%	1%
Demon	28	46%	1%
Tesco	27	47%	1%
Blueyonder	26	48%	1%
own domain name	1579	90%	42%
TOTAL	3376	89.8%	

An additional 124 organisations serve 385 properties representing 10%

Email addresses for serviced accommodation providers for 2005 were complied from the visitcotland.com database and ATB area accommodation brochures. A total of 3,761 email addresses were identified, which represents 58% of the calculated population of serviced accommodation providers (Harwood, 2007). However, this number of email addresses is viewed as conservative on the basis that the population was complied from sources that included those that provided no indication of online activity and as such could have online presence. This suggests that email uptake in 2005 could be significantly higher and that the email details available represent only a sample, albeit a large sample, but, an uncontrolled sample. However, it can be postulated that those properties with emails, but not recognised as such, represent a smaller proportion of the rest of the population on the grounds that these properties would want visibility. However, this is offset by the publishing policies of the data sources, which may restrict the publication of online details. Furthermore, this does not obviate failure by the serviced accommodation providers themselves to provide such details. Nevertheless, the size of the sample can perhaps be viewed as indicative of possible trends. An examination of the available data suggests that many accommodation providers (42%) disguise their ISP though use of their own domain name. This is perhaps suggestive of concern about the way these businesses present themselves – to provide a more professional image

Figure 22   An analysis of email service provision to hoteliers

Whilst the task of configuring the email facility is made easy, the hotelier is faced

with the complexity of which email services provider to source from. Although no

statistics are available, it was noted that email services providers did change, with the ease of switching and cost are possible reasons for change.

Configuration is Ongoing

Getting up and running is not the end of the learning process. In the case of the set-up and placement of a web-cam, this was not optimal and required moving and tinkering:

> We added a web-cam after about two years… it used to come from outside the house and then we shifted it up the hill and [XXXX] is always tinkering with various computing modifications to try and improve the resolution and so on [S3].

The web-cam is an instrument, which requires adjustment, but adjustment is an ongoing tinkering process to refine performance.

The development of an online presence is revealed to be an 'evolutionary' process over time:

> its been an evolving picture.. you are constantly learning and thinking and accepting new ways of thinking about things [AR4].

DG2 recounts about the development of his website. Initially there was: "A very simple one page site. Unattractive and basic" [DG2]. Mid-2003, a local web design company was found:

> ...and got funding with Scottish Enterprise to update site…. updated to a four page site, more appealing yet simple and more info. Introduced an e-mail reply system to notify and confirm bookings or answer any enquiries… [but] soon realised that our information was not user friendly DG2].

In late 2004 the site was updated:

> Updated the site again to 11 pages. More specific information, new techniques with 360 degree room views, comments page, enquiry page etc, and even more appealing [DG2].

This brief insight reveals a development trajectory which progresses from simple to complex. In this case it is suggested that the motivation to upgrade from the first one page site to a four page site may have been the availability of financial support. However, the developed website was not 'user friendly' raising questions about the design process and how the issue of being user friendly was considered. Recognition of the unfriendly nature of the information provided is assumed to be due to feedback from site visitors:

> A site needs to be easily navigable for someone to quickly find the specific information they require [DG2].

'Navigation' concerns the clarity of the signposting on the site for site viewers to correctly and easily locate the required information. The image/identity presented is undermined by 'poor navigation'. Does the frustration in dealing with the site translate into frustration in dealing with the hotelier? We are familiar with the signs in our dealings with people. However, signposting in the online domain is a new phenomenon, which raises questions about how much we understand about it.

The development trajectory is likely to be unplanned. The hotelier [M13] who developed his own online booking engine had no vision as to how it would unfold:

> it has just grown… it's now about thirty pages… if we think it is going to be useful to us I do it… it is, as I said before, something of a labour of love... most B&Bs would say that they couldn't possibly justify a thirty page website with online bookings… and nor could I if I was paying for it [M13].

Enthusiasm and interest in online technologies allowed developments which would otherwise have not been considered. The explanation given for developing the booking engine was: "because it works, it makes life very easy…people book" [M13]. The spontaneity of "is it going to be useful?" then doing it, underpinned by

the desire to make it work, has driven development. Learning was an integral feature of this:

> it has been a labour of love really... I enjoy doing it and I've been learning how to do it at the same time as... I've learned how to do something then done it… it's full of PHP and Java-Script and you name it – there is no flash… and I haven't got around to AJAX yet, but it will come [M13].

The development trajectory is also a learning trajectory. Learning is 'to make it work'. As more knowledge and experience is gained, it becomes possible to recognise more possibilities and develop better solutions. Learning and development are intertwined.

Actor – Configurator

Whilst the preceding analysis has focused upon the activity of configuration, the actor carrying out the configuration need not be the hotelier. Close family members (e.g. daughters, sons-in-law, nephews) or friends may carry out the actual configuration, with the key features of the identity being provided by the hotelier:

> my sister-in-law did all that... we supplied pictures and information and the rest of it and she put it all together [O1].

The location of these family members is not an issue:

> [my] son set it up. See he works with computers and he did it… he did it from America [DG1].

The closeness of the relationship can transcend the spatial distance – the Internet enables instantaneous communication and the transfer of files, irrespective of distance. This provides an interesting contrast with the location of third party website developers. It has been observed that respondents who use website developers, with whom the relationship is assumed weak, have tended to select those who are spatially

close: "Contacted a local website developer… the hosting is done by a firm in California" [X1]. Hosting, however, can be carried out anywhere:

> my particular hosting package costs me sixteen pounds a year… I think they are in New York…, but it doesn't matter does it [M13].

Summary

Configuration concerns the arranging of the different elements in such a way that they operate together to produce the desired result. Five configurational levels are identified: platform, content, interactivity, tools and practices. These allow many configurational possibilities. However, once a configuration emerges it is not static but is likely to change over time, to evolve. Ongoing incremental changes will periodically be complemented by radical changes whereby a completely new offering is presented. The act of configuration is carried out by the configurator. The configurator may be any of, the hotelier, family, friends, neighbours and third party experts/service providers.

5.4.3 Incorporation

The positioning or embedding of the configured solution within existing practices entails the development of routines and organisation of time. Routines are embedded into everyday practices and the schedule of the 'busy' day. However, these are but two of the numerous locations that need to be considered for placement. Furthermore, this embedding is likely to involve (re)configuration within each of the placement locations.

…In the Process of Taking a Booking

Embedding is within the process of taking a booking. This is illustrated with the embedding of an online booking facility developed by the hotelier himself. The essential device is:

> basically the diary... when somebody books online it generates an email which is sent to the person booking and a copy comes to us so we get a notification by email and we basically copy that into the diary… we keep a hard copy because we have to deal with telephone bookings as well… and I haven't found a really good way for paralleling that up… if somebody rings up and books then I have to go online and take it off the website because obviously the telephone does not do that automatically [M13].

The old practice of the diary is retained and is not displaced by the new online booking facility. The technological barrier is the updating of the online database directly from telephone enquiries. Instead, online bookings share with telephone bookings the diary. Further a new discipline is imposed when taking a telephone booking in that, in addition to the details being entered in the diary, the online database is also updated. This also introduces an unintended consequence, the risk of a double booking if the discipline is not adhered to.

> There could be a timing issue on it... it never happened yet but I am aware that it could, particularly if we happen to be away or even just in [XXX] for the day and somebody rings up and books… I cannot get back here to change the database… but it has never happened yet… and I do make it clear to people booking online that the booking isn't good until they get confirmation and that is really the only way I can cover it [M13].

Telephone bookings are spatially unconstrained and can be taken anywhere. Online bookings are spatially fixed requiring local intervention. A 'fool-proof' system devised to avoid double bookings, designates the online booking as 'provisional' until the hotelier sends 'confirmation'.

…In the 'Busy' Day, but not in the Private Domain

The 'simple' act of handling an e-mail enquiry needs to fit within day-to-day activity

or the 'busy' day. However, this fit can be viewed in different ways:

> having said that you are then getting more emails… its changed my timing of
> when I do things.. I would be dealing with emails at 6 o'clock in the morning
> and that sort of thing [A1].

Time may have to be allocated and the discipline adhered to for their handling. If the

discipline is not adhered to then the penalty is potentially lost bookings:

> I would forget all about it and not look at it for thirty-six hours or something
> like that... that's a disadvantage [DG1].

For some, the daily discipline does not appear to fit comfortably into their lifestyles.

However, for others, emails are a welcome alternative to the telephone:

> Emails are great as you pick them up at your convenience and they can be
> sent at any hour without worry of pestering folks at a busy time unlike the
> phone enquiries which can be very intrusive on your family time [M2].

Several issues are raised here. The first concerns the dual roles residing within the

hotelier's property. There is the publicly accessible business role and private family

role. Daily life is a blend of the two, with a boundary that is blurred. This raises the

second issue of intrusion. Aside from intrusion into the private domain, the previous

two quotes suggest that intrusion can take different forms. In the first, the emails are

not a naturalised feature of daily life and, as such, have not yet been fully

internalised. They are an intrusion that can be ignored, because they can be kept

waiting out of sight. This view is highlighted in the second quote and contrasts with

the telephone, which cannot be kept waiting and must be handled immediately

irrespective of what is being done at the time and no matter how 'busy' you are.

However, another issue concerns convenience:

the computer is not on all day so would have to switch it on… we can take the diary up to the rooms, garden, car… we can make the phone come through to the mobile which we do in the garden… we always answer the phone if it rings because it is more than like to be a B&B booking [BI1].

The convenience offered by the configuration of the diary, the call forwarding telephone and the call receiving mobile phone allows bookings to be taken when doing other things and when located in other places. The fixed location of the computer and the act of switching on the computer introduces both spatial and temporal constraints to the taking of a booking. Nevertheless this respondent commented:

I am quite happy with email… nearly all is done on the internet by email.. but I still think it is important to have that personal contact [BI1].

A dichotomy is raised. Telephone based booking offers convenience, but can be intrusive. Emails are relatively non-intrusive, but, are relatively inconvenient and impose discipline. For both, delay in response is a lost booking. Email has a diminished significance relative to the telephone in terms of a sense of immediacy in dealing with enquires. The telephone offers "that personal contact", an issue which emerges in the next chapter as an important issue in the context of automated online booking engines.

…In Time

A website presence is not static. It needs to be placed in the current phase of time. It requires maintenance. The hotelier who developed his own online booking engine reveals the distinction between the complete redevelopment of the website and its updating:

found the optimum way of expressing things and you find what people understand and you stick to it and of course the basic facts don't really change, but I try and freshen them up occasionally and restyle it… the present

styling with the large images in the background has been running for about nine months now, I suppose, six or nine months [M13].

A formula is found which appears to work and is used. Maintenance entails the site being "freshened up" without damage to the formula. The frequency of maintenance varies from weekly to very infrequently. The owner of a small hotel comments:

> I revise it every week... I make changes… I put in offers… I tweak it here and there… just to make it a wee bit more attractive... not an awful lot of time… probably... evening it out, probably spend about half an hour a week [AR4].

The website offers opportunities to gain business. It is not a significant amount of time, but the "offers" and the "tweaking" might bring in additional business. In contrast, a three bed roomed B&B owner comments:

> we don't put much store in keeping it updated and making it look interesting… it is just a factual thing.. it hasn't changed much in two years… because we are such a small place we don't have any books and things like that for information… people ask can you send me a leaflet or a brochure… well we just don't do it… I point them to the website which is cheaper and easier to update that with new photographs and information than it is doing fliers [G3].

Whilst the latter respondent gave size of property as an issue, perhaps this is more a question of attitude. Differences in the value attached to the site as an advert for the business are reflected in the perceived need to update the site. Furthermore, even if there is recognition for a need to update, time, again, is an issue:

> some of the photos are from when the place was unfinished… now it down to me…it's just getting the time and... just sitting down and doing it myself [AR4].

The site may be portraying the property in a less than favourable state and still, the site is not updated because of lack of time. In the case where a web-designer is responsible for the updates, even this can be problematical:

The web designer that I use, I've told him on a number of occasions we need to have it on the web and it is not on the bloody web yet [EH22].

The need to have the site updated is frustrated by being dependent upon a third party.

…In Rankings ('Being Found')

'Embedding' in the online virtual domain relates to the position or ranking in the results of a search engine query. There is a need to be correctly positioned in the online virtual domain to be found online. Being found online assume a priority comparable to having the right location in the physical world. People are no longer passing by in their cars (section 2.3.1). They are going online and touring online. Properties now need to be visible in these online journeys particularly when accommodation is being sought:

> "Hotel Edinburgh" is bombed out of the top ten search phrases due to its loss of positioning in Google, this month. So, I get these every month. The key words in Edinburgh are "Budget Hotel Edinburgh" is top, "cheap hotel Edinburgh", "Edinburgh Hotels, Edinburgh", "B & B, Edinburgh" and so on, and then, under theatre, if you get "Theatre Breaks, Edinburgh", it is top and then "golf, Golf Breaks, Scotland" is top, so what we have tried to do is, we have tried to suit our Web to the key words that I have been given out of there [EH9-4].

The importance of the right search terms is highlighted. The search behaviour of the online visitor searching for accommodation is simulated and the successful criteria are incorporated into the website to improve the likelihood that it will be positioned high in the search listings:

> I did pay for a kind of optimisation of it and I did... there are a couple of companies which help you to get the website seen by the search engines... I am really not sure to what extent they do this… I am just assuming that that they do the work for you properly… I really don't know too much about that side of it [AR4].

The success of being found becomes a performance issue. 'Optimisation' implies configuring the website parameters to meet the search criteria provided and in such a way that the website domain name is found closer to the top of the first page than others. Whereas the hotelier may have intuition/knowledge about the right location to position his property in the physical world, this tends to be absent in the online virtual domain. Thus, third party expertise is sought, though this may invoke blind trust that they are doing what they are being paid for. One approach to establish their effectiveness is to regularly search on key words: "I check the search engines from time to time and I am always on the first page" [SK10]. This provides reassurance that the hotelier's website can be found in a prominent position – the 'first page'.

…With the "Right People"

Being found online is also achieved by being placed on other websites. Embedding is in the form of a reciprocal link on these other websites: "I spent a lot of money just linking with other Websites… like identifying ourselves with the Castle or…" [EH16-7]. This is analogous to the belief in networking and the importance of 'knowing the right people'. There is a need to be present, in the form of a link, on other websites. This may be a reciprocal link, whereby two sites link to each other: "I am always encouraging some people to give me a reciprocal link" [M16]. Alternatively, this may be a paid link, whereby another site is paid to have a link to the hotelier's website. Of particular value are 'local' sites that promote local attractions. If visitors are looking to see what they can do at a location, then they may also be looking for somewhere to stay in that location. Having the 'right connections' is applicable in the online virtual domain. However, it takes time and incurs cost, which has to be balanced against the amount of business that can be potentially

generated: "have sometimes got to draw the line as to how much you are prepared to do" [AR4].

…In a Secure Domain

A common requirement of hoteliers is that of taking a deposit as part of the booking process. This is illustrated by the following example:

> we have a deposit system... I take an initial booking deposit of 20% of the price.. and until that deposit is paid they are not basically booked... they can pay that anyhow... by cheque or by credit card or by debit...
> …for example with credit card details... people are worried about giving these on an insecure website so... a lot of guests send me two emails splitting the information in two... which gives a degree of protection in that if one is intercepted... it's unlikely that the two emails are intercepted... so is done quite a lot and others choose to telephone me... It was about 70% give me details via emails... and the others will telephone with the details [SK2].

Whilst one option is to telephone the credit card details, people appear to have a preference for email. This is despite the widely held view that emails are insecure, they can be intercepted. Nevertheless, in the absence of a secure location to enable the transfer of the deposit details, emails are still used. However, a work-around is configured. This involves the split-up of credit card details and their distribution over two or more emails. Underpinning this is a conception about how the Internet works as a publicly accessible location, which may or may not be valid. Data of a sensitive nature is split up and located in an exposed location on the assumption that it cannot be read in its split form. This highlights that we embed practices upon assumptions which may not be well founded, but which we feel comfortable with, and which may later give rise to unanticipated problems (e.g. fraud).

…Relative to Competition

Embedding can also occur within the competitive domain: "to have an edge over your competitor" [M16]. Some hotelier's want their website to be as good as if not better than that of their competition. They may indeed be early adopters and seek to retain their edge:

> he is doing better than anybody else down here… they know fine now, it is mainly the website… people will be starting to maybe try and do equivalent websites [M16].

Alternatively they do not want to fall behind what their competitors are doing online:

> It's just, I suppose, really to keep up with the competition… and see what other people are doing… and get ideas from their websites [SK10].

This leads to the practice of trawling for ideas by visiting other websites and imitating what appears to be of use. This is not necessarily a regular activity, being prompted by the online developments of local neighbouring competition or by a feeling that there is a need to freshen the site. This also appears to be a subjective activity:

> updating a wee bit to bring it in line with other websites which look more exciting and inviting than ours [M11].

How is "more exciting and inviting" defined? Changing attitudes, new 'gimmicks', online technological developments, each prevent a website from retaining a dominant position without it being updated. Furthermore, websites are accessible for all to gaze upon. Yet embedded in it are secrets about how it is found how it is designed to entice and how it is entrenched in practice:

> There are little tricks that I do, particularly when I am answering e-mails… I hope you do not tell any of my competitors these things [M16].

The website does not provide a complete picture to the viewer or the accommodation seeker. There are deliberate omissions. Those 'seriously' seeking accommodation will make contact with the hotelier and in doing so, these omissions are revealed.

Summary

An examination of how the configured solution is positioned or embedded within existing practices reveals a diverse range of locations within both the real and virtual domains. Embedding is not exclusively within the process of taking a booking. Instead embedding needs also to take place within the 'busy' day in such a way that it does not intrude into the private domain. Furthermore, within the virtual domain relevant features are embedded within the current period of time, within search engines to be found, within secure solutions so that credit card details are not hijacked, and relative to competitors so that the online presence is more attractive. The desired result is that visitors use this online presence to make contact with the hotelier and book accommodation.

5.4.4 <u>Conversion</u>

The underlying reason for an online presence is that people engage with it. The desire is that online visits to a website are converted into actual visits. That email enquiries convert to bookings. The visible evidence from an hotelier's perspective is the impact that this presence has in terms of enquiries, bookings and feedback about the website.

Examination of the manner in which engagement with customers and others (e.g. tourism intermediaries) has been affected by an online presence reveals that it is varied. A guest house owner [A1] notes the change:

> I suppose it has given me more time… because we get less enquiries… because people are finding us by going online… and so they don't phone up for the brochure and therefore I am not writing all the letters and sending out the brochure… so it has actually given me more time… having said that you are then getting more emails… we live in an age of instant gratification... people want answers yesterday... not the day after tomorrow… [A1].

Social changes in behaviour brought on by the Internet are invoked. People have become impatient. Websites displace traditional and time-consuming forms of promotion and provide information on demand. Emails proliferate and hoteliers are expected to respond immediately.

More people are reported to be buying online (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006), yet few hoteliers provide online booking facilities, even through third party facilities (treated in more depth in the next chapter). Nevertheless, an hotelier who has developed his own online booking facility has seen an increase in online bookings over time:

> It grows steadily... I haven't consciously monitored it… it's to the point where it probably accounts for 80% of our bookings [M13].

Nevertheless, the issue of personal contact was still viewed as important, though this can be by means of a long email rather than by telephone, this questioning the notion of what constitutes 'personal' contact. Another hotelier [AR4], who has a preference for direct contact, but uses a third party booking facility, acknowledges that a small (10-15%) amount of business comes by that route, though commented that the impersonal nature of online booking is such that she treats those who book online,

impersonally when they arrive. This, perhaps unusual reaction, interestingly highlights the tension between visitors who are comfortable with the use of online booking facilities, but "who have no idea of what they are coming to" and hoteliers for whom "direct contact... almost necessary, almost vital". Perhaps this reveals concern about visitor disappointment with the actual experience due to the inability of online booking facilities to impart the nature of this experience during the booking process. Whilst there is clearly a change in the way visitors engage with hoteliers, this is not ubiquitous.

Old behaviours persist:

> someone who is calling round all the hotels to see if an hotel has accommodation. I find that they are the least productive in as much as its usually people who don't have access to the internet so they haven't done preliminary homework and… they may be phoning a lot of hotels… [AR4].

This reveals the traditional way of finding accommodation, which, from this hotelier's perspective, is not effective. However, for this hotelier:

> I get telephone calls from people that are returning and we get a lot of repeat trade… they come every year and maybe three or four times a year.. [AR4].

It is postulated that returning visitors are relatively flexible in their dates and may be seeking special arrangements, such as a particular room.

However, emails tend to be displacing telephone calls for the initial contact:

> initially you get an email enquiry followed by a telephone call... so... Probably about 75 to the email and 25 to the phone… that is initial enquiry [M11].

A follow up telephone conversation is not uncommon, which allows a more personal exchange. However, in the case overseas enquiries, email tends to be used: "foreign

visitors would use the e-mail" [DG1]. This overcomes both time zone differences and the cost of an international call. However, it assumes that language barriers can be overcome. Language barriers provide a challenge irrespective of the communication channel. This provides third party online booking engines with the advantage that they may provide access in the language of the accommodation seeker (e.g. Lastminute.com).

One particular group uses the telephone: "I do find a lot of older people in particular, we are probably talking 60 plus, actually ring up" [M11]. It is the elderly who are more likely to telephone rather than email, reflecting perhaps computer illiteracy, lack of access to Internet facilities or a preference for talking directly with the hotelier.

A unique instance of unintended engagement with the public is provided with the installation of a web-cam. A web-cam can be viewed as a 'bolt-on' technology that provides additional functionality. It allows visitors to gaze into the hotelier's locale in real time and perhaps briefly enter into this locale: "they look at the web-cam and they go, Wow! and then they book…" [S3]. The facility informs and persuades. Unintended, it also attracts other observers who may intrude if their gaze is disrupted:

> people from all over… when the web-cam goes down, we get e-mails from New Zealand, South Africa and places saying,' your web-cam has gone down. I look at it every day, what is the problem? Or we have e-mails saying a sheep is sitting in front of it. Will you please go and shoo it away, and the oil-fields, the Brent and Ninian Oil-fields use it, because we are only about [XXX] miles from Scatsta Airport where the oil helicopters come in and when the weather is bad in the winter, they check our web-cam to see if it really is [S3].

The website performs the role intended by the hotelier and has been assigned an unintended role which has been adopted by the hotelier. It enacts the role of a window into the local weather.

The manner of engagement with customers is perhaps summed up with the following respondent's comments:

> Perceived advantages: Faster communication; Website is a central base for all information; Cheaper; Less personal (some people prefer that)
> Disadvantages: Slow response – because you have not spoken physically to someone it's too easy for the response to be slow and excuses to be made; Spam – the possibility of information being lost in the millions; Lack personal Touch – relationships are not built [DG2].

Most of the points have been previously raised, but this respondent reveals the apparent contradictions. The faster communications offered by the Internet is countered by slower responses to enquiries. The picking up of emails at times convenient to the hotelier, obviates the desire of the sender to get an immediate response. However, there is another phenomenon, not previously mentioned, 'spam'. The inundation of spam and the configuration of filters in email packages to filter out spam gives rise to emails not being 'picked-up'. The telephone is intrusive, but ensures contact and gives the accommodation seeker immediate responses to a series of unstructured questions, which may be prompted by the response. The website provides a cheap information portal visible to all, but like email, lacks the "personal touch" which is important in the context of developing a relationship between the accommodation seeker and the hotelier. This raises the notion of the type of relationship sought by hoteliers. For some hoteliers, the personal touch is important, for others anonymity is preferable. This creates a challenge for serviced

accommodation in that they need to provide for all types of accommodation seeker and in doing so, exploit the opportunities of the available online configurational technologies in such a way that fits in with their way of doing things. The mere act of taking a booking is, in practice, embedded in the complexity of the hotelier's world, the virtual online world and the accommodation seeker's world.

Summary

The impact reveals the manner of engagement through the online presence. Email has not completely displaced the telephone. Instead, the visitor uses them appropriately. Moreover, whilst online booking is increasing, not many hoteliers make this facility available. This highlights the importance to the hotelier of the relationship between hotelier and visitor. The hotelier's desire for personal contact may be in conflict with a visitor's desire to mechanically transact.

5.5   Discussion

The foregoing analysis presents two strands of thinking. The first concerns the insight provided into the online practices of hoteliers. The second relates to the analytical framework used and how the framework facilitates the analysis. Both will be examined in turn.

5.5.1 Online Practices

Examination of the online practices of hoteliers suggests that the uptake and use of online technologies is a complex activity which involves a diverse range of issues,

from choosing the level of online presence to determining how to fit online practices into a busy daily routine. These issues are captured under four general themes: substitute/supplementary technologies, the process of domestication, the impact of domestication.

Substitute or Supplementary Technologies?

Pre-online practices relating to the booking process involve two core technologies: the telephone and the reservations book. These respectively provide a communication and a recording mechanism. Thus, they can be used separately and without the other, for uses other than bookings. The physical format of the reservations booking provides a convenient location for the recording of telephone contact details or the dates of events, neither necessarily connected to the booking process. This raises the notion that the reservations book offers opportunities for use other than that specifically intended, i.e. the recording of booking details.

Sellen and Harper (2002: 17) contrast the use of paper and digital technologies and argue that paper has 'affordances' or 'possibilities for action' that cannot be replicated with digital technologies. This notion of affordance explains the attraction of the reservations book and its persistence, despite the power of digital technologies as a recording mechanism. A similar argument may be attached to the telephone and the opportunity offered for rapid open-ended exchanges of questions and answers, though this can be costly if conducted over long distances and can be intrusive. The reservations book and the mobile phone, which receives telephone calls forwarded from the fixed-location business telephone, offers mobility. The physical immobility of the PC and the need to power it up by switching it on undermines its attraction for

holding a reservations diary. Likewise, email, which is non-intrusive, but in terms of dialogue can take time due to delays in responses. The example of the hotelier who had developed his own online booking facility highlights the convenience offered by automated online booking. This provides a recording mechanism, which could be considered as a potential substitute for the reservations book. However, the hotelier reveals that is not interoperable with the telephone, which results in a work-around, which results in use of both the reservations book and the booking engine as recording devices.

This analysis suggests that online technologies do not substitute for existing practices, but 'supplement' them (Woolgar, 2002 (also Appendix 2.4.1)), over-simplifies the relationship between old and new technologies. The complementary nature of the telephone and email is evident. Whilst there is overlap in the capabilities each offer (e.g. interactivity), each have affordances that are specific (e.g. real time interactivity afforded by the telephone versus message storage afforded by email). Thus, the popularity of email is perhaps explained by the convenience it affords in terms of when emails are handled, unlike the mobile phone, which may inopportunely intrude into other activities. Likewise, the website affords possibilities that exceed that of the traditional brochure. Whilst the brochure requires a batch to be produced by a printer and, upon request, requires posting, both activities incurring cost and consuming time, the website can provide all the information of the brochure as well as offer other possibilities such as affording the opportunity to update it at any time. Indeed, enquiries from those without access to the Internet can be handled by printing web-pages and posting these. Whilst the

website substitutes for the brochure, it also introduces new practices (e.g. web-page maintenance). However, the affordances of new technologies need to be recognised and given commitment to learn to make them work. However, this commitment may not arise for such reasons as comfort with the familiar, lack of time or the user-unfriendliness of the new technologies.

This notion of affordances perhaps explains some of the perceived difficulties with online booking facilities. Online booking facilities are not necessarily perceived to offer the possibilities afforded by the combined use of the mobile phone and the reservations book. Examination of this suggests that the larger hotelier will perceive the affordances of online booking facilities differently from smaller hotelier. The larger hotelier, which has a manned reception area can develop practices to allow the affordances of an online booking facility to be absorbed. For the smaller hotelier the affordances can be perceived as problematical and incompatible with the multi-tasking environment of the smaller hotelier. For them, desirable features are likely to include ease of use, mobility, on demand visibility of existing bookings and contact details in a visually appealing format, a local and real time single database and multiple communication formats (e.g. voice, email and text messaging). These are currently distributed across the different devices used, including the reservations book, which explains the particular configuration of devices observed. The question is whether a single device can be developed that offers these properties or whether there will be a persistent need for the reservations book and its affordances.

The Process of Domesticating online Technologies

The view has been presented that the uptake and use of online technologies is an internalisation process that can be conceptualised using domestication theory. Examination of this process suggests that there are many configurational and embedding possibilities. Furthermore, these are not static, but evolve over time, with respondents disclosing increasing configurational complexity. This view is supported by the findings of Azzone et al (2000), from their 1998-9 examination of the websites of 39 leading US and Italian multinational companies. Azzone et al (2000) observed that websites tend to increase in their complexity over time, i.e. their configuration evolves. They attribute this evolution to learning: from experience, from site visitors' feedback and from viewing other websites. However, in contrast to the Azzone et al (2000) study, which confines itself to websites, the boundaries of the online presence are defined by the practices and context associated with the online presence.

Three specific themes assumed common to all businesses are observed: learning, identity and location. Learning, also recognised by Azzone et al (2000), cuts across each of the four domestication viewpoints, culminating in the learning that results from reflecting or reviewing the benefits achieved. The identity portrayed by the business is translated into an online identity through the configuration of the appropriate online technologies suitably located to be found and viewed by the onlooker. However, location applies to both the real and virtual domains and concerns the different locations in which online technologies can be found. These three themes will be examined in more detail.

<u>Learning</u>

Learning permeates the domestication of online technologies. However, learning is not aimed at developing a skill or acquiring a qualification. Instead, it tends to be practical in orientation – to make online technologies not only work, but fit in with day-to-day practices within a busy diary. It is perhaps best described as 'learning by trying' (Fleck, 1994). This applies irrespective of whether the goal is to establish a single page hosted by the telephone services provider, or to develop one's own online booking facility. It is a problem solving exercise conducted within the confines of the business, institutionally unsupported but drawing upon a local network of family, friends and local expertise ('learning by interaction', Williams et al, 2005). It is suggested that learning is not codified and articulated to explore the boundaries of what has been learnt and gain knowledge. Instead, codification and articulation, if it takes place, is directed towards completing the task. Much of what has been learnt remains unarticulated. The emphasis is upon 'How do I do such and such', not 'Why?'

The aim is not to develop understanding but to achieve a practical solution. This has been recognised by providers of online technologies. They provide 'Wizards', software applications which lead the user through a series of 'self-explanatory' screens, prompting for specific information at each stage. At the end, the Wizard informs the user that the set-up is complete and that the application is ready to use. There is very limited need to understand, to penetrate the black box of the respective technologies. All that is required is sufficient understanding to know what to do, which may be provided though the 'instructions' available to guide actions. These

'Wizards' contrast with von Hippel's (2005) 'toolkits', where the latter are orientated towards fostering user innovation in designs. There is no innovation associated with the 'Wizard'; the emphasis is upon effortless configuration and integration.

However, there will be a need to design practices of usage that fit within all that is done in the day. This requires a degree of creativity or innovation determined by the functionality offered by the technology. However, this assumes that the technological elements will configure to give rise to the desired result. If not, then a work-around is needed to compensate for the deficiencies of the technology. This is clearly demonstrated by the online booking engine, which cannot be integrated with telephone-sourced bookings. The workaround was the provisional nature of the online booking until the hotelier sends a confirmation. This reduces the likelihood of a double booking.

The online booking engine is a good example of a user innovation, though not for distribution or diffusion to other hoteliers. Whilst the hotelier could be described as an enthusiast, the mode of learning is still that of problem solving, 'learning by trying'. Learning was supported by technical books and the Internet with occasional recourse to knowledgeable family members. Learning also involved observing what others were doing online ('learning by observation and imitation'), an approach which appeared to be a relatively common approach.

'Learning by trying' is informal and unstructured, making use of relevant accessible paper-based, and online reference documentation. During appropriation learning is

associated with acquiring or accessing the products or resources. The hotelier needs to learn about the language, availability, technicalities and applications of the technologies, their potential benefits, the suppliers of the technologies and the rules governing how to engage with these suppliers. It may involve observing what others are doing, getting ideas ('learning by observation'). Configuration involves identifying the different elements and working out how they fit together ('learning by trying'). Embedding includes positioning on a search engine so that when key words are typed in, then the website is found. This may involve the simulation of possible search behaviours – itself a learning process. The development of the online presence tends to be an uncertain and evolutionary process, a process observed by Fleck (1994) in the development of CAPM (Computer Aided Production Management), with learning being an on-going feature of this process. The development trajectory is also the learning trajectory. As more knowledge and experience is gained, it becomes possible to recognise more possibilities and develop better solutions. Learning and development are intertwined. However, when a specific task is achieved the learning activity relating to the task stops. If the task is not repeated, the knowledge is not maintained, and over time, forgotten. Following a period of use, the impact of the online presence may be reviewed or reflected upon, which may lead to changes in the nature of the online presence or to practices. This latter mode is learning from reflection about experience.

A further mode of learning that perhaps tends to be neglected is 'learning by regulation'. Although learning by regulation will raise levels of knowledge about how to comply with legislation (e.g. Disability Discrimination Act 1995) and how to

successful apply for financial support, this does not appear to be an issue of concern. It was rarely raised. One respondent raised concerns about the Data Protection Act 1998 and the keeping of visitor details (e.g. contact details), but this was an exception and revealed possible misunderstanding of the implications of the Act for her practices. A similar situation of misunderstanding the rules led another respondent to fail to receive a government grant.

Learning is an important element of the domestication process. However, the need for learning, the approach to learning and the depth of learning varies considerably from person to person. This is assumed to reflect the needs, interests, characteristics and development paths of the individuals. The main approach is learning by trying, which emphasises its practical orientation. This has support connotations from a supplier's perspective, which have been recognised through the provision of 'Wizards'. However, this is not always the case and the challenge imposed by the need to learn may deter uptake and use, or perhaps constrain what is achieved, though this was not explicitly raised or examined during interviews.

Identity

An issue recognised in responses, although not explicitly acknowledged by respondents, was that of identity. This was signified by the importance of having the 'right' photographs, the 'right' text, the 'right' website layout and 'right' facilities for visitors to interact with the hotelier; that the hotelier was creating an online identity. This identity projects the business identity. As most hoteliers tend to be very small owner-manager/family businesses, this projects the hotelier's identity through that of

the business. As the hotelier shapes the business to reflect personal views about the desired clientele and the service they are to receive, this can be expected to translate into the manner of the online presence and, thereby, the online identity. However, this raises the question of how is an identity created. What specific elements need to be configured to create the desired identity?

Alessandri (2001) has examined the concept of identity in the context of the business ('corporate' identity). She makes the distinction between practitioner and academic views. Practitioners tend to generally accept that "corporate identity (what the firm is)" is distinct from "corporate image (what the firm is perceived to be)" (Alessandri, 2001: 174). Academic views about what constitutes corporate identity range from the way a company visually presents itself to the core, enduring and unique features of the company. Alessandri concludes that "corporate identity is the presentation of the firm" in contrast to the "image" as perceived by others (Alessandri, 2001: 177). She presents an "operational" definition that identifies the features that comprise this identity: "all of the observable and measurable elements of a firm's identity manifest in its comprehensive visual presentation of itself… also includes the firm's public behaviour" (Alessandri, 2001: 177). The image held by the public results from the public's experiences of interacting with the identity of the business.

As the identity generates the experience and the image formed, then this highlights the importance of creating the right identity online. However, the concept of identity still retains a nebulous disposition. Instead, it is more useful to focus upon the experience and image desired for the visitor. This highlights the significance of the

'right' photographs, the' right' text, the 'right' website layout and the 'right' facilities for visitors to interact with the hotelier. The hotelier tacitly recognises the importance of portraying the identity of the business through the visitors' online experience.

The hotelier creates this experience. The visitor's image of the hotelier and the locality is shaped by the experience. Whilst images and text on the website inform and entice the visitor, the experience extends to how the visitor can engage with the hotelier, in particular, to make a booking. This may translate into the desire to develop a rapport with the customer to reflect the notion of good service within the business and value direct contact by telephone or by email and thereby shun the provision of online booking facilities. In contrast, visitors may view the ability to anonymously book online using an automated booking engine as desirable and consider the lack of this facility as indicative of an inefficient organisation. The hotelier faces the challenge of establishing what constitutes the desired experience for the visitor and how this should be configured and where it is to be placed so that it is accessible to those for whom it is intended. The configuration determines the functionality, appearance and informational content. The embedding establishes how others engage through the online presence. Configuration and embedding more subtly targets preferred audiences.

In deciding the experience to be created, a decision is also being made about the type of visitor being sought. This implies that the development of an online presence is not exclusively practice orientated, but takes into account their potential customers.

However, customers are not the mass-consumers associated with the Institutional view (I-model) (section 3.5.3). Instead the emphasis is upon personal consumption in which experience is important (the U-model). This allows different tastes to be catered for (e.g. anonymity or rapport).

The creation of identity can be augmented by two other developments. The first is the acquisition of a third party Quality Assurance grading. The grading is designed to

> give a clear idea of the standards of hospitality, service, cleanliness, accommodation, comfort and food you can expect… distinguish between the quality of the accommodation and the range of facilities on offer.
> (www.visitscotland.org, accessed 17th February 2008)

Assigned to one of five grading levels, the awarded grade reveals the standard attained. The second development is the emergence of online customer review websites (section 7.4.3). These allow customers to post online comments about their experiences of stays at a property. It can be argued that these reviews make third party Quality Assurance schemes redundant, in that these equate with a recommendation by a friend. This view is supported by Dickinger & Mazanec (2008), who found that friends' recommendations and online customer reviews are the most important factors affecting the decision to book an hotel online. The hotelier's grading tended to be disregarded. The experience of the stay is translated into an online comment over which the hotelier has no control, and which can either enhance or undermine the identity constructed. This finding highlights the need to ensure that the online experience is consistent with the actual experience of the stay. Experience and thereby identity, are important features in the configuration and embedding of an online presence.

Location

Once online technologies are configured they need to be positioned with regard to existing practices, other activities and events in the 'busy' day and also, into the public space as distinct from the private space. Furthermore, there is the need to consider position within the current period, within search engines, on other websites through links, and relative to other websites. This distinguishes between the 'real' domain, defined in terms of spatial and temporal dimensions, and the 'virtual' domain whose dimensions include capacity and speed. Within the real domain attention focuses upon activity and fit within time, manifesting as processes and daily routines. Within the virtual domain attention focuses upon information, functionality and linkage, manifesting as relevance to the current period, the ability to be found, secure transmission and comparison to what others are doing online. This is summarised in the following table.

REAL	VIRTUAL
Process (fit) The 'busy' day (time, discipline) Private – public (intrusion)	Current period (up-to-date), Search engines ('being found', 'ranking') Security Website links ('the right people') Competitor online presence (benchmark)

Figure 23   Situations in which to be positioned

The local 'real' context defines the requirements of the configured online technologies (e.g. the ability to inform, communicate, transact). It also defines the working environment of the configured solution: the busy hotelier who needs to clean rooms, do laundry, shop. The configured solution will be accepted into the

working environment if it 'fits' not only into the practices it is intended to support, but also within the daily schedule of the busy day. However, the busy day comprises both private and public spaces, which raises the challenge of how the public: private spaces are demarcated. The public nature of email enquiries contrasts with the private nature of personal emails. A person dealing with email enquiries may not distinguish between what is personal and what is public without prying into the personal, which creates the dilemma of how to place email enquiries into the public domain accessible by anyone and personal emails into the private domain accessible by the intended audience. Furthermore, whereas the busy family hotelier may exclude online matters from private time, the enthusiast who views the Internet as a hobby may allocate private time to online developments. Online practices are clearly local.

However, online technologies introduce a new domain, the virtual domain. This creates a global digital context. A website is positioned within the population of websites and is found through the search parameters used in a search engine from amongst this population. Websites may have links from other websites, which are associated with distant locations, but share a mutual interest. Competitors, who are not necessarily spatially close, may have more enticing websites inviting people to visit their local, and stay at their property, but which also can be a source of 'ideas'. Websites also need to be positioned in time, content needs to be relevant to the current point in time.

The virtual global context defines the requirements of the configured online technologies (e.g. to inform, entice, communicate). It also defines the working environment of the configured solution: bandwidth, speed, search engine algorithms, other websites, hyperlinks. However, acceptability is not the criterion for fit of the configured solution within the working environment of the virtual domain. Instead, 'fit' concerns performance: can the website be found, can emails be downloaded quickly, does the website functionality work?

In conclusion, location is not necessarily in physical space. The physical location of the hardware is an issue but it is perhaps the least important issue. Location pertains to both real and virtual domains. Within the real domain location is local and pertains to the locality of the hotelier in terms of activity and a busy day. Within the virtual domain, location is global and relates to digital spaces created within the configuration of all that comprise the Internet and WorldWideWeb (WWW). From an uptake and use perspective, location is perhaps underestimated and simplified in terms of how it is viewed. Nevertheless, the actions associated with uptake and use, ensures the configured technology fits within the respective domains.

The Effect of Domesticating Online Technologies

The impact of the online presence is an indicator of the manner others engage with this online presence. Impact manifests as visits to the website, feedback about the website, email enquiries and any other form of interaction.

There is an undeniable increase in the use of email, with this overtaking the telephone as first mode of contact, though telephone contact may follow this initial

contact. Likewise the website has displaced the brochure as a device to inform potential visitors about the hotelier and the locality. However, as will be examined in the next chapter, there has not been a major shift to the provision of online booking, nor has it been taken up in the way anticipated. This is despite claims that people are increasingly booking online (Figure 11). Instead, email and the telephone are used in a complementary manner, but in such a way that imparts the notion of a service. This suggests that online technology use tends to relate more to the U-model rather than the I-model. Attention is upon experience rather than a transaction.

An underlying assumption is that visitors have access to an online presence. This is not always the case, as with the example of the elderly, which, as a group, can be portrayed as non-users of the Internet (Wyatt, 2003). Likewise, people may have a preference for telephone contact where they can discuss their requirements during the single contact, rather than through the iterative contact that may ensue with emails. However, it is not possible to make definitive statements about overall patterns of how customers view and engage with the online presence of hoteliers. The evidence presented is based upon the views of hoteliers about their experiences of customers engaging with them. It is unclear how customers themselves view the booking process and the level to which customers prefer access to an anonymous automated online booking facility (I-model) or direct contact (U-model). It is expected that different types of customers will have different preferences, but these will target specific types of accommodation. Whilst it is not possible to identify these types of customer directly, the manner of engagement is indicative and suggests that for the

customers of smaller hoteliers, direct contact by email or telephone is the preferred mode (U-model).

5.5.2 Analytical Framework

The value of conceptualising the uptake and use of online technologies using domestication as presented in section 3.5, is that it provides a set of conceptual instruments to guide the systematic examination of the complexity inherent in the process. Further, it acknowledges the non-material and configurational aspects of online technologies. The physical presence of online related technologies (e.g. the desktop computer) is assumed to attain the significance of taken-for-granted furniture fitting into the room more for convenience of use rather than as a symbol of status. It may be positioned in a living room, kitchen or back office and its use may be shared amongst those within the property and include private use. However, it is argued that from a business perspective, the emphasis is upon the content, the meaning ascribed to the content and the actions that ensue. This focuses attention upon practices, how practices are established and are modified over time.

The concepts of appropriation, configuration, incorporation and conversion usefully distinguish between the acquisition of the requisite components, their arrangement, the deployment of the resultant solution and the impact of the solution. They focus attention upon the different possibilities afforded by each concept and thus, allow the complexity of the domestication process to be revealed. However, as an analytical device the interplay between the different elements needs to be acknowledged as

domestication is not a linear process. It is an evolving one. New components are appropriated and configured. Embedding involves re-configuring the existing configuration, accommodating the new and adjusting for withdrawal of the redundant. Dissatisfaction with conversion may lead to further appropriation, configuration and incorporation.

The focus of the study has been upon understanding online practices, i.e. what is done, rather than upon the reasons underpinning practices. The hybrid framework used, emerged from reflection upon both the data and available conceptual frameworks. It is in its use that its value is appreciated. However, this requires further study, which, it is anticipated, will reveal how it can enrich the enquiry process by focusing attention upon issues that may not be otherwise recognised, for example, the significance of where the "equipment" is positioned for engaging in online practices and why specific website content is selected. It is concluded that the analysis does demonstrate that the framework is a useful analytical tool for examining the exploitation of online technologies within the business context and, thereby, for examining the non-material aspects of configurational technologies.

5.6   Conclusion

This chapter has explored the internalisation of online practices utilising the concept of domestication. In addition to providing a framework to understand the process, use of the framework has revealed the need to adapt it to accommodate the non-material nature of the technology applied within a business context. This results in

two sets of conclusions, the first pertaining to the online practice and the second to domestication.

5.6.1 <u>Online Practices</u>

Examination of the online practices of hoteliers suggests that the uptake and use of online technologies is a complex activity which involves a diverse range of issues, from choosing the level of online presence to determining how to fit online practices into a busy daily routine. Four general themes are highlighted.

The degree to which online technologies substitutes for, or supplement existing technologies has been examined using the notion of affordances. If the newer technologies can offer all the affordances of the existing technologies then substitution is more likely.

Examination of the domestication process reveals three core issues. Learning is an intrinsic feature, which tends to take the form of 'learning by trying' to make the configurational technologies work. Rather than attempting to develop a deep understanding of the technologies, the emphasis is upon solving practical needs. The online presence involves the creation of an online identity, a personification of the business identity and, in many, cases the business owner's identity. This translates into the creation of an online experience that caters for targeted customers, whether the preference is the anonymity associated with an online booking engine or rapport associated with direct contact. Online technologies exist at different locations within

both the real and virtual domains. Attention needs to be given to their effective embedding within each of these locations. The many different possibilities for configuration, practice and impact result in different usage patterns.

The manner of customer engagement reveals the impact online technologies have. Rather than online booking being the dominant mode of engagement, reflecting a transactional view (I-model) of the engagement experience, engagement is a combination of email and telephone, highlighting the importance of direct contact (U-model). However, the example presented by the web-cam reveals that unintended engagement may ensue.

5.6.2 'Domestication'

The concept of domestication has been used to examine the adoption-use or internalisation of online technologies by hoteliers. This framework is a hybrid version of those presented by Silverstone et al (1992) and Williams et al (2005) to accommodate the non-material nature of online technologies within a business context. It has provided a useful framework to systematically focus attention upon different aspects of the internalisation process. The concepts of configuration and incorporation have been useful in focusing attention upon the different possibilities afforded by these concepts. In summary, the framework is demonstrated to be a useful analytical tool for examining exploitation of online technologies within the

business context and thereby examining the non-material elements of configurational technologies.

An issue not examined here, but very relevant and the subject of the following chapters, is the role of third party intermediaries and local/national destination marketing intermediaries, both of whom provide an online presence, perhaps in terms of a promotional entry on a website page or an online booking facility.

Chapter 6   INTERMEDIATION (PUBLIC SECTOR): a conflict of paradigms?

Whatever their ultimate promises, technologies confront major resistance and acceptance problems when and because their promoters fail to consider impacts and the impacted communities lack access to the pertinent decision making processes. Citizen protests and regulatory challenges that come after-the-fact are symptomatic of this exclusion

(Rip et al, 1995: 3)

6.1   Aim

This chapter is the second empirical chapter and examines how hoteliers domesticate online intermediary services, focusing upon the online services provided by the public sector. It explores the tensions inherent in the domestication of a more sophisticated form of online technologies in the form of online booking facilities, where the tensions also extend towards the service provider. It draws attention to the importance of the manner of relationship between the technology provider and the user.

6.2   Introduction

The development of a system at a national level for use at a local level can provide an opportunity for visitors to gaze upon and explore a destination and entice them to book a visit. It functions as an intermediary between customers and producers of tourism products and services. It extends the reach of the tourism product producer. Indeed, it may be assumed that users can benefit from the system and, therefore, will use the system; that people, if they can, will go online, and, by preference, conduct

their travel arrangements online. Further, it may also reflect the desire to be 'cutting edge' and reveal the technical excellence of the nation. However, this is a symptom of the 'imperative' nature of technology held by policy makers. Instead, it presents users with a challenge. How attractive and aligned is the system to users and their needs? How easy is the system to use? How likely is the system to be used on an ongoing basis? Most importantly, is there a particular type of user who can undermine the viability of the system by their reluctance or even resistance to use the system?

This chapter examines hotelier uptake of the online services provided by VisitScotland, the national tourism agency, though their service provider, visitscotland.com, and their Destination Management System (DMS). It can be argued that this DMS occupies a privileged position through its government-authorised status, its potentially all-inclusive wealth of data about localities and tourism products and services, and its assumed visibility to the global public. This makes it a potentially attractive intermediation service to hoteliers.

This chapter is structured in three parts. First, a brief overview is provided of empirically based research into hotelier use of online booking facilities and the use of DMS. Secondly, it examines the big picture: a quantitative analysis establishes the level and manner of engagement nationally by Scottish hoteliers with the visitscotland.com website. This is followed by a micro-level examination of the actual practices and concerns of hoteliers. The analysis utilises the concept of domestication developed in section 3.4. Emphasised are the configuration and

incorporation elements of domestication. The discussion examines the findings and distinguishes two modes of engagement, which respectively align with the U-model and the I-model (section 3.5.3). Tension between these two modes appears to underpin the controversy that has arisen between visitscotland.com and hoteliers ("A national tourism portal: visitscotland.com", in section 2.5.1).

6.3   Destination Management Systems (DMS) – empirical findings into hotelier uptake

Government intervention in tourism often manifests in the activities of the National Tourism Administration (NTA), a term which Pearce informs was coined by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) in 1979 to denote the official tourism organisation at a national level (Pearce, 1989: 42-43). A NTA's activities are likely to be geared towards the promotion, regulation and development of the industry and have been conceptualised through the notion of 'Destination Management'. This appears to be a relatively recent term, which appears in the mid-1990s (e.g. Heller, 1996), though the notion itself is perhaps embedded in the practices of established NTAs. The emphasis is upon how visitors engage with the tourism product in terms of information provision, booking and fulfilment.

However, whether NTAs should be involved in bookings is contentious (Archdale & Stanton, 1992; WTO, 1999), in particular, when charges are imposed upon tourism product providers for this service. Archdale & Stanton (1992), in their examination of Destination Databases (the precursor to DMSs), recognise the burden that

commissions and booking fees placed upon smaller inventory providers. As will be raised later, not only is this a controversial issue, but the features of the booking facilities may result in their rejection, not by consumers, but by the providers of tourism product.

Indeed, attention has tended to focus upon consumer use of DMOs[25] and online booking facilities, as reflected in Park & Gretzel's (2007) review of 153 papers to establish "success factors for destination marketing websites" (Park & Gretzel, 2007: title). Susskind et al (2003) reveal that attitudes to online transactions differ from those to online information searches and that "the 'look-book' gap is very real" (Susskind et al, 2003: 264). This distinction is attributed to the respective attributes of a website's usefulness and an individual's "self-efficacy mainly regarding online booking, but as well information searching" (Steinbauer & Werthner, 2007: 74). However, and perhaps significantly, Susskind et al (2003) note that "providers have set up travel-related search engines that allow consumers to deal directly with the sellers rather than acting as broker of information and a middleman" (Susskind et al, 2003: 264). The booking transaction is not simply an act between a consumer and the 'system', but involves engagement with the inventory provider; moreover, it involves an experience. Attention is now drawn to the booking experience and to providers of tourism product. It also draws attention to the relationship (e.g. terms and conditions) between the intermediary providing the booking facilities and mediating this experience, particularly when the intermediary can be viewed as a 'public service'.

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[25] DMO is used, in common with general usage, interchangeably, to denote both Destination Marketing Organisations and Destination Management Organisations. Where a clear distinction is required, DMkO (Marketing) DMgO (Management)

Blank & Sussmann's (2000) study of smaller accommodation providers' use of the Irish national DMS, "Gulliver", following its privatisation in 1996, provides an insight into hotelier views. The 50 responses to a questionnaire revealed that:

- 56% of respondents used the allocation facility, with those using the allocation facility tending to have a more positive view about the services of Gulliver.

- the view prevailed that the DMS generally did not contribute to improved profitability, did not provide "promotional benefits" nor was it a "cost effective method of promotion" (Blank & Sussmann, 2000: 424).

- over 55% did not experience an increase in pre-bookings and 39% did not view it as "a reliable method of taking bookings" (Blank & Sussmann, 2000: 424).

- newer members tended to have a more positive outlook.

They conclude that "whereas the overall indication is that the majority of the respondents do not seem to perceive any benefit from Gulliver, their perception is also that Gulliver will become a more important distribution channel in the future" (Blank & Sussmann, 2000: 428).

This brief and incomplete insight into Ireland's experience reveals that 'online booking' is viewed as a desirable feature of a national DMS, irrespective of who owns it. However, the debate about online booking and whether a hotelier takes up this service, is not about the technicalities of an online booking facility, but about issues that relate to its operation, impact, management and ownership. Nevertheless, uptake requires that the tourism product providers are able to embed the online

booking facility into their practices. It is suggested that the transactional nature of a booking underplays an interaction, not between consumer and system, but between consumer and tourism product provider, which elevates the interaction from a 'transaction' to an 'experience'. However, a booking through an online booking facility introduces, not a system, but an intermediary, the provider of the online booking facility, who shapes the 'experience'. This elevates issues relating to the operation, impact, management and ownership of the facility into issues that can impact any decision regarding uptake.

When the Scottish experience of the DMO provision of booking facilities is briefly reviewed, it provides deeper insight into the problematic nature of this.

6.4   Examining the uptake of the national DMS

It might be assumed that a national DMS will provide an attractive complement to the internal online practices of an hotelier, since it will attract a significantly broader audience than achievable by the provider alone. However, this begs the question as to whether this actually is the case? To examine this, the level and manner of uptake of the visitscotland.com is quantitatively analysed to provide a general over-view of the appeal of the portal to hoteliers. This raises issues, which are investigated later (section 6.4.2) by examining the detail of actual practices.

6.4.1 <u>The Big Picture - Level and Manner of Uptake</u>

A top-level view of the manner of interaction between hoteliers and visitscotland.com is provided with the following quantitative analysis. A full quantitative analyses has been published in Harwood (2007). Four primary sources were used to determine the population of hoteliers in 2005: ATB accommodation brochures, visitscotland.com database, the SmoothHound website and the Yellow Pages Directories. The population was determined to be in the order of 6,522 with 62.2% (4,054) of these being live on the visitscotland.com database.

The visible inventory of hoteliers on the visitscotland.com website[26] was examined between February, 2006 and November, 2007. This reveals a decline in particular categories of hoteliers (Figure 24). Whilst a change in classification to say an 'inn' or 'lodge' may account for some of this, data for 2005-7 suggests that this may be less than 3% (Harwood, 2007: table 33). The introduction of new categories also compensates for the most recent decline. There is evidence to suggest that nationally there is a decline in the number of registered hoteliers, particularly smaller hoteliers (Harwood, 2007: section 9) by approximately 25% over the 10-year period. However, it is unclear how much of this is due to withdrawal from accommodation provision or merely hoteliers disappearing from view by disassociating themselves with the STB/VisitScotland. In 2005, 35% of serviced accommodation was not represented by VisitScotland, suggesting viability without a STB/VisitScotland representation. Thus, the 16.6% reduction in inventory on the visitscotland.com

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[26] This entailed an accommodation search of the 'full directory' on the visitscotland.com website http://guide.visitscotland.com/vs/guide/5,en,SCH1,objectId,RGN20vs,curr,GBP,folder,ACCOM MODATION,season,at1,selectedEntry,acco/acco.html [accessed 12th July 2007]

website over the 19 month period is perhaps indicative of disassociation rather than withdrawal on the basis that a 10% inventory reduction per year is in excess of the 25% decline postulated between 1996 and 2005. The question arises as to whether the decline is associated with dissatisfaction of the visitscotland.com online service or whether there are other issues (e.g. dissatisfaction with the VisitScotland Quality Assurance scheme).

	23rd February 2006	21st February 2007	reduction since Feb 2006	16th May 2007	reduction since Feb 2007	17th Nov 2007	reduction since May 2007
Hotel	615	451	164	461	-10	403	58
Small Hotel	484	464	20	439	25	314	125
Guest House	860	821	39	816	5	810	6
Bed & Breakfast	1,954	1,785	169	1,756	29	1,579	177
New classifications: hotel						91	-91
New classifications: farmhouse						64	-64
TOTAL	3913	3521	392	3472	49	3261	211
			10%		1.4%		6.1%

Figure 24 An analysis of visible online inventory from the visitscotland.com website

Despite the decline, that a significant proportion of hoteliers are still using the website suggests that there are perceived benefits of being represented online by visitscotland.com. One of the features of the visitscotland.com website is that it allows visitors to book their accommodation through the online booking-engine. Hoteliers can allocate rooms to the engine and complete the booking transaction online without further contact with the hotelier, thus facilitating the national goal: "the ultimate aim is for businesses to provide 24-hour online booking facilities" (Scottish Executive, 2006: 31). However, the manner hoteliers engage with the website for bookings perhaps reflects a different outlook.

Examination of the visible inventory of visitscotland.com in February, 2007 reveals hoteliers' chosen mode for visitors to book via visitscotland.com: book online or email/telephone the central reservations system. Figure 25 reveals that 57% of hoteliers used the email (default) option, whilst 25% selected the telephone call option, although it is to the call-centre. Of the 17% (642) who are represented by visitscotland.com as offering the online booking facility, only 9% (347) allocate rooms (green). The remainder (295) provide rooms on a call-to-book basis (blue) or designate their rooms as unavailable (grey). In other words, 46% of the 642 who are presented as offering online bookings, do not use online booking.

	book by email	book online	call to book
blue		270	832
green		347	4
grey		25	103
not available	2,127		
	2127	642	939

	book by email	book online	call to book
blue		7%	22%
green		9%	0%
grey		1%	3%
not available	57%		
	57%	17%	25%

Figure 25   Uptake of the different booking options on the visitscotland.com website (February 2007)

blue = call or mail (using enquiry form) to book
green = available to book online   grey = unavailable

Figure 26 provides the detail behind Figure 25. This reveals that within the 9% that offer an online booking facility, 55% (green-blue, green-blue-grey) allocate only some of their rooms to the online booking engine. For the remainder, they require

customers to call-to-book (blue) or have designated these rooms as unavailable (grey). Thus, only 45% (156) use the online booking facility on its own. Unexplained are the four properties that have made rooms available for booking online, yet are presented as call-to-book.

	be	bo	bo - be	c	Total
blue		105		392	497
blue grey		165		440	605
green		25			25
green blue		16		1	17
green blue grey		175		2	177
green grey		131		1	132
grey		24	1	103	128
(blank)	2,127				2,127
Total	2,127	641	1	939	3,708

Figure 26   Manner of uptake of the different booking options

be = book by email   bo = book online   c = call to book
bo – be = assumed to be a set-up error

This insight reveals that online booking is not an accepted practice for many hoteliers, which raises the question, "why?" Further insight can be gleaned by examining the characteristics of these hoteliers, for example, size (rooms) of hotelier, accommodation type, grading and geographical location (Harwood, 2007: tables 54 to 58).

Whilst email is the dominant manner of engagement by properties with one to three rooms, the size of the hotelier (number of rooms) is not a deterrent for the use of online booking facilities (green). Whereas 40% of all hoteliers with 20 rooms or over used the online booking facility, 44% used this mode in association with the call to book option. Likewise only 4% of hoteliers with four or less rooms used online booking of which 56% used it with the call to book option.

Hotels were the dominant users of the online booking facilities (44% of all hotels), though 44% used this mode with the call to book option. For the 65 hotels that there is room capacity and grading information, 31 are three star hotels and 27 are four star hotels. The average room capacity is 95.7, though the numbers of rooms range from two to 319 rooms. Only 9% of guest houses and 4% of bed and breakfasts used the online booking facility of which 73% of guest houses and 56% of bed and breakfasts used this mode with the call to book option. For the 34 B&Bs that there is room capacity and grading information, the average room capacity is 3.1 rooms, range from one room to six rooms and include 23 three star B&Bs and eight four star B&Bs.

An examination of seasonal business use reveals that it is predominantly by email (72.7% of all seasonal businesses). Only 2.6% of all seasonal businesses use the online booking facility, but combine its use with the call-to-book option.

When geographic location is examined one locality stands out with regard to the adoption of online booking facilities – the City of Edinburgh, with 28% of hoteliers using the online facility. One possible reason for this is the presence of national and international hotel brands (e.g. Sheraton, Hilton, InterContinental), which have experience of dealing with online booking engines. Online booking is less likely in rural areas (e.g. Scottish Borders: 4%) and islands (e.g. Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands: both zero uptake).

The significance of online booking can be examined further with reference to the annual accounts. If 347 businesses are using the booking service in February, 2007 and the assumption is made that many of these businesses were taking online bookings in 2006, then it can be calculated that, since it was reported that there were 139,677 in 2006[27], this translates to 383 bookings per day or 1.1 booking per property per day. Furthermore, the value of each booking is calculated at £135, perhaps the equivalent of a one-to-four-night stay depending upon quality of accommodation. It is postulated that the level of online business is skewed towards some businesses (e.g. larger hotels offering a standardised product) at the expense of smaller hoteliers. Thus, it is hypothesised that the level of business provided by online bookings to many hoteliers who use it, is relatively small in comparison to other modes of booking. This questions claims about the importance of online booking to the industry, not only to those taking bookings online, but also to those buying online. It is further hypothesised that online booking is important but to particular types of customer. Whilst customers' online purchasing behaviour is not investigated here, it cannot be neglected. As such, this basic analysis attempts to provide a perspective on overall customer booking practices.

Summary

In conclusion, this analysis of the booking preferences of hoteliers suggests that larger organisations are more likely to have the capability to manage an online booking engine and use it exclusively. Smaller hoteliers can manage online booking facilities, though are unlikely to use them. However, if they do use them, they are

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[27] Available from: eTourism Ltd (2006) "Director's Report and Financial Statements for the Year to 31st December 2006"

less likely to use them exclusively. Whilst this confirms what intuitively may be expected, further understanding of the concerns about use of the online booking facility requires discussion with hoteliers.

6.4.2 <u>A Microscopic View of Uptake Practices</u>

Issues Affecting Uptake

A micro-level analysis of the practices and concerns of hoteliers reveals a variety of issues within the domestication process, of which four themes appear significant and reflect the manner of engagement between hoteliers and the visitscotland.com portal: the promise, acceptance, commitment and impact.

Appropriation

The Promise, Rhetoric and Universal Application

It is unlikely that many tourism businesses would be unaware of VisitScotland or the website visitscotland.com. However, they might not be aware of the message on the official tourism industry website operated by VisitScotland which promotes the promotional opportunities of the website. This message, which has remained virtually unchanged since 2003, invites businesses to:

> Exploit the benefits of modern technology to the full in reaching potential visitors. People are increasingly using the Internet to research holiday destinations and to book online. Scotland's information and booking site, visitscotland.com offers the perfect window to the world and opens up a lucrative additional sales channel for you. Ensure your product and facilities are listed on visitscotland.com; participate in relevant online promotions.

The message presents an 'official' perspective of the benefits of the portal. It can be read as suggesting that booking online is the future and this can be exploited using the facility provided by visitscotland.com. It persuades by suggesting that it is optimal in reaching a global audience, it is "the perfect window to the world", and that it is a "lucrative additional sale channel". However, it presents a choice of use by allowing for a listing "on visitscotland.com", rather than using the online booking facility, though it is unclear whether the benefits will accrue with a mere listing.

Acceptance – Cost, Dependency, Principle and also… Loyalty?

A major factor governing uptake is economic. Whilst a number have not commented on the cost of a visitscotland.com presence, those who have, have been negative in their views. The charging structure for bookings (10% 'deposit' and a processing fee) has created controversy among hoteliers, in particular, smaller hoteliers. Objections were sometimes 'principled' in nature, with some respondents suggesting that a private, government privileged business deprives tourism businesses of income:

> "I do not like paying commission to a private company. That money is not benefiting Tourism" [I2]

Some other reasons were more 'practical' and related to cost (that smaller businesses cannot afford the costs). Enrolment to the visitscotland.com website is conditional upon meeting the criteria of being quality graded by the VisitScotland Quality Assurance department. The cost of acquiring this grading includes both the

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[28] Most recently found on www.visitscotland.org/print/marketing_opportunities_main/vs-branding/vs-branding-nextstep.htm [accessed 30th March 2009]

VisitScotland inspection cost and the expenditure on fixtures and fittings to attain the desired grading. This cost, together with the additional cost of advertising with VisitScotland though their various channels including the portal, excludes a number:

> the amount you have to pay… this that and the other... so it starts to get very expensive… so I just decided that it wasn't worth it… I'm not going to be much fuller if I pay them another £800, than if I just ignore them... [SK3].

In other cases, there is apparent coercion, as three respondents illustrate:

> getting graded and also paying ten percent of any bookings that come to us directly through VisitScotland so that actually is a fairly expensive option for a wee hotel… but I cannot see any alternatives to it right now [AR4].

> we are listed with VisitScotland as almost any business in the industry almost has no choice [DG2].

The above is summed up by the comment: "if you cannot beat them you join them…" [AR4].

Furthermore, some reject the inspection scheme due to disagreement with the inspection criteria, which are viewed as sanitising, and are thereby excluded from the visitscotland.com website.

However, belief that the portal offers scope beyond that possible for a lone business introduces the conflict between loyalty and justification:

> I still believe you should support it, because at the end of the day, it will do an awful lot of national and international advertising, which you cannot do. However, they take…if somebody books with them for a week, they take 10% for the week... for a small business, that is quite a lot [M16].

The up-take of the visitscotland.com offering is not a straightforward decision. Since VisitScotland is the 'official' agency responsible for the promotion of Scotland, it

can be viewed as both authority and expertise on how Scotland is promoted. Thus, it might appear as the obvious choice for an hotelier. However, a variety of issues affect the decision. Justification, perhaps tacitly, balances straightforward economic against more complex ones. For example, a visitscotland.com listing is conditional upon a VisitScotland grading, so businesses consider the merits of the grading process and the cost of attaining the desired grade (e.g. cost of refurbishment). Another factor is the level of awareness of alternative options and how these are viewed relative to VisitScotland's offerings.

Indeed, fieldwork reveals an interesting picture. Less than 63% of hoteliers are listed on visitscotland.com (Harwood, 2007) and the number of hoteliers listed is declining (Figure 24). This suggests that visitscotland.com is not as attractive a proposition as might be 'publicly' supposed. Nevertheless, an unknown but possibly significant[29] number of hoteliers object to visitscotland.com, yet still use its services. The economic argument appears to take prominence over more complex arguments. If this is the case, does this economic argument also underpin the manner of uptake of visitscotland.com's facilities, in particular, the exploitation of visitscotland.com's online facility? Fewer than 5% solely use the online booking facility, which, having made the decision to go with visitscotland.com, raises the issue of what affects the manner of uptake.

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[29] There were about 695 signatories to the petition about visitscotland.com submitted to the Scottish Parliament on the 15th November 2006

Configuration - Incorporation

Online Booking – Fully Committed and a Domestic Matter

One of the challenges facing a service provider is how to exploit the online facility

offered by the visitscotland.com portal and incorporate this facility into daily

booking practices and the overall routine of operating serviced accommodation. An

insight into how this challenge is handled is provided through the comments of three

smaller hoteliers who use the visitscotland.com online booking engine. All three

properties have their own website and use a hard copy reservations book or chart.

An island based hotel owner [AR4] with eight bedrooms reveals the initial anxiety

about using this facility:

> overcoming my initial reluctance in having anything to do with it… and
> deciding if this is going to work for me I would have to work hard to make it
> work for me….and that is precisely what I have done… …it took a wee while
> to get used to it and I was absolutely certain at the beginning that this was
> something I really didn't want to do... because it is going to take up an awful
> lot of my time… as it happens as time went on …by the time we got into the
> really busy time I could do it quite quickly and it wasn't really a problem…

> it was probably a month or so.. I was very nervous at first because I thought
> something awful could happen here…I could have double bookings all over
> the place… but it didn't happen that way .. simply because I would go into it
> at all times of day and night… I don't do it now… initially spending a lot of
> time double checking and making quite sure that I didn't end up with any
> embarrassments... .. I probably spent.. it wasn't just checking my allocation I
> was trying to get a feel for the whole of the system .. so very often if I went in
> to check .. I would be doing something else at the same time… working what
> rooms are available.. .. trying to work out how I could take advantage of the
> last minute reductions which I have used… they have actually produced a
> lot.. there is a lot of working out … .. putting a time scale on would be very
> difficult… I am nearly 65 years old I cannot do things as fast as youngsters
> would. I probably spend rather too much time just double checking.. making
> sure that I haven't made a mistake...

> it is probably not the most user friendly book in the world and in the initial
> stages I thought I was going to give it up… because it was quite difficult….

but I've learnt to use it and I think it could probably still be improved upon I found ways around it and I can use it ok...

I was advised by someone who had long experience of online bookings to make sure that you held back a couple of rooms that were never touched by the online system just in case… It's a safe-guard…. In terms of the number of bookings there has been a significant improvement this year… I would say possibly between ten and 15%...

I believe in updating it regularly and keeping an eye on it, I have actually have benefited from it at end of the day.

This long, but insightful quote reveals that initial resistance was displaced by a commitment and determination to "make it work", despite the anxiety involved in this process. Furthermore, this learning experience does not appear to be easy. Learning was facilitated with a 'User Guide'[30], which provides instructions about the data entry and configuration of fields and how to load images. However, the User Guide is not user friendly and it is not informative about the practices that it supports, which in this case was provided through a friend rather than visitscotland.com. Initial fears about its demands upon time were subdued with growing experience of using it and the realisation that it would not be so demanding. The challenge was not how to become technically competent, but how to exploit the functionality within the practices of the business. It involved a process of familiarisation – 'getting the feel' for it. It identified the new activities of monitoring e-mails that confirm an online booking and the daily updating of details. It raised the need to be disciplined in both this monitoring and the updating. The intriguing issue is why go down this route, particularly as the person was 65 years old:

I reckoned that I was paying for it.. .. you pay for grading which costs a considerable amount… and then you pay for a listing the VisitScotland brochure and the presence on the website… … if you are going to get your

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[30] TISCOVER (undated) Tiscover Extranet User Guide: Tiscover for visitscotland.com. Livingston: eTourism.

money's worth then should make sure get as many bookings as you possibly could.

Again, economics comes into play with the outcome that the effort did pay-off. However, the effort and benefit gained is against the backdrop of discontent about the charging system and bookings that were considered would have come to the island anyway irrespective of visitscotland.com:

> I have had a lot of bookings from them but my major reservation is that I don't think these are bookings that won't have come to somebody and at the end of the day people are paying 10% more in order to book through VisitScotland.

Again, the economic perspective is offset against more complex arguments.

A city based hotelier [EH9-4] who has eleven rooms, uses four third-party online booking engines and spends around 2.5 hours per day to maintain these facilities:

> I think I am up to about 60% of all my bookings are online throughout the year and growing .. all the time… they can all book online direct to me.. but I have to be very proactive to make sure that if I have bookings coming in from one lot that I reduced the other peoples by that number of rooms.. so it is a matter of... that you have to be on the ball 24 hours a day with it or you could get your fingers burnt quite heavily.. because we don't have that many rooms, … its not like a big hotel that can give 20 rooms to every book online system.. and still have plenty left over.. … there is no one system the same... that is the big problem at the moment... I need to go into each system and manually reduce the number of rooms you've got available… I allocate more rooms than I have got.. probably 120% of my rooms at any one time because I allocate eight doubles and eight twins which is 16 rooms.. I have only 11 rooms… so I am allocating five rooms that I don't have.

The practices surrounding the booking process involve the time-consuming management of a selected portfolio of independent online booking engines. Two issues emerge. The first reveals the domestication of an assemblage of online booking engines. However, this imposes a discipline and incurs time on a daily basis to maintain each individual system. The second issue is the insight provided into

practice… the allocation of additional rooms. Whilst no explanation was offered, it raises an interesting contrast with the previous example where caution was exercised about the number of rooms allocated.

Both hoteliers had reservations about whether smaller hoteliers could use the facility. Would they be able to allocate the time to be constantly alert to an online booking?

> I'm not sure about that .. I honestly feel that people like that are not going to be in their office quite as much as I am and they would be much better to have the call-back system rather than the online booking [AR4].

The implication is that the effort and economic return would not merit attention by a smaller hotelier. The next example questions this.

One city based three-room bed and breakfast owner [EH16-6] was receiving about 90% of all business in August, 2007 via the booking engine of visitscotland.com. Nevertheless, this hotelier still uses a diary to record booking details as "I don't trust computers". Reflecting back, the decision to use the online facility arose from the need to combat a fall-off in sales "my takings were very meagre that particular year", which was not recognised immediately "I went with that for probably up to a year longer that I should", and reflected that the market has changed over the last few years:

> that's the only way you are going to get enough customers. If you just go via people calling you via the telephone centres.. you will be out of business… you HAVE to go by allocation.. you cannot go by passing trade either - that's dried up. I perhaps got up to 70% of my guests… would have been passing trade... But now it's more like 7%... the dynamic has changed totally... people do not phone as before…. only happened in the last two years.

However, a number of issues relating to its use are raised: "if you just learn a few of the moves then you are fine". Technical competence is not necessary. The aim is to

learn enough to use the online booking facility. Furthermore, initial resistance is displaced by confidence in its use and practices involving the maintenance of the online facility substitute for the management of emails, which is deemed inefficient:

> from a personal perspective I would actually rather go with allocation despite the reservation I have had about it because... so much of my time is wasted on a week basis just on speculative emails…

Nevertheless, it is in the domain of practice that the danger of using the online booking facility is clearly expressed:

> I work on allocation and, basically, you can easily get a double booking, because you have to be looking at the computer all the time… because people can book and then a hour later, they arrive... you can be out or someone else has already come to the door or something can happen in that time…

> when someone comes through some other means, then I have to upgrade it manually or phoning them or logging onto the site. It is a minimal... I can even do it in as little as five minutes... computer is in a guest room.... wife has just got a laptop so… it is a nuisance because you can easily get caught out that way at this time.

The facility must fit into overall practices associated with taking a booking otherwise a double booking can occur. These practices are embedded not only in the temporal domain, whereby the timing of events associated with bookings is variable and potentially simultaneous, but also spatially, with the resources associated with taking a booking not being readily available. However, the facility impedes the performance (reduced yield) of practices due to the manner in which it receives bookings:

> yes it is an issue and that is true…unless you stipulate – the system will allow you to choose whether it is one night or two.. or whatever your preference... its six of one – half a dozen of the other... it you stipulate three night then you may not get your three nights so you lose out... the allocation system is not flexible in that sense.. because it is an either or situation and it is something you predetermine in advance – you have to choose... it is better if you can personalise it and speak to the person first or discuss it with them through email or whatever other means because you are less likely to get floater nights… if you get a better booking say... you cannot move them to another room.

One of the criticisms levelled at online booking facilities is that, once they are configured, they eliminate the flexibility offered over the telephone or by email of negotiating the details of the stay (e.g. alternative dates, cheaper rates). Online bookings are based upon the details presented online and is reduced to a mechanical 'take-it or leave-it' process. There is no negotiation. In contrast, negotiations can include enriching the accommodation seeker's understanding of the destination leading to revised requirements. It also results in manipulating existing bookings to optimise bookings and get the best yield performance for the given inventory. The richness that underpins the booking process is an issue that has been repeatedly raised in discussions with hoteliers. Booking is not a routinised mechanical transaction, but is a personal experience for the accommodation seeker and a complex operational process for the hotelier. This distinction raises the question of where does one draw the boundary between the two; is it fixed or does it vary from transaction to transaction or business to business?

A further issue that was raised by this hotelier relates to decision about how to use the online booking facilities: "another reason why you have to go with allocation... otherwise you won't get preferentially listed". The preferential display on the visitscotland.com website of hoteliers, who use allocation, provides an incentive to adopt the online booking facility. This raises the issue that the visitscotland.com website has been configured in a particular way to meet specific aims. Whether these aims are to make it easy for visitors to book accommodation, to provide a revenue stream for visitscotland.com or to encourage hoteliers to become more sophisticated in their online practices can each be argued to have validity. However, the use of

allocation automatically generates revenue for visitscotland.com upon a booking. If being found requires the use of allocation, then not to use it implies not being found. The website has been configured to allow discrimination in favour of those using the revenue generating option, whilst it is assumed that other configurations are possible (e.g. random listing). Thus, it can be construed that a specific aim is to generate revenue for visitscotland.com. The website can be viewed as a tool to make money, which hoteliers can share through the allocation facility, but at a cost (the 'deposit' which visitscotland.com retains). Alternatively, hoteliers can chance their luck and reduce their chances of being found by being 'down the list'.

Partial Commitment – online Booking Rejected/Basic Intermediation Selected

Whilst the focus in the previous section has been upon issues relating to online booking on the visitscotland.com site, over 90% of serviced accommodation listed on the website does not use the online booking facility. Instead, they can opt for contact to be made by telephone or e-mail (default). With telephone contact, the hotelier has the option to reveal and maintain room availability information, which the majority do. The decision not to use the online booking facility can be for a variety of reasons, whether based upon hands-on experience of the facility or merely the perception about the practicalities of using the facility.

Hoteliers may perceive themselves to be too small:

> the main thing is that we cannot allocate rooms... we're again too small... if we allocated three rooms to them it would take away too much of our ability to let things out... well... lose control really... if you've got 26 rooms yes you can say .. yes ok we'll allow you to have control over five of them... but in our case we only have six rooms in total [S2].

The refusal to relinquish control to a third party for bookings and the way bookings are handled raises the question of what is it that is being controlled... the allocation of rooms, the booking transaction or what? The phrase "our ability to let things out" suggests that there is something special about "our ability". This is the ability to optimise room allocations, which becomes more critical the smaller the hotelier and hence, the comparison with the 26 roomed property. Even the practice of displaying availability information is potentially problematic, in that it deters negotiation:

> they will have a look and see that it says... you are full for a couple of days... so they won't call you... whereas if they call you might be able to suggest something to them [S2].

If the dates required are shown as unavailable this can lead to a lost booking, whereas a discussion may reveal flexibility in the accommodation seekers requirements and possibly an extended stay beyond that initially intended.

An alternative perception is that of time, the time to fit the use of the faculty within the practices, not only of taking a booking, but those practices relating to running the business as revealed by the example of maintaining availability information:

> I have tried to do my updates on their availability lists but it is very time consuming… . when you still have six beds worth of bedding to iron… its finding the time to sit down and do the computer as well [S2].

The time involved in checking online when a booking came in by an alternative route (e.g. by telephone) is viewed as problematic, though the three examples who used the online booking facility had found a way to deal with this:

> so every single time that somebody phones you would then have to check to make sure that somebody hadn't already come in online and booked for that time.

This example reveals inventory records are remotely located and held by visitscotland.com, not the hotelier.

> we would have to check with them to see if we had availability as opposed to them having to check with us to see if we have the availability [S2].

This spatial conceptualisation re-presents the booking process as an outsourced activity. There has been much debate about 'out-sourcing' (e.g. Venkatesan, 1992; Harland et al 2005; Jiang & Qureshi, 2006; Lacity et al, 2008). Out-sourcing is a long-established practice with its roots in the 1930s and the provision of the service bureau, which handled the payroll function (www.ceridian.co.uk[31]). However, although out-sourcing is an accepted practice, it has had limited success in replacing in-house practices. It could be argued that, for the differentiated products offered by smaller hoteliers, there is only limited opportunity for the out-sourcing of any aspect of the booking process (e.g. secure payments) with much of the activity being viewed as best delivered in-house.

Again, the preference for personal direct contact with potential visitors is raised, with the provision of appropriate information, the avoidance of misunderstandings and the management of visitor expectations and the visitor's experience being explicit reasons:

> I prefer to speak personally to people and very often they need directions and clarification of where they are coming to… you would be surprised at how many people will book.. you will take the booking and .. ten minutes.. half an hour later .. they will ring up and say 'oh I am sorry I didn't realise you are an island..' its that kind of thing… at the moment I prefer to speak personally to people [O1].

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[31] "Ceridian A History of Innovation", http://www.ceridian.co.uk/hr/downloads/110382-000%20Timeline.pdf [accessed 14th January 2008]

within reason you can sort of suss out a person quite quickly as to whether they are going to enjoy their holiday with you or not.. I think that's very common [M11].

I do not like it [online booking] because we are in the hospitality industry which is all about giving people a good welcome, looking after their needs and... [I2].

This emerging insight into the way the visitscotland.com website is used highlights the necessity of its fit within the practices of the hotelier, whichever the mode of use. Furthermore, whilst the booking process may be reduced to an unidirectional mechanical transaction between system and visitor, there is a significant preference to elevate it towards the status of an experience.

Conversion

Impact – Upon Performance and Views

There are over 3,000 hoteliers listed on the website. However, the amount of bookings provided by visitscotland.com varies from business to business. Some businesses receive a lot of bookings from visitscotland.com and are positive about the future:

but VisitScotland has actually come up quite well…. I would think it is nearly a 50/50 split now…   is the way to go.. I think I am up to about 60% of all my bookings are online throughout the year and growing... all the time [EH9-4].

Others have reported a shortfall: "but I've got to be very honest and say that they don't send me anybody…" [M11]. Again the value of the service is questioned. During the season there is no need for the service as there is so much demand, whereas off-season the situation changes, but enquiries dry up:

probably once between May and the end of August did I actually manage… to take a booking from Visit Scotland. Right, so I lost 10%, you know, but, again, that is when it is busy and that is when everybody is doing well [M16].

Furthermore, the economic argument of the cost of a booking resides in the background.

There is one case where a five star property closed down in 2007 on the claim that changes to the way it was 'found' on the visitscotland.com portal had led to enquiries drying up. However, there was sole dependence on the portal, which reveals the 'trust' embedded in the portal that it would deliver an adequate level of bookings.

A wide range of more general views is held about the services provided by VisitScotland and visitscotland.com. Positive views are held about the service:

> without VisitScotland I don't think that we would be where we are today... they have actually been very very good and proactive in the marketing field [M11].

Yet these are often qualified, as exemplified by the same person then commenting: "I don't necessarily agree totally with how they do it, but they are active" [M11]. Other views expose a 'put up with it' attitude, especially if little business is generated:

> You will no doubt realise I find VisitScotland a waste of space and only tolerate them because it is included in the cost of the Grading and Classification inspection done by VisitScotland... if I tell you this year so far I have had two booking from them you will understand why I also do not see them as vital for my business [S1].

Vociferous opposition is illustrated in the following comment by a small up-market hotelier:

> this to my mind is the most asinine, idiotic stupid jack ass approach to promoting bed and breakfast in any country or region that you could possibly imagine… if I sound angry it is because they have been a waste of my time and they have damaged my business… [X1].

Whilst there is clearly vociferous opposition, often manifesting as online comments about news articles on the Scotsman website, this is perhaps a minority. However, it is unclear what the level of dissatisfaction is, though there are rhetorical claims regarding dissatisfaction with the charging structure and website related services:

> if you ask an awful lot of people, everyone, I certainly feel aggrieved and a lot of people on [XXXX] do and I know that it extends further than that [M11].

Notably, the dissatisfaction does not appear to be with the technology itself.

Reflection Upon The 'Technology'

Reflections about the technology can be viewed from the perspective of how it supports the hotelier. The functionality of the technology is not in question. What is questioned is the way the technology is used within the booking process by visitscotland.com where there is no closure to the process through the completion of a transaction:

> Actually, when it is working, it works well, in that they will make an enquiry to us either by e-mail or telephone, when the Client confirms they then will then back it up with an e-mail. The problem is there is a gap in the middle there if the Client does not come back to them, they do not come back to us and we are left, wondering are we get this booking or not and you may turn down a booking from another source waiting for them. The speed of response is appalling and their follow-up is appalling [M4].

Again this relates to practices.

Likewise the interface is open to question. One view expressed by a longer-term user of VisitScotland's services highlights a perception iterated by a number of respondents about the website and its design:

> Visit Scotland's website has always been a problem in that it is not user friendly and is intentionally designed to capture as much commission from bookings with little regard for either the service provider or the visitor [M1].

The argument is that the text and the configuration of the interface directs visitors to the visitscotland.com call-centre. Figure 27 provides an example. The first image is what is first visible to the viewer. The invitation "To book your accommodation" is assumed to encourage visitors to use the visible contact details to enquire/book their accommodation, i.e. through the call-centre. The second image is opened when the viewer 'clicks through' on the "contact details" button. This assumes the viewer is able to 'read' the first image or the change in the cursor denoting a hyperlink. Critics argue that the initial invisibility privileges visitscotland.com in that it 'drives' customers to the book through visitscotland.com and incur the cost associated with the 'deposit'.
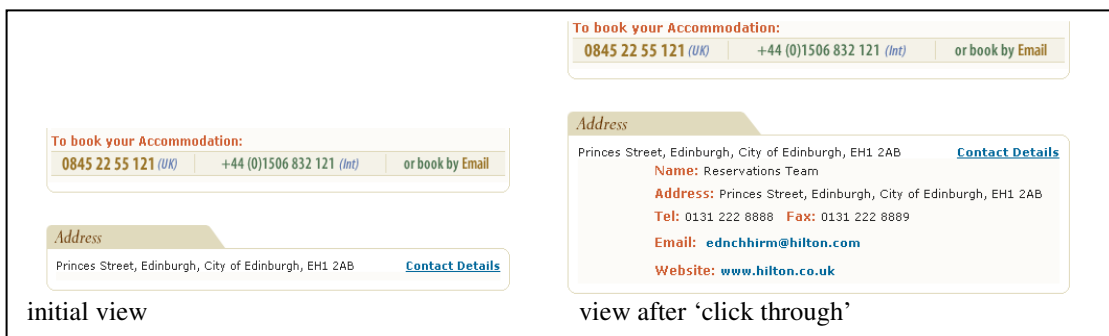
Figure 27   Images from the visitscotland.com website relating to the 'contact details' for booking accommodation [accessed 1st July 2005]

6.5   Discussion

Both a qualitative and a qualitative analysis have been used to examine the attraction of the national DMS to hoteliers. The former provides the big picture in terms of level of uptake, the characteristics of those using the website in its different modes and the trend, albeit in the short-term, but against the backdrop that QA registered hoteliers have declined by 23.7% between 2003 and 2007 (Harwood, 2007: table 41). The latter provides the micro-detail of practices, exposing the range of issues relating to both non-adoption and the different forms of adoption including the detail of practice. Together, they reveal how hoteliers, through their engagement with the website, view the visitscotland.com website.

Whilst there are a large proportion of hoteliers exploiting the visitscotland.com website, there are only a few who are exploiting the online booking engine. Explanations for this are provided by the qualitative evidence, though the significance, in terms of their magnitude, of each of the issues raised, remains to be established. Nevertheless, this exposes tensions between the hoteliers and the service provided by visitscotland.com. A possible explanation for these tensions is rooted in points that are highlighted in different analytical traditions, but reflect a fundamental difference between institutional policy and operational practice or, more pragmatically, between the 'common' conceptualisation of technology and practice.

The institutions appear to view online technologies as being universally of benefit and that, not to adopt them, will be disadvantageous to both individuals and to the

nation. Online trading is inevitable and the only recourse is for businesses to embrace them as quickly as possible. This view manifests in the Scotland's Tourism strategy (Scottish Executive, 2006) and the successive efforts to develop online booking facilities for the national portal (visitscotland.com). This, presumably, is grounded in the view that the technology exists 'out there' to be exploited.

On the other hand, to engage with the visitscotland.com portal is a pragmatic decision. It is likely to be grounded in the practicalities and routines of the 'busy' day, but takes into account the views and sentiments of those with whom there has been contact (e.g. family, friends, business contacts and media).

The uptake and use of the visitscotland.com website, irrespective of the manner in which it is used, can be explained as a domestication process, but one in which the services of an intermediary are appropriated, configured and embedded, with the goal of conversion. Appropriation is not the task of merely buying an online presence, but requires consideration of a range of issues, which relate to configuration, embedding and conversion. The cost of bringing the property up to the desired quality for submission to the scrutiny and decision of the quality assessors may be considered alongside the type of customers sought (e.g. low budget tourist) or accessible (e.g. passing) and the way the business is to be run (e.g. seasonal). Concern about the benefits, will raise expectations that it will generate additional revenue; though raise questions about whether the property will be found on the visitscotland.com website and the likelihood that visitors will choose the property from the competition. There may be contention about the way VisitScotland and visitscotland.com operate, in

particular, the level of charges for services. Thus, the decision is based upon a complex of factors that may ignore the website itself. Furthermore, there are implementation issues that include the learning experience to make it work, which might not have been given much thought.

Learning comprises the task of working out how to make the technology fit desired practices, though practices may need to be shaped to fit the constraints of the technology, as well as other factors such as legislation. The key learning tool is the manual, which provides guidance about how to fill in/configure the fields, but not about how to use the facility within the context of booking practices. The hotelier achieves this by trying out the functionality and making it work, a process which can be described as 'learning by trying' (Fleck, 1994).

A variety of practices can be developed around the portal. Enquiries can be received through the call centre by email or telephone or, alternatively, anonymously through the automated booking engine. In both cases, the receipt of an enquiry or online booking is a waiting game and there is no guarantee that anything will be received. When an enquiry is received, a response is given. Again, there is the wait…. if accepted, the wait is short, otherwise… it is never-ending. Other enquiries come in and the process is repeated. The online booking facility removes this waiting, but it is a disembodied transaction and relies upon the hotelier being found online. It may also take place in isolation to the way the hotelier operates. The hotelier receiving an enquiry by email or telephone from an interested potential visitor, can engage in a social dynamic embracing information exchange, negotiation, expectations alignment

and 'deal'. This takes place within the context of a range of related and unrelated activities. The hotelier is no longer constrained to a single point of receipt, defined by the position of the telephone. Mobility is enabled by the mobile telephone, where calls are forwarded from the fixed location. The mobile phone coupled with the traditional recording instrument of the 'reservations book', which is already mobile, allows enquiries to be location independent. Enquires can be taken whilst engaged in activities removed from the property itself (e.g. shopping). However, the online booking facility is most likely accessed through a fixed location Internet connected PC which need not always be switched on. It re-imposes the shackles of the fixed position telephone, though with the new risk that failure to consult it if an enquiry is received by an alternative mode, may lead to a double booking and the problems associated with it.

Selecting the online booking facility is a business decision that balances the risk associated with the possibility of a double booking with the anxiety that something can go wrong. The set-up of the facility is a learning experience where the learner attempts to translate the instructions of the Use Guide into the desired configuration. The variety inherent (e.g. dates, prices, room-bed configurations) in the process of making a booking needs to be collapsed to a level capable of being handled by the online booking engine. Lack of feedback from the facility about what has been done wrong may lead the learner to give up. Perseverance, through trying to make it work, will lead to the facility being activated to take bookings on the hoteliers' behalf. Tacitly, the hotelier has entered into a one-sided commitment to attend to the facility on a regular basis under the penalty of a double booking. This intrusion of discipline

into the routine activities of daily-life is compounded if the hotelier has entered into commitments with several third party online booking engines. Time is required to service their multiple requirements. However, this can be contrasted with the time required to deal with email enquiries, which may have a low conversion rate into bookings. A larger hotelier is more likely to be able to commit resource to service this facility. The variety inherent in a larger hotelier's accommodation inventory can be reduced to a level of detail that can be handled by the booking engine. For the smaller hotelier, this is all potentially problematic. Furthermore, for the smaller hotelier the booking process is not merely a transaction, but an experience. An idealised comparison between these two perspectives is summarised in Figure 28.

	MODE I	**MODE II**
Modus operandi	Mechanical	Personal
Focus	(disembodied) Transaction	Experience
Process	To order - pay	To negotiate

Flow	Uni-directional
	    [customer – system]
		Bi-directional
		    [customer – supplier]

Information dissemination	Read	Inform
Accommodation	Commoditised	Characterised
Bookings Book management	Fill slots	Manipulate slots
Performance criteria	Availability	Optimisation

Figure 28   The booking process as a transaction (mode I) or an experience (mode II)

The transactional (mode I) view is that of an anonymous automated facility aimed at allowing the visitor to read about the product and, if so wishes, to order and pay for it online. From an inventory management perspective, each room for each day represents merely a slot – a commodity, which the visitor books (orders - fills) if that slot is available. This may lead to empty slots, which cannot be filled due to their unattractiveness. It is a unidirectional experience in that the active element is the

visitor. This transactional view is compatible with the I-model. Technology is disembodied from practice.

The experiential (mode II) view highlights the personal nature of a bi-directional process of negotiation where customers' expectations and requirements can be shaped through the informative dialogue with the hotelier. From an inventory management perspective, each room has its own character, with limited substitutability. Nevertheless, the hotelier manipulates bookings to optimise the configuration of filled beds. This experiential view is compatible with the U-model. Technology is domesticated – it becomes an integral feature of practice where the emphasis is upon experience.

6.5.1 Controversy

The political debate which has ensued about the website (visitscotland.com) raises the interesting debate about whether the visitscotland.com website has politics in the spirit of Winner's (1999) argument about whether artefacts have politics. Is this observable in the configuration of the visitscotland.com website?

In the case of visitscotland.com, a confusion has emerged among certain constituencies whereby the website www.visitscotland.com, its operator visitscotland.com and the NTO VisitScotland have been conflated into one. The website has assumed the politics associated with the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP): the private partner is profiteering at the expense of the industry the public partner is there to serve. This view arises from a) the visible bias revealed in the

preferential display of the visitscotland.com contact details in contrast to those of the hoteliers (Figure 27), b) the preferential display of hoteliers who have taken up the online booking facility, and c) the charging structure for a booking through the website, irrespective of how made, online, by telephone or by email. The issue of preferential display is recognised as a revenue generating ploy (Carrol & Siguaw, 2003; Daniele & Frew, 2004). However, this together with the website design can be changed. Perhaps the underlying issue is that the site is the 'official' national portal for Scotland and thereby raises emotional responses.

6.6   Conclusion

It is proposed that the deterministic nature of institutional policy (typified by the I-model), which tends towards a transactional (mode-I) view of the booking process is at odds with the socially embedded nature of operational practice (U-model) and the experiential (mode-II) view of the booking process. This paradigm conflict possibly explains the tension between the national DMS (visitscotland.com) and hoteliers. If this explanation is valid then what are the implications for policy makers, hoteliers and analysts?

The implication for policy makers should be to recognise the limitations of the 'deterministic' view. A technology cannot be expected to deliver results universally. It is not a panacea. The social implications of each implementation need to be considered as unique, recognising the specificity of each implementation. The issue is not about how technology will effect change, but how the technology is exploited

or made to fit, to effect change. The emphasis is upon the fit. Politically set targets for sophisticated levels of use ignore the practicalities of effective use of appropriate less sophisticated technologies.

The implication for visitscotland.com is the acceptability of the fit between hotelier practice and technological offering. One issue relates to the procedure for implementing the online booking engine, which includes its fit with hotelier practice and the manner in which this fit is accomplished (i.e. the hotelier's learning experience).

The implication for hoteliers is that they recognise the benefits of exploiting technology in a manner that fits with the way they wish to run their business. The issue is not the sophistication of the technology implemented, but the appropriation of relevant technologies, no matter how simple, and their effective use.

The implication for analysts is that they elevate their enquiries from a descriptive mode to an explanatory mode and take advantage of the analytical frameworks and concepts offered from the conceptual domain of science and technology studies. This offers a rich compilation with which to explore the complexities of the exploitation of configurational technologies.

Chapter 7   INTERMEDIATION (COMMERCIAL): uncertainty, trial and then…?

The Internet is having a major impact, relative to other channels, as a source of information for choosing and planning holidays and other forms of travel, and increasing importance as a booking channel
(World Tourism Organisation, 2001: 10)

7.1   Aim

This chapter is the third empirical chapter and examines how hoteliers domesticate commercially provided online intermediary services. It explores the challenge of dealing with the uncertainty associated with the prolific number and variety of different intermediaries and the implications for the domestication process.

7.2   Introduction

The previous chapter explored the relationship between tourism product providers and a third party intermediary (visitscotland.com) with the privileged position of authorised access to both tourism product providers and consumers. However, the Internet has provided an opportunity for a variety of alternative third party online intermediaries to mediate between these providers and consumers. Services range from a simple listing of name and contact details to the 'dynamic packaging' of those tourism products likely to be required on a visit (e.g. flight, car-hire, accommodation). Visitors can both seek information and book everything they need for their visit through the online intermediary. However, from an hotelier's

perspective, this has created the dilemma of how to make the best use of these intermediation services.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the alternative third party intermediary options open to hoteliers. It examines the level of uptake of third party intermediation is examined by focusing upon the inventory of four better known intermediaries (section 7.4.1). The findings suggest that intermediaries differentiate themselves and, in doing, so attract different types of hotelier. However, this creates the problem of how hoteliers who have decided to use this form of intermediation, identify the right intermediaries and how they manage those chosen, including discontinuation. Actual practices are examined to establish how hoteliers deal with this and how effective they are in dealing with this (section 7.4.2). Findings suggest that hoteliers tend not to be effective in their selection of intermediaries, with some expressing disappointment with this as a channel. Performance tends to be assessed in terms of the number of enquiries received and their conversion into bookings. Loyalty, which might have characterised early adoption, is replaced by a commoditisation view of intermediaries; the cost incurred in using them is assessed against the level of business gained and since an intermediary's performance can change over time and there is a low switching cost then, this can lead to a turnover in the intermediaries used.

However, the image presented of the intermediary as being one that is managed by the hotelier, is distorted. A new 'breed' of intermediaries has emerged who have no association with the hotelier, but provide 'visitors' to the property with the

opportunity to comment about their experience at the property. The implications of this and how they potentially substitute for any industry grading system are considered (section 7.4.3). The chapter concludes with a discussion (section 7.5). This finishes with an assessment of the findings from both the previous chapter about public sector intermediation and those in this chapter concerning commercial intermediation (section 7.5.5).

7.3   Intermediation – empirical findings

The intermediary has had a long association within the tourism industry. Thomas Cook's first tour to Scotland was in 1846 (www.thomascook.com). He provided an affordable package, which included transport and accommodation based upon negotiated rates with both accommodation and transport providers (Durie, 2003: 140-149). The value of the intermediary is that it can provide the consumer with a one-stop shop, whereby the consumer can organise all elements of a journey. The intermediary also can be of value to the tourism product provider, amplifying access to consumers beyond the scope achievable one's own.

The World Tourism Organisation (WTO, 1999: 137) notes "the travel and tourism industry is one that has more intermediaries than other industries". Furthermore, they observe the growing trend for tourists to research destinations and tourism products and to book direct, this facilitated by the convenience and accessibility of the Internet. Whilst have been debates similar to those above about the future of intermediaries, but within tourism (e.g. Baines, 1998; Buhalis, 1998; Vasudavan &

Standing, 1999; Licata et al, 2001; O'Connor & Frew, 2000; Wynne et al 2001; Buhalis & Licata, 2002; Law et al 2004; Cheyne et al 2006), there appears to be a general view that both the online and traditional intermediary have a role, though how this will unfold is less clear. Indeed, Law et al (2004), examining the views of tourists, argue that both traditional and online intermediaries within tourism are both important and complementary. However, drawing upon expert opinion to explore the future of intermediation, O'Connor & Frew (2000) conclude that the traditional travel agent will decline in importance, though this may be curtailed if an online presence is developed, and that both direct channels and online channels would grow in importance. One feature of many online intermediaries is that they are new entrants to tourism, exploiting opportunities afforded by the new technologies to provide their own travel services (e.g. LastMinute.com, MicroSoft's Expedia) (WTO, 1999; Licata et al, 2001; Buhalis & Licata, 2002) possibly threatening established players such as the Global Distribution System (GDS) providers (e.g. Sabre, Amadeus and Travelport) (Buhalis & Licata, 2002). Furthermore the landscape of intermediation is in constant flux, with intermediaries growing not only organically but also through acquisitions and alliances (Daniele and Frew, 2004). A further dynamic is revealed by Marvel (2006) who notes that hotel chains are adopting a more selective strategy in their use of online intermediaries. Nodder et al (2003) in a study of ICT adoption/use by SMEs in New Zealand, highlight the relatively high level of ICT uptake by B&B businesses, but note their "tendency to rely on larger portals provided by RTOs or private companies" (Nodder et al, 2003: 359), though it is it open to question whether these private companies are the 'better known' companies. In summary, this oversimplified insight into intermediation

within tourism reveals a complex landscape of acquisitions and alliances, new entrants and new technologies and the selective business use of intermediation by a heterogeneous and fragmented sector.

It is this profusion and variety of online intermediaries which presents a confusing landscape not only to consumers, but also to tourism providers (Buhalis & Licata, 2002). Services range from a simple listing of name and contact details, to the 'dynamic packaging' of those tourism products likely to be required on a visit (e.g. flight, car-hire, accommodation). Visitors can both seek information and book everything they need for their visit through the online intermediary. Furthermore, a new 'breed' of intermediary has emerged which provides 'visitors' to a property with the opportunity to comment about their experience there. This raises the challenge, from a tourism provider's perspective, of how to make sense of this bewildering landscape? It invites the analytical question of whether it is possible to map out the different types of online intermediary in such a way as to be useful to the tourism provider.

7.4   Evidence

The attraction of third party intermediaries is explored using two approaches. The first reveals the level of uptake through a quantitative examination of a limited selection of intermediaries revealed through discussions with hoteliers (section 7.4.1). The second approach investigates the detail of actual practices to shed light upon how intermediaries are selected and handled (section 7.4.2).

7.4.1 <u>The Big Picture - third party (intermediaries) web-sites</u>

A number of online options for online engagement are available which include:

- international 'dynamic packaging' intermediation (e.g. Expedia.com)

- international accommodation intermediation (e.g.Smoothhound.co.uk)

- national promotion and intermediation (e.g. undiscoveredscotland.co.uk)

The three examples reveal different characteristics:

Expedia (www.expedia.com) provides an online booking engine and works on the basis of allocation of inventory. A search on the 13th July 2007 revealed 322 hoteliers in Scotland, which excluded apartments.

SmoothHound (www.smoothhound.co.uk) provides both an online booking engine and an email based booking facility with an international inventory. It is an annual subscription based facility which can cost as little as £30 per annum[32] for UK properties. In April, 2005, 2,215 hoteliers were listed for Scotland. When the site was revisited on the 27th May 2007, it was calculated that there was a net decline since 2005 of 173 properties (8% of the count).

Undiscovered Scotland (www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk) is an information website which provides free listings with direct links (email and website) to accommodation providers. For those that request it, there are various options to

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[32] Available from SmoothHound order form http://www.smoothhound.co.uk/order.html [accessed 14th July 2007]

increase the profile of the property, which includes banners and photos. This also includes the option of a link to www.laterooms.com, a commission (15%) based online booking website, allowing the allocation of 'distressed' or discounted accommodation. There is also a link to an independent review website www.hotelreviewsscotland.com. The UndiscoveredScotland website listed 2,591 properties on the 29th May 2007.

The uptake of the three websites, Expedia.com, Smoothhound.co.uk and UndiscoveredScotland.co.uk, by Scottish hoteliers has been examined. Figure 29 presents a breakdown of each property by the number of rooms available at the time of enquiry. Accommodation details (number of rooms, grading) are provided from the regional accommodation brochures.

This analysis reveals that the three websites attract different types of hotelier based upon the number of rooms available to guests. Expedia has an average of 77 rooms per property excluding campuses. Of the 121 properties for which there are no room details, 40 properties are represented by 11 national and international brands. The other two websites have averages of 17 (UndiscoveredScotland) and 19 (SmoothHound) rooms per property excluding campuses. There is a skew towards higher room capacity properties for SmoothHound.

Number of rooms	Expedia 13 July 2007	SmoothHound April 2005	UndiscoveredScotland 29 May 2007	Expedia 13 July 2007	SmoothHound April 2005	UndiscoveredScotland 29 May 2007
1	-	8	12	0.0%	0.4%	0.5%
2	-	85	140	0.0%	3.8%	5.4%
3	-	225	328	0.0%	10.2%	12.7%
4	-	105	86	0.0%	4.7%	3.3%
5	-	104	110	0.0%	4.7%	4.2%
6	2	150	124	0.6%	6.8%	4.8%
7	3	86	96	0.9%	3.9%	3.7%
8	2	74	72	0.6%	3.3%	2.8%
9	1	52	59	0.3%	2.3%	2.3%
10	5	51	53	1.6%	2.3%	2.0%
11	3	29	33	0.9%	1.3%	1.3%
12	-	43	39	0.0%	1.9%	1.5%
13	2	20	21	0.6%	0.9%	0.8%
14	2	25	23	0.6%	1.1%	0.9%
15-19	12	70	83	3.7%	3.2%	3.2%
20-49	61	146	145	18.9%	6.6%	5.6%
50-99	54	81	61	16.8%	3.7%	2.4%
100-199	41	46	39	12.7%	2.1%	1.5%
>199	13	13	13	4.0%	0.6%	0.5%
no details	121	802	1,054	37.6%	36.2%	40.7%
	322	2,215	2,591	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 29   Accommodation by room capacity represented on the three websites Expedia.com, Smoothhound.co.uk and UndiscoveredScotland.co.uk

Figure 30 presents a breakdown of each property by grading as at the time of enquiry, grading details provided from the regional accommodation brochures. This again reveals the distinction between Expedia and the other two websites. Expedia comprises of a relatively high proportion of three and four star hotels (38% of the inventory listed for Scotland). SmoothHound attracts predominantly three star guest houses, followed by three and four star bed and breakfasts. UndiscoveredScotland attracts predominantly three star bed and breakfasts followed by four star bed and breakfasts and three star guest houses.

Number of rooms	Expedia 13 July 2007	SmoothHound April 2005	UndiscoveredScotland 29 May 2007	Expedia 13 July 2007	SmoothHound April 2005	UndiscoveredScotland 29 May 2007
no grading information	-	7	3		0.3%	0.1%
qaawait	9	78	52	2.8%	3.5%	2.0%
qabb1	-	-	2			0.1%
qabb2	-	41	23		1.9%	0.9%
qabb3	-	174	239		7.9%	9.2%
qabb4	-	120	212		5.4%	8.2%
qabb5	-	6	17		0.3%	0.7%
qac1	-	1	4		0.0%	0.2%
qac2	-	1	3		0.0%	0.1%
qac3	1	-	1	0.3%		0.0%
qagh1	2	13	5	0.6%	0.6%	0.2%
qagh2	2	54	31	0.6%	2.4%	1.2%
qagh3	3	245	207	0.9%	11.1%	8.0%
qagh4	2	109	132	0.6%	4.9%	5.1%
qagh5	-	1	3		0.0%	0.1%
qah1	1	6	2	0.3%	0.3%	0.1%
qah2	9	38	19	2.8%	1.7%	0.7%
qah3	69	129	121	21.4%	5.8%	4.7%
qah4	54	75	64	16.8%	3.4%	2.5%
qah5	14	5	13	4.3%	0.2%	0.5%
qai1	-	5	3		0.2%	0.1%
qai2	-	23	14		1.0%	0.5%
qai3	2	19	29	0.6%	0.9%	1.1%
qai4	1	2	5	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%
qairh5	3	3	2	0.9%	0.1%	0.1%
qal2	1	4	2	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%
qal3	3	9	7	0.9%	0.4%	0.3%
qal4	-		1			0.0%
qarr2	-	-	2			0.1%
qarr3	-	4	9		0.2%	0.3%
qarr4	-	2	9		0.1%	0.3%
qarr5	-	-	2			0.1%
qasa4	3	-	2	0.9%		0.1%
qash1	-	5	5		0.2%	0.2%
qash2	1	55	48	0.3%	2.5%	1.9%
qash3	9	120	167	2.8%	5.4%	6.4%
qash4	11	56	74	3.4%	2.5%	2.9%
qash5	1	3	3	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%
no details available	121	802	1,054	37.6%	36.2%	40.7%
	322	2,215	2,591	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 30 Accommodation by grading represented on the three websites Expedia.com, Smoothhound.co.uk and UndiscoveredScotland.co.uk

The names of the properties were used to establish consortia associations for the set of Expedia listings. Recognising that there are properties in the Expedia listings

whose association has not been identified, nevertheless, a significant proportion (>41%) of properties can be clearly identified as having a consortia association. This contrasts with SmoothHound, which has only 8.5% of those properties listed in 2005, and UndiscoveredScotland, which has 6.3% of its properties listed in 2007.

In summary, it is apparent that each of the three websites has a different attraction to its product client base. Expedia attracts the large hotel groups, whilst SmoothHound appears to attract the guest house and UndiscoveredScotland the smaller bed and breakfast, though these websites are clearly not exclusive to these types of accommodation. This does raise the question of what attracts clients to a particular website? How important is content or can this be explained by the charging structure of the intermediary, or are there other factors. Examination of service provider practices may shed light on this

7.4.2 <u>A Microscopic View of Uptake Practices</u>

The uptake of third party online intermediary services by hoteliers encompasses a wide range of attitudes and approaches. This is compounded by the wide variety of intermediaries to be found online and the difficulty of deciding with whom to associate. Charges, level of bookings received and the type of clientele targeted may influence this. The domestication of third party online intermediary services is mainly concerned with their appropriation. Their use tends to be embedded as part of existing practices. Furthermore, this is an ever-changing landscape with some

intermediaries being discarded and others being engaged according to their perceived impact upon the business in terms of bookings and the costs they incur.

The domestication of commercial intermediaries emphasises appropriation and conversion, which are respectively examined using the framework presented in section 3.5.1.

Appropriation

Appropriation is not necessarily a straightforward activity. Instead, it is revealed to be potentially problematic.

<u>The Need</u>

The motivation to seek out third party online intermediary services is perhaps effectively revealed by reasons given for not pursuing this option:

> we're not a desperately big guest house and we find that we are really filling up quite easily without having to pay out a lot more for other people to be advertising us on their websites [S2].

> I sometimes look at the… but I have never done it... I don't have a big enough turnover... it's a hobby... so it's not worth it [S5].

> if business started getting quiet, then you would be trying everything, wouldn't you? [M16].

The reasons for not using intermediary websites reflects a lack of perceived need due to the existing high level of business, the small size of the business and the seriousness (lifestyle) about getting business in. The last comment suggests, perhaps obviously, that the prime reason for associating with an intermediary is to receive enquiries, which translate into bookings and generates income. The financial motive raises the question of how the cost of intermediation is managed.

<u>Budget And Cost</u>

Whilst a number of intermediaries are free, others charge a period (monthly-annual) fee for an online presence and/or commission for each booking made. Periodic charges vary considerably:

> we get almost daily offers to join websites for only £100 a month or similar deals [DG2].

> given that they cost about.. somewhere between £40 and £50 per year [M13].

The danger arises when the amounts involved can, as additional intermediaries are added to the intermediary portfolio, lead to potentially large amounts being paid for intermediation services:

> if you start advertising on all of them it costs hundreds and hundreds… it is all just a question of finance [SK10].

This "question of finance" highlights the financial constraints of businesses, in particular, smaller businesses:

> the case of smaller business in the industry, which Scotland is full of, who have limited budgets [DG2].

The potential for overspending appears to impose a sense of discipline:

> I only sort of allocated about £300 to it and I would, sort of, not go over that figure... [M13].

This hotelier sets an upper limit but then comments:

> ...but it is only something in my head… we are only a very small business… we don't formally budget"   [M13].

Smaller hoteliers do not necessarily adopt a formalised approached to establishing and monitoring how much is paid annually. This possibly reflects a more relaxed attitude to the financial aspects of the business than would be encountered in larger

organisations: "I have a rough idea in my head what advertising I should spend on" [M16]. How much should be spent is based upon intuition, but it is not blind intuition as these smaller hoteliers need to sustain themselves year upon year. Online costs are embedded into the expenditure for the business, perhaps supplanting more traditional forms of promotion (e.g. brochures, newspapers and magazines) and at lower cost:

> cut back on newspapers and magazines.. are very expensive… and we have done more Internet advertising which has made probably the budget in today's terms over the period actually you are spending less [M16].

The "something" or "rough idea in my head" approach highlights the role of memory and raises the question of the nature of the tacit calculations that give rise to what is "in my head".

These tacit calculations are perhaps more visible where commissions are charged on individual bookings. This represents a cut in income:

> WELL-KNOWN-COMPANY.com want something like 25% -30% commission, you know, and with small businesses like us...I do not really know why they are asking so much, but maybe it is because they think they can get away with it. I think it is rubbish. I actively, you know, broken out of contracts... because I find it is too much. But if you say I can only offer you 20%… I can only offer you 15%… and they laugh "Come on, nobody deals with us who gives us less than 25% [EH16-7].

There is a sense of what is a reasonable expense and this reflects the overall need to balance costs against income for the business as a whole. One of the opportunities offered to hoteliers is the ability to manage this due to the variety of intermediaries available.

<u>Variety Of Intermediaries</u>

Whilst the variety of available intermediaries offers an opportunity to seek out intermediaries most suited to the business, this very variety is itself a problem. How does one select whom to associate with? The variety can perplex hoteliers:

> if there is one major problem for myself in the industry is the number of accommodation websites that are around… trying to select the best sites to list with is a mammoth task"   [DG2].

> it's difficult and we are probably not knowledgeable enough to know which would be the best that you can on [O1].

> the question is, how do you gauge this is the right one for you and which is not [EH16-7].

> we have looked at things like that... we do occasionally search and look for big website that we should put our hotel on to... but... there is just so many of them.. there are so many of these third party booking websites out there... I was looking at my emails today and I had maybe ten companies offering me [B3].

These comments highlight this variety. Further these comments reveal a lack of knowledge about the intermediaries, the need for an assessment approach, the immensity of the task, the desire to be on the best site and the need to avoid certain sites. Furthermore, a daily barrage of offers exacerbates this perplexity. Nevertheless, hoteliers do make decisions about which intermediaries to associate with.

<u>Selection – Choice</u>

The decisions about which intermediaries to associate with reflect a variety of different approaches and rationales which range from the haphazard to the systematic. The first two approaches presented tend towards the haphazard and reflect a lack of knowledge about the intermediaries.

1. Junk mail response.

> via junk mail... that was what we did to begin with [EH15-1].

A response to junk mail is assumed to reflect both convenience and an enticing offer. In the absence of knowledge of who is out there, a persuasive and enticing offer may enrol the newcomer, who tries it and learns from this experience:

> ...and now we try and be a little bit more selective… so that we have some idea whether or not the money we pay to them, even though generally it's not very much, is actually getting us some enquiries… [EH15-1].

The learning is important and guides subsequent actions. In this case the criteria of knowing whether money spent on an online presence is generating business.

There is, however, the danger that an invitation is a scam to extract money as revealed in this comment from a blog on the UKAPAS (United Kingdom Accommodation Providers Alert Scheme) website about NovaChannel:

> We have been caught out by this company by signing a form that was deliberately misleading in its text, we thought that we were merely updating information for a free listings site but actually apparently committed ourselves to a huge invoiced amount for the next THREE years (and the next three after that if you do not cancel correctly), after a few sleepless nights we discovered by searching the internet (you do not have to try too hard to find many many victims) that the general advice is do not pay a single penny and try not to get too upset by repeated threats by letter and phone calls, especially when the debt recovery company premium recovery gets involved.
> [ANON, 3rd August 2005]

The UKAPAS website provides an online facility (http://www.ukapas.ross-web.org.uk) alerting its members to scams. Indeed it links to another website www.stopecg.org (last accessed on the 8th March 2008) providing details

about scams. As the textbox (Figure 31) reveals, even genuine websites can be viewed suspiciously. The first commentator raises the manner in which enrolment occurs; an initial offer of a free listing transforms into an invoice for an annual subscription. Both the second and commentators speculate about how enquiries are generated, particularly in view that they fail to translate into bookings. The second suggests dubious practices revealing uncertainty, whilst the third establishes a self-designated authoritative stance invoking expertise about what is going on, irrespective of whether this is legitimate or valid. The fourth commentator reveals how to respond to the unwanted emails. What is significant is the uncertainty that surrounds this apparently genuine online intermediary.

COMMENTATOR 1: "I wanted to pick your brains. I am not sure if I am just becoming paranoid about web based accommodation sites but over the last 7-10 days I have had a flood of enquiries from a site called ONLINE-BOOKING-COMPANY. This site offered me a free entry some months ago and after filling in my details I heard nothing at all until this week. The way the enquiries arrive, you answer them on the special enquiry form and so do not always have an e-mail address for the enquirer. None of the enquiries have led to bookings but ""big surprise"", a reminder notice came in saying I was due my first paid instalment of $95.00 a year. This would be a recurring payment unless I cancel. I was given 24 hours to pay and my listing was promptly removed"

COMMENTATOR 2: "We decided they were using some odd sales tactics such as getting their employees to send us dummy enquiries so that we would think it was a great site and generating lots of business. Presumably they hoped we would then send our money"

COMMENTATOR 3: "I have realised what they are doing. It is a genuine site as such but all advertisers from an area come up in a search. The customer fills in an enquiry form for the area, clicks on one button and the enquiry goes out to everyone in the area. So one e-mail can go to 100 hotels/guesthouses at the click of a button and you know Americans!!! They have listed us under apartments only. Yet I know that an enquiry I received for an apartment also went out to most of the hotels in the area. So you think you are getting lots of enquiries but the trouble is, so is the whole of your area. Hope this helps. I will not be renewing the subscription!!!"

COMMENTATOR 4: "I am being targeted with a vengeance by them up to 5 'enquiries' a day although I am not registered with them. I have now added them to my 'blocked senders list' with the multitude of other 'offers' I receive by the bucket load"

Figure 31 A selection of comments from different commentators about a third party online intermediary and whether it is a genuine company or a scam (from UKAPAS website http://ukapas.org.uk 22nd May 2003)

2. Blind enrolment.

> For the first couple of months I was writing thousands and thousands of e-mails to people, organisations that promote Tourism in Scotland or rather… buying ourselves hotel spaces and so on… and, some gave me a response and some did not [EH16-7].

An alternative strategy is to try anyone. A potentially expensive approach, it offers a rich learning experience:

> Some of them I paid a lot of money and never once got business from them… you see the site it is super, but in terms of real bookings, zero. They gave you all the sales pitch saying, you know, 'we guarantee that within the year at least, or within the first three months, you will be able to recoup all the money that is spent with them'. Rubbish, basically. Waste of time... everybody wants your money and a million advertisers a day want your money [EH16-7].

The enticement of an attractive website supported by promises can be at odds with the experience.

In both cases learning can lead to both a negative view of intermediaries and a cautious approach to dealing with them.

The other approaches tend to be more selective.

3. Use 'known' names.

> The Scottish Accommodation Index (SAI) is one of the big ones for Scotland [EH16-6].

Well-known names are selected on the basis of general reputation. However, this introduces the question of how these 'names' become established. It also

raises the issue of whether being associated with someone well-known will necessarily lead to bookings.

4. Learning from others.

> noticed that friends around about advertise with them and you can see by the volume of emails that they've not been able to do... maybe we'll give them a go [EH15-1].

In this example, a collaborative arrangement exists between a small group of hoteliers that they will forward enquiries to each other when unable to deal with them themselves, rather than turn a potential booking away. The emails reveal the performance of specific sites used by others and, in doing so, point to the potentially useful websites.

5. Word of mouth recommendation.

A more direct approach is a word of mouth recommendation:

> you cannot be on them all... we're not stupid... we talk to other B&B owners and try and glean as much information from them as to how they've progressed and... the bulk of the people here that do bed and breakfast have been doing it for a long time and are quite experienced in it and so we've been able... and give really of their advice... so it is a fairly small community so everybody tends to help each other out and information is passed freely to which they would advise are the better sites [M14].

The community spirit in which this island-based hotelier lives reveals the open and shared approach to information and experience. In contrast, the following hotelier finds that what worked for his 'ex' did not work for him:

> yet we haven't had a single enquiry and that's been... eight or nine months now and not a single enquiry... my ex- used to run a B&B in Edinburgh and she found that SUCHANDSUCH was great and she got about 90% of her bookings through them [X1].

Located on an island in the West of Scotland in contrast to his 'ex' who was in the East of Scotland, this suggests the possibility that intermediaries can be location specific in terms of their effectiveness. It is suggested that particular types of intermediary, irrespective of location-specific content, appeal to specific types of online visitors who are looking for a particular type of destination (e.g. the city). Indeed this reasoning suggests a minimum of three types of intermediary: the local-specific, national-general and the theme-specific, which perhaps the latter example relates to. This highlights the pitfall that what is shared about what works at a local level, need not be applicable across different localities.

6. Specialist interest groups

The theme-specific intermediary is typified by specialist interest groups such as a society (e.g. The Ramblers' Association). A particular theme (e.g. walking holidays) may have a local presence and thereby the locality may attract visitors with an interest in that theme:

> I put an entry in the vegetarian guide... because I am a vegetarian... I think they have a website entry... I have never ever looked at it [SK3].

In this case, the interest group produced a hardcopy guide and was assumed to have a website, which may also present contact details. As a strategy, it increases the likelihood of attracting the right type of visitor.

7. Seek out consolidators addressing specific markets.

An alternative strategy is to target those who look to organise a complete holiday package through an online consolidator of tourism product:

> considered using ACTIVE HOTELS a few years ago as it provides a one stop shop access to a range of directories [AR4].

The one stop shop approach implies the ability to allocate rooms to the consolidator. Unlike a national DMO, this intermediary is a commercial organisation providing online booking facilities. Nevertheless, from an hoteliers perspective, the practical issues relating to the use of a third party online booking engine tend to be similar and as discussed in the previous chapter.

8. Search engine ranking.

If the question is asked about how the hotelier is to be found online, then a possible response is 'through a search engine". This ultimately leads to efforts to simulate the search behaviours of potential visitors in order to establish which websites have high listings for given search terms. An Edinburgh based hotelier reveals that she only "occasionally" does:

> a search for accommodation in Edinburgh and see which sites come up first on the first couple of pages.. 'that might work' and contacted them… 'can we be on your site?' [EH15-1]

Nevertheless this is sufficient to reveal intermediaries who are found and who might lead to more bookings. Another hotelier raises several interesting issues:

> I am not going to divulge just exactly which ones, but certainly it is really common sense. You can look through the Internet and then find out which ones are working and which ones are not... the only search engine that really matters is Google. That is my experience that... there is no competitor really [M16].

Paradoxically this hotelier did not want to reveal the intermediaries he used. His intermediaries appear to have acquired the status of a trade secret. Perhaps the thinking is that if competitors find out then they may profit at the expense of his own business. Nevertheless, these intermediaries were easily found by typing in the details of the property. Likewise, the view about Google's status as a search engine raises the question of how significant is "experience" in shaping views or giving rise to misconceptions about the Internet. How much knowledge is based upon experience rather than being authoritatively informed?

There may be other approaches to seeking out an intermediary in addition to the aforementioned eight approaches. Nevertheless, these eight reveal the uncertainty associated with any intermediary. This suggests that it is useful to monitor their performance in some way.

Conversion

Conversion, likewise, is not necessarily a straightforward activity, it also being potentially problematic.

Monitor

Monitoring the performance of intermediaries is not a straightforward task. Three specific approaches have been identified, but their effectiveness is questioned.

The first relies upon information provided by the intermediary:

Some of them offer you statistics every month. "You had sixty-seven hits Mr …", well that is okay, but if you have only had zero enquiries then that is not much use is it? [M16].

The number of hits a page receives reveals how frequently the page has been viewed.

However, the aim is to get bookings, which will not happen unless enquiries ensue.

Thus, the hotelier offers a valid view about the statistics provided. A more cynical

view is expressed:

commercially inept on the part of these sites.. that they don't seem to consider that the money we spend that we are interested in seeing whether we actually get anything back... at the end of the year we say 'can you show us what business you've produced and they can't… they can say how many thousands of enquiries that have come through or hits... but that doesn't mean anything [EH15-1].

The ability to monitor the level of business is in terms of bookings. Indeed, this has

become a selection criterion for another hotelier:

look for sites where you can quantify the return because… you can spend you're money and not know what you are getting back… we tend to reject those now that have no means of telling us what business [bookings] we've had [EH15-1].

However, there may be technical issues associated with this from an intermediary

perspective, which may hinder this.

Inadequate feedback from intermediaries can lead to innovative practices by

hoteliers. One hotelier had developed a facility to allow visitors when making an

online booking through his website, to identify where the property had been found:

we have a little box on our booking form which people are asked to tick, though not all of them do, but when they do tick it, it shows where they come [M14].

Whilst this was perhaps a unique development, a practice that might be more widely

considered and developed relates to email use:

we had AA@a.sap.com and RAC@a.sap.com, STB@a.sap.com… so when the enquiries came in we knew what advertising was actually working for.. but now we've actually dropped that and we just have gru@a.sap.com…we were tracking for about five years... we knew where not to put your advertising money... we did discontinue the… after three years... but that was because we weren't getting any business through them... but we kept the Tourist Board because we do get business through that... but whether that comes via THE-LOCAL-DMS as well we don't know... because we are now just now gru@a.sap.com [M11].

The use of different email addresses in the contact details provided to each intermediary allows enquiries to be traced to source. However, monitoring may be a time consuming activity and its continuation is likely to reflect whether new information will be provided. Discontinuation of this monitoring practice is assumed to be due to rationalisation of the intermediaries used on the basis of calculated return on expenditure. This suggests that when there is a degree of confidence in the source of bookings that the effort to monitor will diminish. It does not matter where bookings are coming from as long as the bookings come in. What is important is to eliminate unnecessary costs by identifying the ineffective intermediaries. Another issue is the role of the local DMO and the support given to it, even though its contribution to the business is unknown. This will be examined in the next chapter. Nevertheless, monitoring is not a precise activity, partly because there is a lack of an audit trail between the visitor's first gaze at the property and the booking transaction. The visitor may identify the property on an intermediary website then by-pass it to contact the hotelier directly. The impact of the intermediary cannot be known unless the visitor is asked directly.

This practice of asking the visitor how the property was found can conveniently take place at the time of registering the visitor on arrival at the property. Registration is a legal requirement [Immigration (Hotel Records) Order 1972]:

> have a file on computer… when people register, there is a question 'where did you find us?' and I put it into this file [weekly]… not just the Internet… so that at the end of each year we can look at it… that is why we know that the Internet works so so well [EH15-1].

There are two issues raised.

First is whether the entry is general or specific (e.g. "the Internet" or "visitscotland.com"). If recall is specific, can this be verified as accurate or is it a vague recollection, in which case the recall may distort the data collected. Furthermore, a brochure may have been used in conjunction with several sites on the Internet. Nevertheless, of the approaches available, it perhaps is the most informative in identifying where business is coming from, both online and off-line. It may highlight, as in this case, the importance of the Internet as a channel, not necessarily for the booking transaction itself but as a means to promote, inform and persuade online visitors.

The second issue relates to the Data Protection Act and compliance. One respondent mentioned this as an issue with regard to the collection of visitor details, though whether the respondent was correct in their interpretation of the law was not investigated. Certainly no other respondent expressed concern about the collection of this data. Nevertheless, this raises the question of how aware hoteliers are about any legal requirements relating to their business. VisitScotland published "The Tartan Book" in 2004, but it was never updated. The book provided:

the industry with a comprehensive guide that brought together the wide range of legislation affecting accommodation businesses.

(www.visitscotland.org[33])

Obvious issues such as Health and Safety may overshadow the requirements of the Immigration (Hotel Records) Order 1972, in which case, personal data may be collected without any appreciation of the legal consequences.

However, ongoing monitoring is not an activity carried out by all hoteliers: "The names of which do not spring to mind at the moment, I am afraid" [I2]. The poor recollection of intermediaries used suggests their lack of significance to some. Attention is upon the business received and not the actor who delivers. The names of intermediaries only become important when deciding whether to retain the intermediary.

It is clear that monitoring the performance of intermediaries is a desirable activity, though is not a straightforward activity or widespread activity. Indeed, the inability to differentiate the source of enquiries may not be such an issue if there is confidence that the channels used are delivering business. Whether the intermediary is the national DMO (visitscotland.com) or any other intermediary is immaterial. From the hotelier's perspective, the important issue is that expense produces business or "value for money", an issue that has been discussed in the previous chapter in the context of visitscotland.com.

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[33] Available from
http://www.visitscotland.org/partnership_working/general_business_support/tartan_book.htm
[accessed 9th March 2008]

<u>Impact</u>

The issue is not merely that the expense of using an intermediary is recovered, but that the expense produces "value for money":

> Internet advertising… so, value for money it has worked very well for any accommodation provider. I think we have worked particularly hard at it and I think we have really reaped the benefits, but I think anybody can [M16].

In contrast to newspapers and magazines, "Internet advertising" is both a lower expense and offers better "value for money". This notion of "value for money", is important and has already emerged in the context of visitscotland.com (previous chapter). The issue is not about the recovery of costs incurred, but the relative benefit per unit cost incurred. As raised in the previous chapter visitscotland.com is perceived as expensive relative to other intermediaries. Thus, the value of bookings received relative to the cost incurred serves as a useful metric. Furthermore, the benefit gained may be a function of the effort expended – to make it work; it is not merely a question of paying an intermediary and bookings will flow. The right intermediary needs to be found.

Unless intermediaries are free, then they are expected to perform:

> usually they are mostly on an annual subscription basis and when renewal time comes along I go and take a careful look at what we've got from them and either renew or not [M13].

Loyalty does not appear to be an issue. Instead, their retention or disposal is a business decision based upon "what we've got from them":

> I have reduced the number of party websites that I am on.. third party websites over the years because I really don't think that they are doing the job [AR4].

Are they "doing the job" of getting bookings? However, "the job" need not be very clearly defined and may extend beyond just getting bookings:

> they all help at the quieter times and do many things in the background that we do not realise [EH16-1].

The nature of the perceived "help" and the things done "in the background" is unclear:

> and then there are some of them who do not give you any enquiries, but they actually help you to keep you up on the Internet [M16].

It is postulated that this may be the informational value of the presence on the intermediary or, alternatively, may relate to the way websites are found in search engines. Whatever, the perception of some mystical benefits introduces an alternative to the tangible requirement for bookings.

The performance of one well-known Scottish intermediary has received similar comments from two unconnected and spatially separated properties, one in a city, the other on an island:

> I probably get at least 8 emails a day on average… not many of them translate into bookings [EH16-6].

> I would say that almost every day there is an enquiry, but they don't translate into bookings very often… This year think I have had 4-5 finalised bookings from people who have actually arrived and taken up the booking [AR4].

Similar language is used: "translate into bookings". Bookings are the metric of performance. This intermediary's website reveals a £50 upfront charge, complemented with a 10% commission and £2 booking fee [9th March 2008]. The low upfront cost and its 'promise' of some business due to its profile, perhaps dissuades hoteliers from dropping it… but for how long?

Furthermore, close monitoring reveals that an intermediary's performance can vary from year to year:

> Well, ActiveHotels is probably by far the best for me this year. Last year, RatesToGo was... and ActiveHotels gives you feed-back as well… they have a huge presence by the looks of it [EH16-7].

Intermediaries offer a service for which there are low switching costs:

> every year it is sort of...we try this one and we drop that one, you know. You just kind of… you get a feel for it and you just decide what you think is working and what you think is not [M16].

However, this reveals hoteliers' inexactitude in their decision-making. A feeling of performance may inaccurately reflect actual performance and lead to inappropriate disposal. Intermediaries who can demonstrate their performance and are able to provide a reliable indicator of performance may compensate for this hotelier inexactitude.

Pitfalls

The decision to dispose of a website is not necessarily a simple process of not renewing subscriptions: "we just haven't, you know, renewed our subscription" [I2]. There may be other issues:

> there was one site we advertised with for a couple of years called.. and the guy was incredibly aggressive... he phoned to say our subscription was due and I said that it was not really very convenient to talk to you.. he said, I'll phone back next week... and he did... so I said no we're not going to advertise with you any more because we've had nothing from you…. and he said "how do you know".. and he was so aggressive... I couldn't believe it... I ended up hanging up on him [EH15-1].

The intermediary may use aggressive sales tactics to "persuade" renewal. Alternatively, an invoice may be sent for membership that has never been taken out:

> I got an invoice from them inviting me to renew my membership... I don't have a membership so I have ignored that... I am happy to remain as non-featured [AR4].

One of the dangers with an online presence that is not controlled is the lack of maintenance of the hotelier's details:

> another curious thing that I find is that… I still had enquiries just now and again from XXX and we must still be on their site even though we've not paid anything to them for ages [EH15-1].

This can arise when intermediaries do not delete details. This creates the danger that out-of-date details can mislead, though may offer contact details that allows direct contact. A similar situation arises with the demise of an organisation with a website, but the website retains an online presence:

> DEADSITE.com... that site is not doing anything now… the site is still there and it is quite nice, but unfortunately a few of the establishments are no longer in business… [the site stopped] probably about 2001 [AR4: 14th January 2007].

Whilst the website provides a useful informative facility, the information is dated and is potentially misleading. Unlike the old and out-of-date tourism brochure, which can be thrown out, the hotelier is unable to access this site. There is no control or influence. The website is online debris, a legacy from another period.

Another issue concerns the listing of properties on intermediary sites unbeknown to the hoteliers:

> Are we? I have no idea about that… there are lots of websites that simply choose to grab our information and put them on their sites in order to gain credibility… I've never had a single enquiry come [X1]

There is a perception that some intermediaries compile directories of hoteliers without the hotelier's knowledge. Whether this is true needs to be validated. However, the possibility exists that there is no recollection of enrolment with a

particular intermediary: "cannot remember their names, there are so many of them now"   [EH16-6]. With so many intermediaries, it can be difficult to remember their names and perhaps even an inconspicuous email response to an invitation offering a free "standard" listing in a directory, which presents the property's name, address and telephone details.

Dissatisfaction with intermediaries can lead to their discreditation:

> I feel that there are a lot of cowboys there [AR4].
>
> I've had too many rip-offs of that and it's such a minefield [X1].

One account of a bad experience reveals the nature of the tactics used and the dilemma faced:

> Oh yes, there is www.rip-off-merchants.com in my view they are absolute rip off merchants… they contacted me saying… you pay us so much per month and you'll come top of the Google listing for businesses in your region.. and persuaded me to do that for the two different businesses that I have here… when you see the fine print it turns out that our region is Argyll... so that was a complete and utter waste of time and they did not make that at all obvious… so I cancelled the same day after they had taken the credit card details and then afterwards said yes and this is your region… but they claimed that because… I had agreed to it they proceeded to take £76 a month every month for the following year… so there is no cooling off time… despite the fact that I instructed my credit card company on several occasions don't allow any money to be taken from them… what I'd say was most objectionable about RIP-OFF-MERCHANTS.com that it was a very slick deceitful sales pitch [X1].

The dubious practices of some intermediaries have already been discussed. A "hard selling" approach can persuade uptake, but may be legally binding on account of the "small print". This behaviour tarnishes attitudes towards the intermediation sector and an air of distrust is established. Thus, whilst intermediation can offer the benefit of bookings, the dilemma of finding the right intermediary is problematical and

involves risk. However, the online intermediation sector is confronted by a new entrant.

7.4.3 <u>An Alternative Form of Intermediation</u>

One phenomenon over which the hotelier has little control is the development of websites which allow people to comment about their experiences of staying at a property. One well-known site is TripAdvisor.

TripAdvisor (www.tripadvisor.co.uk) is an online facility that, according to the site itself, "provides unbiased reviews, articles, recommendations and opinions" about serviced accommodation submitted by guests, based on their experiences. A variety of information about a property is provided, which includes a visual indicator of aggregated visitor assessments of various features (Figure 32), a ranking for the locality, submitted photographs and individual comments that vary considerably in length.

What to Expect:		Recommended For:	
◎◎◎◎◎	Rooms	▬▬▭	Older travellers
◎◎◎◎○	Service	▬▭	Young singles
◎◎◎◎○	Value	▬▭	An amazing honeymoon
◎◎◎◎◎	Cleanliness	▬▭	Families with teenagers
◎◎◎○○	Pool	▬▭	Families
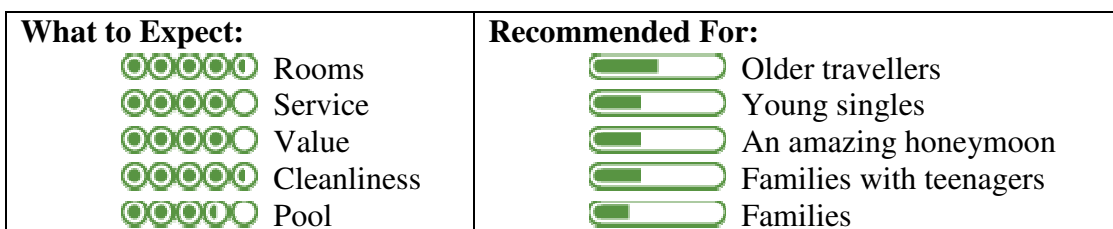
Figure 32   adapted from www.tripadvisor.com

Reviews are regulated. It is stated on the website that:

> We have zero tolerance for fake reviews… we have made, and continue to make, significant investments in maintaining the integrity of our reviews

It further states that submissions need to comply with clear guidelines, are based on "first-hand experience", are "relevant to other travellers" and are uninfluenced by the hotelier. It also allows responses from the reviewed properties.

A search for accommodation in Scotland on the 14th June 2007 revealed 280 locations with 2,692 listed properties of which 1,586 were hotels, 1,106 were "B&Bs/inns" and 186 were "other accommodation. The full spectrum of accommodation is represented. Cities dominated the listing with Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness accounting for around 30% of the listings. This perhaps reflects the most likely destinations of the visitor, with Edinburgh and Glasgow together attracting a significant proportion of visitors staying in Scotland (Figure 33). It must be noted that some properties do appear in more than one location so the figures presented are inflated. Nevertheless, this does highlight the significant role that this manner of promotion represents.

	UK visitors		Overseas visitors	
	nights	spend	nights	spend
Cities of Edinburgh & Glasgow	23%	40%	47%	49%

Figure 33   The percentage of visitors to the cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow as a percentage of the total visitors to Scotland for both domestic and overseas visitors for 2005[34]

Two contrasting views have been expressed by hoteliers regarding this:

> We have never been on TripAdvisor, so it will be quite interesting to see what it has got to say [M15].

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[34] Statistics derived from the "Tourism in XXX 2005" factsheets available from www.visitscotland.org/research_and_statistics/regional_facts___figures.htm [accessed 14th July 2007]

Curiosity surrounds this respondent, perhaps likened to awaiting exam results:

> The other drawback of the internet is the growing practice of websites evaluating accommodation, particularly www.tripadviser.com. Whilst a few glowing reviews will do wonders for your business, there are some reviewers that nit-pick and bitch so I do not think this development is a good one [EH9-2].

The uncontrolled nature of the reviews causes concern for another hotelier. It highlights the potentially different motives of the reviewer. A reviewer may genuinely give praise to a property, yet on the other hand it is suggested that some reviewers may be unnecessarily critical, which is construed as unfair:

> we've actually got a very bad review... which I'm hoping some Canadian guests we had last week are going to a really good one for us... that bad one has been there for about two years or more... it isn't bad but it's just a bit negative [EH15-1].

A review that contains negative comments can be construed as bad for business, especially if there are no other reviews to counter the review. Reviews are clearly at the whim of the visitor and, as such, are arbitrary in their occurrence. The implications of this are discussed in the next section.

In contrast to TripAdvisor, a website has been created for hoteliers to allow them to alert each other about problems with visitors and to exchange information about issues of concern (e.g. scams, cancellations, runners):

> Our purpose is to warn others in the accommodation business of the many scams and cons that are targeted at us".
>   [UK-APAS website, accessed 19th May 2006]

The UKAPAS (United Kingdom Accommodation Providers Alert Scheme) was set up originally in Scotland in July, 2002 as the SAPAS:

> Basically I started it up because of an incident on the 29th September 2001, when my wife and I were awoken at 3am by Police Officers who were trying

to locate an Australian chap to let him know that his nephew was very ill down in London (this guest was due to stay with us on the 1st October - we run a B & B). A relation of his had contacted the Police with our details which had been given to them. When he did arrive we passed on the information the Police had given us. It was at this time I thought it might be a good idea to contact other accommodation providers and see if they would like to give their email and receive 'alerts' from me if someone needed to be contacted. I expanded it to include details of anyone who ran off without paying a B & B bill, missing persons, left items.. Firstly I went through all the accommodation brochures I could find, and took out the email address and sent emails to thousands with the idea - a lot agreed, by July 2002 I had 2,784 other accommodation providers who were quite willing to join the scheme... and that was how it took off...

<div align="right">(Pete Salisbury, founder of UK-APAS[35])</div>

An opportunity was recognised to exploit the communicational opportunities offered by the Internet to inform/alert people about problems that might hit their business. Possibly touching a raw nerve, it quickly gained a lot of support.

In both cases, TripAdvisor and UKAPAS represent a shift in the role of an intermediary, from that which acts as a brokerage to facilitate a commercial transaction, to that which acts as a networking facilitator allowing a community of individuals-businesses with shared interests to exchange views. This notion of online community will be explored from the perspective of hoteliers within the local context in the next chapter.

7.5   Discussion

The value of an intermediary is the contribution the intermediary can make in terms of the bookings gained. However, there are different types of intermediary and each

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[35] Personal communication, 11th May 2006; Text amended by Pete Salisbury, 13th March 2008

is appropriate for particular types of hotelier. One of the difficulties is establishing the right match. This has been examined and reveals a variety of approaches. Common to all is the uncertainty attached to each of the approaches. The dilemma is that there is no right approach, though some are more effective than others. To understand why, we need to unravel the complexity of the intermediation domain.

7.5.1 <u>The Intermediary as Broker</u>

We can think of the intermediary as a broker of a commodified aspect of everyday life, operating in a market in which different actors can engage in exchange. However, actors can have difficulty finding other actors with whom to exchange. The market is not clearly signposted and there is uncertainty about the authenticity of each of the actors. Thus, there are attempts to organise the market to enable authentic actors to find each other, exemplified by a reputable trade directory. The broker is an organiser of the market and brings suppliers and buyers together, but mediates their transactions. The broker is recognisable as a wholesaler, distributor or retailer. Markets take on the semblance of being organised.

However, the analysis of the online domain reveals a different picture. It is crowded, disorganised and uncertain. Many actors can be found online, some more easily than others. Indeed, in contrast to hoteliers, the online intermediary is not easily recognisable, nor easily found. Online directories exist, but they tend to be incomplete yet extensive. There may be lots of names, but differentiation can be difficult.

The intermediary is sought within an online crowd through search engines. Furthermore, the search engine listing requires panning in a manner akin to a gold panner scooping silt from a river bed and skilfully sifting this silt to reveal the grain of gold. However, unlike a grain of gold, the intermediary is differentiated. Even upon identification, we do not know much about intermediaries or how their performance relates to other intermediaries.

The intermediary is initially an unknown entity with few reference points to instil confidence that expectations will be exceeded or even met. There is uncertainty and risk with each intermediary. The uncertainty due to inadequate information elevates the risk associated with the selection. The cost of a bad decision associated with one intermediary can perhaps be counteracted by the benefits accruing from association with another. Intermediary selection aims to minimise exposure whilst maximise benefit. The intermediary needs to be tried to establish acceptability.

7.5.2 <u>The Intermediary as Reference</u>

The view of the hotelier appropriating an intermediary is countered by an alternative view. The intermediary appropriates the hotelier's details and provides a facility for the hotelier's visitors to present a reference or testimonial about their stay.

The reviewer's comment can provide a richness of detail that informs potential visitors what to expect. It highlights issues that may be, in themselves, trivial or

taken for granted by the hotelier, but either delight or disappoint the visitor. However, two issues are raised: the validity and authenticity of the review.

The review is a commentary about the visitor's experience which can be long and descriptive or short, with no concern for spelling or grammar (e.g. "This is one off the best plases i have had the plessure to stay in!!!", www.tripadvisor.co.uk[37]). Comments such as "the WORST place we stayed in Scotland", "The worst place my family have had the misfortune to enter in 30 years of holiday making", "Faulty towers would be far better than this place" (www.tripadvisor.co.uk[38]), extends beyond mere description to reveal emotive content. Within the richer, lengthier descriptions, reviewers reveal what is important to them. However, whilst a review may be valid, it may provide a distorted view of the experience, giving primacy to negative issues. Indeed, it may not reflect the experiences of other visitors and be a symptom of an 'off-day'. Indeed, a negative review can prompt the hotelier to respond:

> such a horrible comment has been made against me and despite being personally insulting and completely untrue… Tripadvisor have refused to delete it. In my opinion, this comment is in direct contradiction to their own review guidelines!
>
> (www.tripadvisor.co.uk, accessed 14th March 2008)

The representativeness of a review lies in its corroboration with other reviews. The facility to score specific criteria provides ratings of a variety of features allowing 'averages' to be presented. Nevertheless, the review is informal and inherently biased. Furthermore, comments assume a trusted status and importance that can influence a potential visitor's decision about whether or not to book. However, it is

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[36] Available from www.tripadvisor.co.uk, accessed 21st March 2009
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

assumed that the reviewer is authentic and has visited the property and has no inherent interest in the property. Indeed, there may be the temptation for the hotelier to produce a good self-review[39] or for someone else to produce a malicious review. This raises the question of how commentaries are effectively "policed".

In contrast to the richness of the online review, is the stark 'rating' resulting from a formal 'quality audit' of the hotelier by an independent trained Quality Assurance (QA) assessor. The property is assessed against a standard set of criteria covering a variety of issues relating to the hotelier's service and facilities. The subjectivity inherent in the reviewer's comment may also be present in the interpretation of the criteria by the assessor. However, the effect of this bias is likely to be lost, just as the details of the hotelier are lost, in the collapse of variety to a single rating number, somewhere between one and five. This number symbolically denotes the provider's 'quality', with the best 'quality' associated with the number five[40]. Indeed, this standard set of criteria can be argued to create a "contrived" service and promote homogeneity. Unique features may be labelled non-compliant and replaced by the features that command a high rating.

This contrast raises the question of whether the online review is usurping the formal audit. The richness of descriptions (including the handling of photographs) and the capacity for multiple descriptions together allow the potential visitor to form a view of what experience to expect which cannot be revealed by a single number. Indeed, it

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[39] Exemplified with the report in The Scotsman by James Adams: "Hotelier posts fake reviews", 12th November 2006 [http://scotlandonsunday.scotsman.com/scotlandsholidayindustry/Hotelier-posts-fake-reviews.2826254.jp, accessed 21st March 2009]

[40] Within Scotland in 2005, 946 (55.9%) B&B properties were graded three and 467 (27.6%) were graded four out of a total of 1,691 (Harwood, 2007: table 18).

has already been suggested in section 5.5.1 ('Identity') that these reviews make third party Quality Assurance schemes redundant. Online reviews possibly equate with a recommendation by a friend, both of which Dickenger & Mazanec (2008) highlight as the most important factors affecting an online hotel booking, with provider's grading being disregarded. The intermediary as a reference is organising hoteliers based upon visitor experiences.

7.5.3 <u>Idealised Models of the Intermediary</u>

The preceding analysis suggests two contrasting idealised models of the intermediary: the traditional broker (b-model) and the more recent reference (r-model). Neither is a substitute for the other, instead they are complementary. Both offer the hotelier the potential benefit of bookings. A summary of these two models is presented in Figure 34.

	Supply-side determination (b-model)	Demand-side recommendation (r-model)
Emphasis	"promises" by the provider	"experiences" of the visitor
Role of Intermediary	**Broker**	**Reference**
Criteria for market organisation	Collectively sorted	Individually ranked
Provider influence	Controlled	Haphazard
Process	Accommodation Provider selection – monitor/review	Visitor assessment - recommendation
Risk	No bookings, Out-of--date details, Financial lock-in and relatively high cost	Bad report, Damage to reputation, No bookings, Temptation of good self-review or malicious review
Nature of delivered service by provider	"contrived"	"authentic"
Implication for Quality of the service provider	Need to meet the criteria of the QA scheme to get a grade, but is not a guarantee of consistent delivery to customer	No need for compliance to a QA scheme, but need to ensure consistency of quality delivery to customer
Implications for regulatory framework	Effective audit process compliant to a standard (e.g. ISO19011:2002)	Effective "policing" of each entry to ensure authenticity

Figure 34   Idealised Models of the Intermediary

The first model (b-model) of the intermediary is supply-side orientated. The hotelier attempts to determine the level of bookings through the appropriation of the right intermediaries. The embedding of practices associated with their use will take place in a manner not dissimilar to the handling of telephone and email enquiries as discussed in the previous chapter for visitscotland.com; likewise online booking. The presence of an online intermediary invokes a promise of a service, though the exposition of this promise varies from basic contact details to elaborate renditions. The appropriation process highlights the activities of selection, monitor and review, which are under the control of the hotelier. The risks associated with the selection of the wrong intermediary are no bookings and contractual lock-in at an expensive rate. Furthermore, details may not be updated particularly if the association is terminated

and the intermediary fails to remove the details. It is suggested that use of this type of intermediary is compatible with external quality assessments and, as such, this leads to a 'contrived' delivered service. The set of criteria used to assess the 'grade' of the accommodation creates a 'contrived' service that is compliant to the criteria that command a high rating. It is not 'authentic' to the inclinations of the hotelier, whose views, facilities and practices need not detract from the principle of quality. Furthermore, a 'grade' is not a guarantee of consistent delivery to customers. Furthermore, it raises the need for an effective audit process which is perhaps compliant to a standard (e.g. ISO19011:2002) to ensure consistency of assessment.

The second model (r-model) is demand-side orientated. It focuses upon the 'experiences' of the community of visitors who can express their views online about their stay with an hotelier. The intermediary assumes the role of a reference point for online visitors seeking pre-booking information and assurances about their possible selected hoteliers. From the hotelier's perspective this is a haphazard process over which the hotelier has no direct control. Indirectly, the hotelier can minimise the likelihood of a bad review by ensuring that all visitors have a positive experience during their stay. The hotelier seeks ways to create a unique and pleasurable visitor experience, perhaps one that will encourage repeat visits. This is likely to result in the creation of an 'authentic' experience, reflecting the tastes and values of the hotelier; it is not prescribed according to an externally generated set of criteria or standards. This suggests that compliance to the criteria of a QA scheme is redundant as the hotelier seeks to exceed these, but in a unique way. Instead there is a need to ensure consistency of the service delivered to customers and that their expectations

are met. Failure leads to visitor assessment and a recommendation in the form of a comment upon the intermediary's website. The risks associated with a bad report include damage to reputation and consequent lack of bookings. The main weakness of the review system is that it is very difficult to authenticate reviews, which can easily be fabricated. Indeed, David & Pinch (2006), in their study of online reviews on the amazon.com website, reveal that reviewers may have interests other than the provision of a valid review (e.g. to establish themselves as credible reviewers or promote a specific agenda). Furthermore, the empowered user will discover ways of using online reviews in ways not anticipated, exemplified by the hotelier who wrote his own favourable reviews.

7.5.4 The Hybrid r-model Intermediary

There is a third manifestation of the intermediary, which is consistent with the r-model, but can be described as a hybrid of this model. Exemplified by UKAPAS, this intermediary contrasts to that which allows visitors' to publically share their experiences of hoteliers. It serves a different community, offering a private (membership-only) viewing of hoteliers' comments about visitors (e.g. 'warning' of rogue visitors). Indeed, the emphasis upon 'warning' others, contrasts with the emphasis upon "recommendation" implied by the visitors' comments. Furthermore and unlike the visitor community, which is distributed, fragmented and open, this is a closed community which requires enrolment before access is permitted. Membership is exclusive to those who meet the criteria of being an hotelier, though there are others who have privileged access:

It is also open to police forces, trading standards officers and other similar organisations.

[www.ukapas.ross-web.org.uk, accessed 14th March 2008].

Nevertheless, in both types of intermediary, the validity and authenticity of comments is a requirement. Furthermore, in both cases, there is a new form of accountability, with misuse resulting in penalisation and, in the case of the closed network, expulsion.

The value of these two idealised models is that they help us understand why intermediation can be an attractive option to hoteliers, how they complement particular practices, but also how they have uncertainty and risk associated with them. It is postulated that perhaps these models are indicative of an hotelier's innovativeness. The hotelier who is associated more closely to the b-model is perhaps rather habitual and compliant, with the visitor having the standardised experience associated with a three star grading. Accommodation is commoditised with prices fluctuating according to demand. In contrast, those associated with the r-model may be more innovative and attentive to the consistency and authenticity of the visitor experience. Accommodation is personalised and can command a premium. Indeed, these hoteliers may be critical of efforts through QA schemes to shape the way they want to run their business. Thus, tensions may exist due to recognition of the value of a grading (they may typically receive a four-five star grading) and disagreement about the criteria used during the assessment.

7.5.5 <u>Intermediation: public sector versus commercial</u>

The different forms of intermediation available, offer a choice to hoteliers of how they wish to engage with their customers and how the intermediary becomes an extension to the hotelier. The commercial intermediary has been presented as both a broker and a reference. As a broker, the intermediary commodifies local knowledge and tourism product, translating this into text and images and re-presenting this as an online directory. This directory is the travel agent's 'shop-window' allowing the visitor to both 'gaze' upon the locality and 'view up' the hotelier. Whilst some intermediaries may then effect 'introductions' by providing contact details, others may strive to direct the visitor to the 'counter' to complete a booking transaction. As a reference, the intermediary provides the visitor with a facility to 'speak', though the speaker has not the role of spokesperson. Unlike Hennion's (1989) intermediary (the artistic director or 'producer') in the context of music production, neither the broker nor the reference is a producer. The commercial intermediary is a relatively passive role, harvesting visitor comments and hotelier details and presenting them to an unknown audience.

In common with Hennion's producer, the commercial intermediary inserts itself "between the artist and the public" (Hennion, 1989: 414), the artist being the hotelier, whether authentic or contrived. However, Hennion's producer manifests as the public sector intermediary. The face of the public sector intermediary manifests as the configuration of VisitScotland and visitscotland.com. This is an intermediary with both an online and off-line presence. This intermediary assumes a stance that, in

Hennion's words, "play[s] the role of the public" (Hennion, 1989: 414). It is acts as a spokesperson for the visitor. It tells the industry about what the visitor expects:

> it is well-documented that people are easily frustrated with poorly performing websites or difficulties in moving from planning to booking. The growth of short breaks, often booked close to departure, also makes it vital that people can organise their trips - while making sure they have the best deal - quickly and easily.
>
> (VisitScotland Tourism Prospectus, 2007: Appendix 3, page 2)

It makes assertions about the visitor; it "presupposes a public that is already known" (Hennion, 1989: 412). But these are not wild assertions; resources are dedicated to understanding the customer. This enables it to "predict a potential public" (Hennion, 1989: 414) as demonstrated in Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie (2006). However, Hennion states "but the public... is by definition an unknown, something to be found" (Hennion, 1989: 412). The public is multifarious, cannot be neatly market segmented and, by default, incorporates the unknown. The insinuation that the public want to book online ignores those who do not want to do this. Who are these people and are there many of them? Are they just the elderly, for whom the Internet is an alien technology? Moreover, this intermediary is neither a broker nor a reference, though it assumes a broker's characteristics through its online presence. It is a producer and has a privileged position. Through its messages to the industry and its provision of the QA scheme, it attempts to "transform the candidates into actors.. make them enter into their own roles" (Hennion, 1989: 414). The home-owner, through the advice received by VisitScotland, becomes the hotelier desired by VisitScotland.

From an hotelier's perspective, the challenge is how to best exploit intermediation services. The attractions of the public sector are undermined by its role as a producer. The attractions of commercial intermediaries are undermined by uncertainty and risk.

Hoteliers can side-step these issues through the appropriation of a selection of intermediaries and, through trial and error, establish the mix that is most appropriate for their business and gives the right experience to the online visitor.

7.6   Conclusion

This chapter has examined the manner in which hoteliers have embraced commercial intermediation. It complements the preceding chapter, which examined public sector intermediation. This revealed the contrasting views of institutional policy makers and operational practitioners towards online technologies and the tensions that have arisen. The examination of commercial intermediation reveals a different type of intermediation, characterised by the uncertainty and risk associated with the appropriation of an intermediary.

Appropriation requires the 'searching' out within an indeterminate online domain, an intermediary appropriate to the business. However, the nature of online intermediation is currently characterised by uncertainty. Thus, the appropriateness of the intermediary can really only be established through use and can vary over time. What works in one locality, does not necessarily work in another locality. This highlights the need for hoteliers to actively select, then monitor, the level of business received from the selected intermediaries. This type of intermediary which hoteliers appropriate has been labelled as a broker type (b-model) of intermediary.

In contrast, another type of intermediary has emerged which is labelled a reference type (r-model) of intermediary. The hotelier has no control over this type of intermediary, which provides visitors with the opportunity to "speak" about their experiences. It provides a reference for potential visitors, alerting them to anything that might possibly deter a visit. A hybrid r-model intermediary is also identified, which provides a service to hoteliers, alerting them to problem visitors and possible scams.

These two distinct idealised intermediary models have contrasting implications for hoteliers and visitors' experiences.

The discussion ends by contrasting public sector intermediation (previous chapter) with the commercial intermediary. This suggests that commercial intermediaries tend to assume the role of marketers in contrast to the public sector intermediary, which has the characteristics of Hennion's producer. This creates a possible tension from an hotelier's perspective in that the hotelier may want to resist the producer's attempts to shape the hotelier, whilst there is uncertainty and risk with the appropriation of the marketer.

The analysis and discussion reveals a variety of issues, which have implications for those with an interest in intermediation.

Hoteliers need to be more alert to the uncertainty associated with the selection of an intermediary and appreciate the value of the more sophisticated forms of evaluation

that have been presented here. The online domain can be currently characterised as the 'field of uncertain intermediation'. The benefits can be a raised level of business, but this is likely to require ongoing efforts to maintain awareness of those intermediaries that are doing a good job. Hoteliers also need to be alert to the risks associated with the use of intermediation. Whilst the UKAPAS website does provide this service, not all accommodation providers use UKAPAS. There perhaps is a need for a "watchdog" organisation to monitor and report upon intermediaries, perhaps establishing a directory of reputable websites to guide selection. However, this is an ever changing landscape and may be impractical in terms of the abundance of websites to be found.

Online intermediaries may benefit from the provision of meaningful statistics about the amount of business awarded to hoteliers. However, if visitors use contact details from the intermediary's website to make direct contact with the hotelier, then the promotional value of a website might be under-valued.

From a policy maker's perspective there is a need to ensure that the legislative framework is in place to effectively deal with rogue traders or 'cow-boys' and offer hoteliers an instrument that allows them to take action when dealing with these 'cow-boys'. Furthermore, clear guidelines about what constitutes good or acceptable practices may help stamp out dubious practices for enrolling hoteliers.

This analysis has revealed how little is known about individual intermediaries and, in particular, how some acquire hotelier details without the hotelier's knowledge. Some

organisations appear to operate a variety of websites at an international level. Others are national in coverage. The profusion of intermediaries confuses. Although it has not been possible to examine these intermediaries in any depth, there are questions about how they function and support hoteliers. From an analytical perspective there is the temptation to label them all together. However, this analysis has revealed that they do differ. A better understanding of these differences might perhaps contribute to the development of more effective tools to evaluate and select intermediaries, and thereby reduce the uncertainty and risk associated with their appropriation by hoteliers.

To finish, there is one more phase to complete this empirical study. Whilst hoteliers can make themselves visible to potential customers online either through their own actions or the use of intermediaries, there is a major constraining factor to winning business. This is the challenge of how to get people to come to your locality in the first place. The dissolution of the membership-based Area Tourist Boards in 2005 was perhaps a catalyst of a phenomenon which had been sporadically present in the 1990s and earlier, but which has since become more widespread. This phenomenon is the collective activity of local tourism businesses, in particular hoteliers, to draw visitors to their locality. This phenomenon is examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 8   LOCALISATION: collective solutions

the problem does not seem to be one of entertaining the visitors when they are in the region, but rather one of getting the visitors to the area in the first place.

(Nash & Martin, 2003:177)

this study has shown that the relationships between … inequality and ICTs relate less and less to stark, binaried geographies of access or lack of access. Rather, digital divides increasingly entail contrasts in modes, styles, temporalities and intensities of ICT use. These imply that the ways in which ICTs are being unevenly used reshape the temporal, spatial and logistical constraints that characterise … inequalities, mediate individual and collective relationships in new ways and require careful attention.

(Crang et al, 2006: 2565)

8.1   Aim

This chapter is the fourth empirical chapter and examines how hoteliers exploit locally provided online intermediary services, in particular, that of the local tourism action group. These are important solutions as the local intermediary not only is able to promote the hotelier but also the locality. Moreover, the tourism action group is an intermediary in which the hotelier is a stakeholder. This introduces the analytical challenge of how domestication can or otherwise account for this particular form of online technology exploitation, which is also examined.

8.2   Introduction

One of the more conventional routes to gaining business is through the local Tourist Information Centre (TIC). The hotelier would register details with the TIC and update the TIC about room availability. Tourists would walk-into the TIC, find and

book accommodation. More recently, the requirement that only VisitScotland graded accommodation could be promoted within the TIC precludes ungraded hoteliers from using this outlet. Whilst the exclusivity of the TIC might be a concern, the trend towards forward booking off-sets this. The tourist searches online, finds the hotelier and contacts them, perhaps by email or by telephone. One of the challenges for the hotelier is to be found online. If it is assumed that the tourist is specific about the target destination during online searches, then websites about the destination are those most likely to be sought out. This offers the hotelier the opportunity to be found.

However, this raises the question of what is available online about the locality. National intermediation websites such as Undiscovered Scotland (www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk) and the Internet Guide to Scotland (www.scotland-info.co.uk) provide details (previous chapter), but it can be argued that those with richest knowledge about a locality are those living there. Indeed, the desire of locals to tell the world about their locality and the ease with which an online presence can be established has resulted in websites appearing specifically about home localities.

From an hotelier's perspective three options to exploit this opportunity have been observed. The first to develop one's own online promotional presence and enrol subscribers to advertise. The second is to appropriate a listing on another's locality promoting website. The third option is to collectively develop an online presence promoting both the locality and local tourism businesses. This localised behaviour,

which was not known or anticipated at the start of the research, was revealed during interviews with hoteliers.

The chapter is structured in three parts. The first section (8.3) presents a general insight into hotelier exploitation of local intermediary services, examining the nature of these services and also the manner of uptake by hoteliers of these services. The second section (8.4) explores the specific case of the local collaborative efforts of hoteliers in the form of tourism action groups. Six case studies reveal the heterogeneous nature of these groups and their inherent variety. Their analysis (section 8.4.7) includes a more general discussion about how the localisation processes challenge the assumptions of domestication. The third section (8.5) concludes this chapter with a summary of the findings and conclusions.

8.2.1 <u>The localities in the spotlight</u>

It might be expected that, given the availability of online technologies and the common interest in tourism, there may be a convergence in practices; that similar behaviours would be observed in different localities. However, as suggested in the quotation by Crang et al (2006) which heads this chapter and was written in the context of urban divides, though is postulated to have wider relevance (word "urban" marked by the dots), this need not be the case. Instead, locality specific contingencies may result in geographical differences in the manner of uptake, which are revealed through finer grained examination of usage.

Ten tourist localities are examined in an exploratory mode to establish the nature of these localised activities. Ten geographical locations were selected on the basis that they could be assigned to one of three contrasting locations: city, rural and remote (Figure 35).
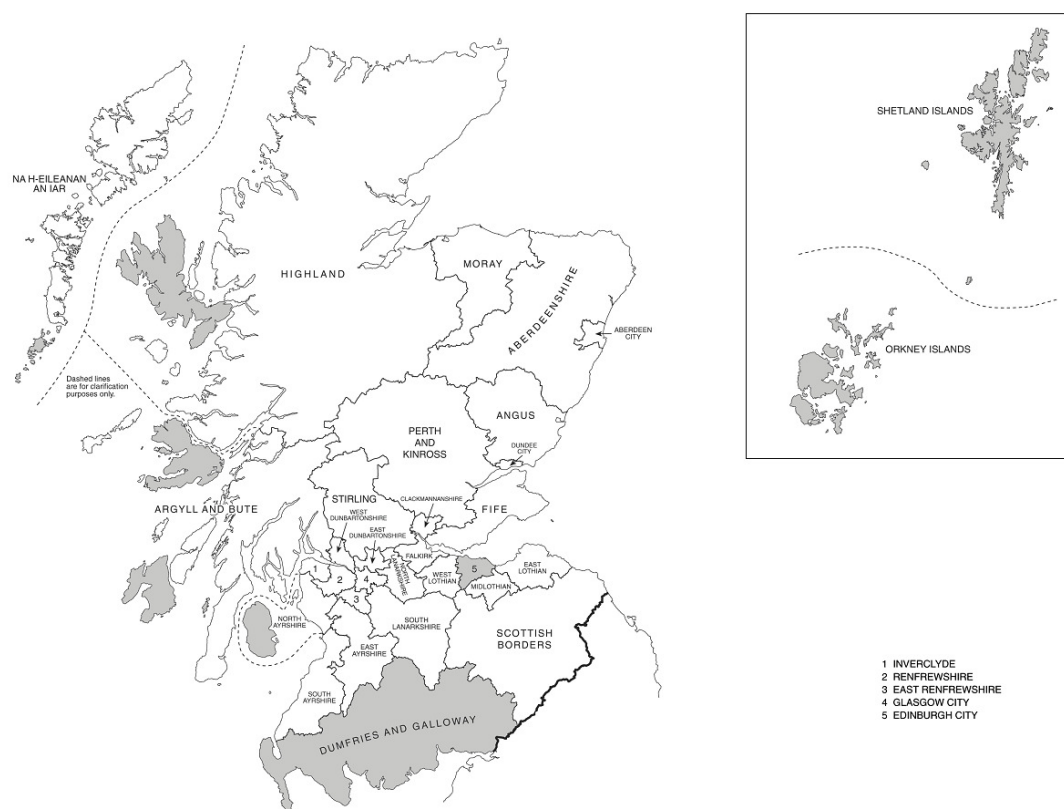
Figure 35   The localities studied are shaded grey in this map of Scotland (internal borders mark Local Authority areas)

The first is the top city tourism destination in Scotland – Edinburgh. The rural location (Dumfries and Galloway) is a location that can be described as sufficiently distant from major urban areas, yet easily accessed by having the key road linking England and Scotland cutting its eastern flank. The other eight are remote locations by virtue of them being islands and, thus, have accessibility issues.

The differences between the different localities can be gleaned from the basic statistics offered in Figure 36.

Location	Land area (hectares)	Population size	Number of households	Number of identified s.a.ps**	s.a.ps as % of households	hectares per s.a.p.
Arran	43,079	5,058	2,247	69	3.1%	624
Barra	6,173	1,078	462	18	3.9%	343
Dumfries & Galloway	642,601	147,765	63,807	437 (2005)*	0.69%	1470
Edinburgh	26,373	448,625	204,683	533 (2005)*	0.26%	49
Gigha	1,368	110	51	4	7.8%	342
Islay	61,497	3,457	1,541	57	3.7%	1079
Mull	91,718	2,696	1,221	133	10.9%	690
Orkney	99,093	19,245	8,342	125	1.5%	793
Shetland	147,357	21,988	9,111	89	1.0%	1656
Skye	167,570	9,251	3,940	256	6.5%	655

Figure 36   Key statistics for the selected localities

(Source: 2001 Census, data supplied by the General Register Office for Scotland. Crown Copyright.) [www.scrol.gov.uk]   *** from table 16, Harwood 2007, ** from the following analysis**

This reveals the dependency of Mull upon tourism (11% of households are likely to be hoteliers[41]) in contrast to Edinburgh and Dumfries & Galloway, even though both have a significant number of hoteliers. Whilst Edinburgh has a very high concentration of hoteliers (49 hectares per property), in Dumfries & Galloway their dispersion only lags behind that of Shetland. However, caution is required with interpretation of these figures. Whilst tourism may appear to be relatively insignificant in Edinburgh, it accounts for around 10% of all employment. Nevertheless, it is clear that each location has its own distinctive profile with tourism

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[41] The assumption is that serviced accommodation providers are more likely to be family homes

having some status. This makes their investigation interesting in terms of any pattern of behaviour that may be revealed.

8.3   The many forms of localised online intermediation

The ease with which an online presence can be established has resulted in a variety of websites appearing specifically about localities. This section examines what is available locally in selected localities and the manner of uptake by local hotelier. The following section examines the particular form of local online intermediation that results from hoteliers' collective activity.

8.3.1 What is happening locally?

Examination of local online promotion within the ten localities reveals different approaches to and different levels of local online coverage. A summary of the propensity for local online promotion within the ten localities is presented in Figure 37. It reveals VisitScotland is the dominant channel in some localities (e.g. Orkney, Shetland). The two smallest islands integrate tourism promotion within their community online presence. Edinburgh is conspicuous by the lack of local online offerings on which hoteliers can be listed. This is despite a lot of online promotional activity for events and facilities, as well as the Edinburgh 'official' website and VisitScotland, to which the 'official' website is linked for accommodation.

This diversity in the manner localities are promoted online, raises the question of why this should be the case. It can be argued that tourism is postulated to be economically important for each of the localities examined, all localities are assumed to have the same access to online technologies[42] and there is an institutional desire to get 'everyone' online. Thus, it might be expected that there is convergence in the emerging practices. Furthermore, whilst a small population within a locality may restrict developments of tourism specific websites, as in the case of the two smallest islands, why is Edinburgh conspicuous by its lack of locally produced websites that promote local hoteliers?

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[42] One issue affecting parts of Shetland has been its quality of broadband. Initiatives under the direction of the Scottish Government, which aims to ensure all Scottish communities have access to affordable Broadband, have led to the roll-out to remoter locations of "basic broadband" (512Kbps) service. However, this capacity, together with contention levels and service down-time can prove to be inadequate and problematic for business use. One mainland accommodation provider who operates several businesses comments

> "we absolutely rely on e-Commerce and the Internet and Websites, and the Telecommunication support that we receive from the Scottish Executive isn't abysmal, it is lamentable… if you want to actually transfer files and provide data to people, even something so trivial as e-mailing somebody a scan of a set of directions of how to get here from the airport" [S3]

LOCALITY	Dominant Local Promotional Organisation(s)	Observations
Edinburgh	• Edinburgh Inspiring Capital • (Edinburgh Tourism Action Group (ETAG))	ETAG "co-ordinates" tourism related activities, leaving promotion to VisitScotland. In addition to the recent development of the Edinburgh brand (2005), an 'official website (2008), a Destination Marketing organisation is being set up to promote Edinburgh. Other than VisitScotland, there is not prominent channel which is widely used by hoteliers. The smaller accommodation provider's association (EHGHA) has primarily a lobbying role and has no online presence
Mull	• HolidayMull	A long established group (1977) which both promotes and develops the local tourism product. It together with other local websites promote the locality including hoteliers
Arran	• VisitArran	Arran had an active local ATB prior to amalgamation in 1996. Various initiatives since had led to VisitArran (May 2007), to both promote and develop tourism in Arran, through business 'participation'. Whilst it is the sole Arran focused tourism organisation, there are a number of local online ventures which provide alternative promotional options for hoteliers
Orkney	• www.visitorkney.com (VisitScotland) • (The Orkney Tourism Group (OTG))	OTG was established in 2005 in response to the ATB dissolution. Its focus is to lead and develop tourism, with promotion being carried out by VisitScotland. There are limited local online options for the promotion of hoteliers, though the recent relaunch of Orknet may compensate for this. Recent tensions between Orkney Council and VisitScotland raise uncertainty about future promotion
Shetland	• www.visitshetland.com (VisitScotland) • Shetland Tourism Association (STA)	STA was established in 2005 in response to the ATB dissolution. No information has been found to reveal its role (no website), though promotion of Shetlands is being carried out by VisitScotland. The announcement that a DMkO is being set up may change VisitScotland local role. There are few local options for the online promotion of hoteliers.
Barra	• Voluntary Action Barra and Vatersay (VABV)	VABV is a community organisation which appears to be as much focused upon the development of the island as it is of tourism and the promotion of the island, though it has its own tourism orientated website.
Gigha	• Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust (IGHT)	IGHT is a community organisation which appears to be as much focused upon the development of the island as a whole, with tourism and the promotion of the island as just one element
Islay	• Islay & Jura Marketing Group (IJMG) • DiscoverIslay	An interesting development is that IJMG (est. 1980s) appears to have been usurped by the newly created DiscoverIslay, which has gained legitimacy by being awarded Challenge Funds. Whilst IJMG is explicitly a marketing organisation, DiscoverIslay itself is marketing orientated. Irrespective, there are a number of local online ventures which provide alternative promotional options for hoteliers, in particular, the Festival of Malt and Music website.
Skye	• Skye and Lochalsh Marketing Ltd (SLM)	Skye presents a complex picture. Whilst there is a local consortia of hoteliers who have developed their own website, formal representation of tourism for the island is provided by SLM which was established in 2002 by tourism businesses "disheartened by the trend of centralisation in tourism marketing"[43]. Although it has its own website, relatively few hoteliers are listed. However, there are a variety of other online options open to hoteliers, several of which are part of a portfolio provided by a local ICT services company.
Dumfries & Galloway (D&G)	• www.visitdumfriesandgalloway.co.uk (VisitScotland) • Association of Dumfries & Galloway Accommodation Providers (ADGAP)	Online promotional channels were not investigated. However, as a large locality and former ATB area, it raises its own challenges of how the disparate localities are promoted and tourism is managed. In contrast to the promotional activities of VisitScotland is the online promotion of the locality by an established local website D&Gonline. However, an alternative, geared towards accommodation providers, is the website provided by ADGAP. There does not appear to be any organisation dealing with tourism other than the D&G ATP, which plans to create a DMgO for the locality.

Figure 37   A summary of the propensity for local online promotion within ten localities (DMkO: Destination Marketing Organisation; DMgO: Destination Management Organisation)

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[43] http://www.skye.co.uk/about-us.php,   last visited 17th August 2008

Whilst a response to these questions is beyond the scope of this study, nevertheless, they are relevant from an hotelier's perspective. The availability of local online promotional websites on which the hotelier can be listed, can affect whether the hotelier gets found. However, as will be revealed in the following sections, there are different types of local promotional websites. Furthermore, any of them may be present in any configuration or quantity. Also, that a website is present does not imply that the hotelier will seek a listing on it, even if the listing is offered free.

In the absence of suitable websites provided by others, the hotelier has recourse to developing his own website which promotes the locality and enrol subscribers. However, there are factors which prevent this, of which the obvious ones are time and the requisite technical expertise to create and maintain the website. Thus, it is postulated that this is generally not a feasible option. Indeed this activity was observed in only a few instances (e.g. the Lochranza Hotel, Arran).

An alternative, perhaps more effective option is for the hotelier to band together with others with a vested interest in local tourism and collectively develop an online promotional presence. This is examined in section 8.4.

8.3.2 <u>Different types of local promotional websites offering listings of hoteliers</u>

When the local online promotional websites across the ten localities are examined, a wide variety can be recognised. The distinction is made between websites of

individuals or businesses (singular), community websites and websites that are the outcome of commercially orientated collaboration. Within each of the three categories there are a variety of possibilities. An additional category is the public sector initiative. A classification of these websites is presented in Figure 38.
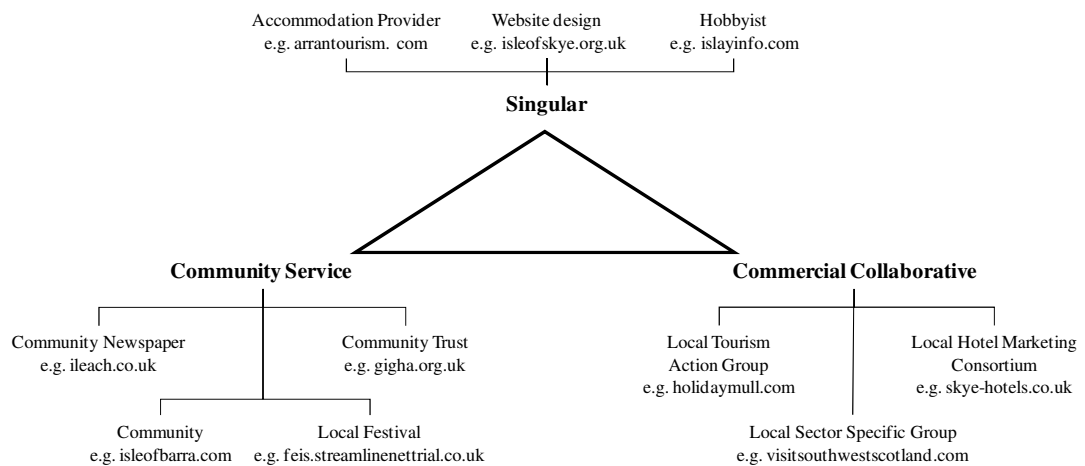
Figure 38 A classification of websites

The 'Singular' category comprises unitary bodies such as individuals or businesses. Three types of businesses are distinguished.

One is the hotelier, this being the unit of interest in this study. The distinction is made between the hotelier who promotes his own business online and the aforementioned hotelier who promotes the island and presents listings of local businesses. This innovative behaviour of the latter is exemplified by the website www.arran.net. This is a website, formally set up in 1995 as a company, Arran Internet Ltd., by two local business partners, one of whom owns the Lochranza Hotel, Arran. An interview with the hotel owner reveals that the reason for setting the website up was "to give Arran a presence on the Internet". The owner's account

of the issues relating to its set-up suggests that this innovative entrepreneurial activity is not dissimilar to that discussed in the earlier chapter about the internalisation process, though there are additional issues which were not examined (e.g. handling of subscriptions – advertising fees).

Also identified are IT related businesses (e.g. web design), which perhaps provide a local promotional website as a strategy to showcase what they can deliver, but also as a portal for clients' websites. This contrasts with non-IT related businesses that provide listings, where a listing is perhaps one element of the service offered. For example, whilst the ferry company Caledonian McBryne (Calmac) attracts only a small number of hoteliers on Mull (Figure 39), its offline promotional mechanisms (brochures, onboard and terminal advertising) may be the appealing factor for enrolment.

The individual or hobbyist who sets up a website is intriguing as financial gain need not be the reason for the many hours that are assumed to be required for both set-up and maintenance. Two contrasting examples from Islay touch upon some of the motivations.

The first is www.visit-islay.com, a website, which has its roots as a school website around 1990, and has been developed by an Islay school teacher, Ray Husthwaite. The site states that this is "a personal site, not commercial". Furthermore, "No payment for space or comment has ever been received, nor ever will be. There is no

advertising". The site presents listings of hoteliers, but it is clearly stated that these are based on personal recommendations:

> I am recommending them from personal experience over the years I've stayed here.. There are many B&B and Self Catering establishments on Islay and Jura, too many to list here. The ones listed are ones I have actually been in and have liked. (accessed 2nd July 2008)

In February, 2007, there were 17 hoteliers listed.

This contrasts with www.islayinfo.com, which was established during the summer of 2005 as a hobby by a Dutch IT professional, Ron Steenvoorden, living in Holland, who had developed a passion for Islay following a initial visit, which has increased with successive visits. It is announced on the website that it is constantly being updated and developed, searching "for possibilities to expand and organise the site even better" with the help of his wife and "a lot of support from my friends on Islay and other locals". An online shop offers local products with secure payment facilities through PayPal. The philosophy underlying a listing is that:

> to actively support the local community and promote the island… every business, accommodation, artist or other local group with a website gets a free listing on the Islayinfo website and, if appropriate, on the Islay Accommodation Directory, which includes a link, picture and some general information. (accessed 3rd July 2008)

On the 3rd July 2008, the number of hoteliers listed was 34. One measure of the success of the website is the number of new visitors it attracts: 28,000 in 2006, 160,000 in 2007. One of the benefits of this growth is described:

> "As the visitor numbers increase almost every month the website also attracts more and more advertisers". (accessed 3rd July 2008)

Advertisement rates vary between £30 and £80 at the time of writing. Another aspect to this website is philanthropy:

It is my intention to give as much as possible back to charities on the island. (accessed 3rd July 2008)

A variety of community websites can be identified. One meets the general needs of the community, whilst others service specific functions (e.g. newspaper, festival promotion). Common is the service provided to the community at large within the locality, but also to outsiders (e.g. geographically dispersed diaspora).

Collaborative efforts are perhaps more purposive, serving the specific interests of the collaborating bodies, for example, an exclusive consortium which promotes a group of hotels or the inclusive sector specific group (e.g. accommodation), which promotes its members. One collaborative effort that is of particular interest in this study is the local tourism action group, which is examined below (section 8.4). However, its website potentially exists within a clutter of other local online websites (e.g. websites promoting Islay) such that its appeal to local hoteliers is diminished.

A fourth category is presented to capture Public Sector initiatives instigated and funded by more centrally located public sector bodies. An example is the 'Connect Islay Jura' initiative, which aimed to develop an island portal www.islay-jura.com, which was reported[44] would be:

> an entry point to information about Islay and Jura and existing sites will be able to link to it

The portal was developed by the Islay Development Company (www.islay.org.uk) in partnership with BT, Argyll and Bute Council, and Argyll and the Islands Enterprise (AIE). The portal was launched on the 10th August 2000. On the 3rd June 2004, it

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[44] http://web.archive.org/web/20041019170404/www.islay.org.uk/__connect_islay_jura.html
[accessed 2nd July 2008]

listed 12 hoteliers, these being primarily hotels[45]. However, the website appears to have been withdrawn during 2004 for reasons that are not known, though the final "latest news" entry is the poignant comment "This site What a waste", posted 3rd June 2003. Furthermore, in May 2004, due to a shortfall in funding, staff of the Islay Development Company were made redundant[46]. The domain name www.islay-jura.com is still registered to the HIE, but unused, whilst www.islay.org.uk has been registered privately since 2007 and now provides material informing about Islay. Reading between the lines and in the absence of any information, it is postulated that the funding of the initiative was fixed term and that sustainable income had not been established. Thus when the funds ended, likewise, the initiative ended. This draws attention to the issue of how short-term publicly funded initiatives are transformed into financially viable and sustaining ventures.

Whilst there are many different types of local promotional websites, localities can vary considerably in the mix found within a locality. Furthermore, their uptake by hoteliers can also vary.

8.3.3 Different levels of enrolment

An insight into the manner of uptake by hoteliers is provided by examining the online promotional websites found within four localities, Mull, Islay, Arran and Skye.

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[45] http://web.archive.org/web/20040603094433/www.islay-jura.com/menu/menu.asp?menu=Places+To+Stay   [accessed 2nd July 2008]
[46] www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/SustainableDevelopment/7471   [accessed 2nd July 2008]

The assumption is that a promotional website attracts online visitors and with an increase in visitors, the site becomes more attractive to advertisers (e.g. hoteliers). From an hotelier's perspective the website should bring people to the locality and direct them to their property. Websites that promote the locality might be expected to be attractive to these hotelier's and enrolment, a straightforward issue. Whilst it is not possible in this exploratory study to examine the range of issues raised here (e.g. website design, the process of enrolment, etc), an insight into these may be gleaned by examining the level of uptake of local promotional websites by local hoteliers; in other words, how hoteliers perceive the website and demonstrate this by appropriating a listing. The uptake for the four islands is presented in the set of tables (Mull: Figure 39, Arran: Figure 40, Islay: Figure 41 and Skye: Figure 42).

The tables present estimates of the local population of hoteliers based upon a trawl on the internet and using the VisitScotland accommodation brochure, as well as the database compiled for the analysis presented in Harwood (2007). Included are conservative estimates of those with an email address and a website. This reveals that an online presence is not ubiquitous. Whilst Mull has been privileged by its selection in 2002 as one of two locations in Scotland whereby every household received an Internet connected PC (see Harwood, 2009: 26-27) its level of use of email and own websites appears lower than that of Skye. The reason for this disparity may be methodological, but the type of business not to make use of an online presence is the B&B, i.e. the smaller hotelier who is perhaps looking for additional income. Thus, despite the possibility of methodological error, there may also be a degree of validity in the magnitudes presented.

Common to all websites is the issue of enrolment of hoteliers. However, it must be acknowledged that hoteliers are only one type of tourism stakeholder who might seek a listing. Thus, a listing with a low number of hotelier may disguise rich listings. Nevertheless, the issue here concerns the attraction of specific websites to hoteliers, evident in the levels of enrolment.

As the tables of uptake reveal, enrolment is highly variable. VisitScotland varies from 32% (Islay, Figure 41) to 66% (Skye, Figure 42). Islay's local tourism group website has a relatively low uptake (e.g. www.isle-of-islay.com with 23%) in contrast to the island's Festival of Malt and Music website (Feis Ile 2007) which has 81%. Islay's community newspaper website (www.ileach.co.uk) offers a free listing, but has only 28% enrolment. One website (www.arrantourism.com, Figure 40) is conspicuous by its very high level of enrolment (83%). However, when its listings are analysed in terms of any assigned quality gradings (Figure 43), this reveals that its listing comprises all those listings in the 2007 VisitScotland brochure. This contrasts with www.arran-hideaways.co.uk, which comprises 100% quality graded properties. The former example suggests that there are alternative strategies for generating accommodation listings other than enrolment, whilst the later highlights that enrolment is more than a financial transaction and that there is a selection process.

The notion of selection implies exclusion. Thus, when the two web-sites www.HolidayMull.com and www.Tobermory.com are examined, their

complementarity is revealed (Figure 39). The former is the website of Mull's tourism group, HolidayMull, whilst the latter is the entrepreneurial provision of the HolidayMull webmaster. A listing on the former incurs a membership fee, but until April, 2008, it also required that applicants were quality graded. A listing on the latter incurs a fee that is less than the membership fee and with no grading requirement. Thus, Tobermory.com, has only 34% of its listings graded, highlighting the service it provides to absorb those excluded. Exclusion may be due to the cost, which is accumulative if the cost of a grading is considered and can be viewed as excessive by smaller hoteliers. The distinction between these two websites perhaps highlights the distinction between soliciting enquiries from potential visitors by acquiring a listing on Tobermory.com, and shaping the context in which these enquiries arise by joining the organisation behind HolidayMull.com. This notion of joining is revisited later.

The complementary nature of these two websites is highlighted in the following statistics: 25 of the 35 hoteliers on tobermory.com were not on HolidayMull.com. Likewise 33 of the 43 hoteliers on the HolidayMull website were not on Tobermory.com. The ten hoteliers on both sites were all in the VisitScotland brochure, which raises the issue of the propensity to appropriate multiple listings.

Enrolment can also be considered within the context of other online channels promoting the locality. The evidence from Mull (Figure 39) reveals variable uptake, as might be expected. The international intermediary SmoothHound has a relatively low uptake, possibly due to its lack of local focus. TripAdvisor's relatively low

number of listings possibly reflects the type of visitor going to Mull, since only visitors to a property can list a property on the website.

	Type of accommodation					Total	% of population
	B&B	Guest House	Hotel	Inn	Small Hotel		
Population of hoteliers (Oct 2006)	90	15	4	1	12	122	
Number with email	62	10	3		9	84	71%
Number with website	33	5	3		8	49	41%
VisitScotland brochure 2006	52	9	2		8	71	60%
Calmac	3	2			2	7	6%
HolidayMull	26	7	2		8	43	36%
CoC - mull.zynet.co.uk	12	5	1		4	22	18%
Tobermory.co.uk	28	4	1		2	35	29%
Just Mull (web-grafix.co.uk)	18	7	2	1	6	34	29%
Explore Scotland (explore-oban.com)	13	2	1		7	23	19%
SmoothHound	8	4	1		3	16	13%
Undiscovered Scotland	19	8	2	1	7	37	31%
TripAdvisor.com	13	2	2	1	7	25	21%

Figure 39   The different online promotional strategies used by Mull hoteliers *20/38 were 'found' unique to the website Tobermory.co.uk

Nov-06	Type of accommodation					Total	% of population
	B&B	Guest House	Hotel	Inn	Small Hotel		
Population of hoteliers	25	18	8	1	12	64	
Number with email	11	11	7	1	12	42	66%
Number with website	9	9	7	1	12	38	59%
VisitScotland brochure 2006	15	13	4	1	9	42	66%
arran.net	2			1	6	9	14%
arran-hideaways.co.uk	7	3	2	1	2	15	23%
arrantourism.com	21	15	5	1	11	53	83%
arranonline.com	8	3	2		4	17	27%
coastalway.co.uk	11	11	2	1	6	31	48%

Figure 40   The different online promotional strategies used by Arran hoteliers (after search - Nov 2006)

	Type of accommodation					Total	% of population
	B&B	Guest House	Hotel	Inn	Small Hotel		
Population of hoteliers in 2007	38	7	4	3	5	57	
Number with email	17	4	3	1	5	30	53%
Number with website	8	4	4	1	5	22	9%
VisitScotland brochure 2007	9	3	1	1	4	18	32%
In both 2007 brochure and Feis Ile	7	2	1	1	4	15	
Feis Ile 2007 20th April 2007	32	4	4	1	5	46	81%
www.ileach.co.uk	4	3	3	1	5	16	28%
www.isle-of-islay.com	6	2		1	4	13	23%
www.islayinfo.com	12	5	3	1	5	26	46%

Figure 41   The different online promotional strategies used by Islay hoteliers (after search - March 2007)

	Type of accommodation						Total	% of population
	B&B	Guest House	Hotel	Inn	Restaurant	Small Hotel		
Population of hoteliers	163	25	16	3	2	17	226	
Number with email	145	23	13	3	2	17	203	90%
Number with website	126	24	10	2	2	17	181	80%
VisitScotland brochure 2007	71	15	6	2	1	13	108	48%
www.skye-hotels.co.uk			4		1	8	13	6%
www.isleofskyeaccommodation.com	135	23		1		1	160	71%
www.isleofskye.org.uk — Portfolio offered	67	11	4	1	1	5	89	39%
www.isleofskye.com — by a website	46	8	3			1	58	26%
www.ealaghol.co.uk — designer	46	8	3			1	58	26%
www.scotland-inverness.co.uk/skye.htm [also as www.skye-info.co.uk]	24	3	3			3	33	15%
UndiscoveredScotland (29th May 2007)	68	10	13	2	1	14	108	48%

Figure 42   The different online promotional strategies used by Skye hoteliers (after search - March 2007)

VisitScotland brochure 2006	Number of properties listed in the brochure	www.arran.net	www.coastalway.co.uk	www.arran-hideaways.co.uk	www.arrantourism.com	www.arranonline.com
QABB2	4			2	4	
QABB3	9		7	4	9	4
QABB4	2		1	1	2	
QAGH2	1				1	
QAGH3	9		5	3	9	3
QAGH4	3		3		3	
QAH3	1				1	
QAH4	1			1	1	1
QAI3	1	1	1		1	1
QASH2	3	3	3	1	3	1
QASH3	7	1	4	3	7	2
QASH5	1	1			1	
Total Graded	42	6	24	15	42	12
% of Grand Total that are graded		67%	77%	100%	79%	71%
Not graded		3	7		11	5
Grand Total		9	31	15	53	17

Figure 43   Arran – grading of serviced accommodation providers

Of the two national websites, UndiscoveredScotland has over a third more hoteliers than ExploreScotland and ranks only behind HolidayMull in terms of popularity. Unlike UndiscoveredScotland, which is a solely online venture, ExploreScotland is a tourist information website, which is supported by off-line activities, in particular, visitor guides and local tourist newsletters. Examination of the 2006-7 accommodation guide (available as a PDF file) revealed only 82 properties listed for the whole of Scotland, which suggests that accommodation is only one relatively small aspect of the offering. However, this disguises the amount of accommodation listed on the sister sites for specific areas. For example, www.isle-of-mull.com has 30 hoteliers listed for Mull. Indeed the complex network of sister sites and linked

sites, reveals a degree of co-ordination and also co-operation between the respective individuals and organisations behind these websites.

Factors affecting uptake can be speculated upon, (e.g. focus, relevance, reach, aesthetics, social). Cost, as raised in the chapter on Intermediation, is an issue. However, inspection of advertisement charges for the websites examined suggests that these tend to be low or even free for basic listings (e.g. UndiscoveredScotland or www.david-wright.co.uk[47]). Thus, it need not be expensive to have multiple listings on websites promoting the locality.

8.3.4 <u>The propensity for appropriation by type of hotelier</u>

The level of uptake of available local websites is examined for Mull (Figure 44) and Islay (Figure 45). In contrast to Islay where al properties appear to be listed on at least one website for reasons already discussed, Mull offers a different and perhaps more typical picture. It reveals that only 54% of hoteliers use local offerings, of which those least likely to appropriate a listing, are hotels/inns followed by B&Bs. Those most likely are small hotels. Furthermore the propensity to seek out multiple websites follows this pattern. Overall, 44% appear to use a single channel, of which 56% were B&Bs. Small hotels appear to make use of more channels than other accommodation types. The grading information reveals that a property with a VisitScotland grading would be most likely to use more multiple channels. However, the table reveals that B&Bs with one and two stars did not use more than two

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[47] For example, a listing on the portfolio of websites offered by a website designer on Skye (Figure 42) is only £25 (plus VAT) per annum [www.david-wright.co.uk/internet/services,   last accessed 10th August 2008]

channels. This suggest that multiple channel use is perhaps more likely for higher graded properties. This pattern was also discernable, but to a lesser degree, for Arran and Islay, though both their populations of hoteliers is about half that of Mull. The pattern is broken in the case of Skye due to the provision of multiple websites operated by a website designer on Skye (Figure 42). A paid listing on one is likely to lead to a listing on the others.

Number of channels used	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total	% of pop.
Total	54	23	13	8	9	8	3	4	122	54%
B&B	50	17	7	4	4	4	2	2	90	55%
Guest House	2	4	3	2	1	3			15	60%
Hotel		2			2				4	25%
Inn			1						1	33%
Small Hotel	2		2	2	2	1	1	2	12	71%
Number listed in the 2006 VisitScotland Brochure	19	15	8	7	8	7	3	4	71	
QAAwait		1			1	1			3	
QABB1	1	1							2	
QABB2	3	1							4	
QABB3	11	6	4	2	3	3	1	2	32	
QABB4	3	3	3	1		2	1		13	
QABB5				1					1	
QAGH3	1	2		1	1				5	
QAGH4		1		1					2	
QAH3					2				2	
QASH2			1						1	
QASH3					1	1	1	1	4	
QASH4				1				1	2	

Figure 44 **The number of online channels used by the serviced accommodation population in Mull**

Number of channels used	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Population 2007	29	9	5	8	6	57
B&B	25	6	2	4	1	38
Guest House	3	1	1	1	1	7
Hotel		2	1	1		4
Inn	1		1		1	3
Small Hotel				2	3	5
Number listed in:						
Feis Ile 2007 (20th April 2007)	21	8	4	7	6	46
VisitScotland Brochure 2007		2	4	6	6	18
www.ileach.co.uk	2	1	2	5	6	16
www.isle-of-islay.com		1		6	6	13
www.islayinfo.com	1	6	5	8	6	26

Figure 45   The number of online channels used by the serviced accommodation population in Islay

A possible explanation is that businesses who, if they are going to invest in a VisitScotland quality grading or have a relatively large number of rooms to let, are more likely to exploit all possibilities to fill rooms. Thus, small hotels are likely to have a more pressing need to fill rooms than B&Bs and thereby, will exploit whatever channels are available to win business. Whilst hotels might also be expected to fit this model, the evidence is not so strong, perhaps reflecting their limited number. It can be speculated that perhaps hotels tend to use other channels, rather than local channels, but this requires investigation.

This notion of the pressing need of the business highlights the distinction between the two extremes of the fully committed business and the fly-by-night non-commitment of the opportunist. The degree of commitment perhaps can be assessed by the hotelier's attitude towards an offer of a free listing. Will the availability of a free listing attract those who would not normally be visible online? The Islay festival website has attracted a significant proportion of the island's B&Bs, of which two

thirds are only visible on this website. However, the community newspaper website (ileach.co.uk) attracts those who exploit multiple channels. It is perhaps a reasonable supposition that everyone on the island is aware of both the week-long festival and community newspaper website. However, it is postulated that a number of households recognise the opportunity to make money during the fixed period of the festival. This contrasts with visibility on the community newspaper website which, by implication, means being open for business all year round or perhaps for the duration of the tourism season. A presence on the community newspaper website implies more commitment. This reinforces the distinction between the committed businesses and opportunists who perhaps fall prey to the band-wagon effect stimulated by financial return for negligible expense.

8.4   Local collective activity to promote the locality online

Whereas the preceding section has examined the provision of local online promotional websites and their uptake by hoteliers, hoteliers have the option to generate an online presence through local collective activity.

This section present six different case studies of local collaborative effort to promote the locality and local businesses. These case studies were not sought out to provide different stories, but instead presented themselves through the initial interviews with hoteliers as stories to be told. These cases suggest that there are more unique stories to be told. The variety inherent in these different case studies presents the challenge of their analysis.

8.4.1 Case Study 1: HolidayMull (www.holidaymull.co.uk)

(based on interviews with past and present HolidayMull chairperson's and the webmaster)

The stimulus to develop a local organisation to promote Mull was a meeting of the Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB) around 1976-7. The HIDB were encouraging localities to develop packaged holidays and offering five years financial support. The take-up of this opportunity, particularly by the then owner of the Western Isles Hotel, led to HolidayMull being formed in 1977. The initial membership comprised of twelve of the larger tourism product providers on Mull due to the high membership fee of £300. As an organisation, it managed to negotiate discounted rates for a range of tourism related services allowing holiday packages to be offered. Provision of these packages continued until around 2002, when insurance requirements made it expensive to sustain these packages.

HolidayMull underwent a significant change following pressure from one excluded local tourism product provider. Its governance was democratised and the membership fee was significantly reduced (~£20 per annum) to be affordable by other local tourism product providers. Since then, HolidayMull has expanded its membership and established an online presence.

Membership peaked about 2005, with reasons for the subsequent fall including changes in ownership, and a perceived decline in benefit. Membership numbers affect funding, which has always been an issue. Various formulae for determining

the membership fee had been tried over time. Eventually one based on a flat rate, which escalated according to the number of rooms, was settled upon and has been in-place for many years. One of the criteria for membership was the requirement that members participated in the VisitScotland QA scheme. This was necessitated by the local ATB (AILLST) who provided financial assistance ('back-funding'). This assistance ceased upon the dissolution of the ATB in 2005 rendering the QA requirement redundant. During the AGM in March 2008, it was decided that membership would be opened up to include businesses not registered to VisitScotland. HolidayMull should speak for the whole island. The immediate effect was a rise in membership numbers.

The website went live around 1994, being developed by a local IT literate teacher. The maintenance was out-sourced around 1997 to an Oban based company, this being passed back to the teacher around 1998-9 who, himself, set up an IT business around 2000 and who maintained the website until late 2008, when he resigned this post for personal reasons. It has been periodically updated, though the webmaster considered that it could do with a re-write. Keeping the website up-to-date is a challenge due, not only to relentless development of online technologies, but also to changing fashions regarding appearance:

> it all looks a bit dowdy and four years old. Computer websites develop rapidly. The problem is keeping up with it   (webmaster, October, 2006).

A former Chairperson of HolidayMull described the website as "a very popular site" and believed it to generate a lot of business for the island.

One of potential problems with a website relates to domain name ownership. The tactics used to prevent problems are revealed in the following comment by the webmaster:

> they were bought to stop other people using the HolidayMull name, because we found that there were a number of people on Mull who did not want to join HolidayMull, but then bought the, or tried to buy the domain name, so we bought them up so they could not be used.

The key principle underpinning HolidayMull is to get people to the island and be in control of how this is done. Its constitution establishes its status as a "voluntary Association" and defines its purpose as:

> [a] to give special attention to the needs of the area in relation to the promotion and development of tourism and to provide information about the area; and to assist in the promotion of tourism in the Highlands and Islands (as defined in the Highlands and Islands Development (Scotland) Act, 1965 as amended.
>
> [b] to maintain contact with the bodies directing the local, regional and national effort to tourism; and
>
> [c] to liaise closely with the various interests related in any way to tourism in the area.
>
> [www.holidaymull.co.uk/holiday-mull/constitution.htm, last accessed 8th June 2008]

Its activities, whilst promotional, also include being involved with issues on the island that affect tourism and lobbying. It has been financially sustained through its fee based membership and financial support from public sector organisations, including an award of £3,080 from the Challenge Fund in October 2005. It is organisationally sustained through the voluntary activities of its members and the energy of the founder which persisted until his retirement in 2004. One concern, which is perhaps a legacy from the days when only a few businesses could afford membership, is that it has been perceived as an elitist organisation. The recent

decision to open up the membership perhaps may overcome this. What characterises HolidayMull is its continuity and evolution over a period of thirty years.

8.4.2 Case Study 2: Orknet, Orkney.com and the emergence of The Orkney Tourism Group

(based upon interviews with several of the leading participants within this narrative)

In contrast to Mull, events on Orkney have a more recent beginning, are marked by discontinuity and latterly tensions with VisitScotland. Two disassociated developments characterise events on Orkney. The first relates to the development of an online presence to promote Orkney. The second relates to the organisation of local businesses to deal with local tourism issues.

Orknet, Orkney.com

The development of an online presence to promote Orkney and local tourism businesses, in particular, accommodation providers, has progressed through different phases. It possibly starts with the development of Orknet.co.uk. This was a private venture of two local entrepreneurs to promote the island. The initial intention was to enrol local accommodation providers, but no interest was shown. Nevertheless the website ornet.co.uk was launched in 1996 and, over time, more and more content was added. The website grew with the consequence that it attracted 'hits' and thus, interest from local businesses wanting to advertise, including the elusive accommodation providers. However, it was not alone. A year earlier another website, orkneygateway.com, had been launched by another local entrepreneur. According to one observer, the competition between the two websites was such that the loyalties

developed created tension on the island. A third "privately-run, non-profit website" (www.orkneyjar.com) was launched in 1997 as an experiment and to publish online material about Orkney's heritage. It became an award winning and popular website. Unlike Orknet, this does not appear to have any advertisements, does not list hoteliers, though does provide a links page.

Against this backdrop, Orkney Tourist Board, Orkney Islands Council and Orkney Enterprise, together, established an initiative to develop "an all-encompassing Orkney portal" (Project participant, personal communication). The development of the portal was submitted to a tendering process, which was won by the Orknet team. The website www.orkney.com was launched in September, 1998. Its aim was:

> to present a comprehensive and 'holistic' view of the Orkney Islands - for the benefit of both visitors and local people alike
> [www.orkney.com (Internet archive[48])]

However, as a public sector initiative,, its funding was fixed. Other issues undermined it. The public sectors became interested in developing their own online presence:

> we lost our all-important webmaster… we also found there was a lot of friction between some of the supporting bodies… people left... people moved on.. people had their own agendas, so really the fact that we had lost our key person meant that it kind of faded from prominence.
> (Project participant, personal communication)

People on the project moved on and agendas changed. One IT specialist, who mediated between the different parties, left the Council. This led to less frequent meetings of the Steering Committee, a loss of momentum and perhaps the loss of the partnership spirit. This was exacerbated with the loss of the webmaster, who took up

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[48] http://web.archive.org/web/20010405050040/www.orkney.com/aboutframes.htm

other employment around March 1999, after six months employment, leaving a vacancy which was difficult to replace. To compound the difficulties, conflict arose about use of the domain name orkney.com. This was owned by an islander, whose business provided internet services. The domain name was rented over a three year period, but when it was time for the subsequent rent renewal, the domain name was offered on a sale basis, but at a price which could not be accepted. This led to the acquisition of the domain name www.orkney.org in 1999 and the re-launch of the site under the new domain name, though this appears to have had an unsettling effect amongst the partners. Sometime around late 2001, early 2002, content the behind portal was replaced by links from the homepage to the websites of the respective public sector agencies, the three non-tourism themes presented on the home page were replaced by direct links to the respective stakeholder organisations: tourism (Orkney Tourist Board), community (Orkney Islands Council), heritage (Orkney Heritage), and business (Orkney Highlands and Islands Enterprise).

This created a gap in terms of how local communities could be served, which led to the launch of a community based website, www.orkneycommunities.co.uk, in October, 2003:

> it was set up to fill a niche that was not served by the public agencies.. the rationale behind it was that orkney.com was a portal project, but it really never got off the ground to the extent that it could have and that was largely because of the agencies that it was representing and the interests that it was representing went beyond it in having their own websites.
>
> (SH, personal communication, 6th April 2007)

Initially funded and developed by Orkney Enterprise[49], it has since become financially viable in its own right. Two attractive features of this site to the visitor were, its rich collection of images and up-to-date details about local events:

> yes it does promote the locality… quite a great deal... in terms of popularity and use... its one of the top three most visited sites in Orkney.
>
> <div align="right">(SH, personal communication, 6th April 2007)</div>

The Orkney Tourism Group

The announcement of the dissolution of the Orkney Tourist Board led to the formation of the Orkney Tourism Group as a not-for-profit organisation. The concern and uncertainty are capture in the statement:

> we decided to form a tourism group, because we had no idea of what was going to happen..we didn't know if we were going to lose our tourism office here… whether marketing was going to be done properly.
>
> <div align="right">(CT, personal communication, end of April 2007)</div>

The activities of the group were explicitly stated in a variety of ways. The minutes of the Orkney Tourism Group's Inaugural AGM on the 11th November 2005 stated that, in addition to the Group's lobbying role, it would "gather and collate information regarding the performance of VisitScotland (both good & bad)". Its "Mission Statement" stated that it:

> will contribute to the growth of a quality tourism industry in Orkney by providing leadership, representation and support that helps tourism operators to develop and prosper in a sustainable manner.
>
> [www.orkneytourism.co.uk, last accessed 7th July 2008]

It's Business Plan 2007-09 iterated these roles and made explicit another role:

> as a catalyst that brings local operators together.
>
> [www.orkneytourism.co.uk/strategy.htm, last accessed   7th July 2008]

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[49] www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/oldnews.asp   visited 8th July 2008

Also included was its role to lobby and to give support to efforts to "extend the tourism season". However, one activity that it did not intend to get involved was the promotion of the island. This was to be done by "businesses or VisitOrkney or whatever" (CT, personal communication, end of April, 2007).

The Group was set up as a membership organisation with its website homepage [www.orkneytourism.co.uk] reporting 130 members when viewed on the 7th July 2008. The composition of the membership was split between serviced accommodation, self-catering and others, each roughly having a third of the members[50]. The cost of membership for 2008 was £55 (excluding VAT). Whilst there does not appear to be any constraint regarding membership, it encourages its members to participate in the VisitScotland QA Scheme. This focus in quality is iterated in the Business Plan 2007-09:

> OTG will promote quality criteria as a condition of membership in order to contribute towards the development of Orkney as a high quality tourism destination.

It has already been mentioned that the Orkney Tourism Group, in focusing upon the interests of its members, all with a vested interest in tourism, has left the marketing of tourism to VisitScotland (VisitOrkney). However, concern about this being recently raised in the local online press (June 9-15th, 2008) revealing tensions in this relationship:

> Islands councillors have expressed concern over the "centralised" way in which VisitOrkney is being run so much so they have issued an ultimatum to VisitScotland. Members of last week¹s Orkney Islands Council Development Committee meeting agreed that VisitScotland's requested funding allocation of £197,000 should be put on hold, as well as the full grant from last year, not yet

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[50] http://web.archive.org/web/20070320020010/www.orkneytourism.co.uk/pages/members.htm [last accessed 7th July 2008]

fully paid, due to a lack of financial information being provided by the national organisation.

<div align="right">(Orcadian, 2008)</div>

8.4.3 Case Study 3: VisitArran (www.visitarran.com)

 (based upon interviews with spokespersons for VisitArran and Arran Taste Trail, 7th November 2007, June-July, 2008)

Arran, like Orkney, has undergone several stages of development, but, unlike Orkney, development has been progressive. Furthermore, there appears to be support from and alignment with VisitScotland.

The concept of a participatory organisation to develop and promote local tourism is not new to Arran. Prior to 1996, when ATBs were merged and Ayrshire and Arran Tourist Board was formed, Arran had its own Tourist Board with 400 members. Since then, two successive developments appear to have shaped the most recent development VisitArran. The first was the "The Isle of Arran Taste Trail".

The Isle of Arran Taste Trail (1997-2002)

The "Isle of Arran Taste Trail" was established as a pilot project by Argyll & the Islands Enterprise (AIE) to explore the exploitation of two sectors with mutual interests: food and tourism. Arran had been selected due to its good mix of food and tourism related products. The initial offering was a guide-book (1998, 2000, 2002 editions), though a website was produced, www.tastetrail.com, which went live about 1999, and hasn't change significantly since then. When the funding ended, the website went into abeyance though it was still accessible in November, 2006.

Recognising the value of the site, a local company Taste of Arran, negotiated with the website's owners, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, for the transfer of the site. Taking eighteen months, the transfer took place early-2007. Whilst website details have been updated, development of this site is a future activity.

Whilst this was an Enterprise project, it required the participation of local businesses. Initial resistance was quickly replaced by acceptance. Indeed, it could be argued that it triggered local collaboration, particularly between food related businesses. Around 2000, food producers were seeking a collaborative structure, but there was resistance to a co-operative structure. Instead, a privately owned company, "Taste of Arran", was formed in 2001, which provided a route to market for local food producers. This led to the development of a trading portal www.taste-of-arran.co.uk.

However, the significant event was the attendance of "Taste of Arran", not at food trade fairs, but at tourism trade fairs. It had been recognised by Arran's food producers, that locally produced food could be sold through tourism. As a result of a meeting at the VisitScotland Expo 2002 trade fair, between "Taste of Arran", and VisitScotland's CEO, it was decided to launch a new initiative Destination Arran.

Destination Arran (2003-2006)

The focus of Destination Arran was upon quality and how Arran's tourism product could be improved. Whilst an online presence was considered, this was rejected to focus upon tourism product development and improvement. The project created a challenge: How to get people to collaborate to improve the quality of their offering. It was a three-year project that ended in August, 2006. Thirty local businesses

participated[51]. The value of this experience was both in the co-operation it fostered

and the local tourism initiatives generated:

> what it has instilled was the confidence of the Tourism sites to work together. No doubt about that and also, a far greater focus on product development... we have got better information available on the ground now. We have information points on the ferry. We also run an Ambassador Scheme for people that go the extra mile to try and improve Tourism on Arran and we have an Ambassador Awards Dinner… we also have a children's passport, which we use to get families to move around the island rather than be based in the main villages.

However, there was limitation in what could be achieved due to the voluntary nature

of involvement and the demands of running businesses.

VisitArran

When the project ended in August, 2006, work had already started to establish

VisitArran, which included a successful application to the Challenge Fund, winning

the award of £18,600[52]. VisitArran was incorporated in January, 2007, though it was

May, 2007 before the website was formally "launched". The aims of VisitArran were

to:

> collectively market the Isle of Arran and to bring island businesses and public sector organisations together to provide better information and a quality, joined up tourism experience for island visitors.
>
> (www.VisitArran.org, accessed 7th November 2006)

Although "a totally private sector led Tourism organisation", it received support

from both private and public sector organisations which included Argyll & The

Islands Enterprise, Caledonian MacBrayne, Forest Enterprise, Historic Scotland,

North Ayrshire Council, Royal Society for Protection of Birds, Scottish Natural

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[51] www.VisitArran.org   [accessed 7th November 2006]

[52] www.scotexchange.net/marketing_opportunities_main/growthfund/casestudies/visit_arran.htm, accessed 15th March 2009

Heritage and VisitScotland. It received £13,378 in Challenge Funding in May 2007.

The relationship between VisitScotland and VisitArran was clear:

> we totally view Visit Scotland as the marketing organisation for Scotland…
> What Visit Arran is trying to achieve is not per se marketing. It is management.
> It is making sure the product is right for market and then what we are
> promising we can... we are actually delivering on the ground… it will tie in
> absolutely and utterly with VisitScotland's national strategy.

The help of a tourism consultant was enlisted.

However, it was not a membership-based organisation, with subscribing businesses

being 'participants':

> They will just be called participating businesses where you are asked to pay a
> small fee towards the running of the company. It will not be membership at
> all.

The annual subscription fee was calculated as either 0.3% of business turnover or

£150, whichever was the higher[53]. In addition to the subscription, funding was also

raised by public sector funding and VisitScotland Challenge funding.

Much of the early effort was upon setting up the organisation, developing the Arran

brand and establishing a portal. By the end of 2006, an extranet (www.visitarran.org)

had been set up. The visitor facing website www.visitarran.com was launched on the

9th May 2007 (VisitScotland, 2007a). The .co.uk and .com domain names for

VisitArran had been created in 1997 and 2000 respectively, with the registrants being

visitscotland.com (Network Solutions). The .net domain name was being used by a

Glasgow based company to promote Arran.

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[53] From the membership application form available online from www.visitarran.org, accessed May
    2007

The desire to encourage business participation was explicitly stated:

> We want as many businesses as possible to be involved in this project.
> (www.visitarran.org, accessed 7th November 2006)

By the middle of July, 2008, there were 62 participating businesses[54]. Indeed, VisitArran's claim that it spoke on behalf of tourism businesses is validated by the type of organisations participating:

> if people might say to Visit Arran, why should you be the voice-piece? Well the thing is, we have got the biggest brands on the island, people who are committing serious money to Tourism.

The mixed composition of the membership possibly reflects the contribution tourism makes too many of Arran's businesses, with only a third of the island's accommodation providers being 'serviced'[55]. However, despite the high number of participating businesses, only thirteen of these were hoteliers[56] out of a population of around 60 (see Figure 40 for population details in 2006). These tended to be hoteliers with five or more rooms, which compromise just over half of all hoteliers[57]. Only three hoteliers participated from the half of the population comprising the smaller hoteliers.

A possible reason for the limited uptake, particularly by smaller hoteliers is the requirement that hoteliers have a VisitScotland grading. This cost adds to the £150 minimum subscription fee. One hotelier [AR4] explained why uptake might be hampered. VisitArran is new and unproven with benefits of membership being unclear:

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[54] Personal communication, VisitArran spokesperson, 14th July 2008
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

I haven't seen yet what obvious advantage there would be in it and there is an upfront payment in it anyway... without any indication as to what that might produce at the end of the day [AR4].

Alternatively, there may be a personal preference to "pursue a more independent line and do our own thing" [AR4: January, 2007] or perhaps there is a dislike of VisitScotland or visitscotland.com:

in many people's minds… the association with VisitScotland… we don't like VisitScotland so we don't like him... and I think maybe VisitArran will suffer from that [AR4].

One insightful comment reveals that uptake might be a more personal issue, reflecting the fact that local communities are not immune to internal tensions between its members:

to some extent the problem has been that it has become one person's [project]… has perhaps annoyed a few of us a little bit with what has been going on... and I don't really want to be totally negative about it... he's done a good job in promoting Arran [AR4].

Indeed, some may hold the view of letting others 'get on with it', and reap the benefits of any spill-over.

8.4.4 Case Study 4: Aviemore and the Cairngorms Destination Management Organisation (ACDM) Ltd

(base upon media reports)

Aviemore presents a designer approach to the development of the local tourism group. However, this is not necessarily a guaranteed route to the formation of a local tourism group as demonstrated in Aviemore. Recent press accounts reveals that the prescriptive approach potentially obviates recognition of local factors that are significant to the longevity of the effort.

Problems with the Aviemore initiative are revealed in an opening statement in a news article in the Strathspey and Badenoch Herald on the 2nd July 2008:

> SCOTLAND'S first destination management organisation has carried out major changes in a bid to broaden its appeal and hit its target of increasing the value of tourism in Badenoch and Strathspey by a further £77 million by 2015. Bosses hope that the shake-up will attract more members, and, in turn, funding for Aviemore and the Cairngorms Destination Management Organisation (ACDM) Ltd, which was officially launched amidst a fanfare of publicity in September, 2006 (Musgrove, 2008).

Aviemore and the Cairngorms Destination Management Ltd is presented as a flagship for the principle of "Destination Management" in Scotland, with the claim being made that it is the "first. Financially it was supported by VisitScotland (includes awards from the Challenge Fund[58]: £37,200, round 1; £40,000, round 2; £6,260, round 3; £46,800, round 5). However, it appears to have experienced difficulty. The news article further reveals that:

> Progress has been hampered because of a lack of local businesses signing up, and funding issues after Macdonald Aviemore Highland Resort, the main private-sector funders, pulled out and plans for the country's first tourism levy were met with stiff opposition by the local industry (Musgrove, 2008).

Additionally, it revealed criticism about the 'behind closed doors' Director's meetings.

The story of Aviemore and the Cairngorms Destination Management Ltd is told both in a Highland Council briefing document (2007)[59] and a PowerPoint presentation by one of its directors (Crook, 2006). Incorporated as ABSC Marketing Ltd on the 24th

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[58] Data provided by VisitScotland August 2008. This was the largest award to any group and accounted for 9.6% of the total awarded (£1,350,827.44) over the nine rounds.

[59] Briefing document about "Aviemore and the Cairngorms Destination Management Ltd." www.highland.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/89015B71-A986-484F-ACFF-85F6809D2172/0/bsa200729marchbs9066A.pdf [accessed 5th July 2008]

December 2003, the "official" launch of the company on the 5th September 2006 was not only reported locally in the Strathspey and Badenoch Herald (Musgrove, 2006b), but also nationally on the BBC website (anon, 2006). Part of the hype was that this was "SCOTLAND'S first destination management organisation" (Musgrove, 2006b), and, as reported by the BBC, "Scotland's first privately-led area tourist body" (anon, 2006). The fundamental difference between the Aviemore locality and the other localities examined, was that its strategy appeared to emerge from an international benchmarking exercise, under the guidance of a tourism consultant (anon, 2008). The other localities were reported in the Strathspey and Badenoch:

> ACDM is based on models in operation in 15 of the world's leading mountain resorts such as Whistler in Canada, Park City in the US state of Utah, Jackson Hole in neighbouring Colorado, Zell am See and Caprun in Austria and Bled in Slovenia (Musgrove, 2006a).

Furthermore, it intended to adopt an innovative approach to raising funds by introducing a voluntary tourism levy, though these were shelved in April, 2007 (anon, 2007).

The news article of the 2nd July 2008 (Musgrove, 2008) reveals that the "shake-up" was intended to increase membership and thereby increase its funds. The recovery strategy involved a significant reduction in membership fees (small businesses fee: £250 reduced to one based on turnover with a minimum of £85), the re-launch of the website www.visitaviemore.com and a re-organisation, to include the election of directors. In a reported quote by Alan Rankin, appointed CEO in June, 2007 and formerly the CEO of the Scottish Tourism Forum, the aim is to get everyone's buy-in and be inclusive:

the principle now is to get everyone on board, which is why we are offering a free listing to tourism businesses.

A subsequent statement reveals the learning exercise experienced:

> Mr Hamish Swan, chairman of ACDM, said: "The new membership arrangements are really very exciting, and are based on what we have heard from local businesses and what we have learned from successful overseas destination management organisations.

This statement also reveals optimism about the future.

8.4.5 <u>Case Study 5: Islay</u>

Islay presents an interesting situation in that the long established local tourism group appears to have been usurped by a new group which has established legitimacy with VisitScotland, through the award of a Challenge Fund grant.

An early attempt to promote Islay, and also its adjoining island Jura, online was effected by a local website designer (GB). The website www.islay.co.uk appears to have been created and launched in 1997[60]. Furthermore, it was adopted as the initial online outlet for the Islay & Jura Marketing Group. Around 1999-2000 they migrated to a website under their own domain name www.isle-of-islay.com[61]. This had been developed by BP, an associate of GB, through their company ScribbleVision. The initial website www.islay.co.uk then transformed into a directory, with links, of Islay and Jura websites. At some point around 2004 the directory was replaced by a

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[60] Whilst the domain named had been created in March 1997 (Nominet), examination of an archived version reveals the statement "last updated: July1997". [http://web.archive.org/web/19981206052239/www.islay.co.uk/index3.html, accessed 2nd July 2008]

[61] http://web.archive.org/web/19981202203636/www.isle-of-islay.com/group/index.html [accessed 2nd July 2008]

holding page with the statement "Update in progress, please call back later", which is still in place at the time of writing (3rd July 2008).

The Islay & Jura Marketing Group, was established in the 1980s, "following the demise of the Licensed Trade Association, which was made up of hoteliers" (interview, 7th July 2008). A requirement for membership of the Islay & Jura Marketing Group was to be "fully paid up members of VisitScotland" (www.isle-of-islay.com). The cost of membership varied:

> according to the type of membership your business requires. i.e. the difference between being an Accommodation Provider or a shop, restaurant, craft etc.[62]

During the summer of 2007, the Islay & Jura Marketing Group launched a new website, www.islayjura.com, this having been developed by a mainland based company located in the south of the UK. The long-serving association of the website with ScribbleVision, who had created and maintained www.isle-of-islay.com, was severed.

Also during 2007, another marketing group emerged, Discover Islay. Two different views have been expressed regarding the purpose of this organisation. One view, reportedly held by members of the embryonic group, was to develop an "all encompassing" website to promote Islay[63]. The other was that it was "to promote Islay as a winter destination with up market accommodation"[64], a view that prevails. It set a requirement that members were not only quality graded, but that they had at least a four star grading. This was later lowered to three stars due to limited

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[62] http://web.archive.org/web/20070426123645/www.isle-of-islay.com/advertise/index.html [accessed 2nd July 2008]
[63] HS, personal communication, 7th July 2008
[64] Ibid.

enrolment. This 'quality' message also appeared in a VisitScotland media announcement, which revealed that this new group aimed:

> to increase Islay's international reputation as a quality Scottish holiday destination, with particular emphasis on developing the winter season.
>
> (13th September 2007[65])

A Challenge Fund award was made of £6,800 (40% of the budget) to achieve this. This would involve branding, a new website and a promotional programme to the media. The website www.discoverislay.com was launched on the 10th December 2007. The activities of Discover Islay were raised in an islayinfo.com blog[66], which revealed that membership to the group cost £175 for the first two years and that there was the requirement of a three star VisitScotland grading. The blog itself was the subject of a discussion on the forum run on islainfo.com[67]. It highlighted a couple of concerns, in particular the exclusivity of the website and the omission of prominent Islay tourism businesses. Thereby, what was presented provided an incomplete picture of what the island had to offer, which was misleading (e.g. the amount of accommodation on the island). On the 3rd July 2008, it listed 11 hoteliers, of which seven were also present on www.islayjura.com, the website of the Islay & Jura Marketing Group, which also listing a total of 11 hoteliers. The population of hoteliers was determined to be 57 in March, 2007.

One islander has commented about this new group, Islay's island community and the tensions that many not be uncommon to communities in general:

> we understand that there is a little discord within the group, since it does not appear to be democratically run, i.e. the voice of only one, or the desires of...

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[65] http://www.visitscotland.org/news_item.htm?newsID=46997 [accessed 2nd July 2008]
[66] http://blog.islayinfo.com/article.php/discover_islay_website_launched [accessed 2nd July 2008]
[67] http://blog.islayinfo.com/forum/viewtopic.php?showtopic=614 [accessed 2nd July 2008]

Islay is inundated with various groups following different lines, there are so many different factions around. I suppose this is typical of small communities.
(7th July 2008)

8.4.6 <u>Case Study 6: Edinburgh</u>

Edinburgh is perhaps conspicuous amongst these six case studies, but not due to its profile: it is the second most popular UK urban destination after London and the number of visits relative to London has been growing[68]. Furthermore, it is a significance destination within Scotland in that it accounts for 10% of all bed-nights by domestic (UK) visitors to Scotland and just under a third of all bed-nights by overseas visitors (VisitScotland, 2006g).

However, what makes Edinburgh conspicuous is that, other than VisitScotland (www.edinburgh.org), there is an absence of local online activity to promote both Edinburgh and hoteliers. Indeed, around 70% of all hoteliers are promoted by VisitScotland. Furthermore, it may be argued that, since Edinburgh is a popular destination and, thus, there is much demand for accommodation, accommodation businesses will be guaranteed income and that there is no need to promote accommodation in Edinburgh. This argument is simplistic and seriously flawed.

First, the type of tourist is changing, from one driving past and staying in smaller privately run accommodation in the more peripheral areas of Edinburgh to another who arrives by plane or train and stays in corporately branded standardised

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[68] http://www.tourismtrade.org.uk/Images/Top%20Towns%20Historical_tcm12-37882.xls [accessed 6th September 2007]

accommodation centrally located. Indeed, 80% of the stock of beds and rooms is provided by 20% of hoteliers (hotels, lodges and campuses) (Figure 46). Furthermore, to exploit this shift, new branded hotels are opening up in central locations[69]. Coinciding with this, is the shift towards booking ahead and the use of online booking facilities, which these branded hoteliers tend to cater for.

	Number of sites	Number of bed-spaces	Number of rooms
B&B	124	735	346
Campus	5	5,770	3,421
Guest House	265	4,121	1,944
Hotel	89	15,998	7,651
Inn	3	90	44
Lodge	11	1,437	685
Small Hotel	36	908	433
City of Edinburgh TOTAL	533	29,059	14,524

Figure 46   The profile of serviced accommodation provision in Edinburgh (2005) (Harwood, 2007: Appendix 3)

Second, Edinburgh has recognised that it is competing internationally, so must be proactive in persuading visitors to come to Edinburgh. In 2000, the Edinburgh Tourism Action Group (ETAG) was established to coordinate tourism related activities involving both public and private sectors. Furthermore, a brand has been

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[69] Apex, Waterloo Place site acquired for hotel. [www.apexhotels.co.uk/about accessed 7th June 2008]

Holiday Inn Express Hotel, Cowgate, opened 9th April 2008. [http://edinburghnews.scotsman.com/romancatholicchurch/Cardinal-opens-new-hotel-on.3961823.jp accessed 7th June 2008]

Hilton, Premier Inn and Novotel "Hilton aims for budget city hotels", Edinburgh Evening News, 30th May 2008. [http://edinburghnews.scotsman.com/topstories/Hilton-aims-for-budget-city.4136234.jp accessed 7th June 2008]

InterContinental and Travelodge "InterContinental and Travelodge sign £200m Edinburgh hotel deal" 12th April 2007. [www.caterersearch.com/Articles/2007/04/12/313055/intercontinental-and-travelodge-sign-200m-edinburgh-hotel.html accessed 7th June 2008]

Sofitel "New five-star hotel for Edinburgh", The Herald, 10th February 2007. [www.scottishhospitalityjobs.com/news/2007-02-10-1.shtml accessed 7th June 2008]

developed, "Edinburgh Inspiring Capital", which ws launched on the 26th May 2005. At this time Edinburgh is setting up its own marketing organisation, the Destination Edinburgh Marketing Alliance (DEMA), to be launched on the 1st April 2009. A report upon its progress, 10th March 2009, reveals that Edinburgh City Council had provided VisitScotland with £557,617 during 2008/09, proposing that this funding would, from the 1st April 2009, go to DEMA, who would "purchase bespoke services from VisitScotland based on proven added value" (EDC, 2009). It remains to be seen how this will support hoteliers.

Thus, the question arises as to how smaller hoteliers, particularly in the more peripheral locations within Edinburgh, are to be found, especially online. Indeed, amongst those tourism businesses least represented in Edinburgh are the smaller hoteliers. Of the 533 properties identified in 2005, 73% were either B&Bs or guest houses (Figure 47). Though they have a representative body, the Edinburgh Hotel and Guest House Association (EHGHA)[70], its membership has been declining and stood at around 120 in August 2006 (i.e. approximately 30% of Edinburgh's B&Bs and guest houses, which itself, may be declining in numbers due to retirement and attractive property prices). Currently mainly a lobbying group, in the past it operated an information centre at Waverly train station, which provided a source of bookings. It also had a web-site, though this was short-lived due to funding issues. Currently the key issue is apathy which undermines efforts to be proactive. This appears within the membership of the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce. Within its membership in

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[70] this account is based upon a personal communication with the Chairman of the Edinburgh Hotel and Guest House Association, 14th August 2006, 9th June 2008)

November 2007, 56 of were hoteliers and of these less than ten could be classified as small businesses. Nearly half were corporate businesses (e.g. Hilton, Premier).

	B&B	Campus	Guest House	Hotel	Inn	Lodge	Small Hotel	Total
Population of serviced accommodation providers (2005)	124	5	265	89	3	11	36	533
VisitScotland brochure 2005	86	5	185	62	2	4	28	372
Yellow Pages 2005	51	4	235	80	2	9	35	416
SmoothHound 2005	25	1	150	49	2	3	24	254

Figure 47 Promotional outlets for Edinburgh's serviced accommodation providers in 2005

There are a variety of options open to the smaller hotelier, both online and off-line. A Google search using the terms "Edinburgh hotel", "Edinburgh Accommodation" and "Edinburgh bed and breakfast" revealed over 700 sites, which included a wide range of intermediaries, from those servicing travel and accommodation globally, to those local to Edinburgh. However, any local offering tends to be of a commercial nature. Furthermore, only a few of those dedicated to the promotion of Edinburgh, offer accommodation details (see Figure 48 for details of websites). There is clearly a fragmented approach, with no specific representation of smaller hoteliers possibly due to the adequate provision of intermediaries.

Promoting Edinburgh but without accommodation details	
www.edinburgh-festivals.com	Edinburgh Festival (to support the variety of festivals held throughout the year in the city)
www.edfringe.com	Edinburgh Fringe
www.edinburgh-tattoo.co.uk	Edinburgh Tattoo
www.conventionedinburgh.com	Edinburgh Convention Bureau (promoting Edinburgh as a conference and event location)
www.edinburgharchitecture.co.uk	Edinburgh Architects
Promoting Edinburgh and with accommodation details	
www.edinburgh-royalmile.com	the Royal Mile (a site set-up and run by an online Gallery for Artists)
www.edinburghcastle.biz	
www.edinburghbedandbreakfast.com	
www.edinburghguide.com	

Figure 48   A selection of official and unofficial websites promoting Edinburgh in late 2007

The situation is perhaps gloomily summed in the following comment

> I believe there is no future for a B&B operation in the mainstream. The B&B operation is under extreme competitive pressure by low cost serviced accommodation – the TravelInns, TravelLodges, Holiday Inn Expresses, who can sell consistent product and of generally a higher standard at generally at least the same price, sometimes lower than you can get in a B&B… so why stay in a B&B in a peripheral location which is a lowly quality and lower consistency and no branding. There will always be a place for a high quality privately owned guest house accommodation but its going to be niche, it's not going to be mainstream... it's going to be high quality, personal service… the mid-market low cost B&B has no future in cities and through time these will revert back to private accommodation.
>
> [hotelier and member of an Edinburgh focused Tourism organisation, personal communication, Sept. 2007]

In summary, the situation within Edinburgh appears to be one of consolidated effort involving both public and private sector to promote the city as a destination, though this is a recent development. However, from a smaller serviced hotelier's perspective, this may have only a little impact upon them. Their traditional reliance upon passing trade and bookings through the local TIC, however, is being affected

by a shift of visitors to more centrally located branded accommodation, facilitated by the exploitation by the branded hoteliers of easily accessed websites. Discussions with smaller hoteliers in the peripheral areas of Portobello and Newington reveal their concern about the decline of passing trade. However, some do find 'solutions" to stay financially viable, which includes developing some kind of online presence and using a multiple of online intermediaries. These businesses cannot escape from the need to continually embrace innovation to win and retain guests. What is conspicuous is the lack of collective activity to secure bookings. Indeed, there is no active membership-based organisation which deals exclusively with their concerns. The Edinburgh Hotel and Guest House Association suffers from the apathy of smaller hoteliers. Indeed, smaller hoteliers appear lost within the clutter of activity of many different organisations, associations and networks, of which, only a few have an association with tourism.

The key issue is that smaller businesses are perhaps isolated as a minority amongst the predominantly larger players, who can exploit the privileged position of their central location, as well as their advantage of having corporate websites with booking facilities. Just as these smaller businesses are being marginalized because of their physical peripheral location, they may also marginalized because of the peripheral online location. The larger players are more able to exploit the international and relatively well know intermediaries such as Expedia and LastMinute.com, who have well developed online consolidation portals. VisitScotland plays an important, but perhaps declining role for hoteliers. This offers smaller players the opportunity of elevating their position through collective activity,

in particular the development of a collective online presence. However, it is to the remote island locations that there appears to be evidence of how this can be successfully achieved, though this is not without its own tensions.

8.4.7 Analysis

The case studies reveal a complex mix of socio-technical issues. Personalities and politics counter-balance collaboration and technical delivery. The narratives, whilst incomplete, reveal diversity, but also the uniqueness of the local, as well as interplay with the distant.

A summary of the case studies is presented Figure 49. The development of an online promotional presence is not necessarily the sole goal, or even the goal. In addition to the promotion of the locality and local businesses ('destination marketing'), may be the desire to develop the local tourism product; fashionably labelled as 'destination management' or 'destination development'. Also is the opportunity to act as spokesperson for the locality and lobby local and national public sector bodies to pursue an issue (e.g. development of better transport access).

Whilst a variety of issues have been recognised, there will be others that have not been recognised or have been ignored, yet may be significant (e.g. domain name ownership or website content management). These form part of the background, surfacing when there is a problem (e.g. dispute over domain name use).

Locality	Summary
Mull	HolidayMull is characterised by its continuity and evolution over a period of thirty years. This may, in part, be due to the central role of one of its founders over much of this time. Its website, launched 1994, has been developed and maintained locally.
Orkney	Events on Orkney are more recent and are marked by several stages of discontinuous development of an online presence, with the main aborted development being a public sector initiative. Unrelated to these developments, in response to the demise of the ATB, the Orkney Tourism Group formed in 2005 to address local tourism issues, though VisitScotland retained the promotion of Orkney. However, recent tensions appear to have emerged between Orkney Council and VisitScotland.
Arran	Arran, like Orkney, has undergone several stages of development, but, unlike Orkney, development has been progressive, with the formation of VisitArran in 2006 and the launch of a website in 2007. Furthermore, there appears to be support from and alignment with VisitScotland. The latest development, VisitArran, presents a designer approach, using the assistance of a tourism consultant.
Aviemore & Cairngorms	ACDM, established in 2006, was reported in July, 2008 to have 'shaken-up' its strategy due to poor membership numbers and funding issues. This was despite having adopted a designer approach under the guidance of a tourism consultant.
Islay	The Islay and Jura Marketing Group was established in the 1980s and went online in the late 1990s. However, it appears to have been usurped by a new group, Discover Islay, established in 2007, in that it has established legitimacy with VisitScotland through the award of a Challenge Fund grant. Its website was launched at the end of 2007. Community tensions are exposed.
Edinburgh	What makes Edinburgh conspicuous is the absence of local online activity to promote both Edinburgh and hoteliers other than VisitScotland. Although there is a Tourism Action Group (ETAG) which was established around 2000, its focus is upon tourism product development. The 'community spirit' of the islands appears to be lacking, being replaced perhaps by apathy in a location that is privileged by its supply of tourists.

Figure 49   Summary of the key features of the case-study locations

Inherent variety

The case study narratives reveal a diversity of plots and raise a variety of issues.

Foremost is that there does not appear to be a given solution, nor a common

approach. Indeed, when specific themes are identified from the data, they reveal

different courses of action (Figure 50). For example, governance can be democratic,

whereby members have a vote on issues. Alternatively, a committee may make

decisions without consultation. Likewise the enrolment criteria may allow anyone to become involved or may be exclusive.

Trigger	Public sector initiative:	Private sector: vacancy or response to something
Enrolment	Perceived benefit is direct – increased business	Perceived benefit is indirect – provides competitive advantage over others
Involvement	Appropriate services and shape the business	Participate and shape locality
Governance	Democratic	Behind "closed doors"
Funding	Short-term "primer" public sector award, but how to sustain	Self-sustaining: membership or appropriation
Criteria 'to belong'	Inclusive (e.g. low cost)	Exclusive (e.g. high cost, grading)
Process	Evolving (natural): learning through experience (and mistakes)	Prescribed (designer): learning from others (benchmarking), external advice
	Enthusiastic and voluntary involvement	Professional managed (salaried)
Technology	State-of-the-art: cost / risk exposure	Sufficiency: 'it works' and delivers

Figure 50   Variables offering different configurational possibilities

This suggests that there is a multiplicity of possibilities about the dynamics of these groups, which appear to be contingent upon local circumstances. One question is whether some possibilities are more likely to lead to both sustainability and viability of the online presence and the organisation underpinning it. This raises the issue of whether there is a common dynamic underpinning their formation and operation.

One feature that does appear to be common is the formalised nature of the relationship between those collectively acting on tourism issues. It is postulated that informal relationships between locals with a vested interest in tourism are unlikely to sustain co-ordinated collaborative activity. Commitment of time to meet and do things and perhaps commitment to fund expense incurring activities is argued to be

undermined by the pressures of the 'busy lives' of locals, self-interest and complacency. The Edinburgh Hotel and Guest House Association (EHGHA) (case study 6) appears to have succumbed to this informal status and, as such, is perhaps little more than a voice-piece. Furthermore, where money is involved then the issue of accountability for its use arises, which implies that a more formal approach will be required.

Challenge of analysis

The variety inherent in the local collective online promotion of a locality and its associated activities presents the challenge of how to analyse. Unlike the other local online intermediary forms, which can be appropriated and domesticated in a manner akin to the intermediaries examined in the previous chapters, the local collaborative approach challenges the assumption of domestication.

The local collaborative approach can be characterised in a number of ways. Collaborative groups are formally established and require effort to retain financial viability and long-term sustainability. Their composition is membership based, fluid and can be described as relatively open, which contrasts with the hotelier's business and similar types of organisations (e.g. SME's, corporations) which can be described as relatively closed and stable. Temporally, the time-scale is long-term. Spatially, there is no fixed operational site, with members congregating at venues as appropriate and operating from within their own businesses. One reason for their formation is to establish a collective online promotional presence. Indeed, the group need not exist if there is no online presence. Furthermore, there may be externalities (e.g. funding) which impose conditions upon the mode of operation. An important

feature of these groups is local knowledge, which denotes the uniqueness of each locality. Indeed, it can be argued that every possible locality will be unique, despite similarities between localities being recognised, just as there are people who are viewed as similar. Similarities can be exploited from an economy of scale perspective, whilst uniqueness needs to be accommodated.

From the hotelier's perspective, there are a variety of options, of which there are two more extreme forms. One is for the hotelier to appropriate the online services of the local group in a manner akin to any other commercial intermediary, taking a passive role in the activities of the group. The hotelier's interest lies in an online presence on the group's website. Participation within the group is of no consequence to the hotelier. The alternative is the active involvement of the hotelier, perhaps being a founder member and also an on-going committee member. The hotelier is, in this instance, is able to influence the nature of the group's online presence and the manner in which it comes about and is managed. It is this latter active involvement which is off interest here.

There are a variety of issues which are raised here relating to the use of domestication to conceptually explain how a hotelier will exploit online technologies as an active member of the tourism group. First, unlike the household, the group needs to come into being and the dynamics worked out of how to establish an online presence. Further, the group exists, in part, for its online presence, so the dynamics relating to the online presence are an integral feature of the dynamics of the group, at least in the early days. Secondly, both the formation of the group and the

development of an online presence are user innovations, which does not appear to rest easy with the notion that domestication is a 'conservative' process (section 3.4.3). Thirdly, the hotelier's involvement with the group introduces yet another boundary which needs to be managed in addition to that of the public - private and work – home.

Assumption 1: the nature of the social entity within which domestication takes place is stable and familiar

The assumption underpinning the domestication of technologies is that the social entity into which the unfamiliar crosses already exists, is relatively stable and familiar. Indeed, domestication says nothing about the dynamics of the organisation other than accommodate it from a contextual perspective in the uptake and embedding of a new technology. To illustrate, Sorensen (2006) presents the example of the domestication of the car in Norway, the social entity being Norway with domestication taking place within this entity, with events raised that had relevance to this domestication process.

However, the tourism group needs to come into being. There is nothing familiar about this to those setting up the group as typified by Discover Islay (case study 5) and ACDM (case study 4), both organisations set up to include online promotion.. Indeed, it is a learning experience as one thing is tried then another as illustrated by Mull and Arran (case studies 1 and 3). Even the expertise of a consultant is brought into question when things go wrong soon after set-up, as in the case of Aviemore (case study 4). It is argued that the early life of the group (e.g. Discover Islay) is a

process of familiarisation: with each other and how to interact with each other, establishing roles and codes of behaviour, setting tasks, including that of developing an online presence, and enrolling others. Moreover, it is a process of familiarisation within that which is familiar within the busy day of each hotelier. However, this is arguably a more complex process to that of domestication though there may be elements which are found within domestication.

Assumption 2: domestication has a temporal dimension

The observation that the domestication process is not a one-off event, but is "continuous and dynamic" (Aune, 1996: 118), draws attention to the temporal dimension.

Over time, the tourism group establishes itself, becomes stable and familiar to those associated with the group as typified by HolidayMull (established 1977). In the sense that this group decided to develop an online presence in 1994, then it can be argued that the group domesticated online technologies to serve their promotional needs, in a manner that can be accounted for using the framework presented in the previous three chapters. Online expertise is appropriated, an online presence is established and all associated issues and activities are embedded within the agenda of the group. Conversion is an agenda item in committee meetings. Moreover, domestication is a time consuming activity and needs to be fitted into the busy day. This is as valid for the activities within the established group as it is for the business. Indeed, it introduces the boundary between time committed by an active hotelier to group work and that required by both the business and home-life. However, HolidayMull is

perhaps an atypical example in that this group established itself in 1977 well before online technologies became accessible to such groups.

Nevertheless, this draws attention to the timing of the uptake of online technologies with regard to the formation of the tourism group. Indeed, if domestication can be said to take place within the example of HolidayMull, yet domestication does not take place in the example of Discover Islay, then this raises the question of how to distinguish between the two, which introduces an analytical challenge.

Another temporal aspect of domestication concerns how time is made for domestication to take place. Domestication is not a one-off event, but is "continuous and dynamic" (Aune, 1996: 118). However, whether viewed as either, domestication is an activity that needs to fit into the busy day. It is unlikely that it is accomplished in one burst of activity, instead is a fragmented activity in which things are done when they can be fitted into the busy day, with tasks distributed over many days. This is equally as valid an issue with regard to the hotelier's participation in the group as it is for the hotelier domesticating online technologies within the business. It is not something which is confined to one day, but is ongoing over time, demanding commitment, as illustrated by the founder of HolidayMull who dedicated over 25 years to its running (case study 1) and also the hotelier who struggled over a period of a month or so, but was determined to use VisitScotland's online booking facilities: "it took a wee while to get used to it" [AR4] (section 6.4.2). Time is an critical element in both the domestication of online technologies and active participation within the local group.

Assumption 3: domestication is inherently 'conservative' (section 3.4.3)

A further issue concerns the 'conservative' nature of domestication as raised by Silverstone & Haddon in 1996 and iterated a decade later by Silverstone (2006). It preserves the stability of the everyday. The 'wild' and 'strange' is tamed and embedded within the familiar, becoming familiar. This problematises the notion of user innovation within domestication, particularly if new uses for technologies are found (section 3.4.3). Indeed, the act of forming a tourism group to establish an online presence for the locality is an innovative activity. Furthermore, whether it be an established group or the hotelier establishing an online presence, whether directly or indirectly using intermediation, this can also be construed as innovation. Is this conceptually an issue?

This 'conservative' view contrasts with Technology Studies view presented by Sorensen (2006) that "domestication... is a co-production of the social and the technical" (Sorensen, 2006: 46), tacitly invoking that during co-production new possibilities may arise.

This contrast raises the issue of whether there is a question about the validity of either view or whether both views are mutually compatible. There appear to be two active aspects to this.

Bakardjieva's (2004) view of the 'home' presents the household as a relatively stable, safe and controlled environment in which its members can freely go about

their activities in a manner which allows their own identities to be developed and expressed. However, this is not without its own tensions with its members negotiating their respective stances (Sorensen et al, 2000; Bakardjieva, 2004). Nevertheless, this challenges the notion of 'conservative', particularly in the context of new technologies and uptake. Indeed the homogenous view encapsulated by the notion of 'conservative' masks the inherent differences in people's attitude towards new technology as illustrated by Roger's (1995) model of adopter types (section 3.3.4; Appendix 2.2.2). This suggests stability and familiarity are relative terms and that user innovation is fully compatible with the notion that domestication is 'conservative'.

Moreover, the notion of the "co-production of the social and the technical" (Sorensen, 2006: 46) is also compatible. Co-production invokes not merely an activity but a process in which both technology and individuals interact in an indeterminate manner in accordance with notably local conditions. Furthermore, the more innovative users will exploit the affordances of a new technology in ways that will enhance what they do within the household. However, the issue is not about better or new practices which emphasises the activity itself, in other words, the mechanical aspects of the domestication process[71]. Instead, the emphasis is upon the experience of making the technology work, which introduces the feelings of struggle, annoyance, accomplishment, satisfaction, fun, etc. This interpretation of 'co-production' translates into the experience of the user, of which there are different types of user, and thus allows for innovative user behaviour.

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[71] See Bakardjieva's (2004) critique of mechanical approaches to domestication in section 3.4.4

However, the innovative act of forming a tourism group to establish an online presence for the locality challenges the applicability of domestication. The innovative act is not taking place within an existing entity. Instead, the entity is the outcome of the collective activity of a group of independent entities (e.g. hoteliers) who become the entity. Domestication does not explain this activity, though the configurational dynamics can be conceptually explained using the conceptual instrument of 'configuration' developed in section 3.5.1. Likewise, active members need to embed their time involved in the establishment and involvement in the group within their respective busy days, which draws upon the instrument of 'incorporation'. However, the whole innovative act invokes a different dynamic to explain it.

Assumption 4: domestication involves 'boundary work' (section 3.4.4)

Whilst there is the analytical challenge of drawing a boundary around what constitutes 'domestication', there is also the recognition that the process of domestication introduces a variety of boundaries which need to be managed (e.g. public – private, work – life). Additionally, the appropriation of the 'right' intermediaries extends the boundaries of the hotelier's capability, which itself requires work. However, the local tourism group introduces a variety of boundary issues, which perhaps gives insight into what constitutes 'domestication'. One boundary is that which interfaces between the interior and familiar and exterior and unfamiliar. Domestication involves the crossing of this interface. This implies that the interior exists and is familiar to those within. The evaluation of the previous three

assumptions has revealed that the notion of 'localisation', manifesting as a collective effort to develop an online presence, invokes a different dynamic to that of domestication. However, it could be argued that the hoteliers getting together are from a local community and are familiar with each other as community members, friends and business associates. Further, it could be argued that their collaboration, the enrolment of others who are less known to them and the development of an online presence, constitutes domestication. They are bringing into their familiar 'circle' of friends and associates, that which is unfamiliar, other local businesses and also 'outsider' participants (e.g. national company representation such as the ferry provider Caledonian MacBrayne). However, it can be counter-argued that is problematic. Both the 'community' and the 'circle' are notional. The boundary of both the 'community' and the 'circle' is unclear, even if the locality is an island. Indeed, one activity of the tourism group is to delineate a spatial boundary of what constitutes the locality to be promoted, which is problematic if there are no geographical features to aid this. As the boundary of the familiar becomes more vague, it is postulated that 'domestication' as an analytical device is weakened and its use becomes increasingly metaphorical, in which 'anything out there' is domesticated and made habitable; the notion that one person moves into a locality and domesticates everyone and everything there, is perhaps stretching usage, as illustrated in the metaphorical use of taming in the context of America's 'Wild West'[72].

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[72] The Taming of the West (1939) Columbia Pictures Corporation

<u>Assumption 5: domestication is an adequate analytical device to conceptually explain
the formation of local tourism groups to promote the locality online</u>

The final assumption draws upon issues raised in the preceding evaluation. Indeed, in
the previous paragraph it has been argued and counter-argued that domestication can
adequately explain a group of friends and business associates establishing a tourism
group to promote the locality online.

Whichever model of domestication is used, it is suggested that there are three issues
which undermine domestication as an adequate analytical device. First, is the
inadequate recognition of the different actors (e.g. customers, competitors,
intermediaries, founder members, enrolled members). Second, is the inadequate
account of how both the organisation and the online presence come into being.
Thirdly, is the generality of the conceptual instruments which it comprises. It is
suggested a more sophisticated model is required, though it may embrace the
conceptual instruments of domestication. If the metaphor of 'tailoring' is introduced
to account for the formation of these local tourism groups, it provides a reference
with which to examine these three issues (The use of this metaphor is presented in
Appendix 3).

The inadequate recognition of the different actors (e.g. customers, competitors,
intermediaries, founder members, potential members, local expertise, sources of
funds) ignores the role each may play in shaping both the organisation and the online
presence. For example, the presence of local technical expertise allows the online
presence to exploit the benefits of proximity, with the web-master being able to

attend committee meetings. Likewise the need to enrol members raises the issue of how to enrol and whether an inclusive or exclusive approach is to be adopted.

Second, is the inadequate account of how both the organisation and the online presence come into being. What is the intention and how will this be achieved. Discover Islay (case study 5) and ACDM (case study 4) illustrates the problematic nature of this. It is necessary to evaluate requirements in a more sophisticated manner than is invoked merely by the concept of appropriation. Attention should be given to such issues as governance, policies, practices and duties, funding, enrolment and use of technology. It highlights planning as an important issue. Furthermore, this precedes the act of appropriation.

Thirdly, is the generality of the conceptual instruments which are presented in each of the versions of domestication. Their generality allows a wide range of different situations to be considered, but in doing, raises the spectre that necessary details are overlooked in particular scenarios. For example, whether planning is regarded as an element of appropriation or not, the issue is whether planning should be regarded as an essential feature of appropriation and, if so, how this relates to the impulse purchases of the consumer or to other situations in which planning is not significant. Likewise, the notion that Destination Arran (case study 3) could be likened to an 'apprenticeship' for the CEO of VisitArran draws upon the metaphor of a tailor and the period of learning prior to the tailor (CEO) 'does it for real'. This leads to the suggestion that public sector financed fixed term initiatives can be used as apprenticeships to spawn local developments as exemplified on Arran.

Indeed, this argument supports the view that a more sophisticated explanation is required for the specific case of the formation of local tourism groups. Further, even if the argument is accepted that domestication can deal with the formation of local tourism groups, the distinctions offered by a more sophisticated approach draw attention to important issues which could be overlooked using domestication. Furthermore, to embed these distinctions within domestication would introduce specificities that need not be applicable in other applications.

Summation

Domestication offers an attractive analytical device to examine the process of bringing in the 'wild', 'strange' or 'unfamiliar' across a boundary into a 'safe', 'familiar' and 'controlled' environment. However, it is deemed inadequate to conceptually explain the formation of local tourism groups to promote their locality online. Aside from issues relating to the nature of the group, 'domestication' lacks the requisite distinctions as an analytical device to be able to examine the necessary specificities of the dynamic of the formation of the group and their online developments.

8.5   Summation and Conclusions

The unfolding narrative reveals the propensity for local online promotional developments against a backdrop of a shift towards increased centralisation of tourism services and perhaps a more authoritarian stance towards the direction of

Scottish tourism (section 2.5.1). Indeed, there are many different possibilities for the creation of a locality focused online presence, with exploitation of online technologies by a variety of individuals, businesses and other groups. Furthermore, these local efforts provide an opportunity for local hoteliers to promote themselves though the appropriation of a listing or advertisement on these local websites. However, uptake is unpredictable, with even the offer of a 'free' listing not necessarily being exploited. Furthermore, different types of hotelier exploit these local intermediaries in different ways, with small hotels most likely to use multiple local intermediaries and B&Bs least likely to use more than one.

Furthermore, local autonomous tourism groups have emerged at this localised level, to provide a more formalised approach towards not only online promotion, but also the development of local tourism. Their autonomy contrasts with institutional centralisation, which creates the potential for tension between the political motives of the institutions and the day-to-day requirements of local businesses. Nevertheless, these groups provide an opportunity for local hoteliers to participate in the shaping of local tourism developments. These groups appear to be an important facet of how an hotelier can promote both the locality and the business; first, to get people into the locality, then to persuade them to stay at the hotelier's property. Interviews revealed local groups to be present in most of the localities examined. Edinburgh was conspicuous by the lack of activity, particularly involving smaller hoteliers. Whether this is complacency or otherwise is not known, but in view of the changing nature of Edinburgh's tourism, is perhaps cause for concern.

Investigation into the dynamics of local groups reveals the locally contingent nature of these groups. The six case studies present both 'successes' and 'failures' and reveal the diversity of issues and the multiplicity of possible approaches. This presents an analytical challenge, as the nature of the social entity is arguably different, invoking a more sophisticated analytical device. The essence of the argument is that domestication involve the crossing of the unfamiliar technology from outside across a boundary into a familiar setting and it being made familiar through its use within the familiar. However, domestication says little about how this familiar setting comes into being. Moreover, domestication lacks the requisite distinctions as an analytical tool for the specific phenomenon of the establishing of both the group and the online technologies, to draw attention to its salient features. One possibly more sophisticated analytical device is contained within the metaphor of tailoring, which is used to illustrate how the richness of this metaphor allows fresh insights to be gleaned which would be otherwise overlooked.

The implications of this analysis of what is happening locally can be viewed from six perspectives.

The first is that of hoteliers. They have a choice. They can take a passive role in local developments and merely appropriate a listing on a local promotional website. These local offerings appear to be generally inexpensive or even free. Thus, it need not be expensive to appropriate a listing on a number of websites and thereby increase the likelihood of being found. Alternatively, they can actively participate in the collective efforts of a local group to produce an online promotional presence and

shape the way the locality is promoted. However, this does imply a commitment of time.

It is suggested that local tourism groups measure their potential membership base and assess their enrolment strategies and practices such that they are able to maximise the opportunity this offers, whether they want to be all-inclusive or exclusive to those who perhaps are offering a 'quality' product. This extends to public sector stakeholders who, perhaps, may be able to support their activities.

The producers of local promotional websites may want to target small hotels and VisitScotland graded hoteliers if they wish to enhance their online inventory of hoteliers. These two groups appear to be the most likely to appropriate a listing.

The implication for VisitScotland is to clarify their local role, establish whether there is a conflict of interest and to separate out activities best performed locally, which take advantage of local knowledge from those where economies of scale can be exploited through their centralisation. It could be argued that the institutional structural changes over the last three years have been carried out in recognition of this, but it is counter-argued that if this was the case, then the apparent current level of dissatisfaction with VisitScotland would not be so high and that hoteliers would be taking VisitScotland's services in increasing numbers rather than in decreasing numbers as suggested in Harwood (2007).

Public sector sponsors of fixed term initiatives may wish to design them in such a way that provides apprenticeships, though this requires that they enrol the right people who are most likely to benefit from this experience. Whilst it is necessary to establish criteria to identify these right people, it is suggested that these people, at the end of the initiative may have the innovative insight to ensure the continuity of the initiative, albeit in a different form as in the case of VisitArran.

From an analyst's perspective, localisation challenges the analytical value of domestication. The heterogeneity and complexity inherent in the formation and maintenance of the local tourism group and its development of an online presence is inadequately handled. Indeed, domestication lacks the requisite distinctions to focus attention upon the salient issues relating to this specific phenomenon. Instead, a more sophisticated analytical device is advocated, such as presented in the 'tailoring' metaphor which is introduced here and detailed in Appendix 3.

In conclusion, localisation is an important aspect of an hotelier's online practices, if its potential is recognised. It offers the opportunity to improve being found online, through the appropriation of a listing on a locally produced promotional website. Moreover, it offers the opportunity to shape how the locality is promoted through participation in the collective efforts of a local group to produce an online promotional presence, which is likely to be one aspect of a more general interest to develop tourism locally.

Chapter 9   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

You can see the computer age everywhere but in the productivity statistics
                    (Robert Solow, New York Times Review of Books, 12th July 1987)

9.1   Aim

This final chapter presents an overview of the research. It outlines the research problem, the analytical perspectives, and the journey of establishing the research programme. It then presents the research contribution, reviews the findings and discusses the implications for practitioners, policy makers and researchers.

9.2   Introduction

The aim of this research has been to investigate how online technologies are exploited commercially, in particular, to understand differences in the manner of their exploitation. The focus has been upon the online practices of a specific group of smaller businesses who seem most likely to benefit from new ICTs: hoteliers. Underpinning their practices is the need to make contact with their customers, at a distance, to inform the customer that they exist then to persuade and close the transaction with a booking. The appropriate embedding of online technologies within practice offers the hotelier the opportunity to improve upon traditional modes of interaction. However, unlike other technologies this is not a technology which the hotelier necessarily brings within the business. Instead the hotelier may appropriate the services of an online intermediary, which introduces set of issues. Moreover,

there are different types of intermediary, of which, one is that which results from the local collective activity to promote and enhance the profile of the locality. This provides a dedicated intermediation service in which the hotelier is a stakeholder.

The thesis has been structured with chapter one introducing the problem, the research questions and the importance of the questions. Chapter two provides a insight into Scottish tourism focusing upon a number of salient issues to this study. The third chapter outlines how technology can be conceptualised and from this, derives a set of conceptual instruments which are used in the analysis. The research strategy and methodology are presented in the fourth chapter, advocating the case for a mixed methods approach. The following four self-contained chapters address specific scenarios on the uptake and use of online technologies by hoteliers, presenting evidence, its analysis and a discussion.

This final section provides a synthesis of the research. Contained within one chapter, it comprises eight sections. It commences with a brief statement outlining the problem and the research questions (section 9.3), provides a brief account of the research journey and modifications to the route (section 9.4), establishes the analytical perspective from which the questions are being examined (section 9.5), proposes the contribution of this research (section 9.6), presents a summary of the empirical findings (section 9.7), discusses the conceptual insights revealed from the study (section 9.8), considers the implications from the study for both practice and future research (section 9.9) and concludes with a summing up of what has been learnt from this study (section 9.10).

9.3   Statement Outlining the Problem and the Research Questions

Online practices are those that surround openly available technologies which permit the creation of a virtual domain for social interaction. Whilst larger organisations have tended to more fully exploit online technologies, uptake and use by smaller organisations tends to be constrained or even resisted (Scottish Enterprise, 1999: 40; DTI, 2003: 62). Furthermore, uptake can vary according to geographical location with urban based businesses more likely to take up more complex applications, though this itself varies from industry to industry (Forman et al, 2002, 2005). Tourism is a sector which can significantly benefit from online technologies, yet larger hotels have been more ready to take up online technologies than smaller businesses (Scaglione et al, 2004, 2005). Reasons cited for restricted use and non-use include lack of training (Buhalis & Main, 1998; Duffy, 2006) relevance and cost (Mutch, 1995; Buick, 2003).

At the same time, it has been argued particularly at institutional levels, that online technologies 'are the future', so must be embraced with urgency (e.g. CEC, 1997). Within tourism, this need has been expressed by Buhalis & Main (1998) and Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie (2006). Institutional support to encourage uptake of ICTs has manifested as various initiatives, exemplified by the European Union's "Go Digital Initiative", launched in March, 2001 and targeting SMEs. Within Scottish tourism, the policy document "Scottish Tourism: The Next Decade - a framework for change" (Scottish Executive, 2006) has espoused the need for businesses to get

online and has presented targets for the provision of online booking facilities (section 2.5.1). However, despite these imperatives, many small businesses still view them as not being relevant or worth the cost. This raises the question of why?

Existing research on business ICT uptake and use has ascertained levels of uptake and reasons for specific levels of uptake. However, it does not address the question of why such issues as training, relevance and cost are reasons for limited or non-uptake. Fuller and Southern (1999), Martin (2004) and Beckinsale et al (2006), each shed light into why this might be, highlighting the idiosyncratic nature of smaller business practices. This suggests that to address the question of why businesses do not take-up online technologies or restrict their use of them, requires an understanding of how businesses, specifically smaller businesses, take-up and make use of these technologies and the underlying dynamics of uptake and use.

However, as noted by Pollock & Williams (2009), one of the weaknesses of studies of technology applications is their tendency to focus upon a particular level or frame of analysis (e.g. micro-practices, the organisation or society at large). Their use of the metaphor of the 'zoom lens' (Pollock & Williams, 2009: 278) reveals the danger of limiting attention to a single lens, whereby perhaps the detail is revealed, but with loss of the big picture, or vice versa. Instead, an approach that can zoom between different frames will provide both the big picture as well as relevant detail and thereby provide a better understanding of business practices. These frames will also accommodate a temporal dimension. Changes to the bigger picture may traverse a different time-span in contrast to microscopic views, for example, a present-day

contextual analysis of a situation may fail to explain microscopic activity that is a legacy of some historical institutional decision. These methodological considerations helped define the boundaries of this investigation into the online practices of hoteliers. This led to a set of research questions.

9.3.1 Research Questions

The basic concern is with smaller businesses and how they exploit online technologies. Online technologies are viewed here simply as email, online booking facilities and a website or web-page. A number of questions arise about their exploitation, with the central actor being the hotelier.

The first main question relates to the hotelier and how the hotelier exploits online technologies. This unpacks to reveal two further questions:

- How do hoteliers take ownership of their own online presence (e.g. email and own website)? Are their different approaches and practices, with some hoteliers being more innovative than others? Can different adopter characteristics be identified? What are the difficulties experienced during this process?

- How do hoteliers to exploit the services of online intermediaries? This raises questions about the different forms of intermediaries. What are these different forms? Do intermediaries exhibit different levels of interest by hoteliers, with some being more attractive to hoteliers than others? Why might this be so? Do intermediaries make different demands upon the hotelier, thus shaping

how the hotelier takes up and uses their services? What are these demands and how do hoteliers handle these demands? What problems might a hotelier face using the services of intermediaries?

The second main question concerns any externalities (e.g. institutional policies and rhetoric, industry developments) which may condition how hoteliers take up and use online technologies. What are these externalities and how do they affect hoteliers? What problems might they cause a hotelier?

The third main question is how to conceptually explain observations – findings. What analytical device will provide an understanding of hotelier online practices? Are there any circumstances in which the assumptions underlying this device are challenged?

In each of the questions, the hotelier's role is primarily that of a user of online technologies, but may also be that of an innovator.

Discussions about the issues raised are to be found distributed throughout the four empirical chapters, as they are not mutually exclusive. Whilst all these issues have been addressed at some level, some of the questions have been examined in much more detail than others.

9.4   The Analytical Perspective

The analysis of technology can be viewed from a variety of perspectives. These include Economics, Politics and Anthropology from within the Social Sciences, and Geography from within both the Sciences and Social Sciences.   Economics emphasises utility and the roles of the producer and user. Its concepts include innovation, diffusion, implementation and the management of technology. Politics invokes the notions of power and exploitation and distinguishes different stakeholders. Attention is drawn to the concept of governance. Anthropology focuses attention upon the social and cultural embedding of technology as part of everyday experience and provides the concept of domestication. Geography highlights the spatially uneven distribution of technology and the concept of the locality. The specific discipline of Science and Technology Studies draws attention to the interplay between technology and the human producer-user and how one constructs, shapes or configures the other.

Any attempt to understand the use of technology should acknowledge the contribution of these different viewpoints. However, to integrate all these views into an all-encompassing insight perhaps is more likely to confuse than enrich any understanding. This suggests the adoption of appropriate viewpoints from which to examine the phenomena under study.

Since the object of study is the smaller business, then an appropriate viewpoint is one that addresses the process of how online technologies are internalised into business

practices. This invites the framework of domestication as the underlying research framework due to the manner it accommodates the processes associated with the acquisition and implementation of technology. However, in dealing with the collective effort of local businesses to organise themselves and develop an online presence, this challenges the assumptions underpinning the use of domestication. When these assumptions are examined, they reveal their inadequacy, primarily, due to their lack of requisite distinctions which draw attention to the salient features of this phenomenon, thus calling for a more sophisticated approach.

9.5   The Journey of Establishing the Research Programme

In attempting to seek answers to these questions, this has necessitated an understanding not only of practices at the detailed level of the business unit, but also, locally, in terms of collective activity and at the bird's-eye level of what is happening nationally, in terms of institutional policies, initiatives and legislation that may impact upon local activity and how these have emerged.

At the outset, a three pronged approach was selected: to understand institutional developments primarily using documentary sources, to produce a bird's eye view of uptake using a quantitative analysis and to examine the frog's eye view of practices through interviews.

The initial focus had been upon a more conventional quantitative analysis of levels of uptake underpinned by a diffusion model of adoption, reinforced by a limited

qualitative analysis to understand issues affecting uptake. Two issues spurred a change in direction. The first was the early recognition that the quantitative analysis intended was limited due to flaws in the data contained in the sources intended for use: official accommodation directories. The second was the recognition that online practices, even for an act as apparently mundane and simple as taking a booking, was inherently more complex than envisaged and that there 'might' be local factors at play as well as institutional factors.

The effect was to shift the emphasis towards developing a deeper understanding of hotelier's online related practices through a frog's eye view, generated mainly from semi-structured telephone interviews. Respondents were sought from local populations of hoteliers in selected localities, thereby providing the opportunity to examine any local influences, as well as those arising from accommodation type.

The quantitative analysis was continued because of the high level view it offered of Scottish hoteliers, with the granularity that it provided insight into geographical variation and temporal changes over a five-year period. Furthermore, it allowed serviced accommodation provision in Scotland to be mapped out, which presented a startling, yet obvious observation. Hoteliers were aligned along roads and clustered in towns/cities. This highlighted the issue of being 'found'. Furthermore, online developments suggested that there was a shift taking place in the manner in which hoteliers were found by a tourist. Rather than being found by passing through a locality, they were increasingly being found online. If this shift is taking place, then

it raises the question of what are the implications of this shift. It is inferred that hoteliers need to exploit online technologies as part of the way they operate.

Furthermore, it was during interviews with hoteliers that the issue of 'localisation' emerged. Hoteliers were collaborating locally to promote both themselves and the locality online, to be found online. This added the local dimension, which, because it had not been expected and did not appear to have attracted prior analytical attention, has been handled in an exploratory mode.

Complementing the database and interviews was the third strand, which examined documentary sources to create chronological narratives of institutional developments and provide insight into key issues. One narrative provides insight into the development of policies, initiatives and legislation relating to the use of online technologies (Harwood, 2009). The second reveals a series of institutional reviews of tourism and national tourism strategy publications and, perhaps more significantly, institutional decisions that have given rise to an increasingly centralised structure (Harwood, 2008).

9.6   Synopsis of the Contribution of this Research

The contribution of this research is within the domain of management and lies in the comprehensiveness of the study. It provides a rich empirical insight into the customer-facing online practices of a heterogeneous group of business users. It presents both a bird's eye and frog's eye view of these online practices. It also

presents local views taken from geographical vantage points. Thus, it attempts to overcome the restrictive view of a single lens, to allow both the overall picture to be revealed, as well as the detail of issues of interest and how they relate to each other.

Methodologically, the contribution is both to support the use of a mixed methods approach as well as demonstrate that online technologies, whilst an object of study, can serve as a mechanism for study. Online documentation and archival material provided a rich source for developing a contextual insight. Intermediary websites provided rich data sources to generate a quantitative insight into uptake. Email provided an effective, albeit not a problem free, mechanism to engage with respondents. Indeed the combined use of search engines and email allowed particular people to be tracked down and contacted. The mixed methods approach allows the generation of rich descriptions which results from shifting the observer's gaze from the microscopic detail of practices to one which is able to zoom into different locations (in both spatial and temporal domains) both near and far to the hotelier, these different locations being sites of activity which have some bearing upon the hotelier.

Conceptually, the contribution lies in the use of a loose social shaping approach to the analysis of the data. The process of domestication presented by Silverstone et al (1992) and Sorensen et al (2000) was used to examine the internalisation of online practices and the use of third party online promotional websites to access potential visitors. When applied to the localisation phenomenon, this challenges the

assumptions underpinning domestication, thereby revealing the limitations of domestication and suggesting the need for a more sophisticated analytical device.

9.7   Review of Empirical Findings

The empirical insights relate to the online practices of hoteliers. Both bird's eye and frog's eye views are presented.

9.7.1 <u>Bird's Eye View</u>

Scottish Tourism has traditionally been characterised by the consumer masses flocking to resorts or the touring family driving around. However, Scottish tourism appears to be in a period of perhaps significant transition. The duration of visit (weekend break), the expected experience (guaranteed) and manner of access (plane-train) are privileging standardised pre-booked city centre hoteliers, often corporately owned. Edinburgh is Scotland's most popular destination. Dispersion into the outlying areas is a topic for debate at institutional levels, with wide disparities in tourism numbers throughout the regions. The significance lies in the manner in which tourists are touring. In the past, touring would be around different localities finding accommodation as required in passing. However, this appears to be changing with an increasing number touring online and finding accommodation online.

This view that visitors want to be online has led to institutional deterministic proclamations (e.g. "Scottish Tourism: the next decade", Scottish Executive, 2006)

that hoteliers must get online and provide around-the-clock online booking facilities. It is not uncommon to allude to VisitScotland, who can provide this as a service. This deterministic, customer focused characterisation of the institutional view is designated the I-model (section 3.5.3).

However, an alternative view is that not all visitors wish to book online. Instead, destinations can be viewed as socially constructed experiences. Visitor experiences are locally produced by the providers of tourism products, these producers include hoteliers. Booking is part of the visitor's experience and allows visitor's expectations about the visit to be shaped. This socially constructed producer focus is designated the U-model (section 3.5.3).

This distinction suggests that there are hoteliers who desire personal contact during the booking process (mode II). This contrasts with those satisfied with the anonymous automated transactional (mode I) nature of an online booking. The contrast itself suggests that perhaps there is divergence and variety in the online practices of hoteliers.

9.7.2 Frog's Eye View

The Domestication of online practices

Examination of the online practices of hoteliers reveals that even the mundane act of using email is not necessarily a simple task, since it offers different possibilities regarding use. The internalisation or domestication of email requires the appropriation of the requisite technologies, their set-up/configuration, which involves

the configuration of associated tasks, and the embedding of these email related tasks within the daily routine and the 'busy' day. Each stage involves a learning experience in the process of making email work and thereby serves a practical need.

The production of a website introduces an additional dimension. Whilst email places emphasis upon the technical configuration that makes it work, a website raises the issue of how the business is to be perceived by others. This business identity is translated into the provision of an online experience through the content and functionality offered by the website. The website can be configured to cater for those visitors who wish the instantaneity and anonymity of an online booking facility and also those wishing the rapport associated with direct contact.

The use of a third party online booking facility presents a greater challenge in its configuration and embedding. This is also an internalisation process, but of an intermediary's service. It also entails a learning experience in trying to use the service and make the booking facility work. If more than one online booking facility is used, their embedding creates the need to configure new activities that ensure consistency and reliability of the information provided in each of the facilities. These new activities themselves require to be embedded. Indeed, this need to 'manage' multiple online booking facilities exposes a possible weakness of online technologies. Attention shifts from direct use of the technologies to activities that synchronise use. The regulatory aspects of use are highlighted, which introduces discipline and requires commitment of time, perhaps negating the advantages of convenience and ease. The use of multiple third-party online booking facilities can

be likened to the busy executive who organises his/her time using three remotely and separately held diaries. That each has to be maintained highlights the weakness of remote online booking facilities.

It is questioned whether online technologies can substitute for the physical reservations book and mobile telephone that typifies the conventional way of taking a booking. The affordances offered by the mobile telephone and reservations book extend beyond the basic transactional aspects of a booking, which an online booking facility can handle. Instead, online technologies currently complement associated practices.

Intermediation

The use of intermediary or third party online websites provides both a complementary and alternative online option for hoteliers. Indeed, it is possible to have a proxy presence through an online intermediary and receive enquiries by fax, without having any computing facilities or online technologies on-site[73]. Two options are available. The first is to utilise the online services offered by the national tourism organisation VisitScotland through its franchise visitscotland.com. The second is to appropriate a listing on a commercially available website.

Possibly the more obvious option is to appropriate the services of VisitScotland, which includes the offer of online booking facilities. However, this is not a straightforward task and is clouded by a 'reputation', which appears to be translating

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[73] Stewart (2003: 11) identifies 'proxy use' as a strategy to get online, whereby "responsibility, problems and costs" are passed onto others.

into declining use of VisitScotland by hoteliers. There was less than 10% uptake of visitscotland.com's online booking facility in February, 2007, these tending to be larger hoteliers (Harwood, 2007). Aside from the practicalities of embedding online booking facilities into practices, there are concerns about VisitScotland/visitscotland.com, which deters interest. These include the requirement that hoteliers are quality graded, which can be expensive and there may be disagreement about the grading inspection criteria. That appropriation of visitscotland.com's online services requires the institutional configuration of the hotelier, which may be a step too far for some hoteliers. Furthermore, the embedding of visitscotland.com's online booking facilities requires acceptance of the charging structure, which implies reconfiguring the revenue model and thus has met with opposition. The rhetoric to persuade use of visitscotland.com's online facilities, in particular the online booking facilities, contrasts with the evidence of use. This provides support for the suggestion that there are contrasting attitudes towards the manner of visitor engagement, idealised in the I-model and the U-model (section 3.5.3).

The appropriation of a listing on a commercially available website raises the question of who to use. A cursory examination of uptake of three better known online intermediaries reveals their respective appeal to different types of hotelier's. A frog's-eye view provides insight into the factors affecting the appropriation of a listing. Cost is complemented by risk and uncertainty. What works in one locality may not work in another. The only way to establish the appropriateness of an intermediary is through use, which can vary over time.

Different types of intermediaries are identified. Those which hoteliers appropriate are labelled brokers (b-model). This contrasts with a new type of intermediary over which the hotelier has no control, but offers a facility for visitors to 'speak' about their visitor experience and are points-of-reference (r-model). A hybrid of the r-model provides a service to hoteliers, allowing them to 'speak' about issues of concern, including bad experiences with visitors.

Commercial intermediaries have been contrasted to the public sector intermediary visitscotland.com. Whilst the former assume the role of marketers, the latter has the characteristics of Hennion's producer (Hennion, 1989), who attempts to shape both audience and performer, in this case, the hotelier. Resistance to this by hoteliers has resulted in tension. Whilst there is temptation to label intermediaries together, this would be a mistake as it is apparent that broker intermediaries comprise different types. It is evident that little is known about online intermediaries and, thus, more research is needed.

Localisation

However, within the locality there is an interesting development. The ease of setting up an online presence has resulted in user produced locality orientated online promotion. Three basic categories of website are recognised: the singular; community service; and commercial collaborative, though these disguise the variety inherent within each.

Two issues arise.

The first is that these websites represent local online intermediation and offer hoteliers with the opportunity for appropriation in the same manner as previously considered intermediaries.

The second issue is the opportunity offered to the hotelier to shape what is done locally to promote the locality online. However, it is in this context that the interplay between institutional policies and initiatives and local practices is most evident. The demise of Area Tourist Boards is associated with the increased centralisation of promotional services through VisitScotland. This, and also concern about promotion of the locality, has been amongst the reasons for the emergence of local tourism groups. The hotelier can, through the group's online presence, bring attention to both the locality and the business and thereby, persuade visitors to visit the locality and to stay at the property. In contrast to the relatively contained business that internalises online technologies, the group is a relatively open organisation that produces an online presence that is appropriated by its members through their membership. The aim of the group is to tailor itself in such a way as to be viably sustainable through its membership and thereby be able to produce and maintain an online presence. The online presence of the group becomes a potentially important complement to the hotelier's domestication of online technologies and appropriation of online intermediaries. The hotelier becomes a stakeholder in this specific form of intermediation.

9.8 Conceptual insights

Several more conceptual issues are also highlighted in this work. The first concerns the nature of online technologies and how they are taken up and used. The second relates to the nature of users of online technologies.

9.8.1 <u>The Nature of the Online Technologies</u>

The nature of online technologies introduces conceptual challenges. What is the artefact? Orlikowski & Iacono (2001) reveal the quagmire that the 'IT artefact' can be conceived in a multitude of ways; as a tool, indirectly through surrogate indicators, as an ensemble, as a computational device or as something that is 'nominally' there whilst attention is elsewhere. Furthermore, they offer, through their five premises, insight into the nature of the IT artefact: that they are "designed constructed and used", are "embedded in some time, place, discourse, and community", are 'made up' or assembled-configured, yet are dynamic and impermanent and "emerge from ongoing social and economic practices" (Orlikowski & Iacono, 2001: 131). This has ready application to online technologies, which, in their classification as ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), adds to the notion of computation, that of 'communication' and the role of medium (Silverstone et al, 1992).

Indeed, it is perhaps their role as a medium that establishes the specific character of online technologies. As a medium, their physical features are rendered invisible

merging into the background, becoming visible when problems arise (cf. Bowker, 1994: 10; Thrift 2004: 584). Instead, attention focuses upon the non-physical, upon "the symbolic dimensions" (Yoneyama, 1997: 105). Technological developments have rendered these symbolic dimensions as effectively device independent. Practices relate to this symbolic dimension and relate to the exchange of information/money and imply a shared language. The metaphor of the text focuses attention upon the production (writing) and communication of meaning embedded in this symbolic dimension (Lytje, 1996; Yoneyama, 1997). Meaning translates into the practices associated with the uptake and use of online technologies. The reader of a promotional website will send an email enquiring about accommodation. The recipient will check bookings and confirm availability. One assumption is that what is produced is authentic (e.g. the website presents a valid portrait) and implies trust on behalf of both writer and reader. Furthermore, tacit codes of behaviour arise (e.g. emails are replied to immediately, online bookings are checked). It is through the enactment of the technology that the 'technology complex' (Fleck & Howells, 2001) is revealed. Until then, the technology remains speculation; the 'technology' is merely an artefact. Orlikowski & Scott (2007) utilise the concept of performativity to describe this enactment. The technology, in its use, performs and reveals itself.

The potential of online technologies is perhaps revealed by considering the interplay between the computer, practices and language (Winograd & Flores, 1986). New technologies allow new possibilities for action (e.g. automated online booking) and new possibilities for expression (e.g. new words, website). Perhaps it is the attraction of new 'possibilities for action' that leads to rhetorical claims of the benefits and the

need for uptake. However, this disregards or overlooks an integral feature of technology implementation - that of embedding it in "time, place, discourse, and community" (Orlikowski & Iacono, 2001). Enactment is achieved through the embedding into practices, though this is only part of the process of enactment.

The domestication of online technologies

Online technologies tend not to be 'plug and play' technologies passively received and used. They require configuration to make them work and further configuration to personalise. The configured solution is then embedded into what exists in terms of practice, the 'busy' day and also within the virtual domain.

The conceptualisation of how online technologies are brought into use and used on an ongoing basis is usefully framed within the notion of domestication. Domestication recognises that users of technology have an active role in both its usage and the construction of both 'meaning and identity' that the artefact evokes (Sorensen, 2006: 46). Further it accommodates the various characterisations of the IT artefact as presented by Orlikowski & Iacono (2001). It allows the manner in which technologies are internalised to be unpacked. Whereas Silverstone et al (1992) focus upon the household, for Lie & Sorensen (1996) the user's struggle to incorporate acquired technologies into everyday life, takes place within any socially bounded space (e.g. the work place). Domestication is a learning experience, but not in a formal sense.

The artefact, through use, is both fitted into everyday routines and practices and is positioned both spatially and temporally. However, this can be interpreted as

emphasising the physical aspects of the artefact: it is physically placed, it is physically used, it is physically symbolic, it is physically displayed to the outside world. This resonates in Silverstone et al's (1992) 'objectification', i.e. the process whereby the artefact assumes a symbolic status through positioning or use to provide insight into the identity of the household. However, online technologies are configured by users to personalise them as well as make them work. 'Objectification' is not just about positioning and using the artefact. 'Configuration' is an essential feature. There may be configuration of physical components of particular specifications (e.g. flat-screen monitor, wireless mouse and keyboard, external hard drive, wireless router). However, much attention is likely to centre upon the non-physical or 'symbolic': the set-up parameters of email, the configuration of the website. Indeed, for the hotelier, the identity of the business assumes an important aspect of this online presence. Identity is part of the online promotion. It presents the challenge of how the business 'self' is portrayed online. Moreover, practices are configured which relate to these symbolic elements, to be able to use them, to correctly interpret and act upon messages received. Instructions are composed to allow others to correctly respond to emails. The outcome is a configured solution to the task of making the technologies work in a desired way, to interact with content as appropriate and in a timely manner. The user is not a passive user of technology, but shapes the way in which it functions, though within the constraints imposed by the technology and also by other factors (e.g. legal compliance so as not to misrepresent). In short, the user configures the technology but, in turn, is configured by the technology.

Complementing configuration is 'incorporation', in other word the embedding the configured solution within 'all' that constitutes the 'busy' day. Embedding is necessary; otherwise this solution is unlikely to happen, since it becomes an awkward intervention rather than an integral feature. This 'all' is itself a configuration, which implies that it needs re-configuration, some parts more than others. It takes place both spatially and temporally and also, both in the real and virtual domains. In the real domain there is fit within the detail of practice, but also within the demands of the day and the public-private domain. Furthermore, there is placement within the virtual domain in order to be found, up-to-date (current), secure, connected to the right websites and be positioned more favourably relative to competitors.

Whilst conceptually, configuration and incorporation are distinct, pragmatically they are likely to be inter-twined. Furthermore, as noted by Aune (1996) with regard to domestication, they are not merely acts of getting online technologies to work, but are ongoing processes making adjustments when new configurational elements become available or when changes are made to some aspect of the daily routine. Lie & Sorensen (1996: 11) note this lack of "stable closure of the distribution of meaning and practice related to the artefact". Over time, all manner of changes can take place, with the possible need for upgrading (re-domestication) or divestment (de-domestication).

Silverstone et al (1992) reveals that artefact can confer status upon the household. The symbolism inherent in the artefact is upon what can be observed by outsiders.

However, whilst the physical presence of the artefact may denote status, can status be assigned to the embedded imagery? The device independent symbolism presented through online technologies may co-ordinate action and be pragmatic in its everyday use. However, whilst web designers may win awards, an unfriendly website may impart a negative view about the organisation. An email praising the business may be forwarded with pride to family and friends. Status is not conferred by the artefact as an object, but through the artefact as a medium by what is presented in the symbolic domain.

The 'busy day'

The busy day has been introduced in recognition that domestication is situated in the temporal domain and that it needs to be somehow fitted into all that goes on during the busy day for each day that domestication takes place. This is potentially problematic and if there are more important or appealing activities, then these may take precedence. Indeed, there can be many reasons why domestication does not take place not only during one busy day but over a succession of busy days. The disruption to the domestication process may result in it being 'shelved': "I've no time. I'll do it tomorrow". Good intent is replaced by "it will do", as disinterest overtakes novelty and the effort to exploit the full functionality fades. The 'taming' is not fully achieved.

In the case of the hotelier, whose business is also a home, the busy day is a blend of the public (business space) and the private (domestic space). The hotelier invites visitors into an allocated 'public' space and engages in a range of activities orientated to towards the visitor's experience. However, the hotelier's 'private' space is closed

to the public, though the boundary between the public and private may be blurred, with visitors on occasion stepping into this private space (e.g. the kitchen for a cup of tea, the baby being comforted in the hotelier's arms). From a hotelier's perspective the boundary of the private and public is an on-going balancing act, yet with the visitor's experience central.

The visitor's experience is makes the difference between a good and bad reputation and hence levels of business. The hotelier's management of the visitor's experience commences with the need to attract the visitor and continues with engagement in securing the booking and handling the arrival, stay and departure. Utmost is the challenge of how to get visitors and who to help with this. There is the on-going need to be available to deal with enquiries and take bookings. In addition to the face-to-face contact with the visitor are the tasks of cleaning, cooking and acquiring provisions. There will also be maintenance issues (e.g. gardening, painting) and also major acquisitions (e.g. bedding, furniture), perhaps requiring a visit to some distant shopping centre. Shops are not the only other sites visited. There is also the need to be compliant with regulatory issues (e.g. food hygiene, access, safety) perhaps requiring third party advice, requiring a visit. Furthermore, the hotelier does not act in isolation; family, friends and neighbours 'drop in' or are visited. Some of these friends and neighbours may also be competition, but the shared interest in the visitor results that there is collaboration; visitors seeking accommodation are passed around if 'full'. The more ambitious may expand this collaborative network, inviting less familiar faces, but each with the common interest of the visitor, and organise themselves into a local tourism action group with the aim of improving the

promotion of the locality exploiting whatever channels there are, in particular the development of an online presence. However, this itself requires commitment and needs to be fitted into the busy day.

The unpacking of the notion of the busy day reveals that despite the appearance of routine, there is inherent variety and potential unpredictability, with the day being configured, if everything is to get done. It is multi-level, involving different actors, and multi-sited. Not to be overlooked is that somewhere within the busy day the hotelier also seeks to fit in "a moment to myself"'.

'Localisation': the challenge to domestication

Domestication offers itself as a useful analytical device to explain the 'internalisation' on online technologies, irrespective of where sourced. However, when applied to the local phenomenon of hoteliers collectively collaborating to develop an online presence to promote both the locality and their businesses, the assumptions relating to the use of domestication are challenged. Empirically, this collective activity can take a variety of forms. The groups formed are less stable and more open with greater fluidity in terms of its participants. Within the temporal domain is the need to embed practices within a long term time frame, particularly if compare to the 'busy day'. There is no spatially fixed location of operation. The act of creating the group is an innovative activity which is not accommodated within domestication since it is assumed that domestication takes place within an existing social entity, thus calling for another device to explain the group's formation. Collectively, these issues focus attention upon the social, spatial and temporal boundaries of the phenomenon of localisation comprising the collective collaborative

effort. Thus, it is argued, requires a more sophisticated approach to deal with the dynamics inherent in this group. It is counter-argued that a case can be made for the use of domestication by focusing attention upon the entity constituted by the 'circle' of friends or business associates. However, against this is the view that the specificities of the dynamics of the group are not adequately recognised within the domestication framework, i.e. domestication lacks the requisite distinctions to adequately deal with the salient issues of the group and that to use it is pushing the creative limits of domestication as an analytical device.

9.8.2 Adopter Characteristics

The adoption and use of online technologies can proceed in a variety of ways dependent upon the degree of creativity of the adopter and whether a third party is used. It is postulated that it is possible to identify different characteristics in this process allowing their simple categorisation, which can explain why a particular approach is adopted.

Rogers (1995) analysis, although it can be critiqued for its simplicity, is still nonetheless useful here. It examines adopter characteristics within the context of the diffusion of innovations. He identifies five ideal types of adopters based upon whether they are eager or resistant to adopt (Figure 51). He notes that early adopters have a different profile from late adopters (e.g. higher socio-economic status, higher level of formal education and literacy, more open-minded, more able to deal with risk and more socially interactive). This provides a useful classification for

explaining changes in the profile of adopters over the life of an innovation. It provides an insight into motivation for adoption, the role of local interpersonal networks and the attitude towards uncertainty relating to the adoption.

Ideal	Characteristics
Innovators: venturesome [2.5%]	Obsessive, operates within clique networks, is technically competent and able to handle uncertainty (rash, daring, risky), can handle knock-backs, is a gatekeeper for the transfer of innovations from other domains
Early adopters: respect [13.5%]	More integrated locally, respected opinion shapers based upon subjective evaluation of early adoption, 'role models'
Early majority: deliberate [34%]	Established interpersonal networks, deliberate before adopt
Late majority; sceptical [34%]	Economic necessity and/or network peer pressure, cautious adopters, uncertainty avoidance
Laggards; traditional [16%]	Traditional in outlook, embedded in the past and socially isolated, suspicious of and resistant to change,

Figure 51   Idealised Types of Adopters (Rogers, 1995: 263-280)

However, in the case of configurational technologies where there are many different configurational and placement possibilities, the question of whether adopters are early or late is rendered obsolete. Instead, it is suggested that it is more meaningful to understand the nature of adoption, which varies considerably from non-adoption, to an online presence exploiting a wealth of functionality, since an online presence tends to evolve. In other words, there are different shades of adoption. It is postulated that the nature of adoption and the manner of its evolution reflects the characteristics of the adopter. However, whilst different adopter types can be recognised in interview respondents, their characteristics were not explicitly sought during interviews. Nevertheless, four tentatively ideal adopter types are presented (Figure 52). These adopters contrast with the non-adopter type, which also needs to be

recognised. The two dominant variables that characterise these types are the degree they innovate and the level of involvement of third parties.

		Third Party Involvement	
		low	**High**
Innovation	**Information**	Functionalist Establishes online presence to meet basic needs (e.g. e-mail, simple website)	Buyer Uses third party to provide basic needs (e.g. web-page)
	Process	Enthusiast develops online presence to exploit the advantages offered by online technologies using a tool-kit	Partner Works with third party to establish and maintain an online presence

Figure 52   Idealised configurational technology adopter types

Innovation can be viewed crudely in terms of the level of online functionality offered. This can vary in complexity, from the provision of information or emailing facilities, to the provision of a variety of interactive functionality (e.g. an online booking engine, live-web-cam). The former places emphasis upon information delivery whilst the latter introduces interactivity and emphasises improved practices.

Third party involvement seeks out external expertise to develop and maintain the online presence. This may be the purchase of basic emailing and web-hosting services as provided by a telecommunications operator or the purchase of a presence on a third party website. Alternatively, it may involve website design, maintenance and hosting management as provided by a website design company. The former seeks the provision of a standard service, which is bought. The latter may involve a partnership style relationship leading to a more sophisticated online presence.

Low third party involvement reflects a DIY approach with minimalist third party support. The two contrasting idealised DIY types are presented in Figure 53. The Functionalist is minimalist, whilst the Enthusiast is selective. The Functionalist is interested in an online presence for minimal effort in order to provide information and establish email-telephone contact. The Enthusiast wishes to exploit online technologies to improve the way of operating. It is suggested that actual adopters are located somewhere between these two ideals, though whether there is a skew towards a particular ideal, needs to be established.

	Functionalist	Enthusiast
Characteristics	Disinterested in ICT, basic IT skills to 'do the job'	ICT literate, tendency to become engrossed in solving the problem,
Motivation	Concerned with establishing an online presence that serves merely to meet basic needs	To find solutions to practical requirements exploiting configurational technologies to maximum advantage
Attitude to uncertainty	High	Low
Appropriation	Standard services at right cost	Selective to get right mix
Configuration	Minimal components	Components selected to provide a solution
Placement	Configure solution placed in a limited number of locations	Configure solution placed in a variety of locations
Impact	Enquires/bookings by email, telephone	Enquires/bookings by email, telephone, online booking engine
Third Party Involvement	**Buyer** procuring standard services	**Partnership** jointly developing a customised online presence

Figure 53   Contrasting idealised DIY adopter characteristics

The table recognises the relevance of Rogers' adoption characteristics. The Enthusiast may share similarities with Innovators and Early adopters (e.g. the motivation for adoption and the attitude towards uncertainty) (Figure 51). Factors influencing a tendency to the Enthusiast type could be inherent in the background of the person (e.g. higher level of education, familiarity with ICT, prior private use

experiences influencing business use). However, there is little indication that the effect of local interpersonal networks is more significant for one rather than the other, though family members may be involved in the process, if they have the requisite skills, which may create a more sophisticated presence. Thus, the Enthusiast or Functionalist may look to others to carry out the development work and maintain the online presence.

The 'third party' possibly equates with Rogers (1995: 325-370) 'change agent'. It is suggested that 'change agents' are likely to be found in larger organisations, whilst smaller organisations may resort to third parties for advice, support and services. Furthermore, the manner of engagement with these third parties is anticipated to reflect the motivations of the adopter. The Functionalist assumes a Buyer role to appropriate a standard off-the-shelf service. However, since the Enthusiast is seeking advantage from online technologies, it is anticipated that there will be a relatively close relationship with the third party, this tending towards a partnership relationship (Partner role). Whilst the Enthusiast benefits in terms of the nature of the online presence, the third party has permission to present the Enthusiast to promote his own business.

The value of this model of adopter characteristics is that it highlights different attitudes towards the exploitation of online technologies. Hoteliers can achieve a satisfactory level of business with a simple website, a basic email facility and at relatively little cost. There may be gains by going towards to a more sophisticated online presence, but unless this is done in a DIY mode, then this can be expensive

and not necessarily merit the return. There is no evidence to demonstrate that a more sophisticated online presence will provide a corresponding increase in business. There are many factors involved with the development of an online presence, in particular, the manner of configuration and placement, both online in a virtual domain and offline in the real domain. These translate into the experience offered online to visitors and how this relates to the experience offered off-line during the visit. An hotelier in a popular location with little competition and with a high level of repeat business is unlikely to need more than a basic online presence and perhaps links on appropriate websites promoting the locality.

9.8.3 <u>Third Party Intervention – online intermediation</u>

Whilst the preceding section has focused upon the adopter-user, it highlights the important role of the third party intermediary within the domestication process. Whilst the emergence of the Internet has led to predictions about the 'death of the intermediary' (Owen, 1998; Yakhlef, 2002), instead, as demonstrated in this study, it has provided the stimulus for the development of a new type of intermediary who operates online (a process some have described as 're-intermediation' (e.g. Chaffey, 2004:39). The low barriers to securing an online presence have given rise to vast number of online intermediaries. However, this raises questions about the role of the intermediary.

Examination of online intermediation in the context of the promotional service they offer to hoteliers highlights, not only their profusion and variety, but that many types

of organisations, including public sector, are active in their provision. Two modes of operation have been identified, broker (b-model) and point of reference (r-model). The former is transaction based, whilst the latter provides information, though the information may be provided by others. The value of the online intermediary is the assumed ability to reach a broader audience then can be achieved by one's own activity.

An alternative view of the intermediary has been presented, where the distinction is made between the tourism product provider (producer) and the visitor (audience). Whilst all intermediaries attempted to shape the audience in some way, perhaps influencing a decision to visit, a few also attempted to shape the producers, establishing criteria which affected the way the producer did things (e.g. being quality graded). The intermediary shifts from a passive role to an active role within the market-place shaping its dynamics.

This active role may or may not be accepted by producers, and if accepted it may be reluctantly. It reveals that intermediaries can establish a prominent position in the market-place, influencing how it functions. This raises the question of the nature of the relationship between intermediaries and producers, whether it supports producers or whether it pursues self-interest. This argument underpins the controversy involving visitscotand.com and its relationship with its producers. Is its priority to provide a promotional service or to make money?

9.9   Implications

The implications from this study of the uptake of online technologies are varied and relate to both practitioners and analysts. These implications, from the perspective of the respective tourism stakeholders, have been considered in the conclusion sections of each of the empirical chapters. However, these implications can be considered more generally with regard to practitioners who wish to exploit online technologies and analysts who wish to examine these practitioners.

9.9.1   …for practice (practitioners and policy makers)

Domestication is less about the technologies themselves and more about the people and how they embed the technologies into their busy lives. The implications of this can be viewed from a variety of perspectives, of which two are perhaps significant: users and institutions.

Smaller Business Users

The implications for hoteliers are that they recognise the benefits of exploiting technology in a manner that fits with the way they wish to run their business. The focus is upon not what the technology can do, but how the technology fits into business practice and the 'busy' day, and how it is positioned to be accessed by visitors.

One feature of online technologies is the possibilities offered regarding use. In addition to, or as an alternative to, one's own online presence, the business can

exploit the opportunities offered by online intermediaries. It can be argued that there is not necessarily resistance to the use of online technologies, but constraint. Whilst there may be "fear" of the technology and of appearing ignorant about the technology (Duffy, 2006), this is being eroded as younger generations become familiar with the technologies and teach their elders. It is proposed that fear is being replaced by constrained uptake.

This constraint relates not only to anticipated financial benefits for the effort expended or costs incurred, but more pragmatically to the issue of relevance. It is not enough to consider how the technology assists in a task, but how the technology is appropriated, configured and embedded not only into the task, but also into the demands of the day. Furthermore, it is perhaps meaningless to implore that the fullness of the technical offering is exploited if it is problematical to integrate within not only the task, but also within the daily routine. The example of the online booking engine reveals that, whilst it offers a lot of functionality, not all of it can be used and, further, that it imposes a discipline that is not easy to embed within the daily routine. The functional optimisation offered by the technology is offset by the sub-optimal world of getting everything done in the 'busy' day. Thus, it is not surprising that relevance, together with cost, are cited as reasons for non-use (Mutch, 1995; Buick, 2003). Relevance becomes an issue of appropriate embedding into practice. From a design perspective this shifts attention from the technical features of the technology to the manner in which the technical features are used.

This implementation of online technologies involves the acts of appropriation, configuration and embedding. This often involves a personal learning experience in trying to make online technologies 'work'. For the technically illiterate, this is perhaps a challenge. One low cost option is the involvement of technically literate friends and family. A costly alternative is the use of third party expertise. However, in both cases the emphasis is perhaps upon the technical aspects of the support rather than how to embed into practice. Instead it is proposed that a business wishing to exploit online technologies needs to consider the nature of the daily demands, rather than the task itself. How is the day to be reconfigured to accommodate online practices? E-mails need to be handled. How is this to be done in an effective manner using a fixed location PC when busy with a range of tasks many of which are conducted away from the PC? From an ICT training provider's perspective it implies that the scope of the training extends beyond configuring the task to consider the issues of appropriation and embedding. Furthermore from a training delivery perspective, it raises the challenge of how to successfully embed training within the demands of the day, whereby the learning experience is embedded as part of the routine and practices of the day.

However, a complement or alternative to one's own online presence is the use of an online intermediary. The examples of online intermediation within the context of tourism highlight the roles brokerage or reference. However, these do not exclude other roles, which may be relevant in other contexts (e.g. auctions). Nevertheless, caution needs to be exercised due to the uncertainty, risk and potential costs associated with their appropriation and the possibility that no benefit is gained.

Online intermediation is essentially an unregulated domain, with low barriers of entry, no guarantees of realising benefit and open to fraudulent behaviour. It is also a changing domain with intermediaries appearing and disappearing. Further research on intermediaries can help. An enhanced understanding of their strengths and weaknesses may lead to better forms of selection.

Localisation brings intermediation within the control of its participants. The localisation of an online presence is illustrated with the example of the collective activities of local tourism stakeholders to promote the locality online. It reveals the online opportunities offered through the collective activity of those who share a mutual interest, in this case, the locality. The hotelier becomes a stakeholder in the group's activities. However, the case studies reveal that different possibilities are possible for this collective activity and, whilst it is not an arbitrary process, it is unclear whether some possibilities are more likely than others. Furthermore, this collective activity is merely one example of different approaches by those with a interest in the locality. Trade groups, community newspapers and hobbyists typify others.

Institutions

Whilst attention has focused upon what has been happening at the local level, it is not possible to ignore the nature of institutional engagement with businesses. Institutional rhetoric imploring that businesses get online may persuade some to go online, try it and learn from the experience. However, other businesses will be less convinced, implying that a more persuasive mechanism is required.

Scottish tourism is perhaps unique within Industry in that it has its own government agency, VisitScotland. Thus, the institutional message to get online is channelled directly to a group of businesses who are more likely to benefit from an online presence than other businesses. An online presence affords opportunities congenial to the operations of businesses in this group. It facilitates direct contact between these businesses and their potential customers who are spatially afar, overcoming the time and cost constraints of traditional modes of contact (e.g. the brochure, media advertisement, post and telephone). The Scottish Government has set targets for the provision by hoteliers of around-the-clock online booking facilities. Furthermore, VisitScotland, through its franchise, visitscotland.com, offers an online intermediation service that provides tourism business with the opportunity to exploit the sophisticated functionality (around-the-clock online booking facilities) of online technologies. However, uptake is limited, there is dissatisfaction with VisitScotland's services and relatively few hoteliers offer around-the-clock online booking.

Underpinning these institutional developments appears to be a deterministic view, that new technologies and, in particular, online technologies, will provide competitive advantage and corresponding benefit. Thus, it is not unexpected that there will be institutionally set targets for technically sophisticated use (e.g. online booking). Despite the proximity of VisitScotland to businesses, VisitScotland's rhetoric to get online and offer online booking facilities appears to indicate a failure to understand business practices and disengagement with businesses. It appears to ignore the issues raised in the previous section relating to the needs and contingencies of the business. It ignores the benefit from effective use of appropriate

and less sophisticated technologies. This raises the question of whether this is the case for other institutions. Indeed, policy makers need to acknowledge that the nature of the adoption and use of online technologies is that which is deemed to be most appropriate for the business and need not take a form that exploits the latest developments. This indicates that policy makers need to develop a better understanding of the practices relating to online technologies; that engagement with practitioners is required for this to happen. Online technologies are not universally applicable. The danger of disengagement and the failure to understand business practices, is inappropriate institutional support for the uptake of new technologies, whether this be financial or in an advisory capacity. "The devil is in the detail" (anon).

9.9.2 …for future research (analysts)

The findings and their implications raise a range of questions relating to online practices, both empirically and conceptually:

Conceptual issues

Conceptually, attention focuses upon the analytical framework presented and the conceptual instruments presented. Central is the concept of domestication. Domestication offers a framework to conceptually explain the process by which a smaller business internalises or takes up and uses a technology. The instruments of appropriation, configuration, incorporation and conversion address aspects of this process. Furthermore, domestication draws attention to the boundaries across which a technology must traverse and also the actors, both outside and within these

boundaries. The actors of interest are the adopters and the variety of intermediaries. Each offers opportunity for further development.

Domestication

Domestication has been presented as a metaphor to provide insight into how technologies are 'tamed' (Lie & Sorensen, 1996). As a metaphor, it was suggested in section 8.4.7 (assumption 4) that 'anything out there' can be domesticated and made habitable. Indeed, the metaphor invites the question of whether technologies are really domesticated; that they are never to fully trusted and, instead, they are 'controlled' (Stewart, 2003). This metaphorical use invites further exploration.

However, the version of domestication offered here extends beyond the metaphorical to present an analytical device, which comprises of a set of conceptual instruments. It recognises that there is a configurational aspect to the use of ICTs. Furthermore, this together with appropriation, incorporation and conversion involves learning, but not formal learning as encountered in a educational establishment, but learning as an integral feature of dealing with the everyday. Whilst, the analysis here has utilised Fleck's (1994) and Sorensen's (2006) generic approaches to conceptualising learning (section 3.4.2), this functionalist view perhaps oversimplifies what is assumed to be a complex process. Indeed, to investigate this specific activity is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the question is raised of whether there are insights within other disciplines that address these pedagogical issues and whether they can enrich our understanding of the informal process by which we learn to use new technologies by trying to make them work.

This issue of learning draws attention to an associated issue. It is evident that family, friends and acquaintances influence the uptake and use of online technologies, though, whilst identified, this has not been examined here. Indeed, they appear to assume the role of the 'local expert' identified by Stewart (2007). This raises the question of how Stewart's 'local expert' contributes to the domestication process. What can we learn from Stewart's insight into the local expert? How does the local expert participate within the social network of the smaller business? What different types of local expert are there? How does the local expert compare with more formal sources of expertise, such as provided by local government agencies or consultancies? Indeed the local expert draws attention to the local social network and its dynamics. How does this network tie in with efforts to create a local group to promote the locality?

Boundaries

Domestication, as a concept, draws attention to the boundaries between an exterior and an interior, over which any technology must cross if it is to be successfully used. This notion of boundary pertains to the spatial, social and temporal domains.

Spatially, the common object of attention is the household, a unit contained within walls which is subdivided by more walls, with the contained spaces allocated functions (e.g. living room). Likewise, businesses are conventionally located within designated closed spaces (e.g. the factory, the office). However, when this spatial boundary is removed, as in the case of the local collaborative tourism group, does

domestication as an analytical device still retain its usefulness? This local group needs to define a spatial boundary to establish the locality, though it has no dedicated site of operation – this boundary becomes important from a promotional aspect in that the contained locality develops a sense of identity which is presented online. In the context of so called 'virtual organisations', does domestication break down when the spatial boundary dissolves, or is the spatial boundary not a necessary dimension to domestication?

Socially, the obvious boundary is the household, though this has been redrawn in this study to focus upon the smaller business which is not uncommonly a 'family' business. Indeed, this draws attention to the internal boundaries manifesting as the distinction between work – home and private – public. Nevertheless, the household and the business constitute socially bounded entities which are relatively stable and closed (section 8.4.7). This invites the question of whether technology uptake and use (e.g. ERP) within larger social units, such as businesses employing say over one hundred employees, can be usefully analysed using domestication. What difficulties might be experienced? Furthermore, it invites the question of whether domestication can be used to analyse the uptake of technologies within so called 'virtual organisations'. Are the issues similar to those of the tourism group, or is the notion of a 'virtual organisation' one which requires further unpacking? Furthermore, is the social boundary and, more specifically, the particular nature of the boundry, unlike the spatial boundary, a necessary dimension to domestication?

Within the temporal domain, the duration of the domestication activities themselves form one boundary. However, the need to embed these activities within all that is done in the day draws attention to the naturally occurring temporal boundary of the 'busy day'.

The 'busy day'

The 'busy day' is a common experience. Furthermore, this study has provided insights into the busy day (sections 3.5.2, 5.3.2, 5.4.3, 8.4.7, 9.8.1), However, how much is actually known about this common experience, particularly within the domain of the smaller business in which the private world of home-life intrudes? The unpublished findings from shadowing two production managers in a small production-engineering company, each for two full working days, reveals both the fragmented nature of the day with the routine interrupted by the unexpected. The days were typically filled with between 30 and 40 separate tasks and included up to 35 phone calls and up to 85 interruptions from internal people asking questions. This clearly will vary according to the role but this example illustrates the challenges of the busy day with regard to efforts to incorporate a new activity. Moreover, this becomes compounded if this new activity takes a month to become embedded and familiar. Thus the notion of the busy day becomes conceptually challenging in terms of how to explain the dynamics of the busy day, particularly from the perspective of, in this case, the hotelier.

Domestication involves a variety of actors of which two have a significant role in this study. The first is clearly the hotelier, of which there are many different forms. However, rather than distinguish hoteliers on the basis of type of accommodation or size, it is conceptually more useful to focus upon the technology adopter characteristics. The second actor which has a significant role is the intermediary, of which there are also many different types. In both cases, their conceptualisation invites further investigation.

ADOPTER CHARACTERISTICS

Although the model of adopter characteristics presented (section 9.8.2) is relatively undeveloped, nevertheless it highlights that, rather than distinguish between use/non-use that there are different shades of use. Rather than argue that non-users resist uptake, the view that there are different shades of use, suggests that there are constraints which determine the nature of usage. This offers the opportunity to examine why particular technological offerings have limited uptake.

INTERMEDIATION

Intermediation takes many different forms and arises for a variety of reasons, of which economic factors are only one driver. Whilst altruism and special-interest can be identified, giving rise to community and hobbyist websites, what other factors are there? Do these drivers influence the type of intermediary and its online activities? How can one define 'type' and what types of intermediary are there? Both the simple

classification presented here (e.g. brokerage, reference) and also the one offered by Stewart & Hyysalo (2008) perhaps oversimplifies this.

Whilst intermediation offers users, particularly business users, the opportunity to amplify their capability, this is weighed against by the need for intermediaries to become obligatory points of passage (Stewart & Hyysalo, 2008). This shift towards an active role in shaping not only the audience, but also producers, has been illustrated with the controversy of visitscotland.com and the opposition that built up against its perceived privileged position. Whilst Stewart & Hyysalo offer insight into the mechanisms used by intermediaries to establish themselves as obligatory points of passage, (e.g. their bargaining position), the insight into online intermediation gained during interviews (e.g. the provision of untaken free listings), suggests that there are perhaps more complex dynamics at work. It may not merely be about provision of a service, but may also relate to the manner in which they innovate or engage with those who might appropriate their services. What are the dynamics underpinning their formation and operation? Furthermore, they may offer a proxy service whereby non-users can gain an online presence without, themselves, having any online connectivity. What are the implications of this in terms of the services offered and taken-up?

Methodological issues

The methodological implications of this research are to emphasise the multi-method, multi-site, multi-timeframe approach advocated by Pollock and Williams (2009). The more conventional approach to the study of domestication is an ethnographic study within a single site – that of the household. The frame of study, provides a rich

insight into the detail of what is taking place over a fixed period of time within a bounded space. It is ideal to investigate the 'busy day'. However, it neglects that which is outside the frame. This raises at least two issues.

First, is the issue that these types of studies fail to capture the externalities that establish the boundaries of the discretions that are permitted within the household. Moreover, there is a need to take a historical perspective, since the specificity of the current situation is an outcome of the myriad of historical events both local and distant that have shaped it. This raises the question of how to identify these externalities. Attention focuses upon the contextual issues, but, in doing so, raises the question of what constitutes the relevant contextual issues. The privileging of the obvious as presented in chapter two, is based upon assumptions which are questionable. Whilst these issues were selected after an exhaustive review of issues (Harwood, 2008, 2009, 2009a), what less obvious, but possibly significant issues, have been omitted (e.g. institutional efforts to establish comprehensive cover of broadband throughout Scotland). Indeed, what issues are being neglected that are being addressed at other sites (e.g. Ireland) that are relevant to an understanding of these local activities?

Second, is the extrapolation from the specific to the general, though this is a well worn debate. To illustrate, it would be inappropriate to use the busy day of the production managers, mentioned previously, as indicative of that of the hotelier unless a level of abstraction could be attained that completely decontextualises this. But this raises the question of whether this could be done and, if so, how? This

suggests the desirability to use multiple sites to understand practices. But even this is problematic as it creates the question of how to select the sites.

Indeed, a study of a hotelier who used the online booking facilities of VisitScotland could give rise to view of the unproblematic nature of such a use. However, the quantitative analysis of usage (section 6.4.1) reveals the low level of uptake of these online facilities. Further investigation reveals both institutional targets for uptake of online facilities by hoteliers, as well as opposition to the specific online services offered by VisitScotland through the franchise visitscotland.com (section 2.5.1). The implication is that a deeper insight of practices requires the more detailed study of a variety of sites as well as the more general study of the nature of practices and also the context in which practices take place, raising the challenge presented in the previous paragraph of how to identify the requisite context. Indeed, this example supports the argument for a multi-site, multi-method approach. However, whilst this allows the studies of individual sites to be positioned relative to what is happening, it is also challenging in terms of time and resources. Moreover, this is an approach which does not appear to be recognised in text books. This is not triangulation, but rather the generation of a 'thick' description (section 4.3). This raises the question of its difficulties, aside from those of time and resources, and how can these be effectively overcome.

Empirical issues

Empirically, a number of issues are raised which can be differentiated between those that are tourism specific and those that have more general applications.

This study has focused attention upon the hotelier as an adopter-user of online technologies. However, this is a specific group of users who can benefit from the exploitation of online technologies. Instead, it can be questioned whether the issues raised concerning the internalisation of online technologies relate to other groups of tourism product providers (e.g. self-catering accommodation providers) and also businesses in other industry sectors, and, if so, how these relate. Are there common themes crossing all industrial sectors and are there specific issues that are industry specific? If there are industry specific issues, then why is this so; what industry characteristics shape a particular online practices? In view of the argument for the need to embed within the busy day, then this raises the question of how the day is organised. Whereas larger organisations have resources to routinise the day by means of work fragmentation-specialisation, thereby allocating resources to 'standardised practices', the one person business needs to deal with all the contingencies of the day, thereby undermining any commitment to routine.

Another aspect of the study is its focus upon customer facing interventions. This raises two related issues. The first concerns the nature of customer preferences with regard to online/off-line purchases. The second relates to whether the online purchasing behaviour of hoteliers compares to their customer facing activities. The latter perhaps provides insight into the former.

Whilst there appears to be evidence to support the increasing tendency to book online and, more generally, make online purchases, the question arise as to what

distinguishes between a person who will buy online and one who will not. Furthermore, for the person who will buy online, is there a boundary between that which is bought online and that which will not be bought online. Insight from the buying characteristics of interviewed hoteliers, whilst not examined within this thesis, revealed this distinction. Furthermore, whilst convenience was raised as a reason for making online purchases, it was found that those more likely to buy online lived in remote locations with city-based hoteliers not making purchases. Also, whilst the Internet overcomes the spatial constraint of distance, this is undermined by the logistics of delivering goods, with hoteliers relating the problems of receiving deliveries to an island, due to supplier perception of what this entails. Skye is viewed as an island, despite having direct access via the road-bridge. Whilst this can be unpacked to raise many questions, this insight highlights the general need for a better understanding of the customer from a supplier's perspective to ensure the appropriateness of the customer-supplier interface (e.g. the importance of the telephone). It also has implications for the effective design of online interfaces (e.g. interactive websites). This raises the question of whether hoteliers are correct in their stance against online booking in that the customers they are targeting do not want to book online.

This focus upon interface highlights the role of technology. In the context of the hotelier, do state-of-the mobile technologies exist which might provide an alternative to the reservations book - mobile phone couplet? This offers a technical challenge which invites investigation, though the potential market for such a device may not

merit the research expense. If such a technology exists then what are the diffusion-implementation issues? How can the concept of domestication inform this process?

Whilst the focus in the preceding paragraphs has been on business users, there are other types of users. One specific group are those who are learning online. Online learners are assumed to be remotely located and have the need to fit their online learning experience within their day. This has implications for the configuration of the technological elements and interactivity of the online presence. Is there transferability of the issues raised in this study to online learning? Furthermore, are there other domains in which this research may be relevant?

Intermediation

Intermediation is viewed in this study as an opportunity to be used by hoteliers. Whilst online intermediaries offer hoteliers the opportunity to amplify the possibilities for targeting potential visitors, selection practices are fraught with risk and potential cost. How does one advise on how to select an online intermediary? This raises the question of whether online intermediary performance can be assessed in such a way that can translate into a tool to allow businesses to make more effective selection decisions. This has a broader application to industry in general, but is likely to feature industry specific characteristics as per the previous paragraph.

More generally, online intermediation provides an important theme in its own right. Indeed Anderson & Anderson (2002) offer insight into why online intermediaries have been successful, when it was expected that they would be rendered redundant

due to the ease of direct producer-consumer contact. However, how much is really known about the businesses underpinning these intermediaries? How useful are studies of online business models (e.g. Kinder, 2002; Chen S, 2003) to understand the way online intermediaries function? Why do some online intermediaries succeed (e.g. Undiscovered Scotland) whilst others falter (e.g. visitscotland.com). What are the challenges facing online intermediaries? Amazon.com was established in 1994, just over a decade ago, whilst the London grocer's Fortnum & Mason was established in 1707. What do online intermediaries, whether large (e.g. Amazon.com) or small (e.g. Undiscovered Scotland), have to do to survive another decade? Are there particular combinations of internal organisational factors that are more conducive to viability and sustainability and, if so, how can these be modelled? How significant is the handling of uncertainty to longevity and how can it be handled? What other issues should be considered?

Localisation

The notion that an hotelier can band together with other locally based tourism product providers to collectively collaborate on the promotion of their locality online was an unexpected finding from this study. However, its relevance to this study resulted in an exploratory study of practices within a number of localities. This revealed that there is no specific format for their formation or operation; that different configurational possibilities allowed different organisational forms to operate. Furthermore, a cursory examination of the literature suggests that this is not an extensively researched area, though a number of investigators have been identified (e.g. Murphy, 1983; Tinsley & Lynch, 2001; Cawley et al,2002; Galloway

et al, 2005; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007). However, it provides an important channel for hoteliers to promote themselves.

This suggests that a better understanding of how these groups form and sustain themselves would benefit those that wish to pursue this option. It raises the issue of whether there are particular factors that are critical to the formation and longevity of a local group. Also raised is the issue of whether the composition of the group (e.g. other tourism product providers) affects the manner in which the group operates and promotes the locality. Furthermore, the benchmarking undertaken relating to Aviemore raises the question of what can be learnt from other locations. Indeed, Aviemore's use of internationally located benchmarks raises the question of their value upon local developments and how better use can be made of these international investigations.

Other issues can be raised with regard to the structural changes that have been taking place in tourism in Scotland, in particular the formation of Area Tourism Partnerships (ATPs). How effective are these ATPs as a mechanism of engagement between institutions and both tourism product providers and local tourism groups? Can they act as a conduit to inform institutions about tourism product providers' ICT needs? Indeed, the tensions between VisitScotland and hoteliers regarding visitscotland.com and online promotion, raises the question as to why this is the case. What are these tensions symptoms off?

9.10   Conclusion

This is an exploratory investigation into the online practices of hoteliers within Scottish Tourism. It has involved a multi-method approach thereby allowing online practices to be viewed through different lenses, which range from the frog's eye to the bird's eye.

An empirically rich account has been presented which distinguishes between an hotelier's own efforts to get online (internalisation), the appropriation of online intermediation services and local collaborative efforts to generate an online promotional presence. This account reveals the locally contingent nature of implementation and use. There are institutional calls for hoteliers to get online and provide online booking facilities. This reflects a shift from traditional touring holidays and being found by passing through the locality, to one whereby touring is done online and being found is online. However, whilst many utilise email and have some form of online web-presence, online booking facilities are not commonly provided and tend to be through online intermediaries. The issue is not whether or not businesses are online, but the shades of online presence, which includes proxy presence using online intermediaries. The exploitation of the most advanced technical offerings is constrained for a variety of reasons.

The analysis of practices using the concept of domestication suggests that these constraints are associated with issues that can manifest at any point in the appropriation, configuration and embedding of online technologies. Furthermore,

there are many configurational possibilities though these may be constrained through the need to ensure appropriate embedding. Embedding involves placement of a configured online solution within what exists, both spatially and temporally and within both real and virtual domains. Embedding is into existing practices, the 'busy' day and within online search directories. This can explain why there is limited uptake of online booking facilities.

Domestication includes the appropriation of third party online intermediation services. However, these intermediaries vary considerably in type. In addition to the more passive 'broker' is the 'producer' who attempts to shape not only the consumer but also the provider. Furthermore, there is potential risk and cost associated with appropriating their services, with the intermediary's 'promise' not necessarily being fulfilled through conversion. Moreover, there are the difficulties of configuring and incorporating the more sophisticated online applications (e.g. online booking facilities). Nevertheless, intermediation offers a complementary or proxy opportunity to being found on-line.

There is a further option to that of intermediation, though is itself a form of intermediation. Concern about the locality being found has resulted in local collaborative groups who have developed an online presence to promote both the locality and their businesses, a process described as localisation. This presents an analytical challenge to the use of domestication. It is argued that domestication lacks the requisite distinctions to deal with the salient feature that are specific to this

phenomenon. Instead, it is argued that a more sophisticated analytical device is required such as contained within the metaphor of 'tailoring'.

To conclude, the apparently deterministic institutional view of the universal benefit of online technologies and the imperative that they are fully exploited to give competitive advantage, is at odds with the locally contingent and diverse nature of online practices, which is characterised by the appropriation, configuration and embedding within the business. The lens of domestication provides an insight into why this is the case.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1   SCANNING THE HORIZON OF THE EMPIRICAL DOMAIN – WHAT DO WE KNOW?

1.1   Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been the subject of much interest and empirical inquiry. This appendix is the first of two which examine how others have viewed ICTs and, more generally, technology. This appendix scans published empirical studies of ICT uptake and use, to gain insight into what these studies have revealed and how these studies have been conducted. The volume of material that has been published, which is of variable quality and uneven coverage, precludes a comprehensive review. Instead, attention focuses upon a selection of material which has been considered as indicative of the empirical field of inquiry. Inevitably there are omissions. Nevertheless, it provides an overview of the range of issues which might be expected. The appendix commences with a very brief historical overview of the development of ICTs. This is followed by three sections which review empirical studies relating to the implementation of ICTs and online technologies respectively within smaller businesses generally and then specifically within tourism. The appendix ends by considering the implications of this review.

1.2   Historical perspective

The exploitation of technology is interwoven with the development of mankind. Interest in how it has been exploited is perhaps a more recent phenomenon as

revealed through the histories of technologies (e.g. Usher, 1929) and the accounts of contemporaneous implementations (Ford, 1922). The industrial revolution and the scaling up of manufacturing owes its achievements, in part, to the ability to continuously innovate both new and improved materials and improved means to power, produce and transport. However, the advent of semiconductors and computational technologies in the 1950s mark the start of the shift from mechanical and electrical technologies to electronic and digital technologies.

Since the 1950s, information and communications have radically changed from isolated megalithic systems solely within the reach of larger organisations to affordable integrated micro-systems offering applications supporting a wide range of business tasks. Technological developments appear to have followed two prominent trajectories, one relating to manufacturing and the other to the travel sector.

The manufacturing trajectory commences with bespoke inventory systems running on mainframe computers in the 1950s. These have evolved through various stages (MRP, MRPII, ERP) before manifesting as internet-enabled and company-wide integrated information systems (ERPII) (Harwood, 2003). One characteristic of this trajectory is the emergence of system producer/vendors who diffuse their technologies to system users/manufacturers. This transfer of the MRP-ERP portfolio from one domain into another has focused attention upon implementation issues. This is well documented and includes both prescriptive accounts (Wight, 1983; Harwood, 2003) and analytical (Roberts & Barrar, 1992; Parr & Shanks, 2000, He, 2004). A wide variety of issues have been raised which have included cost-benefit,

vendor selection, process improvement, management commitment, user consultation and involvement, training, implementation (project) management, documentation and review (Harwood, 2003). The emphasis is upon formalised approaches to the implementation of ICTs within organisations.

The travel trajectory commences with the early airline reservation systems of the 1950s, which metamorphosed into the Electronic Distribution Systems (EDS) used by many operators within the tourism sector, both off-line and online (Copeland & McKenney, 1988; Chervenak, 1991; Archdale & Stanton, 1992; Emmer et al, 1993; O'Connor & Frew, 2000, 2004; Carroll & Siguaw, 2003). The nature of these systems tends to be more differentiated, with specialised applications being distinguished: Destination Management Systems (DMS), Global Distribution Systems (GDS), Central Reservation Systems (CRS) and Property Management Systems (PMS). The challenges appear to be more technical. Emmer et al (1993) notes that the challenges that have faced developers of hotel reservation systems have been the handling of different and changing prices and accuracy of available information. It is postulated that, as the implementation of the early systems were confined to larger organisations (e.g. airlines) and that the implementation of successive generations of these systems has been within organisations familiar with these technologies, that implementation has not been such an issue. However, the latest technologies bring elements of it (e.g. online bookings) within the scope of the smallest of businesses, particularly those not necessarily familiar with these technologies. This introduces a new aspect to the implementation of the ICTs, that of

their uptake by smaller businesses, perhaps unfamiliar with ICTs and, for whom formalised approaches to implementation are inappropriate.

1.3   Implementation of ICTs within smaller businesses

The uptake of ICTs by smaller businesses is a relatively 'new' phenomena, materialising with the availability of personal computers (PCs). Indeed, in 1997, Swartz & Boaden stated that research into 'information management' (which includes the uptake of technologies) within small businesses had emerged "only over the last decade" (1997: 53). One early study by Raymond (1985) noted the paucity of studies of 'information systems' (IS) within small businesses. Raymond based a later study (1990) upon a framework offered by Ein-Dor & Segev (1978) and reaffirmed the earlier finding that successful use of information systems is contingent upon organisational context (size, maturity, resources and time-frame). Raymond concluded that "IS implementation should really be viewed as an 'organisational design' activity" (Raymond, 1990: 18). Cragg & King (1993) in a study of the changing use of computers in small engineering businesses over time, revealed that expertise was "gained working directly with the computer" and that "lack of IS knowledge, lack of managerial time, poor support, and limited financial resources" inhibited their development (Cragg & King, 1993: 54-56). In a continuation of that study, Cragg & Zinatelli (1995) introduced the concept of 'end-users' to identify 'non-computing professions' who directly used computers. They reveal that the "typical method of developing IS knowledge and skills was through on-the-job experience" (Cragg & Zinatelli, 1995: 6). They concluded that the uptake and use of

Information Technologies (IT) "can be viewed as an innovation" (Cragg & Zinatelli, 1995: 7). This view was iterated by Graham et al (1996) in a study into 'electronic commerce' in the pre-Internet days of EDI (electronic data interchange) and airline reservation systems. They suggested that, whilst electronic commerce may be viewed as an 'information technology', it might also be viewed as "an innovation in business practice" whereby users had 'freedom' to configure the technology as required (Graham et al, 1996: 161).

These early studies of computer use in smaller businesses highlight the heterogeneous nature of IT implementations, which is contingent upon local context and proceeds in a manner which, not uncommonly, involves learning, not so much through formalised training, but from the experience of using it. Moreover, and drawing upon Cragg & Zinatelli (1995), implementation is an innovative act within the context of the end-user.

The emergence of the Internet during the 1990s has been associated with the recognition of its value as a business tool. The acronym IT has been supplanted by ICT (Information and Communication Technologies). Inquiries have shifted to examine the uptake and use of these online technologies. However, these inquiries into online practices do not appear to have built upon this notion of innovation and local contingency.

1.4 Implementation of online technologies within smaller businesses

Amongst studies of the online practices of businesses, are a series of papers by Daniel and co-authors (Daniel & Grimshaw, 2002; Daniel & Wilson, 2002, 2003; Daniel, Wilson & Myers, 2002, 2003). During March, 2000 and using a questionnaire-based survey involving 678 SMEs and 613 large businesses within the UK, they examined:

- adoption differences between larger and smaller companies (Daniel & Grimshaw, 2002); and

- adoption issues within SMEs (e.g. approach (Daniel, Wilson & Myers, 2002, 2003), realised benefits (Daniel & Wilson, 2002)).

They found that SMEs tended to be more opportunistic (Daniel & Grimshaw, 2002), though at that time, online recruitment and purchasing were the least developed applications, with most benefit being achieved with internal communication and customer-facing applications (Daniel & Wilson, 2002). They present a sequentially staged adoption model, whereby, SMEs progress to more sophisticated applications and, during this process, go through a learning curve. As they gain more experience of e-commerce, initial over-optimism is replaced by disappointment and more realistic expectations (Daniel, Wilson & Myers, 2002, 2003).

This interest in the degree to which online technologies have been embraced has led to efforts to map the level of adoption onto a roadmap (Cooper & Burgess, 2000), ladder (Martin & Matley, 2001) or stage model (Rao et al, 2003, Daniel, Wilson &

Myers, 2002, 2003). Each suggests that a business's online practices 'evolves', becoming more sophisticated over time. However, this does not preclude businesses commencing with a sophisticated solution or leap-frogging stages or levels. Nevertheless, these models enable the monitoring and measurement of the development of online practices by a business or a group of businesses.

In a separate study of five companies developing an online presence, Daniel & Wilson (2003) revealed a 'learning by doing' approach giving rise to an emergent strategy for e-commerce, this reflecting the turbulent impact of e-commerce upon markets and the uncertainty associated with this, rather than it being "highly formal and analytical", more typical for "traditional markets" (Daniel & Wilson, 2003: 293). They noted the need to provide for customer initiated dialogue which required process reconfiguration, rather than it being firm initiated (e.g. by advertising and direct mail).

Pires & Aisbett (2003) question the assumption that ICT, in particular e-commerce, will deliver benefits. In a review of 21 papers, they reveal the contradictory arguments contained, about the relative advantages and disadvantages of e-commerce to individual businesses. The uncertainty, complexity and dynamics of the business environment leads to the conclusion that any evaluation of e-commerce must be firm specific.

1.5   Implementation of ICTs within smaller tourism businesses

The implementation of IT and ICT within the tourism industry, in particular, the hospitality sector and, more specifically, the serviced accommodation category, has received limited attention, though a number of analysts have described applications and their benefits. In an early study, Sheldon (1983) described the scope of application and benefits, distinguishing between front- and back-office applications and also telecommunication, safety/security and energy management applications. Baines (1998) recognised that technology offers the benefit of the automation of routine tasks and access to information about customers. However, neither gives scant attention to the implementation issues (a theme examined in this work).

The newer online technologies have been recognised for their potential to offer marketing opportunities (Morrison et al, 1999; Van Hoof & Combrink, 1998; Gilbert et al, 1999, Wei et al, 2001, Wan, 2002). Indeed, Buhalis (1998) offers a somewhat deterministic view: "in order to satisfy tourism demand and survive in the long term there is no choice but to incorporate technology and enhance the interactivity with the marketplace" (Buhalis, 1998: 411). Implicit is the argument that more and more people are going to both search and book their travel arrangements online (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006).

1.5.1 <u>Implementation Practices of Online Technologies</u>

One of the earliest references to Internet use within the hospitality sector is "an exploratory look at the internet and at world-wide-web hotel sites" (Murphy et al, 1996: 78). This was at a time when views existed that the Internet was a 'toy' and technical difficulties included "connection and transmission speed to the internet, evolving technologies, and browser compatibility" (Murphy et al, 1996: 73), highlighting scepticism and technological instability. They surveyed 36, mainly US hotels (20 chains and 16 independents), examining their websites and sending out e-mail questionnaires. They found that the main website features were orientated to e-mail contact, information provision and a means to make a reservation, though few offered the facility to take payments. The degree to which the technology was embraced varied considerably from basic e-mail to fully integrated automated booking facilities.

There is not much guidance about how to get online, though Carter & Bedard's (2001) suggestions include linking to a DMS, re-engineering the reservations process and buying online. Likewise, the 'strategic IT framework' offered by Buhalis (1998) outlines the scope to which IT can be applied, but is unspecific about implementation mentioning training and re-engineering. Both are perhaps more applicable to the larger organisation and are assumed to be embraced as an integral feature of the ICT strategies and practices of larger organisations. However, the question arises as to whether these are appropriate for smaller organisations, characterised by multi-tasking, limited resources and lack of time.

Indeed, Scaglione et al (2004, 2005), using the registration dates of domain names, suggest that hotels have a greater propensity to adopt online practices than smaller enterprises and that these smaller enterprises tend to imitate. This view is perhaps supported when the ICT solutions offered by vendors (e.g. Cendant) are examined. These appear to be generally targeted to the larger organisation in a manner comparable to ERP application. Thus, size of organisation is a factor governing the depth ICT is embraced. If the larger organisation is likely to embrace technology in both its depth and scope then any variation in uptake is to be found in the smaller organisation.

1.5.2 <u>The practices of smaller providers</u>

Four relatively recent surveys into the adoption characteristics of smaller organisations provide insight into this variation.

Lituchy & Rail (2000) examined small business exploitation of the Internet in a mail survey of 114 small inns and B&Bs across the US and Canada. This revealed the promotional value of a website, though motives included the belief that this is the way of things to come (16 respondents). Whilst offering "a relatively inexpensive form of marketing" (Lituchy & Rail, 2000: 95), only six respondents highlighted online reservations as an advantage (though the manner of how online reservations were made was not clarified). However, nine respondents "were concerned about the

lack of rapport with clients and considered this drawback an impediment to generating sales" (Lituchy & Rail, 2000: 994).

Buick (2003) surveyed small hotels in Scotland, citing earlier research in which he attributed their failure to embrace IT to, in part, being due to their tendency not to be "members of any professional hospitality associations" and thus, being "in isolation from the main stream of hotel industry", lacked encouragement (Buick, 2003: 243). His survey of 57 small Scottish hotels revealed that 67% owned a PC, and that 60% of these were very dependent on their PC. Main reasons for non-ownership were 'not required' (44%) and cost (38%). Main (1995) also cites cost as a principle reason in a survey of independent hotels in Wales. Significantly, 68% of non-owners have a web-page, which compares with 80% of PC owners. Only 18% use their PC for reservations. Main applications are word processing (54%) and spreadsheets (44%). An online presence does not necessitate ownership of a PC, though Buick does not reveal whether the absence of a PC precludes the use of e-mail by telephony.

Buhalis & Deimezi (2004) examined online practices in the Greek tourist sector. They revealed that "e-commerce is in its infancy" (Buhalis & Deimezi, 2004: 108) with less than 5% of reservations coming through the internet for many of the businesses surveyed. Online bookings tended to be received by larger businesses and only 6% of hotels and lodgings offered a real-time booking facility with 'on the spot' confirmation. For those businesses, e-mails and online booking forms were the most common form of online booking (44% and 59%, respectively). They report that the Greek domestic market was not Internet orientated which, together with satisfaction

with telephone use and also the accommodation provider's relationship with tour operators, each perhaps contributed to a limited online presence by accommodation providers.

A questionnaire survey was carried out by Duffy (2006), investigating the ICT adoption characteristics of small and medium sized accommodation providers within Co. Donegal, characterised as a rural or peripheral area. The responses (25 from B&Bs and 25 from self-catering accommodation providers), reinforced by a focus group session, revealed that most ICT users received the majority of their reservation enquiries via e-mail, but required time to deal with responses and had a low conversion rate. Duffy (2006: 190) found that the main barriers to ICT use were: "lack of IT training, cost of relevant software/hardware, security concerns, dependency on outside experts". The major barriers to ICT use were: "fear of technology itself and the fear of displaying ignorance of IT especially to peers". Whilst none of the respondents had broadband, connectivity was not named as an issue. Duffy raised concern about the lack of insight by those businesses that made little use of ICT.

The four surveys suggest that variation in uptake of ICT is a function of knowledge, requirements, fear, risk and expense. Hospitality businesses have different views and approaches about how best to exploit online technologies. These become important when considering the uptake within the hospitality sector of what is possibly a complex ICT application – online booking (Proll et al, 1998).

1.5.3 <u>Online Booking Practices</u>

The importance of online bookings is highlighted in the Scottish Tourism Strategy: "The ultimate aim is for businesses to provide 24-hour online booking facilities" (Scottish Executive, 2006: 31). However, to achieve this is both potentially and actually problematic for the smaller organisations as evidenced by the study conducted by Nysveen & Lexhagen (2001). They examined the use of the Internet for room bookings in a survey of 302 Swedish hotels, many of which were hotel chain members. They identified three distinct booking approaches: e-mails, online forms and online booking systems. E-mails and online forms involved manual intervention and were as time consuming as telephone or fax bookings. Online booking systems required less intervention, but incurred third party transaction costs and tended to be used by larger hotels or chains.

In a study of the use of online booking engines by SMEs in New Zealand, Landvogt (2004: online) reveals that not only do few SMEs use online booking engines, but of those that do "price and availability is often out of date, inaccurate or missing". Buhalis (2003: 221) suggests that non-use of online booking systems is in part due to the difficulty of "describing, standardising and managing rationally the hospitality product electronically". The booking process, irrespective of whether it is online, is affected by a number of factors which include "occupancy rates, overbooking policy, percentage of non-guarantee no-shows, hotel size, room rates and types of guests preferred" (Meidan & Chiu, 1995: 205). This suggests that practices require decisions that are not readily programmed into an online booking facility.

Furthermore, and raised by Lituchy & Rail (2000), is the desire for personal contact during the booking process, a theme that appears to be overlooked in studies of Internet use.

1.5.4 <u>Online Purchasing Practices</u>

The specific issue of online purchasing appears to have received little attention in the literature, both within tourism and more generally. A study of online purchasing practices was carried out by Davila (2003), who examined mainly large-medium US manufacturing companies during late 2000 – early 2001. Four online purchasing approaches are described: direct, market exchanges, auctions and purchasing consortia. He found that only 34% of those engaged in online practices had been doing so for over a year, with many organisations experimenting with it. Lancioni et al (2003: 211) noted a shift "from indiscriminate application" to a more focused approach. Kothari (2005) examined the online purchasing practices of 14 city based US hotels and revealed the immature level of uptake and compatibility concerns between online and traditional practices. Sigala's (2005) examination of Greek food-service operators, both small and franchisee/chain, revealed that purchasing systems were exclusively used by franchisees/chains whilst nearly two-thirds of the operators surveyed did not engage in online purchases. Whilst online purchasing may offer opportunities, even larger originations appear slow in exploiting this, with most of the effort focused upon revenue generation related activities.

1.5.5 <u>Resistance to Implementation</u>

Whilst the benefits of going online have been extolled, the issue of resistance has also been raised (see Duffy, 2006 above; also Whitaker, 1987; Buhalis & Main, 1998; Heung, 2003). However, Miles & Thomas (1996) in their study of media technologies, argue for the need to "unpack" the notion of resistance to differentiate between the different degrees of limited use and outright rejection (Miles & Thomas, 1996: 272).

Resistance by individuals can be expected. Main (1995) states that older people, females and the lower qualified, are specific groups less likely to use IT. Indeed, the tourism industry is characterised by being labour intensive, with "a high proportion of female and migrant workers, a relatively young, transient and low-skilled work-force with relatively low pay, high turnover and precarious working conditions" (Baines, 1998: 161). Thus, usage can be viewed as potentially problematic.

Resistance by organisations is also to be expected. An early study into IT implementation in UK hotels (Whitaker, 1987), highlighted implementation barriers not unfamiliar to ERP implementations: supplier conflict, internal resistance, financial "outlay for uncertain returns" and, in particular, training. It was noted that substantial improvements could be gained prior to an IT implementation, which was explained by the changes (due to "rethinking from first principles", Whitaker (1987: 233)) in strategy and practices that preceded the implementation. However, this perhaps relates more to larger organisations than to smaller family sized businesses.

Other studies have examined the level of uptake of ICT in the hospitality sector, for example, ownership of PCs, applications used and internet connectedness (e.g. Main, 1995, Buhalis & Main, 1998; Main, 2001; Wei et al, 2001; Buick, 2003; Law & Jogaratnam, 2005; Duffy, 2006). What is significant from these studies is not the sophistication of ICT use (e.g. the provision of a complete reservation service, including cancellation (Gilbert et al, 1999)), but non-use. Whilst the former can be explained by the availability of resources, competencies and commitment to implement and maintain an online reservation service, why do 33% of the small hotels surveyed by Buick (2003) not own a PC and how do these contrast with the 67% who do? Buhalis & Main (1998) in their study of small and medium sized hospitality organisations in three peripheral localities: rural Wales, Alpine France and the Greek Aegean Islands, concluded that IT was under-utilised, tending to be used for operational activities (e.g. reservations, word-processing and accounts). Reasons cited for under-utilisation were:

- no training;

- age, educational attainment and family circumstances;

- non-rational management practices including absence of the marketing function; and

- managerial short-termist operational focus.

Unlike large businesses, small businesses have fewer people and many are family businesses.

Making reference to residential users, Corrocher (2002) identifies five reasons for non-use of the internet: access speed, difficulty of use, lack of interest, information overload and lack of trust, which, when added to cost and relevance (Mutch, 1995; Buick, 2003) are all valid reasons for business non-use, particularly for smaller businesses. A study of SME online practices by Drew (2003) highlighted that "high-tech/knowledge intensive firms were notably more sophisticated in their use of Internet technologies" (Drew, 2003: 83). Thus, the inclination to adopt appears to reflect the views, attributes and background of the key decision-makers within small businesses. These have been categorised by Martin (2005) who identifies warriors, interpreters, clerks and priests. This may partially explain the degree to which businesses embrace ICT and by whom. Furthermore, we are reminded by Southern & Tilley (2000: 152) that "when small firms use the technology complex relations unfold", highlighting the need to examine the ongoing fit between technology, the users and the practices within the context of business objectives and benefits.

1.5.6 <u>Geographical Barriers to Implementation</u>

It can be argued that geographical location can impact the adoption of online practices. This has been examined by Forman et al (2002, 2005), who reveal that rural areas were as likely to adopt basic online technologies (e.g. browsers, email), whilst urban areas are more likely to take the lead on complex application "requiring technical support and third party servicing". However, they also note that uptake varies according to industry and that the geographical distribution of industries is a factor affecting geographical variation.

A study by Nodder et al (2003) examines ICT adoption/use by SMEs in New Zealand. They highlight the relatively high level of ICT uptake by B&B businesses. However, they reveal the "tendency to rely on larger portals provided by RTOs or private companies" (Nodder et al, 2003: 359). Furthermore, they observe that the "adoption and effective use of ICT is higher in urban areas where infrastructure provision is greater, as is access to technical expertise and training" (Nodder et al, 2003: 359). They highlight the role of 'professional advice' for website development or software purchases and the role of informal networks for "information and advice on technology related issues", which provided an "ICT acumen" building experience (Nodder et al, 2003: 361). Amongst their conclusions they state: "most important though is the facilitation of networks that can play a role in fostering technology uptake" (Nodder et al, 2003: 362). This examination of third party involvement in ICT uptake highlights that businesses do not operate in isolation.

1.5.7 Stakeholder Influence and Public Sector Intervention

Recognition of stakeholders' influence has been acknowledged by Buhalis & Main (1998) in their study of small and medium sized hospitality organisations (SMHOs). They argue that SMHOs can significantly benefit from IT, and that stakeholders with an interest in SMHO welfare, have a role as catalysts to either push or pull IT into a SMHO. These stakeholders include customers, strategic partners and the Public Sector.

The impact of government policies on ICT uptake in small firms has been examined by Fuller & Southern (1999). They suggest that a difference exists between the small firm and the policy maker, about why the small firm should take-up ICT. They highlight that ICT tends to be developed for larger organisations and thus tends to lack application to the way small firms operate. Rather than encourage uptake, this can deter uptake on the grounds of additional work and risk. From a policy perspective, rather than understand the "small firm experience of ICT", policy makers have promoted the re-education of owner-managers about the opportunities offered by ICT, but without demonstrating the benefits of ICT. This is due to the unfounded assumptions that policy makers hold:

- ICT holds the same meaning for the small firm, the small-firm sector and for the economy;

- ICT is core to competitiveness of both small firms and the economy;

- increased competitiveness will lead to increased employment;

- increased ICT skills will lead to increased employment;

- awareness of ICT is sufficient to effect change in small firms; and

- realisation of the potential of ICT will, through intuitive actions, lead to benefits.

They argue against the technology push of policy makers stating that "adoption and implementation must surely be in the hands of the owner/manager" (Fuller & Southern, 1999: 300). Instead "Small firms use ICTs as and when required, and no amount of technology push will break down this principle" (Fuller & Southern, 1999: 300). This message is iterated by Martin (2004: 89) "small firms need to be seen in the context of their own reality in terms of sector, size, experience and aspirations,

rather than as a homogeneous body of firms requiring standard support". Likewise, Beckinsale et al (2006: 368-369) note that "government policies and strategies have little influence on SME internet adoption" and that "SMEs rely more heavily on their own and local knowledge".

Furthermore, there may be the tacit assumption that non-users of the Internet are disadvantaged in some way and must be coaxed into using it: "the non-internet computer users must be further convinced of the value of the Web as a complement to the use of the PC" (Corrocher, 2002: 17). However, there are clearly different reasons for non-use. Wyatt et al (2002) present a typology of non-users: 'resisters' (do not want to use), 'rejecters' (choose to discontinue use), 'excluded' (no access) and 'expelled' (loss of access possibly due to cost). This has clear policy implications in that each have different policy requirements (Wyatt, 2003), for example, the provision of infrastructure or services.

1.6   Implications

The insight gained from this review suggests that the tacitly held deterministic views of policy makers about the benefits of technology, in particular online technologies, are at odds with the reality of the business, in particular the smaller business. The reality of the business which Martin (2004) refers to, can be viewed as a complex of changing and interacting psychological (fear, risk), social (knowledge, requirements) and economic (cost, return) factors, where satisfaction with the status quo is at odds with the political or economical imperative of the policy makers. Rather than a

homogeneous body for which a standard ICT implementation template can be developed, businesses are more appropriately characterised as a "heterogeneous and complex mix" (Martin & Matley, 2001: 407); adopters choose if and how they want to exploit online technologies and idiosyncratic practices are contingent upon local context of application. Indeed, exploitation can be viewed as 'innovation' following that of both Cragg & Zinatelli (1995) and Graham et al (1996) (this point will be developed further below).

However, the preceding insight suggests that both heterogeneity and innovative behaviour is not widely recognised. Whilst descriptive accounts identify the nature and level of uptake and provide explanations or reasons for this, arguably the practices of online users are not understood. The manner of investigation perhaps hinders this. At least nineteen of the references cited were questionnaire-based studies in contrast to three which involved semi-structured interviews.

Certain scholars have already noted this. O'Connor & Murphy (2004), for instance, in a review of research into IT within the hospitality sector, comment upon the predominance of the use of survey methodology within tourism. They state that much of the empirical research is descriptive, over-reliant upon surveys and, by not examining "actual behaviour", fails "to show causality". Lynn (2002: ii) goes further and critiques research in the tourism sector stating that there is too much description of "current opinions or practices"; managers are asked "what they think are the underlying causes". He calls for a shift from descriptive approaches to quantitative methods establishing causal relations that can support practitioner decision-making.

However, Botterill et al's (2002) review of 149 UK and Irish doctoral theses on tourism topics (for the period 1990-99) revealed that qualitative approaches tended to be marginally more common (58%) than quantitative approaches (42%), though questionnaires predominated (30%) with interviews and ethnographic studies comprising 22% and 14%, respectively, of the approaches adopted. Under 10% of approaches combined quantitative and qualitative methods. Botterill et al (2002: 293) suggest that "a Humean empirical truth"[74] dominated research methods and that there "was little sign of any explicit engagement with epistemological debate".

This epistemological debate has received much attention within the IS (Information Systems) domain. Hirschheim & Klein (1989) have drawn upon the paradigmatic framework offered by Burrell and Morgan (1979) to distinguish between 'alternative conceptions' of information systems development (e.g. functionalist, social relativist). Orlikowski & Baroudi (1991) in a review of 150 IS research papers published between 1983 and 1998, reveal a predominantly positivist stance (96.8%), with nearly a quarter (23.9%) of these being descriptive or 'factual' accounts, this reflecting the survey – laboratory orientation of publications. Despite the espoused emergence of a non-positivistic stance (interpretivistic) in IS research, Mingers' (2003a) survey of 902 IS research papers published between1993 and 2000 revealed that around 75% assumed a positivistic stance. Likewise, Chen & Hirschheim (2004), in their review of 1,893 IS research papers published between 1991 and 2001, also reveals the predominance of positivism (81%), with surveys (41%) and

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[74] One based upon observation and experience

case studies (36%) being the preferred method. Each of the three reviewers suggest this positivistic orientation reflects the cultural or institutional norms of the local research environment as well as journal bias, whilst the latter two reviewers also highlight the deterrent nature of time-consuming approaches (e.g. interviews, ethnography) associated with the interpretivist stance. Nevertheless each reviewer iterates the need to consider the appropriateness of different methods for the research questions raised.

Appendix 2   CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF TECHNOLOGY

The history of the Internet is not an instance of historical inevitability… the Internet we have today was not the only possible choice. There were alternatives not chosen; for example, systems based on videotex technologies or proprietary e-mail services used in the 1980s. At different moments during the history of the Internet, closure has been variously made and undone, with the involvement of new actors, the connection of networks using different protocols, and the development of new interfaces and applications

(Thomas, G. & Wyatt, S., 1999: 696)

2.1   Introduction

New technology is typically characterised by uncertainty, despite efforts to make it predictable. The reason for uncertainty is due to the multitude of possibilities that may arise about the way it develops, diffuses or is used, whether deliberate or otherwise. Furthermore, new technology may have consequences other than those intended. Indeed, the factors affecting decisions about development, diffusion or use may have little to do with the technology itself. Instead, these decisions may be based upon unrelated issues such as for commercial, political or emotional reasons. This highlights the social context of technology and suggests that technology, no matter how we consider it, is not clearly understood.

The aim here is to examine different analytical conceptualisations of technology to identify the various interpretations of what it is that constitutes technology. It aims to establish what technology is and how it comes into being and is used. Due to the magnitude of such a task, only an overview of the salient issues is presented.

This appendix examines the conceptualisation of technology and its creation, diffusion and uptake. It is presented in three sections.

The first section (2.2) examines how technology has been conceived in terms of what it is and how it has been taken up and used. It commences with an overview of a more conventional view of technology, which is followed by an outline of an alternative view of technology. This latter view calls for the 'workings' of technology to be examined, raising the issue of establishing the nature of technology and how it comes into being and is used, which is explored. With emphasis upon users, four modes of uptake, reflecting different views about innovative activity, are examined, innofusion, 'democratised innovation', 'domestication' and 'social learning'. Finally, attention focuses upon one debate that arises from this unpacking, about whether technologies have deterministic properties (essentialism) or are to be read as text (anti-essentialism).

The second section (2.3) examines the specific case of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (the object of interest within this thesis), focusing upon the issue of virtuality.

The third section (2.4) explores how technology and, specifically, digital technologies have been viewed from a spatial perspective.

2.2   Unpacking 'Technology'

Our understanding of "technology" perhaps commences with establishing the meaning ascribed to the word. The Standard Oxford English Dictionary (OED) (2nd edition) defines "technology" as:

> 1a. A discourse or treatise on an art or arts; the scientific study of the practical or industrial arts
> b. transf. Practical arts collectively
> c. With a and pl. A particular practical or industrial art
> 2. The terminology of a particular art or subject; technical nomenclature.

Technology appears to be associated with activity, the language that goes with the activity and accounts of that activity. This activity is referred to as an "art", which itself is defined as:

> Skill; its display or application
> 1. gen. Skill in doing anything as the result of knowledge and practice
> 2. a. Human skill as an agent, human workmanship. Opposed to nature.

The product of this - skill - art - technology is an "artefact" defined as "Anything made by human art and workmanship; an artificial product". It is inferred that a feature of technology is the knowledge (cf. Misa, 1992) that is associated with the accounts generated and skills developed.

Kline (1985) offers four definitions of technology based on usage of the term: 1) hardware or an artefact; 2) a sociotechnical system of manufacture; 3) knowledge, technique, know-how or methodology; 4) a sociotechnical system of use.

Common to both the OED and Kline are notions of artefact and the knowledge and practices relating to the artefact. However, Fleck & Howells (2001) highlight how

easy it is to privilege the artefactual element, because it is visible. Indeed, it is not uncommon for everyday use of the word technology to point to the 'artefact' and in doing so ignore any human involvement. This exposes a boundary between what constitutes technology and humans (cf. Grint & Woolgar; 1997: 9). Moreover, and moving from the status of technology to its effect, some would be bold enough to claim technology has the capability to bring about revolution, though others might deem this linguistic carelessness: "Technology has revolutionised the practice of revenue management" (Yeoman, 2006: 1). Nevertheless, this statement underpins a view that technology causes social changes.

2.2.1 <u>Technology determinism</u>

This conventional deterministic view of technology considers technology as a black box (Edge, 1995: 14). The technology itself is not questioned; there is little consideration of how the technology comes into being and 'works'. Instead, attention focuses upon its effect or social impact. People adapt to technology rather than shape it (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999: 5). It is neutral, it does not take sides, it is benign[75]; "all that matters is the way societies choose to use them" (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999: 4). It is as if technology resides outside society (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999: 5), that technology is independent of humans.

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[75] The online Oxford English Dictionary (visited 23rd Feb. 2009) offers a variety of definitions of the word 'neutral of which two have particular relevance here: 1. "not taking sides in a controversy, dispute, disagreement, etc.",   2. "having no strongly marked effects, characteristics, etc.; undefined, indefinite, vague". [http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.webfeat.lib.ed.ac.uk]

Furthermore, the development of technology is viewed as unproblematic. It is a sequential or linear process with 'inevitable' outcomes that follow a "largely pre-determined technical 'trajectory'" (Edge, 1995: 14[76]) or an "internal technical logic" (Russell & Williams, 1988: 1) and that "particular paths of technical change were inevitable" (the 'technological imperative') (Williams & Edge, 1992: 4). Technological innovations diffuse to users who passively adopt and use them (see next section on Diffusion).

2.2.2 Roger's "Diffusion of Innovations" Model (1962 to 2003)

Perhaps one of the most influential models to explain how innovations are adopted was first published in 1962 by Everett Rogers, in "Diffusion of Innovations". Over its four subsequent editions, the model of the diffusion process was refined.

Rogers (1995: 10) defines diffusion as "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system". His focus is upon adoption by individuals, though he does explore issues related to the implementation of an innovation within organisations. Rogers explores the concept of an innovation and suggests that defining the boundary around an innovation is problematical. He presents the concept of a 'technology cluster' to explain the simultaneous emergence of set of interdependent innovations which more realistically captures what takes place.

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[76] Originally published as EDGE, D. (1987) The Social Shaping of Technology. Edinburgh PICT Working Paper No. 1, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University.

He examines the:

- generation of innovations, presenting a linear model comprising research, development and commercialisation. It is 'manufacturer-centric' (von Hippel, 2005: 1);

- attributes of innovations (rate of adoption, relative advantage, compatibility, complexity ["difficulty to understand and use" (Rogers, 1995: 242)], trialability [pre-adoption experimentation], observability [visibility to others]);

- innovation-adoption decision process (five stages);

- adopter characteristics - innovativeness – individual vs. Organisation;

- role of the change agent;

- diffusion networks and the role of interpersonal communication, introducing the notion of social learning, where one person learns from observing another person; and

- consequences of innovation (desirable/undesirable, anticipated/unanticipated, direct/indirect, equilibrium/disequilibrium, equality/inequality).

A simple five stage linear model of the innovation implementation process in organisations is presented:

1. agenda-setting: establishing need;

2. matching: identifying a suitable innovation;

3. redefining/restructuring: modifying innovation to suit application, modifying organisation to accommodate innovation;

4. clarifying: refining the relationship between innovation and organisation; and

5. routinising: internalising innovation as an integral part of the organisation… no longer a separate identity.

Lyytinen & Damsgaard (2001) claim that this diffusion model is suitable for 'discrete packages' within a 'homogeneous population' where decisions are taken in isolation, but question its suitability for complex networked technologies (e.g. in their case Electronic Data Interchange: EDI), where decisions are taken within the context of other decisions. Taking a social construction perspective (section 2.2.4), they note the interpretive flexibility offered by technologies, the fluid non-homogeneity of the 'diffusion space', the role of industry associations and government, deviations from Roger's adopter characteristics and the complexity inherent in the adoption process over a long period of time, which is characterised by power relations, blurred boundaries between stages and feedback mechanisms, all allegedly deficient in Roger's diffusion model.

Furthermore, Lyytinen & Damsgaard (2001: 181) contest the notion of 'forces' pushing and pulling the adoption process. This invokes a deterministic view of the adoption process, that the presence of a force will give rise to a particular behaviour and that there is sufficiency in the market pull or supply push to give rise to adoption. Groth (1993: 41) suggests that these external "factors play an instrumental role in the success of efforts to exploit a particular technology". This notion of externalities in contrast to internal factors raises the question of their relative importance and introduces the notion that there are 'drivers' or governing factors affecting the adoption process (e.g. Beckinsale et al, 2006).

The Rogers diffusion model does not distinguish between different types of innovations. However, Islam & Meade (1997) distinguishes three types of diffusion processes that reflect different technological developments: the introduction of completely novel innovations, the substitute of one technology by another and the incremental development of successive generations of a technology, with each generation, Islam & Meade note, attracting different adopters.

Whilst Roger's model is 'manufacturer-centric', Rogers introduces the concept of 're-invention' to explain user-centric innovation: "the degree to which an innovation is changed or modified by a user in the process of its adoption and implementation" (Rogers, 1995: 174). This is a theme developed by Fleck (1988) with 'innofusion', and von Hippel (2005) who introduces the concept of 'democratised innovation' (both discussed below).

2.2.3 <u>Revised conceptualisations of technology</u>

Opposition to the deterministic view of technology has led to efforts to open up the black box and reveal its workings in terms of "social actors, processes and images" (Winner, 1993) i.e. to breakdown the barrier and restore human participation within the development and use of technology.

These efforts have emerged under the umbrella of Science and Technology Studies (STS) in a variety of forms, for example, Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK),

Social Construction of Technology (SCOT), Actor Network Theory (ANT), Social Shaping of Technology (SST), Socio-technical Systems, Innovation-Diffusion Studies and the Management of Technology (MoT). These studies are conceptually rich and embrace different, but not exclusive, views of technology. Underpinning each is the notion of 'social', which embraces "organisational, political, economic and cultural" factors (Williams & Edge, 1996). It is beyond the scope of this appendix to pay anything other than lip-service to them in terms of giving account of them, of which there are a number (e.g. Grint & Woolgar, 1997: 6-38; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999: 3-27; Cutcliffe & Mitcham, 2001: 1-64; Russell & Williams, 2002: 37-132). Nevertheless, the selective examination of some of the more prominent views reveals the contrast with the technology deterministic view. One of the earliest accounts was the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT).

2.2.4 <u>The Social Construction of Technology (SCOT)</u>

In 1984, Pinch & Bijker presented SCOT in their seminal paper "The Social Construction of Facts and Artefacts: or how the sociology of science and the sociology of technology might benefit each other". This introduced the central tenets of the constructivist approach, in particular, the notion that the different interpretations of technologies by individuals and 'social groups' can lead to different development paths and uses. Meaning arises through social interactions and does not reside "in the technology itself" (Bijker, 1995: 6). Underpinning this approach is the need to account not only for successful outcomes, but also the unsuccessful, thereby providing a 'symmetrical' account.

Pinch & Bijker (1984) introduce the notion of 'relevant social group' to describe any group of actors who "share the same set of meanings, attached to an artefact". The interpretative flexibility of an artefact relates to the scope offered by an artefact in how it can be viewed and designed. The different ways of thinking about the artefact, in particular, about the problems associated with it, gives rise to different solutions and the emergence of different development paths. As different possibilities are eliminated, the interpretative flexibility of the artefact converges upon a reducing number of possibilities, giving rise to 'stabilisation' and 'closure'. Later, Bijker (1995) clarified these concepts. Stabilisation occurs when there is convergence in the variations or variety associated with the artefact within a social group, i.e. criteria defining the artefact emerges, which can be revealed through an analysis of language used. Closure arises when "only one interpretation is accepted by all" (Bijker, 1995: 85), in other words, there is a reduction in the interpretative flexibility within and, particularly, between social groups, with one dominant design emerging. Two mechanisms are suggested to achieve closure: rhetoric and problem redefinition. The former, perhaps a 'knock-down argument', is persuasive without demonstrating the invalidity of other arguments (Bijker, 1995: 86), whilst the latter dissolves the need for different interpretations, thereby improving relevance to otherwise disinterested social groups (Pinch & Bijker, 1984).

This contrasting view to that of technology determinism reveals fundamental issues about how both the nature of technology and the relationship between the artefact and people, are viewed. This is examined in the following three sections.

2.2.5 'Technology' – the black box opened up

The call to open up the black box of 'technology' to reveal its workings exposes the elements that it comprises, at the most generic level, people and the artefact.

Recognition of the interplay between the social and technological was first published in Trist & Bamforth (1951) in their examination of coalface work practices. This was a precursor to Eric Trist and Fred Emery's development of the concept of socio-technical systems, the notion that to examine technology implies a study of the social and together they constitute a whole. Some years later, Rip & Kemp (1998) presented an alternative view of technology as stratified: components are configured into devices which are configured into working systems. Their inference was that technologies are "configurations that work" (Rip & Kemp, 1998: 330), which can be interpreted that because they work they are successfully embedded in the social. Hughes (1986) suggests that this embedding is such that they form a "seamless web". The embedding is a process of co-production (Russell & Williams, 2002: 50-52) or co-evolution (Sellen & Harper, 2001: 186). This coalescing of technology and social creates difficulty for observers who attempt to distinguish between what is the social and what is technology. However, there have been several attempts to unpack this seamless web.

The notion of configuration has been developed by Fleck (1988), who distinguishes four classes of technology:

- Discrete: stand-alone, self-explanatory, self-contained packages typified by consumer products and ready to use;

- Component: building blocks;

- System: "complexes" of component technologies with properties that arise from the collective functionality of the system with a discernable "technology trajectory"; and

- Configurational: unique "complexes" of component technologies with properties that arise from the collective functionality of the system, but with no necessary discernable "technology trajectory", though stabilisation may result in their 'crystallisation' and the emergence of "stable systems".

The distinction is made between systems and configurations, though Fleck states this distinction "is very much a matter of degree" (Fleck, 1992: 40). The latter's openness to possibilities necessitates user participation in drawing out (innofusion or user innovation) these possibilities, though, recurring configurations may emerge and stabilise or 'crystallise', perhaps leading to contingency specific generic systems (Fleck, 1992: 8).

Another relatively early typology for technology is that of Carl Mitcham, whose view of technology distinguishes between object, process, knowledge and volition (Mitcham, 1980). Rip & Kemp (1998) identify artefacts and machines, but embed them within a "technological regime" (cf. Fleck's (1988) citation of Metcalfe, 1985), which denotes the "rule-set or grammar" of the technology discipline (Rip & Kemp, 1998: 338), and a "sociotechnical landscape", which denotes that "something around us that we can travel through" (Rip & Kemp, 1998: 334), whether this is society at

large or the household. A landscape contrasts with a "niche" which is a managed "protected space" to allow the formation of markets for new technologies (Schot et al, 1994: 1073).

One systemic way to think about the complexity associated with the development of a technology has been conceived by Molina (1990), who presents the concept of a "sociotechnical constituency". He later defines a sociotechnical constituency as:

> dynamic ensembles of technical constituents (e.g. machines, instruments) and social constituents (e.g. institutions, interest groups) which interact and shape each other in the course of the creation , production and diffusion of specific technologies (Molina, 1997: 604).

An alternative view is presented by Orlikowski & Scott (2008a, b), who present the concept of sociomateriality to avert distinguishing "discrete entities" of human actors and technological artefacts influencing each other. Instead, it views materiality as "intrinsic to everyday activities and relations" (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008a: 20). "Form, attributes and capabilities" (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008a: 21) are acquired through the entanglement or interpenetration of people and technologies, which is not fixed or pre-given, but enacted in practice or performed: "all practices are (re)configured by some specific sociomateriality" (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008b: 25). In other words, rather than discrete entities in interaction, they propose that entities exist through their relations or interactions, and draw upon Actor Network Theory, as it makes no distinction between human and technology (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008b, 22).

Whilst the preceding views provide insight into the nature of a socio-technical system, they illustrate the issue raised by Fleck & Howells (2001) about lack of clarity regarding what is technology. In their discussion of the meaning of 'technology', they found that definitions varied from discipline to discipline, revealing context specific orientations. Nevertheless, each identified the artefact, but embedded within "a specified pattern of human activity and organisational or social context" (Fleck & Howells, 2001: 524). Their synthesis of these definitions revealed a variety of elements, of which there was overlap, but which collectively constitute the "Technology Complex" (Figure A - 1). This framework provides "a means of 'resolving' the imprecise terms 'social' and 'technical' into more precise constituent elements" (Fleck & Howells, 2001: 525). In considering a definition of technology, they "suggest 'knowledge and activity related to artefacts'" (Fleck & Howells, 2001: 525). Whilst it is easy to privilege the artefact because it is visible, this potentially creates problems during implementation due to the 'softer' elements of the technology complex being neglected.

Underpinning each of the latter views of technology presented above, is the aforementioned notion of configuration of technological and social elements. Indeed, this notion of configuration is invoked in the different descriptions of the partnering of technological and social elements, irrespective of whether one views the elements and their relations as 'heterogeneous assemblages' (Larkin, 1969, Landstrom, 2000), 'socio-technical ensembles' (Bijker (1995: 269), 'sociotechnical constituencies' (Molina, 1990, 1997) or 'sociomaterial assemblages' (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008a, b).

TECHNOLOGY COMPLEX
Basic purpose or function
Material
Energy source
Artefacts/hardware
Layout
Procedures (programs/software)
Knowledge/skills/qualified people
Work organisation
Management techniques
Cost/capital
Organisational structure
Industry structure (suppliers, users, promoters)
Location
Social relations
Culture

Figure A - 1   The Technology Complex (Fleck & Howells, 2001)

Furthermore, this notion of configuration appears fundamentally relevant to the successful exploitation of technologies, whether new or established. Fleck (1994) states that the implementation process for configurational technologies is context guided, involves "learning by struggling" – innofusion, and is non-linear and iterative. The "operating system" results from the configuration of "technical, organisational and financial resources" (Fleck, 1994: 640).

This raises issues about how technologies come into being and are taken up and used. It also raises the question of how technologies change.

2.2.6 'Technology' – birth, uptake and use

The Technology Complex suggests that any given technology is a blend of elements which, if correctly mixed in the 'right' amounts, create a product – the artefact,

which users will take up and use. This invocation of a prescriptive solution suggests that organisations can assemble teams of technical experts whose knowledge of specific technologies collectively will lead to creative activity which produces 'must-have' solutions which will take the market by storm.

This argument is flawed and oversimplifies the complex dynamic involving scientific activity, producer innovation, diffusion, consumption, domestication and any other related activities as well as all the variety that is associated with all of this. One feature of this dynamic activity is the distinction between producers and users of technologies and the recognition that innovative activity is not confined to producers. Users themselves may innovate to enable use and may, in-turn, supply their innovations to others, i.e. become innovation producers. Indeed, the manner that users implement technologies has drawn analytical attention (and is the object of interest in this thesis), with a variety of modes being distinguished.

The most basic mode is perhaps diffusion, which has been examined by Rogers (1995) (section 2.2.2). It emphasises the communication process between producers and users and the manner in which a technology is dispersed and adopted. Although user innovation is acknowledged, the model arguably assumes passive uptake and use of a producer innovation.

Fleck's (1998) "Innofusion"

This contrasts with 'innofusion' (Fleck, 1988), defined as the "diffusion, adoption and development process", with users active in this process. Fleck questions the distinction between innovation and diffusion suggesting that, for 'configurational'

technologies in particular, the boundary between these is blurred, i.e. it conflates the processes of diffusion and innovation and places them at the location of the user. Applied initially to conceptualise the implementation of robots within an industrial context, innofusion is particularly relevant to configurational technologies (e.g. ERP systems), where on-site developments by users are required to make the supplied technologies work and necessarily entails active involvement of the technology producers, who provide technical expertise.

Fleck discusses the concept of knowledge in the context of the innovation - diffusion process, distinguishing between knowledge that exists prior to and that which emerges during this process. Implementation is "an organisational learning process" and a successful implementation is the sum of "generic technology knowledge + local practical knowledge" this constituting "the fundamental implementation equation" (Fleck, 1992: 31).

The technology development process is viewed as non-linear and characterised by options, choice, which invokes negotiation, and increasing lock-in to specific developmental trajectories, reflecting the closure of options and the stabilisation or convergence of design variety. Fleck et al (1989: 23) questions the concept of a technology trajectory "as emerging from the unfolding of an inner technical logic" or as "predicated upon the maintenance of a stable set of social, economic and technical forces, which serve to generate the necessary uni-directionality of technological development" in a study of CNC machine tools, robotics, office automation (word-processing) and CAPM. Whilst trajectories may be identified retrospectively, their

prediction is "inherently risky and problematic" (Fleck et al, 1989: 23). Instead, it is proposed that for such technologies in particular, trajectories can be frustrated by the "tensions within the sphere of the implementation" (Fleck et al, 1989).

Fleck & Howells (2001) contrasts the development of robots with aircraft. Whereas the design and development of aircraft is fundamentally determined by the physical laws of nature, robotic design is driven by usage and thereby reflects the social and political conditions (e.g. work practices and government policy). In the former case, the development of "'best solutions' to unchanging physical laws has led to the emergence of specific development trajectories. However, different situational requirements have led to the proliferation of robotic designs. Fleck & Howells (2001: 530) conclude that "different technologies appear to vary in the degree to which they are 'socially shaped' or 'technologically-determined'".

Von Hippel's (2005) "democratised innovation"

The third mode, which views the user as an innovator, has been examined by von Hippel (2005). Von Hippel recognises that end-users can be prolific innovators in their own right and describes the capacity of the user to innovate as "democratised innovation". Users innovate, perhaps due to the enjoyment of doing it, but more importantly, due to the cost of contracting to someone else and to meet their specific requirements. User generated innovations tend to be generated by 'Lead Users' (von Hippel, 2005: 4), who have two characteristics – they recognise the market trends earlier than other users and they anticipate benefits from finding a solution. Innovation typically entails a problem-solving process involving trial and error. Users "tend to develop innovations that are functionally novel" (von Hippel, 2005:

8), based upon rich user-need and use-context information. This contrasts with manufacturers, who "tend to develop innovations that are improvements on well-known needs and that require a rich understanding of solution information for their development" (von Hippel, 2005: 8). User innovation "tends to be widely distributed" (ibid.) involving many users and entails "many forms of cooperation" (von Hippel, 2005: 10), for example, direct and informal or organised. The collective behaviour is portrayed within the notion of an "innovation community… nodes consisting of individuals or firms interconnected by information transfer links which may involve face-to-face, electronic or other communication" (von Hippel, 2005: 96). However, one cost may be the absence of Intellectual Property (IP) rights.

Unlike manufacturers, users tend to privately invest in innovation activities then "freely reveal" (von Hippel, 2005: 9) the product of this activity for the public good, giving up their intellectual property rights (e.g. open source software). This "intriguing puzzle" (von Hippel & von Krogh, 2003: 213) is explained as perhaps "the best or only practical option available" (von Hippel, 2005: 10) and may give rise to "significant private benefits" (von Hippel, 2005: 10) (e.g. suggestions for improvement, enhanced status). This behaviour is presented as a "private-collective model of innovation" (von Hippel & von Krogh, 2003: 216), which provides a middle ground between two contrasting models explaining the incentive to innovate: the profitable returns from private investment in the innovation activity (the private-investment model; ibid.) and the relinquishment of knowledge in the interests of the public good within a domain of collective innovation activity (the collective-action model; ibid.).

Since only those users privileged with access to the requisite resources will innovate, von Hippel states that the democratisation of innovation occurs when:

> users of products and services – both firms and individual consumers – are increasingly able to innovate for themselves (von Hippel, 2005: 1).

This provides an opportunity for manufacturers to improve their innovativeness by seeking out and exploiting user innovations. This can be developed further through the provision of toolkits to users. Citing the example of semi-conductors, this new approach may change the industry structure as users take an increasing role in designing their own custom products.

The value of this framework is that it shifts attention from the manufacturer to the user as an independent innovator.

Domestication

The next mode is less concerned with innovation and, instead, examines how objects (i.e. technologies) enter and establish meaning. In other words, how they are domesticated into the daily life of the household. Developed by Silverstone et al (1992) in the context of media, the concept of domestication has been further developed by others (e.g. Aune, 1996; Sorensen et al, 2000; Pierson, 2006).

In developing the concept of domestication, Silverstone et al (1992) draw upon the notion developed by Kopytoff that objects or "things have biographies" (Kopytoff, 1986: 66), which through their changes "reveal the changing qualities of the shaping environments through which they pass" (Silverstone et al, 1992: 17). One possible

event identifiable in a biography may be that of "appropriation", a concept that Silverstone et al (1992) use to describe the transfer of a technology (commodity) into ownership and become an object within the context of the domestic household and every-day life. This, together with the concepts of 'objectification', 'incorporation' and 'conversion', describe an economic or transactional view of a household's dynamics during the domestication of the object. Objectification is the process by which the technology, through its use and display and thereby its embedding within the household, portrays the household's identity, values etc. The emphasis is in the spatial domain. Incorporation focuses upon the functionality of the technology and it's role-fit within the daily routine, i.e. its usage. This emphasises the temporal domain. Conversion defines "the relationship between the household and the outside world" Silverstone et al (1992: 25), whereby technologies both facilitate conversion and provide the content of conversion of household members, thereby establishing their status in their respective communities. The technology becomes an outward symbol to the community of the household's status.

This "process of domestication" involves the construction of "local routines" and "general scripts", which takes place within "the symbolic domain", and is ongoing, perhaps involving re-domestication, where new uses are found, until the time of dis-domestication, whereby the artefact is disposed off (Lie & Sorensen, 1996: 10-11), though its "traces" may remain (Sorensen, 2006: 48). Haddon (2006: 115) reveals that "changes in people's circumstances" (e.g. children growing up) can alter use and likewise new related technologies can alter use.

Sorensen et al (2000) offer a re-interpretation of this framework to explain how artefacts are made to work. During use, which involves a learning experience, artefacts are given meaning and are constructed into the identity of the user. This reveals three dimensions: the practical [pattern of usage], symbolic [production of meaning] and cognitive [learning about the artefact] (Sorensen et al, 2000: 240). The domestication of an artefact requires the artefact to be "acquired" ("made accessible"), "placed" ("situated in a physical, symbolic and mental space"), "interpreted" ("to be given meaning within the household... symbolic value to the outside world") and "integrated" ("into social practices of action") (Sorensen et al, 2000: 240).

Mackay & Gillespie (1992) draw attention to the role of markets in which design and appropriation are intertwined through the activity of marketing from which consumption or "demand is socially constructed" (Mackay & Gillespie, 1992: 698). This extends the notion of domestication suggesting that users can both shape and be shaped by the technologies that they domesticate. Marketing may create the notion of 'lifestyles' in which specific products are embedded, whilst users can identify unexpected uses.

Though domestication does not necessarily invoke innovation, innovation perhaps arises during the attempt to make things work or as new uses are found. This view interestingly contrasts with Leonard-Barton's (1988) statement that "implementation is innovation", also iterated by Cragg & Zinatelli (1995) and Graham et al (1996) (see 1.3). Leonard-Barton (1988: 265) argues that "technology will never exactly fit

user environment" and thus, adjustments (large-scale or minor) will be required: "that change in both technology and user environment is more beneficial than holding one constant and changing the other" (Leonard-Barton, 1988: 265). This raises the question of whether a finer distinction is required about a technology's implementation/use to distinguish between innovation and non-innovative use.

Domestication has been further developed by Aune (1996), who distinguishes between individual and collective (negotiated) strategies for domestication in the household. The personal computer (PC) is adapted to everyday life whilst everyday life is adjusted to the PC. The introduction of the PC has not prescribed specific changes; rather change is a consequence of its use in a social context. Furthermore, since use changes, "domestication is continuous and dynamic", not "once-and-for-all" (Aune, 1996: 118), a point iterated by Sorensen et al (2000: 240) "to domesticate an artefact is to negotiate its meaning and practice in a dynamic and interactive manner". However, Sorensen (2006: 47) notes that we rarely "domesticate things in isolation", thereby accentuating the notion of fit.

Domestication is not viewed as a smooth process. Ward (2006) reveals that the process is non-linear, with stages melting together. Furthermore, conflict can arise and domestication is "sometimes unsuccessful". Bakardjieva (2004: 63) reveals that negotiations (e.g. establishing "rules of mutual engagement" with others) can be difficult. Sorensen et al (2000) suggest that reasons for conflicts which can arise include differences between local interests/roles and differences between the

inscription and use of technologies. Likewise technologies are not immutable (Sorensen et al, 2000), giving rise to tensions as their position is re-established.

The issue of non-adoption is raised by Sorensen (2006) who draws attention to technologies that are viewed as an integral feature of day-to-day life or "part of 'normal' behaviour" (Sorensen, 2006: 41). Non-adoption may be attributed to techno-phobia, when the reason may be the "strategic decision" not to adopt, perhaps citing no need. The norms that emerge regarding use (e.g. accepted use of the mobile phone) arise as a collective feature of domestication; they "may be understood as contested, fluid, emergent properties of developing technologies" (Sorensen, 2006: 56-57).

Lie & Sorensen (1996: 8) draw upon the notion that "we tame the technologies that surround us in our everyday life", which relates to definitions found within the OED (2nd edition) that to domesticate is: 1) "to make, or settle as, a member of a household; to cause to be at home; to naturalise"; and 2) "to accustom (an animal) to live under the care and near the habitations of man; to tame or to bring under control; to civilise". Domestication is the process of embedding within a local context. Thus, the notion of domestication can be extended beyond the household into other contexts (Lie & Sorensen, 1996).

This extension has been explored by Pierson (2006), who examines the uptake of ICT in very small businesses. Her study revealed that need, fit and usefulness were important for (non)-adoption, though "something too innovative" would more likely

be rejected (Pierson, 2006: 220). The boundary over which appropriated items must cross for the small business is likened with that of the household, which contrasts with large organisations. The boundary demarks the transition from an open public to a closed private context, though in the context of the micro-business, with its informal mode of operating, the boundary becomes blurred as the home-work, private-public demarcation dissolves. Her argument, extended to larger organisations, suggests that these are characterised by an open formal operating mode, with a relatively clear demarcation between work and home, where home is viewed as intrusive though not inescapable. Furthermore, it introduces the notion that differences can exist between the privately held meanings of the home and micro-business and those in the public domain.

Silverstone (2006) explores the role of digital technologies in redefining the boundaries between private and public. A change has occurred, whereby the private viewing of public performances has been complemented with the rise of private conversations in public spaces (e.g. blogs, mobile phones). For such a change to occur, for new technologies to be exploited in novel ways, suggests failure in the domestication process. Total domestication neutralises the potential for change in the process of embedding. This, domestication can be viewed as a "conservative response to the challenge of technological change" (Silverstone, 2006: 246), thereby preserving the status quo.

However domestication is viewed, it highlights an issue that is perhaps neglected, that of learning how to make a technology work. Indeed, this notion of learning is not

confined merely to uptake and use, but also to how a technology is brought into being and is diffused. This encompassing view is encapsulated with the process of 'social learning', developed by Williams et al (2005).

Social Learning in Technical Innovation (Williams et al, 2005)

Social learning highlights that, whilst learning is an experience experienced by an individual, it is not an experience in isolation from other people. An early proponent of theories about learning and the importance of the social context in shaping learning ("social learning") is Lev Vygotski (1896-1934). Moreover, texts with "social learning" in the title can be found dating back to 1945 (Miller & Dollard's "Social Learning and Imitation" (1945)).

The conceptualisation of social learning developed by Williams and co-authors "is not restricted to the pedagogic notion of a group of persons learning from others, but is conceived more broadly to include processes of negotiation and alignment of views within and between groups" (Jaeger et al, 2000: 278). It develops the conceptualisation of how users finding new uses for supplied technologies. It focuses upon usage and the practices surrounding usage of artefacts. It "emphasises the information and cultural content of artefacts" (Williams et al, 2005: 7), in addition to their technical features. The notion of a linear mechanical innovation-diffusion process is dismissed in favour of an iterative, interactionist dynamic and cyclical process, which can be conceptualised both with the innofusion-domestication models and with an evolutionary model involving on-going experimentation and incorporating innofusion-domestication. Innofusion-domestication are presented as separate cycles, though not as "different and necessarily separate kinds of activity"

(Williams et al, 2005: 70). Instead the emphasis is upon differences in meaning attached to technicalities and uses. Another model is presented which, described as 'laissez-faire', distinguishes between the provision of generic tools and components and a 'pick and mix' up-take by users, who configure according to need, characteristic of 'configurational technologies', a model which is reminiscent of von Hippel's 'democratised innovation'.

The shift from technology supply to technology use changes the manner in which diffusion should be viewed, particularly by policy makers. Diffusion (passive transfer) is now complemented by social learning. The focus shifts to how users appropriate, implement (innofuse), consume and use technology, which is explained through the concept of social learning. "Social learning seeks to understand how such technological capabilities are appropriated and become embedded in society" (Williams et al, 2005: 48). Social learning takes place 'by doing' (trial-and-error) and 'by interacting' (e.g. supplier-user negotiation, training), which involves knowledge translation, its absorption, and thereby its transformation. Sorensen (1996: 6) characterises social learning "as a combined act of discovery and analysis, of understanding and meaning, and of tinkering and the development of routines". It is not only about action, but also "meaning and identity" (Sorensen, 1996: 7). It is more than "just the acquisition of skills and knowledge" (Sorensen, 1996: 13). It involves "the construction and reconstruction of culture" through the (re)-configuring of "artefacts, skills, knowledge and social relations" (Williams et al, 2005: 57). Social learning is about the way something is brought into a local domain and made to fit.

This new perspective exposes the tensions which exist between the desire for technology 'stabilisation and entrenchment' and the practices associated with 'technical enhancement' and its 'social appropriation'. Technological instability may deter uptake and undermine viability. Trade-offs may ensue, whereby incentives to adopt overcome resistance. Although standards may develop and aid technological homogenisation, the dynamic of rapid technology evolution and differentiated adoption will give rise to technological heterogeneity. Technology architectures offer stabilisation by means of interoperability standards, yet allow "dynamism to take place within particular black boxes" (Williams et al, 2005: 222). The impact of changes (e.g. learning) can be minimised.

For technologies to be successful, they require a supportive environment (e.g. 'technological regime'). This manifests through the role of the State, the rhetoric of the need to adopt or fall behind and the activities of stakeholders (e.g. setting standards, providing infrastructure, promoting innovation), each of which contribute to attempts to establish "the 'rules of the game' for innovation" (Williams et al, 2005: 58). This introduces the notion of 'learning by regulating', the way regulatory issues affect learning, through the opportunities created or constraints imposed. Social learning does not favour specific approaches instead "draws attention to alternative strategies" (Williams et al, 2005: 76).

Learning to make 'it' work

Whilst social learning conceptualises the social dynamics of learning, at a pragmatic level it is possible to identify a variety of different generic learning modes. These are 'learning by':

I **observation and imitation:** The concept of new users observing and imitating other users is not new. This perhaps underpins the management activity of benchmarking business-operational practices against competitors and successful businesses, though imitation is not replication in every detail, but involves innovation as the 'imitated' practices are customised to suit the business;

II. **doing** (Arrow, 1962: 155): learning is through the experience of attempting "to solve a problem and therefore only takes place during activity". More specifically, learning is through the experience of producing the designed product and leads to process improvements. This is commonly described as the learning curve. Rosenberg (1982: 121) notes that this can also be a "source of technological innovation";

III. **using** (Rosenberg, 1982: 120-140): learning is through final user use of the designed product, whereby use reveals how the product can be improved (embodied knowledge) or how use can be improved (disembodied knowledge) ['pure' learning by using], though in practice this distinction is blurred. 'Learning by using' tends "to be associated with a high degree of systemic complexity" (Rosenberg, 1982: 135);

IV. **trying** (Fleck, 1994): learning is about the "struggle" to make configurational technologies work (Fleck, 1994: 638). This involves improving/modifying the component elements to enable the configuration to "work as an integrated entity" (Fleck, 1994: 638). Fleck makes the important distinction between Rosenberg's users 'using' a working technology and users trying to get the technology to work in the

first place. The act of trying to get the technology to work may involve innovation and lead to "new viable configurations" (Fleck, 1994: 649), though without necessarily achieving the working solution. Furthermore, 'failure' to make work is itself a learning opportunity (Leonard-Barton, 1988);

V. **interacting** (Lundvall, 1988): learning from two-way user-producer relationships involving user requirements - usage issues being fed back to the producer and producers informing users about supply-use issues. It emphasises a partnership orientated relationship; and

VI **regulation** (Williams et al, 2005): learning the way regulatory issues (e.g. legislation, standards, availability of infrastructure) affect learning through the opportunities created, or constraints imposed upon supply, usage and also disposal.

It is postulated that these different modes do not operate in isolation, but in varying mixes. For example, learning by trying and interaction may characterise an ERP implementation, where both user and provider work together towards GO-LIVE day, when the configured solution is "switched on" and expected to work. Learning by regulation shifts attention to the conditions affecting the learning process. However, it does not reveal how these conditions are changed. Argyris (1976) presents the earlier work of Argyris & Schon (1974), who develop the Single Loop and the Double Loop Models of Learning. These distinguish between action/learning compliant to "governing variables" (Single Loop) and action/learning which challenges and changes the "governing variables" (Double Loop). The transition

from a compliant to a challenging state is argued to be problematical as people are reluctant to challenge the status quo and expose themselves to any associated risk. Whilst this framework relates to a person's behaviour within an organisation, it provides a useful framework to guide the examination of the interplay of policy – practice at an institutional level.

2.2.7 Viewing the artefact-human relationship: essentialism/anti-essentialism

A core issue in much of the social study of technology is the nature of the relationship between the artefact and the human. This has resulted in an extensive debate with different streams of thought emerging in response to such questions as: What effects do the artefact and human have upon each other? Is the artefact real or a social construct (SCOT)? Is the artefact immutable or malleable? Is the artefact the outcome of being shaped by social processes (SST)? Is the relationship between artefact and human symmetrical, with either having an effect upon the other (ANT)? Whilst these questions simplify complex issues, attempts to answer them reveal that technology is open to different valid interpretations.

One specific debate which has relevance here, concerns whether artefacts have properties and how these act upon or are interpreted by humans. There are two contrasting positions, that of the essentialist and the anti-essentialist, though whether anyone adopts a polarised stance on either is an open question.

The essentialist recognises that material properties constrain design options and thereby possibilities for application. However, design itself introduces properties which thereby prescribe (determine) or constrain the possibilities offered for use. Winner (1980:123) proposes that, due to the embedding of properties in design, "artefacts can contain political properties", whereby specific interests are pursued through the possibilities offered by the artefact. However, whatever the properties offered, MacKenzie (1996: 263) argues that what we know about the "technical properties" of artefacts is "socially contingent".

The anti-essentialist view problematises the focus on properties. The meaning and value of the artefact is highlighted; the artefact is a symbol. There is no influence; influence is a construct of interpretation (Grint & Woolgar, 1997: 10). Conflict and competition arises between different social groups and their interpretations, with different development paths arising. The interpretative flexibility of the artefact tends towards stability within the social group (intra-group) and closure between different social groups (inter-group), when, through the process of solving problems related to design and action relating to the artefact, there is convergence about the possibilities for design and action (Bijker, 1995). Nevertheless, the interpretivist view sustains possibilities for action, allowing use which includes that unintended by its designer.

Akrich (1992) presents the symmetrical ANT perspective, that the designer inscribes a script into the artefact to pre-determine action, which the user de-scripts to act out as intended or otherwise. This exposes the dynamic social interplay between designer and user. The complexity of this social interplay is revealed by Mackay et al (2000)

who build upon Woolgar's exploratory study of the metaphor of "technology as text". Initially explored by Woolgar in 1991, Grint & Woolgar (1997: 72-73) demonstrate that a carefully scripted text can constrain the actions of the reader-user, thereby "configuring the user". Grint & Woolgar (1997: 93) surmise that the metaphor is useful as "it stresses the contingency of interpretation". Mackay et al (2000) in acknowledging that the user can be configured, provides the counter-view that the designer is configured by both users and the designer's organisation, highlighting the inherent complexity of the 'designer-user interface'.

This debate highlights that there are different possible and conflictual explanations relating to the artefact-human interplay. This is brought to the fore by Hutchby (2001) who presents Gibson's (1979) concept of 'affordances' to counter use of the metaphor of "technology as text". "Affordances are properties taken with reference to the observer. They are neither physical nor phenomenal" (Gibson, 1979: 143). However, a few pages earlier, Gibson (1979: 139) states "the object offers what it does because it is what it is". Simply put, objects, things, artefacts, they afford or offer users possibilities for action, whether perceived or not, but in their perception, give rise to action. However, Gibson does not distinguish between artefacts and naturally occurring objects. A naturally occurring stone affords to chimpanzees the cracking open of nuts[77]. This highlights the issue of how an object's affordances are recognised. Moreover, an artefact is the outcome of design, which Pfaffenberger (1992) suggests, can embed political aims, presenting the example of Ford's production assembly line. He presents the notion of 'technological drama' to

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[77] An examination of chimpanzee stone use is presented in Mercader et al (2002).

embrace the discourse (statements and counterstatements) which surrounds the design (of constrained possibilities – technological regularisation) and enactment (adjustment to make bearable or reconstitution to reassert position). Whilst Pfaffenberger views the design of artefacts as a political enactment, he demonstrates how properties and interpretation come together. In contrast, Rapport's (2003) critique of Hutchby's account of affordances was summed up in the statement "little more is stated than that devices have situationally defined properties" (Rapport, 2003: 574). Whilst "affordances" offer "a convenient label for a host of psychological processes cued in by material possibilities" (Rapport, 2003: 576), it is inadequate in itself to aid understanding of artefacts and their use.

2.3   Technology as ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies)

An understanding of what a computer really does is an understanding of the social and political situation in which it is designed, built, purchased, installed and used
(Winograd, T. & Flores, F., 1987: 84)

2.3.1 <u>Why distinguish ICTs?</u>

ICTs offer a particular conceptual challenge for researchers that is perhaps illustrated with the example of the laptop computer. The attention of the laptop user tends to focus upon the imagery contained within the interface (e.g. the screen and key-board) rather than the physical package within which it is embedded. Indeed, it is perhaps in the domain of media studies and the television that the distinction between the physical object (television) and the message contained (television programme) surfaces (Silverstone et al, 1992). The distinction Silverstone and co-authors make

between object and medium, draws attention to the particular feature of the artefact whereby its interface is a conduit for the transmission of messages. In their study of the appropriateness of different communications media (e.g. telephone, email and memo), Trevino et al (1990) highlight the equivocality or uncertainty contained within the message as a determining feature for the particular medium chosen. Indeed, the greater the need to discuss issues or be emotionally expressive, the more likely is the move towards richer media that allow multiple cues (e.g. body language, tone and inflexion of voice) to be used. This emphasis upon the topics of interest or discussion, introduces the notion developed by Bowker (1994) of 'infrastructure inversion' whereby the infrastructure over which messages are transmitted becomes invisible. In other words, the television (the object) is rendered invisible to the programme (the medium).

The computer, a computational technology, can be viewed in a similar manner, again with the interface being the focus of the user's attention. The operational domain is language (Winograd & Flores, 1986), which suggests that the metaphor of the 'text' is an appropriate device to examine ICTs. Indeed, Lytje (1996) in their study of the development of computer software, distinguish between systems development "as a kind of writing" and systems use "as a kind of reading" computers (Lytje, 1996: 143). Yoneyama (1997: 105) states that "the symbolic dimensions of computer systems may be addressed as if they were texts". For Yoneyama, the text metaphor focuses attention upon the dynamics of the computer system use and the associated production of meaning; computer systems become "spaces of action possibilities". This is reminiscent of Winograd & Flores (1986: 7) whose basic argument is that

new technologies can shape practices which, in turn, can shape language (e.g. new terms), which, in turn, "generates the space of possibilities for action" (e.g. new practices). Attention is upon the generation of meaning.

2.3.2 <u>Technology and Virtuality: the paradox of the invisible material and visible virtual</u>

> *Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily….*
> (Gibson, W., 1984: 67)

The emergence and widespread use of online technologies has led to a new vocabulary and set of concepts which have assumed an everyday usage (e.g. 'virtuality', 'virtual reality', 'virtual worlds' and 'virtual space'). Other words arise prefixed with 'cyber-' (e.g. cyberspace). These reflect a distinction that has become common-place between practices that are off-line and on-line.

Off-line practices are associated with the notion of 'materiality', which the OED defines as: "of or relating to matter or substance". In contrast is the notion of 'virtuality': "Essential nature or being, apart from external form or embodiment". The key distinction between 'material' and 'virtual' is perhaps captured in the notions of substance and embodiment. However, in making this distinction, it should not disguise that the boundary between 'material' and 'virtual' is ill-defined and unavoidably blurred (Interrogate the Internet, 1996).

In the virtual domain there is no substance or embodiment. Furthermore, we may convince ourselves that we have transported ourselves into this virtual domain and

engage in 'virtual worlds', 'social networks' and other online activities, creating and experimenting with new self's and exploring new experiences, perhaps denied or 'forbidden' in the real (Turkle, 1996). However, as Turkle reveals, this ability to recreate oneself, change gender, age, ethnicity, personality, appearance, being… reveals the illusionary nature of the virtual domain. Furthermore, we are exposed to the potential threat inherent in that we do not know how authentic the person we are engaging with is. This becomes important when we distinguish between the virtual as a realm of fantasy, with its own, perhaps 'unrestricted', conventions or as an extension of the real, where the conventions of the real world still hold.

Any substance associated with online technologies, i.e. the wires and boxes that constitute the infrastructure, is perhaps invisible to users (cf. Bowker, 1994). This invisibility has been interpreted by Thrift (2004: 584) as "imputed background whose content is rarely questioned". He suggests that this background can be viewed as a paratext: "invisible forms which structure how we write the world, but which generally no longer receive attention because of their utter familiarity" (Thrift, 2004: 585). Visibility returns when something goes wrong (Graham, 2004: 13), in which case someone is contacted who can deal with it. Most end-users are unable to enter the black box of online technologies and 'fix it'.

When the black box labelled 'online technologies' is opened, its complexity is revealed. It can be presented as a stratified model, distinguishing between the material artefacts of the apparatus and infrastructure and their non-material counterparts, the 'programming' that provides the functionality that users exploit in

their daily practices, whether in maintaining the 'system' or using the 'system' to support what they are doing. The programming is also responsible for the amassing of libraries of webpages, images etc, each of which is catalogued and listed in a directory to be found - online. Whereas, user attention focuses upon the non-material and being able to find, for Thrift (2004) the invisibility of the material implies that it has no meaning; it exists "outside the realm of meanings, being known only in their performance" (Thrift, 2004: 585). Nevertheless, it functions globally, with every point of contact having its unique address.

However, as a 'system' it offers no clear development trajectory, is spatially uneven in its distribution and is in a state of on-going change as new innovations (e.g. the 'semantic web') introduce new possibilities. Demand is ubiquitous, but not evenly distributed and not everywhere. Supply is open to all (e.g. anyone can load content), though the large corporations perhaps control many aspects of the technology (e.g. the telecommunications infrastructure, operating systems, software applications and search engines) (Graham, 2004). However, some sense or order is introduced by efforts to regulate both design and use through standards (technical, legislative or codes of behaviour) that allow interoperability between the configured elements (e.g. users). However, the uneven nature of this regulation has resulted in, on the one hand, government censorship (e.g. China) (Zittrain & Edelman, 2003) and on the other, the unrestrained distribution of 'unacceptable' materials (e.g. child porn). It is far from being a homogenous 'system' and that its internal complexity is reinforced by externalities which disturb its smooth roll-out (e.g. fears and inaccessibility) and by the seemingly infinite possibilities for its use.

There appears to be no limit to the possible applications of this 'system': communication, informing, learning, shopping, meeting people, play, propaganda, gambling, sex, fraud, deception… In the mid 1990s, its underlying principle was viewed as dissemination, not control (Interrogate the Internet, 1996). However, a decade later, the question can be asked whether this principle holds.

'End-users', one of many types of users, are predominantly interested in the interface itself. The pre-occupation with the interface, whether a computer keyboard and monitor or the mobile phone, draws attention to the screen and the manner of interacting with it. Thrift (2004: 585) drawing upon Parks (2003), refers to how these screens are kinetic surfaces "along and across which things run… and which demand certain kinds of structured engagement". The screen presents an image, which comprises of colour, icons and text, and perhaps also of sound. This appeals to our visual and hearing senses, requires touch to interact with, though may also be voice activated, but does not cater for our senses of taste or smell. Meaning may rest in the symbolism of having the latest devices or old technology, but for most, meaning lies in the content of the image. The images tend to be designed to be 'read' in particular ways, constraining how we may interpret and interact with what is presented. However, this does not preclude new readings, but may preclude any reading at all if presented in an unfamiliar manner (e.g. Chinese characters to a mono-lingual English speaker). More significantly, Thrift (2004: 585) suggests that they may change the way we understand "space, time and movement".

Use of the Internet requires 'literary' skills, the ability to read and write in this new medium, with implications for how people learn these 'literary' skills. More sophisticated engagement (e.g. online discussions) may require learning the acceptable conventions for participation. Indeed, even something basic (e.g. e-mail) requires knowledge about how to use the email software, raising the question of how one acquires this knowledge; perhaps not formally by going on a course in some distant college, but perhaps informally within the home, by being shown by one's children. This example reveals one further issue to be considered in relation to technology, the interplay between technology and the human use of space.

2.4   Technology and Space

Simmel (1908 [1997: 138]) highlighted the exclusivity of space: "every portion of space possesses a kind of uniqueness". If each portion of space or location is unique then this suggests that it possesses contingencies which are unique to that location. This implies that if a technology is to be adequately implemented in that location it needs to be embedded in such a way as to deal with these contingencies. Successful technological implementations are thus, locally contingent processes. This is demonstrated in the examples presented by Gamser et al (1990) of innovative activity within poor communities in the world's poorer countries (e.g. Kenyan residue stoves). However, this view runs counter to the deterministic notion that technologies can be suitable and acceptable anywhere, with this manifesting in the export of technologies from developed nations world-wide. Furthermore, this is a

very general argument, but it does highlight the locally contingent nature of technology.

The importance of technology from a spatial perspective is self evident. Technological developments, particularly over the last century have allowed people to overcome the hurdles created by space-distance. Skyscrapers allow the concentration of people into small land areas. Developments in telecommunications have facilitated almost instantaneous interactive communications between any two points world-wide. Likewise, containerisation and the jet engine are two of many technologies that have facilitated the rapid movement of both people and materials around the world. The metaphor of 'space-time compression' illustrates how our perception of space and time has been affected.

One particular portfolio of technologies about which there have been expectations of a "revolution" in the way society functions, are digital technologies, i.e. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), characterised by the Internet. However, despite the utopian promises, the reality is a digital divide. The following section provides a cursory examination of this.

2.4.1 <u>Digital Technologies and Space</u>

The promise of the digital technologies from a geographical perspective has perhaps been succinctly examined by Steven Graham (2004) in the context of cities and the professed transformation they would undergo. Highlighting their deterministic and

unproblematic undertones, he identifies four key themes that prevailed during the period 1960s to 90s about the "post-urban fantasy" (Graham, 2004: 6-9). The first is a shift from the material space that characterises the geography of cities, to increasing inhabitation of cyberspace. The second is the "annihilation" of spatial constraints through real time engagement with others through cyberspace – the 'death of distance'. The third theme is that ICT could enable "more democratic egalitarian, decentralised and ecologically sensitive societies" (Graham, 2004: 8) through the communities built through cyberspace. The fourth theme is the shift towards the melding of body and ICT to allow instant transition between material space and cyberspace, the latter allowing instant access to any "co-ordinate in data space" (Graham, 2004: 9).

Graham provides a number of responses. One is that cyberspaces are created within the material domain. This comprises of not only the technical infrastructure, but also of allocated spaces containing the banks of servers which produce the virtual, but also the disposal sites where valuable or contaminant metals are extracted from end-of-life devices. Furthermore, there is geographical variation in the distribution of the infrastructure, both internationally and at the local neighbourhood level, with the privileging of localities with highest demand and lowest cost and risk.

Graham also states that the promises have over-generalised about people's experiences of ICT. People do not have the same experiences. Instead, the different experiences are contingent upon what is happening locally in ways that are perhaps subtle and counter-intuitive:

The ways in which places become enmeshed into geographically and temporally stretched electronic networks like the Internet form an extraordinarily diverse, contingent process. And, whilst there certainly are a growing range of transnational and even 'global' interactions on the Internet, we must also remember that many such relationships are profoundly local" (Graham, 2004: 17).

Likewise, ICT's capabilities are overestimated. ICTs may have the capability of transmitting 'bits', but lacks the "complexity, richness and the continuing anthropological and cultural power generated by co-present human bodies in places" (Graham, 2004: 18). He cites Sawhney (1996), who highlights that the quest to eliminate "'inefficient' and 'expensive' face-to-face interaction" is such that "the ritual or the communal aspect of human communication is almost totally neglected" (Graham, 2004: 18). He draws upon Robins (1995) who surmises that even though we are more exposed to "experiences of de-realisation and de-localisation… we continue to have physical and localised existences" (Graham, 2004: 18-19).

Graham discusses how ideology or promises of how ICT will liberate, disguises or 'camouflages' corporate exploitation of ICTs and the control they muster, including the increasing commodification of 'domains' (e.g. space and time), the emergence of a 'digital divide' and the environmental issues arising from production-use-disposal.

Finally, Graham reveals how the predominantly deterministic view has led to the widespread institutional and business appropriation and implementation of ICT systems with consequent technological failures arising due to the neglect of the social process underpinning innovative practices.

In response to the deterministic argument, Woolgar (2002: 13-20) presents five general "rules of thumb" to evaluate deterministic claims about new technologies. The first rule states that "the uptake and use of the new technologies depend crucially on local social context". From this derives the second rule, that "the fears and risks associated with new technologies are unevenly socially distributed", i.e. that social context is not homogenous. The third rule states that "virtual technologies supplement rather than substitute for real activities", which is later paraphrased as the "virtual activities sit alongside existing 'real' activities". The fourth rule extends the third rules, stating that "the more virtual the more real"; that virtual technologies may stimulate more of a specific 'real' activity, which is illustrated with the example of email and business travel, the former stimulating more face-to-face meetings therefore involving travel. The fifth rule, in stating "the more global the more local" is critical of attempts to design devices which "render location insignificant" and thereby have global reach. Instead, technologies are located and that it is within this local domain that technologies are managed; their functioning "depends on specifically local ways of managing the technology". This differs from the first rule, in that whereas the former emphasises how local context shapes use, rule five highlights that use is situated locally. Woolgar surmises that these rules are counter-intuitive, which suggests that the intuitive view entails determinism, ubiquity, homogeneity of demand and supply, implicit substitution of newer technologies for older ways of doing things, a shift of activity into the virtual domain and global standardisation.

2.5 Summary

This cursory examination of how 'technology' has been conceptualised reveals both the complexity inherent in one word and the different ways that technology and its creation and use can be viewed. Early deterministic views about the inevitability of technology and concern with its impacts have been displaced by the recognition that technology and its development and use arise from social processes, this latter way of thinking about technology being captured under the umbrella "Social Shaping of Technology" (SST) (Williams & Edge, 1996). Today, many studies of technology assume positions somewhere between the deterministic inevitability of technology and the use of technology being shaped by social processes.

When the black-box of technology is opened to reveal its workings, it reveals a complex of artefacts and people engaged in activities of conception, innovation, development, diffusion, appropriation, implementation, use and disposal. The distinction is made between the producer of technology and its user. Both can be involved in innovative activity. The notion of user introduces the possibility that technology can be accepted or rejected, used in ways both intended and unintended, with consequences as intended, un-intended or un-desired, with continuance terminated. During our struggle to make the technology work, we learn about it. Our perception of technology, what it is, what it can do, how it develops or changes, how it affects us or how we can exploit it, governs how we interact with it and how we learn from these interactions. Furthermore, we do not act in isolation and, as such, our views influence and are influenced by others. We share and negotiate views;

there is social learning. We also encounter views different from our own, which can create tensions and which may manifest in confrontation or negotiation. A central theme is the notion of agency, that there is no technological imperative. Instead, there is choice in all our dealings with technology, at all stages in its life-cycle. Thus, specific technologies viewed in different ways can lead to differences in their development and application – there is nothing predictable.

A core debate arising in technology studies concerns the relationship between the artefact and the human. Do artefacts have properties that act upon the human, or does their reading offer possibilities for action? This has implications with regard to their design as political interests may be embedded to constrain the manner of usage. This distinction emerges in the context of ICTs. The material is argued to become invisible as attention focuses upon reading messages contained.

The recent development of the Internet and World Wide Web is paralleled with the development of an associated vocabulary. The notion of a virtual domain denotes a 'space' in which online practices take place. This domain is distinguished from that in which off-line practices take place through the notions of substance and embodiment. Indeed the material aspects of online practices (e.g. the devices used and telecommunication infrastructure) are rendered invisible as attention focuses upon the content of what is presented. When the black box of online technologies is opened it reveals a complex configuration of elements. These offer seemingly infinite possibilities for its use, which are amplified with each new innovation that emerges. Use implies the reading of images on a screen. The notion of reading raises

the question of learning, which it is suggested, can be a local activity within the informal environment of the household as opposed to a spatially fixed place of learning distantly removed.

The spatial aspects relating to technology and, specifically digital technologies, highlight the locally contingent nature of implementations and the importance of local embodied experiences. These undermine deterministic arguments relating to technology. In his examination of digital technologies, Steven Graham draws attention to the situated material presence of its underlying infrastructure and its uneven distribution. This has implications when examining the notion of a digital divide to shift attention away from polarised have/have-not approaches, to richer approaches which distinguish between different types of use (e.g. episodic versus pervasive).

To conclude, the conceptualisation of technology reveals its inherent complexity and the need to take account of the locally contingent nature of place. This complexity is compounded by different ways to view technology, each of which presents their own useful insights. This contrasts to simplistic deterministic views of technology and its inevitability, which ignores this inherent complexity with the outcome of inadequate policies and ineffective practices.

Appendix 3   The metaphor of 'tailoring' to conceptually explain local tourism groups

3.1   Introduction

Six case-studies were presented in section 8.4 of the local collaborative efforts to promote the locality online. The variety inherent in these local efforts presents the challenge of how to analyse. It can be argued that online technologies are generic technologies that are locally implemented, highlighting the importance of local knowledge (Fleck, 1992). However, there are externalities that need to be accounted for, such as, institutional intervention and the needs of the customer. There is a process invoked which involves fitting the generic to the local. The word 'fit' brings to mind the notion of a tailor-made suit, which is fitted to meet the unique shape of the person. Each case-study reveals the uniqueness of each locality. Furthermore, it can be argued that every possible locality will be unique, despite similarities between localities being recognised, just as there are people who are viewed as similar. Similarities can be exploited from an economy of scale perspective, whilst uniqueness needs to be accommodated. The metaphor of 'tailoring' appears to handle this and is presented as an analytical device to examine these case studies.

3.2   The metaphor of 'tailoring'

The unpacking of the metaphor 'tailoring' reveals a start point, the introduction between **tailor** and **customer** where the **opportunity** emerges to produce an **outfit**[78] (e.g. Highland Dress). The outfit comprise a set of items that fit together, each item itself made or alternatively bought in. Other activities include:

- the **initial measurement** of the customer's relevant dimensions;

- the firming up of specific **design requirements** (e.g. items, appearance-style, functionality, cost) which may involve scanning what has been produced elsewhere, current fashions and trends. This may involve looking up **reference materials** (e.g. catalogues);

- **to source requirements**: assessing what needs to be acquired, defining specifications and source (e.g. box pleat expertise in the Scottish Borders);

- **acquiring resources:** taking possession of resources (e.g. delivery of a specific tartan material);

- the **muslin trial**: testing a specific design;

- cutting (**shaping**) materials, perhaps to a template. This is the detailed act of shaping each piece that is to be assembled;

- **assembling** the components (e.g. the pieces that make up each item), in the right configuration to produce each item and assembling the item to produce the outfit; and

- **fitting** - adjusting the items in the outfit to achieve the 'perfect' fit .

The customer's experience of the tailor's service has been pleasurable. The outcome is an outfit that serves a purpose, presents an image and feels good to wear. The customer is **satisfied** and will both return and recommend to others. Nine basic

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[78] The term 'outfit 'can also be used to describe a group of people. One definition offered by the online OED is "Chiefly U.S. A hunting, travelling, exploring, or working party, together with its means of transport and equipment. Also: a team in charge of herds of cattle, etc."

stages in the production process have been identified, though there may be more. Indeed, following hand-over to the customer, the life-span of the outfit will shorten if the outfit is not given care and **maintenance**. This may involve the tailor offering maintenance instructions or service. Furthermore, at a later point in time, there may be a need to make **alterations.** Also considered is perhaps how the tailor is **found** in the first place, particularly if there is **competition**.

3.3 'Tailoring' the collective effort to develop local tourism, including online promotion

The **outfit** to be tailored is the collective development of local tourism through the tourism organisation, whose activities include the production and maintenance of an online promotional presence.

The process of producing a sustainable and viable local tourism organisation that fits local contingencies is the act of tailoring the organisation. In the case of the tailor and the production of an outfit (e.g. Highland Dress), the **customer** is clearly identifiable, the person who is to wear the outfit, who may be different from the person paying for the outfit, who is also the customer. This reveals that customers are not necessarily easily identified. They do not always walk through the door and present themselves. With regard to the local tourism organisation, there are two readily recognisable groups of customers. The obvious customers are the visitors, both online and at the destination, for whom the experience of the visit is important, if they are to return or recommend. However, they do not generate revenue for the

tourism organisation. Instead, they receive the benefit of the organisation's efforts. Another group of customers that needs to be recognised is the local community, in particular, local tourism product providers. The tourism organisation performs the service of developing the local economy through its tourism related activities and, in return, receives the revenue from members who join and pay a subscription in recognition of the value of the organisation.

The **tailor** is: 1) the founders of the organisation who recognise the opportunity and start the tailoring process off, perhaps continuing in their tailoring as committee members(e.g. the founder of HolidayMull) and 2) the organisation's active members who become involved in the tailoring process, perhaps because of their skills (e.g. website development). Unlike the clothing tailor who receives income for tailoring, these tailors are voluntary and unpaid.

The tailor is expert on the process of tailoring. The tailor is likely to go through some form of apprenticeship so the production of the first outfit is likely to be supervised. However, if the outfit is completely new to the tailor in terms of materials, design, techniques and how it will wear, then this is likely to be a learning process. Likewise for the founders of the tourism organisation, this is likely to be a new experience, involves learning by trying and may result in the enrolment of a consultant to guide or supervise activity.

The process of tailoring of the outfit can be unpacked to reveal nine basic stages.

1. **Opportunity**

    The opportunity denotes the recognition that there is a need to establish a group. It might be the announcement of the dissolution of the membership based ATBs (e.g. Orkney Tourism Group) or the announcement of public sector financial support for local tourism initiatives (e.g. the HIBD in the case of HolidayMull). At this stage the general intentions are set out – to develop people's awareness of the locality and persuade them to visit or, in the case of the Orkney Tourism Group, to lobby and also to "gather and collate information regarding the performance of VisitScotland (both good & bad)"[79]. This may change or be challenged as in the case of Discover Islay which was espoused to have been initially formed to develop an all-encompassing website to promote Islay, but has established to promote Islay as an upmarket winter destination.

2. **Initial measurement of the customer**

    Two possible approaches to this may be adopted. Does the tailor rely upon experience and knowledge to 'eye' the person up, or is there a more formal measuring process undertaken to establish the 'facts'?

    The visitor as customer presents a challenge as to what to measure. The obvious measurement is to establish current visitor levels and, if possible, what they have been in the past so that there is a reference point to assess future visits. The key dimensions may be associated with attendance at prominent visitor attractions and occupancy in a range of hoteliers.

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[79] The minutes of the Orkney Tourism Group's Inaugural AGM on the 11th November 2005

The measurement of the tourism product provider as customer is possibly going to consist of a stock-take to establish the local tourism product inventory, the level of interest in joining the group and the factors that will both encourage and deter from joining.

In both cases, the temptation may be to rely upon what is thought to be known about customers rather than adopt a more formal approach to establish the 'facts'. There is no evidence in most of the locations examined to suggest that the more formal approach is adopted. Visitor numbers may be collected by the respective businesses, but their use is not known. The only locality that there is evidence of measurement is Arran. VisitArran's extranet publishes (July, 2008) a profile of Arran's tourism based on three local visitor surveys carried out between 2002 and 2005. However, it also notes the absence of detailed information and of base-line data on an accommodation inventory, rates, occupancy, employment and seasonality. The author's receipt of a serviced accommodation dataset from VisitArran in August, 2008, suggests that the aforementioned deficiencies are being addressed.

The implications of measurement are perhaps highlighted in the lesson of the Aviemore 'shake-up' and its need to increase membership. If a tourism product stock-check had been carried out and views elicited about Aviemore's proposals for membership would the 'shakeout' have been avoided.

Measurement requires the requisite dimensions to be identified. It enables tourism product inventory levels to be determined. It provides a yardstick against which developments can be assessed. That it appears not to be widely happening, suggests that the benefits of measurement are perhaps undervalued or unappreciated.

3.   Design requirements

This attempts to define on paper the format of the desired organisation. However, the tailor with the new outfit may sketch out the intended design, but through the process of trying to make certain parts may develop and modify the finer details. The design of the organisation will give consideration to issues which may include purpose, governance, policies, practices and duties, funding, enrolment and use of technology. However, this may be merely a general sketch, with the finer detail emerging through the process of making things happen. The tailor's sketch will reveal the configuration of the key elements of the outfit. Likewise the sketch of the organisation should reveal the interoperability of the aforementioned issues and how these are to be configured. Taking the three issues of Governance (open or closed), Involvement (participation or membership) and Funding (e.g. subscription, advertising, public sector award), two possible configurations can be proposed.

The first is a membership-based organisation (e.g. HolidayMull) with a democratically elected organising committee, with clear roles for committee

members (e.g. Treasurer). Decision making is open. The notion of membership suggests joining something, being part of it and being involved in decision making, implying an open governance structure.

Alternatively, it may be a private venture involving a limited number of 'closed door' decision makers (e.g. Aviemore), with others being enrolled through a subscription for services. Whilst subscribers may be able to participate in the activities of the organisation (e.g. Arran), its raises the question of whether their sense of 'being part of something' is as deep as within the preceding membership-based organisation. Indeed, as illustrated in Aviemore, a few people making decisions can be a deterrent to enrolment.

In both cases, the enrolment of others becomes a critical issue; gaining the support and commitment of others, both private and public sector organisations. The former in that their business may benefit from involvement, but also, the more members enrolled the greater the subscription revenues; the latter through their stakeholder interest in tourism (e.g. local councils and the provision of adequate public services to support tourism). However, this is potentially problematic. On one hand, VisitScotland can provide financial support through its Challenge/Growth Fund. However, the conditions imposed regarding the promotion of visitscotland.com on the organisation's promotional website may deter potential members who view visitscotland.com with disdain (e.g. Blair Atholl).

The criteria to 'join' needs to be such that it does not discourage potential members, though it may be decided to set minimum standards (e.g. three star grading for DiscoverIslay membership). The requirement to be VisitScotland quality graded incurs a cost that needs to be added to the fee, which itself may be high for smaller businesses. HolidayMull have dropped this requirement to increase membership and become more 'inclusive' and have attempted to shed the legacy perception that they are 'exclusive'. This highlights that the perception of exclusivity can be deliberately created to focus the customer's view upon quality offerings, e.g. DiscoverIslay. However, the danger is that this may create tensions within the community, as experienced in the early days of HolidayMull with its demanding membership criteria, which remains as a legacy.

Funding can be addressed through membership subscription, though this requires successfully enrolling members, raising the question of whether a sufficient number of members can be raised to financially support planned activities (e.g. set-up and maintain online promotion). Voluntary support can offset some of these costs (e.g. administration costs). However, other sources may need to be considered. Online advertising of local non-participating businesses may also generate a revenue stream. The public sector may be a source of financial support, perhaps as a one-off award, as in the case of VisitScotland's Challenge/Growth Funding. The venture needs to establish financial viability to be self-sustaining in its own right.

Reference materials: the tailor may make reference to what others are doing for ideas. In the case of Aviemore, its activities were informed by international benchmarking which was carried out to establish best destination management practices. The ease of accessing websites allows inspection of how other localities present themselves. The temptation may be to copy, but in doing so, ignore that what is copied may be the outcome of extensive learning about what works and what does not work (e.g. techniques to handle particular types of materials). Likewise, best practices are a result of what works locally and will be the outcome of a learning process of trying things out. For example, a locality dominated by smaller tourism product providers (e.g. Skye) will be different from one that has a large corporate presence (e.g. Edinburgh) and has implications for enrolment levels. For Skye to copy and apply Edinburgh's enrolment model may deter enrolment of members. The benefit of looking about is the opportunity it provides to identify and consider possibilities (e.g. a tourism levy - Aviemore), but the question is how a tourism levy would fit into the locality – in the case of Aviemore, it was not acceptable. This emphasises the need to translate desired possibilities into realities that accommodate local contingencies, which itself, is likely to involve learning in trying to make it work.

One of the difficulties facing the designer of the organisation is that, unlike the tailor, whose general expertise will guide the process of creating a new outfit, the issues considered at the outset may arise in an arbitrary manner through common sense. The danger is that something is overlooked (e.g.

community buy-in). This can be overcome with the aid of a guide such as the pilot "Destination Development Guide", provided through Tourism Intelligence Scotland. The value of this is that it provides a checklist, which reduces the likelihood that something is overlooked, though in itself, does not guarantee a successful outcome.

4. To source requirements

Whilst the design may reveal sourcing issues (e.g. to use a particular type of material), this will be followed by an explicit definition of specifications (e.g. the weight, colour, cost, etc.) and source (supplier) of the material. The assumption is that there is clarity about what is required and that there are funds available to allow purchases.

In defining requirements a choice is presented. Familiar materials can be chosen to produce an outfit, about which there is relatively high confidence that it will 'work'. Alternatively, new materials can be selected about which there is little known other than the sales rhetoric, but if believed and can be made to work, will then produce a 'state-of-the-art' outfit. However, this involves risk, may incur more costs and can take longer. This choice is presented in the development of the online presence, which raises the question of what kind of presence is desired: a static website that merely presents content or a dynamic website allowing online booking, purchasing of local produce and interactive imaging allowing specific sites to be viewed in 3D.

Requirements extend to how the locality is to be translated into a configuration of icons, text and perhaps sounds, creating a designed image, the 'brand', to be perceived online by the online visitor. It raises questions of what to include, but also what to exclude. This raises the issue of the contribution to this act of configuration by those who speak up for their respective sectors, locations or interests. However, it is not sufficient to configure the locality online in such a way that it appeals. The image perceived by the online visitor needs to be authentic, so that the visit to the locality meets the expectations generated online.

One of the challenges is that there may not be clarity about what is required and who to approach for advice, particularly as this tailoring activity is a learning process. Aviemore and Arran both utilised a well-known consultancy, which it is assumed, helped clarify what to do. A first port of call for advice is perhaps VisitScotland. VisitArran used VisitScotland's expertise to help develop the Arran brand. However, there may be uncertainty who to approach for the development of the website and its management. The case-studies reveal a tendency to use local technical expertise, though whether this is a coincidence or reflects the self-dependency that perhaps characterises island communities is unclear.

The availability of funds may be dependent upon membership subscriptions, which places emphasis upon a sufficiency in the number of members and their willingness to pay the requested fee. It was lack of funding, which was

based on membership contributions, which prevented EHGHA from maintaining an online presence, though a website had been developed. Assistance with the funding of ventures has been provided through VisitScotland's former Challenge Fund and its replacement the Growth Fund. Challenge Funding has been provided to Aviemore, Arran, Skye and Mull.

The issue of requirements also relates to that of enrolling members. Measurements may have included a stock-take of local tourist product providers, including hoteliers. This provides a pool of potential members, but in so doing, as previously raised, introduces the notion of exclusivity, which manifests as the criteria for joining. It also raises the question of whom to invite as well whom not to.

However, to be effective within the locality in improving the tourists experience, one requirement is the support of those who provide services and facilities. Clean toilet facilities and good public transport are just two of many issues that might require attention, but are outwith the control of the group. For Mull, organisations to enlist would include the local authority who provides the toilet facilities and the ferry company Calmac.

5.   Acquiring resources

This can be viewed as the act of taking possession of, or using materials, which is distinct from sourcing requirements. This includes both negotiating the terms and conditions with suppliers and the receiving goods or services.

Indeed, the acquisition of resources need not be problem free. Locals may provide content for the website, for example photographs. However, use other than that intended may give rise to ownership issues, with spill-over into the community through tensions that might arise. HolidayMull bought various domain names to prevent others in the locality from using them. At the end of the rent period for the domain name www.orkney.com, its owner is reported to have refused to renew its rental, instead offering it for sale at an unaffordable price, which led to the acquisition and ownership of the domain name www.orkney.org, thereby securing rights of use.

An alternative view of the acquisition of resources is the act of enrolling members. People need to be aware of the organisation and that it is worth enrolling. The locality with an integrated community is one whereby people are already known to each other and word-of-mouth is an effective communication channel. However, both Arran and Islay reveal the importance of personalities in this process. Whilst individuals may persuade, they may also deter, both by virtue of who they are and their manner.

The acquisition of materials involves the receipt of materials and placing/storing them somewhere. This involves storing them in conditions that prevents their deterioration or them going off. Extended to members this raises the question of how to retain them so that they do not go off, as exemplified by Aviemore's loss of its main subscriber, Macdonald Aviemore Highland Resort. EHGHA suffered from a loss of membership following the

closure of its information centre in Waverly station, which was a source of bookings for its members. HolidayMull has experienced a small decline in recent years of its members, assumed to be due to a lack of perceived benefit and members withdrawing from tourism for various reasons (e.g. selling their business or retiring).

6.   The muslin trial

Before the finished version is produced, the tailor may produce a muslin model of specific items of the outfit to test the design.

The tailoring metaphor can be extended to incorporate another type of customer, that of the public sector organisation who sets up a fixed term project to develop an all encompassing online presence which serves both the community and visitors, as in the case of the 'Connect Islay Jura' initiative and Orkney.com. The tailor is the contracted website developer (e.g. Islay Development Company and Orknet). Unlike the voluntary tailors of the preceding analysis, this tailor is paid and when payment stops, tailoring stops. Furthermore, the test-piece is not a complete outfit. Attention is on the production of selected items of the outfit, i.e. the all-encompassing online portal. It can be referred to as a pilot, implying that this is a trial from which to learn, to use when producing the 'real' thing. The difficulty with this customer is that the customer's interest in the pilot is short-lived, with attention transferring onto other initiatives at the end of the fixed period.

In both the cases of Orkney and Islay, the 'real' thing never manifested. However, Arran experienced two public sector funded pilots, "The Isle of Arran Taste Trail", then "Destination Arran", from which VisitArran emerged. The focus of the first was to test the connection between food and tourism, the second, to test local collaborative effort to improve the locality's tourism product. The two pilots could be viewed as an apprenticeship for the tailor who founded and tailored VisitArran, assumingly with assistance from VisitArran's active members and external support from VisitScotland and a consultant.

The metaphor suggests that pilots can serve as apprenticeships for future tailors, thereby ensuring that the lessons learnt are later used. The question arises as to what was different about the apprentices in Islay and Orkney in comparison with Arran's, in that the latter has moved on to tailor the outfit, VisitArran.

7. Shaping

The materials are cut to the measurements of the customer, perhaps with the aid of templates to guide the shaping and to create each piece, which will be assembled and fitted to produce an item. The tailor may delegate this activity to an experienced cutter, or sub-contract aspect if unable to do in-house. Attention is to the detail.

The pieces include the memoranda of association of the formed company, the code of conduct by which members are expected to adhere to, the procedures

for handling subscriptions and expenditure, and the format of committee meetings. Likewise, the website is a configuration or assemblage of pieces. The pieces are the photographs, text, pages, hyperlinks and, indeed, anything that can be embedded within the website. Pictures and other objects are sized to fit on the page, but also sized in terms of their electronic file size, so that visitors can upload the web-page objects relatively quickly.

Unlike mass produced standardised components designed to fit together upon assembly to produce a finished functional item, tailoring is a craft. Whilst the pieces can be assembled together, the assemblage need not fit and require fitting to ensure a good fit. The craft of the tailor is to be able to achieve this good fit. The fine-granularity required to examine this has been detected in the case-studies, but as an exploratory study, this finer detail is, in the main, missing. Nevertheless, the traces detected allow commentary.

8. Assembling

The pieces for each of the items of the outfit are pinned - stitched together into their correct configuration, yet this may not be the final configuration. The online pieces are stitched together using hyperlinks and embedded objects before being loaded onto the host server. Discussions may ensue setting timetables for meetings and agendas. An action plan may be generated which brings everything together so that people can communicate what is happening.

9. Fitting

The fitting provides the opportunity to establish whether the items and the assemblage of items which make up the outfit, fit together and also fit the customer. Minor adjustments may be required to get the fit right. Several fittings may be necessary to identify all the adjustments required to get the right fit.

Fitting is about how the activities of the group fit within the busy business and private lives of the members. It concerns how the website functions when loaded onto the host server; whether images may fail to appear or are slow to upload when the website is brought up in a browser and require resizing or reloading. It concerns how the code of conduct deals with members misrepresenting the organisation to the media and needs adjustment. It concerns whether the formula for establishing the subscription fee gives rise to the perception of being 'unfair', discriminate against some. It concerns whether particular information is missing online because potential visitors ask the same questions about visiting the location whenever they book accommodation, whoever it is they are booking with. It is through the enactment that the flaws are detected and put right. Fitting is about making it work. But not just getting it to work, but to work in the way that is 'right'. The tailor's skill is to ensure that the outfit fits 'perfectly', irrespective of the contours or appearance of its wearer. It may involve adjusting, tinkering, experimenting, work-arounds, or starting again as in the case of the jacket that defies a good hanging or is 'just not quite right' in colour.

The linearity invoked in this process perhaps relates to the progressive series of developments rather than to a temporal sequence of events, with iterations of specific aspects being required to get troublesome parts to work. Furthermore, the end of the fitting invokes the end of the process. However, the test of the tailor's skill is, whether through the wearing of the outfit, it fulfils the aspirations of its wearer, that the customer is **satisfied**. The outfit needs to be used. The organisation should function, be viable and self-sustaining. Members should retain their membership and others should want to join. The website should attract online visitors, arguably in an ever increasing number. Visitors both on and off-line should have an experience such that they want to return and also recommend to others.

10. Flaws, Alteration and Maintenance

It may be only after a period of time that the wearer discovers whether the outfit is wearing as well as it should; whether something is wrong, that there are **flaws** (e.g. the stitching comes undone). The media announcement of the Aviemore 'shake-up' and that members were not enrolling suggests that the original design was flawed.

This contrasts with the need to make **alterations**, because the outfit no longer fits the customer, new accessories are available or fashions change. Websites need to be updated to accommodate developments in search engine technologies if they are to continue to be found. Their appearance can become "dowdy" after only three-four years and require a re-write, as commented upon by the HolidayMull webmaster. Views towards particular criteria for membership can change as exemplified by HolidayMull who dropped its quality grading requirement in March, 2008 and

become more inclusive. Jura, after a long association with its webmaster, changed its webmaster. Alterations refresh.

Alterations differ from **maintenance**, which preserves the lifespan of the outfit. The tailor may offer maintenance instructions or service. On-going maintenance covers all aspects of the outfit. For example, regular committee meetings will raise organisational issues which need to be addressed, such as a divisive disagreement between members. The online presence will require regular maintenance if it is not to be viewed as dated and superfluous (e.g. 'events', 'news', membership listings, advertisements, links).

Local Competition between Tailors

Another aspect to be considered is **competition**. The new arrival sets up shop in the same street as in the case of Discover Islay (www.discoverislay.com) which formed in 2007, despite the existence of the long established Islay & Jura Marketing Group (www.islayjura.com). The question is whether the tailor offers the same service or caters to a different customer group. Discover Islay purports to promote Islay as an upmarket winter destination. However, as revealed in the previous section about what is locally available in terms of online promotion, there are other tailors on Islay (Figure 41). A search in Google on the 23rd August 2008 for the words 'Islay' and 'accommodation' listed the 'ileach' and 'islayinfo' websites within the first ten listings with Feis Ile and 'islayjura' listed close to the bottom of the first 100 results and no sign of 'discoverislay'. The tailor who provides the website (Feis Ile) for the Festival of Malt and Music has enrolled a large number of local hoteliers (Figure 41),

which contrasts to the relatively low levels enrolled to Discover Islay and Islay & Jura Marketing Group. This raises the question of how the customer (i.e. potential member or potential appropriator) distinguishes between the tailors. Indeed, is there a need for the two tailors Discover Islay and Islay & Jura Marketing Group?

This notion of competition within a locality is further illustrated in Orkney. Competition between the tailors orknet.com and its rival orkneygateway.com is reported to have created tension within the Orkney community, with strong loyalties forming. Competition can be divisive.

The divisive nature of competition is perhaps most poignantly raised in the context of the local tailor being in competition with the national tailor, as raised by Patricia Ferguson (Minister for Tourism) in her parliamentary statements. The metaphor raises the question of what the respective tailoring activities are and whether there is a conflict of interest. Do the two operate in partnership, exploiting their respective strengths (e.g. the local group has the advantage of local knowledge) or does one attempt to exercise control over the other as suggested in the comment of VisitScotland's CEO's "we want businesses to come in with us".

One feature of the national tailor's outfit is the provision of an online booking service, a service which the local tailor is prevented from giving, other than through the national tailor as a condition of the financial support it gives to the local tailor. Indeed, this condition discriminates against local entrepreneurial and innovative activity. An example is that of the Webmaster of HolidayMull, who has developed,

in partnership with an IT developer in Tasmania, an online booking engine suitable for smaller hoteliers. However, the integration of this facility into the website of a local tourism group would disqualify it for a Challenge/Growth Fund award, as it is independent of the vistitscotland.com online booking facility. Furthermore, acceptance of the national online booking service, denies the inventory of the local group who are not within the inventory of visitscotland.com from exploiting the benefits of 24/7 online booking.

3.4   Discussion and Conclusions

The metaphor of tailoring has been used to examine the six case studies presented in section 8.4. Its unpacking reveals the tailor, customers, the process of tailoring, the resultant outfit and later need for alterations. Also raised are the notions of apprenticeship and competition, both locally and nationally.

The metaphor has allowed the diversity inherent in each of the localities to be examined in a coherent manner to provide a rich insight into local developments. The emphasis placed on fitting highlights that this is not about taking an outfit off-the shelf, wearing it and making do with its ill-fit. Instead, the emphasis is upon ensuring a good fit; it meets all requirements of the customer, whoever the customer is. Tailoring is a process whereby attention is given to the detail of each piece and also the detail of how everything is made to fit together. It draws attention to the value of measuring the customer and the act of fitting, thereby reducing the likelihood of disappointment when the 'finished' outfit is worn over time, as in the case of

Aviemore. Indeed, questions can be asked why Aviemore had such an about-turn in its strategy, particularly in that this strategy appears to have emerged following the international benchmarking of 'best practice'. Perhaps the lesson is hidden in the final quotation of the Aviemore case study: "based on what we have heard from local businesses". Measuring local customers and being effective in the fitting within the locality appears to be a fundamental principle. This message is perhaps reinforced with examples of the long established HolidayMull and the Islay and Jura Marketing Group. Both preceded the world-wide-web, which suggests that the viability and sustainability of an online promotional presence is dependent upon its appropriate fit into a local social context, irrespective of the purpose. Nevertheless, it is known that HolidayMull endured adjustments to its subscription rate formula before getting it 'right' and also undertook periodic alterations to accommodate changes, for example, developing an online presence in 1994 and dropping its quality-grading requirement for membership in 2008.

One novel insight is presented by the view that a tailor will undergo an apprenticeship. This allows the provision of fixed-term public sector funded initiatives to be viewed in a new light. It is not known how many started, then, at the end of their life-cycle, die and leave 'trace evidence' of their activity (e.g. "Connect Islay Jura"). However, the two successive initiatives on Arran can be viewed as 'apprenticeships', which spurred the formation of VisitArran. This view of their apprenticeship potential offers an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of such local initiatives. However, it does require identifying and enrolling the right apprentices who have the potential to identify future opportunities for development.

The metaphor encourages the concept of competition to be explored deeper than might otherwise be considered. Whilst competition is perhaps not acknowledged locally, there are local competitive elements which determine whether hoteliers join a local group or merely appropriate a listing on a local website. Furthermore, competition examined in the context of the local tailor and the national tailor raises the issue of their relationship. This view heightens interest in the relationship between VisitScotland and local tourism groups and draws attention to whether there is a conflict of interest undermining collaboration.

It is concluded that the metaphor of tailoring offers a useful device to understand these local collective efforts.