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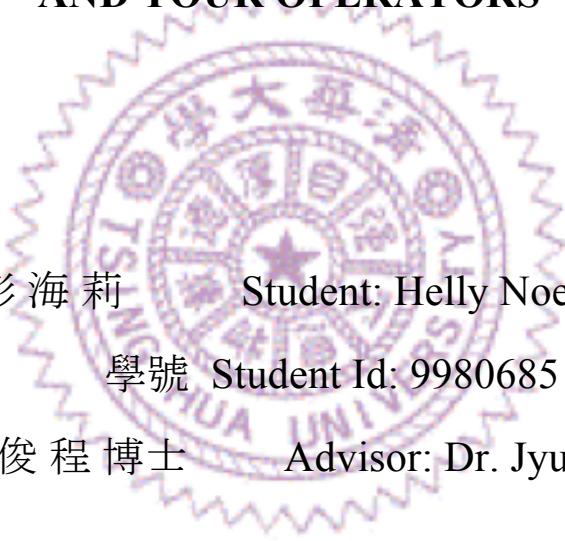
電子旅遊業在貝里斯：調查分析評價旅館和旅遊經營商的網路平台

**E-TOURISM IN BELIZE: A SURVEY ANALYSIS AND  
EVALUATION OF THE INTERNET PRESENCE OF HOTELS  
AND TOUR OPERATORS**

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# **Abstract**

The use of the Internet and other Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has revolutionized the way businesses are carried out today and it is believed to be a very important channel of distribution of information and linking customers to services and products and especially in E-tourism. E-tourism has allowed customers and business owners with a direct platform to communicate with each other especially for marketing and sales activities such as choosing destinations, getting information, making reservations, paying online, and advertising among others. Internet and ICT in the tourism sector will only continue helping tourism entrepreneurs to enhance their service offerings and thus overall position in the market.

Belize has a public-private economy with tourism as the number one foreign exchange earner. In this study the E-tourism status in Belize was assessed. This study explored uses of the Internet and presence of web marketing tools in tourism businesses in Belize, since very little information is currently known. A concurrent mixed-method approach was used in this study. Firstly, a service blueprint for travellers was developed to identify the actions of the traveller and how they relate to E-tourism. Upon reviewing the blueprint and identifying that the Internet and ICT played a large role in user's actions while travelling, the Internet presence of all Belizean hotels and tour operators were surveyed. After analyzing the survey, and identifying that most of the hotels and tour operators had websites and how important a role website play in tourism businesses, a website evaluating approach was used to further assess and study the state, quality and effectiveness of websites used among the Hotels and Tour operators. A modified Balanced Score Card (BSC) approach was used as the evaluation method for the websites and the focus of this study. User Judgment was also measured via a questionnaire to assess the satisfaction levels of a destination website.

This research has much implication, mainly for tourism businesses wanting to improve their services over the Internet. Most importantly this study illustrated that currently Belize e-tourism is slow growing and that web marketing tools in tourism institutions seem to be expanding but are still very limited. The website evaluation approach illustrated that for hotels, the greatest strength was site attractiveness and their weakness was in the technical aspect. Similarly, the tour operator's greatest strength was in technical aspect and the weakest strength was marketing effectiveness. Low scores in all perspectives evaluated in the BSC approach and low levels in Internet presence, indicates the need for improvements in almost all web platforms.

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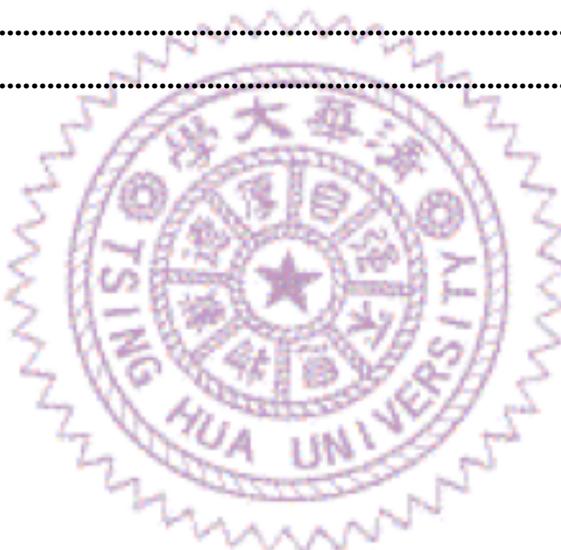
Thank you all so much!!

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”  
— Winston Churchill—

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# **Chapter 1: Overview of Study**

## **1.1 Preface**

Tourism is one of the largest civilian industries in the world providing the greatest number of jobs for most economies and boasts a greater array of heterogeneous stakeholders than many other industries (Buhalis, D., & Law, R., 2008). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, the total contribution of travel and tourism related economic activity to the world's GDP for 2013 was 9.4% (USD 6,842.0bn), and is expected to rise by 4.4% per annum (10% of GDP) by 2023 (WTTC, Economic Impact Report, 2012). Because of its magnitude and significance to most global economies, especially developing ones like Belize, much interest is placed in its growth, potential and economic development. The robust growth and development of the industry are perhaps only mirrored by the growth of information and communication technologies-ICTs (Buhalis, D., & Law, R., 2008).

Today, Tourism is mostly based on information and the interactive ability to communicate with consumers through various channels to market products and build customer relationships (Pan, B., & Fesenmaier, D. R., 2006). The Internet and the adaptation of Information and Communication technologies (ICT) have become efficient ways to disperse information and market tourism services and products (Pitoska, E., 2013). Moreover, the Internet and ICTs, play a critical role for the competitiveness of tourism organizations and destinations, and have widened the scope of tourism in the global market (Buhalis, D. et al., 2005 & 2008). Also, these tools are important for seizing tourism developmental opportunities arising from integrating and strengthening of the local tourism value chain. However, due to different capacity of an organization to understand and transform the Information and communication technology and all that the Internet has to offer, not all organizations are able to effectively integrate these tools into their strategic marketing operations (Li, X., & Wang, Y., 2011). Studies have pointed out that to use the Internet in tourism to its fullest potential and to keep up with new technologies involves; the continuous redesign of tourism websites for ease and convenience, upgrade web technologies to be more personalized for customers, initiate web campaign, develop brands and integrate branding strategy on the web, gather customer information, improve customer service and streamline online reservations (Baloglu, S., & Pekcan, Y. A., 2006).

Moreover, many other studies have shown that the Internet has become the most important source for tourism information acquisition and one of the most important technologies that have changed

travellers' behaviors (Buhalis, D., & Law, R., 2008). In fact according to Google 2013 travel statistics, 68% of leisure travelers seek travel inspiration online. ICTs and the Internet have dramatically increased the number of choices for consumers and have open the market for other organization that were not made available, to be able to compete with local brands. Therefore, the rapid growth of online users and the increased rate of online transactions, clearly show the popularity of the technology and as such, tourism businesses are increasingly adopting e-business models to achieve their goals (Law, R., et al., 2010).

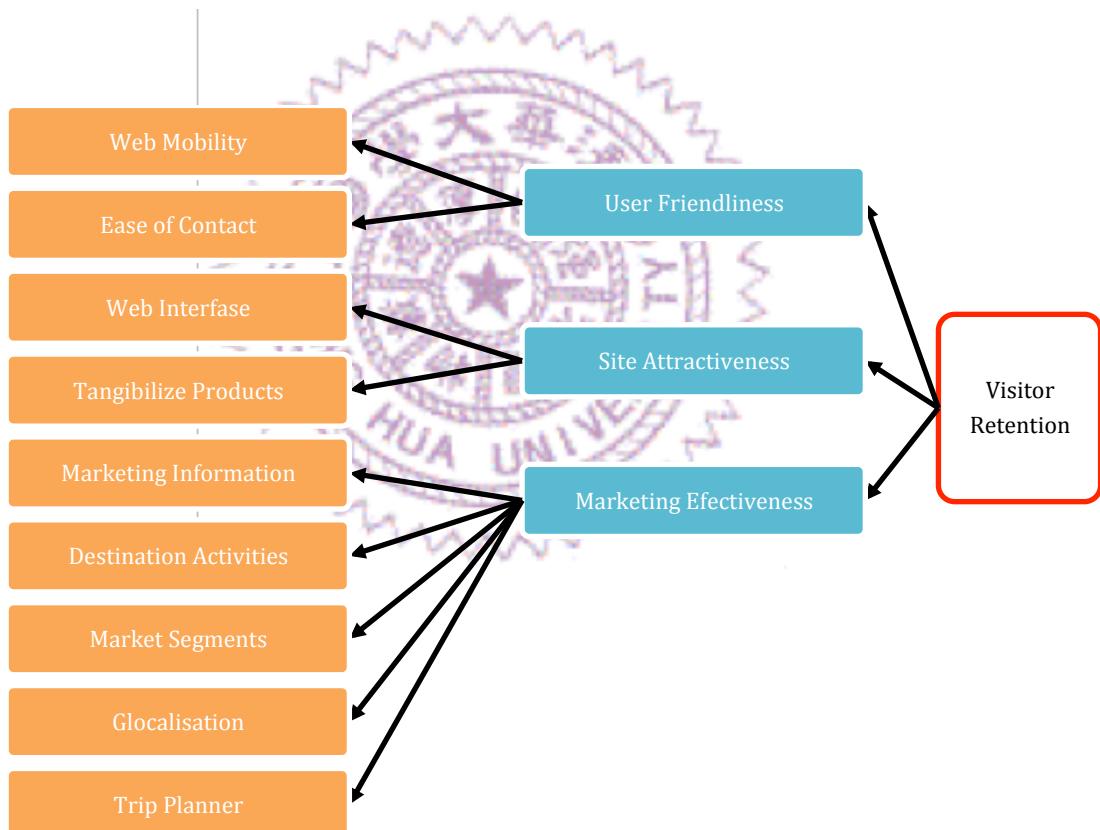
Research done by Law, R., et al., 2006 and Buhalis, D. et al., 2008, mentioned that consumers have been increasing their use of the Internet to search for accommodation related information and similarly a large number of customers make reservations directly from hotel websites during travel planning. A website as a web marketing tool can be useful, to reach customers, reduce operational cost and increase market share, but with the explosive ever changing climate of the internet and web technology applications, websites design and content can be at risk of being dysfunctional. According to Gehrke, D., & Turban, E. (1999), the success of e-commerce for any company, especially if it is not a well-known name, is greatly dependent on the appropriate design of its Website. A high quality website can allow the user to freely gather information about the tourism business and possibly book a reservation without calling the business directly or going through an agent (Abdinnour-Helm, S., & Chaparro, B. S., 2007). Therefore, maintaining an effective website has become vital to strengthen its customer relationship and gain market share (Law, R., et al., 2010).

Website evaluation can help organizations track the performance of their website over period of time, and thereby facilitate continuous improvements and comparison of site performance against competitors and industry peers (Morrison A. M., et al., 2004). A variety of website evaluation approaches have been implemented, both quantitative and qualitative, but according to recent studies done by Law, R., et al. (2010), the counting method seems to be the most widely used.

Because the hospitality sector has been known to be a major component of the tourism industry and the fact that numerous efforts have been done to market it using the Internet, this study aims at finding out the present status and effectiveness of Internet based marketing tools specifically among Belizean hotels and tour operators. A counting method approach was adapted in this study, by using an instrument for evaluating websites known as the modified Balance Score Card (BSC), based on Morrison A. M., et al., 2004, Douglas, A., & Mills, J. E. (2004) and Kline, S. F.,

et al. (2004). The BSC checklist evaluates mostly four parameters for website visitors retention, which includes user-friendliness, site attractiveness, marketing effectiveness and technical aspects. **Figure 1-1** shows a website visitor retention model, proposed by Douglas, A., & Mills, J. E. (2004), sharing the same parameters used to prepare the BSC checklist.

Other methods, such as questionnaires and surveys were also used to assess and analyze website's overall user satisfaction, online actions and digital presence in Belize tourism Industry. The mixed approach, in this study was able to analyze the overall Internet presence of Belizean hotels and tour operators. Although this BSC approach has been used to evaluate similar websites of tourism businesses and destination marketing organizations (DMO's), in other countries, no such studies have been conducted in Belize, where the main economic earner is tourism and whose ICT infrastructure and it's applications are known to be limited.



**Figure 1-1 Website Visitor Retention Model**

(Source: Douglas, A., & Mills, J. E., 2004)

## **1.2 Purpose of Study**

The Internet and ICT have made impacts on the overall operational, structure and strategy of business organizations today, making their success dependent on how effectively and strategically they are using these tools. As such, it is important that organizations, especially tourism ones, are cognizant that this growing phenomenon (the Internet) and its impact on businesses is inevitable and here to stay.

Since the Internet emerged, travel planning has been a primary use as to why people use the Internet, making it evident that businesses need to create and implement business models that satisfy their customers needs. Many previous studies in hospitality and tourism have evaluated websites of accommodation institutions according to certain categories of evaluation criteria in various countries. The main purpose of all websites is the effective transfer of information to an online target audience by paying attention to parameters such as user friendliness, site attractiveness among others, as instructed by the modified balanced scorecard instrument. However, few studies have focused on the consumer as a source of website evaluation; instead most have looked as the managerial and design perspective by adopting other evaluation methods. Thus, this study attempts to address this gap, as well as finding out how effective are tourism related businesses using these ICT tools, especially websites? And how much Internet presence do these establishments actually have?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the E-tourism status and competence of a developing country: Belize. Firstly, the size and structure of the tourism industry of the country will be reviewed. Following that, a travelers blue print will be created to explain common consumers behaviors or actions over the Internet when searching for a destination country and which web marketing channels users normally access as they plan their trip. And finally, the digital presence in hospitality related businesses would be examined by specifically focusing on tourism websites in Belize. A website evaluation approach that will measure their overall effectiveness will be used. Due to factors that cannot be controlled, this industry analysis will only be limited to 10 hotels and 9 tour operators in Belize. The research methodology will be based on a concurrent mixed approach of different data sources, both quantitative and qualitative, leading to the analysis and reporting. Furthermore, this study does not attempt to replace existing categories of website evaluation criteria with new ones, but instead intends to expand existing categories by including the consumer perspective as a way of making website evaluation more comprehensive and useful.

Belize's primary economic earner is tourism and is known to be a popular destination for many seeking an unforgettable experience. The findings of this thesis will shed some light as to what E-Tourism practices need to be taken in account and considered within the industry, for its future growth and development. This study will thus also provide insight for destination marketers and tourism organizations in their Internet marketing efforts.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Despite the fact that maintaining an effective website has become vital for a business to strengthen its customer relationships and gain a larger market share and that the usefulness of a website is based on its functionality and usability (Law, R., et al., 2010), very little research has focused on using consumers to measure their overall satisfaction of websites.

There have been extensive studies evaluating websites in a tourism context (Morrison, A. M., et al., 2004; Kline, S. F., et al., 2004; Abdinnour-Helm, S., & Chaparro, B. S., 2007; Douglas, A., & Mills, J. E., 2004 and Meintjes, C., et al., 2011), however few of these studies were conducted in a developing country like Belize. Also, most researchers investigated accommodation establishments, and no previous research, to the best of our knowledge, has examined Tour Operator's Websites. Hence this study attempts at closing these gaps in the existing body of information and knowledge that is presently known.

Also, this study is unique in that apart from evaluating websites, it also provides an assessment on how much Internet presence exists in the tourism industry of Belize. It brings about an overall perspective of how the tourism industry is supposed to be managed with reference to Internet based ICT and how important Internet based ICT tools are to help in the development and growth of tourism. Lastly, it tries to address reasons for the digital divide with tourism related businesses.

These research findings will be helpful to many nations, especially to less developed ones and tourism marketing agencies and business, so that they can go back and reevaluate their overall E-Tourism scale. This research will be gladly shared amongst all contributors, in the hope that it will not just be an extension of truths, but a means with which they can better access and control ICT resources within the Industry.

## **1.4 Objectives**

Considering the problem statement mentioned in Section 1.3 and the fact that this study will only focus on tourism in Belize and specifically on hotels and tour operators, the objectives specific to this study are as follows:

1. To examine how much Internet presence, tourism related business have in Belize, especially hotels and tour operators (TO), by identifying if they have basic drivers indicative of its use like: having a website that is functional, using social media in their websites, using any international travel portal or local forums, and having any Google place activity.
2. To assess and evaluate the marketing effectiveness and usability of hotels and tour operator's websites, based on the criteria of the modified Score Card, a counting method approach (see chapter 4). This assessment will determine the strengths and weaknesses that these tourism establishments face in respect to website design and development for marketing. A mobile compatibility test of the websites evaluated will also be done as an extension of the evaluation process.
3. To provide recommendations and suggestions for Belizean tourism institutions, to improve their overall E-Tourism status and ways to combat the digital divide. These recommendations will be presented based on overall findings gotten from this study.

## **1.5 Motivation**

Making good use of the Internet is not only about having good connectivity, but it is about exploring what the Internet has to offer, in order to reap its benefits. Most businesses today, including tourism units, use and see the need of the Internet as a means to commercially interact between them and their customers. Tourism is often said to be the industry that can act as the best catalyst for conservation and improvement of the environment and maintenance of local diversity and culture (WTO, 2014). As such, there is still much to be learnt about what are the best suitable drivers to stimulate its growth and success, and what roles does the Internet and ICT play in this endeavor.

Also, little is known of how much Internet presence is found in developing countries such as Belize, where ICT infrastructure is not fully developed and more specifically website quality and design factors for e-commerce success are not known. So, in view of the emerging need to identify these gaps, this study will be geared at finding how much Internet presence exists within tourism related business and the quality of their websites, by using a quantitative website evaluation model. We contend that, in some countries like Belize, that depend solely on tourism

as an economic earner, the Internet is not used to its ultimate capacity and there is still a digital divide existing within tourism organization.

## **1.6 Thesis Organization**

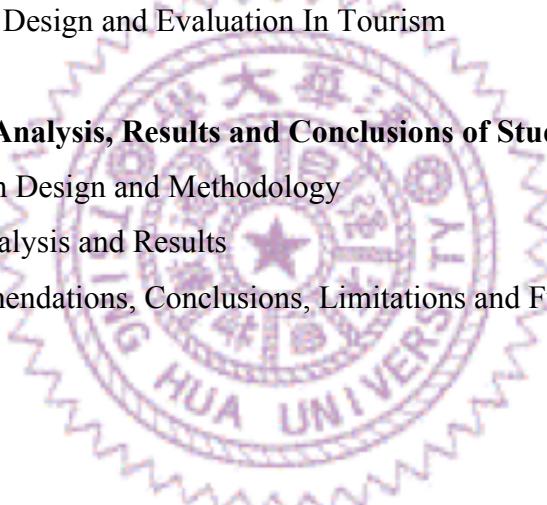
This thesis is divided into two logical sections. The first section consists of mainly introductory, background and related factual information concerning the study. It also includes a review of related works. The second section includes information pertaining directly to the study approach, data collection, findings and interpretation of the analysis.

### **Section 1: Introductory and Background Information of Study**

- Chapter 1: Overview of Study
- Chapter 2: Status of Tourism Industry and ICT in Belize
- Chapter 3: Internet, ICT and Service Design in Tourism
- Chapter 4: Website Design and Evaluation In Tourism

### **Section 2: Methodology, Analysis, Results and Conclusions of Study**

- Chapter 5: Research Design and Methodology
- Chapter 6: Data Analysis and Results
- Chapter 7: Recommendations, Conclusions, Limitations and Future Work



# **Chapter 2: Status of Tourism Industry and ICT in Belize**

This chapter gives a complete overview of the current statistics and trends of the Tourism Industry in Belize. Also, since the main focus of this study has to do with the Internet and ICT, the overall ICT status of the country will also be addressed in this chapter.

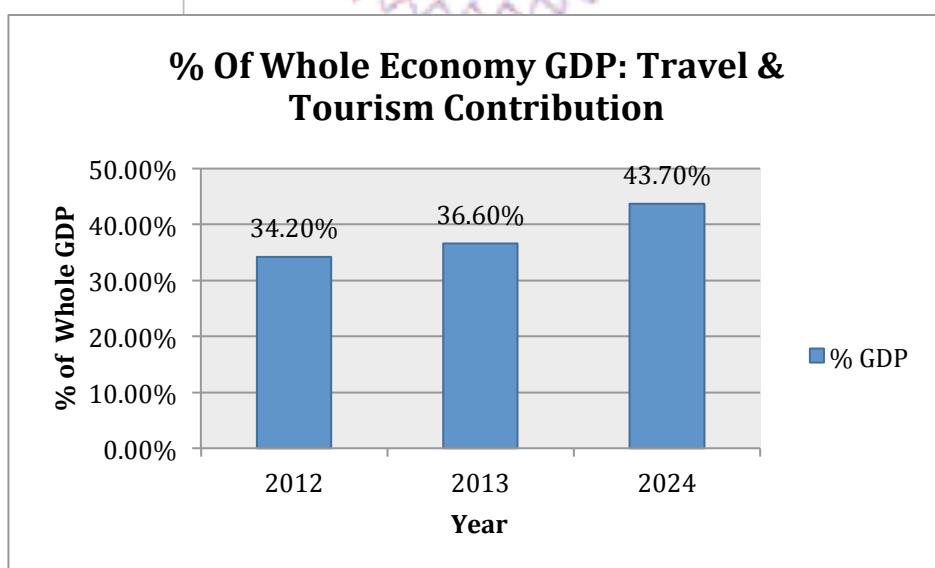
## **2.1 Belize Tourism Industry**

Tourism is a combination of activities, services and industries such as means of transportation, accommodation and entertainment places, sports centers, restaurants and shops. All these industries contribute to a nice traveling experience by lifting the standard of living, by promoting employment, by raising investments and thus supporting the economy (Pitoska, E., 2013). In Belize, tourism is the largest international revenue generator and the economy is very small consisting of mainly small medium enterprises (SMEs). Known for its extreme biodiversity and distinctive ecosystems of marine life, Belize has grown to be a very popular destination for visitors wanting to experience nature to its fullest. Belize is strategically located in Central America, bordering Mexico to the North, Guatemala to the South and West and the Caribbean to the east. It is a country filled with diverse culture and is the only English speaking country in Central America. This along with its natural beauty attractants, makes it a good choice for English native visitors, running away from the harsh winter climates, to come and experience another world filled with ancient Mayan history, tropical climates and diverse ethnicity (BTB, 2014). With a population of only 343, 000 last reported in 2012, and a land area of 22,966 sq. km, it has a very low population density of 15 people per square kilometer (countryeconomy.com, 2014).

One of the first indications that Belize would be a good candidate for tourism came in the 1950's when expatriates and foreign visitors came inland to hunt jaguars and fish on the barrier reef, which is presently the largest in the western hemisphere. Shortly after, around the 1960's, some 11, 000 foreign visitors came to Belize each year. At this time Agriculture was the main focus for Belize's development, and Belize remained virtually unknown to the outside world beyond the Caribbean and Central American regions. The country's underdeveloped nature, especially the lack of infrastructure, discouraged travellers to visit. However as time passed the industry grew exponentially welcoming both cruise visitors and overnight visitors. The tourism in Belize is believed to have initiated in San Pedro Ambergris Caye around 1964, an Island off the coast of Belize City, due to foreign investors who saw its potential (BHA, 2014).

Around, 1985, the government of Belize became committed to making tourism a primary factor of foreign direct investment, due to its potential in bringing good gains for the country. A promotional campaign was launched under the theme “BELIZE – The Adventure Coast, Undiscovered and Unspoiled”, which highlighted Belize as an adventure destination (BTB, 2014). Ever since then, Belize’s tourism ranks escalated, making it a major booster in the country’s economy.

Today tourism has become a priority for government officials, since its development has contributed to an increase in Belize’s population, employment and overall economy. In fact, in 2010, the government and the Inter American Development Bank funded and initiative of BZD\$13.3 million to support the Sustainable Tourism Program (STP) through the Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation and Culture. This STP was design to create “responsible tourism” through different strategies. The goal of the STP was to contribute to national economic growth that is environmentally and socially responsible, supporting overnight tourism and national capacity for destination planning and management. This loan would provide investment to the BTB to implement new systems for improvements in areas such as Internal Management, Quality Assurance, Marketing and Destination Planning (BTB action plan 2010-2012). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council Economic Impact for Belize 2014, Travel and Tourism account for 36.6% (BZD\$1,173.6mn) of the whole country’s GDP and contributes to 33% (47,000 jobs) of total employment in 2013. **Figure 2-1** indicates trends for travel and tourism contribution to whole GDP.



**Figure 2-1 Travel and Tourism Contribution To Belize’s GDP**

*Source: World Travel and Tourism Council (2014)*

Belize's primary tourist attractions range from a variety of land and sea activities, making it essential to develop a balance between development and conservation of its natural resources. Consequently, Belize is recognized by the tourism world as a country that continuously redefines tourism as an economic strategy that preserves and conserves, instead of destroying its resources. Furthermore, the Belize tourism product had been described as experiential tourism with strong ecotourism content. According to the Belize tourism Board (BTB), in 2013 the four most popular destinations in the country are the Islands (e.g. San Pedro Ambergris Caye), Placencia, San Ignacio and Belize City. The most popular activities offered by these destinations include an array of island diving, snorkeling and fishing adventures in the second largest barrier reef and the great Blue Hole diving site, inland forest hikes and treks, cave tubing, zip lining, and visits to historical Mayan sites (BTB statistics, 2013). Presently, one of the tourism niches that Belize is trying to attract is family holiday takers and "honey mooners". This new trend is being taken advantage of by hotels offering free lodging to children less than 4 years and discounts for those under 12 years of age. Hotels are also advertising themselves as a wedding destination, to encourage visitors to have their dream wedding by the sea. Furthermore, this trend has also been extended to Tour Operators, offering family packages that include accommodation, transportation and tourist attractions (Euromonitor.com, 2012). Most tourism services in Belize include accommodations such as hotels and resorts, food and beverage, adventure tourism, transportation, travel trade, events and conferences, attractions, and tourism services (BELTRAIDE, 2014).

### **2.1.1 Tourism Institutions**

In Belize most private sector organizations foster the development of tourism. The following institutions are the major statutory bodies in Belize that assist in the overall development, marketing and maintenance of the Tourism Industry.

#### **Belize Tourism Board (BTB)**

The Belize Tourism Board is an institution that was established around 1996, within the Ministry of Tourism (BHA, 2014). It functions as a strategic partnership between government and the private sector to develop, market and implement tourism programs that fulfill the emerging needs of the local industries and international tourism marketplace for the benefit of Belize and Belizeans (BTB, 2014). The BTB has a long history of guiding and enabling the development of sustainable tourism in Belize. As tourism continues to become increasingly important part of Belize's economy, the BTB has a primary role to play in maintaining the nation's competitiveness in the global and regional tourism marketplace.

The mission of the BTB is to develop tourism initiatives and programs. It is responsible for implementing tourism policies and to cater for the needs of visitors. The operational management of the organization is performed by the a director of tourism (CEO), a registrar of hotels and four other directors involved in marketing, public relation, hotels and finance and administration.

The guiding principles of this institution are as follows (BTB, 2014):

- Tourism is a national priority designed to bring benefit to Belize and enhance the overall visitors' experience;
- Appropriate balance among all sectors of the industry safeguards and secures Belize's destination-positioning in the global tourism market;
- Tourism sector planning and management are based on partnerships, collaboration and creative approaches;
- Local communities play a meaningful role in the tourism sector, one that ensures economic, social and cultural benefits to each participating community;
- Integrate tourism policy and development programs with national economic, social, cultural and environmental policies;
- The tourism industry is developed with the integral involvement of the private sector;
- Tourism recognizes the importance of protecting Belize's natural and cultural resources.

### **Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA)**

This institution was founded in 1985 as a broad-based tourism umbrella organization. As the leading private sector tourism association, BTIA serves to promote the interests of its members, to develop and promote the Belize tourism product and to influence and secure the improvement of the industry. Presently the association has representation on almost every government, legislative, advisory, consultative and licensing committee, which indicates its continued commitment to national development. BTIA also plays an important role in the linkage of the private and public sectors (BTIA, 2014). The overall goals of this institution is as follows:

- Identifying needs and priorities of their members
- Lobbying and advocating on key tourism issues
- Promoting sustainable development
- Dissemination of tourism related information
- Offering/Facilitating training for members
- Setting standards in the industry
- Networking
- Assisting/Facilitating the marketing needs of members

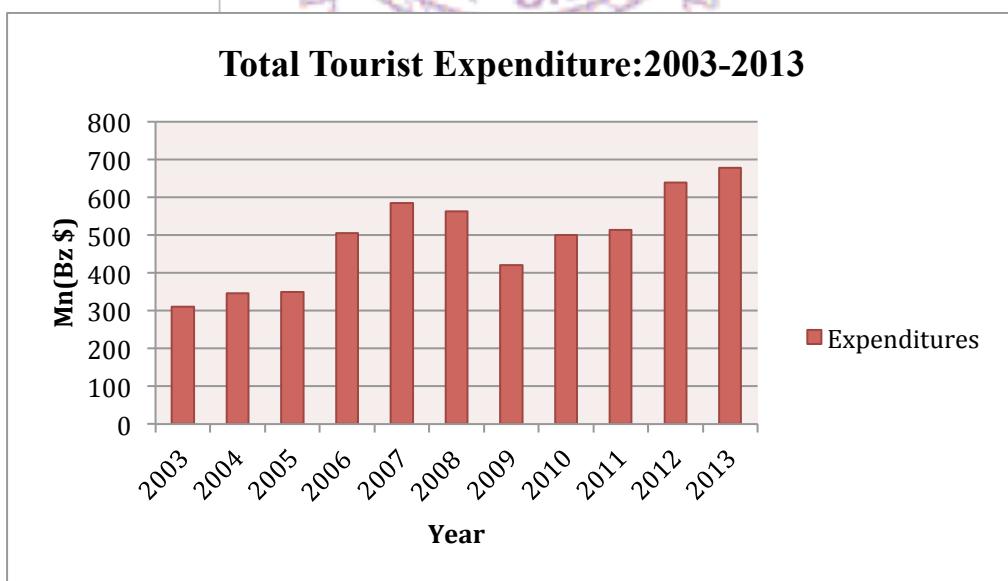
- Advising the BTB and Ministry of Tourism on marketing and product development matters

### Belize Hotels Association (BHA)

This association was established as a non-profit, non-government organization whose members are comprised mainly of hoteliers (hotels, resorts, lodges, condominiums, educational facilities and home stay) as well as other allied members who actively service the hospitality industry. BHA works attentively, to assist in the sustainable growth of member hotels and the tourism industry. It does this through global marketing initiatives, private and public sector partnership and training opportunities, to increase the standards and professional service (BHA, 2014). Furthermore, even though there are approximately 730 hoteliers in Belize, not all establishments are members.

### 2.1.2 Belize Travel Industry and Trends

Tourism is the largest service sub-sector in Belize and over the past decade it has emerged as an important pillar of country's economy. Each year, tourist expenditures are increasing. According to BTB 2013 statistics, the total tourist expenditure of travel and tourism was **BZD\$ 677.92 million**. **Figure 2-2** shows the tourist expenditures for the last decade. The figure clearly illustrates that visitors coming to Belize are spending more money each year and trends of the past years indicates that such activities will only continue to increase over the years. In view of such trends the government of Belize should aim to continue to invest in the industry to further its growth and development.



**Figure 2-2: Travel and Tourism Expenditures 2003-2013**

*Source: BTB, 2013*

In line with the need to continue investing in the industry, World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2014) estimates that a 31.6% of total investment will be allocated to Belize tourism by 2024, equating to almost BZD\$326.6 million. A great number of private developers have made significant contribution to investments especially in the coastal areas of Belize. Also, another, moderate trend that has been seen over recent years is the foreign demand for vacation homes and retirement homes. This has spurred a boon in residential real estate development of Belize. To encourage such trends to continue the government has many financial incentives in place to attract private investment for tourism related projects, like the Fiscal Incentive ACT, which provides tax holidays. **Table 2-1** shows key macroeconomics indicators and their estimated impacts on Belize's Economy for the next 10 years.

**Table 2-1: Macroeconomic Indicators of Belize Travel and Tourism Industry**

Topic	Outlook	2014 ↑	2024 ↑
GDP Direct Contribution	The direct contribution to GDP in 2013 was BZD\$432.5mn or 13.5% and was expected to grow by 4.1% pa in 2014. By 2024 its expected growth will be by 4.4% pa (BZD\$695.7mn).	4.1% per annum (pa)	4.4% pa (16% of GDP)
GDP total Contribution	The Total contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP in 2012 was BZD\$ 1,173.6mn or 36.6%. It was expected to rise by 4.5% (37.2% of GDP) by 2014 and a forecast growth of 4.5% pa by 2024.	4.5% (37.2% of GDP)	4.5% pa (43.7% of GDP)
Employment: Total Contribution	In 2013, 47,000 jobs were created by this industry, contributing to 33.0% of total employment. Its expected rise for 2014 was 5.1%, estimating the creation of some 49,000 jobs. This rise will continue and expected to increase by 4.1% pa by 2023 (73,000 jobs).	5.1% (33.5% of total employment)	4.1% pa (39.5% of total employment)
Visitors Exports	Visitors exports generated BZD\$662.3mn in 2013 (31.7% of total exports). This is expected to rise by 4.3% in 2014 attracting 309,000 international tourist arrivals. By 2024 the forecast growth is 4.7%, welcoming 434,000 tourist arrivals. Generating expenditures of \$BZD 1,091.1mn.	4.3%	4.7% pa (39.1% of total exports)
Investment	Tourism investment for 2013 was BZD\$ 185.6mn or 24.9% of total investment. Its expected to rise in 2014 was by 7.5% and for the next decade its growth estimate is 5.1% pa, or BZD\$ 326.6mn.	7.5%	5.1% pa (31.6% of total investment)

*Source: WTTC 2014 Statistics*

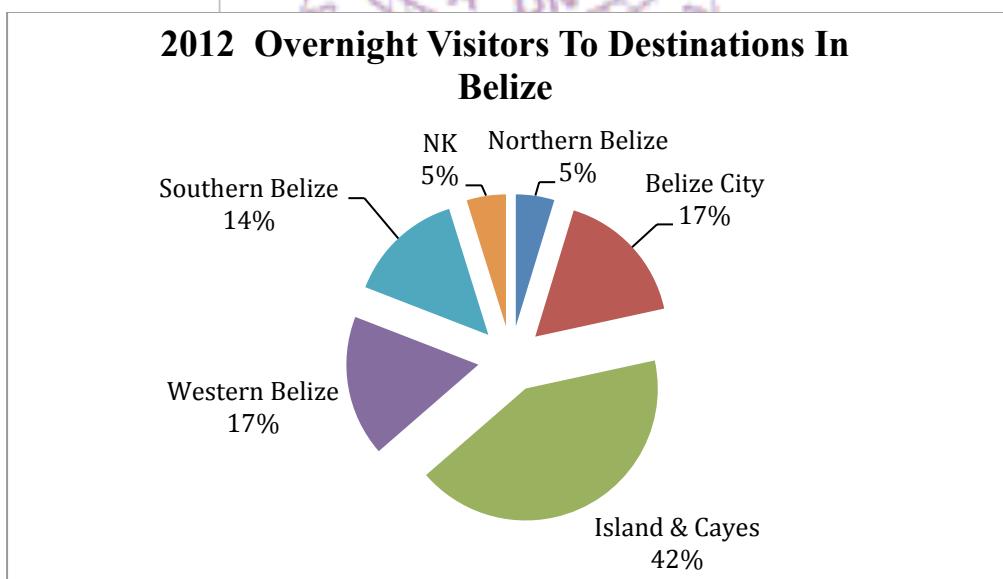
According to the latest statistics of the Belize Tourism Board, 2013 was an exceptional year for the Belize's Tourism Industry welcoming a total of 971,527 visitors, of which 294,177 were overnight tourist arrivals and 677,350 cruise visitors respectively. **Table 2-2** shows the arrivals trends for over 6 years. It shows that the overnight arrivals have remained relatively stable with a percentage change of 6% from the previous year. The most significant increase over the years has been cruise tourists.

**Table 2-2: Trends Of Visitors To Belize 2008-2013**

Area	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	% Change 12' vs. 13'
<b>Overnight Tourists</b>	245,007	232,249	241,919	250,263	277,135	294,177	6.1%
<b>Cruise Tourists (Excursionists)</b>	597,370	705,219	764,628	727,878	640,734	677,350	5.7%
<b>Total Visitors</b>	<b>842,377</b>	<b>937,468</b>	<b>1,006,547</b>	<b>978,141</b>	<b>917,869</b>	<b>971,527</b>	<b>6%</b>

*Source: BTB, 2013*

Most of the overnight visitors tend to stay on the islands, accounting for around 42% of the total. **Figure 2-3** below gives a representation of the distribution of overnight visitors and the most visited areas in Belize.



**Figure 2-3: Overnight visitors destination visits in Belize, 2013**

*Source: BTB, 2013*

\*NT=Not Known

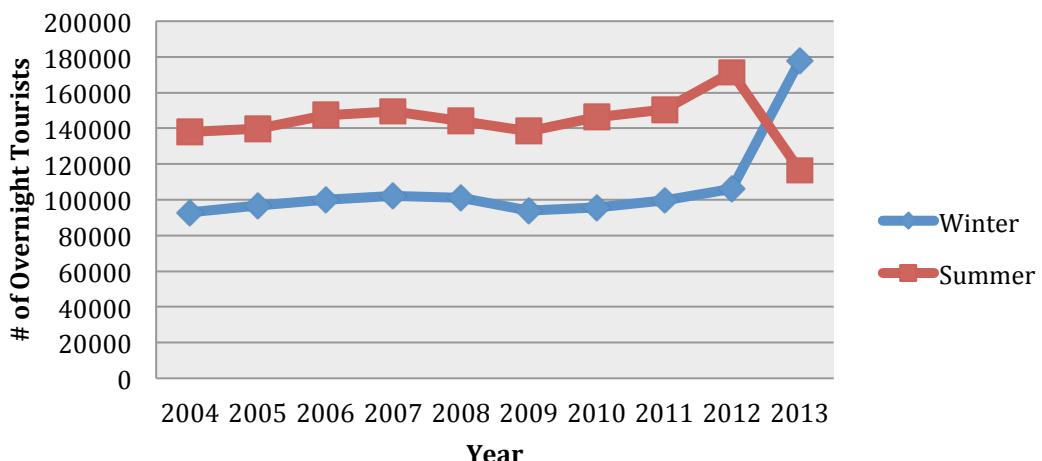
Since the beginning of the 2000, Belize overnight arrivals have grown moderately at an average compound rate of 2.0% (2000-2010). Belize experienced a challenging year in 2009, as can be seen in **Table 2-2** for overnight visitors, due to the economic crisis, resulting in the decrease of international visitors. This Phenomenon was not only experienced in Belize but was witnessed by other tourist destinations as well (BTB, 2012 & Taylor Gray et al., 2011). Overnight arrivals in Belize are much more important than cruise arrivals, since they are the ones that tend to spend more time and money in the country. As such, as the trends continue to increase, the government intends to continue to invest in the infrastructure and global marketing efforts of the nation's Tourism Industry.

Over the past 8 to 10 years Belize has experienced a significant influx of cruise visitors resulting in most of the arrivals to Belize. In 2013, approximately 70 % of the total visitors were from cruise visitors. Because of this boom, in 2010 the carnival corporation finalized an agreement to build a new cruise port in Belize City. This new port estimated cost was US\$50 million and was expected to generate over US\$ 500 million in the next 20 years or so. Technically, to be a tourist one must spend at least 24 hours in the destination country, as such cruise arrivals are mostly considered excursionists, since they only spend a limited amount of time in Belize (BTB Statistics, 2012 & Taylor Gray and Kathy Conroy, 2011).

### **2.1.3 Seasonality**

Most overnight visitors that come to Belize, visit during the summer, or more specifically between the months of January to April. However in 2013, Belize experienced a decrease of visitors during the summer and an increase during the winter months, which is between the months of May to December. **Figure 2-4** is indicative of this sudden shift in trend.

## Seasonality Trends For Overnight Visitors: 2004-2013

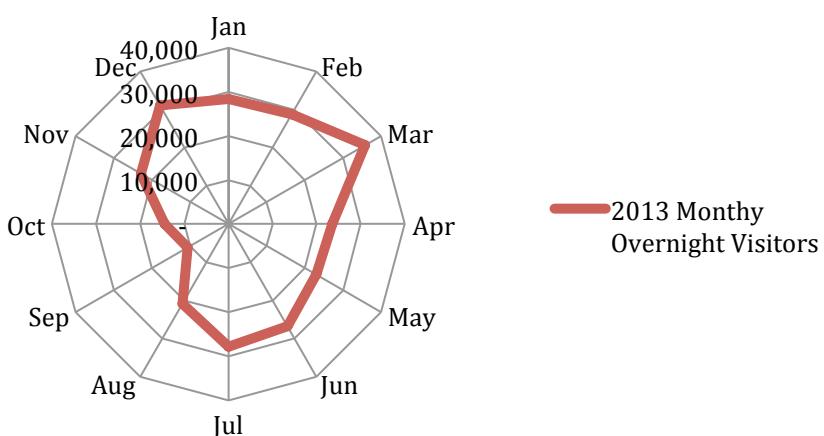


**Figure 2-4: Seasonality Distribution of Overnight Tourist Arrivals in Belize**

*Source: BTB, 2013*

According to BTB statistics, most months in 2013 experienced an increase of overnight tourist arrivals, with the exception of April, September, October and December. The month with the most overnight visitors was March, with a total of 35,795 tourists, 10% rise from the previous year. **Figure 2-5** shows a representation of the number of visitors monthly in 2013.

### 2013 Monthly Overnight Visitors

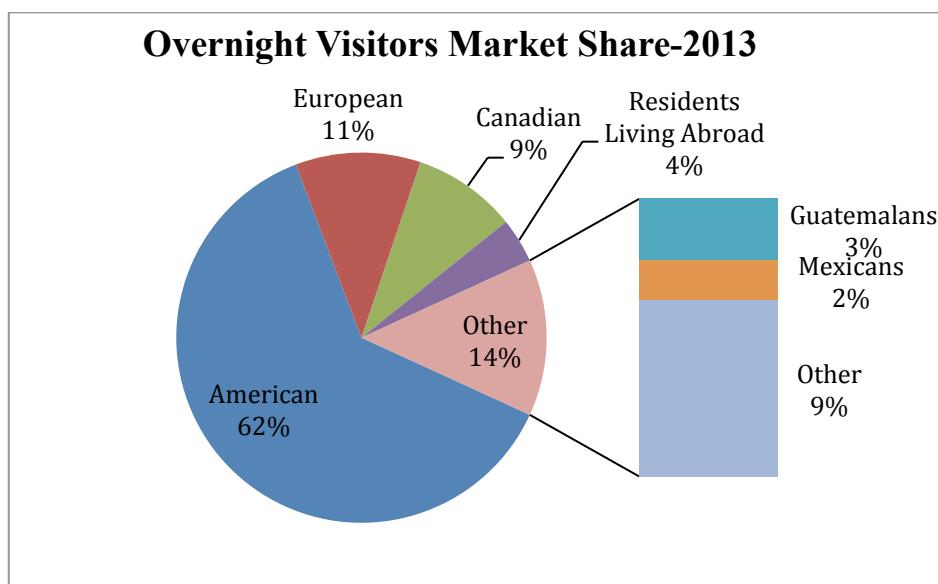


**Figure 2-5: Monthly overnight arrivals to Belize, 2013**

*Source: BTB, 2013*

#### 2.1.4 Visitors Market Mix

Belize receives visitors from a variety of places around the world, but over the years, the United States, Europe and Canada remained the main markets, with the US being the most predominant contributor (62%). For most Americans, it is evident that Belize is an ideal destination since it is only a few hours away from nearest US airport and is English speaking. BTB reports that collectively, these three regions account for approximately 73% of the total overnight arrivals in 2013, as can be seen in **Figure 2-6**. Not much local tourism is witnessed in Belize, only a small percentage (4%) of residents living abroad come back to Belize as tourists. 9% of the total visitors come from other places such as Africa, Asia, other parts of Central America and the Caribbean, South America, Oceania and Middle East. Neighboring bordering countries such as Guatemala and Mexico contribute only 3% and 2% respectively (see **Figure 2-6**).



**Figure 2-6: Visitors Market Mix, 2013**

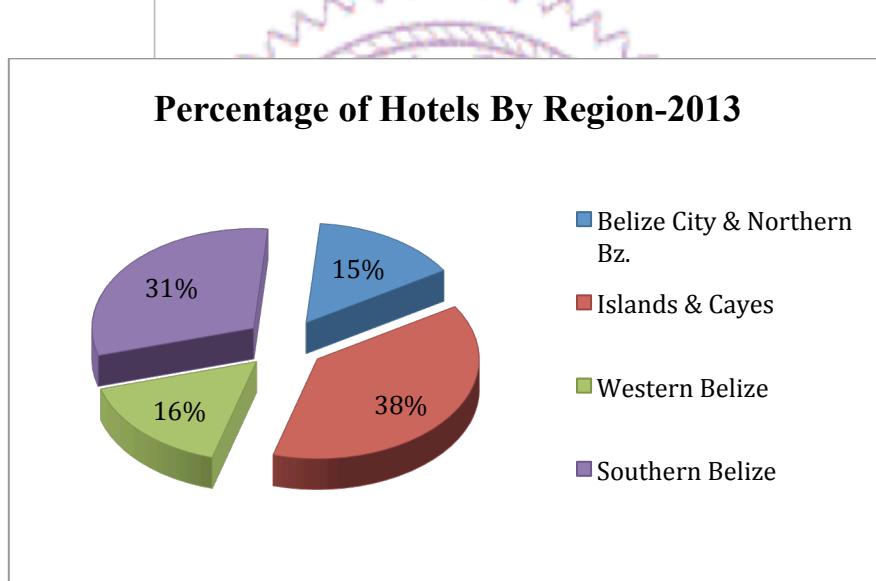
*Source: BTB, 2013*

#### 2.2 Hotels Supply In Belize

The accommodations sector in Belize is governed by the *Hotels and Tourist Accommodation Act* (last revised in 2003) and is regulated by the Belize Tourism Board. By definition a hotel is an establishment providing accommodation, and related hospitality services like meals, stores and tours to travelers and tourists. In Belize, hotels are mostly categorized into cottages, resorts, guesthouses, and cabañas (BTB, 2013). The national branding landscape of the Belizean accommodation industry presently consists of 730 units, accounting for a total of almost 7000

rooms. Of the total hotels only two are chain affiliated (Radisson Fort George Hotel and Marina and Best Western Belize Biltmore Plaza) and one is brand-affiliated property (Ka'ana), meaning that there is room for development in this arena that remains lacking (Taylor et al., 2011). The vast majority of the hotels supply consists of budget and economy hotels, in fact almost 90% of the accommodations in Belize are comprised of 20 rooms or less (BTB, 2012). The rooms in these economy hotels offer the necessary amenities and are generally small in size. According to trip advisor, most of the hotels in Belize are rated as 4 stars.

Historically, these hotels catered to backpackers, adventure tourists and other price sensitive travelers, but overtime with the encouragement of government incentives, there have been a few developers beginning to take advantage of the market opportunities that an upscale full service hotel can offer (Taylor Gray & Kathy Conroy, 2011). A few Hotels with 50 rooms of more can be seen in Belize City and the Islands. The following figure shows the hotels supply by Region for 2013.



**Figure 2-7: Hotels Supply By Region**

*Source: BTB, 2013*

From **Figure 2-7** above, you can clearly see that most of the hotels are located on the Islands, accounting for 38% of the total, specifically Ambergris Caye. This figure is not surprising since this island is one of the country's most popular diving and snorkeling destination. Furthermore, the supply of the hotels in Belize has grown moderately over the years as can be seen in the **Figure 2-8**. Also, the hotel occupancy for 2012 was an average 42.1% of the total rooms available for that year. This occupancy rate was not seen since 2006, before the global economic crisis, indicating that this sector has made enormous strides over the years and is expected to

continue to grow. The total number of jobs in 2012 attributed to this sector was 7,931 (BTB, 2012).



**Figure 2-8: Hotel Supply Trend In Belize**

*Source: BTB, 2013*

## 2.3 Belizean Tour Operators Supply

Tour Operators (TO's) in Belize are tourism service providers that operate tours locally within the country either comprising of single individuals or companies. According to BTB, their customers are comprised of anyone in the world that may have their own way to that country and purchase a local tour in that country. Also, the BTB national classification of Tour Operators state that some of the services provided by these entities include but are not limited to:

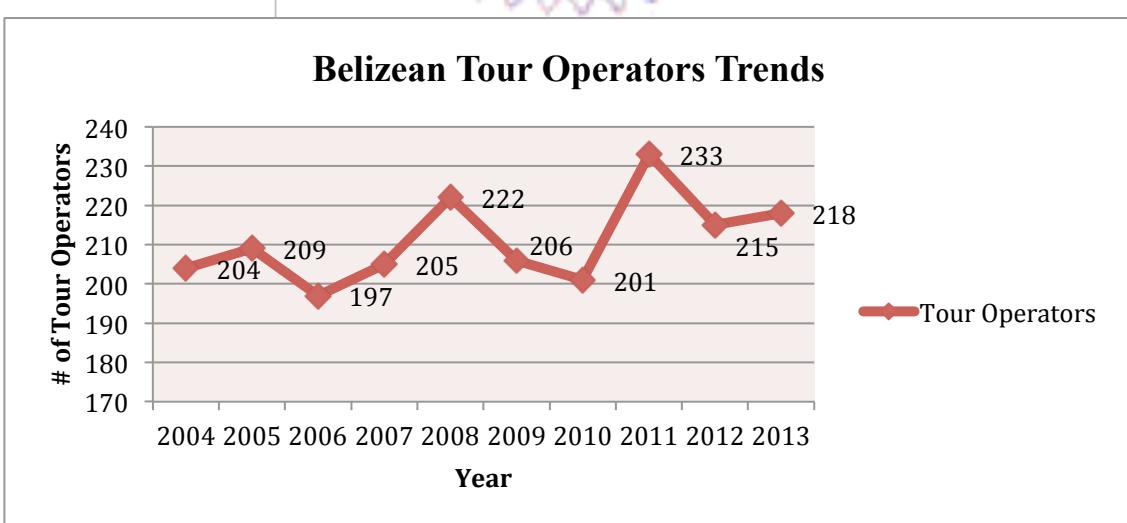
- Coordinating and handling adhoc/ incentive groups;
- Generating and handling multi-center holiday packages;
- Creating hotel and activity innovative packages for special interest groups as well as individual travellers;
- All types of transfer and transport arrangements;
- Airport, port and hotel agent representation and;
- Local and pre-booking of excursions and tours.

Furthermore, some of the main responsibilities that TO needs to carryout, in order to ensure that the traveler or tourist receives the utmost satisfaction in the services they seek are as follows.

- Plan and document the tour itinerary;
- Advertise and market the tour;

- Make bookings for the tour and ensure that the necessary equipment is available and in sufficient quantity for the size of the tour party;
- Ensure that the equipment to be used is in good working order;
- Ensure that the Tour Guide and staff employed by the TO are certified and adequately qualified to perform their duties;
- Ensure an effective means of communication between his/her tour guide or representative and his/her base of operation or other appropriate contact in order to cater for emergency situations;
- Liaise with all necessary local suppliers;
- Coordinate all bookings and cost with the tour organizer or planner;
- Establish a ratio of tour guides based on the type of tour being carried out, in an effort to ensure delivery of a quality service, among others.

These responsibilities were stipulated under the Belize National Classification of Hotels and Tour Operators, 2012. The TO's sector in Belize began in 1999, when the Tour Operator Regulation was established, and a total of 51 entities were offering services. Today, this sector has quadrupled with exactly 218 TO's distributed across the entire country of Belize (BTB, 2013). Visitors coming to Belize rely on these tour operators to create vacation packages, comprised of airfare, accommodation, transportation and trips. Most TO's are based locally but can also be managed from offices outside Belize (BTB, 2014). **Figure 2-9** shows trends of the TO's supply in Belize over the years. One can see that this sector has remained relatively stable. The highest distribution of TO can be found on the Islands and Cayes, which are known to be the most popular destinations in the country.



**Figure 2-9: Tour Operators Supply, 2004-2013**

*Source: BTB, 2013*

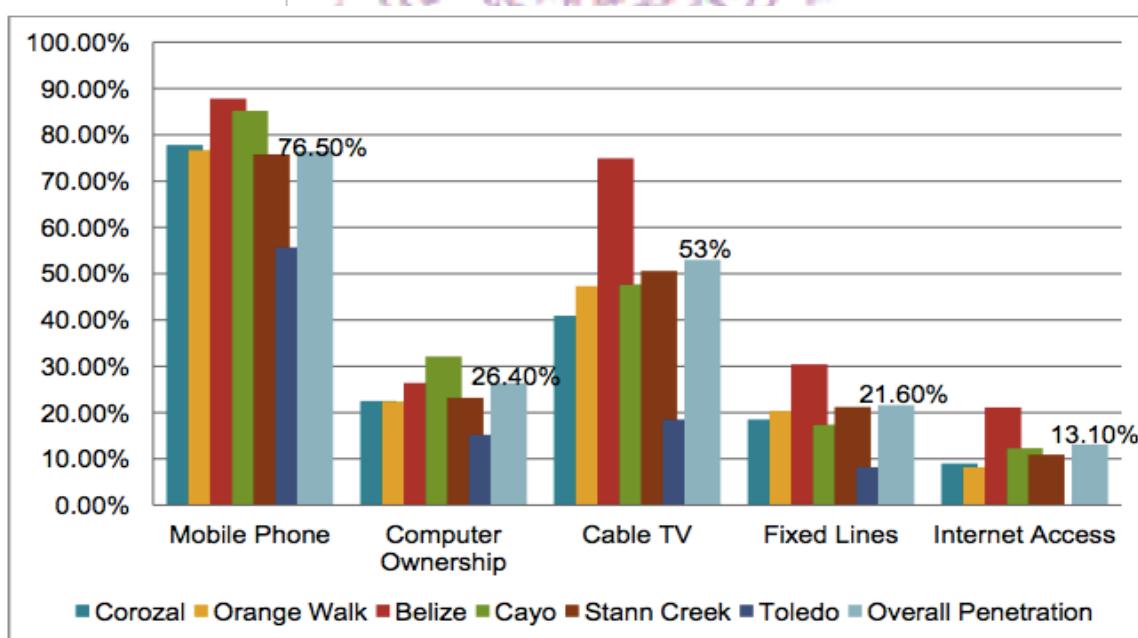
## 2.4 ICT In Belize

E-readiness (electronic readiness) refers to the degree to which a nation or country or economy may be ready, willing or prepared to obtain the benefits which arise from the benefits of Information and Communication Technologies (Dada, D., 2006). In order to understand the overall e-readiness of Belize the following areas of the country will be addressed in this chapter:

- Internet penetration, Access and Affordability
- Internet Presence by Sector
- ICT Trade policy and Regulations In Belize

### 2.4.1 Internet Penetration

The United Nations, E-Government Survey, ranked Belize 124 out of 190 economies as it relates to the overall capacity and willingness of the public sector to deploy ICT for improving knowledge and information in the service of the citizens (United Nations E-Government, 2012). However, with a population of approximately 343,000 the country has shown to be actively embracing the global information society as can be seen in **Figure 2-10** (SIB, 2013). The latest report from the Belize Housing and Population Census, 2010, shows that about 50% of the population had cable TV and that almost 76% possessed a cellphone (Belize Housing and population Census, 2010). The National Statistics of Belize also stated that only 26% of the population owned at least one personal computer per household (SIB, 2011).



**Figure 2-10: Technology Penetration By Region, 2010**

*Source: Belize Housing and population Census, 2010*

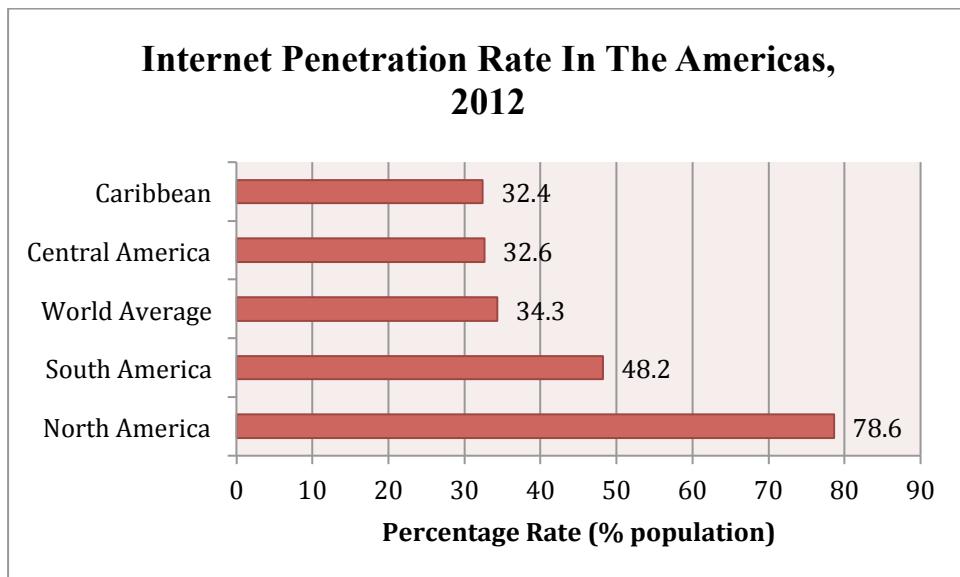
Today, we can see that technology adoption by Belizeans keeps increasing, in fact the latest statistics posted by the International Telecommunication Union, mentioned that the Internet penetration have almost doubled since 2010, accounting for almost 25 % (83,574) of the population. The following table gives a breakdown of the country's ICT profile for the period 2005-2012 (ITU, 2013).

**Table 2-3: Belize ICT Profile Statistics, 2005-2012**

Belize ICT	2005	2010	2012
Fixed-telephone subscriptions (# of people)	<b>33,770</b>	<b>30,228</b>	<b>25,415</b>
Fixed-telephone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants	<b>12.42</b>	<b>9.81</b>	<b>7.8</b>
Mobile-cellular subscriptions (# of people)	<b>96,000</b>	<b>194,201</b>	<b>172,423</b>
Mobile-cellular subscriptions per 100 inhabitants	<b>35.3</b>	<b>62.93</b>	<b>53.2</b>
Fixed (wired)-broadband subscriptions (# of people)	<b>5,022</b>	<b>8,915</b>	<b>9,973</b>
Fixed (wired)-broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants	<b>1.85</b>	<b>2.89</b>	<b>3.1</b>
Mobile-broadband subscriptions (2010)	<b>No Data</b>	<b>No Data</b>	<b>15.84</b>
Households with a computer (2000) (%)	<b>No Data</b>	<b>No Data</b>	<b>8.2%</b>
Households with Internet access at home (%)	<b>No Data</b>	<b>No Data</b>	<b>No Data</b>
Individuals using the Internet (% of population)	<b>9.21%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>25% (83,574)</b>

*Source: International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2013*

While the previous table shows an increase in access to Internet, accessibility is still considered fairly low compared to other countries. However, as per Internet World Stats, 2012, it showed that not only Belize seems be behind when it relates to Internet adoption, but it is in fact a common trend seen in most of Central America and the Caribbean. **Figure 2-11** indicates that compared to the rest of the world, Central America and the Caribbean still lags behind in Internet penetration.



**Figure 2-11: Internet Penetration Of The Americas**

*Source: Internet World Stats, 2012*

#### 2.4.2 Internet Affordability

Even though computers and Internet are readily available in both urban and some rural areas of Belize, these items are still considered a luxury, since it is still not affordable to most Belizeans. The table below indicates the present Internet speeds and prices according to the main telecommunication provider in the country (Belize Telemedia Limited). From **Table 2-4** you can see that for a 4MB Internet connection, the average Belizean will have to spend almost 1/4 of their annual income to be able to afford it. Despite the fact that Internet prices have improved over the years, it is still quite costly for some and perhaps the reason why Internet penetration is fairly low.

**Table 2-4: Internet Present Rates**

High Speed Internet Service	Monthly Charge (BZD)	% GDP Per Capita PPP 2012, World Bank Data Figures (BZD\$ 15,874)
<b>128K</b>	\$25	2%
<b>256K</b>	\$56	4%
<b>512K</b>	\$88	7%
<b>1MB</b>	\$140	11%
<b>2MB</b>	\$240	18%
<b>4MB</b>	\$390	29%
<b>8MB</b>	\$700	53%

*Source: Belize Telemedia Limited, 2014 (BTL)*

In a similar vein, from the previous table (**Table 2-4**) we can also conclude that because Internet is not so affordable, only few of the business entities have invested in dedicated data lines or extensive data automation. As there are only a small number of consumers currently online. However, businesses such as banks and tourism institutions seem to be the most interested in the Internet as an E-commerce tool. Most Tourism Institutions in Belize use the Internet, for email and basic web presence (Juan Carlos Namis et al., 2010).

Belize Telemedia LTD. (BTL) is currently the major Internet Service Provider in Belize. Even though the telecommunication company was liberalized in 2003, from its de facto monopoly of telecommunication and Internet services, it continues to be dominant in fixed-lines and mobile and broadband services. Others such as Speed Net joined the race in 2004 to break the monopoly and to offer Belizean consumers Internet and telecom choices. However, BTL still remains the predominant service provider today. In 2009, BTL was renationalized by the state, in order to improve conditions for consumers, but prices still remain high and competition is marginal (Digitaljournal.com, 2014).

#### 2.4.3 ICT In Education

Most of the current ICT Initiatives in Belize are focused on education and providing infrastructure and equipment to enable the teaching of ICT at all levels. (Fosigrid.org. 2014).

The most current initiative as part of the Belize Rural development Program (BRDP), involved the implementation of 30 public ICT centers in rural areas. The purpose of this initiative, which is being financed by the European Union, is to provide villages with ICT accessibility to improve their business reachability as well as to give access to Internet for the community at large on a self-financing basis

The ministry of Education has strongly underlined the importance of bridging the digital divide that currently exists between the urban schools and the rural schools, as such sees the need to formulate a national policy that would help fix this issue. At present many schools set their own curriculum but the government is geared at finalizing a national policy in this sector (Juan Carlos Namis et al., 2010). The following table gives an account of the number of labs available by regions in the education system for 2010. You can also see that from **Table 2-5**, that the ICT infrastructure in Education is currently considered limited and needs further development.

**Table 2-5: ICT In Education**

District	# of Students	# of Computer Labs	# of Computers	Internet Bandwidth
<b>Belize</b>	6,130	24	474	512K
<b>Cayo</b>	3,726	13	386	1MB
<b>Orange Walk</b>	1,932	6	107	512K
<b>Corozal</b>	1,786	5	124	1MB
<b>Stann Creek</b>	1,985	6	199	512K
<b>Toledo</b>	1,639	3	75	512K
<b>Total</b>	17,198	57	1,365	

*Source: Belize Housing and population Census, 2010*

#### **2.4.4 ICT In The Work Force**

According to the Belize Chamber of Commerce, even though most firms have some form of Internet access, not all employees have individual access. Those that do have, have an e-mail account, pertaining to the larger organizations or firms. Also, the number of corporate websites for all firms is unknown, but is believed to be quite high. These websites even though they are available, are mostly modest in nature, with limited information that is not updated regularly. As such, the Belize Chamber of Commerce is of the opinion that ICT in the workplace can be presumed limited (Juan Carlos Namis et al., 2010).

#### **2.4.5 ICT In Government**

According to a survey conducted by a consulting team formulating the National ICT strategy for Belize, the government has placed significant investment in most government ministries. In fact, most ministries seemed to have modern computer and telephony equipment. Also, a few ministries have installed relevant management information systems, specifically the ministry of Health, Finance and Public Safety. Others such as the ministry of Foreign Affairs, Labor, Immigration and Natural resources are in the process of doing such implementations. The 19 ministries that took part in the survey had access to Internet and email. Moreover, half of the ministries had a functional website and most of these websites were linked to the main government portal (Juan Carlos Namis et al., 2010).

The ICT report also stated that the information and communication technologies in the form of computers, telephones and network solutions are prevalent throughout the Government facilities,

but the uses of electronic systems and processes are still very limited. Most vital information is still in paper-based form and not in automated systems. Database servers are mostly used as a backup for data rather than a central record system. Furthermore, there is no central secure government network in place. Most systems are a mixture of different systems relating to applications in accounting, income tax, service tax, among others. These systems are currently managed by the Central Information Technology office -CITO (Juan Carlos Namis et al., 2010).

#### **2.4.6 ICT In Businesses**

According to the evidence collected for the formulation of the National ICT strategy, 2010, there is no hard data indicative of the state of information economy within Belize. However, it is believed by the Chamber of Commerce, that ICT penetration in businesses purposes is considered limited. Most business industries within Belize are small medium enterprises (SME's) or micro-enterprises with the exception of a few, like banks and larger hotels, and they seem to perceive that web presence is not a productive investment, due to cost and GDP per capita. The Businesses that seem to be taking advantage of the uses of ICT, in a very minimal scale, are mostly operations in the tourism industry, as a means to sell their products and welcome investors. As such the Belize Chamber of Commerce continues to say that Belize has no e-tourism infrastructure (BELTRAIDE, 2014 and Juan Carlos Namis et al., 2010).

#### **2.4.7 ICT Trade Policy and Regulations In Belize**

Belize is one of the few countries that have enacted legislation allowing for the establishment of online gambling, called the Computer Wagering Licensing Act of 1995. This legal framework currently concentrates on e-commerce and online gambling, as well as copyright protection and interception of communications. New laws governing computer misuse and unauthorized access are predicted to be drafted in the near future, however no such plans are implemented at the present time (Juan Carlos Namis et al., 2010).

#### **2.4.8 Overall ICT View of Belize**

According to the National ICT Benchmarking report, Belize needs to improve in almost all sectors of ICT implementation by first focusing on implementing policies and strategic planning (National ICT Benchmarking Report, 2011). These measures will aid in the ICT infrastructure environment, human knowledge and skills, and the overall e-readiness of the country. Even though mobile cellular devices seem to have increased over the years, Internet and broadband usage is significantly low. It is evident that the government needs to place legal and regulatory measures to encourage competitiveness in the industry markets and so reduce prices of Internet

accessibility, so that the larger population can be able to afford it. Thus, it is noticed that there is significant room for improvements in capacity for innovation by businesses and upgrading of infrastructure to drive Belize along a more successful path. Key sectors in Belize's economy would greatly benefit from all these improvements, such as the tourism Industry and Agriculture.

## 2.5 Tourism Market Structure

Travel and tourism is a hybrid industry and more than other services, tourism services are increasingly dominated by information, however the core product is in almost any case a physical service. These services are produced and consumed in a physical world and embedded in a rich, locally colored context. The challenge for the industry is to provide a seamless integration of information and physical service, with flexible configurations of the physical and the informational parts (Werthner, H., & Kline, S., 1999). The web is the tool for change and makes the perfect platform for the travel and tourism Industry to bring information about their products to the customers all over the world, in a direct, cost minimizing and time effective way (Markus Gratzer, M., et al., 2002).

According to Gratzer, M., et al. (2002), the tourism product consists of two parts: the first includes transportation, accommodation and attractions. The producers of these services like air, sea, railroad carriers, hotels and other forms of tourism accommodations, and the various forms of attractions like skiing resorts, fun parks and natural attractions are called the service suppliers. The second part includes the service sector of the Industry, which is used to deliver these products to the consumer. These distribution channels are very important, since the products within the tourism industry are invisible services. The figure below illustrates the product creation in the tourism industry.



**Figure 2-12: The product Creation In The Tourism Industry**

*Source: Gratzer, M., et al., 2002*

Also, the previous authors continue to say that there have been two main channels of distribution in the travel and tourism industry that has been identified by various researchers. The two main channels include; direct distribution to the consumer via direct marketing, phone or fax, web and

advertising in different kinds of media and secondly, is by selling the products and services through intermediaries to the customer. Gratzer, M., et al. (2002) continued to say that the distribution flow within the tourism industry consists mainly of the suppliers, consumers, tourism boards (local Tourism Organizations - LTO, Regional Tourism Organizations - RTO, national - NTO), tour operators, travel agents, and the reservation systems (Computer Reservation Systems- CRS/Global Distribution Systems-GDS).



# **Chapter 3: The Internet, ICT and Service Design in Tourism**

Shopping online has become a very popular trend. Strong consumer demands and the increasing number of goods and services made available online has characterized its overall growth. According to the latest Nielson global survey, more than 85% of the world's online population makes a purchase online. Most consumers rely on the Internet to satisfy three basic shopping needs namely, convenience, choice and value of their money. One of the most common shopping behaviors is in travel and tourism. In fact, Statistic Brian (2014) mentioned that almost 148.3 million people use the Internet each year to make reservations and booking activities. As such, the Internet has allowed people to find convenient ways to communicate and do business online.

This chapter offers an overview of what role the Internet and ICT play in tourism. Even though both terms, Internet and ICT (Information and Communication Technology), will be used interchangeably in this chapter, it is relevant to mention that the Internet is part of ICT. Since this study focuses on web tools used in E-tourism, other relevant basic concepts will be defined as well.

## **3.1 Internet and ICT In Tourism**

Ever since its development in the 1950's, the Internet has proven to be an efficient medium of accessing, organizing and communicating information (Alka Varma Citrin et al., 2000). The use of web-based systems for search and purchase of products and services has grown rapidly over the past years (Van Dijk, G., et al., 2007). As such the challenge of identifying, attracting and retaining customers in the online market as well as the issue of understanding consumer's perceptions is becoming a critical success factor (Steinbauer, A., & Werthner, H., 2007).

According to Oxford dictionaries online, the Internet can be defined as a global computer network providing a variety of information and communication facilities, consisting of interconnected networks using standardized communication protocols. Its widespread magnitude has combined many features of existing media with new capabilities of interactivity and addressability, and has transformed not only the way individuals do business but what it means to be a human being in society (Buhalis, D., & Jun, S. H., 2011). Moreover the Internet has brought about four key changes in the way business is conducted (Pease, W., & Rowe, M., 2005). These key changes include:

- The ability to turn ideas into marketable innovation for a wide range of customers, with reduced buyer search costs and costs of access to markets;
- Increased speed to market and access to new product offerings via the Internet;
- Changed processes and the sharing of information within and between organizations; and
- A shift in the balance of power between suppliers and customers due to the increased availability of information.

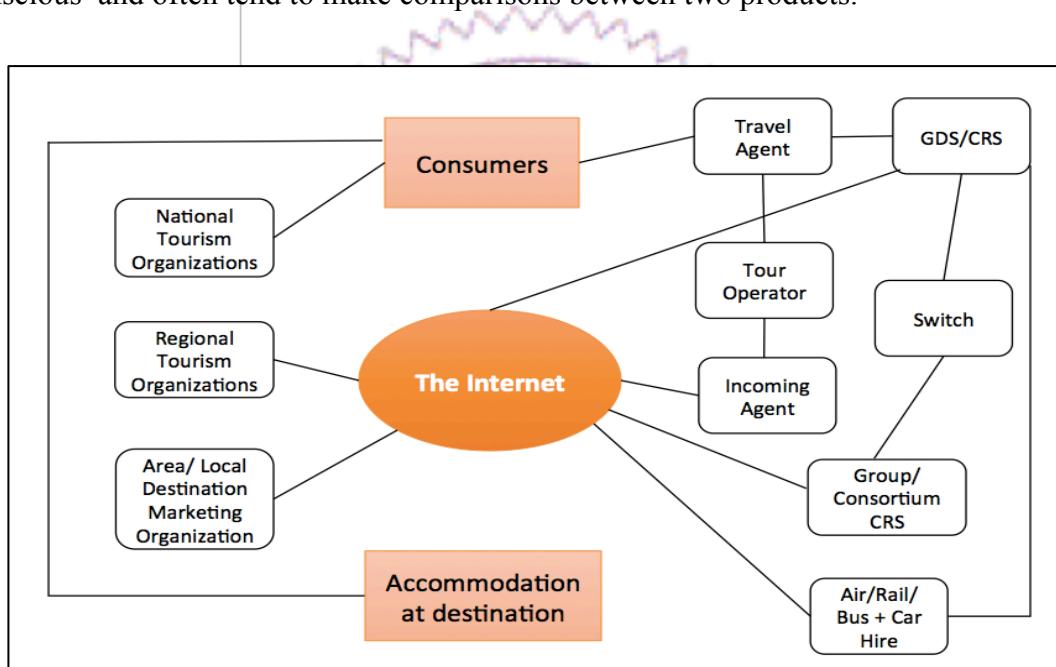
ICT refers to the entire range of tools, which facilitate the operational and strategic management of organizations by enabling them to manage their information, functions and processes as well to communicate interactively with their stakeholders for achieving their mission and objectives. ICT emerged as an integrated system of networked equipment and software, which enabled effective data processing and communication for organizational benefits towards transforming organizations to e-business (Buhalis, D., & Jun, S. H., 2011). Tourism has closely been connected to the progress of the Internet and ICT for over the past 30 years (Buhalis, D., & Jun, S. H., 2011). This Industry can be seen as one of the first business sectors where business functions are almost exclusively using information and communications technologies. As such, ICT has played an important role in the development of tourism (Pease, W., & Rowe, M., 2005) and has affected it dramatically. Computerized Reservations Systems (CRS) were among the first applications of Information technologies worldwide (Pease, W., & Rowe, M., 2005).

Before the Internet, the travel industry was organized into three main components: suppliers, intermediaries and consumers. Where suppliers used Tour Operators (TO's) and Travel Agents (TA's) for reaching the end consumer. For leisure tourism, TO's were mainly responsible for packaging and administering services such as transportation, accommodation etc., together for lower prices. TA's in turn were selling those packages or suppliers' products to end consumer by using Global Distribution Systems (GDSs). The distribution of travel was conducted by using traditional intermediaries through the use of Computer Reservation Systems (CRS), GDS and videotext. So, suppliers had to pay both fees and commissions to these intermediaries and technology companies (Buhalis, D. et al., 2007).

Now, because of the demand for more services and products from tourism suppliers by consumers and the Internet, it has allowed the purchasing of products instantly, inexpensively and interactively (Buhalis, D. et al., 2007). The evolution of CRS and the Internet has provided all players in the tourism industry an easy assess to the end user (Shanker, D., 2008). Key

developmental changes in tourism by the Internet and ICT are as follows (Shanker, D., 2008).

- Direct selling to the customer has increased.
- Increase in new intermediaries such as Internet portals specialized in selling tourism products.
- Customers have access to the distribution channels traditionally used by tour operators through Internet.
- Companies can regularly alter products and services based on the needs and expectations of clients through regular interaction through Internet.
- Increase in the transparency and the efficient relationship between customer and management.
- Change in the consumer behavior. Consumers are now asking better services. They are more specific with regard to content and the details of the arrangement. They are more cost conscious and often tend to make comparisons between two products.



**Figure 3-1: Internet Based Value Chain**

*Source: Shanker, D., 2008, adapted from Wethner, H., & Klien, S., 1999*

Furthermore, ICT tools have facilitated business transactions in the industry by networking with trading partners, distribution of product services and providing information to consumers across the globe. On the other hand, consumers are also using online to obtain information and plan their trip and travel. ICT tools in the tourism industry are used widely for marketing, operation and management of the customer (Shanker, D., 2008).

The following table indicates potential uses of ICT tools in tourism.

**Table 3-1: Potential Uses of ICT Tools In Tourism**

Different Aspect In Industry	Application
<b>Site development</b>	GIS used for identification of Tourist site and destinations
<b>Marketing</b>	Advertisement and Promotion
<b>Operations</b>	Buying and management of supplies and services

*Source: Shanker, D., 2008*

Shanker, D. (2008) also mentioned that there are six key factors for applying ICT in tourism.

These factors can be described as follows:

- IT education and training for policy makers, managers and other players in the industry;
- Integration of various sectors like transportation, lodging among others;
- Technical Infrastructure;
- Human Infrastructure, which includes skilled people, vision and management;
- Legal Infrastructure: Regulation of telecommunication providers, Subsidies for Internet service providers and Legal framework for online advertisement or official endorsement for online marketing;
- ICT culture via: creating and sustaining ICT environment, maintaining and updating of websites, ICT training for all levels of workers and establishing electronic linkages between all related sectors.

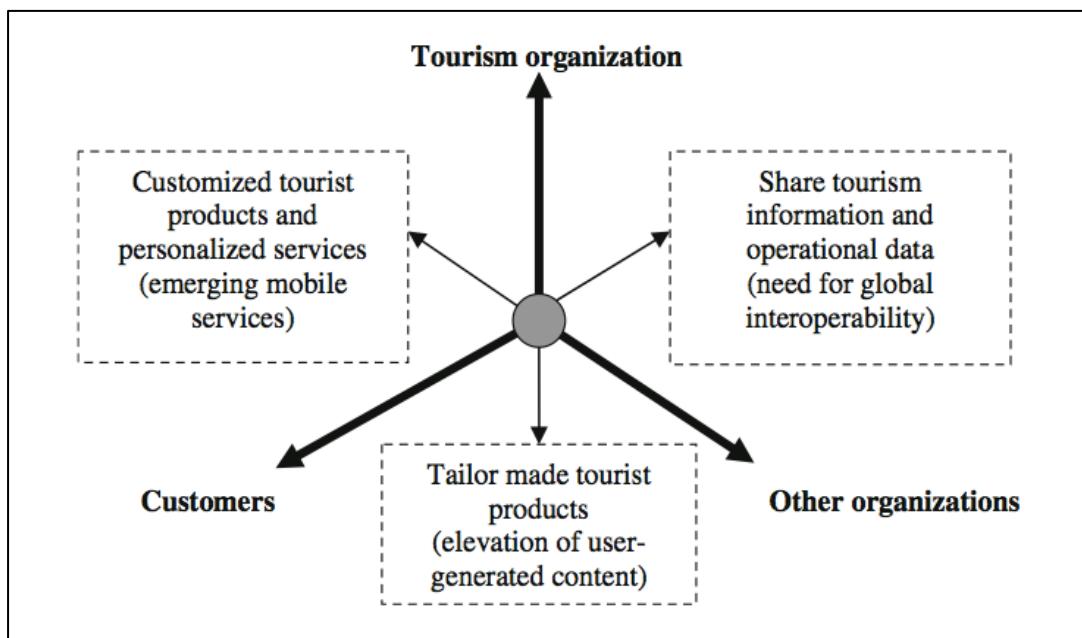
### **3.2 Benefits of the Internet In tourism**

The benefits of the Internet and ICT are substantial, but Pease, W., & Rowe, M. (2005), summarized the following key benefits:

- Enhanced level of collaboration between tourism operators, for example, between travel agencies and service providers;
- Pre-arrangements with respective suppliers no longer necessary;
- Web service discovery will identify alternatives, enabling holiday packages to be constructed;
- Greater negotiation of service to be purchased and customization of services/activities; and
- Generally greater levels of interoperability with internal and external applications.

Information is lifeblood of tourism and, therefore, ICT has a great impact on the tourism industry. ICT enables direct communication with clients and improves efficiency and effectiveness of customer service, trading and product design related processes. At the same time ICT makes competition harder and demands continuous investments. ICT provides new tools and enables new distribution channels. It supports tourism innovations and vice versa. ICT development has created a new business environment, E-tourism (Henriksson, R., 2005).

The Framework below demonstrates how ICTs contribute to the tourism business strategy development, as well as all the possible interactions between tourism organizations (Stiakakis, E., & Georgiadis, C. K., 2011).



**Figure 3-2:The Impact of e-business technologies on tourism Industry**

*Source: Stiakakis, E., & Georgiadis, C. K. (2011), adopted from Buhalis (1998)*

Buhalis, D., & Jun, S. H. (2011) mentioned that the emergence and mainstreaming of the internet empowered the global network of computers, enabling individuals and organizations to access a plethora of multimedia information and knowledge sources, regardless of their location or ownership, often free of charge.

### **3.3 E-Tourism and Concepts Defined**

#### **3.3.1 E-Tourism**

Electronic tourism (E-tourism) reflects the digitalization of all processes and value chains in the tourism, travel, hospitality and catering industries. It emerges as a term describing the entire

range of applications of ICT on tourism and the implications for the tourism value chain (Buhalis, D., & Deimezi, O., 2004). Buhalis, D., & Jun, S. H. (2011) continues to say that at the tactical level, it includes e-commerce and applies ICT for maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of tourism organizations. Furthermore, at the strategic level, E-tourism revolutionizes all business processes, the entire value chain as well as the strategic relationships of tourism organizations and all their stakeholders. Moreover the E-tourism concept involves all business functions such as, E-commerce, E-marketing, E-finance, E-accounting, E-HRM, E-procurement, E-strategy, E-planning, E-R&D and E-production (Buhalis, D., & Jun, S. H., 2011).

E-tourism success factors in the travel industry, according to recent studied done by Yang, D. J., et al. (2012), can be classified into three categories namely: content and value of product, website content and application, internal operations and resources. In addition the study, stated that travel companies when planning their e-commerce, should consider their product planning in relation to favorable content and value of the product, helping the customer to understand the content and value of the product as customers expect. Also, according to Kim, S., & Stoel, L. (2004), some key factors for successful small and medium sized tourism enterprises (SMTE's) E-commerce practices, include security of the E-commerce systems and user-friendly web interface. Thus, the author recognizes that building customer trust and convenience for customers are essential to succeed.

Moreover the previous author also identified some key barriers for SMTE's to adopting E-commerce in countries like Korea. These barriers include; limited knowledge of availability technology, lack of awareness, cost of initial investment, lack of confidence in benefits of e-commerce, shortage of skilled human resource, resistance to e-commerce adoption, small e-commerce market size and limited infrastructure and cost of system maintenance (Kim, S., & Stoel, L., 2004).

### **3.3.2 E-Marketing**

Electronic Marketing (E-marketing) or Internet marketing can be viewed as a new philosophy and a modern business practice involved with marketing of goods, services, information and ideas via the Internet and other electronic means (El-Gohary, H., 2012). Also, it can be referred to advertising and marketing efforts that use the Web and email to drive direct sales via electronic commerce, in addition to sales leads from websites or emails. Internet marketing and online advertising efforts are typically used in conjunction with traditional types of advertising like radio, television, newspapers and magazines ([webopedia.com](http://www.webopedia.com)). This approach can be further

divided into the following components, web marketing, email marketing and social media marketing ([webopedia.com](http://webopedia.com)). **Table 3-2** gives a brief description of all the online marketing strategies that can be adapted in tourism.

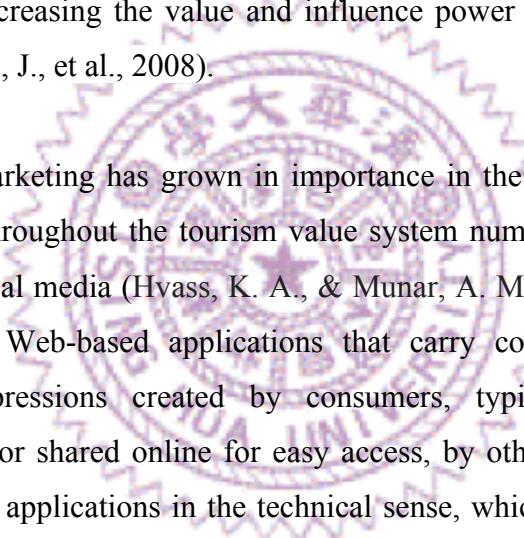
**Table 3-2: Online Marketing Strategies in Tourism**

Online Marketing Strategies	Description
<b>Websites</b>	This is the main presence of businesses on the Internet. It should inspire people, inform them and close the purchase at the end of the decision making process. Mobile compatibility of websites is important to target impulse options during a trip.
<b>Search Engine Optimization (SEM and SEO)</b>	These are effective for potential customers seeking specific information in search engines such as Google. They both drive traffic to your website for no or low cost.
<b>Social Media</b>	It is important to know what people are saying about your product, to enter into a dialogue with customers and for past customers to spread the word about your product with friends and family. Social media links, such as twitter, Facebook or trip advisor offers such advertising and marketing flexibilities.
<b>Online Display advertising</b>	This includes banner ads and other advertising on websites. It works well to generate awareness and drive specific actions. This technique is usually more expensive than SEO or SEM
<b>E-Mail Marketing</b>	This is important to proactively manage consumers and encourage repeated visitation via personal interaction. It is an idea strategy for travel, destination, because it allows you to carefully cultivate customer relationships, stay in touch with clients, and grow your business.
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Party Websites</b>	Maintaining web presence on other websites such as Google place and trip advisor is important because it will allow you to manage and market information about your business to a broader audience of potential customers.

*Source: Online Marketing Guide, 2011*

### **3.3.3 Web 2.0 and Social Media**

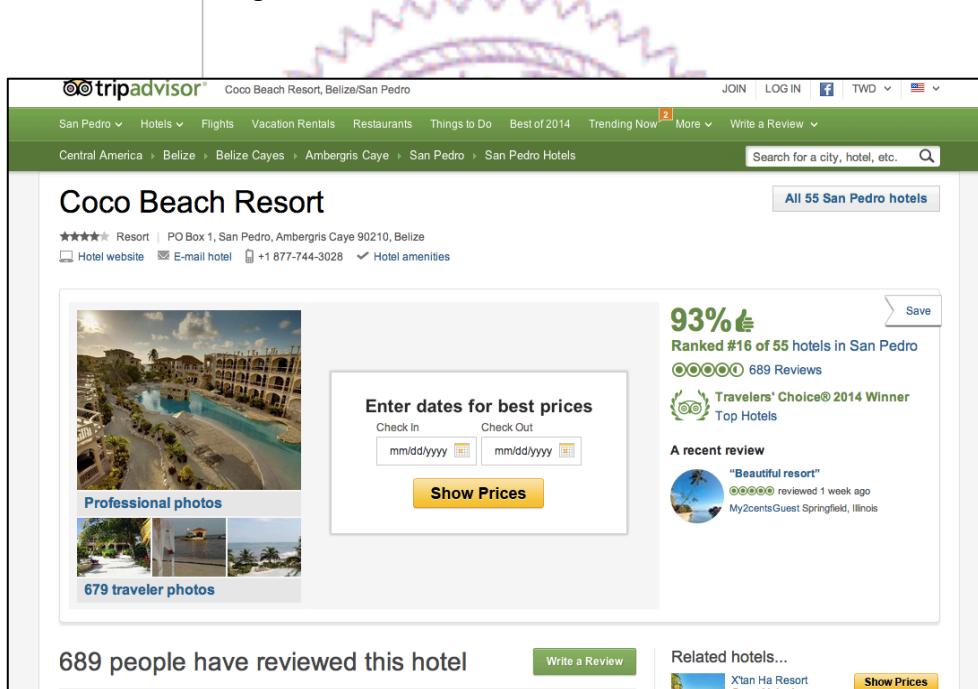
The term Web 2.0 came around 2005, but the subject is already controversial. Considerable controversy stems from the fact that Web 2.0 applications are by and large based on content generated by users often being anonymous and lacking qualitative credentials (Constantinides, E., & Fountain, S. J., 2008). The Web 2.0 concept comprises a second generation of Web-based services, such as social networking sites, wikis, blogs, communications tools and folksonomies (Schegg, R., et al., 2008). Web 2.0 presents businesses with new challenges but also new opportunities for getting and staying in touch with their markets, learning about the needs and opinions of their customers as well as interacting with them in a direct and personalized way (Constantinides, E., & Fountain, S. J., 2008). Web 2.0 applications in the tourism sector have been named Travel 2.0 applications. Traditional operators are facing new consumers who can easily access information and easily share own views, comments and suggestions in an informal and collaborative way, increasing the value and influence power as determinants of choice for other consumers (Miguéns, J., et al., 2008).



Over the years, online marketing has grown in importance in the tourism industry. This media space offers companies throughout the tourism value system numerous marketing tools, one of the most recent being social media (Hvass, K. A., & Munar, A. M., 2012). Social media can be generally understood as Web-based applications that carry consumer-generated content. It encompasses media impressions created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experience, and archived or shared online for easy access, by other impressionable consumers. This includes a variety of applications in the technical sense, which allow consumers to “post”, “tag”, “digg”, or “blog”, and so forth, on the Internet (Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U., 2010). The contents generated by these social media include a variety of new and emerging sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated, and used by consumers with the intent of educating each other about products, brands, services and issues. Social media are playing an increasingly important role as information sources for travelers (Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U., 2010). This is so because these social media websites assist consumers in posting and sharing their travel-related comments, opinions, and personal experiences, which then serve as information for others (Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U., 2010).

Moreover, according to Miller, S., 2014, 85% of customers expect businesses to be active in social media. In a similar vein, Forbes also reported that 82% of consumers trust a company more if they are involved with social media. So, there is much importance placed on social media by

consumers. This shows that the web is shifting from a business-to-consumer marketing to a peer-to-peer model for the sharing of information. All tourism businesses are thus facing the need to implement strategies and tools (websites or portals) based on user generated contents or, at least, to incorporate these new technologies to enrich their multimedia contents (Miguéns, J., et al., 2008). Social networking has changed how travelers research trips, make decisions and share experiences. Sites like Facebook, with more than 800 million active users, and Tripadvisor, with 50 million unique monthly visitors and 50 million reviews, enable travelers to seek trip information and advice from the sources they trust the most: other travelers and people they know (Daniel Edward Craig, 2011). Tripadvisor is one of the largest online travel communities, offering travelers features such as reviews and advice for hotels, flights, vacation rentals, packages, travel guides and much more. So, tripadvisor gives tourism businesses the opportunity to learn more about their business and improve on it. Having a Tripadvisor page will help in allowing a business to rank high in web search results, and thus not be overlooked.



**Figure 3-3: Belizean Hotel Tripadvisor Page**

Facebook on the other hand, represents a massive opportunity to connect with consumers. A Facebook fan page can allow a business to engage with users using their brands and encourage visitor's retention. The objective of Facebook for a business is to build a community of advocates who can support the decision making process and make referrals. Message about the business can travel fast through this medium, because each user has an average of 130 friends (Online Marketing Guide, 2011).

### **3.4 Service Design In Tourism**

Service design can be defined as the activity of planning and organizing people, infrastructure, communication and material components of a service in order to improve its quality and the interaction between service provider and customers (SDN, 2014). Tourism is a service-intensive industry focusing on the customers service experiences not only during their stay, but also prior and subsequent to it (Stickdorn, M., & Zehrer, A., 2009). As a result, one can see that tourism involves numerous stakeholders that are all involved in the delivery of tourism-related services, which may include hotels, travel agencies, tour operators among others. In the past service experience was known to be a unique experience to an individual at a specified point in time, in a specific location at a specific event. However, this view has changed and is now seen as both an individual and a social experience. Furthermore, a service experience occurs in a series of events that influence customer satisfaction, and influences the purchasing decision, evaluation and consumption process of the consumer (Stickdorn, M., & Frischhut, B., 2012).

So, to make sure consumers receive the most memorable experiences, business services providers need to perform an operational analysis of their services being offered and design or redesign this process. The operational analysis can be guided using two forms; a process flow diagram and a process chart. A common flow-charting technique used by service providers to demonstrate the relationships and provide the initial preparation of determining who the supplier is and who the customer is, is called “Service blueprinting” (Shahin, A., 2010). Thus, we can define a service blueprint as an operational planning tool that gives guidance on how a service will be provided and stipulates physical evidence, staff actions, and support systems needed to deliver a service across its different channels. The service blue print also includes what is referred to as the line of visibility between customers and service providers by separating the front and back stage services (Shahin, A., 2010). According to Gummesson, E., & Kingman-Brundage, J. (1992), a service blue print application has the following benefits:

- Identifies fail points like weak links of the chain of service activities, which can be the target of continuous quality improvement. Also, the Line of interaction between external customers and employees illuminates the customer’s role and demonstrates where the customer experiences quality, thus contributing to informed service design.
- Line of visibility promotes a conscious decision on what customers should see and which employees will be in contact with customers, thus facilitating rational service design.
- Line of internal interaction clarifies interfaces across departmental lines, with their inherent interdependencies, thus strengthening continuous quality improvement.
- Stimulates strategic discussions by illuminating the elements and connections that constitute

the service. Those who participate in strategic sessions tend to exaggerate the significance of their own special function and perspective unless a common ground for an integrated view of the service is provided.

- Provides a basis for identifying and assessing cost, revenue and capital invested in each element of the service and constitutes a rational basis for both external and internal marketing. For example, the service map blueprint makes it easier for an advertising agency or an in-house promotion team to overview a service and selects essential messages for communication.
- Facilitates top-down, bottom-up approach to quality improvement. It enables managers to identify, channel and support teams. Employee work teams can create service maps and thus more clearly apply and communicate their experience and suggestions for improvements.

There are five components of a typical service blueprint, depicted in the table below:

**Table 3-3: Service Blueprint Components**

Components	
<b>Physical Evidence</b>	
<b>Customers Actions</b>	<b>Line of Interaction</b>
<b>Onstage visible contact employee actions</b>	<b>Line of Visibility</b>
<b>Backstage invisible contact employee actions</b>	<b>Line of Internal Interactions</b>
<b>Support Process</b>	

*Source: Bitner, M. J., et al., 2007*

According to Bitner, M. J., et al., (2008), the customer actions are all the steps a customer take as part of the delivery process, that are aligned in a chronological manner depicting that the customer's actions are central to the process. Furthermore, the next critical step in the blueprinting process is the onstage visible actions, which are the face to fact actions between the employees and the customer. This stage is separated from the customer via the line of interaction. The third stage of the blueprint is the backstage invisible actions. These actions are actions that are invisible to the customer that the contact employees normally engage in, to perform their responsibilities and serve the customer needs. Lastly, the support processes is the stage that separate the contact employees by the line of internal interaction. These actions are those that are not carried out by the contact employees but within the company itself necessary to deliver the services. The components of the online service blueprint are shown in **Table 3-3**. It is a simple representation of different events behaviors and relationships between the customers and the online supplier. Service Design in tourism is important because it provides an overall framework to achieve the necessary understanding of the tourist experience and how service providers can cater for those needs.

# **Chapter 4: Website Design and Evaluation In tourism**

This chapter gives an overview of the importance of having an effective website in tourism businesses. It also sheds light on the current website evaluation approaches used in studies today.

## **4.1 Importance of Website Design In tourism**

With the emergence of the Internet, the information search and purchase behavior of hotel consumers has changed significantly, and presently there are a large number of customers making reservations directly from hotel websites (Buhalis, D., & Law, R., 2008 and Chung, T., & Law, R., 2003). In response to the increasing demand for hotel E-business, many hotels have established websites to promote their services and products, and eventually gain a share on the online market (Chung, T., & Law, R., 2003). Also, Parets, R. T. (2002) shows that web marketing is not just for big hotels but for small and independent ones as well. Well designed, easy to navigate websites, offer a low cost valuable tool, which can make the business more competitive. According to Law, R., & Leung, R. (2000), customer needs are the most important factor for hospitality and tourism websites to succeed. As such, the website visitors would ultimately reward a company if the site can provide valuable services that benefit their visitors (Chung, T., & Law, R., 2003). Chung, T., & Law, R. (2003) continue to say that a hotel website is not merely an online channel but also an electronic platform for profitability. A well designed website with useful information and extra benefits available to the customer can help increase sale volume and improve the reputation of the hotel (Chung, T., & Law, R., 2003).

Website design quality and service quality are both important factors for tourism business to consider in their marketing websites because the online environment is different from the offline one. Website design quality can be defined as the technological aspect of a website such as navigation, website appearance and layout, whereas service quality refers to aspects such as on-time order delivery, prompt response to customers inquiries and personalized and knowledgeable after-sales service (Zhou, T., et al., 2009). As can be seen in **Table 4.1**, Kim, W. G., & Lee, H. Y. (2005), classified web service quality into six dimensions, namely: ease of use, usefulness, information content, security, responsiveness and personalization. As such, a successful website should therefore take customer's interest and participation into consideration, to capture information about their preferences, and to subsequently use the information to provide personalized communication and services (Chung, T., & Law, R., 2003). Additional literature suggests that page design, managerial issues and information content should be discussed as the three main categories to develop a website (Hanna, J. R. P., & Millar, R. J., 1997). The previous

authors also pointed out that every online business should keep Web information current and respond to customer's requests in a timely manner.

**Table 4-1: Web Service Quality Dimensions**

Dimensions	Description
<b>Ease of Use</b>	The degree to which a user believes that using the internet would be free of effort.
<b>Usefulness</b>	The degree to which the user believes that using the internet would be better than using other competing ways.
<b>Information Content</b>	The degree to which the user believes that content of the websites are reliable.
<b>Security</b>	The degree to which the user believes that using the internet would be safe when processing sensitive personal information.
<b>Responsiveness</b>	The degree to which a user believes that the promises service would be performed accurately and in a timely manner.
<b>Personalization</b>	The degree to which a user believes that the individualized attention to user concerns and requests would be provided.

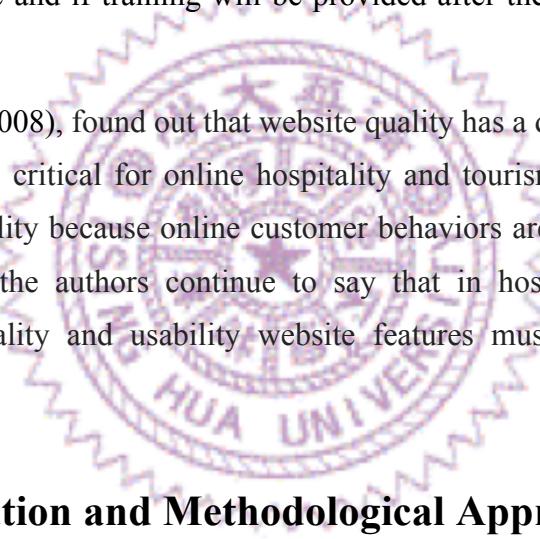
*Source: Kim, W. G., & Lee, H. Y. (2005)*

The website visitors would ultimately reward a company if the site can provide valuable services that benefit their visitors. Unfortunately, many hospitality companies still do not have adequate knowledge to build a useful website. Some hotels have placed a lot of information onto their websites but do not include relevant information or arrange the information in an appropriate order. More importantly, some hotel websites are not updated regularly. The outdated information may eventually be negative for the hotel's image. If Internet users do not consider a hotel website useful, the resources invested in establishing and maintaining the website will be wasted (Chung, T., & Law, R., 2003). In order for tourism enterprises to have a good website that reflects, not only what products they offer but focus on the end user, the following steps in website development are to be considered (Online Marketing Guide, 2011).

- **Objectives & Strategy:** This is where you identify your target market and overall objectives of your business online, as well as how you are going to use your website strategically in your marketing plan and if the website generates direct link to sales being generated.

- **Content:** This includes the information that goes on the website, which includes words, images, maps, social media and other multimedia. Ensure that the content used is of good quality and that is relevant to your brand. The content has to appeal on an emotional level describing your products in a virtual way.
- **Usability:** This refers to how well you organize the content on the website. Make sure that you consider information architecture and interaction design qualities when organizing pages on the website. The key here is to keep the website simple and seek professional help in web architecture and design if necessary.
- **Design:** This involves the virtual look of your website. A professional looking website is what gives your business credibility.
- **Technology:** Choosing the right technology for your website is important but you need to consider if the technology is mainstream, if you will be able to maintain the hosting cost and technology of your site and if training will be provided after the site is complete to manage the site.

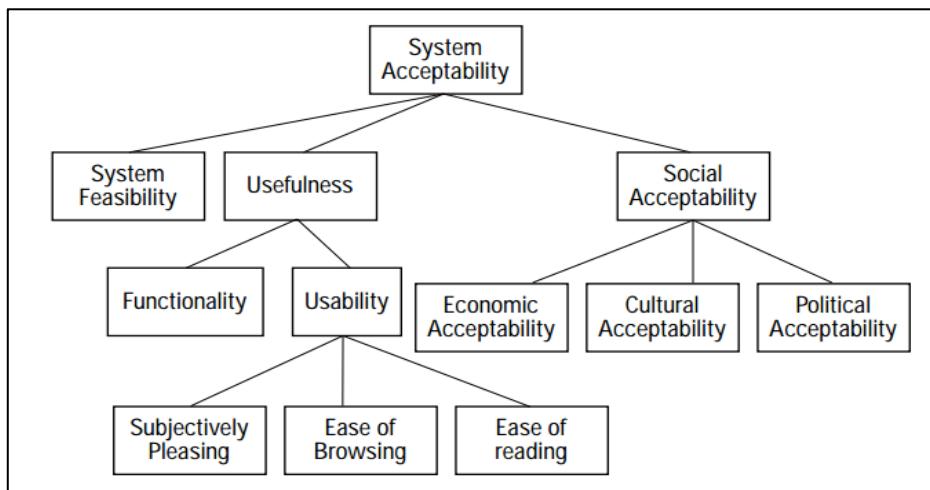
Studies by Bai, B., et al. (2008), found out that website quality has a direct and positive impact on satisfaction. As such it is critical for online hospitality and tourism companies to continue to invest in their website quality because online customer behaviors are greatly influenced by their virtual experience. Also, the authors continue to say that in hospitality and tourism online businesses, both functionality and usability website features must be examined to enhance purchase intentions.



## 4.2 Website Evaluation and Methodological Approaches

Ever since the Internet became so popular, businesses saw the need to incorporate it into their marketing modules as a means to expand their market horizons. Website development was seen as a very important tool in tourism, however not all tourism institutions had appropriate websites that were successful in E-marketing. As such, many researches had advocated the importance of assessing website effectiveness. Because, this is currently a new area, website evaluation does not have a proper definition yet, but according to the US department of Human Health and Service, it refers to the act of determining a correct and comprehensive set of user requirements, ensuring that a website provides useful content that meet users expectations and setting usability goals (Law, R., et al., 2010). According to the framework proposed by Yeung, W. L. (1998), shown in **Figure 4.1**, usability and functionality are the two major elements contributing to the usefulness of a website. Hotel practitioners should, therefore, attempt to continuously improve

the usefulness of their websites. This, in turn, will lead the websites to generate more business transactions and revenues (Yeung, T. A., & Law, R., 2003)



**Figure 4-1: Framework for effective Web Application development**

*Source: Yeung, W. L. (1998)*

Websites with a usability problem will result in failure and cause the user to feel pressured and give up before they even finish their task. Websites that are unable to give a clear profile of the destination, look disordered, are not easily found in search engines or have a usability problem, result in disappointment for the user. Usefulness refers to whether a web application would be helpful to others, or potential clients and customers, in accomplishing its intended purpose; in other words does it have the functionality to meet their needs or are the pages on the website easy to use in order for the user to achieve specific goals, such as effectiveness, satisfaction and efficiency (usability) (Yeung, W. L., 1998). To succeed in E-marketing, the institution has to design a website on the basis or marketing strategy and its goal. The successful website has a clear value proportion (Werthner, H., & Klein, S., 1999).

There has been many website evaluation approaches used in hospitality and tourism over the years, for example researchers have attempted using the content analysis methodology. Content analysis is an established social science methodology concerned broadly with "the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the content of communication" (Herring, S. C., 2010). Benckendorff, P. J., & Black, N. L. (2000), used content analysis to evaluated 16 websites of Regional tourism authorities in Australia (RTA's). They proposed the concept of an Internet marketing star, with four points comprising site planning, design, content and managerial characteristics. Also, Park, J. W., et al. (2003:2004) evaluated the websites of 23 large Korean travel agencies through a content analysis approach that measured factors such as the availability of online reservation, a home page in English, tourism information and company's background,

electronic boards, interactive communication tools. Others such as Chung, T., & Law, R. (2003), identified five major hotel website dimensions to measure the performance of Hong Kong Hotels, namely facilities information, customer, contact information, reservation information, surrounding area information and management of websites. Singh, N., et al. (2003) also did content analysis of 80 U.S. domestic Chinese websites, where they found out that the web is not a culturally neutral medium and provided a framework to measure cultural adaptations on the web. Also, other such as Feng, R., et al. (2003); So, S. I. A., & Morrison, A. M. (2004); Douglas, A., & Mills, J. E. (2004); Choi, S., & Morrison, A. M. (2005), among other, have applied a benchmarking approach using the Modified Balance Score Card (BSC) to measure the marketing effectiveness and usability of tourism websites instead of content analysis.

According to recent studies done on website evaluation approaches, website evaluation can take two forms: Quantitative and Qualitative (Law, R., et al., 2010). Quantitative measures involves generating performance indices or scores to capture the overall quality of a website. This form of approach focuses on the gathering of numerical data to test hypothesis. For example Faba-Pérez, C., et al. (2005), introduced a technique that compare web space measures such as text element and link formatting by applying Kohonen's neural networks. For qualitative studies researchers assess website quality without indices or score but they develop their own evaluation guidelines or instruments. This approach is subjective and researchers use their own instrument to gather deeper understanding of the patterns and make interpretation of facts and suggestions for further improvements. For example Kim, S., & Stoel, L. (2004) used the Web Qual-Scale to examine the dimensional hierarchy of apparel websites.

Law, R., et al. (2010), did a recent review of developments of methodological approaches in website evaluation and reported that most websites were evaluated using an adopted or modified model or instrument. The authors continued to say that modified model or instrument can be further classified into five methodological approached which are as follows.

- *Counting Methods (C)*: This method is used to evaluate a website performance or its content richness. It has two requirements: a well-prepared checklist to verify the existence of attributes on a website, where the items are mostly taken from a modified or adopted model and, the second requirement is the involvement of consumers, practitioners, policymakers, researchers or students to do the actual counting.
- *User Judgment Methods (U)*: This approach measures user satisfaction or perception. Consumers or potential consumer groups are mostly used as evaluators to measure different

aspects and level or satisfaction. This approach can be done via questionnaire or interview depending on the research purpose.

- *Automated Methods (A)*: This involves the evaluation of websites using a software system, which is usually developed based on the researcher's main purpose. This form of evaluation is more consistent and relatively faster than human based evaluation. However, there is no user insolvent in this approach.
- *Numerical computation Methods (N)*: This approach uses mathematical functions to compute tourism website performances based on a number of aspects. There is no user involvement and performance is usually represented by a set of numerical scores.
- *Combined Methods*: This involves a combination of any of the above-mentioned measures for a more comprehensive benchmarking evaluation.

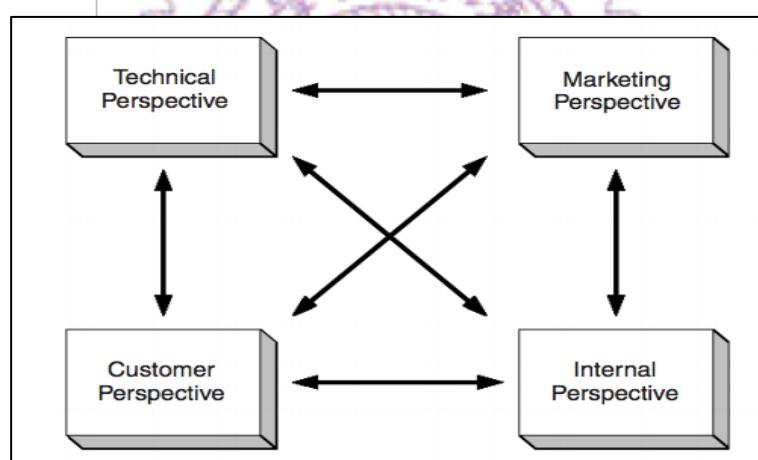
Each of these approaches have their limitations, as such there is no absolute method for website evaluation. According to the survey done by Law, R., et al. (2010), most researchers tend to have adopted the counting method. The counting instrument was able to demonstrate its validity more in combination with other instruments such as user judgment, automated or numerical. In this study a combined approach was used to evaluate Belizean tourism websites, specifically a counting method approach (Balance Score Card approach), User Judgment and Automated methods. The counting method was used as the focus of the analysis in this research. The BSC models will be explained in detail in the following section.

#### **4.2.1 The Balance Score Card Approach (BSC)**

The original Balance Score Card was developed about two decades ago by Robert Kaplan and David Norton (1992:1993), and was one of the most influential management tools that appeared on the corporate scene. The BSC came at a time when there was a need to break away from measuring company performance on solely financial measures (Morrison, A. M., et al., 2005). According to Niven, P. R. (2002), the BSC is a set of carefully selected measures originating from the organization's vision and strategy and it was a tool used by company executives to communicate to employees and shareholders the outcomes of the company's value drivers and their success in achieving the vision and objectives. The BSC specifies that performance should be measured from four perspectives: customer, financial, learning & growth and internal business action. It captures both financial and non-financial elements of a company's strategy and examines the cause and effect relationship that drive business results. This allowed the organization to be strategic by using lead indicators as oppose to following lag indicators to evaluate performance (Morrison, A. M., et al., 2005). As such the BSC was created as a way to keep companies looking and moving forward as opposed to management's fixation on past

systems. This new system and the development of other similar models seemed crucial to help organizations compete in the new millennium (Morrison, A. M., et al., 2005).

The first to apply the BSC in website evaluation of Tourism institutions was Morrison et al. (1999). These authors recognized that measuring a website performance was multidimensional, meaning that there was more than one dimension on which a site should be measured. According to Schwartz (1999), subjectivity was seen as a problem in website evaluation and suggested that a larger variety of measures should be used to reduce it. Morrison, A. M., et al. (1999) supported Schwartz perspective that website evaluation is subjective in nature and must be performed with a balance set of nature (Kline, S. F., et al., 2004). The modified model of the BSC included multiple critical success factors based on four perspectives: technical, marketing, internal critical and customer critical. The critical success factors in website evaluation represents criteria that a website must meet in order to be effective. Each hotel website received a total score to represent their performance. The authors also marked the website performance based on error rate and three levels of download speed.



**Figure 4-2: The Modified BSC Approach**

*Source: Morrison, A. M., et al., 2005, adopted from Morrison, A. M., et al., 1999*

The BSC approach was further modified by researchers to match their specific needs of different industrial sectors and geographical regions (Law, R., et al., 2010). For example, Kim, D. Y., et al. (2002:2003), conducted an evaluation performance of the websites of conventions centers in the US. Feng, R., et al. (2004), evaluated and compared destination websites in China and the US. Douglas, A., & Mills, J. E. (2004), Kline, S. F., et al. (2004) and So, S. I. A., & Morrison, A. M. (2004) also used the modified BSC models in their studies of hospitality and tourism organizations. Studies such as the ones mentioned above, improved the modified BSC by addressing and correcting element upon which Morrison, A. M., et al. (1999) had been criticized. Some of the changes that were made to the modified BSC include: changing the measurement

scale from likert to dichotomous (Yes/ No) formats, changing the level of subjectivity. Also, it was noticed that the final scores of the 4 perspectives were unbalanced since the critical success factors of the internal perspective was difficult to measure. And lastly, instead of having one expert rater evaluating all measure, multiple expert raters were introduced. Another key adoption by the latter studies was an automated instrument (e.g. NetMechanic) to measure the technical aspect of the modified BSC (Law, R., et al., 2010).

The modified BSC instrument adopted for this study was based mostly on Kline, S. F., Morrison, A. M., & John, A. S. (2004), Exploring Bed & Breakfast Websites: A BSC approach. The perspective's descriptions used to design the BSC usability checklist, for both hotel and tour operators in this study, can be seen below in **Table 4-2**. Explanation of each perspective will be done in chapter five.

**Table 4-2: Modified BSC Quadrant Descriptions**

Quadrants	Factors Examined
<b>1. User-friendliness</b>	<p><i>examples of items:</i></p> <p>Site search Site map Home button Navigation tools Limited scrolling</p> <p><b>Contact information:</b> <i>examples of items:</i></p> <p>Direct e-mail contact Mailing address Telephone number Fax number</p>
<b>2. Site Attractiveness</b>	<p><b>Visual appeal:</b> <i>examples of items:</i></p> <p>Pictures Clear and uncluttered text Text readability Background color</p>
<b>3. Marketing effectiveness</b>	<p><b>Product:</b> <i>examples of items:</i></p> <p>House and room pictures Virtual tour</p> <p><b>Information availability:</b> <i>examples of items:</i></p> <p>Rate availability Target market addressed Unique aspects of B&amp;B and innkeepers Local activities and links to activities</p>
<b>4. Technical qualities</b>	<p><b>NetMechanic test:</b></p> <p>Link check, HTML check, Browser compatibility, Load Time and Spell check</p>

*Source: Kline, S. F., et al. (2004)*

#### 4.2.2 Related Work In Website Evaluation

The **Table 4-3** below gives a few of the most recent related works in which the BSC as a benchmarking approach has been used to evaluate hospitality and tourism websites.

**Table 4-3: Recent BSC Approaches Used In Tourism & Hospitality Websites**

Author	Year	Title	Method & Instrument	Evaluation Measurement	Study Description
Feng, R., et al.	2004	East versus West: A comparison of online destination marketing in China and the USA	Quantitative, Counting	Modified BSC	To compare destination marketing organization (DMO) websites in the USA and China. By applying a modified BSC, website marketing strategies, web page designs, marketing information and technical qualities were evaluated. Findings showed that US DMO websites were superior to those in China in terms of marketing strategies and information, and US CVB sites received the highest evaluations.
Douglas, A., & Mills, J. E.	2004	Staying Afloat In the Tropics: Applying a structural Equation Model Approach To Evaluation NTO Websites in the Caribbean	Quantitative, Counting & Automated	Modified BSC Model	Using the results obtained from the modified BSC to develop and test a model of Caribbean NTO website visitor retention. Finding showed that the four aspects of the BSC are important for the development of the NTO Websites.
Kline, S. F., et al.	2004	Exploring Bed& Breakfast Websites: A BSC Approach	Quantitative, Counting & Automated	Modified BSC	To evaluate the websites of Bed & Breakfast belonging to the Indiana B&B Association. Findings illustrated that the websites major strength was their attractiveness but need improvements in all quadrants.
So, S. I. A., & Morrison, A. M.	2004	Internet marketing in tourism in Asia: an evaluation of the performance of East Asian national tourism organization websites	Quantitative, Counting & Automated	Modified BSC	To Compare NTO websites in East Asia Region and identify internet marketing strengths and weaknesses. Findings showed that the NTO websites were not being effectively used as a marketing tool.

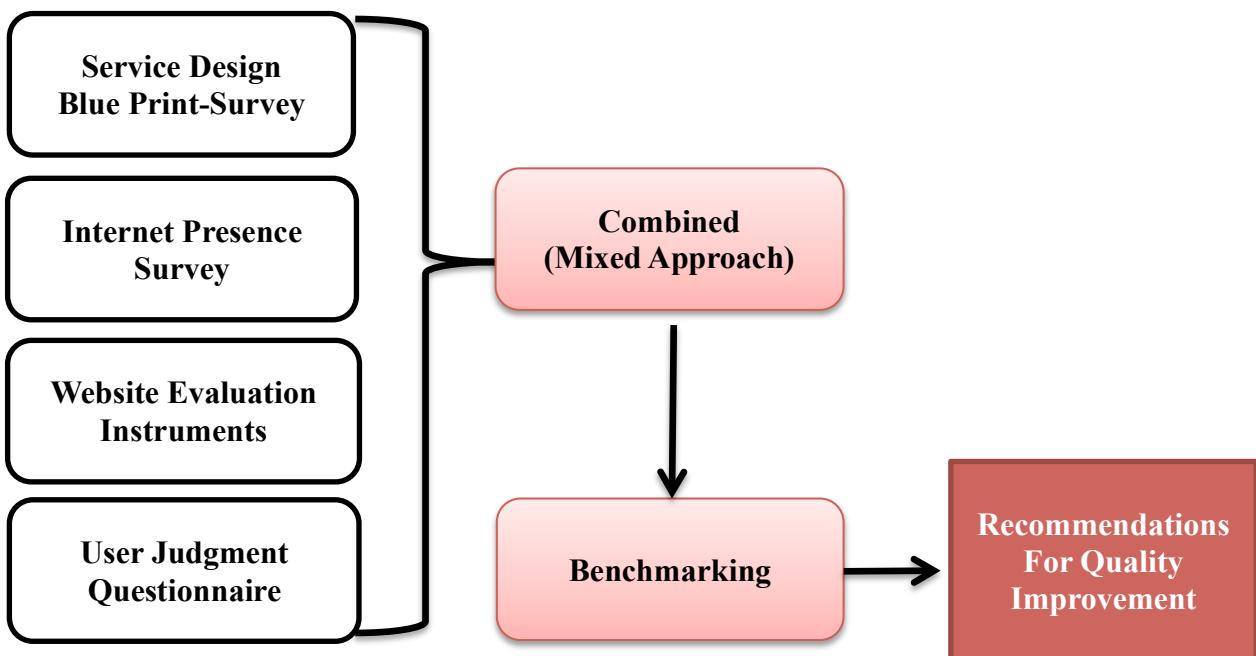
<b>Choi, S., &amp; Morrison, A. M.</b>	2005	Website Effectiveness for Bricks and Mortar Travel Retailers	Quantitative, Counting	Modified BSC	To evaluate the website performance of brick-and-mortar travel retailers in the US and investigate the present situation in their website marketing. Findings showed that they had weaknesses in attracting customers and were not designed to generate substantial online profits.
<b>Abdinnou r-Helm, S., &amp; Chaparro, B. S.</b>	2007	A Balance Usability Checklist Approach To Evaluate Palestinian Hotel Websites	Quantitative, Counting Method	Modified BSC	Using the BSC/BUC model to assess the usability of Palestinian Hotel Websites. Findings were that the hotels websites faired poorly on 3 out of the 4 quadrants.
<b>Lee, J., &amp; Morrison, A. M.</b>	2010	A comparative study of web site performance	Quantitative, Counting	Modified BSC	The study measured and compared the overall effectiveness of upscale hotel web sites and checked the correlation between overall web site effectiveness and size of upscale hotels in South Korea and the US. The results showed that there was no significant difference in the overall effectiveness of the upscale hotel web sites in South Korea and the USA. Also, Korean upscale hotels performed slightly better than their US counterparts.
<b>Meintjes, C., et al.</b>	2011	Evaluating Web marketing of luxury lodges in South Africa	Qualitative & Quantitative, Counting	Mixed approach of Website evaluation methods	Evaluated the marketing aspects of luxury lodge websites in Mpumalanga, South Africa and found that the websites are generally of high standards and appealing but lack originality and uniqueness.
<b>Kim, Y. H., et al.</b>	2013	The application of the modified balanced scorecard advanced hierarchy process extended to the economy, upscale, and luxury hotels' websites	Quantitative, Counting & Automated	BSC & Analytical Hierarchy Process	Using a combined balanced scorecard and analytical hierarchy process to determine differences in perspectives and CSFs among three hotel level types. Results suggest that customer perspective is of highest importance in the website design.
<b>Poklepović, T., et al.</b>	2013	Different Perspectives of website Performance Analysis From Croatian Hotels	Quantitative, Counting	Modified BSC	Evaluated the websites of Croatia's hotels from the perspectives of user-friendliness, site attractiveness, marketing effectiveness, and Food and Beverage. Findings showed that although a majority of hoteliers recognized the importance of online presence, most were not effectively using websites.

# Chapter 5: Research Design and Methodology

The research design used for this study is a mixed method approach. According to Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2007), “mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems that either approach alone”. More specifically, this research can be classified as a concurrent mixed approach where qualitative and quantitative data are collected concurrently with quantitative data leading the analysis and reporting. The data collected was then combined to formulate a benchmarking approach of tourism websites in Belize, leading to the provision of recommendations to the industry for quality improvements. The methodology can be described as follows:

- Qualitative measures included a creating a service design blueprint, a survey conducted to check for internet presence and a questionnaire to understand how satisfied users were with the destination website. The questionnaire measured user judgment of the website from the perspectives of user satisfaction, user friendliness, perceived ease of use and marketing effectiveness.
- Quantitative measures included using a counting method approach of website evaluation, known as Modified Balance Score Card, to evaluate the quality of hotels and tour operators websites.
- Furthermore, benchmarking was done by comparing the findings of the checklist and other evaluation instruments used, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of websites in the Belizean tourism industry. The benchmarking analysis was then used to make appropriate recommendations to improve on website development and design within the Industry, to better the online experience for travelers and encourage visitor retention.

Considering the objectives stipulated in section 1.4, the following model (**Figure 5-1**) provides an overview of the mixed method design approach taken in this research to be able to fulfill the requirements. Each instrument and data collection process used to fulfill each objective will be addressed individually in this chapter. The compilations of data across all instruments were gathered within two months.



**Figure 5-1: Methodological Design Used In Study**

## 5.1 Survey and Data Collection for Blueprint

With the help of the Belize Educational Service Group from National Tsing Hua University, a survey was conducted in which they were asked to document their every move while planning their trip to Belize. They documented their behaviors and actions filling out a survey, which was hosted by Google Docs. This information was then used to come up with the customer actions of the service design blue print created for online travellers while planning their trip. Since the group is planning to travel to Belize in the upcoming summer, the 10 members made ideal candidates to take part in the survey. The survey responses were collected within 1 week and were mostly open questions with a total of 16 items. Most of the questions asked were divided by travel stages, specifically Pre-Travel (before travel), Travel (during travel) and Post-Travel (after travel) categories to be able to get all the users actions across all travel stages. The survey items used can be seen **Appendix 1**.

Using the data from the survey, an online traveler's service blue print was created. The same components illustrated by Bitner, M. J. (2008), were used to design the blueprint. The elements used to design the blueprint for online travelers are as follows.

**Table 5-1: Service Blue Print Criteria**

Components	Description
<b>Physical Evidence</b>	Actions involved in the service delivery that customers come in contact with.
<b>Customers Actions</b>	Includes all of the steps that customers take as part of the service delivery process. Customer actions are depicted chronologically across the top of the blueprint.
<b>Onstage visible contact employee actions</b>	The face-to-face actions between the employees and the customer. This stage is separated from the customer via the line of interaction.
<b>Backstage invisible contact employee actions</b>	Actions that are invisible to the customer that the contact employees normally engage in, to perform their responsibilities and serve the customer needs
<b>Support Process</b>	Separates the contact employees by the line of internal interaction. These actions are those that are not carried out by the contact employees but within the company itself necessary to deliver the services.

When creating the blueprint for online travelers, the service process or sub process to be blueprinted was identified first. In this case the service was online travel planning for online users going to Belize. Once the service and the target customers were identified, the results from the survey were then used to identify all the customer's actions that were done during the travel planning process. These components served as the foundation of the blueprint. After this was established, the contact employee actions, both onstage and backstage were delineated followed by the support processes. The physical evidence was done last and it highlighted all the actions involved in the travel planning process (pre-travel, travel and post travel). The goal of the blue print designed was to capture the entire customer experience and actions online while planning their trip.

Moreover to demonstrate the entire travel experience and behaviors of the consumer, separate blueprints had to be created, depending on the stage of travel. Since most tourism products are booked and paid for in advance, customers have to rely on the accuracy of accessible information (Stickdorn, M., & Zehrer, A., 2009). A such, an online service blueprint will give an overall

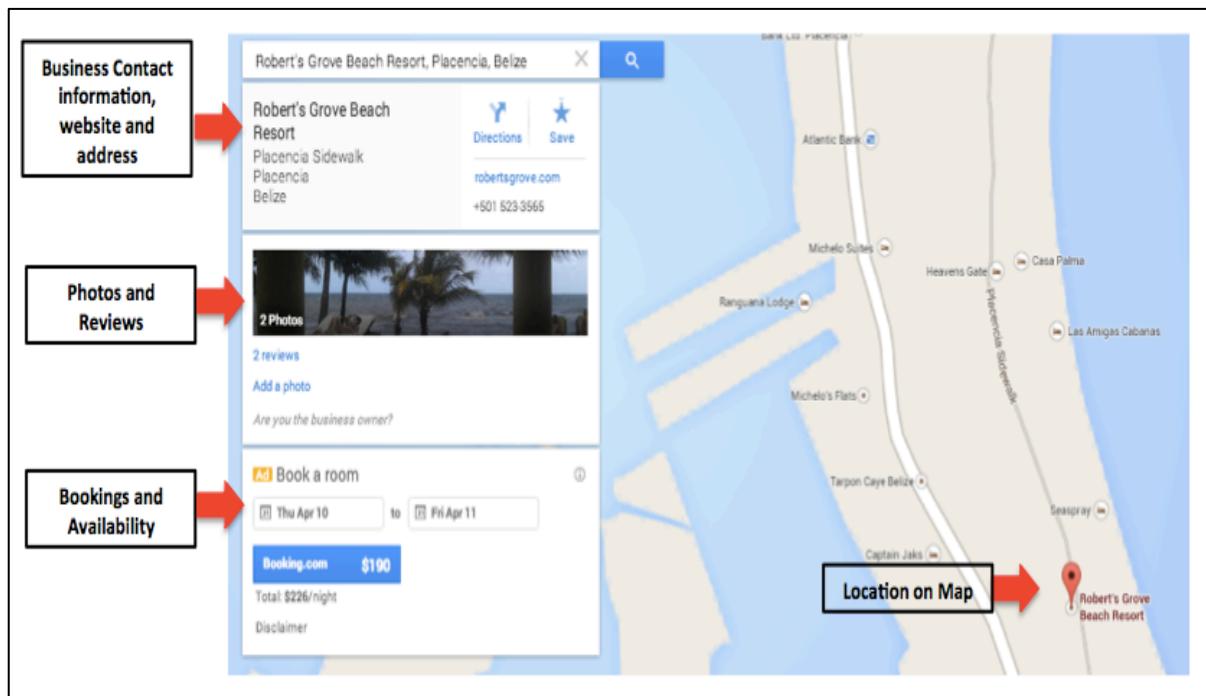
perspective of online tools and services that are available to guide the travel planning process and give the customer the satisfaction and flexibility during the process. The blue prints indicated the travel experience and behaviors of customers, employees and support groups along the various travel stages. The physical evidence and customer's actions were mostly based on the Survey results gotten. Onstage employee actions, backstage employee actions and support processes were not taken from the survey but were identified based on prior industry knowledge.

## **5.2 Internet/Web Presence Data Collection**

Considering that web marketing channels/tools are key in the purchasing of products and services by users online, it was necessary to identify how much Internet presence exists within Belizean tourism institutions. As such, to understand if tourism business in Belize were using online marketing tools for E-tourism processes and to access their Internet presence, all hotels and tour operators units were examined by first searching each unit's name via Google search. Google, as the top search engine of the web, was the main tool used for assessing presence. Internet or Web presence refers to an individual or business having an established existence on the World Wide Web. This can be accomplished by having components such as website, e-mail, social media, blogs, online advertisements, communication and large screen activities (Webopedia.com, 2014). In this study, functional websites, social media presence, Google pages, and access to travel portal devoted to that entity within the regions in Belize were tested to measure the Internet presence. The Belize Tourism Board and Belize Hotel Association provided the lists, used to check each hotel and tour operator. A total of 730 hotels and 218 tour operators were assessed to see if they had the established criteria on the survey checklist designed for Internet presence. The following table describes the criteria used in the survey to measure Internet presence for each hotel and tour operator in Belize. The survey questions comprised of 8 items and was hosted by Google docs. The Data collection was completed within 2 weeks. To view the survey questions see **Appendix 2**.

**Table 5-2: Criteria used to measure Internet Presence in Hotels and Tour Operators**

Criteria	Scale of measurement Dichotomous: (Yes (1) or No(0)	Description of Criteria
<b>Website Existence</b>	Yes/No	Each business name was searched on Google. If a website appeared on the search the business was given a "Yes" or 1 point. The website was then checked for functionality. Another point was given if the website was functional. If a website was not found for the business, it was given a "NO" or 0 points
<b>Social Media</b>	Yes/No	Social Media presence was identified by looking at the website and checking if they had any links to Social Media pages. If social media links such as Facebook, twitter, Flickr among others, were not identified within the website, further search was done on Google. If a social media page was identified either within the website or elsewhere and provided business information, they were given a "Yes" and otherwise, a "No" for the alternative.
<b>Travel portals</b>	Yes/No	Travel portal sites such as Tripadvisor and hotels.com can offer a variety of benefits for businesses. They can provide the business with reviews that can assist in overall improvements and they can be used as an intermediate platform for reservations and booking. These online travel portals are widely used during the travel search process. As such, if the business had a registered page it can offer them the exposure they need. If any of these related travel portal sites contained information about the business, they were given a "Yes" and otherwise, a "No" for the alternative.
<b>Google place activity</b>	Yes/No	This involved searching for the business name in Google maps. If Google has an address for the business, it will attempt to locate it on Google Maps, and the business receives a Google place page. This page is a very simple page, showing address, Phone number, website, business picture and Google user reviews. For our purpose the most important feature on this page was owner - verification. If the owner officially claimed and updated information on the page, the business was given a "Yes" and a "No" if not owner-verified. See <b>Figure 5-2</b> , for an example.
<b>Local forums or Information sites</b>	Yes/No	Local forums and official site links within websites are key during the information search process. As such, it is important those businesses offer these available resources to the consumers. If the website has links to local forums or official sites they were given a "Yes" or otherwise "No" for the alternative.



**Figure 5-2: Google Place Page of a Belizean Hotel**

This survey checklist was able to identify the absence and presences of web tools necessary for tourism industries to succeed. The information gathered from this survey indicated that further analysis was needed regarding the proper uses of web tools such as websites. Thus, the evaluation method explained in the next section was carried out to further evaluate the overall strengths and weaknesses of websites in Belizean tourism institutions. Analysis of data for the digital presence was based on frequency distribution and percentages.

## 5.3 Website Evaluation Instrument and Data Collection

### Population and Sample

The sample of hotels and tour operators used in this study were randomly selected from the lists provided from the Belize Tourism Board and Belize Hotel Association. These lists were updated lists for 2012-2013 and gotten from reputable tourism organizations in Belize. Hotels and Tour operators were selected at random in order to be able to access websites from regions that are mostly visited by tourists. Once the websites were selected, they were checked to see if they were functional, before being subjected for evaluation. Given that this analysis focused on the whole country of Belize, 10 hotel and 9 tour operators were selected from four main regions: Belize City and Northern Belize, Islands and Cayes, Western Belize and Southern Belize. **Table 5-3** below gives and account of the hotels and tour operators used in study, along with their location and URL.

**Table 5-3: Names and Website Addresses of Tourism Businesses Used in Study**

Hotels	Location	URL
<b>Chabil Mar</b>	Southern Belize	<a href="http://www.chabilmarvillas.com/">http://www.chabilmarvillas.com/</a>
<b>Coco Beach Resort</b>	Island & Cayes	<a href="http://www.cocobeachbelize.com/">http://www.cocobeachbelize.com/</a>
<b>Ka' ana Boutique Resort</b>	Western Belize	<a href="http://www.kaanabelize.com/">http://www.kaanabelize.com/</a>
<b>Laru Beya Resort &amp; Villas</b>	Southern Belize	<a href="http://www.larubeya.com/">http://www.larubeya.com/</a>
<b>Princess Hotel &amp; Casino</b>	Belize City	<a href="http://www.princessbelize.com/">http://www.princessbelize.com/</a>
<b>Radisson Fort George Hotel and Marina</b>	Belize City	<a href="http://www.radisson.com/belize-city-hotel-bz/belize">http://www.radisson.com/belize-city-hotel-bz/belize</a>
<b>Ramon's Village</b>	Island & Cayes	<a href="http://www.ramons.com/">http://www.ramons.com/</a>
<b>Roberts Grove</b>	Southern Belize	<a href="http://www.robertsgrove.com/">http://www.robertsgrove.com/</a>
<b>San Ignacio Resort Hotel</b>	Western Belize	<a href="http://www.sanignaciobelize.com/">http://www.sanignaciobelize.com/</a>
<b>The Lodge At Chaa Creek</b>	Western Belize	<a href="http://www.chaacreek.com/">http://www.chaacreek.com/</a>
TOs	Location	URL
<b>Belize master Tours</b>	Island & Cayes	<a href="http://www.belizemastertours.com/">http://www.belizemastertours.com/</a>
<b>Cayo Adventure Tours</b>	Western Belize	<a href="http://www.cayoadventure.com/">http://www.cayoadventure.com/</a>
<b>Ecological Tours &amp; Service</b>	Belize City	<a href="http://www.ecotoursbelize.com/">http://www.ecotoursbelize.com/</a>
<b>Island Expedition</b>	Island & Cayes	<a href="http://www.islandexpeditions.com/">http://www.islandexpeditions.com/</a>
<b>Joy Tours</b>	Southern Belize	<a href="http://www.belizewithjoy.com/">http://www.belizewithjoy.com/</a>
<b>Maya Walk Tours</b>	Western Belize	<a href="http://www.mayawalk.com/">http://www.mayawalk.com/</a>
<b>Pacz Tours</b>	Western Belize	<a href="http://www.pacztours.net/">http://www.pacztours.net/</a>
<b>Paradise Expedition</b>	Western Belize	<a href="http://www.birdinginbelize.com/">http://www.birdinginbelize.com/</a>
<b>Tanisha Tours</b>	Island & Cayes	<a href="http://www.tanishatours.com/">http://www.tanishatours.com/</a>

## Data Collection

The Coders/evaluators/raters selected to evaluate the websites were mostly International MBA and Information Technology masters students from National Tsing Hua University and National Chiao Tung University. A total of 14 coders took part in the evaluation process of websites. Because hotels and tour operators were evaluated separately, the number of coders for each category had to be split into two groups, meaning 7 of the 14 coders evaluated hotel websites only and 7 evaluated tour operators. Prior to doing the site evaluation, raters received a training

in which they were given a set of instructions that explain the criteria and checklist methodology they would use to evaluate each website. These set of instructions were explained to them on a face-to-face individual basis. Once they understood what they were supposed to do, a date was assigned in which they would record their responses. For consistency purposes, coders were required to do the evaluation during a fixed time frame that was monitored to ensure compliance. A Google Docs checklist link was given to the coders to document their responses as well as the list of web links they were supposed to evaluate. Insertion of responses was monitored online via Google Docs by the proctor. Because each item on the checklist was made a required item, no item on the checklist was skipped or missed. Google Docs was used as a control tool for the data collection to avoid data being missed by coders. If coders had questions during the evaluation process, Facebook was used a medium of communication between the proctor and the coder.

Since this study mirrored the same evaluating approach to that of Kline, S. F., et al. (2004), the data collection for this evaluation process had to be ideally carried out in a controlled environment. That approach was however not used since it was difficult to get all coders to meet at a certain place in the same time frame. This change made to the already modified approach might have subjected this analysis to some limiting factors. Online tools such as Google Docs and Facebook were used instead to monitor the coder's data entry and to answer doubts they might have had during the evaluation process.

### **BSC Instrument/Checklist Design**

The instrument used for the evaluation of hotel and tour operators was based on similar approach used to that of Kline, S. F., et al. (2004) which stems from the original Kaplan and Norton, (1992) BSC model. In addition, Taudes, A., & Tanaka, A. (2013), "The status of E-tourism in Hokkaido and Austria", was also considered to formulate the BSC checklist used in this study. The BSC by Kline et al. (2004) is composed of a checklist of items divided into 4 Quadrants, also referred to as Perspectives or Elements. Given that the BSC for this study was based on the one by Kline, S. F., et al. (2004), it also included the 4 Perspectives but was modified to include an additional Perspective from Taudes, A., & Tanaka, A. (2013) to have a total of 5 Perspectives, namely, (i) Objective, (ii) User-friendliness, (iii) Site Attractiveness, (iv) Marketing Effectiveness and (v) Technical Aspect. To view the items on each perspective of the checklist designed refer to **Appendix 3, 4 & 5**.

Each Perspective contains items that allowed the coder to evaluate the website based on the perspective. Each item was constructed to be answered/evaluated by using a dichotomous scale of Yes or No (Yes=1 point & No=0 point) to record the absence or presence of the items on the websites. In addition to the Yes/No type items, Perspectives (ii), (iii) and (iv) contain a single 4-point likert-scale (Excellent=4, Good=3, Satisfactory=2 and Poor=1) based item that asks the coder to provide an overall rating based on the Perspective. The coders evaluated the websites using Perspectives (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv). The (v) and last perspective (Technical Aspect) was not evaluated by the coders, but by using an automated tool called NetMechanic.

The BSC checklist for hotel website evaluation comprised of 62 items. In addition to that, Perspectives (ii), (iii) and (iv) also contained a single likert-scale based item to provide an overall rating to the website based on the Perspectives, similar to that done in the Kline, S. F., et al. (2004) method. The 7 coders evaluated each item for all 10 websites assigned. Additionally, after the checklist was completed, the coders were asked a final question, which was as follows;

*As a customer, would you stay at such hotel based on the information given on the website, if you were planning to travel to the destination (Belize)?*

The BSC checklist for tour operators was fairly similar to that of the hotels checklist, but minor changes were necessary to accommodate for the specific tourism unit. 58 items were designed for the checklist with a similar dichotomous scale used to do the rating. A likert-scale based overall rating item for Perspectives (ii), (iii) and (iv) was added taking the total number of items on the checklist to 61. All 7 coders evaluated the 9 websites using all the items. The coders were also asked a final question once they had evaluated all perspectives on the checklist. The question was as follows:

*As a customer, would you book a tour with the tour operator based on the information given on the website, if you were planning to travel to the destination (Belize)?*

The overall ratings given by the coders along with the question asked was used to access the relationship between the BSC evaluating parameters and the coder's satisfaction of the establishments.

### **BSC Perspectives Descriptions**

**Objective:** was measured with 14 and 15 items for Hotels and Tour operators respectively. This perspective measured the reliability of the website by assessing: How users can trust the author and information on the website? What is the purpose of the website? This element is used to examine whether the website author has credentials in the subjects presented (authority), whether the author is careful with accuracy of the information (accuracy) and whether the website carries

out the purpose without bias (purpose). The more authoritative the author of a website is, the more accurate the information is. Community building was also a part of this element, to see if the website used social media to build relationships with users. This element was taken from the Taudes, & Tanaka (2013), approach. All other perspectives were taken from the Kline, S. F., et al. (2004) approach.

**User friendliness:** this element was measured with 10 Yes/No items for both hotels and tour operators with an additional overall rating item with a 4 point likert scale response. These items were used to determine whether the website was easy to use in terms of format, design and layout. A website that is easy to navigate enables a potential guest to freely click in and out of pages without causing confusion or distress. The more user friendly a website, the more a potential guest is likely to continue to view the information and find out more. Also, it looked at other characteristics such as whether there was a home button on all pages. This is important because it prevents the user from accidentally closing the browser. Other aspects such as clearly displaying contact information to communicate with potential guests and using buttons to enable users to click from page to page without having to scroll through multiple pages were equally important features to measure in this perspective. The relation between the usability and the design was evaluated here. According to Douglas, A., & Mills, J. E., 2004, the 2 major components of this perspective are web mobility and ease of contact. As websites assume a major marketing role in tourism by interfacing with the visitors, both online and offline interaction should be facilitated.

**Site Attractiveness:** This perspective was evaluated with 18 Yes/No items for hotels and 17 Yes/No items for tour operators, along with an addition overall rating item with a 4 point likert scale response. This perspective measured qualities of a hotel and tour operators based on whether the site had clear and readable text, hyperlinks and good quality photographs and images. This perspective examined the attractiveness of a website in terms of the interface, format, design, layout, pictures, visual entertainment, other aesthetics and appeal. Website attractiveness sometimes affects the ability for the website to be an ambassador for the business or organization and should be simple with a touch of elegance. Too much graphics, animations, vibrant colors and “fancy” backgrounds can distract the users attention (Douglas, A., & Mills, J. E., 2004).

**Marketing Effectiveness:** Following the same criteria by Kline, S. F., et al. (2004), this perspective was evaluated with 20 Yes/No items for hotels and 17 Yes/No items for tour operators. An overall rating question with a 4 point likert scale response was also incorporated.

This perspective judged whether the tourism websites followed sound marketing principles. These principles include that the site should define the uniqueness of the establishment and its surrounding environment by providing adequate information of the organization history, local events, rates, photographs, awards, testimonials, packages and promotions. All these factors are important to address the effectiveness of current market information, consistency in website design, market segments, destination attributes, advertisements, trip planner and make the virtual experience of the establishment more tangible for the user. Douglas, A., & Mills, J. E. (2004) mentioned that the critical components for this aspect include marketing information (items that inform users about hotels, restaurants and activities about the destination), market segments (niche tourist groups such as business travelers, couples, honeymooners, children, tour groups and meetings and convention groups), destination activities (arranged by interest such as culture and arts activities, recreations and excursions and sporting activities), trip planner (information should be thorough and to the point allowing users to be able to “do-it your-self” with limited assistance) and “glocalization” (aspects that refers to the impacts of global issues, trends ideas and events on the local environment or vice versa) to guarantee visitor retention.

**Technical Aspect:** As indicated by the Kline, S. F., et al. (2004) approach this aspect was not measured by coders but allowed the researcher to use a freely available automated tool called NetMechanic to measure this perspective. This tool was created for small medium enterprises, who needed easy, affordable, self service web tools to help run high quality business web sites. Netmechanic is the largest independent provider of website tools helping businesses increase revenues, satisfy customers and improve overall website quality. The automated tool analyzes website availability and reliability, improves page visualization, optimize search engine ranking and monitor performance. It has been used in over 300 publicly available studies of a similar nature based on Google Scholar search results.

The NetMechanic service allowed up to 5 pages to be freely tested per website. NetMechanic tested each website for the five following technical aspects using a five star rating per page.

- **Link Check:** Each page was rated based on the number of bad (inactive/defective) links available on each page.
- **Load Time:** Rating for this aspect was based on the time required to load the page using a 28.8 modem. A 2 second penalty is added for every web server that must be accessed to load a page and its graphics.
- **HTML Check & Repair:** This aspect was rated based on the number of HTML errors found on each page.

- **Browser Compatibility:** Rating is based on the number of compatibility problems affecting more than 10% of site visitors.
- **Spell Check:** This rating is based on the percentage of suspected misspellings on each page submitted for testing.

Since not all websites had five or more pages to be evaluated, average scores for pages were used for assessment and comparison. To view the scales and points awarded for each technical aspect see **Appendix 5**.

To analyze the data for the website evaluation approach previously mentioned, rankings and descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequency distributions and percentages were employed. Rankings of each perspective were calculated by summing the scores of the dichotomous items across all coders for that specific perspective. NetMechanic data was converted to dichotomous scale to be able to be ranked. The means for each perspective were summed and percentage values were calculated to identify weaknesses and strengths of the websites overall. The percentage score was used as a baseline to identify whether the perspective was either acceptable or poor. The data collection was completed within 2 weeks

### **Statistical Analysis of BSC**

As with any research study, validity and reliability are critical considerations. For this study, its measures and procedures must be reliable. Reliability refers to the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results. Because more than 2 raters/coders/evaluators were used to evaluate the websites of both hotels and tour operators, the type of reliability test done by the researcher was inter-rater reliability/ inter-rater agreement. Inter-rater reliability is a measure or reliability to assess the degree to which two or more independent judges or evaluators agree in the assessment decision. The test then compares the scores to determine consistency of the rater's estimates (Cherry, K., 2014). Because this research used two different scales in the BSC approach for website evaluation, three different reliability tests were conducted and will be described below. Inter rater reliability was conducted on all perspectives measured in the checklist by the coders except the technical aspect which was rated by an automated tool-NetMechanic.

For the Dichotomous items (Yes/No) used in the BSC checklist, Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (W) was calculated. This test is a non-parametric test that measures the level of

agreement among independent judges/raters/coders assessing a given set of objects and when the data is dichotomous and then ranked.

Using Excel, the formula below was used. The Coefficient of Concordance was calculated as:

**Equation 1: Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance**

$$W = \frac{x^2}{J(n-1)} \quad \text{Or} \quad W = \frac{12S}{m^2(n^3-n)}$$

Where J or m = number of judges (judges/coders/raters);

n = number of problems ranked (websites);

S = sum of ranks

W ranges between 0 and 1, and indicates the strength of agreement. The closer to 1, the higher the level of agreement or concordance and W of zero signifies disagreement.

Furthermore to test the hypothesis of agreement, the chi-square test was calculated using Friedman's Chi test ( $x^2$ ), also using Excel. This non-parametric test is used to detect differences in treatments across multiple test attempts. The procedure involves ranking each row (or block) together, then considering the values of ranks by columns. It is calculated as:

**Equation 2: Chi-Square Test**

$$x^2 = J(n-1)W$$

Where J = number of judges (coders/raters);

n = number of problems ranked (websites);

W= coefficient of concordance.

The Hypothesis tested for agreement was as follows:

**H<sub>0</sub>: W=0** (A lack of concordance between the coders or no significance of the order or agreement by coders)

**H<sub>A</sub>: 0<W≤1** (the coders assessment are concordant or the degree of agreement of the rankings by coders is significant)

To test the internal reliability for the four point Likert scale used in the BSC checklist, that measured the overall ratings, the Cronbach Coefficient of Alpha was employed. This analysis was done using SPSS software. Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency that is, how closely related sets of items are as a group. A "high" value of alpha is often used as evidence that the items measure an underlying (or latent) construct (Ats.ucla.edu, 2014).

This test was calculated as follows:

**Equation 3: Cronbach's Coefficient of Alpha**

$$\alpha = \frac{K \bar{c}}{(\bar{v} + (K - 1)\bar{c})}$$

Where,  $K$  is number of items,  $\bar{v}$  the average variance of each component (item), and  $\bar{c}$  the average of all covariances between the component across the current sample of people. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient normally ranges between 0 and 1. The closer the coefficient is to 1.0, the greater is the internal consistency of the items (variables) in the scale. High Alpha is good because it shows that there is a high variance, or in other words the scores are widely spread, indicating that the raters are easier to differentiate. Cronbach's alpha coefficient increases either as the number of items (variables) increases, or as the average inter-item correlations increase (when the number of items is held constant).

Furthermore, because two scales were used in the BSC checklist, namely dichotomous and likert, they had to be correlated. To test if the dichotomous ranked data was significantly different from the likert ranked data, the two scales were tested using Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, on SPSS. This test is a nonparametric hypothesis test, alternative to the two sample t-test, which is based solely on the order in which the observations from the two sample fall (Weiers, R. M., 2011).

The Hypothesis and test statistic is as follows:

$H_0$ : there is no difference between the two treatment or scales

$H_A$ : there is a difference between the two scales

$\alpha = 0.05$

z critical value=1.96

Thus, we reject the null hypothesis if the z value is  $\leq -1.96$  or  $\geq 1.96$ , z critical value,  $p < 0.05$

Wilcoxon signed ranks test can be calculated as:

**Equation 4: Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test**

$$z = \frac{T - \frac{n(n + 1)}{4}}{\sqrt{\frac{n(n + 1)(2n + 1)}{24}}}$$

Where T= smallest value of the summed ranked scores

Findings of the tests of reliability in the present study will be explained in chapter 6.

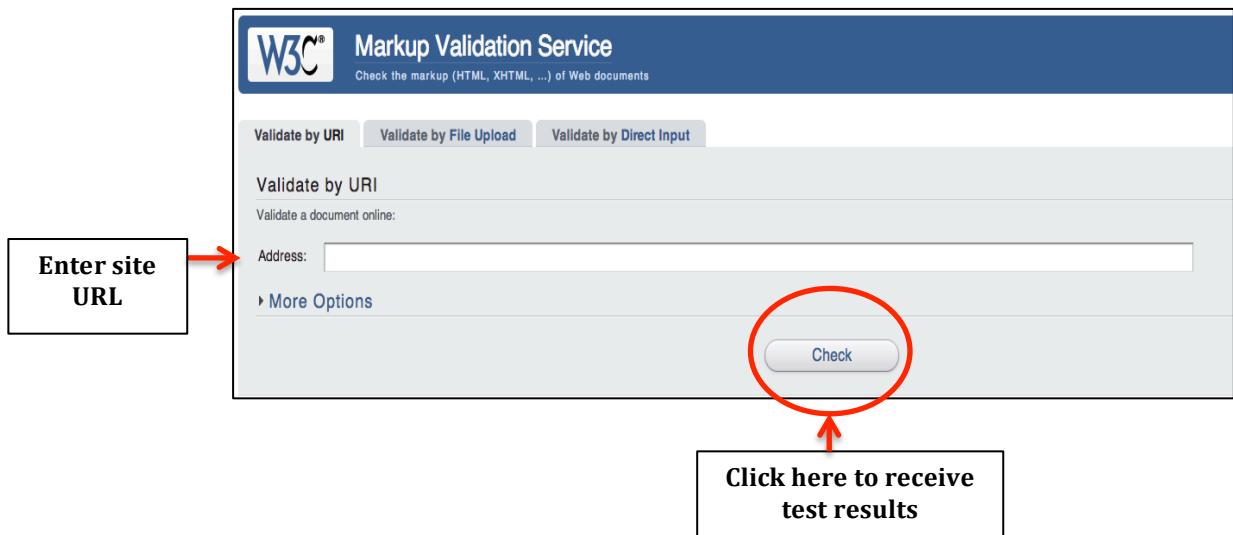
## 5.4 Mobile-Web Readiness Check

In addition to the automated tool used in the BSC approach for technical aspect, testing for Mobile-Web friendliness seemed necessary, considering that mobile phones are the number one item users bring while traveling and that 38% of leisure travelers and 58% business travelers use it for travel information (Google, 2013)

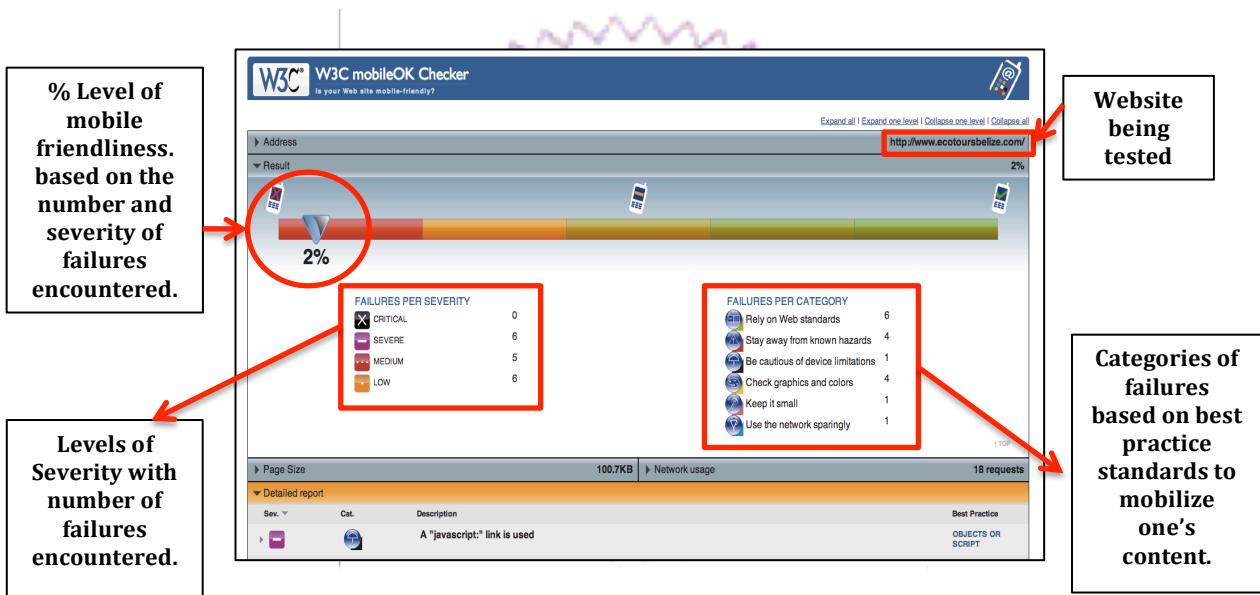
To test for web mobility friendliness of the 19 websites (10 Hotels and 9 TO's) subjected to evaluation, a validator tool formulated by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) was used. W3C is an international community working together to develop standardization mechanisms for web technologies. It does this by following processes that promotes high quality standards based on community consensus. Web inventor Tim Berners Lee leads the W3C community. The validator standards used on the websites for this research checks the markup validity of Web documents in HTML, XHTML, SMILm and MathML. Furthermore the mobile OK checker is based on a subset of the mobile Web best practices 1.0 standard, and the test covers different areas that impact the mobile friendliness of Web content (W3.org, 2014). These areas are as follows:

- **Markup validation:** some tags and attributes that may be used in a page may not be well supported by a vast majority of mobile devices.
- **Structure of the page:** size matters on mobile devices, using tables for layout usually does not work, support for Javascript is limited, pop-ups and frames negatively impact the user experience on small screens
- **Cascading style sheets:** using absolute measures is unlikely to work well on mobile devices
- **Images/Objects:** image format and dimensions should match the capabilities of the device.
- **User input:** default values should be provided in input fields whenever possible, user inputs should be minimized.
- **HTTP level:** proper caching and encoding information should be sent in the HTTP header.
- **Character encoding:** to see if the content properly encoded in UTF-8.
- **Links:** content targeted by the page should be appropriate for mobile devices.

The screen shot in **Figure 5-3** demonstrates how the researcher used the mobile validator to test each website's URL.



**Figure 5-3: Web Mobility Validator Test**



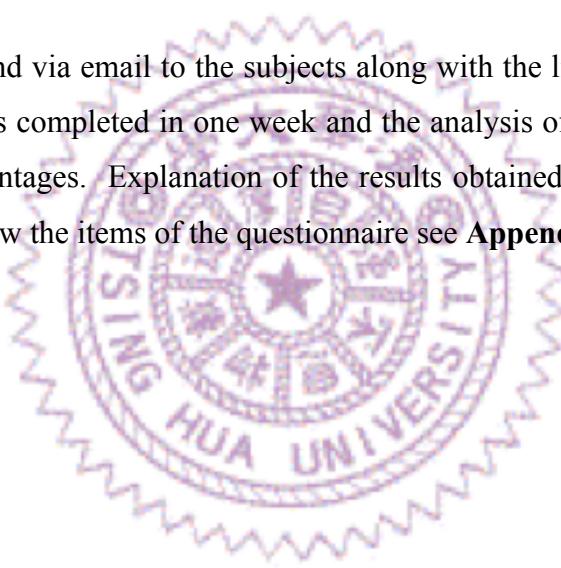
**Figure 5-4: Test Results From Validator**

Once the URL is tested, a window will pop up expressing the results of the test. The screen shot in **Figure 5-4** illustrates a sample of the results received for each websites that was tested. Analysis of the results of the web mobility test will be explained in chapter 6.

## **5.5 Questionnaire Development for User Judgment (U)**

In order to understand how users of websites perceive the elements in the BSC checklist and whether the overall website quality had motivated them to visit the destination another questionnaire was developed. 10 subjects, who travelled at least twice a year over the last two years, were asked to complete the questionnaire, which was hosted by Google Docs. The website that the subjects evaluated was the destination website for Belize ([travelbelize.org](http://travelbelize.org)). The questionnaire measured User Judgment on the level of satisfaction based on psychological and physical experience of utility. The format of the questionnaire to measure the level of satisfaction and perception was based on the same elements of the BSC checklist of usability, namely the five elements; i) Objective, ii) User Friendliness, iii) Site Attractiveness, iv) Marketing Effectiveness and v) Technical Features. The questionnaire comprised of a total of 55 items including demographic information. Most items on the questionnaire were Yes/ No based.

The questionnaire was send via email to the subjects along with the link to enter their responses. The collection of data was completed in one week and the analysis of the data was mostly based on frequencies, and percentages. Explanation of the results obtained from questionnaire will be done in chapter 6. To View the items of the questionnaire see **Appendix 6**



# Chapter 6: Data Analysis and Results

This chapter focuses on detailing the empirical finding and conclusions made on the current study. All the findings including, service blueprint, digital presence, website evaluation and website user perception will be discussed individually to be able to answer the underlying aim of this study which is: To examine the overall E-tourism status of Belize by examining and evaluating web marketing tools used in the industry. To answer the aim, and considering the problem statement stipulated in 1.3 and the objectives in 1.4, the following research questions will be tested.

- What are the most common behaviors/actions online users normally do while planning their trip to a destination country?
- What is the current Internet or Web presence within tourism institutions in Belize as it relates to web marketing?
- How well do hotels and tour operators websites fare in terms of user-friendliness, site attractiveness, marketing effectiveness, technical aspect and web mobility? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- How satisfied are prospective travelers with the destination website of Belize?
- What implications do the findings from this research hold for other tourism institutions in Belize? What recommendations can be made from the findings?

## 6.1 Survey and Blue Print Results

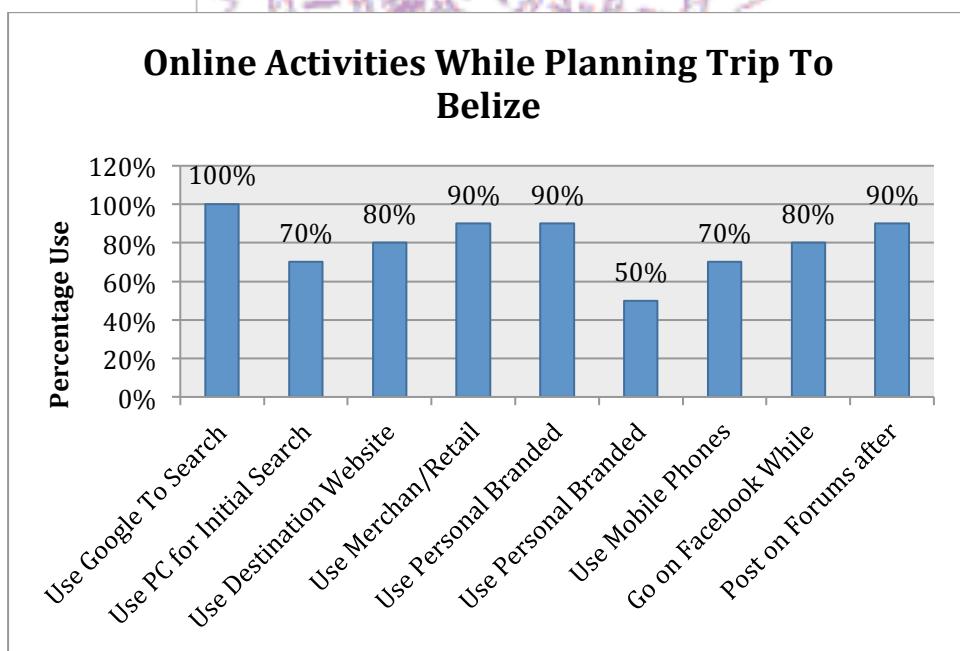
The following question will be tested in this section:

***What are the most common behaviors/actions online users normally do while planning their trip to a destination country?***

According to Statistic Brian, the online travel sales generated in 2012 was US\$162.4 Billion, in revenues. These revenues are 75% greater than the previous five years (Statisticbrian.com, 2014). While the growth of online users has increased, with 2,749 million last recorded, so has the number of available channels to improve the travel supply in efficiency, quality and flexibility (Internet world Stats, 2013; Steinbauer, A., & Werthner, H. 2007). Most users now rely on a variety of channels like travel portals, social media sites, and websites to plan their trip. With this in mind, a service blue print of travelers online was created to be able to relate what online services and channels are accessed by the online user, while planning their visit to a destination. The service blue print created focused on the actions and behaviors of 10 prospective travelers going to Belize, as they plan their trip. Results from the survey were used to build the service blueprint. Also, seeing that websites from the destination and hotels were key for the booking

and reservation process during the pre-travel stages, the website evaluation approach used as a focus of this study seemed necessary.

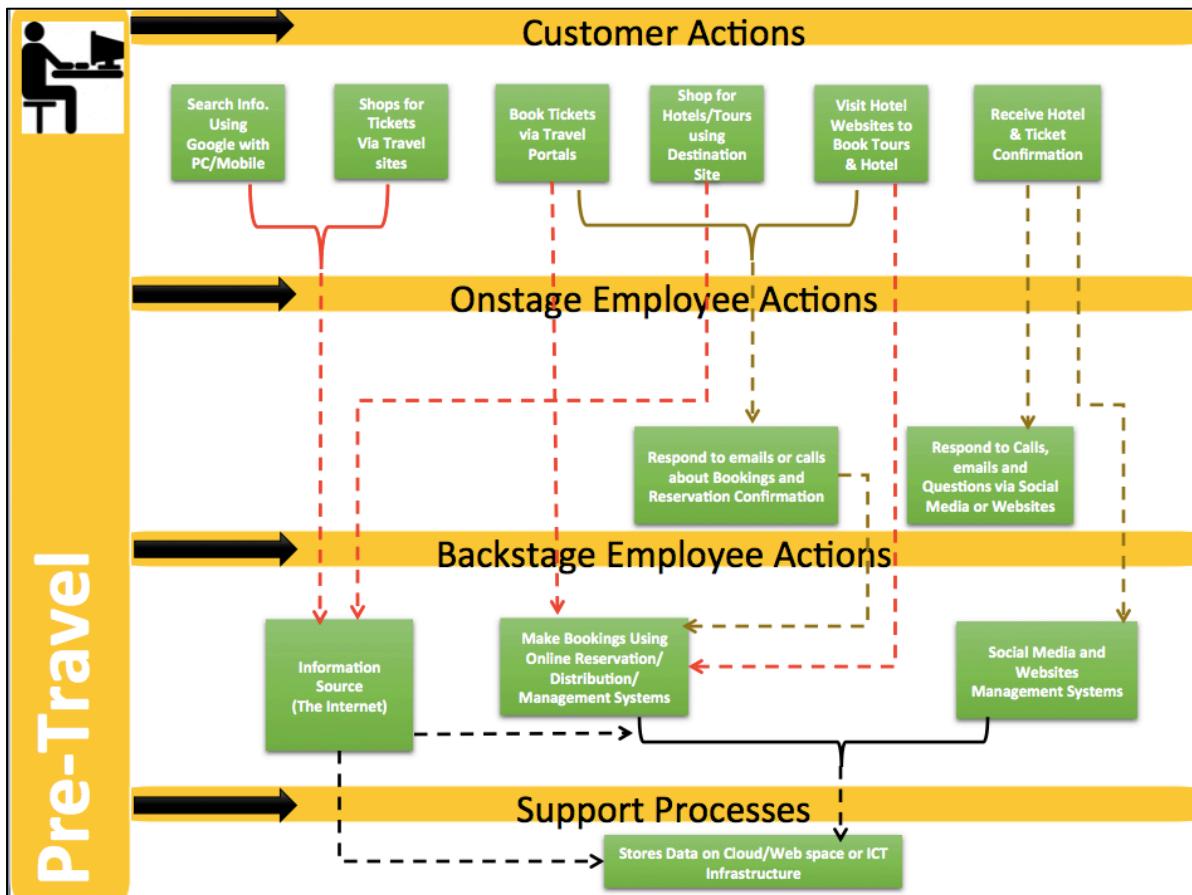
The survey results illustrated that most users visited the official destination website to gather information about the country. Another peculiar behavior was that, almost 70% of the users used their personal computers (PC) during the initial search, but most intend to use their mobile phones while traveling. Furthermore, another key finding from the survey was how important personal branded websites are, to make bookings and reservation for hotels and tours. This indicates the need for tourism business to have a well updated, well designed, easy to use website to cater for the customer needs during the travel process. These websites seem to be key in the bookings and reservation processes, thus should provide the user with a one-stop-shop experience, flexibility of use and reliability of service. Specifically, 90% of the travelers surveyed used hotels personal websites to book hotel rooms (see **Figure 6-1**). Moreover, most users expect to use social media, especially Facebook, to chat with family and share their experience during the travel process. Also, it was found out that after their travels, they have every intention of posting comments/photos on social forums, and other travel sites like trip advisor, to document reviews and comment on their trip experiences (90%).



**Figure 6-1: Online Activities By Users**

Using the information gathered from the survey a blue print was created. Some of the pre-travel activities that were most common used by the users were, using Google as a major search engine (100%), using their personal computer for the initial search (70%), booking hotels by going

directly to the personal branded websites (90%) and going to the official destination website to search information about the country (**See figure 6-2**). Travel activities that were mostly done include using social media to contact friends and family (80%) and using their mobile devices to stay connected (**see figure 6-3**). Lastly, the activities that were mostly common after they complete their travels, was posting on forums and travel sites to make comments and reviews (**see figure 6-4**). Since the results seem to indicate the importance of destination and hotel websites in the travel process, a website evaluation approach was used as the focus of this analysis.



**Figure 6-2: Pre-Travel Service Blueprint For Online Users**

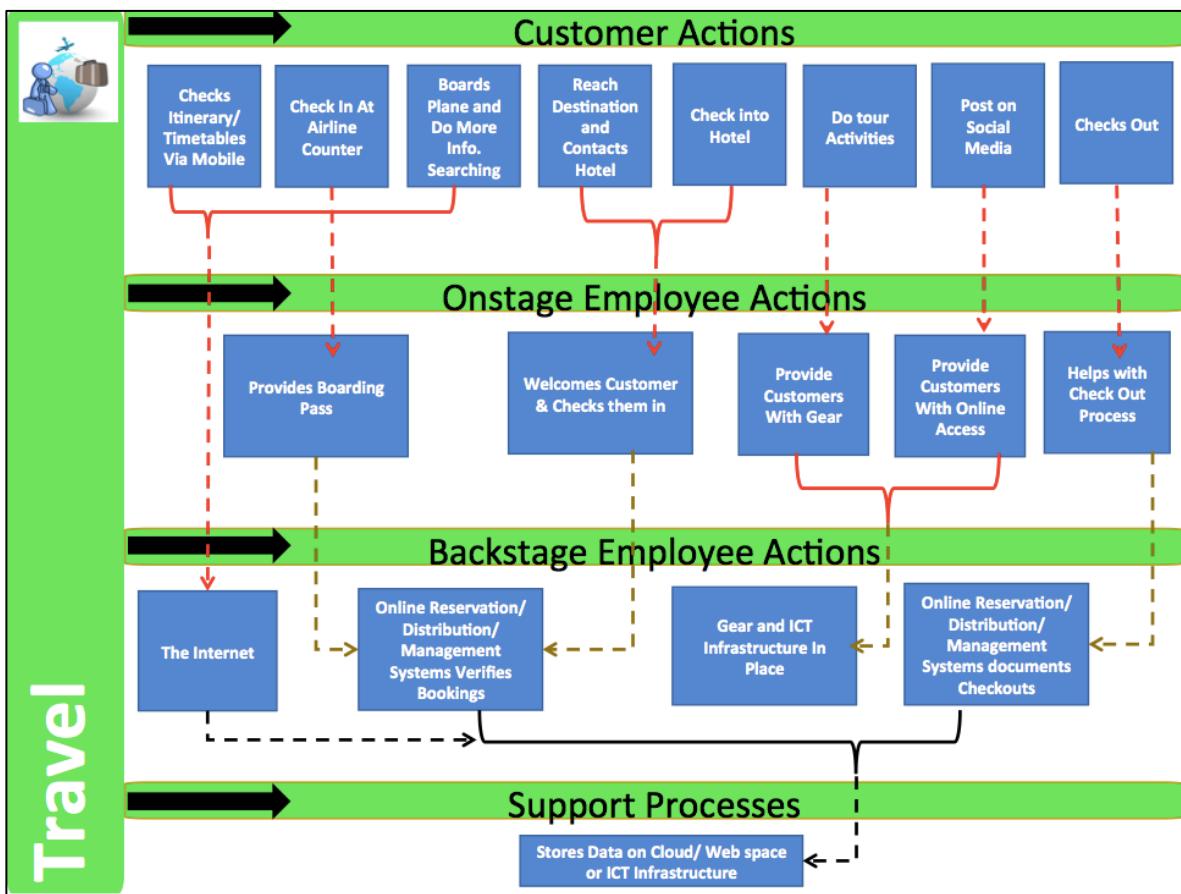


Figure 6-3: Travel Service Blueprint for Online Users

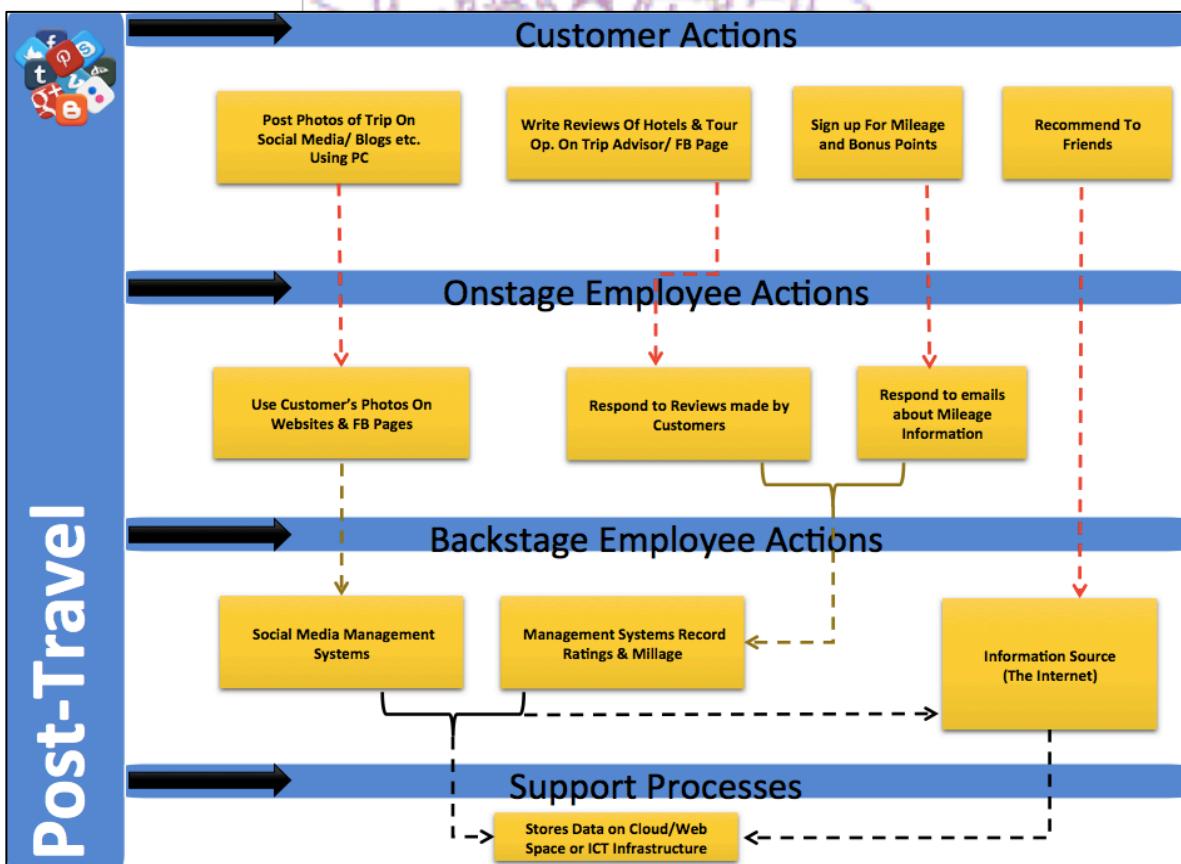


Figure 6-4: Post-Travel Service Blueprint for Online Users

From the blueprints, it suggests that most of the customer's actions carried out were mostly influenced by factors such as vast availability of online products and services, travel companies and social media platforms. As such, it is vital that tourism service providers not only give adequate intelligent information on their web platforms, but also make them flexible enough without constricting the user's travel plans. The main takeaway from the survey and service blueprints were that users planning their trip could be overwhelmed by the excessive amounts of information and platforms out there in the Internet. Thus, a competitive tourism business should provide online channels that are easy to understand, easy to use and flexible enough to give way to a better user experience and unconsciously manipulate the user to make purchases. Some common online frustrations that were noticed in this section of the study was that there were not too many tourism websites available providing information about the destination country. They relied mostly on one destination website and Wikipedia. Also, most personal websites for tour service providers were not in the first options of the search on Google. As such, users mostly relied on merchant travel websites like tripadvisor to plan and book activities.

**Figure 6-5** gives an illustration of the online physical evidence of all the actions that customers come in contact with that can influence their quality perception involved in the travel process to the destination, Belize. These actions were mostly observed during the pre-travel stage of the trip planning. The actions range mostly from searching for information, booking and making reservations using web channels that were most convenient.

In conclusion, the most common actions and behaviors that were identified in this section of the study were that, mobile devices are the most common items used for travelling and searching for information. Also, visiting personal websites of tourism business providers are key in searching for information services and products, which will eventually lead to the purchasing decision of the traveler. Lastly, social media platforms are vital mediums for the user to stay connected while traveling, and to share and post their overall experience and satisfactions of the destinations once they return. In this survey the majority of the users let the criteria of attractive websites, booking flexibility and adequate information guide their decision making process.

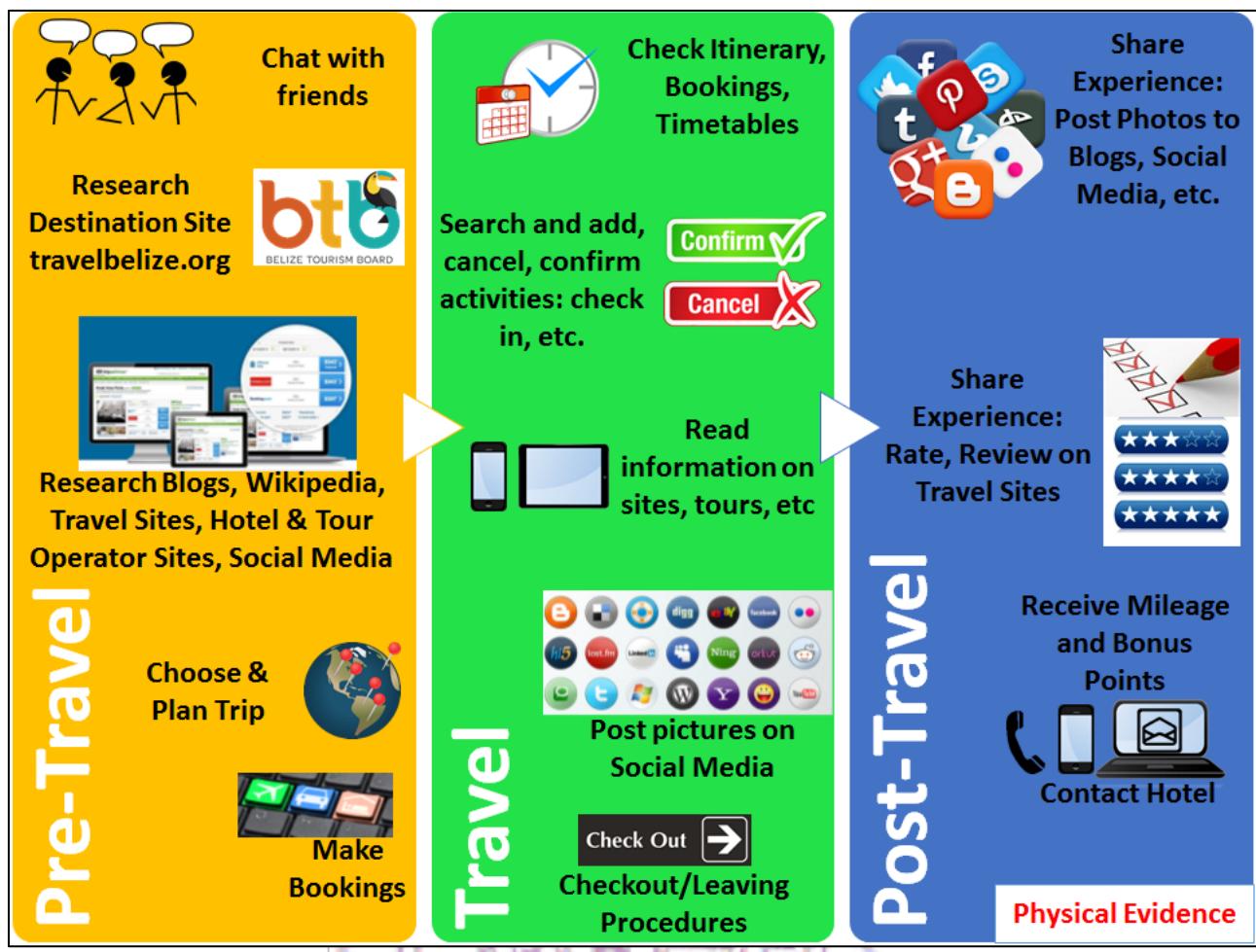


Figure 6-5: Physical Evidence of Travel Stages

## 6.2 Web Presence Results and Analysis

The following research question will be addressed in this section of the study.

*What is the current Internet or Web presence of tourism business institutions in Belize as it relates to web marketing?*

To be able to test the above question, all 730 hotels and 218 tour operators in Belize were checked for Internet presence. A survey was conducted in which each hotel and tour operator was searched using Google and checked for the following: having a functional website, social media links, Google place activity and using other travel sites and local forums on personal branded websites.

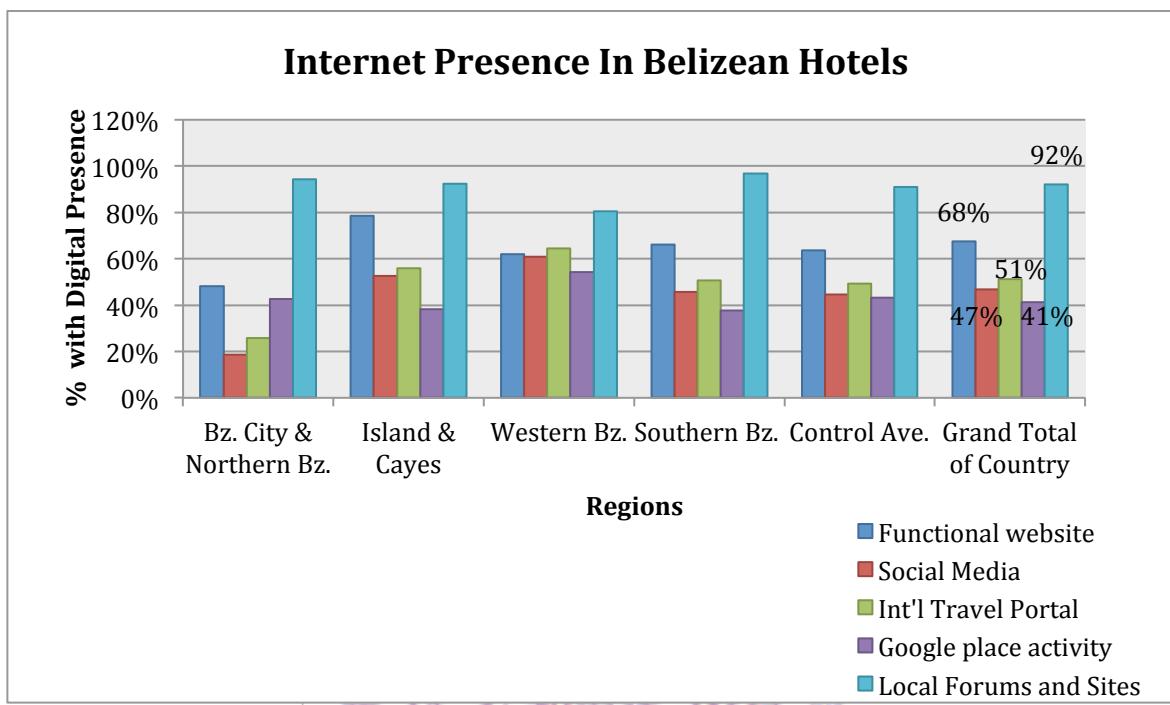
### 6.2.1 Hotels Internet Presence

This assessment found out that across all 730 Hotels surveyed in all 4 main regions in Belize, 549 (81%) had a website but only 493 (68%) were functional. Furthermore, only 342 (47%) had a social media link that provided updates about packages and additional information about the business. Also the criteria, that measured Google place activity was the most limiting, with only 302 (41%) hotels having a Google page that was verified by owners. On average 91% of hotels had additional links to local sites and forums such as, Belize Tourism Board, Belize Hotel Association among other, but only 49% on average had additional link or pages with international travel portals such as Tripadvisor or Agoda.com. **Table 6-1** illustrates the results of all the Internet activities that were measured across all regions in Belize. The table illustrates frequencies of the activities present as well as percentages.

**Table 6-1: Internet Presence in Belizean Hotels**

Measure	Belize City & Northern Belize	Island & Cayes	Western Belize	Southern Belize	Country Total	Control Average %
<b>Hotels with Websites</b>						
# of Hotels	108	279	118	225	<b>730</b>	
% of Hotels	15%	38%	16%	31%	<b>100%</b>	
# With listed websites	62	243	82	162	<b>549</b>	
% With listed websites	57%	87%	69%	72%	<b>81%</b>	<b>71%</b>
# With functional websites	52	219	73	149	<b>493</b>	
% With functional websites	48%	78%	62%	66%	<b>68%</b>	<b>64%</b>
<b>Hotels with Social Media</b>						
# With Social Media	20	147	72	103	<b>342</b>	
% With Social Media	19%	53%	61%	46%	<b>47%</b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>Hotels with Int'l Travel Portals</b>						
# That used int'l travel portal sites	28	156	76	114	<b>374</b>	
% That used int'l travel portal sites	26%	56%	64%	51%	<b>51%</b>	<b>49%</b>
<b>Hotels with Google place</b>						
# With Google place activity	46	107	64	85	<b>302</b>	
% With Google place activity	43%	38%	54%	38%	<b>41%</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>Hotels that use Local Forum</b>						
# That used local Forums and Sites	102	258	95	218	<b>673</b>	
% That used local Forums and Sites	94%	92%	81%	97%	<b>92%</b>	<b>91%</b>

Looking at specific regions in Belize, hotels in western Belize seemed to be the furthest along in Internet presence across the whole country with the most social media presence, Google place activity and having links or pages with international travel portals. This finding was quite unusual considering that this region is only the 3<sup>rd</sup> most visited region by overnight visitors. Most hotels in Islands and Cayes have functional websites and hotels in Southern Belize seemed to be linking to most local forums and sites to provide additional information (see **Figure 6-6**).



**Figure 6-6: Internet Presence of Hotels Across All Regions in Belize**

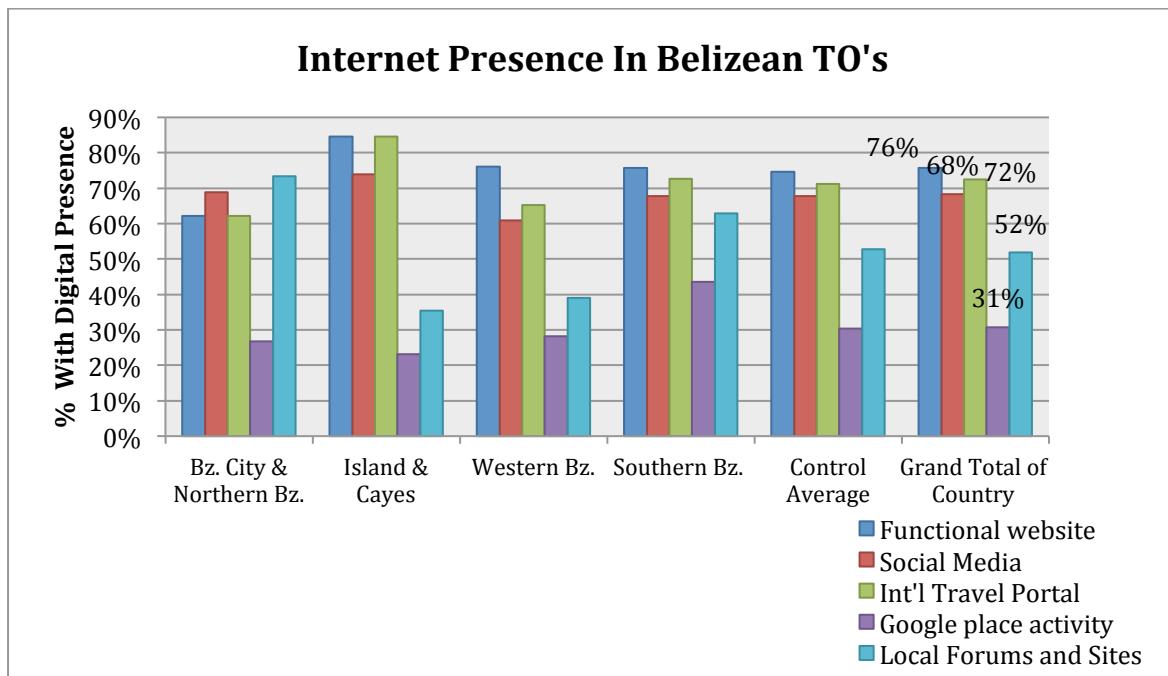
### 6.2.2 Tour Operators Internet Presence

Across all 218 tour operators (TO's) in Belize, this assessment found out that 174 (80%) had a website but only 165 (76%) were functional. Moreover, 149 (68%) of TO's used social media or links on websites and 67 (31%) had Google place activity. Furthermore, on average 71% of TO's had links with international travel sites and 53% used local forums or sites in their websites. **Table 6-2** gives an overview of all the digital activities measured for TO's along with frequencies and percentages.

**Table 6-2: Internet Presence in Belizean Tour Operators**

Measure	Belize City & Northern Belize	Island & Cayes	Western Belize	Southern Belize	Country Total	Control Average %
<b>TO's With Websites</b>						
<b>% Of TO's</b>	21%	30%	21%	28%	<b>100%</b>	
<b># With listed websites</b>	34	56	35	49	<b>174</b>	
<b>% With listed websites</b>	76%	86%	76%	79%	<b>80%</b>	<b>79%</b>
<b># With functional websites</b>	28	55	35	47	<b>165</b>	
<b>% With functional websites</b>	62%	85%	76%	76%	<b>76%</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>TO's with Social Media</b>						
<b># With Social Media</b>	31	48	28	42	<b>149</b>	
<b>% With Social Media</b>	69%	74%	61%	68%	<b>68%</b>	<b>68%</b>
<b>TO's with Int'l Travel Portals</b>						
<b># That use int'l travel portal sites</b>	28	55	30	45	<b>158</b>	
<b>% That use int'l travel portal sites</b>	62%	85%	65%	73%	<b>72%</b>	<b>71%</b>
<b>TO's with Google place</b>						
<b># With Google place activity</b>	12	15	13	27	<b>67</b>	
<b>% With Google place activity</b>	27%	23%	28%	44%	<b>31%</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>TO's that use Local Forum</b>						
<b># that used local Forums and Sites</b>	33	23	18	39	<b>113</b>	
<b>% that used local Forums and Sites</b>	73%	35%	39%	63%	<b>52%</b>	<b>53%</b>

More specifically, the region that had tour operators with the most Internet presence was in the Island and Cayes. This region on average had the most functional websites, used most social media and had links to international travel portals such as tripadvisor. TO's in Belize City used mostly local links in their websites and TO's in Southern Belize had the most Google place activity. **Figure 6-7** gives an overview of all the Internet presence in TO's by region.

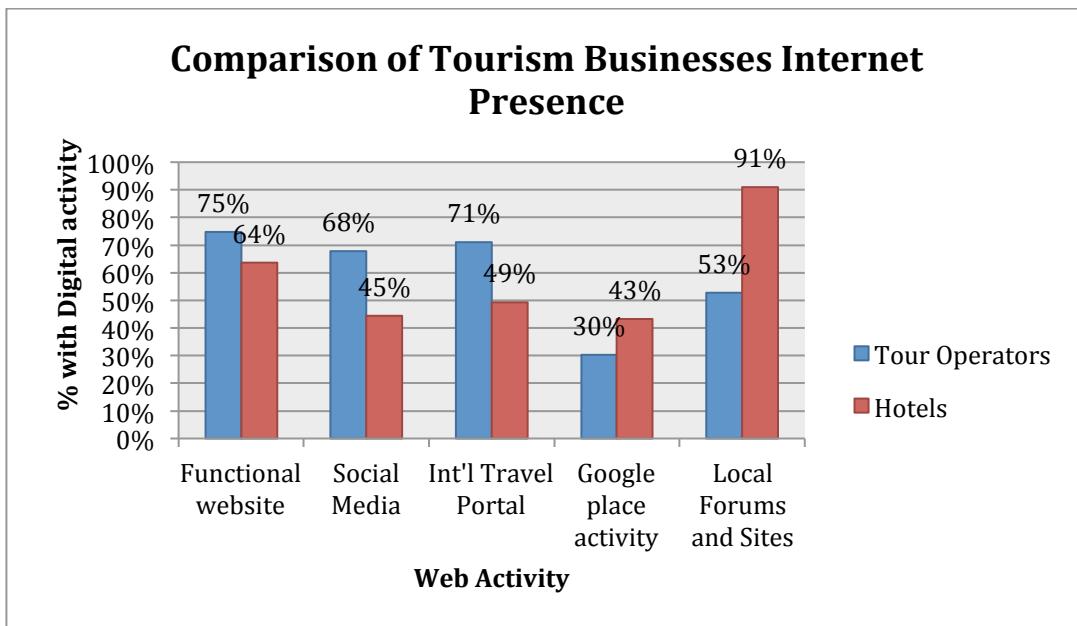


**Figure 6-7: Internet Presence of Tour Operators Across All Regions in Belize**

### 6.2.3 Comparing the Internet Presence of Hotels and TO's

After assessing each tourism business individually, they were compared to identify which had on average the overall highest Web presence. **Figure 6-8** illustrates that TO's seem to have highest percentages in 3 activities, mainly having a functional website, using social media and using international travel portals in their websites. Hotels were most predominant in having Google place activity and using local forums and sites in websites.

In conclusion, it can be said that even though most hotels and tour operators seem to know the importance and need of having web marketing tools in tourism and the use of the internet, there is still much room for improvements in using social media platforms, Google place activity and most importantly having functional websites. Thus, we can conclude that web presence with in these establishments is limited. To further analyze how one of these web marketing perform overall, specifically websites, the next section will analyze and illustrate the website evaluation results obtained.



**Figure 6-8: Comparison of Internet presence In Belizean Hotels and Tour Operators**

### 6.3 Website Evaluation Analysis and Results

To answer the research question below, the results of the websites evaluated for hotels and tour operators will be addressed individually.

*How well do hotels and tour operators websites fare in terms of user-friendliness, site attractiveness, marketing effectiveness, technical aspect and web mobility? What are their strengths and weaknesses?*

#### 6.3.1 Hotels BSC Results and Analysis

##### Inter rater reliability

Inter rater reliability tests were performed for the Dichotomous and Likert Scale data of the hotel websites, similar to that of the Kline, S. F., et al. (2004) approach. For the dichotomous items, all the perspectives on the BSC checklist for each site was ranked from highest to lowest, and the 10 sets of site rankings were tested using the Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (W). The coefficient was calculated to having and overall value of  $W=0.311$  and a chi-square of 19.614 (see **Table 6-3**). Kendall's Coefficient always falls between 0 and 1, with 0 representing complete disagreement and 1 representing complete agreement. A result between 0.4-0.6 is considerate moderate agreement and a result between 0.6-0.8 statistics reflects a substantial level of agreement. The present study tests showed that across all perspective, with the exception of objective, the levels of agreement was low and would appear that the coders in the study experienced high levels of disagreement about the items on which they were questioned.

However, since there was not complete disagreement, we can still reject the null hypothesis that W=0 or that there is no agreement. The results in the original Kline, S. F. (2004) illustrated an overall moderate agreement. This was not the case in this study for the test on hotel websites. This could only suggest that the coders evaluated the objective based on their personal likeness, even though the questions were designed to evaluate presence of specific attributes without the interference of the emotional factor.

**Table 6-3: Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance Test Results For Hotels**

	Objective	User-Friendliness	Site Attractiveness	Marketing Effectiveness	Overall
<b>W, Coefficient of concordance</b>	0.427	0.1643	0.398	0.279	<b>0.311</b>
<b>x<sup>2</sup>, Chi-Square Coefficient</b>	26.911	10.356	25.044	17.597	<b>19.614</b>

Furthermore to test for reliability for likert scale data of the overall items, Cronbach's Coefficient of Alpha was calculated for the hotel websites. Cronbach's alpha measured the level of internal consistency between the scores or items. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient normally ranges between 0 and 1. The closer the coefficient is to 1.0, the greater is the internal consistency of the items (variables) in the scale. In other words, if the inter-item correlation/variance are high, there is evidence that the items are measuring the same underlying uni-dimensional latent construct. Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items for hotels website was found out to be 0.867. Thus it can be suggested that the test was 87% reliable. **Table 6-4** below gives an overview of the results obtained for this test.

**Table 6-4: Cronbach's Coefficient of Alpha for Likert Items**

Variable	Mean	SD	N	Raw Cronbach's Alpha Overall	Standardized Cronbach's Alpha Overall
<b>User-friendliness</b>	3.257	0.736	70	<b>0.862</b>	<b>0.867</b>
<b>Site Attractiveness</b>	3.071	0.857	70		
<b>Marketing Effectiveness</b>	2.914	0.676	70		

Lastly, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was then used to check if the rankings on both types of scale used in the BSC checklist, namely likert and dichotomous, were correlated. Wilcoxon signed ranks test is a non parametric hypothesis test performed on ordinal data to compare if there was any statistical difference between the questions ranking for both scales used in the present study. From **table 6-5**, you can tell that the p-values across all perspectives were greater

that 0.05 and that the z values were within the range to retain the null hypothesis. Thus, it can be concluded that there was no difference encountered between the two treatments of scales.

**Table 6-5: Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results**

Variable	Z	p-value	Decision
User Friendliness	-.298	.766	Retain null Hypothesis
Site- Attractiveness	-.423	.672	Retain null Hypothesis
Marketing Effectiveness	-.357	.721	Retain null Hypothesis
Overall	-.070	.944	Retain null Hypothesis

### BSC Rankings for Hotel

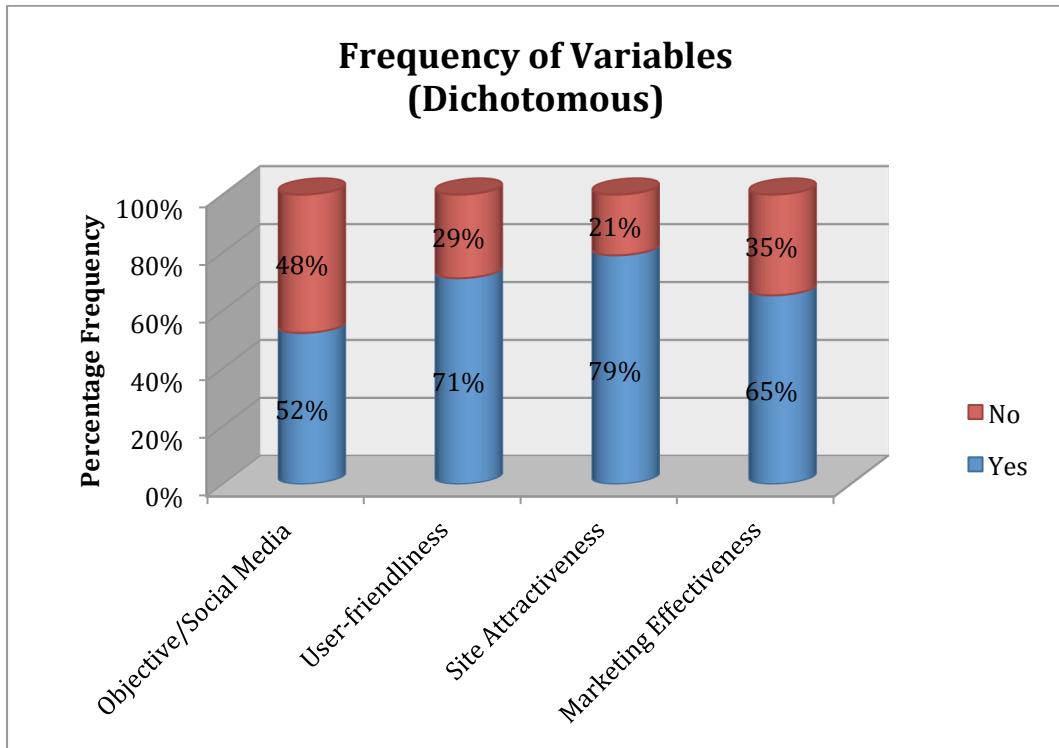
The next step in the website evaluation approach for hotel websites was to rank each perspective of the BSC checklist. This was done by summing the scores of the dichotomous items across all raters/coders for that perspective, e.g. objective perspective rankings was calculated by summing the scores of the 14 items, while user-friendliness rankings were based on the sum of 10 items across all 7 raters and so on. NetMechanic 5-star ratings results for the technical aspect of the BSC checklist were converted to dichotomous variable (1, 0) similar to the techniques used by Kline, S. F. (2004) (**see Appendix 5**). The final BSC ranks, was then determined by summing the five perspective rankings for each hotel website and arranging them from lowest to highest (the lowest total rank was considered the best website). **Table 6-6** illustrates the rankings for all the hotels. Roberts Grove, in Southern Belize, was ranked the best hotel in almost all perspectives with the exception of site attractiveness. Radisson Hotel and The Lodge at Chaa Creek were ranked the worst, according to the BSC approach. **Figure 6-11**, illustrates a screen shot of the home page of the best overall hotel.

**Table 6-6: Rankings of Hotel Websites by Perspective and Final Rankings**

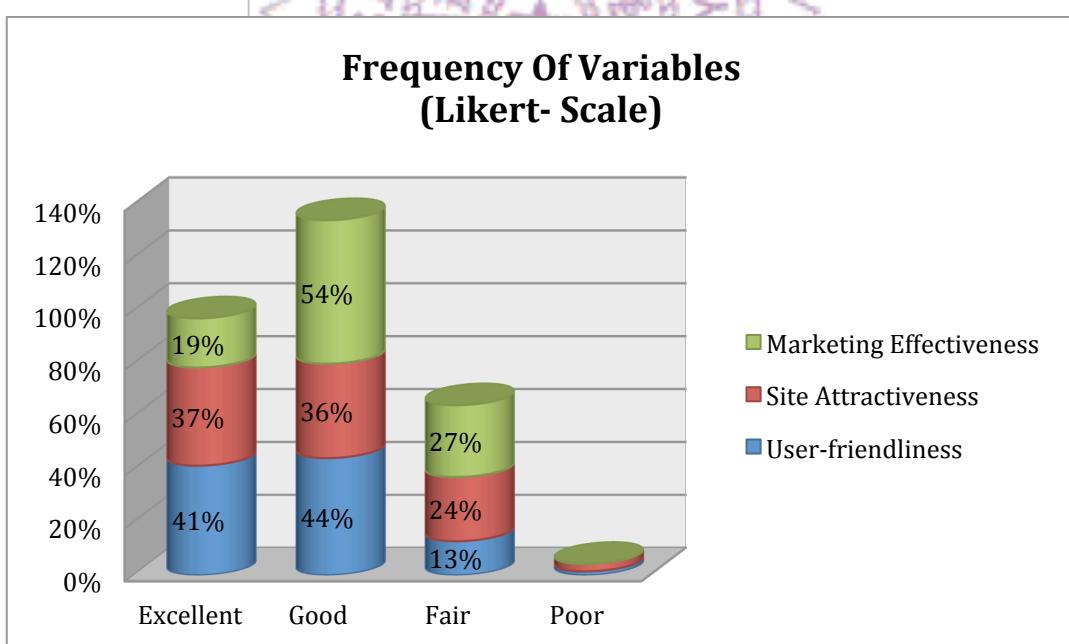
Hotel	Objective Rank	User Friendliness Rank	Site Attractiveness Rank	Marketing Effectiveness Rank	Technical Aspect Rank	Sum	Final BSC Rank
<b>Chabil Mar</b>	3	7	2	4	4	<b>20</b>	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Coco Beach Resort</b>	4	8	6	8	6	<b>32</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Ka'ana Boutique Resort</b>	6	2	1	5	6	<b>20</b>	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Laru Beya Resort &amp; Villas</b>	9	4	7	3	1	<b>24</b>	<b>5.5</b>
<b>Princess Hotel &amp; Casino</b>	10	6	10	10	1	<b>37</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Radisson Fort George Hotel</b>	8	8	9	9	6	<b>40</b>	<b>9.5</b>
<b>Ramon's Village</b>	5	3	4	6	6	<b>24</b>	<b>5.5</b>
<b>Roberts Grove</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>San Ignacio Resort Hotel</b>	2	4	3	2	4	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Lodge At Chaa Creek</b>	7	8	8	7	10	<b>40</b>	<b>9.5</b>

### Frequency of Variables Used

It is important to mention that in this study, the calculation of means and standard deviations were based on the number of “Yes” given to each item of each perspective. “Yes” responses were coded as 1 and if the item was not available on the website, it was given a “No” response, which was coded as 0. Dichotomous means fell between 0 and 7, 0 indicating the level of agreement between the absence of the items and 7 representing the level of agreement about the presence of the items. **Figure 6-9 and 6-10** gives frequency responses for each perspective for both likert and dichotomous scales used in the BSC checklist. For the Dichotomous items most of the responses was awarded to site attractiveness and the least responses was awarded to the objective. Thus, we can conclude that overall for the dichotomous items respondents seem to find out that most items for both user-friendliness and site attractiveness were present, considering they received passing scores. For the likert scale, most raters gave “excellent” and “good” responses to all objectives of hotel websites. Overall these results show that for user-friendliness most respondents gave the websites an overall “Good”, site attractiveness was given an overall “excellent” and marketing effectiveness was awarded and overall “Good”.



**Figure 6-9: Dichotomous Items Frequency of Variables**



**Figure 6-10: Likert Items Frequency of Variables**



**Figure 6-11: Screen Capture of the Homepage of Roberts Grove: The Best Overall Hotel**

### Strengths and Weakness of Hotel Websites

In order to identify the overall strength and weaknesses of the hotel websites evaluated using the BSC approach, descriptive statistics were used for all the items on each perspective. These statistics was able to identify the overall strengths and weaknesses of all hotel websites from the customer (objective, user-friendliness and site attractiveness), marketing and technical perspectives. **Tables 6-7(1-6)** illustrate the means and standard deviations for all of the BSC items measured for the websites. In addition, the percentages of the total points of the 10 hotels for each of the perspectives are shown. The results show that hotel's greatest strength was in site attractiveness, earning 79% of the total points available. The items that were limiting for site attractiveness were that most websites did not have good multimedia interaction, visual entertainment, sound and testimonial and awards were not made known. The hotels also received a passing score on user-friendliness with 71% (limiting items were multiple language, search function and limited scrolling not available).

**Table 6-7-1: Descriptive Statistics For Hotel Websites:  
BSC Evaluation Scores For Objective**

<b>Objective (14 items)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
<b><i>Authority, Accuracy &amp; Purpose</i></b>			
Site developer vs. webmaster difference	1.00	0.94	70
“About Us”, available	4.80	2.35	70
Webmaster can be contacted	2.60	1.58	70
Have ".bz" domain	0.10	0.32	70
When website produced stated	0.80	0.63	70
“last updated” mentioned	1.30	0.95	70
Recent update made before 6 Months	0.10	0.32	70
Main purpose of website made clear	6.00	0.82	70
Easily identify what the site is for	6.40	1.07	70
Top page indicate what could be done at destination	6.00	1.05	70
Website inspire the holidays	5.70	1.64	70
<b><i>Social Media Presence</i></b>			
Use any social media links	6.00	2.16	70
Website have more than one social media links	5.20	2.20	70
Social media links provide additional information	5.20	2.15	70
<b>Total</b>	51.20		<b>980</b>
<b>Percentage of Total: 51.2/98</b>	<b>52%</b>		

**Table 6-7-2: Descriptive Statistics For Hotel Websites:  
BSC Evaluation Scores For User-Friendliness**

<b>User Friendliness (10 items)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
<b><i>Web mobility &amp; Ease of Navigation</i></b>			
Home button	7.00	* 0	70
Site map or index	4.00	1.41	70
Multiple languages	1.10	1.85	70
Clear and easy navigation tool	6.50	0.71	70
Search function	2.10	2.02	70
Limited horizontal or vertical scrolling	3.70	0.67	70
<b><i>Contact Information</i></b>			
Telephone number	6.80	0.42	70
Mailing address	6.40	0.70	70
Fax number	5.40	1.26	70
E-mail	6.80	0.63	70
<b>Total</b>	49.80		<b>700</b>
<b>Percentage of Total: 49.8/70</b>	<b>71%</b>		

**Table 6-7-3: Descriptive Statistics For Hotel Websites:  
BSC Evaluation Scores For Site Attractiveness**

<b>Site Attractiveness (18 items)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Web Interphase</b>			
Text clear and readable	6.90	0.32	70
Limited grammar mistakes	4.90	0.88	70
Pages clean, organized and uncluttered	6.20	1.03	70
Sufficient contrast between background and text	6.30	1.25	70
Hyperlink is easy to use and read	6.40	0.52	70
Appropriate use of color	6.20	1.23	70
Good multimedia interaction	4.20	1.81	70
Photos and images of good quality	6.80	0.63	70
Photos and images reinforce text	6.50	0.97	70
Effective use of webpage space	6.20	0.79	70
Background is subdued, effective and appealing	5.60	1.43	70
Appropriate URL domain name	6.50	0.71	70
Site linked to other sites	4.90	0.99	70
<b>Visual &amp; Sound Entertainment</b>			
Visual entertainment present	3.10	2.56	70
Sound present	1.10	2.13	70
Sound didn't distract usability of users	6.70	0.95	70
Testimonials and awards	4.60	1.96	70
Photo gallery	6.50	0.97	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>99.60</b>		<b>1260</b>
<b>Percentage of Total: 99.6/126</b>	<b>79%</b>		

**Table 6-7-4: Descriptive Statistics For Hotel Websites:  
BSC Evaluation Scores For Technical Aspect**

<b>Technical Aspects (5 items)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
Load Time	1.6	1.35	10
HTML Check & Repair	2.8	1.23	10
Browser Compatibility	1.7	0.67	10
Spell Check	3.5	0.85	10
Link Check	4.2	1.14	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>13.8</b>		<b>50</b>
<b>Percentage of Total (13.8/25)</b>	<b>55%</b>		

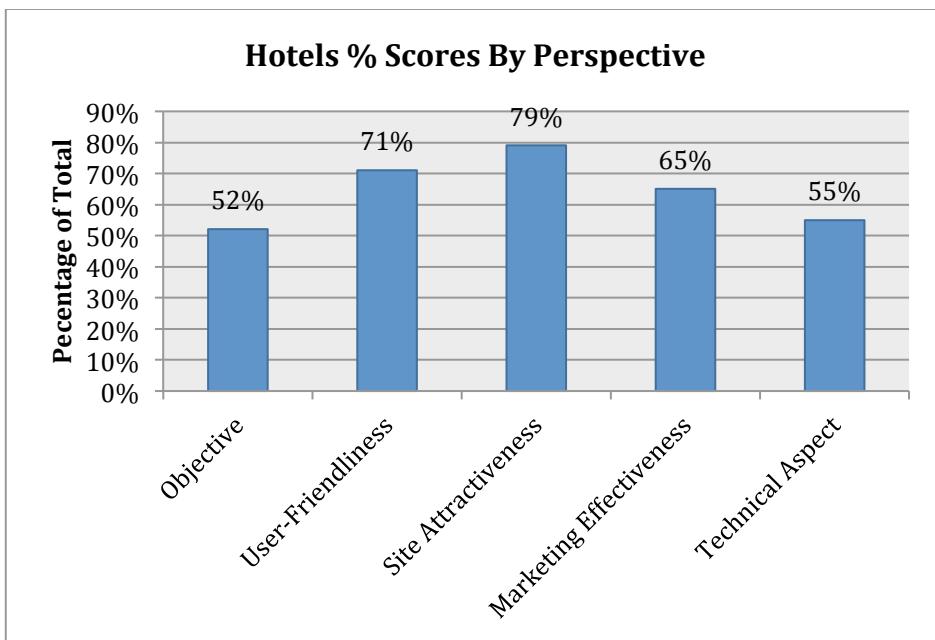
**Table 6-7-5: Descriptive Statistics For Hotel Websites:  
BSC Evaluation Scores For Marketing Effectiveness**

Marketing Effectiveness (20 items)	Mean	SD	N
<b><i>Market Information &amp; Attributes</i></b>			
Logo on all pages	6.90	0.32	70
Rates made available	5.70	1.25	70
Room pictures available	6.90	0.32	70
Map of the area	3.50	2.68	70
Transportation	1.50	1.51	70
Directions	4.00	1.49	70
Management in text	2.10	1.37	70
Room entertainment available	5.30	1.25	70
Other general features	5.30	0.67	70
Swimming Pool	5.90	0.74	70
Target market	4.60	1.07	70
<b><i>Hotel's Activities</i></b>			
Information about tours and things to do in destination	6.40	1.07	70
Local activities and area attractions	5.70	1.06	70
Shopping areas and Restaurants	4.50	1.27	70
Virtual tour	2.90	1.97	70
Accurate information with limited advertisements.	6.30	0.82	70
<b><i>Trip Planner</i></b>			
Reservations and bookings made online	6.40	0.84	70
Packages and promotions	4.80	1.87	70
Digital brochures	1.70	0.82	70
Help function	0.90	1.10	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>91.30</b>		<b>1400</b>
<b>Percentage of Total</b>	<b>65%</b>		

**Table 6-7-6: Descriptive Statistics For Hotel Websites:  
Overall BSC Scores By Raters**

Overall Rating Given by Raters: (3 items)	Mean	SD	N
User-friendliness overall	6	1.05	70
Site attractiveness overall	5.1	2.08	70
Marketing Effectiveness overall	5.5	1.78	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>16.6</b>		<b>210</b>
<b>Percentage of Total: 16.6/21</b>	<b>79%</b>		

Hotels fared poorly in all the other perspective, namely objective (52%), technical aspect (55%) and marketing effectiveness (65%). The major weaknesses of the hotels were in the Objective (limiting factors in this perspective were that the websites were not recently updated, webmaster could not be contacted and they did not have a “bz” domain) and Technical aspect perspectives. Technical aspect can be improved through better use of HTML, browser compatibility and lowering load time. The failing score for marketing effectiveness is concerning given the importance of conveying a clear and positive message to prospective visitors/customers. The focus on building hotel websites in Belize seems to be on site attractive principles, as can be seen in **Figure 6-12**, which are important but not sufficient today for successful online business. Thus, it can be concluded that since most of the perspectives resulted in mediocre scores, the need for overall improvement in hotel websites is to be considered.



**Figure 6-12: Hotels Scores Across all Perspectives of BSC**

While this study focused on investigating websites of hospitality and not the establishments themselves, research has shown that there is a relationship between both (SIU-IAN, A. S., & ALASTAIR, M. M., 2003). Thus, we accessed this relationship by asking coders to rate the websites overall impression based on three perspectives, namely: user-friendliness, site attractiveness and marketing effectiveness. The comparison ranking of coders against that obtained in the final BSC ranks for hotels can be seen in the following table (**Table 6-8**). The ranks resulting from the overall impressions of the coders to that of BSC approach indicated that the items used in BSC were mostly influential to overall satisfaction. The top Hotels were mostly Roberts Grove and Ka’ana.

**Table 6-8: Ranking Comparison Coders vs. BSC**

Hotels	Coders Overall Rank- UF	BSC Rank- UF	Coders Overall Rank- SA	BSC Rank- SA	Coders Overall Rank- ME	BSC Rank- ME	Overall Rank- Coders	Overall rank BSC
<b>Chabil Mar</b>	5	7	5	2	5	4	<b>6</b>	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Coco Beach</b>	1	8	5	6	5	8	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Ka' ana</b>	1	2	1	1	1	5	<b>1.5</b>	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Laru Beya</b>	8	4	7	7	1	3	<b>7</b>	<b>5.5</b>
<b>Princess Hotel</b>	5	6	10	10	8	10	<b>8.5</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Radisson</b>	8	8	7	9	8	9	<b>8.5</b>	<b>9.5</b>
<b>Ramon's</b>	1	3	1	4	1	6	<b>1.5</b>	<b>5.5</b>
<b>Roberts Grove</b>	5	1	1	4	1	1	<b>3.5</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>San Ignacio Hotel</b>	1	4	1	3	5	2	<b>3.5</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chaa Creek</b>	10	8	7	8	8	7	<b>10</b>	<b>9.5</b>

\*UF=User-friendliness, SA=Site Attractiveness, ME=Marketing Effectiveness

An additional question was asked to coders after the checklist was completed, also to measure their satisfaction of the hotels and their intention of whether they would stay if they were to visit the region. The question was as follows:

***As a customer, would you stay at such hotel based on the information given on the website, if you were planning to travel to the destination (Belize)?***

**Table 6-8** suggests that for three of the websites, 29%-43% of the raters/coders would not stay at these hotels if they were going to the destination. These three hotels were ranked 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> respectively, according to the BSC approach. Roberts Grove, which was rated 1<sup>st</sup> by the BSC, received a 100% visitation. **Table 6-9** demonstrates the percentage frequency for all hotels. The table also illustrated that the coders were more willing to stay at hotels, Ka'ana, Ramons and Robert's Grove, also concurring mostly with the previous ranking results regarding the relationship between BSC evaluating parameters of the websites and user satisfaction of the establishments.

**Table 6-9: Percentage of Coders That Would Stay at Hotel**

Hotel	% that said “YES”
Chabil Mar	86%
Coco Beach Resort	86%
<b>Ka’ ana Boutique Resort</b>	<b>100%</b>
Laru Beya Resort & Villas	29%
Princess Hotel & Casino	43%
Radisson Fort George Hotel	71%
<b>Ramon’s Village</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Roberts Grove</b>	<b>100%</b>
San Ignacio Resort Hotel	86%
The Lodge At Chaa Creek	43%

### 6.3.2 Tour Operators BSC Results and Analysis

#### Inter rater reliability

Inter rater reliability tests were performed for the dichotomous and Likert Scale data of the tour operator's websites, similar to that done for the hotels. For the dichotomous items, all the perspectives on the BSC checklist for each site was ranked from highest to lowest, and the 9 sets of site rankings were tested using the Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (W). The coefficient was calculated to having an overall value of  $W=0.400$  and a chi-square of 22.423 (see **Table 6-10**). Kendall's Coefficient always falls between 0 and 1, with 0 representing complete disagreement and 1 representing complete agreement. The present study tests showed that, a moderate level of agreement between the scores. Thus, we can reject the null hypothesis that  $W=0$  or that there is no agreement. The results for TO's was similar to that of the original Kline, S. F. (2004), showing an overall moderate agreement.

**Table 6-10: Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance Test Results For TO's**

	Objective	User-Friendliness	Site Attractiveness	Marketing Effectiveness	Overall
<b>W, Coefficient of Concordance</b>	0.425	0.248	0.463	0.360	<b>0.400</b>
<b><math>\chi^2</math>, Chi-Square Coefficient</b>	23.794	13.885	25.914	20.153	<b>22.423</b>

Furthermore, to test for reliability for likert scale data of the overall items of TO's websites, Cronbach's Coefficient of Alpha was also employed. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient normally ranges between 0 and 1. Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items for TO's

websites was found out to be 0.947. Thus we can say that the test was 95% reliable or have high levels of internal consistency. **Table 6-11** gives an overview of the results obtained for this test.

**Table 6-11: Cronbach's Coefficient of Alpha for Likert Items In TO's**

Variable	Mean	SD	N	Raw Cronbach's Alpha	Standardized Cronbach's Alpha
User-friendliness	2.508	0.821	63	0.947	0.947
Site Attractiveness	2.270	0.919	63		
Marketing Effectiveness	2.191	0.895	63		

Also, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was performed, considering that two different scales were used in the BSC checklist of tour operators. From **Table 6-12**, you can tell that the p-values across all perspectives were greater than 0.05 and that the z values were within the range to retain the null hypothesis. Thus, it can be concluded that there was no difference encountered between the two treatments of scales. These results were similar to the Kline, S. F. (2004) approach.

**Table 6-12: Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results For TO's**

Variable	Z	p-value	Decision
User Friendliness	.000	1.000	Retain null Hypothesis
Site-Attractiveness	.000	1.000	Retain null Hypothesis
Marketing Effectiveness	-.425	.671	Retain null Hypothesis
Overall	-.431	.666	Retain null Hypothesis

### BSC Rankings for TO's

The tour operator's perspectives of the BSC checklist were also ranked, similar to that done for the hotels. This was done by summing the scores of the dichotomous items across all raters/coders for that perspective, e.g. objective perspective rankings was calculated by summing the scores of the 14 items, while user-friendliness rankings were based on the sum of 10 items across all 7 raters and so on. Similarly, Net Mechanic's 5-star ratings results for the technical aspect of the BSC checklist were converted to dichotomous variable (1, 0) similar to that of the techniques used by Kline, S. F. (2004) (**see Appendix 5**). The final BSC ranks, was then

determined by summing the five perspective rankings for each TO website and arranging them from lowest to highest (the lowest total rank was considered the best website). **Table 6-13** below shows the rankings for all the TO's. Island Expedition, in the Islands & Cayes region of Belize, was ranked the best TO overall according to BSC approach. Tanisha Tours in Southern Belize was ranked the worst. **Figure 6-14**, shows a screen shot of the home page of the best overall tour operator.

**Table 6-13: Rankings of TO's websites by Perspective and Final Rankings**

TO's	Objective Rank	User Friendliness Rank	Site Attractiveness Rank	Marketing Effectiveness Rank	Technical Aspect Rank	Sum	Total BSC Rank
Eco Tours & Service	6	8	7	6	7	34	7
Belize Master Tours	7	9	6	7	1	30	6
Cayo Adventure Tours	1	5	2	1	7	16	3
<b>Island Expedition</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>
Joy Tours	8	3	9	9	7	36	8
Maya Walk Tours	5	1	3	3	3	15	2
Pacz Tours	3	4	4	5	3	19	4.5
Paradise Expedition	4	6	5	3	1	19	4.5
Tanisha Tours	9	6	8	8	6	37	9

### Frequency of Variables

Similar to the hotels websites previously mentioned, the calculation of means and standard deviations were based on the number of “Yes” given to each item of each perspective. “Yes” responses were coded as 1 and if the item was not available on the website, it was given a “No” response, which was coded as 0. Dichotomous means fell between 0 and 7, 0 indicating the level of agreement between the absence of the items and 7 representing the level of agreement about the presence of the items. **Figure 6-12 and 6-13** shows frequency responses for each perspective for both likert and dichotomous scales used in the TO's BSC checklist. For the Dichotomous items most of the responses was awarded to site attractiveness and the least responses was awarded to marketing effectiveness. However, most of the respondents believed that across all perspectives most of the items were not present considering they received failing scores. For the likert scale, most raters gave “Good” and “Fair” responses to all perspectives of TO's websites. Overall we can say that for user-friendliness most respondents gave the websites an overall “Good”, site attractiveness was given an overall “Good” and marketing effectiveness was awarded and overall “Fair”.

### Frequency Of Use Of Variables (Dichotomous)

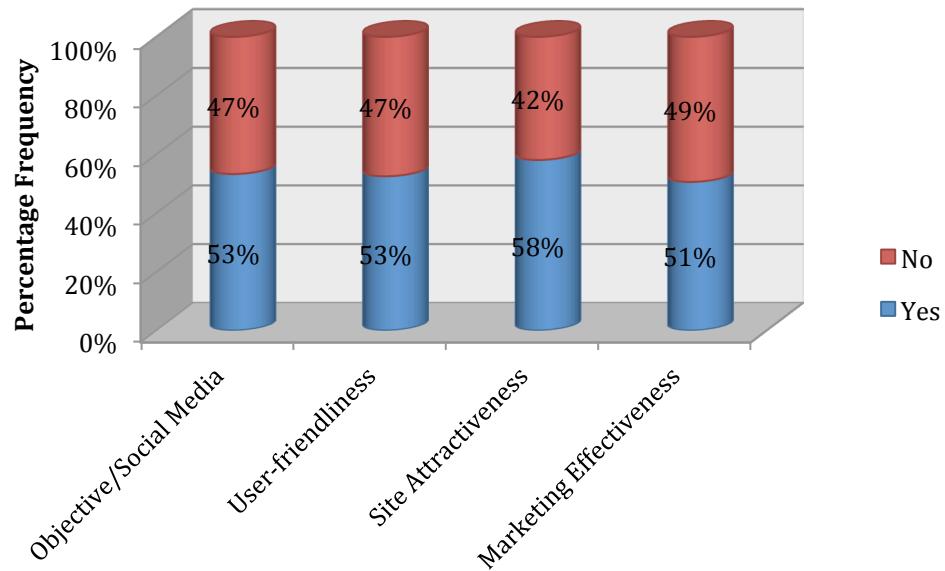


Figure 6-12: Dichotomous Items Frequency of Variables

### Frequency Of Use Of Variables (Likert Scale)

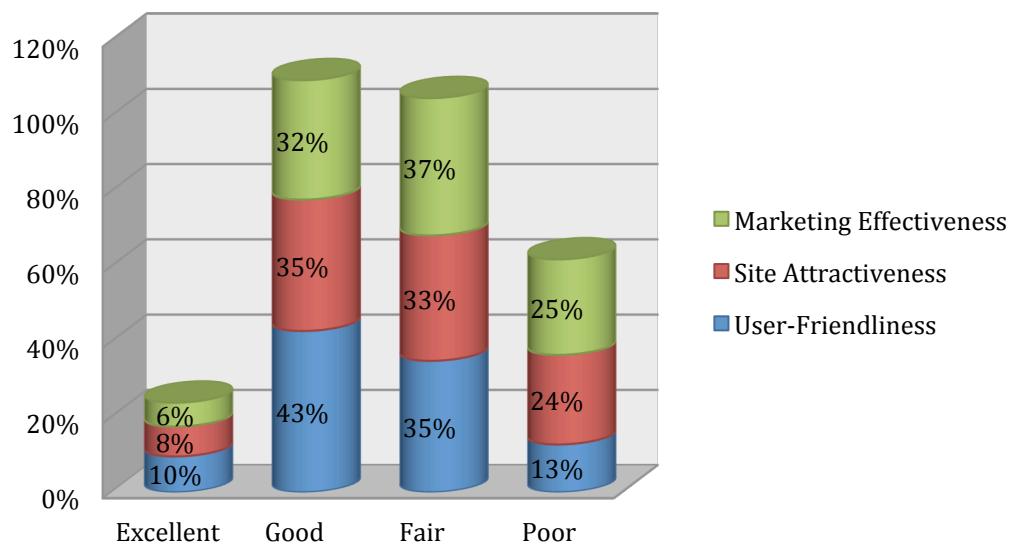
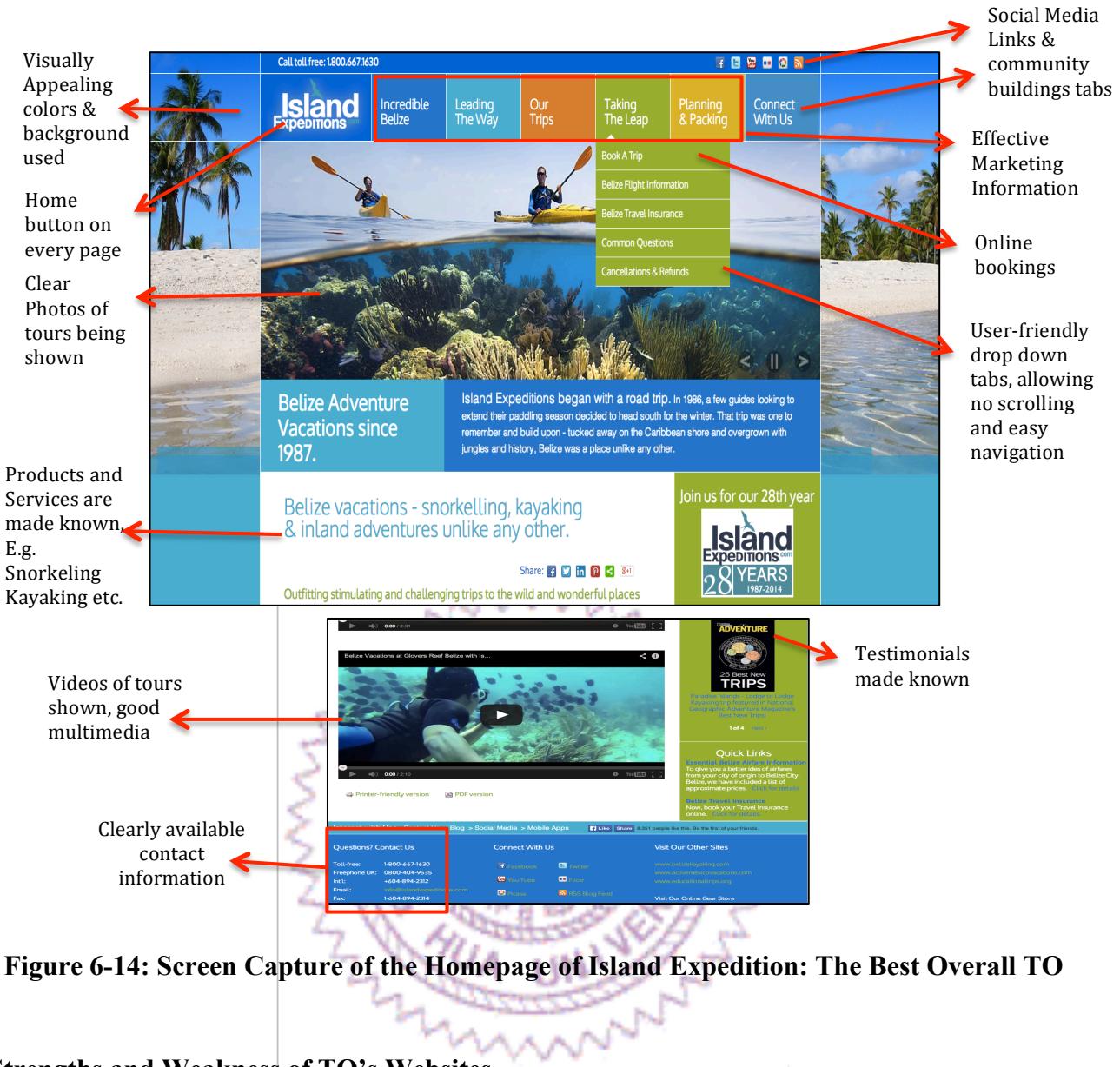


Figure 6-13: Dichotomous Items Frequency of Variables



**Figure 6-14: Screen Capture of the Homepage of Island Expedition: The Best Overall TO**

### Strengths and Weakness of TO's Websites

In order to identify the overall strengths and weaknesses of the TO's websites evaluated using the BSC approach, descriptive statistics were also used for all the items on each perspective. These statistics were able to identify the overall strengths and weaknesses of all TO websites from the customer (objective, user-friendliness & site attractiveness), marketing and technical perspectives. **Tables 6-14 (1-6)** shows the means and standard deviations for all of the items measured. In addition, the percentages of the total points for the 9 TO's, for each of the perspectives are shown. The results show that TO's greatest strength was in the technical aspect, earning 60% of the total points available. The items that were mostly limiting in this perspective were load time, browser compatibility and spell check.

**Table 6-14-1: Descriptive Statistics For TO Websites:  
BSC Evaluation Scores For Objective**

<b>Objective (14 items)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
<b><i>Authority and Accuracy</i></b>			
Site developer vs. webmaster difference	1.22	1.09	63
“About Us”, available	5.44	2.60	63
Webmaster can be contacted	3.78	1.79	63
Have ".bz" domain	0.89	0.60	63
When website produced stated	1.22	1.39	63
“last updated” mentioned	0.56	0.73	63
<b><i>Purpose</i></b>			
Main purpose of website made clear	5.33	1.50	63
Easily identify what the site is for	5.44	1.33	63
Top page indicate what could be done at destination	5.78	0.67	63
Facts about destination country	4.44	2.35	63
Website inspire the holidays	3.44	1.24	63
<b><i>Social Media Presence</i></b>			
Use any social media links	5.44	2.83	63
Website have more than one social media links	4.56	2.88	63
Social media links provide additional information	4.67	2.40	63
<b>Total</b>	52.22		<b>882</b>
<b>Percentage of Total: 52.2/98</b>	<b>53%</b>		

**Table 6-14-2: Descriptive Statistics For TO Websites:  
BSC Evaluation Scores For User-Friendliness**

<b>User Friendliness (10 items)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
<b><i>Web mobility/Ease of navigation</i></b>			
Home button	6.56	1.01	63
Site map or index	2.67	0.71	63
Multiple languages	0.11	0.33	63
Clear and easy navigation tool	5.11	1.76	63
Search function	1.11	1.76	63
Limited horizontal or vertical scrolling	3.67	0.50	63
<b><i>Contact Information</i></b>			
Telephone number	5.44	1.42	63
Mailing address	3.67	1.66	63
Fax number	2.78	2.33	63
E-mail	5.67	2.24	63
<b>Total</b>	36.78		<b>630</b>
<b>Percentage of Total: 36.78/70</b>	<b>53%</b>		

**Table 6-14-3: Descriptive Statistics For TO Websites:****BSC Evaluation Scores For Site attractiveness**

<b>Site Attractiveness (17 items)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
<b><i>Web Interphase</i></b>			
Text clear and readable	5.33	1.12	63
Limited grammar mistakes	5.67	0.71	63
Pages clean, organized and uncluttered	4.67	2.50	63
Sufficient contrast between background and text	4.89	1.27	63
Hyperlink is easy to use and read	5.33	1.41	63
Appropriate use of color	3.56	2.24	63
Good multimedia interaction	2.00	1.87	63
Photos and images of good quality	4.89	1.96	63
Photos and images reinforce text	5.11	1.69	63
Effective use of webpage space	3.67	2.45	63
Background is subdued, effective and appealing	4.67	1.87	63
Appropriate URL domain name	5.89	0.78	63
Site linked to other sites	4.89	1.90	63
<b><i>Visual and sound Entertainment</i></b>			
Visual entertainment present	1.33	2.06	63
Sound present	0.67	1.12	63
Testimonials and awards	2.00	2.12	63
Photo gallery	4.56	2.60	63
<b>Total</b>	<b>69.11</b>		<b>1071</b>
<b>Percentage of Total: 69.11/119</b>	<b>58%</b>		

**Table 6-14-4: Descriptive Statistics For TO Websites:****BSC Evaluation Scores For Technical Aspect**

<b>Technical Aspects (5 items)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
Load Time	1.44	1.0	10
HTML Check &Repair	3.33	1.1	10
Browser Compatibility	2.44	1.4	10
Spell Check	2.89	1.3	10
Link Check	4.78	0.4	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>14.88</b>		<b>50</b>
<b>Percentage of Total (13.8/25)</b>	<b>60%</b>		

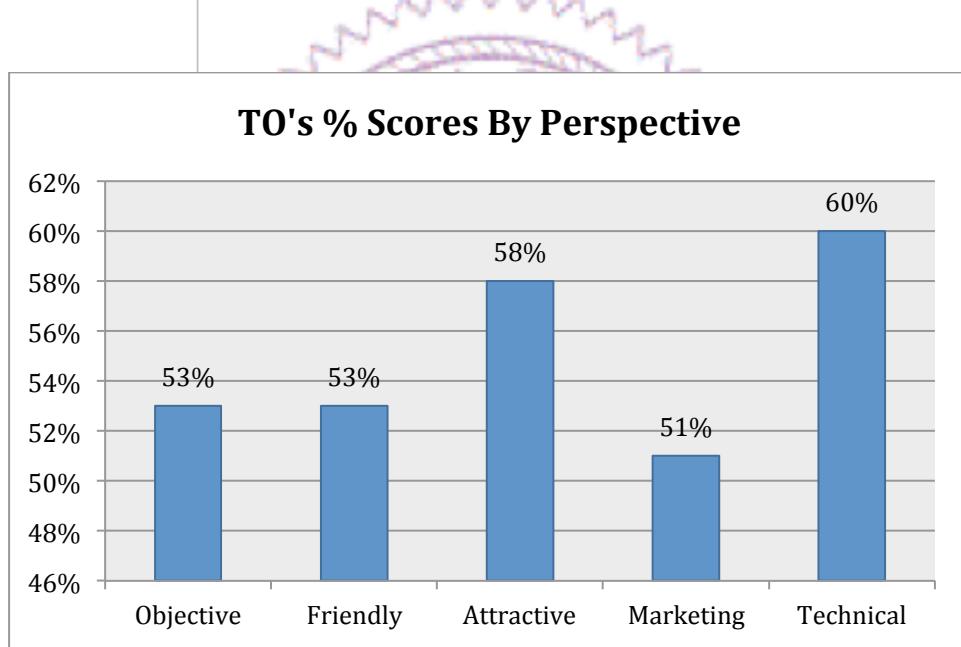
**Table 6-14-5: Descriptive Statistics For TO Websites:  
BSC Evaluation Scores For Marketing Effectiveness**

<b>Marketing Effectiveness (17 items)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
<b><i>Market Information and Attributes</i></b>			
Logo on all pages	6.22	1.39	63
Tour Rates made available	4.56	2.55	63
Tour pictures available	5.44	1.42	63
Map of the area	1.33	1.50	63
Transportation	2.89	2.42	63
Directions	1.89	1.36	63
Items made available for tours made known	4.11	1.05	63
Target market	4.00	1.50	63
Accurate information with limited advertisements.	5.67	1.22	63
<b><i>TO's Activities</i></b>			
Information about tours and things to do in destination	5.56	1.42	63
Information about Tour Guides	1.78	1.92	63
Shopping areas and Restaurants	1.00	1.00	63
<b><i>Trip Planner</i></b>			
Bookings made online	3.67	2.40	63
Packages and promotions offered	2.56	1.67	63
Selection of tours can be made	3.00	1.87	63
Help function	0.67	0.87	63
"Contact Us"	5.89	2.09	63
<b>Total</b>	<b>60.22</b>		<b>1071</b>
<b>Percentage of Total: 60.22/119</b>	<b>51%</b>		

**Table 6-14-6: Descriptive Statistics For TO Websites:  
Overall BSC Scores By Raters**

<b>Overall Rating Given by Raters: (3 items)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
User-friendliness overall	3.67	2.87	63
Site attractiveness overall	3.00	2.87	63
Marketing Effectiveness overall	2.67	2.78	63
<b>Total</b>	<b>9.33</b>		<b>189</b>
<b>Percentage of Total: 9.33/21</b>	<b>44%</b>		

TO's received failing score across all perspectives of the BSC approach, indicating that most website are not up to par, in perspectives that measure its overall effectiveness. The greatest weakness was seen in marketing effectiveness with 51%. Marketing is the most critical aspect of most business platforms to be able to sell their services and products. Such mediocre score for this perspective show that most TO's are not being able to convey a clear and positive message to prospective visitors/customers and are not striving for visitor retention. Some of the greatest limiting factors/items in marketing effectiveness was that websites were not providing maps and direction, help function not available, tours could not be selected, tour packages not made known, booking could not be made online and information about shopping and restaurants was not available. Overall improvements in the above said factors are required to be able to improve the marketing aspect of TO websites. **Figure 6-15** below gives an overview of all the perspective scores. The BSC scores indicated that the focus on building TO websites in Belize seems to be on technical principle. This aspect alone is not considered sufficient for effective e-business.



**Figure 6-15: TO's Scores across all Perspectives of BSC**

To measure the relationship between the BSC evaluating parameters of TO websites and the establishments themselves, overall ranking comparison of coders and BSC was also done. We accessed the relationship by asking coders to rate the websites overall impression based on three perspectives: user-friendliness, site attractiveness and marketing effectiveness. The comparison ranking of coders against that obtained in the final BSC rank for TO's can be seen in the following table (**Table 6-15**). The ranks resulting from the overall impressions of the coders to that of BSC approach indicated that the items used in BSC were mostly influential to overall

satisfaction of the participants. The top 3 TO's were Cayo Adventure, Island Expedition and Maya Walk tours.

**Table 6-15: Ranking Comparison Coders vs. BSC**

TO's	Coders Overall Rank-UF	BSC Rank-UF	Coders Overall Rank-SA	BSC Rank-SA	Coders Overall Rank-ME	BSC Rank-ME	Overall Rank-Coders	Overall rank-BSC
Eco Tours	7	8	7	7	6	6	7.5	7
Belize Master	6	9	6	6	6	7	6	6
Cayo Adventure	1	5	1	2	1	1	1	3
Island Expedition	1	2	2	1	1	2	2.5	1
Joy Tours	9	3	7	9	6	9	9	8
Maya Walk	1	1	2	3	1	3	2.5	2
Pacz Tours	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4.5
Paradise Expedition	5	6	5	5	4	3	5	4.5
Tanisha Tours	7	6	7	8	6	8	7.5	9

\*UF=User-friendliness, SA=Site Attractiveness, ME=Marketing Effectiveness

An additional question was also asked to coders evaluating TO's after the checklist was completed, to measure their satisfaction on hotel and their intention of whether they would book a tour with the tour operator if they were to visit the region. The question was as follows:

***As a customer, would you book a tour with the tour operator based on the information given on the website, if you were planning to travel to the destination (Belize)?***

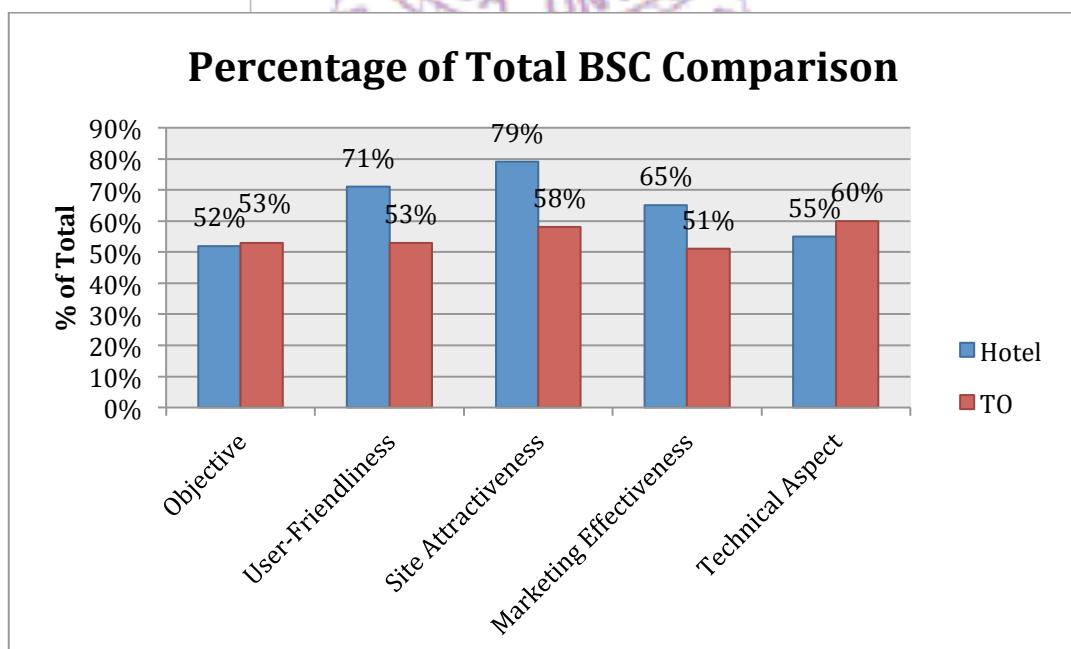
**Table 6-16** suggests that for four of the TO's websites, 0% of the raters/coders would book a tour with them if they were going to the destination. These four TO's ranked 7<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> respectively, according to the BSC approach. The table also illustrated that the coders were more willing to book tours with the following TO's: Cayo Adventure, Maya Walk and Pacz tours. These TO's ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>rd</sup> respectively according to BSC scores. These results concurred with the previous ranking results regarding the relationship between BSC evaluating parameters of the websites and user satisfaction of the establishments.

**Table 6-16: Percentage of Coders That Would Book Tours**

Tour Operator (TO)	% that said "YES"
<b>Eco Tours &amp; Service</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Belize Master Tours</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Cayo Adventure</b>	<b>86%</b>
<b>Island Expedition</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>Joy Tours</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Maya Walk Tours</b>	<b>71%</b>
<b>Pacz Tours</b>	<b>57%</b>
<b>Paradise Expedition</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>Tanisha Tours</b>	<b>0%</b>

### 6.3. Benchmarking BSC Scores

Using the BSC as a tool, a score of 70% in every category can be used as a baseline score. Any category score less than 70% can be said to be deficient and needing improvement. After doing individual analysis for both hotels and TO's using the BSC Approach, it can be said that most hotel websites performed better than TO's websites in their overall effectiveness, however most categories had a score of below 70%. The following figure indicates that hotel's website are more user-friendly, more attractive and have a better marketing aspect. TO's websites were found out to be mostly better in the technical aspect. The Objective aspect was fairly the same for both establishments.



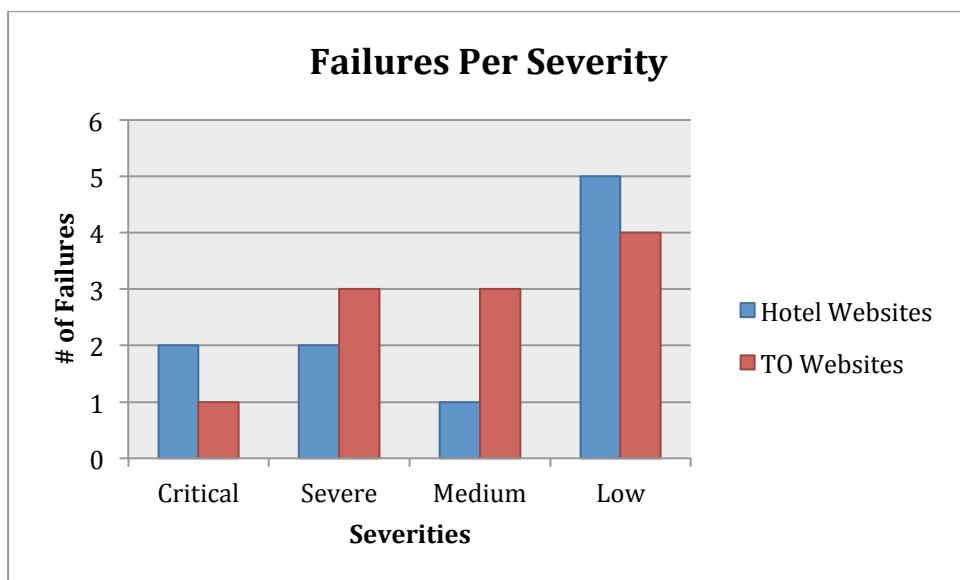
**Figure 6-16: Comparison Of Scores Received For Hotel and TO's**

On average both hotels and TO's scored 52.5% on objective, 62% in user-friendliness, 68.5% in site attractiveness, 58 % in marketing effectiveness and 57.5% in technical aspect. The BSC approach was able to highlight the limiting perspectives of these websites effectiveness, and it's evident that on average both establishment's websites are lacking in all perspectives and that much improvement is required in websites of both hospitality sectors.

## 6.4 Mobile Web Friendliness Check - Results and Analysis

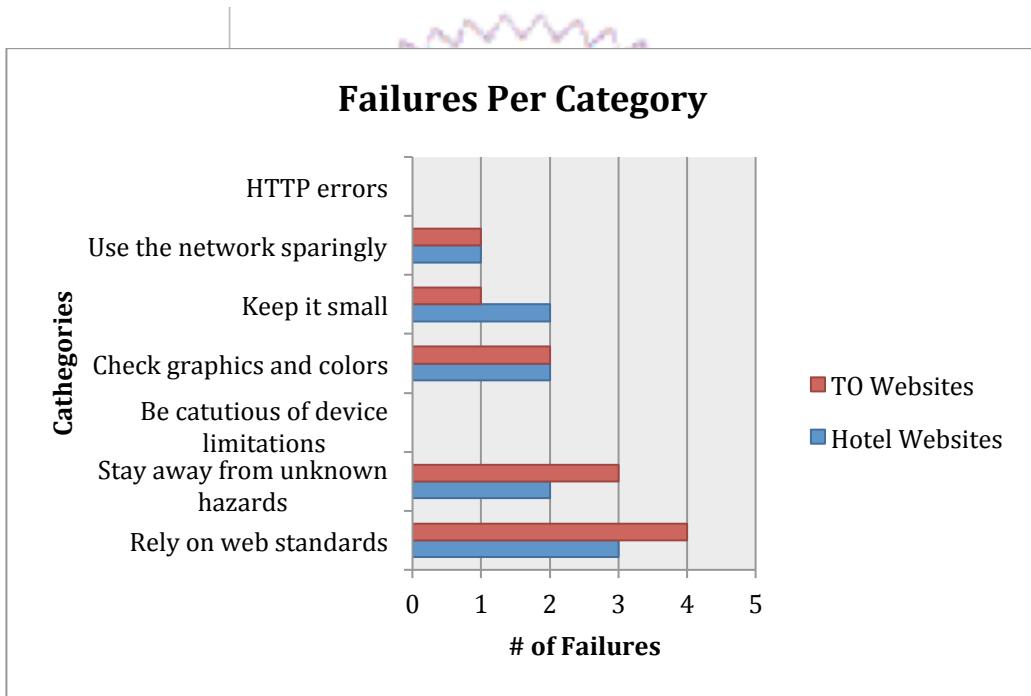
This aspect was measured primarily since most online users rely heavily on the use of their mobile devices while traveling. This aspect was not measured in the original Kline, S. F. (2004) approach, but seemed necessary for the present study considering the research methodology used. As mentioned in chapter 5, an automated tool called W3C mobile OK checker was used to test all 19 websites in the study. The results obtained for each website gave a list of failures based on severity and categories. One website could not be tested because of certain restrictions imposed by the website itself.

Failures per severity measured the overall negative impact on the mobile friendliness of the website pages. The failures range from critical to low levels and were awarded points from 1(low) to 6(critical), stating the overall experience of the page on the mobile device. For the 18 websites (Hotels and TO's) that were tested, an average score of each level's points awarded for the failures of severity was calculated, to make final conclusions. **Figure 6-17**, gives an account of the average failures per severity for both hotels and TO's. Most of the hotel's and TO website pages experience low levels of failures. This means that useful improvements are possible for these websites according to the W3C mobile checker recommendations.



**Figure 6-17: Tourism Websites Failures Per Severity**

Moreover, the next set of failures reported by the mobile checker was failures per categories. This basically refers to standard web practices necessary for effective mobile friendliness. The standard practices are grouped into 10 different categories to mobilize content. Failures reported are areas that need to be addressed and are impacting the mobile experience of the website. The ten categories include; design for one web, rely on web standards, stay away from unknown hazards, be cautious of device limitations, optimize navigation, check graphics and colors, keep it small, use the network sparingly, help and guide user input and think of users on the go. **Figure 6-18**, shows on average the major failures per category reported for all websites. The most failures reported for Hotels and TO's were “rely on web standards”. This category looks at various web standards that guarantee interoperability (able to exchange and make use of information). Some example of these web standards includes; content format support, character encoding support and use and style sheets used.



**Figure 6-18: Tourism Websites Failures Per Category**

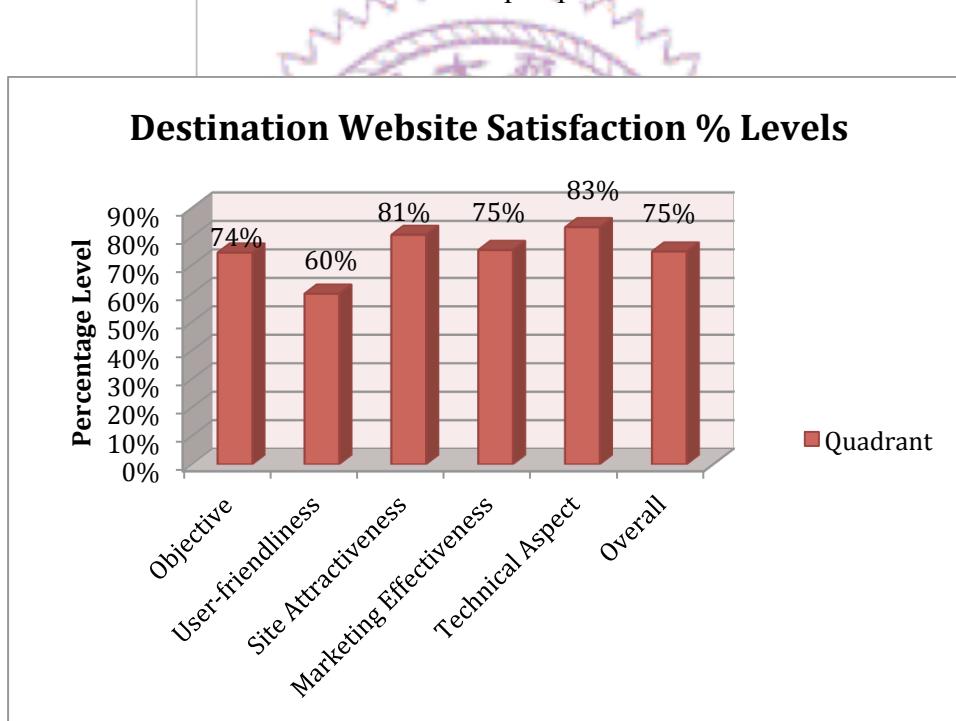
Moreover, the Mobile Ok checker also gave an overall percentage for the websites based on the number of failures received. On average, hotel websites scored 36% and TO's scored 14%. These failing scores clearly demonstrate the need to improve the overall mobile friendliness of these websites to better the online user experience. The Best overall Hotel according to the BSC scored a high 99%, indicating high levels of mobile friendliness. The best TO according to the BSC did not receive any score since the website had certain website restrictions and did not allow the OK checker to evaluate it. This website was not considered in the overall average scores.

## 6.5 User Judgment Questionnaire Results and Analysis

The following research question will be tested in this section.

***How satisfied are prospective travelers with the destination website of Belize?***

To test the above research question a questionnaire was developed where 10 travellers gave their overall perception of one of the most visited destination websites for Belize. The questionnaire criterion was based on the same BSC checklist requirements. The scoring system was similar to that done with the hotels and TO's checklist, where a percentage of the total points (number of "Yes=1" received) was calculated. The table of results of the questionnaire can be seen in **Appendix 6**. Overall, the Belize destination website scored positively in most perspectives with the exception of user-friendliness (60%) and indicates that the respondents seem to be satisfied with the website with an overall grand total of 75% user satisfaction. The following figure gives an account of the overall scores received for each perspective.



**Figure 6-19: Destination Website User Judgment levels**

The objective perspective was measured with 9 items and looked at the consumer indefinite perception towards the website and the destination. The items that were rated high in this perspective were that the main purpose of the website was clearly understood (100%), they were able to expect value from what was being offered by the website (100%) and it had social media presence for building relationships between them and the service provider. The items that were

not satisfactorily scored was that the web developer was not made known and that the website did not make use of Google maps to state location.

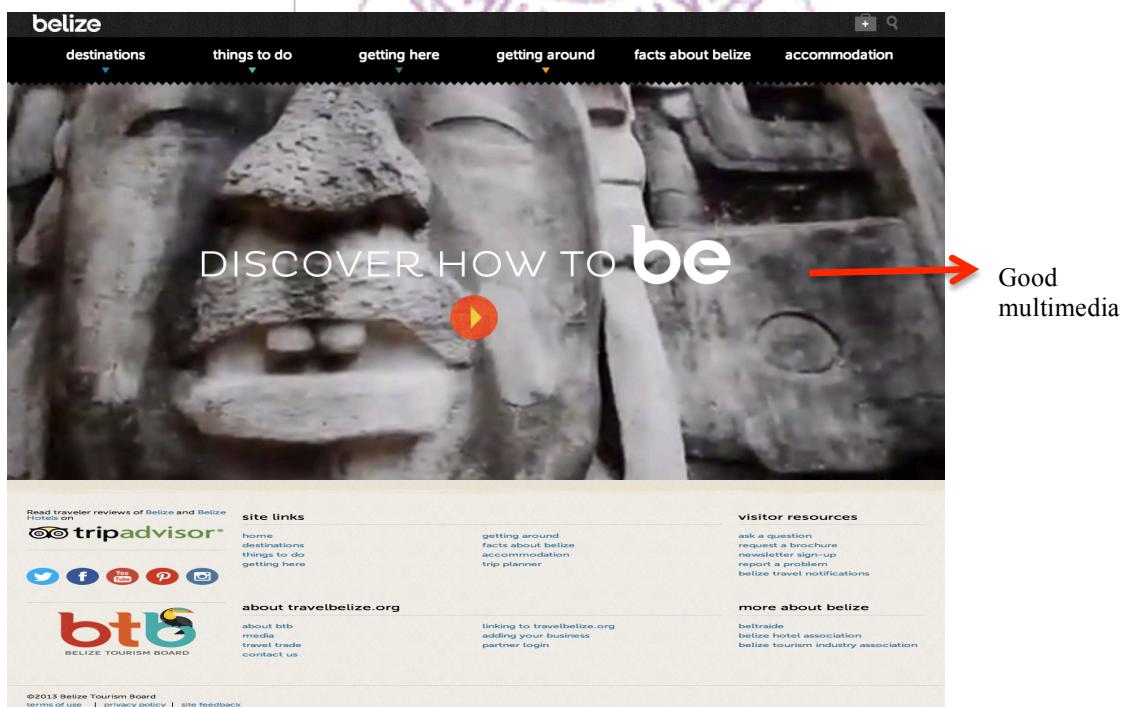
The user friendliness was measured by 8 items and it looked at how much the format, design and layout of the website helped to direct the user to have a successful online experience. The respondents rated user-friendliness poorly overall. Some of the most limiting factors accounting for the discontentment of the users were; the website did not have appropriate web mobility and navigational tools, it did not have multiple languages and “frequently asked questions” was not made available. These factors clearly indicate that the user had trouble being able to view pages easily and visitors who were not native English speakers might have had trouble getting the adequate information from the website since it was only available in one language. Also, the fact that common concerns made by others who previously visited the site were not shown, showed that the website gave very limited feed back to its consumers.

Furthermore, the site attractiveness perspective was rated positively with a score of 81%. This was the second highest score received across all 5 perspectives and clearly illustrated that the website was an overall attractive site. This perspective was measures with 15 items. Some of the most appealing attributes (receiving perfect scores) of the site according to the respondents were that, the test was clear and readable, the URL name was easy and appropriate, it had good multimedia and photos and the sites linked to a variety of other sites providing additional information about the destination country. These positive scores clearly show that users were satisfied with the information given and that the overall appearance of the website did seem to have an effect on the overall satisfaction. It scored poorly on the fact that it was not recently updated and did not provide any testimonials. This could be a problem for some consumers because not being recently updated can cause mistrust on the information provided. Tourism services are products sold online are intangible, as such the consumer needs to feel that they can trust what is being said on these web platforms. Accuracy of information plays a big role in consumer satisfaction and perception about the business.

The marketing perspective was measured with 15 items and received an overall score of 75% by the respondents. As such, the site was given a positive score for this perspective. However some of the major limiting factors of this perspective was the fact that the website did not provide adequate information about tour operators and activities they provide as a service. Most importantly the site did not advertise any package deals and did not allow the customer to book

directly from the site. These elements are critical in the ability of the service provider to be able to allow consumers to plan their trip from start to finish. Respondents were not given the flexibility or autonomy to book activities they would want to do at the destination. Improvements in these factors are necessary to increase better marketing for the destination website. Another key observation from the marketing perspective was that since tours information was not clearly stated it could eventually affect the overall usability of the website. Product and services available by the destination should be clearly laid out, along with reliable content and adequate website design.

The final aspect being judged by the travelers was the technical aspect. This aspect was rated with only 3 items since most of the judgment of the technical items requires an automated tool. Respondents believe that overall the website had a positive technical element with 8/10 saying that it had limited grammar mistakes and 8/10 said that the website loaded < or =13 seconds. If the word “Belize” is used as a keyword for searching information about the country, the destination website will be one of the top search results on major search engines such as Google and Yahoo. From this we can assume that the respondents had no trouble identifying and visiting the website. This was the highest score given by the respondents with 83%. Further recommendations about the website will be addressed in chapter 7. The following figure shows a screen shot of the destination website homepage.



**Figure 6-20: Home Page of Destination Website-Belize**

# Chapter 7: Recommendations, Conclusions and Future Work

This chapter gives an overview of the conclusions made in the present study. Also, it makes recommendations to further improve the E-tourism status and web marketing platforms within Belize's hospitality industry.

## 7.1 Recommendations

The SWOT analysis was used as a framework to make recommendations for future improvements of Belize's E-tourism. The following research question will be addressed in this section.

*What implications do the findings from this research hold for other tourism institutions in Belize? What recommendations can be made from the findings?*

### 7.1.1 SWOT Analysis of Belize's ICT and E-Tourism

#### Strengths:

- Strong strategic vision on tourism development, with adequate support by government and other statutory bodies (BTB, BHA, BTIA and BELTRAIDE).
- Belize Tourism Board 2010-2012 actions plan, highlighting changes to tourism marketing strategies, new programs in destination planning and quality assurance and efficiencies in BTB's revenue collection, operations and finance systems.
- In 2000, government encouraged the opening of a private e-commerce park within Belize City Export Processing Zone, guaranteeing freedom from taxes for incoming dotcoms. Other fiscal incentives are being offered to increase investment opportunities in Belize.
- Strategic location making it highly accessible to getting adequate e-tourism infrastructure and knowledge from more developed nations like Mexico and the USA.
- High influx of visitors from larger nations willing to invest in e-tourism services rendered.
- Global recognition as a destination country, with numerous land and sea activities.
- Recent initiatives (2013) taken by the country's Public Utilities Commission (PUC), bringing together international and local stakeholders to discuss options to improve the quality and lowering the cost of Internet services for Belizeans.
- Local Internet providers now offering higher speed DSL connectivity, wireless internet and mobile internet at moderately lower prices, increasing accessibility for business travellers and tourists to be able to access the internet at hotels, restaurants, airports and other transit points.

- Fixed broadband subscriptions and Internet penetration has increased significantly from 2010.
- Voice Over Internet (VOIP) Protocols are no longer restricted for locals and visitors to use, allowing greater coverage for marketing Belize as a destination country.
- Increased provision of Internet accessibility and computers in rural areas.
- Approximately half of the hospitality tourism businesses, such as tour operators and hotels have adapted web-marketing technologies in their business platforms.

**Weaknesses:**

- Limited ICT infrastructure and human resources and skills within all business sectors still being noticed.
- Most online users are becoming more and more dependent on availability of marketing channels to plan their trip. Destinations countries like Belize and tourism service providers have not constantly updating their web marketing platforms to suit users needs.
- Limited awareness and knowledge about ICT seen at the education level and hospitality service level.
- No standardized ICT and Internet security policies are currently in place by industry sector. With standard ICT policies, resources and knowledge could be leveraged to support and enhance the coverage of E-tourism.
- Even though action plans have been devised by tourism organizations; there is still no defined budget allocated for E-tourism development.
- Even though Internet prices have improved, it is still not that affordable to most people.
- De facto monopoly of Internet Service Providers. Belize Telemedia Limited (BTL) still remains the main Internet provider offering high speed Internet in the nation. As such there are still limits on telecommunications bandwidth in many parts of the country, constraining the quality and availability of online services.
- Lack of e-commerce support being provided by government and tourism related bodies.
- Lack of competitive advantage of the destination, because most tourism business are not fully encourage to see the benefits of having appropriate web marketing technologies incorporated in their business processes.
- Cooperation by SMTEs to fully integrate ICT within business process is still limited. Tourism Businesses such as hotels and tour operators are not fully embracing the Internet to its ultimate capacities, as such there is still a digital divide existing amongst these institutions.
- Web platforms are not being created with enough marketing effectiveness and usability to encourage visitor retention by users and also not being designed to be mobile friendly. Also

many SMTEs do not have any Internet presence making it difficult for them to gain a competitive advantage.

- Not enough multimedia and community building channels such as social media networks are being seen within tourism businesses websites.
- Destination websites are not offering the users the flexibility to “do-it-yourself”, while planning their trip. Websites are not being kept up-to-date and contain unfocused information. This can have detrimental effects for tourism visitor’s influx.
- Limited Mobile Web presence. Given the mass usage of mobile devices, Mobile friendly web-presence is limited.

### **Opportunities:**

- Local focus on the development of mobile Internet (infrastructure and service) for marketing endeavors. This is a strong enabler for touristic applications since most travelers rely more and more on mobile devices while traveling.
- Developing top of the line, up to date, do-it-yourself, multilingual destination and tourism websites with adequate multimedia, design, layout and social media interaction to fit the online user needs.
- Incorporating more ICT infrastructure within tourism and other service sectors, such as the development of information systems for all hospitality sectors as well as for cultural heritage, based on the GIS-map-making, with data for all kinds of historical and cultural heritage.
- Compartmentalize tourism government spending by allocation part of the budget to e-tourism that would lead to efforts in ICT innovation and digital infrastructure.
- E-parks, local ICT education and increase in Internet connectivity and speed are a strong combination to attract ICT companies to the region for further investment.
- Being recognized as one of the top touristic destinations in the Caribbean because of its strategic location, multiple array of land and sea attractiveness and most importantly being the only English speaking country in Central America, can be advantageous for the nation to gain further competitive advantage with the tourism industry of the region.
- Developing standardized policies and security protocols for the service industry to boost the e-tourism and bridge the digital divide.

### **Threats:**

- Due to large amount of government debts and overall spending in other sub sectors in the country, it is difficult to say whether the government will be willing to allocate any specific financial incentives to improve ICT as a whole in the near future.

- Local tourism market is very limited, so businesses will not be entirely convinced of the need to invest in ICT infrastructure if there are not enough users.
- Implementation of policies and standardized regulation for ICT within Industry sectors can be ignored if government does not provide enough awareness and education about its importance for the over all growth of the economy.
- The uses and implementation of web marketing platforms within the industry can serve limited purpose, as service providers are not using them adequately due to limited knowledge and skills.
- Other countries may have better E-tourism capabilities and services putting Belize at a disadvantage in the market.

### **7.1.2 Quality Improvements in E-tourism**

Belize is a developing nation with great potential in improving its overall ICT status to better its economy. It can achieve this by strategically delineating its resources and allocating them based on importance. The methodological instruments used in the present study were able to identify the e-tourism status of the nation and highlighted some key areas for improvement regarding E-tourism marketing directions of present tourism businesses, specifically hotels and tour operators. Furthermore, the study contributed to further understanding of web applications, specifically how a website has to be aligned with respect to marketing and usability on the basis of the level of evaluating parameters.

Based on the findings we can consider Belize's E-tourism status as limited to simple online presentation and slow growing, considering the limited infrastructure, affordability, human resources, government policies, ICT awareness and skills currently in place. It is recommended that the government and tourism managing organizations become more serious about ICT implementation at a national level and recognize its overall importance. They can achieve this by first incorporating and standardizing security policies and ICT protocols by industry sectors, and fully integrating resources and information at a regional and national level to maximize usage and leverage what is available. Secondly, governments can improve awareness of the importance of ICT by offering more trainings, seminars and local ICT education to SMEs. Lastly, government and tourism managing bodies should consider allocating specific financing to improve ICT innovation at a national level.

With respect to E-marketing directions within the tourism industry, the findings were able to identify some weaknesses and needs for improvements on the basis of the evaluating parameters.

The BSC approach was used to identify weaknesses of tour operators and hotel websites. The following table identifies how each perspective can be improved to better the quality of website design, layout and overall effectiveness in Belizean businesses.

**Table 7-1: Tourism Website Suggested Improvements**

Website Perspectives	How can it be improved?
<b>Objective</b>  	<p>This aspect can be improved by including when the site was last updated and who designed the site. This increases overall credibility that the information provided is real and can be trusted. Also, the site should state clearly what the site is for and whom it is being catered to.</p> <p>Another aspect that was limiting was that some websites did not encourage building relationships with their past customers. Having adequate and multiple social networking sites, providing updated information, reviews, recent pictures and package deals, can keep past customers interested.</p>
<b>User-friendliness</b> 	<p>This aspect can be improved by making sure that the website offers a clear home button and adequate navigational tools to make the online experience easier. Some navigational tools like site maps, search function, and multiple languages can make the site seem friendlier to the user. Also, contact information needs to be made clear on the home page. Some websites have outdated styles making it difficult for user to use. Ease of use is key in overall satisfaction.</p>
<b>Site Attractiveness</b>  <b>Web Design</b>	<p>Having clear text and adequate page layout with relevant information about the products and the destination can make this aspect appealing to the user. This can be improved by adding relevant pictures and images to the pages that can reinforce the text.</p> <p>Other areas to improve in the overall design are to make sure that colors and backgrounds are more appealing to the naked eye. Vibrant colors can be distracting or simply make the user want to avoid the site. Outsourcing this aspect of the website would be more suitable to improve overall appearance of the website. The user does not appreciate outdated and poor designs. How attractive your site it, tells the overall personality of the business and tells how serious the business is about satisfying the customer.</p>
<b>Marketing Effectiveness</b>	<p>An improvement to this aspect is important for the service provider to attract customers. More multimedia with adequate videos, virtual tours and pictures</p>



can make a big difference in this aspect. Very little multimedia was seen in most sites making it difficult for the user to experience and capture the essence of the products or services being offered.

Other areas to be improved were to add functions that would allow the more adventurous travelers to book and plan a trip on their own. This was a limiting area for most TO's websites. Most websites did not provide booking and reservation options to be done by the user online. Also, it was noticed that packages were not advertised or even made available in some instances. Owners need to expand the description of packages and special promotions. Contacting other stakeholders and liaising with them to make packages available can improve this and seem more attracting to the user.

<b>Technical Aspect</b> Two small human figures are pushing two large red interlocking gears.	Making sure that the website has good spelling, links that work and quick load time speeds are important improvements in this aspect. This will offer the user a well functioning website that looks and works professionally, adding to the user experience.
<b>Mobile Friendliness</b> A diagram showing a smartphone on the left labeled "BEFORE" with a cluttered screen containing a menu, a map, and a search bar. An arrow points to the right, leading to the same smartphone labeled "AFTER" with a clean, minimalist screen displaying only a single, prominent search bar.	Mobile friendly sites are important to businesses today because mobile devices are becoming the device of choice for many people. By making sure your site is web friendly, you make your products and services more accessible. Belizean websites scored poorly in this aspect and quick improvements can be done by: installing a mobile plugin on the sites, creating smart navigation through the site to get to the most important content, offering clear content with compelling headlines, avoid using too many images that might slow down the site, don't rely on Flash or Javascript, instead stick with plain (X) HTML/CSS standards and lastly, practice good design, e.g. avoiding clutter of text.

Furthermore, the Internet presence within tourism institutions was also identified as limiting. This can be improved by having all stakeholders within the tourism industry willingly take part in available training and seminars made available at the national level, to understand its importance, use and implementation within their marketing plans. Also, Managers and owner should invest in hiring professionals who have the expertise in user-centered design, human factors and E-business, to establish adequate web marketing platforms. However, if resources are scarce, as the case in most developing countries, relying on easy to use models such as the BSC and other automated tools to test the effectiveness of existing web platforms can be a good way to go and serve resourceful.

## 7.2 Conclusions

The tourism industry is an information intensive sector, and the role of the Internet and ICT in the marketing of destinations suggests that it is significant. This study was aimed at analyzing the overall presence of the Internet within the tourism industry of a developing nation, Belize. We proposed a mixed method approach to access the overall e-tourism performance in the nation by using instruments such as surveys, questionnaires and most importantly a modified usability evaluation approach (BSC) for websites, to be able to see how well the internet and Web marketing tools were being used within the industry. With all these methods, we were able to make many conclusions about each aspect that was analyzed regarding Belize's overall e-tourism status.

First we analyzed the tourism industry and its ICT status by looking at present statistics. Regarding the industry itself, Belize tourism seems to be at a booming stage and overall visitors are expected to increase as time goes by. However, the country seems to be lacking in the implementation of proper ICT infrastructure making it powerless to be able to compete with leading tourism destinations worldwide. Belize is rich in natural resources and advertises itself as an untouched wonder of the world, as such having proper ICT integration and infrastructure can only make the country more successful in the future. Currently Internet penetration is at approximately 25 %.

Secondly, we were able to document online actions of prospective visitors going to Belize. The actions and behaviors most commonly observed during this analysis was that, mobile devices are the most common items used for travelling and searching for information. Also, visiting personal websites of tourism business providers were key in searching for information about services and products being offered. Furthermore, social media platforms were found to be vital mediums for the user to stay connected while traveling, and to share and post their overall experience and satisfactions of the destinations once they return. From the survey done it was concluded that majority of the users let the criteria of attractive websites, booking flexibility and adequate information guide their decision making process. These findings then lead to further analysis of the Internet presence currently within two major sectors of the hospitality industry in Belize, namely hotels and tour operators.

The Internet presence survey conducted on all hotels and tour operators was able to reveal that most of these institutions, seem to cognize the importance of incorporating web marketing tools

in tourism, considering that for all the criteria's of Internet presence assessed, approximately 50% of each activity was adapted. However, much improvements in both institutions seemed necessary, especially in using social media platforms to build B2C relationships, to make use of Google place activity as a locator tool and most importantly the ability to have a functional website. Thus, we were able to conclude that web presence is limited. These findings lead to further analysis of one of the most vital marketing web platforms for any business, their websites. The evaluation approach taken into account was the modified Balance Score Card (BSC) and the findings of the BSC guided the focus of this study.

We proposed a Balanced Usability Checklist or Balanced Score Card (BSC) approach to access the usability and effectiveness of 10 hotels and 9 tour operators respectively. This approach offered a quick, yet flexible and cost effective website evaluation approach for hospitality establishments. This approach was able to judge and evaluate websites in five main perspectives; objective, user-friendliness, site attractiveness, marketing effectiveness and technical aspect. Websites have proven to be good useful marketing platforms, but it must be able to provide consumers with good navigation, useful content and accessibility. Reliability tests were able to reveal that the scores provided by the coders for the websites were correlated and proved viable.

Regarding the BSC evaluation approach used, the study was able to reveal that when it relates to the objective aspect, on average both hotels and TO's, scored poorly. This perspective measured the accuracy, authority, purpose and community building aspect of the website. Failure in this perspective was able to demonstrate that these websites couldn't guarantee that the information posted was reliable enough, since they were not currently update and the web developer could not be contacted. Consumers need to be able to trust the information given, since most products and services purchased online are intangible. Failure to update these website will only drive consumers away from the business. For the user-friendliness aspect, hotels websites seemed to be more user-friendly than TO's. However even though they both seem to have home buttons on most pages of their websites, there is still considerable scope left to enhance the user's ability to search and navigate within the sites. In particular, there is a need to incorporate more navigational tools such as site maps, search functions and provide adequate contact information. Even though these seemed to be essential in all websites most TO's lacked them. Another key user-friendly item that was lacking for both entities was that most websites were only in English. Belize receives visitors from European nations where English is not their native language, as such websites should consider the alternative of incorporating multiple languages in their sites to cater

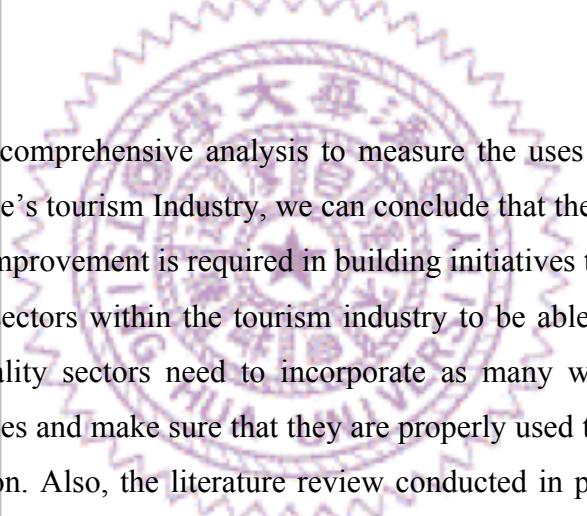
for those lingual needs or at least the use of translators. Furthermore, site attractiveness proved to be poorly implemented in most TO's websites, scoring 58%. This aspect reflects the visual aesthetics of a website and can sometimes be a driving factor for purchasing decisions in users. On average both establishments performed poorly in this perspectives with a score of 68.5%. Both entities can improve the visual appearance of their websites with the use of appropriate color and web page space, offering good multimedia interaction and making sure that the text is properly laid out without cluttering.

Moreover, the sample of websites evaluated for marketing effectiveness was also scored poorly with an average score of 58%. Being able to market products online effectively provides an opportunity for hospitality providers to "tangibilize" the uniqueness of these establishments. Most of the websites evaluated provided photographs of the rooms and tours, but very few provided virtual tours, reflecting the customers experience and communicating the personality of the establishment. Communicating the personality of an establishment requires more than just still pictures of rooms and tours of the property. By providing virtual tours you increase the user's comprehension of the hotel or TO's experience and make them more tangible. Other marketing items that were lacking were site maps, transportation and direction information, restaurants and shopping areas information, and most important the advertisement about packages and availability to book services. Lack of booking availability was mostly seen in TO's websites. These websites were did not give the user the flexibility to plan their trip on their own. This can be frustrating for the user and can result in failure to purchase products. As mentioned previously a large proportion of prospective travelers relied on online channels to make purchases, as such booking and reservation systems incorporated in the website is proven to be a necessity. Another key item that did not appear to be present in most establishments was the fact that little information was provided about management in the website text. Lack of this information may convey that poor management is being done at the establishment.

Lastly, the technical aspect evaluated for all websites also proved to be lacking, with an average score of 57.5%. Good spelling, links that work and quick load time speed offer the web visitor a well functioning website that looks and works professionally. Altogether, for this section of the study we were able to conclude that for both hotels and TO's in Belize, there is great need for improvements in all aspect in the BSC approach, considering that on average they scored poorly on all dimensions. Site Attractiveness seemed to be the strongest suit with an average score of

68.5% for both hotels and TO's. This aspect is important but not sufficient for the success of effective e-tourism in hospitality businesses.

This study further analyzed mobile friendliness of the 19 websites that were evaluated, since it was not taken into account by the BSC approach and considering that mobile devices are becoming a popular tool used while travelling, according to some recent surveys. It can be concluded that this analysis proved that most of the websites are not mobile friendly, reporting vast amounts of failures in severity and categories according to the W3C mobile validator used. Thus, it can be concluded that tourism websites in Belize are not compatible enough to most mobile devices and may result in hindrances to the online traveller. Perception and satisfaction levels of customers towards a destination tourism website was also measured. Most customers were very satisfied with the destination website they were asked to judge via a questionnaire. The strongest element of the destination website was in its technical aspect and the weakest was in user-friendliness.



After conducting such a comprehensive analysis to measure the uses of the Internet and other web technologies in Belize's tourism Industry, we can conclude that the nation's E-tourism status is slow growing. Much improvement is required in building initiatives to improve ICT awareness and infrastructure in all sectors within the tourism industry to be able to succeed in the future. Most importantly hospitality sectors need to incorporate as many web-marketing tools made available in their businesses and make sure that they are properly used to guarantee effective user experience and satisfaction. Also, the literature review conducted in previous chapters supports the notion that all the parameters of the BSC approach used in the website evaluation are necessary and beneficial to tourism business. The study indicated that there is room for improvements across all perspectives of the BSC approach for both Hotels and TO's

### 7.3 Limitations

There are limitations to this research study that needs to be acknowledged. The following points give a brief overview of these limitations.

- A fairly small and homogeneous group of people was used to evaluate the websites and other aspects analyzed. The small sample size could prove to be too small to make concrete conclusions about the overall presence and use of web marketing tools in Belize. The homogeneity of the group selected could have produced very specific results that would not have necessarily been present if the researcher was varied in nature.

- Some aspects of the Kline, S. F., et al. (2004) approach were not considered, like the fact that coders did not do the evaluation for websites within an enclosed environment. This could have subjected the coders to rely on alternative opinions that could have affected their overall responses.
- Additional items were evaluated and considered in the BSC checklist that was not part of the original study. The incorporation of the Objective aspect and mobile friendliness aspect was added and considered in the overall evaluation of websites. While it is believed that the additions helped the study, it may have caused different results when compared to the original study methodology.
- The random selection of the hotels and TO's, might not have shown the true representation of these establishments, since a standard filtering method was not considered.
- A lack of incentives for evaluators and people used in the study could have resulted in lowered commitment or motivation on the part of the respondents/coders/evaluators to devote sufficient time and care to the completing of the lengthy instruments provided.
- Vast availability in evaluation approaches of websites could have inclined the researcher to not be able to select the most appropriate one for the analysis.

## 7.4 Future Work

While acknowledging that this study was an exploratory approach to understanding how much Internet presence was within the tourism industry of Belize, there is still great opportunities in the future to extend it to other sectors within the industry. Also, evaluating a larger pool of establishments would make more concrete conclusions about the overall ICT status.

Furthermore, the BSC approach used as the focus of this study, is a widely used instrument for the evaluation of websites, however it is difficult to say whether it is the most adequate for the evaluation of hospitality websites in a developing country like Belize. Further research and uses of the instrument in a similar capacity will convey its effectiveness.

This research has many implications for practitioners in the relevant field. For example marketing managers and tourism management officials in Belize can use the BSC and the results obtain from this study to improve the image of their establishments, in particular hotels and tour operators. As such this analysis should serve as an incentive for tourism institution to be more competitive and improve on their current Web platforms. This study can also be used as a comparative baseline for Belize and used to evaluate and compare Belize regionally and globally.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Survey Questions Used For Blueprint Along with Frequencies and Percentages

Item #	Travel Stage	Frequency of Use	% Use
	<b>Pre-Travel</b>		
1	Which device did you use to conduct the search about destination?	7/10 used PC	70%
2	State which search engine did you use?	10/10 used Google	100%
3	What key words did you use during the initial search?	8/10 use Belize	80%
4	Which site/s did you visit to find information about the destination country Belize?	8/10 used travelbelize.org	80%
5	Which site/s did you visit to look at hotel in Belize?	7/10 use trip advisor	70%
6	Which site/s did you visit to look at tours available in Belize?	5/10 used trip advisor, 5/10 used travelbelize.org	50% & 50 %
7	Which site/s did you visit to look & Book for tickets to Belize?	9/10 used merchant/ retail websites e.g. Expedia, skyscanner, eztravel.com	90%
8	Which site was the most resourceful to find out information about the country?	4/10 used travelbelize.org	40%
9	Which website did you use to book your hotel?	9/10 used personal branded websites	90%
10	Which website did you use to book tours?	5/10 used personal branded websites/ 5/10 Use Retail Websites	50%
11	Did you visit any social media, blogs or forums while looking at hotels and tours?	9/10 said yes	90%
12	How long did it take you to plan your trip from start to finish online?	6/10 said >than 3 hours	60%
	<b>Travel</b>		
13	During your travel which device/s are you planning to take with you to stay connected and informed?	7/10 said mobile phone, 5/10 said tablet	70 % & 50 %
14	Are you planning to visit the Internet while traveling at the destination?	10/10 said yes, to chat with family, and search for additional information.	100%

15	During your travel, are you planning to visit any social media/ blogs/ forums links to report about your trip status or to find out more information about what to do at destination?	8/10 said yes, Facebook	80%
	<b>Post-Travel</b>		
16	After you return from your trip do you intend to visit any social media links, forums and or travel blogs to share your experience?	9/10 said yes, NTHU Group Forum and Trip advisor	90%

## Appendix 2: Survey Checklist For Internet Presence

Questions	Scale
1. Did the business have a website?	Yes/NO
2. Did the business have a website that works?	Yes/NO
3. Did the business have social media presence?	Yes/NO
4. Which social media site/s did the business use?	Open
5. Did the business use an international travel portal?	Yes/NO
6. Which international travel portal/s did the business use?	Open
7. Does the business have Google place Activity?	Yes/NO
8. Which Belizean tourism official site/s did the business use for travel and information assistance?	Open question

## Appendix 3: BSC Checklist Used in Study For Belizean Hotels

Objective: (14 items)	Dichotomous Scale: Yes (1)/ No (0)
<i>Authority and Accuracy</i>	
Site developer vs. webmaster different	1
“About Us”, available	1
Webmaster can be contacted	1
Have ".bz" domain	1
When website produced stated	1
“last updated” mentioned	1
Recent update made before 6 Months	1
<i>Purpose</i>	
Main purpose of website made clear	1
Easily identify what the site is for	1
Top page indicate what could be done at destination	1
Website inspire the holidays	1
<i>Social Media Presence</i>	
Use any social media links	1
Website have more than one social media links	1
Social media links provide additional information	1
<b>Total Points For Objectives</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>User Friendliness (10 items)</b>	
<i>Web Mobility &amp; Ease of Navigation</i>	

Home button	1
Site map or index	1
Multiple languages	1
Clear and easy navigation tool	1
Search function	1
Limited horizontal or vertical scrolling	1
<b>Contact Information</b>	
Telephone number	1
Mailing address	1
Fax number	1
E-mail	1
<b>Total Points</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Site Attractiveness (18 items)</b>	
<i>Web Interphase</i>	
Text clear and readable	1
Limited grammar mistakes	1
Pages clean, organized and uncluttered	1
Sufficient contrast between background and text	1
Hyperlink is easy to use and read	1
Appropriate use of color	1
Good multimedia interaction	1
Photos and images of good quality	1
Photos and images reinforce text	1
Effective use of webpage space	1
Background is subdued, effective and appealing	1
Appropriate URL domain name	1
Site linked to other sites	1
<i>Visual &amp; Sound Entertainment</i>	
Visual entertainment present	1
Sound	1
Sound distract usability of users	1
Testimonials and awards	1
Photo gallery	1
<b>Total Points</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Marketing Effectiveness (20 items)</b>	
<b>Market Information &amp; Attributes</b>	
Logo on all pages	1
Rates made available	1
Tours/ Room pictures	1
Map of the area	1
Transportation	1
Directions	1
Management in text	1
Room entertainment available	1
Other general features	1

Swimming Pool	1
Target market	1
<b><i>Hotel's Activities</i></b>	
Information about tours and things to do in destination	1
Local activities and area attractions	1
Shopping areas and Restaurants	1
Virtual tour	1
Accurate information with limited advertisements.	1
<b><i>Trip Planner</i></b>	
Reservations and bookings made online	1
Packages and promotions	1
Digital brochures	1
Help function	1
<b>Total Points</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Overall Rating: (3 items)</b>	
User-friendliness overall rank	4
Site attractiveness overall rank	4
Marketing Effectiveness overall rank	4
<b>Total Points Overall Ranking</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Grand Total Of Checklist</b>	<b>74</b>

#### Appendix 4: BSC Checklist Used In Study For Belizean Tour Operators

Objective (15 items):	Dichotomous Scale: Yes (1)/ No(0)
<b><i>Authority and Accuracy</i></b>	
Site developer vs. webmaster different	1
“About Us”, available	1
Webmaster can be contacted	1
Have ".bz" domain	1
When website produced stated	1
“last updated” mentioned	1
<b><i>Purpose</i></b>	
Main purpose of website made clear	1
Easily identify what the site is for	1
Top page indicate what could be done at destination	1
Provide facts about the destination	1
Website inspire the holidays	1
<b><i>Social Media Presence</i></b>	
Use any social media links	1
Website have more than one social media links	1
Social media links provide additional information	1
<b>Total Points For Objectives</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>User Friendliness (10 items)</b>	
<b><i>Web Mobility/Ease of Navigation</i></b>	

Home button	1
Site map or index	1
Multiple languages	1
Clear and easy navigation tool	1
Search function	1
Limited horizontal or vertical scrolling	1
<b>Contact Information</b>	
Telephone number	1
Mailing address	1
Fax number	1
E-mail	1
<b>Total Points</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Site Attractiveness (17 items)</b>	
<i>Web Interphase</i>	
Text clear and readable	1
Limited grammar mistakes	1
Pages clean, organized and uncluttered	1
Sufficient contrast between background and text	1
Hyperlink is easy to use and read	1
Appropriate use of color	1
Good multimedia interaction	1
Photos and images of good quality	1
Photos and images reinforce text	1
Effective use of webpage space	1
Background is subdued, effective and appealing	1
Appropriate URL domain name	1
Site linked to other sites	1
<i>Visual &amp; Sound Entertainment</i>	
Visual entertainment present	1
Sound	1
Testimonials and awards	1
Photo gallery	1
<b>Total Points</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Marketing Effectiveness (17 items)</b>	
<b>Market information &amp; Attributes</b>	
Logo on all pages	1
Tours/Package Rates made available	1
Tours/ Room pictures	1
Map of the area	1
Transportation	1
Directions	1
Additional items	1
Target market	1
Accurate information with limited advertisements	1
<b>TO's Activities</b>	
Information about tours and things to	1

Information about tour guides	1
Shopping areas, Hotels and Restaurants	1
<b>Trip Planner</b>	
Reservations and bookings made online	1
Packages and promotions	1
Selection of tour packages can be made online	1
Help function	1
“Contact Us” function	1
<b>Total Points</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Overall Rating: (3 items)</b>	<b>Likert Scale</b>
User-friendliness overall rank	4
Site attractiveness overall rank	4
Marketing Effectiveness overall rank	4
<b>Total Points Overall Ranking</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Grand Total Of Checklist</b>	<b>70</b>

### Appendix 5: Technical Aspect Ratings for All websites

Technical Aspect Rating Scale	1 point		0 point	
	4 star	3 star	2 star	1 star
Link check	0 bad links	1 bad link	2 bad links	>than 2 bad links
Load Time	<or=13 sec	<or=24 sec	<or=35 sec	> than 35 sec
HTML	0 errors	1-6 errors	7-12 errors	>than 12 errors
Browser	0 problems	1-4 problems	5-8 problems	>than 8 problems
Spell Check	0 misspellings	Up to 5% misspellings	Up to 10% misspellings	> than 10% misspellings

### Appendix 6: Questionnaire Items and Results for Destination Website

Demographic Information (3 items)	Total Points per perspective	Frequency of "Yes"	% Score
Sex	5/10 male, 5/10 Females		
Age Group	2/10=20-25 yrs.,5/10=26-30yrs,3/10=31-35 yrs.		
Have you ever heard about Belize?	7/10 said Yes		
<b>Objective (9 items)</b>	<b>9(items)X10(raters)</b>		
Was the main purpose of the website clearly stated on the top page (E.g. target market and for what)?	1	10	100%
Was the person who developed the website made known and could they be contacted?	1	2	20%
By looking at the website, were you able to expect value of the tours and things to do at the destination?	1	10	100%
Did the website give adequate information about the destination country, like things to do there, where to stay, where to eat, how to get there and	1	9	90%

pricing?			
By surfing the website, did it inspire you to travel to the destination?	1	8	80%
Did the website have social media presence, that provided additional information about what to do at destination, promotional deals or tours, pictures/videos of tours and news etc.?	1	10	100%
Did the website use Google maps to state location?	1	1	10%
Did the website link you to any travel portal or information sites and forums of the destination (E.g. trip advisor, travelbelize.org/BTB, Belize Hotel association/BHA, or belizeforum.com etc.)?	1	9	90%
Was the website mobile compatible (meaning was it able to load appropriately using your smart phone)?	1	8	80%
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>74%</b>
<b>User Friendliness (8 items)</b>	<b>8(items)X10(raters)</b>		
Does the website have clear and easy navigational tools on all pages with limited scrolling, and was well organized and helpful?	1	3	30%
Does the website provide either a search or help function to ease your browsing and navigation experience?	1	10	100%
Was the URL easy to remember?	1	10	100%
Does the overall, layout and design of the site complemented your use of the site?	1	7	70%
Was the contact information clearly stated (phone #, email, mailing address etc.)?	1	9	90%
Was "frequently asked questions" made available?	1	3	30%
Did the site have multiple languages?	1	1	10%
Was this an overall user-friendly site?	1	5	50%
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Site Attractiveness (15 items)</b>	<b>15(items) X 10(raters)</b>		
Was the text clear, easy to read and reliable?	1	10	100%
The site pages were clean, organized and uncluttered?	1	9	90%
Does the site make good use of website space?	1	9	90%
Was there sufficient contrast between background and text of the site?	1	8	80%
The background on the site was subdued, effective and appealing?	1	6	60%
Was the URL/domain name easy simple and appropriate?	1	10	100%
Did the website have an appropriate use of color, improving the overall appearance?	1	7	70%
Did the website have good multimedia interaction (advertisements, sound, YouTube videos etc.)?	1	10	100%
The photos and images used on the site were of good quality and they reinforced text?	1	10	100%
The Hyperlink was easy to use and read?	1	9	90%
The site was linked to other sites?	1	10	100%
The website was recently updated, less than 6 months ago?	1	2	20%
The graphics used in the site motivated you to want to book a tour or hotel and or travel there?	1	10	100%
Did the site provide any testimonials and awards of the destination country?	1	2	20%

Was this an overall attractive website?	1	9	90%
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>81%</b>
<b>Marketing Effectiveness (15 items)</b>	<b>15(items) X 10(raters)</b>		
The Logo was shown on all pages?	1	9	90%
Did the website have accurate information about tour operators in the destination country?	1	4	40%
Did the Website provided pictures of things to do (attractions) in the destination country?	1	9	90%
Did the website allow you to book tours with them directly?	1	3	30%
Did the site provide direction of how to get to the destination country?	1	10	100%
Were accommodations made Known?	1	9	90%
Did the site direct you to hotels personal websites to do bookings?	1	9	90%
Did the website provide additional information about the destination like, food, culture people and other fact?	1	10	100%
Were rates for hotels or tours made known?	1	10	100%
Were services and products offered by the destination country well listed on the site?	1	9	90%
Were packages (accommodation/tour in one) made known or advertised?	1	3	30%
Were you able to book packages with the site directly?	1	1	10%
Did the website provide information about travel agents, to book flight tickets?	1	10	100%
“Contact Us” function made available?	1	9	90%
Did this site have an overall effective marketing aspect?	1	8	80%
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>Technical Aspect (3 items)</b>	<b>3(items)X10(raters)</b>		
Was there limited grammar mistakes noticed on the site?	1	8	80%
Was the loading time of the site < than or = to 13 seconds?	1	8	80%
Do you think that the overall technical aspect of this site was good?	1	9	90%
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>83%</b>
<b>Overall Aspect (2 items)</b>			
After looking at the website, how would you rate it overall?	<b>1/10=Excellent, 6/10=Good, 3/10=Satisfactory, 0/10=Poor</b>		
Would you recommend this site to a friend who wishes to visit the destination?	<b>9/10=Yes</b>		
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>75%</b>