

**Statement Concerning Master's Thesis in Cognition and Communication**

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Title: Beyond the Hostel: Analyzing the Perceived Benefits and Risks of Facebook's Impact on the Backpacker Community through Social Capital

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This dissertation explores how the modern backpacker culture encounters and interacts with social media. It is an exemplary case of new media technology impact on community building and integration. The backpacker culture illustrates well the transition from offline to online community, its many interfaces, challenges and opportunities. The case is both theoretically and methodologically exigent as it requires the candidate to pay attention to the double character of the community, which is a) transnational and mobile, i.e. composed by fluctuating members of different socio-cultural background and b) online-offline, i.e. defining and establishing social relationships through digital media technologies. As such the thesis is exemplary for an important discussion within media and audience studies about users' exploration of the new media landscape, the formation of online communities, and their capacities to overcome both distance and language barriers of communication.

Among the most salient strengths of the dissertation are the clear introductory section, in which current challenges to the backpacker community are linked back to its historical origins. Worth mentioning is also the insightful story of the cultural roots of the backpacker community and its particular ethos. In this connection it is good that social capital and social facilitation theory is brought in with a guiding distinction of romantic-sexual and professional social capital

and its possible tensions. A discussion of intimacy within the backpacker and hostel culture proved helpful here. The theoretical section concludes with an exploration of social networking media impact on social capital within both professional and romantic/sexual relationships.

Another considerable strength of the thesis is its applied methodology. The thesis is born out of personal observation and experience, which is noticeable in the refreshing and insightful style of writing. At the same time, the thesis is firmly grounded in social sciences' methodology. The candidate brings in and combines, in fact, two original sets of data: one socio-graphic survey of personal profiles and interactions among backpackers that has been collected for previous research purpose, and one large scale questionnaire based survey that has been conducted for the purpose of this thesis. The qualitative web-survey collects data about travelers' use and experience with Facebook and hostels. The very carefully drafted questionnaire combines a measurement of social relationships, romantic/sexual relationships, and professional relationships. The operationalization of the research questions and its translation in measurable indicators is highly convincing. The very effective distribution of the questionnaire through specific websites and snowball techniques within the international backpacker community further resulted in a very high response rate that confirms the validity of the findings.

The substantive results ground indeed the high scientific value of the thesis with the potential to be turned into a publication. Among the main findings, it is worth mentioning that members of the backpacker community explore Facebook as a positive source for social capital. For the average user Facebook opens significant opportunities for staying connected without seriously interfering their privacy. Even though the thesis is well aware of the many potential risks of social media use for both professional and interpersonal communications, the net benefits of social capital building seem to prevail and most respondents succeed to engage positively with their community fellows through Facebook. The thesis is rounded up with a reflection on practical and theoretical implications of the research findings as well as future research directions. It may be only criticized that these conclusions build on a somewhat limited picture of a non representative community which is already distinguished by high social capital. This critique aside, Alex Berger's dissertation fulfills the criteria of excellence for a MA thesis. It is an outstanding performance with only minor errors and should therefore be graded 12.

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## **Master's thesis**

### **Department of Communication and Cognition**

Edward Alexander Berger

# **Beyond the Hostel: Analyzing the Perceived Benefits and Risks of Facebook's Impact on the Backpacker Community through Social Capital**

Advisor: Hans-Jörg Trenz

Submitted: August 1st, 2013

## **ABSTRACT**

The backpacker community is becoming an increasingly important segment of the hospitality industry. Previously a semi-anonymous community, this paper sets out to explore how the introduction and widespread adoption of Facebook has reduced that anonymity while changing social dynamics within the hostel environment. This was done by posing three research questions which explored users' demographic data and views through a quantitative web survey of the backpacker community. These three questions revolved around the impact on anonymity in a social, romantic/sexual, and professional context by utilizing a framework built upon an expanded version of social capital theory. This provided a tool to explain both how, and why reductions in anonymity can shift user behaviors. In addition to contributing significantly to the existing demographic profile of the backpacker community, this research offers a compelling insight into the powerful role Facebook is playing in the evolution of the modern backpacker. Strong evidence was found across the three categories to indicate that Facebook is viewed largely as a positive influencer that has played a significant communicative role in re-shaping behavior. At the same time, less evidence than anticipated was found supporting the expected negative threats to social capital, and perceptions of Facebook's reduction in anonymity, within the hostel environment.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
INTRODUCTION & PROBLEM FORMULATION.....	5
Objectives and Research Questions.....	6
UNDERSTANDING THE BACKPACKER COMMUNITY.....	7
EXPLORING AND DEFINING THE NATURE OF MODERN BACKPACKERS.....	9
The Roots of Backpacker Culture .....	9
Roma and Backpackers – Culture Formation.....	12
Exploring Backpacker Demographics .....	14
Age .....	14
Gender .....	15
Education .....	16
Employment.....	18
The History of Hostels and Why They Matter.....	19
Hostel Industry Growth.....	19
The Evolution of the Modern Hostel .....	20
Facebook's Globalization and Adoption Among Backpackers .....	22
History and Growth.....	22
Latest Facebook Figures.....	24
Section Summary .....	25
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	25
Social Capital Theory - How Reputation Shapes Backpacker Behavioral Values .....	25
Introducing the Concept and Early Origins of the Theory .....	26
Applying Social Capital Theory to Computer Mediated Interactions .....	27
Social Facilitation - How Group Dynamics Shape Behavior .....	31
The Social Self - How We Manage Our Relationships and Seek New Social Capital.....	32
The Proteus Effect - Exploring How Virtual Personas Re-Shape Our Real World Identity.....	34
Applications to Social, Romantic/Sexual and Professional Social Capital.....	36
Facebook's Impact on Social Capital Within Peer Groups .....	36
Facebook's Impact on Social Capital Within Romantic & Sexual Relationships .....	40
Facebook's Impact on Social Capital Within Professional Relationships .....	43
METHODS.....	45
Survey Design.....	45
Instrument .....	45

Measurement.....	46
Sampling.....	47
Data Analysis .....	48
Limitations.....	49
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	50
Respondent Demographics .....	50
Analysis of Backpacker Facebook Usage and Profiles.....	54
Data on Backpacker's Hostel Usage .....	58
Respondent's Views on Facebook's Impact on Backpacker Culture.....	59
Self Descriptive Analysis of Facebook's Impact on Backpacker Behavior.....	60
Analysis of Facebook's Impact on Social Capital.....	61
Analysis of Facebook's Impact on Romantic/Sexual Social Capital .....	64
Analysis of Facebook's Impact on Professional Social Capital .....	66
CONCLUSION.....	67
Summary of Findings.....	68
Limitations.....	72
Practical Applications.....	73
Theoretical Applications .....	73
Future Research Directions.....	74
Final Thoughts.....	74
REFERENCES .....	76
APPENDIX.....	89
Appendix A - Survey Instrument .....	89

## INTRODUCTION & PROBLEM FORMULATION

As technology continues to break down both distance and language as barriers to communication, the inherent structure of our social relationships is in a state of change. Just as research several decades ago focused heavily on the impact of the time's emergent technologies such as mass-produced automobiles, ready access to affordable international airfare, or the global adoption and utilization of broadcast television, a growing body of modern research has sought to explore the impact of new internet-based technologies. As individuals, our lives are increasingly mobile and our social networks similarly fluid (Germann Molz & Paris, 2013; Hannam et al., 2006; Urry, 2003). While a letter once took months to convey a few hundred words to its intended recipient, we are now able to exchange similar amounts of data in milliseconds. These data are often supplemented by real-time high definition video, audio and images. Where geography once played a major role in separating various social groups and defining familial structure, the new global environment has moved local community from limited geographical phenomena to a worldwide one.

This thesis is born out of personal observation and experience. As a full-degree international student with family spread across three continents and peers who have, at times, been in contact from all seven of the earth's continents, I regularly observe firsthand the power provided by new social media technologies to help build, maintain, and at times, harm my relational capital. A personal observation that is far from unique and mirrors existing mobilities research such as that done by Germann Molz (2006). This personal experience has instilled a deep-seated interest in how social media may be impacting the day-to-day lives of the tens of thousands of individuals who travel abroad as part of the study abroad, hostel, and backpacker community each year. It has also revealed that the existing body of research in this area remains limited and is in need of further exploration. The goal of this paper is to use a web-based survey of Facebook users from within the backpacker community to better understand the impact Facebook is having on how backpackers select, build, and maintain their relationships.

There is a growing body of research within the backpacker sphere that helps us better understand the complex demographics, motivations, and needs of this population. However, this information is still relatively limited, especially within the context of social media and social network technologies, which are relatively new phenomenon. This thesis will seek to provide insights into these communities by drawing upon existing research from a mixture of disciplines to better frame and explore self-reported survey data about Facebook's impact on intimacy within the study backpacker community.

By providing insights into how the hostel and backpacker culture has adapted to and incorporated Facebook, this paper aims to provide well-documented illustrations of how Facebook use is re-shaping identity and behavior across a global population. This information is potentially invaluable for academic and private sector organizations seeking to develop platforms and structures designed to service and support the backpacker demographic. These findings may also shed light on other areas of society where it would be otherwise impossible, or exceedingly difficult, to gain clear-cut insights into how a large-scale social network can enhance, hinder, and re-structure people's social and communicative behaviors by providing intimacy-enhancing and intimacy-hindering communicative systems.

## **Objectives and Research Questions**

To properly contextualize this area of research, an in-depth analysis of existing theoretical frameworks and behavioral research is necessary. This includes the need to establish a series of carefully constructed and referenced definitions that build upon historical backpacker and tourism terminology while simultaneously modernizing them where necessary. I will further support my research by drawing upon parallel areas of research outside of the backpacker and hospitality space. This research will draw upon social media and social network findings as well as the large body of research focused on intimacy, disclosure, and communicative capital. This will establish a firm foundation from which to analyze and understand the results of a quantitative web-survey. These theoretical and definitional sections will provide evidence that demonstrates a compelling connection between Facebook's ability to result in behavioral adjustment both on, and off-line. These steps will set the stage for the exploration of how these adjustments may impact the behavior of travelers within the backpacker and hostel community. More specifically, this objective forms the following three questions through which social, romantic/sexual and professional types of relational intimacy (later introduced as social capital) will be explored.

- RQ1: How has Facebook's reduction in anonymity impacted social behavior while traveling?
- RQ2: How has Facebook's reduction in anonymity impacted romantic/sexual behavior while traveling?
- RQ3: How has the knowledge that employers review Facebook profiles impacted backpacker disclosure?



## UNDERSTANDING THE BACKPACKER COMMUNITY

Backpackers, Budget Travelers, Global Nomads and Flashpackers are all titles that have come to represent the modern budget traveler. While each of these titles has a specific demographic they all are the modern incarnation of the early budget traveler. It is nearly impossible to accurately identify who the first budget travelers were as the relationship between low-budget travel based in necessity quickly becomes indistinguishable from cost-effective travel for self edification or as part of a traveling apprenticeship. It is also difficult to differentiate between early explorers traveling in small, but well funded, groups far from established tourism paths; those who undertook similar but less well- funded trips; and those engaged in a mixture such as the travelers outlined in Towner's research on the Grand Tour (1985). Luckily, for the sake of this thesis and the insights it seeks to obtain, the early origins of the backpacker community as it exists today are less important than its more recent evolution.

Recent literature reviews have identified the origins of the modern backpacker as stemming from the drifter and hippy movements which took place in the 1960s and 1970s (O'Reilly, 2006; Paris and Teye, 2010). These movements had their roots in a desire to take an alternative approach to traditional lifestyle norms while seeking out opportunities for self-enrichment and discovery. They were dominated predominantly by younger individuals under the age of 40 and centered heavily on a desire to travel and connect with exotic cultures and destinations (O'Reilly, 2006). To do this many of these individuals sought out opportunities to try exciting new foods, contemplate drastically different ideas, immerse themselves in atypical cultures and to open themselves up to challenging opportunities that radically pushed their existing comfort zones (Paris, 2009).

By 1990 Pearce had observed the term backpacker being used in a commercial context and sought to introduce it into academic literature. In so-doing he described a newly labeled phenomenon which, "... had echoes of and roots in the hippie/drifter phenomenon, employment-oriented youth travel, physical health and outdoor adventure seeking behaviors, and travel for personal educational growth and development" (Pearce, 2007, pp 39). This updated definition conveyed many similarities to the hippy/drifter culture that preceded it but helped to cement a significant differentiation where the two groups divided. It is important to note that the hippy/drifter style of travel still exists, but, it is no longer indistinguishable from backpacker culture and has been largely replaced by a budget conscious, but less financially constrained backpacker culture composed predominantly of 20-30 something travelers.

This shift has also been supported by significant movements in the global socio-economic situation as long distance travel has become increasingly accessible due to reductions in price

barriers, time investment requirements, and improved infrastructure (Hannam et al., 2006; Mascheroni, 2007). In short, the modern backpacker has traded in their Volkswagen camper van for budget bus tours, hostels, discount airline tickets, laptops and backpacks.

O'Reilly argues that as the backpacker community has continued to grow and mature the stereotypical image of a backpacker has become increasingly well-defined and recognizable. To aid in this identification, she also provides three key factors which help to define a backpacker. The three are time spent on the road, type of travel, and schedule flexibility (2006, pp 2). O'Reilly elaborates by noting that unlike more traditional vacationers, travelers within the backpacker category tend to schedule trips for longer durations. Because of this added flexibility typical backpacker trips often last weeks, months or, in some cases, years (2006; Paris, 2009). These three key factors mirror previous criteria outlined by Pearce who proposed five criteria which were, "1) a preference for budget accommodation; 2) an emphasis on meeting other travelers; 3) an independently organized and flexible travel schedule; 4) longer rather than very brief holidays; and 5) an emphasis on informal and participatory holiday activities" (2007, pp 39).

Key components of both of these definitions are the role played by budget friendly accommodation and methods of travel. In this capacity, hostels have emerged as a cornerstone of the backpacker movement because of their ability to provide budget accommodation that is flexible, social, well-distributed and easily accessible even while traveling. This also makes them of significant interest when studying and exploring backpacker culture because it is one of the few places where backpackers congregate and form less-transient communities – something which is of note given the extremely flexible and open-ended format most backpacker's travels take (O'Regan, 2008; O'Reilly, 2006). While early backpackers were forced to travel relying on word of mouth, personal discovery, referrals, and backpacker-centered guide books, the internet has allowed backpackers to re-visit their research, booking, and planning process. Paris notes, "The internet has provided backpackers with just-in-time access to travel information, effortless booking of accommodations and transportation, increased mobility, and access to the backpacker culture through online communities" (2009, pp 4-5). This just-in-time approach makes it possible for a backpacker sitting in Florence, Italy to affordably research, identify and book their transportation (e.g. bus or train travel) and hostel accommodation as little as 12-24 hours in advance for destinations both within close geographic proximity to Florence and those significantly further away (O'Regan, 2008).

These powerful changes in the options available to backpackers are also significant in that they enable drastically increased flexibility while significantly reducing the risk of losing large sums of money on transportation and accommodation that was booked weeks, if not months in advance.

The longer the duration of a trip, the greater the level of difficulty, historically, in planning for it. The modern hostel and backpacker tourism infrastructure has arisen to respond directly to these traveler's needs which often vary significantly from traditional destination-resort or luxury hotel travelers on weekend or week-long pre-arranged getaways.

## **EXPLORING AND DEFINING THE NATURE OF MODERN BACKPACKERS**

The following section seeks to build upon the historical context provided in the previous section for the backpacker and hostel communities.

### **The Roots of Backpacker Culture**

The previous section highlighted the origins of the modern backpacker. Yet, to properly analyze and explore the role Facebook is having on intimacy within the backpacker and hostel culture it is important to understand and precisely define the constituent parts of backpacker culture. Due to the fragmented and transient nature of backpackers, this can be challenging. However, researchers have identified a transition within the independent traveler community. Where 40 years ago an exotic trip through India embodied the backpacker mystique and a separation from mainstream culture (Tomory, 1998) the modern backpacker identity has shifted. The latest incarnation of the backpacker identity is a more mainstream and widely accepted identity viewed as typical within the context of increased societal, digital and virtual mobilities (Germann Molz & Paris, 2013).

Communication in the form of exchanging stories, advice, and in-person bonding has always played an important role in backpacker culture. Early hostels helped to facilitate this, but nurtured the counter-culture image as early backpacker culture was almost entirely media-free. Where traditional backpacker culture existed in a communication centric, but much less media-enabled environment, modern backpacker culture is increasingly media-rich and as a result able to better maintain a more organized internal dialogue (Germann Molz & Paris, 2013; Hannam et al., 2006). This has allowed the backpacker community to maintain and better unify its identity, while expanding communication historically limited to face-to-face interactions at the hostel and expanding them to the greater backpacker community. In turn this has facilitated the transition which this thesis seeks to better explore.

The increasingly mainstream nature of modern backpacker culture has resulted in a shift in wide-spread perception. The modern backpacker movement is viewed less as a rejection of the professional world/typical cultural norms and is instead viewed more inclusively as a complementary

opportunity for experiential travel and self-development before a return to a more culturally-normative lifestyle (O'Reilly, 2006, pp 1104). As O'Regan noted,

“Backpackers enact through mobility for a specific period of time a lifestyle that is characterized by a high degree of movement and environment change. They move from geographic location to geographic location with a constant high rate of change in their local environment highlighted by budget travel, an eagerness for interaction and freedom of movement” (2008, pp 110).

The modern backpacker tends to have a mixture of motivations for traveling. While the common thread between each of these is discovery, there are different aspects that vary from individual to individual. One central theme is skill and experience acquisition. As noted by Pearce and Foster,

“An assessment of backpackers’ learning achievements and their relevance to future employment supported the view that the skills acquired were seen as useful and likely to be appreciated by others. When this finding is viewed in its largest context, it can be suggested that travel experiences are indeed providing a kind of educational opportunity for participants and those opportunities may benefit not just the individual but the society to which they return” (2007, pp 1296).

These skills have professional benefits, as well as fostering increased confidence, capability, cultural perspective and sensitivity. They also align closely with historic trends and motivations for travel which have been constant components of the extended-traveler’s inspiration since at least the 1600s (Towner, 1985, pp 311-314). Lastly, education as a primary enabler and inspiration can be understood through the close relationship that exists between the backpacker community and the study abroad community as many individuals taking part in study abroad experiences will also simultaneously participate in the backpacker community.

Another inspiration for many backpackers is the opportunity for romantic and sexual discovery. The idea of discovering love or at least satiating lust in a semi-anonymous, exotic, and romantic setting is one that has been engrained within our cultural narrative. Popular destinations such as Paris and Venice have been built up to be viewed as deeply charming and romantic places while other destinations such as Thailand and Amsterdam have reputations for offering easily accessible sex tourism infrastructure.

Existing research dating back as far as 1966 has documented that sexual and dating behavior change significantly while young people/students participate in study abroad trips (Freeman and

Freeman, 1966, pp 209). Additional research has found that the instances of travelers partaking in what are otherwise noted as high-risk or completely unacceptable sexual activity is far more common and generally considered to be a regular part of travel culture. The flexible, semi-anonymous, and transient nature of independent travel is shown to lead to lower levels of personal accountability and an increased sense of freedom. A sentiment which is bolstered by the often permissive sexual culture which exists within the travel community (Sonmez et al., 2006; Schaffer, 2012).

These behaviors facilitate a more polarized and sexualized environment with lower individual responsibility which encourages more romantic and sexual interactions with unvetted strangers and new-acquaintances upon whom the individual has little/no information (Eiser & Ford, 1995; Herold & Van Kerkwijk, 1992; Milhousen et al., 2006). While backpackers differ from vacationers who travel primarily for sex, the transient nature of the backpacker experience, combined with a demographic that consists predominantly of relatively young, unmarried travelers (Paris, 2010) provides a high number of opportunities for individuals to partake in romantic experiences. The opportunity for individuals to engage in and enjoy novel as well as familiar sexual experiences outside of one's normal social environment is also believed to be why for many individuals there is an increased number of sexual partners while traveling (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2003; Schaffer, 2012). This is magnified by the high level of alcohol use during evening and social events present in many of the backpacker/hostel events such as pub-crawls or social hostel dinners which are designed to help facilitate meeting and socializing with other backpackers.

A third motivation for individuals within the backpacker community stems from the perception that backpacker travel provides increased authenticity while simultaneously providing a more sustainable form of tourism. Ooi and Laing have noted the increasing push among a subset of tourists to identify styles of travel that are non-mainstream. Within this category, two of the most popular are volunteer tourism (voluntourism) and backpacking. Two categories that they note regularly overlap and incorporate many of the same core principles (2010). Other reports have outlined and stressed that the work-as-they-go approach long-term backpackers utilize, combined with their reliance on local transit, food, and tour providers invests their money more directly than traditional mass-tourism travelers (Pearce et al., 2009; WWOOF International Association, 2013). These travelers often partake in an increasingly more extensive network of *voluntourism*-friendly platforms.

### **Roma and Backpackers – Culture Formation**

Another way to understand and explore backpacker culture is through an analysis of other groups that aspire to build a similar transnational identity while maintaining members native nationality (or other group) of origin. Specifically, how these groups use media within their mobile communities to enable and facilitate community building while re-shaping traditional behavior and definitions of community identity. A trend directly relevant to the current shifts we are seeing within the backpacker community.

As one of Europe's largest and most complex, but simultaneously non-cohesive ethnic groups, significant research into identity formation within the Roma-Gypsy population has been done (Herakova, 2009). These cases differ slightly from the formation of a cohesive backpacker identity. The process with backpackers is reversed. They are from diverse backgrounds and come together to form a cohesive backpacker identity. Yet there are still important lessons through which we can better explain the challenges and benefits that stem from the emergence and maturation of a more cohesive backpacker identity by way of increased media interconnectivity.

As with some subsets of the backpacker community, the Roma have a longstanding history as a, "continuum of more or less related subgroups with complex, flexible, and multilevel identities" (Petrova, 2003, pp 104). Similar to backpackers they also tend towards semi-nomadic travel, working as they go, and relocating regularly in pursuit of jobs to fund their movements. These individuals are motivated towards a migratory lifestyle by key economic and cultural factors. To do this, they utilize existing networks within the older Roma communities that are in the population's larger concentrations in places such as Romania, as well as other smaller Roma communities abroad (Pantea, 2012). Like the Roma who have been systematically stereotyped as beggars, thieves, and trouble-makers, early backpackers were regularly referenced as drifters and viewed as a cultural group that contributed little while simultaneously embodying cultural blight through crime and violence (Herakova, 2009; Pantea, 2012; Peel & Steen, 2007).

This type of stereotyping was enhanced and reinforced historically by traditional media such as that noted by Peel & Steen (2007) in their analysis of the Australian media's depiction of backpackers. It signified the traditional structure within which conventional media, which was controlled centrally, was an obstacle to the formation and crafting of a positive community identity. Herakova notes, "Although both public sphere and imagined communities are by definition potentially inclusive, they are literacy based, which makes participation in both dependant on social status, education, and access to a common communicative system" (Herakova, 2009, pp 288). In the case of the backpacker community this common communicative system has been largely expanded

upon by the advent and adoption of hostel networks, the internet, and more recently Facebook. The Roma highlight an example of where the lack of these technologies combined with existing stereotypes dating back as far as the fifteenth century, depicted the nomadically oriented Roma as morally inferior and untrustworthy (Gheorghe & Acton, 2001; Petrova, 2003). This mirrors the challenges backpackers have faced in re-defining backpacker travel as a positive educational and skill enhancing tool. A challenge which includes the transition from unorganized media-poor hostel based conversation, to better organized media-rich technologically enabled global discourse.

Disruptive technologies such as Facebook and web blogs allow highly mobile and transient populations to form and define more cohesive identities despite wide variation in their geography or aspects of their individual profile. Herakova notes that this type of communication is essential as, “a sense of solidarity and shared identity, is formed through communication among individuals and among groups” (2009, pp 290). Later she elaborates that as a result of these new social technologies, “Roma around the world now have their own publications, web sites, organizations, and events - these are all sites of Romani discourse” (Herakova, 2009, pp 295).

By evaluating research into the role of media in shaping Roma identity we can better explore the power of digital media and social networking sites such as Facebook on the crafting and evolution of the backpacker identity. This helps us better understand how that identity has become a global phenomenon, despite being comprised of an extremely diverse and widespread community. As Anderson noted when exploring national identity, “Members of even the smallest nation [community] will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (2006, pp 6). Yet, through communication technologies that allow for a similar worldview and shared knowledge, it is possible to construct an identity that leverages commonalities. When combined with shifts in mobilities brought about by new technology both on and off-line, it is possible to create vibrant community identities that are truly global in nature (Ateljevic & Hannam, 2008, pp 256; Anderson, 2006; Herakova, 2009; Mascheroni, 2007; Kellerman, 2006).

Through this lens we can better understand how backpacker culture evolved historically, and will continue to adjust and morph as Facebook and like-kind resources re-define what is, and is not possible within the backpacker community. It further underscores the invaluable role Facebook plays in shaping backpacker's perceptions of their own community and their ability to engage, evaluate, and explore each other's role within individual's greater social profile.

## Exploring Backpacker Demographics

To properly contextualize the hostel and backpacker community it is important to establish a rough profile for the typical backpacker. Given that the backpacker community is global in nature and truly multi-national, this is a challenge that has partially stifled or at the very least limited the generalizability of backpacker research over the last three decades. Equally, however, it is one of the things that makes the backpacker community such a fascinating area of study, and is simultaneously the reason that any insights that can be drawn are so powerful, valuable, and far reaching.

### Age

The backpacker community is extremely varied. Outliers range from young individuals in their middle-late teens to older travelers. One of the oldest, Keith Wright, recently grabbed international headlines for setting out on a solo backpacking trip through Europe at the age of 95 (Attwooll, 2012).

Outliers can also include entire families. While these families vary quite a bit from your traditional backpacker, they can still be found in hostels and engaged in aspects of the backpacker lifestyle and identity. At the age of ten I was one such case. My parents made the decision to home school my younger brother and I, while taking the family on an 11-month backpacking adventure through Europe. We lived in budget accommodations, campsites, and the occasional hostel while making our way through Western Europe. In July and August of 2012 we took another family backpacking trip. This time we represented a different cross sample of the backpacker population. At the age of 25 and 27, my brother and I fell within the more conventional backpacker framework, while our parents at the age of 61 and 73 fell well outside it. Over the course of this trip we stayed in five different hostels, utilizing four, six, and eight-bed dorms.

Despite these outliers, however, the backpacker community is comprised predominantly of individuals between the ages of 18 and 35. Loker-Murphy's research from 1997 found that a full 90% of hostel-going backpackers were under the age of 30, with an average age of 25 (1997, pp 72). Similarly, Sorenson found that a majority of backpackers fell between the ages of 18 and 33 (2003). More recent research has observed that 77% of backpacker respondents were below the age of 32 (Berger & Paris, 2013) while another study found 65.5% of respondents to be 30 years old or younger (Paris, 2009). These findings align with other studies of the backpacker community. However, due to the varied nature of the research, other groups have opted for an average age bracket that went as high as 40 (Pearce et al., 2009). Another recent survey performed by one of the leaders in hostel booking found that 74.2% of 18,182 respondents surveyed fell between the ages of 17 and 35 (Prendergast, professional correspondence, 2013).



This centralization predominantly in the 20s and early 30s is logical when considered against previously discussed backpacker traits. Many backpackers are unmarried, have limited but still disposable income, relatively few geographically centralized commitments, and are at a point in their lives that revolves around discovery. They are also more likely to have life-schedules that provide long windows of time off work, between jobs, or during breaks in academic programs. The somewhat significant variance between Loker-Murphy's findings and recent data might be explained by the aging of the backpacker population. The individual who was 25 at the time of Loker-Murphy's research would be in their mid-late 30s at the time of Pearce et al., Berger and Paris' surveys.

### **Gender**

One of the most surprising realizations to come out of backpacker research has been the backpacker community's gender distribution. As an active travel blogger specializing on solo travel within the 20-30 something traveler population, one of the dominant concerns I hear stems from the added risks female travelers face. Many female travelers are uncertain about, or refrain from, traveling solo out of fear for their safety. These are valid, if potentially overstated concerns, given the increased risk of rape when compared to male travelers. Risks which predominantly stem from women's smaller average physical size, and the widely varied social status and rights women have from country-to-country. Movies like the horror-rape film *Hostel* (2006) or the abduction film *Taken* (2009) only serve to re-affirm these stereotypes.

It is with some surprise that researchers have found that the modern backpacker is, more often than not, female. Berger and Paris found that 66% of respondents were female while 34% were male (2013). This was slightly more pronounced than Paris' findings that reflected a 57% female 43% male split (Paris, 2010). Both studies noted that their findings were in line with a majority of existing backpacker research that utilizes random or self-reported data collection. Hostelbookers, a leading hostel booking website, found that 40.67% of respondents were male while 59.33% were female. As the site is almost exclusively focused on booking hostels, and the survey was administered to their client base, this should be representative of the backpacker population (Prendergast, professional correspondence, 2013). Other studies, however, have reported a less extreme gender distribution. These studies typically utilize in-person interviews and sampling. One such is Ryan and Mohsin's analysis of backpackers in Australia, which found that 49.1% of backpackers sampled were male and 50.9% were female (2001). Another, which focuses on student travel is by Shoham et al. who studied different travel behaviors among students. They reported a 49.8% to 50.2% split between males and females (2004).

It is unclear if this difference in respondent demographics is the result of the sampling process or not. An explanation may be that the in-person selection process leads researchers to prioritize the selection of a near-equal distribution. While not representative of the population as a whole, in the case of research such as that done by Shoam et al., this would allow for gender-based analysis of usage behavior which was in line with the primary focus of the study (2004). Alternately, it is possible that online respondents participating in studies such as this research project, Paris', and others, tend to attract a disproportionately high number of female respondents. The third potential explanation stems from the nationalities that make up the majority of the population as the gender distribution from country-to-country varies significantly based on social norms. These social norms mean that women enjoy very different rights and social expectations from nation-to-nation and as a result tend to travel at widely different rates. The reality is likely a combination of all three.

For further insight, a look at existing information on students between the ages of 20 and 30 who participate in study abroad and compose a large portion of the backpacker population, appears to support a significant gender difference. A comprehensive review of literature by Salisbury et al., found that women in the United States study abroad nearly twice as often as men do (2010, pp 616-17). As an example of this, George Washington University reported that over the last decade less than 35% of their study abroad students were male (Peligri, 2012). Outside of the United States the UNESCO Global Education Digest 2010 notes that with the exception of the Arab States, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia 50% or more of study abroad participants are female. The highest average female study abroad rate is in Central and Eastern Europe where 65% of study abroad students are female. Individual country data further re-affirms this trend with a full 71% of Romanian, 68% of Polish and 58% of Irish study abroad students being reported as female (2010, pp 72-74). These data suggest that given the focus of this paper and research, which is centered predominantly in Europe and native English-speaking countries, that the high number of female respondents does represent the sample population. As previously cautioned, however, this also means that other regions and points of origin for parts of the backpacker community will likely be under-represented.

### **Education**

Recreational travel and international travel for personal edification, including study abroad, has historically been an area dominated by individuals from more affluent backgrounds. This has been in large part due to the cost and logistics that typically stem from taking large amounts of time off to travel over periods where the generation of income is difficult, if not outright impossible (O'Reilly, 2006; Salisbury et al., 2010; Towner, 1985). In a previous section, this paper explored the role of education as a component of backpacker motivations. It is worth adding that in addition to

traveling for personal and professional educational development, a third category has existed historically for spiritual and religious travel education. These individuals often make religious pilgrimages specifically designed to improve their religious or spiritual connection and awareness (Towner, 1985).

How well-educated are backpackers in general? Are they individuals in their late teens on an explorative pre-degree gap year (O'Reilly, 2006), students on study abroad, or young business professionals in their mid-late 20s and early 30s who have completed a higher education program? Has the average backpacker even gone to college?

The data discussed in the age section indicates that backpackers may be slightly older than initially thought – which is to say there are fewer teens and more individuals in their 20s and 30s. The closer correlation between backpacker culture and study abroad would also support this, as participation within a study abroad program typically requires the student complete at least one year of a Bachelors degree (Salisbury et al., 2010). The exception to which would be international full degree programs.

A recent analysis of the backpacker community by Berger and Paris found that 84% of respondents had completed their University degree while 13% either had an Associate's degree or reported that they had completed some college (2013). This aligns closely with previous findings by Paris, who found that 88% of backpackers had completed a Bachelors-level degree and that a large portion had gone on to complete additional advanced degrees (2009). Similarly, Loker-Murphy found backpackers to be highly educated with an average 15 years of schooling. More specifically, she found that 41.9% of respondents had completed some or all of their Bachelors while an additional 32% of respondents had engaged in graduate level studies (2010). This would mean that roughly 74% of the backpackers she surveyed were highly-educated.

If these data are considered within the context of higher education completion rates across leading nations by educational achievement, it becomes extremely clear just how highly-educated backpackers are when compared to their domestic peers. Within the United States 32.8% of individuals have a Bachelors while 8.5% have an Associate's degree. This places the US 11th out of 36 top-ranked countries. Of the 36 countries only four had more than 50% of students attaining an Associate's degree or higher. 19 of the 36 countries recorded fewer than 40% of students attaining either a Bachelors or an Associate's degree (Hughes, 2012, pp 6-7).

Another compelling figure that helps contextualize the strong correlation between education and backpacker culture is the explosive growth which has been seen over the last two

decades in American study-abroad programs. The number of American undergraduates engaged in study abroad programs has more than doubled from 99,448 during the 1996-1997 school year to 273,996 during the 2010-2011 school year (Institute of International Education, 2008; Institute of International Education, 2012). This surge alone would mean the potential contribution of 174,548 international students from the US, many of whom would be interested in utilizing hostels and backpacker-style travel as part of their study-abroad experience. Meanwhile, total international student enrollment in US universities for the 2011/2012 school year was 764,485 students (Institute of International Education, 2012).

### **Employment**

The modern backpacker appears to be older than one might first anticipate, better educated, and disproportionately female. Thus it is not entirely unsurprising that a relatively small subset of backpackers are unemployed. Given the cost involved in any form of international or long distance travel, this is not, perhaps, entirely surprising. Still, it is a challenging area to evaluate given how backpackers may view their career status while traveling. If they volunteer as part of WWOOFing stays they may be considered full-time, part-time, or simply self-employed. There are also those that work in hostels in exchange for free accommodation, or others who work migratory jobs in intense bursts to renew funds before returning to their travels. These groups in turn contrast with other backpackers who are full-time students on vacation, or business professionals taking an extended leave of absence. There are also those who work remotely, or are engaged in online careers that are completely geo-independent such as some graphic designers, programmers, and the rise of the modern travel blogger (Cooper et al., 2004; O'Reilly, 2006; Ryan & Mohsin, 2001).

In Paris' survey of modern backpackers he found that nearly 21% of respondents were students while just over 11% were unemployed. He also found that a full 67.7% of backpackers who responded considered themselves employed (2009). In a follow up study by Paris and Teye they found that 34.9% of respondents were students, 64.6% were employed and 11.8% were unemployed (2010; Paris, 2010). This profile is supported by a more recent survey by Berger and Paris who noted that 71% of respondents stated that they were employed while the remaining 29% were individuals who were either full-time students, not working, or unemployed. Within these figures 36% of the backpackers surveyed reported being students while 16% stated that they were unemployed. Another 48% of backpackers noted that they were not students and were employed. The authors noted that it was difficult to explore the data further because of challenges differentiating students who were working part-time (2013).

Due to the relatively small sample sizes utilized and the more qualitatively-oriented approach relied upon by many backpacker researchers, the collection of more generic demographic data has been neglected, or remained private. Thus, in-depth demographic data has not been seen as a core aspect for inclusion in research during the reporting of results by way of publication.

The existing data suggests that the modern backpacker is professionally competent, traveling in a fashion that is budget-oriented, but not driven solely by bottom line pricing and price evasion. The majority of these individuals are not, as some early depictions have encouraged popular culture to believe, the homeless unemployed who have rejected, while simultaneously being rejected by, mainstream culture. The modern backpacker brings with them a reasonable tourist budget of which a higher percentage is spent in-country than many other types of tourists. As such, they tend to have an increased impact on local markets and invest in local properties which keeps their tourist dollars more closely targeted to the local community (Cooper et al., 2004; Paris and Teye, 2010). Similarly, when backpackers do include short-term work as part of their travel approach they have been shown to serve as, "... a seasonal labor force which the local employment market is unable to fully complete" (Ryan & Mohsin, 2001). This highlights their value to local communities and attractiveness as a tourist demographic.

The following section will build upon this profile of today's backpackers by delving into and defining the modern hostel. This is done to help understand the landscape within which the modern backpacker is being explored and the face-to-face environment where Facebook is believed to be having a significant impact.

## **The History of Hostels and Why They Matter**

The modern backpacker hostel has already been partially introduced in this paper, however, it is essential to form a working definition. This is somewhat challenging due to the rapid changes which are occurring within the hostel industry and the recent trend towards industry centralization and maturation. In recent years larger players within the hospitality and financial sectors have suddenly taken note of the hostel industry and started to invest in it.

### **Hostel Industry Growth**

The hostel industry is experiencing explosive growth. An example is the 2007 investment by Patron Capital, a private equity group, in Generator Hostel in London. The group has since added seven locations and announced a 200 million British pound investment with the goal of growing the chain from 3,900 beds to 10,000 by 2015. At current levels, Generator Hostels are reporting more than 30,000 customers per month (Business Wire, 2012; Patron Capital Partners, 2013).

This interest is driven by big data and big numbers. WRI reports that the Hostelworld brand has an inventory of more than 35,000 properties across 180 countries. The company also notes that Hostelworld has a database of more than three million customer reviews (Web Reservations International, 2013). A significant number when one considers that the site only allows reviews posted by people who have stayed at the property, and was launched in 1999.

To properly understand the origins of this growth and its implications for Facebook's role in shaping backpacking behavior within a hostel context the following section provides a brief history of the hostel movement and a working definition.

### **The Evolution of the Modern Hostel**

Hostels have existed in one variation or another for hundreds of years. Their early history and evolution is documented in some depth in Towner's pivotal analysis of the tourism industry and the origins of the Grand Tour (Towner, 1985). Towner (1985) along with Leiper (1979, pp 402) trace the evolution of the early travel industry and the role budget accommodation played in it. Among the changes that resulted were hostels, though the hostels at the time were drastically different than what we see today which emerged in the 1960s as part of the youth hostel movement tailored to young budget travelers (Cave et al., 2007; Germann Molz, 2008; Hostelworld, 2008). Several hundred years ago many were places of accommodation used by medical staff, the homeless, halfway houses, or work houses for traveling craftsmen (Adler, 1985; "Geselle," 2013; Hostelworld, 2008; Towner, 1985).

The hostel industry underwent another significant metamorphosis in the 1990s and 2000s resulting in drastic growth. A new generation of independent hostel spread and caught on quickly. These hostels embraced the budget-centric and social components of more traditional hostels (Cave et al., 2007; Nash et al., 2006; Riley, 1988; Uriely et al., 2002), but also drew heavily from standard hotel and university dorm offerings to create a hybrid system. These new hostels reduced or outright eliminated age restrictions, and traded lockout and curfew for 24/7 receptions or individual access systems that work at all hours of the day and night. This also meant that hostellers were no longer expected to do chores in exchange for their stay though the modern hosteller is still expected to do certain things: to make and strip their own bed, to prepare their own meals, clean up after themselves, and to do their own dishes.

The modern hostel has also begun to incorporate services and spaces that further encourage backpacker interaction, sense of community, and interaction. These include on-site bars and a wide range of amenities from paid laundry services, to lounge and movie rooms, free wifi, open access kitchens, basic trip planning services, pub crawls, free walking tours, communal dinners and more

options when choosing the size and composition of one's dorm room. While these hostels still often provide female-only dorm options, the majority of rooms are mixed gender. The size of a dorm room can range anywhere from a single private to up to 60+ beds and may have in-room or communal shared bathrooms split between several rooms (Hostelbookers.com, 2013; Hostelworld.com, 2013). I have seen hostel pricing range from 75 cents USD a night for an outdoor hammock in Guatemala to more than 80 dollars USD a night for private rooms in Europe.

This wealth of options and increased push towards added amenities and specialization has begun to create several different categories of hostel. This has led to what Cave et al., define as a divergence between the under 30 and over 50s budget traveler. They argue that,

“For the under 30s, design improvements should entail: developing the ‘fun’ element such as themed hostels, more liberal attitudes towards licensing of properties, sale and consumption of alcohol, even bars and discos, and increased provision of activities, trained activity leaders/personnel ...” while they suggest that, “... the over-50s group look for smaller rooms with en-suite facilities and shared facilities such as kitchens and dining/social areas that offer opportunities for both socializing as well as privacy” (2007, pp 217).

The increasing popularity of hostels among older individuals is compelling as it may suggest that moving forward, hostels will not be as completely dominated by young backpackers as they have been historically. It also suggests that the look, offering, and pricing structure of the modern hostel will continue to evolve and adapt as its audience grows. Data provided by Hostelworld in 2010 indicated that the number of older individuals using hostels was climbing, and that at the start of 2010 13% of Hostelworld's respondents were over the age of 45 (Hostelworld, 2010).

Based on these shifts and trends within the hostel industry, I find evidence for three general categories of hostels in the future. These are the traditional backpacker hostel, the party hostel, and the luxury hostel. With this in mind, it is possible to better relate to and understand why demographics, data, priorities and experiences may vary widely from hostel to hostel. Influences that may, in turn, impact respondent viewpoints and ideology in the survey section of this thesis.

This thesis uses the term hostel in an inclusive fashion to discuss all three styles as well as more traditional youth hostels. It does not, however, include the historical usage of hostels dating back to before the 1950s as facilities for pilgrims, medical staff, patients, halfway houses, or for the homeless.

I define Hostels as facilities which provide budget accommodation for short to mid-length stays, of which a large percentage of rooms are shared dormitory-style spaces. Hostels may

optionally provide some private rooms. In addition to shared sleeping and social spaces, hostels are marked by their high level of emphasis on socialization and interaction. To aid in this hostels should also provide facilities and services designed to encourage social interaction and engagement such as common spaces, wifi, and local tourist advice. Services such as wifi have become essential as the modern backpacker hostel has come to facilitate and represent the backpacker experience while helping organize and draw together an extremely diverse and mobile community. Hostels are a cornerstone of the backpacker community and are an essential location through which backpacking is consumed and performed. It is through the social interactions in hostels that backpackers exchange advice, share stories, and make increasingly more-long term relationships. A process which Facebook and other forms of digital media are increasingly becoming a central component of (Berger & Paris, 2013; O'Regan, 2008).

*In short, hostels are a socially oriented form of budget accommodation that utilize dormitory style accommodation while serving as congregating points for the backpacker community.*

## **Facebook's Globalization and Adoption Among Backpackers**

The staggering growth of Facebook, first within the United States, and then later across the globe, has left researchers scrambling to catch up. As a formative information-sharing tool it has, and continues to have, a powerful influence on many aspects of our day-to-day lives. This section will trace the evolution of Facebook, highlight Facebook as it exists today, report key statistics and briefly touch on a portion of the existing research into Facebook as a communicative and socially-influential tool. This will in turn will be used to explore Facebook's growing role within the backpacker community.

### **History and Growth**

Since the 1990s our cultural definition of community has been radically re-crafted and expanded. This has been driven by the widespread adoption of electronic media and the internet. Tools such as instant messaging, discussion boards, mobile phones, and our dependency on email (Mascheroni, 2007; Tufekci, 2008; Urry, 2000) have broken down geo-spatial boundaries and greatly expanded our ability to maintain community over large distances and long periods. While these shifts and changes in mobilities have been important across all walks of life, they have been particularly significant for the backpacker community, which has been able to build upon these technologies to better maintain and virtualize their in-person social networks. These, in turn, have created non-geographically limited spaces in which sociality can occur through a blended combination of, "face-to-face interaction and mediated communication, co-presence, and virtual proximity, corporeal travel and virtual mobilities" (Mascheroni, 2007, pp 527). These shifts have



brought with them changes in the way backpackers relate to information, manage their social identity, and view the strength of their relationships.

Facebook was founded in February 2004 (Facebook Inc., 2013). It was initially launched at American universities as a space exclusively for university students. However, by September 2005 the site had grown and responded to demands that it include high school students by opening the network to them (Facebook Inc., 2013). In September 2006 Facebook drastically changed its user model and opened the site up to everyone. This not only included those outside of the education community, it also included individuals outside of the United States and by January 2009 Facebook surpassed MySpace as the internet's largest social networking site (Facebook Inc., 2013). This paved the way for the site's widespread adoption by the international backpacker community.

In September 2011 Facebook radically re-designed the site, seeking to leverage the wealth of historical information it had from users. These data were previously difficult to access after they had initially been posted. The new design, called Timeline, gave users complete and easy chronological access to a user's profile as it existed on a specific date (Facebook Inc., 2013). This historical access led to numerous issues as data that users thought was lost, deleted or inaccessible suddenly became readily viewable.

I am able to draw upon my own personal experiences to illustrate this problem. I joined Facebook November 28, 2004. A quick look at my user ID suggests that Arizona State University, where I completed my Bachelors degree, was the 100<sup>th</sup> or 101<sup>st</sup> university added and that I was roughly the 7,470<sup>th</sup> student at the University to join Facebook. That corresponds to the fall semester of my sophomore year of university. By the time Timeline was introduced in 2011, my Facebook account spanned the last three years of my university experience, a three-month trip through Europe, and more than three years spent as a business professional in corporate America including six trips as a backpacker. All this information was suddenly, depending on my security settings, available for the world, employers, and my family to see. While this did not pose a problem for me, it caused significant headaches for many of the users who had joined the site when it was a closed network. The fun-filled photos they posted depicting the excesses of university life were now available to prospective employers.

Introduced in January of 2013 and gradually implemented across the site, Facebook Open Graph Search is a comprehensive natural language search algorithm. It draws upon the extensive information aggregated through the Timeline feature, a user's Likes, and other activities on the site to generate advanced search results. It also allows for previously impossible searches such as,

“Women from Sydney Australia named Jane studying at Copenhagen Business School” which filters by gender, city and country of origin, first name including variations, and current place of study (Facebook Inc., 2013). This makes finding and potentially adding acquaintances significantly easier. It also has major implications for privacy. From a backpacker perspective, this makes connecting with fellow travelers you have met while traveling much easier so long as you have several basic pieces of information. At the same time, however, it also makes staying anonymous even more challenging.

### **Latest Facebook Figures**

Facebook has continued to grow at a tremendous rate. The latest data available for Facebook paints a compelling picture of the site’s changing demographics. The company uses three key activity markers relevant for this paper. These are daily active users (DAUs), monthly active users (MAUs), and mobile MAUs. This usage data excludes activity and users on the photo-sharing site Instagram which the company purchased and partially incorporated in 2012 (Facebook Inc., 2013b).

Facebook reports that DAUs increased by 26% over the past year and that as of March 2013, the site supported 665 million daily users and 1.11 billion monthly users. Of Facebook’s 1.11 billion MAUs, 195 million were in the US and Canada, 269 million were in Europe, while there were 319 million MAUs in Asia which includes Australia and New Zealand. The remaining 327 million MAUs come from the rest of the world, which includes Africa, Latin America and the Middle East (Facebook Inc., 2013b, pp 21-22). These data suggest that while a relatively high percentage of the population in North America and Europe is active on Facebook, Asia, Africa and South America are still areas that are proportionally underrepresented. Though this is quickly changing it will also mean that these populations will be under represented in the survey discussed as part of this paper which will limit how the resulting data can be applied to these populations. It is also important to note that China, one of the world’s largest economies and populations restricts the use of Facebook, and has its own alternatives such as 51.com and RenRen. The same is the case in both North Korea and Iran (Facebook inc., 2013b, pp 38).

Given the mobile nature of the backpacker community, one of the most relevant and interesting disclosures in Facebook’s 2013 Q1 report is that, “Worldwide mobile MAUs increased 54% to 751 million as of March 31, 2013” And in particular that, “Approximately 189 million mobile MAUs accessed Facebook solely through mobile apps or our mobile website during the month ended March 31, 2013, increasing 20%” (Facebook Inc., 2013b, pp 22-23).

This suggests the increasingly widespread use of social networking software on mobile devices, which from a backpacker perspective further breaks down the barriers between online connectivity and face-to-face interactions. It is now easier than ever, and becoming increasingly

common practice, to be able to add a contact on the spot through mobile devices using cellular or wifi internet connections. A noteworthy departure from previous exchanges several years ago which still required individuals to have access to bulky and less well-connected devices such as laptops and desktops with internet connections in order to connect or research each other via Facebook. When considered in parallel to Facebook's new Open Graph Search functionality (Facebook Inc., 2013) it seems likely that we will continue to experience greater blurring of the boundaries between digital and face-to-face communication and interaction. In short, we are increasingly moving towards an environment where electronic communication is always present even in the case of backpackers who were previously partially defined by their reduced access to these technologies (Bowe, 2010; O'Regan, 2008; Steinfield et al., 2009).

### **Section Summary**

This section provided a review of existing relevant literature related to the definition of a backpacker, the history and nature of a hostel, and relevant history and background information about Facebook. This information serves as an essential foundation for the following section, which will explore the relationship between these three while seeking to understand their interaction through the framework of social capital and social identity theory. This conceptual framework will then be used to analyze and explore the survey results which will be explored in depth later in this paper relative to the paper's three initial research questions.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This section will explore the concept of intimacy predominantly through the lens of social capital and social presence theories. It will then delve further into the topic by focusing on existing identity and group formation research. This research will be explored as it relates to concepts of social capital, personal identity and how the combination of these factors influence backpackers behavior. This will provide a framework to analyze this study's three primary research questions as they delve into Facebook's positive and negative impact on the hostel environment and backpacker culture.

### **Social Capital Theory - How Reputation Shapes Backpacker Behavioral Values**

To define social capital theory, it is first important to clarify what it is not. Due to the extremely expansive nature of social capital, it can be easy to confuse aspects of it with other forms of capital research. These include theories tied to human capital (Becker, 1993; Paulsen, 2001), financial capital (Paulsen, 2001; Perna & Titus, 2005; Perna, 2006), and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Massey et al., 2003; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006). While all of these theories

have the potential to help understand who backpackers are and contextualize how social capital is shaped and perceived, they are not directly relevant to this paper's research questions.

Social capital theory specifically explores the role that social networks play in evaluating, selecting, rewarding and punishing individuals based upon their social profile, network and competency. In short, it proposes that based upon our network we have a certain amount of intangible capital which can be built upon, leveraged, or diminished at any time based on how we are perceived by, and interact with, our network. While initially developed for face-to-face interactions and in-person networks, the theory has been widely applied to better explain and understand the interplay between people's online and offline identities. This makes it ideal for exploring how social capital, through the lens of this paper's core research questions, can be enhanced or diminished by hostel-going backpackers through the use of Facebook to share, document, evaluate and maintain their social identity (Coleman, 1988a; Ellison et al., 2007; Johnston et al., 2013; Massey et al., 2003; Perna and Titus, 2005; Putnam, 2000; Toomey et al., 1998).

### **Introducing the Concept and Early Origins of the Theory**

A historical look at social capital produces a theory that is based in core intellectual principles that have been around as long as sociological and communicative discourse has existed. In his analysis of social capital's origins and evolution, Portes notes components of the theory's basic concepts in the works of history's great orators, political analysts, and social researchers. However, he notes that it was not until the late 1900s that researchers began to form more concrete descriptions for social capital and a more cohesive theory under the social capital title (1998). An analysis supported by the literature (Ellison et al., 2007; Lin, 1999, pp 29-31).

Early social capital theory evolved from the work of three primary researchers: Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1988a, 1988b, 1990, 1993), and Putnam (1993, 1995). In his analysis, Portes summarizes cornerstones of Bourdieu and Coleman's research into social capital stating that,

"Both Bourdieu and Coleman emphasize the intangible character of social capital relative to other forms. Whereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships. To possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it is those others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage" (1998, pp 7).

While Putnam advocated social capital as something with, "features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1993, pp 35-36). He goes on to argue that communities that collectively share a large

amount of social capital will be more effective. Maximizing these intangible relationships through a variety of mediums and networks is fundamental to building social capital and this in turn enhances the value and richness of backpacker experiences. It is also the reason that Facebook and hostels, two resource that facilitate the building and maintenance of relationships are so pivotal to shaping backpacker's social capital.

Portes distilled these down to, "three basic functions of social capital, applicable in a variety of contexts: (a) as a source of social control; (b) as a source of family support; and (c) as a source of benefits through extrafamilial networks" (1998, pp 9). He suggests that there are positive and negative consequences of involvement in networks and social structures which include restricted access to opportunities, restrictions on individual freedom, excessive claims on group members, and downward leveling norms. Social capital accrues through value introjections, bounded solidarity, reciprocity exchanges, and enforceable trust (Portes, 1998, pp 8). Even though much of the theory Portes analyzed was directed at political networks or social governance, there are elements like bonding and reciprocity that apply to the relationship between individual backpacker networks, intimacy, and the medium of Facebook. While Portes' three categories for social capital are useful, they are slightly limited by their over reliance on the role of family within a network. This has driven later researches to expand and re-tool the categories to better encapsulate more diverse communities and large-scale networks.

Despite the research synthesized by Bourdieu and extensive writing on social capital provided by Coleman and Putnam in an effort to hone and evolve the theory's definition, it is still a general concept that has been used on a prolific level across a wide variety of areas of study (Adler & Kwon, 2002). The theory has been utilized to better understand most aspects of our lives and many researchers criticize social capital theory precisely because it is so widely applied. In these instances researchers have suggested the need for more in-depth analysis and more comprehensive theories to better explain what is actually occurring within large networks (Evergeti & Zontini, 2006; Ryan et al., 2008; White & Ryan, 2008). The following section will take into consideration suggestions posted by Lin et al., which caution the importance of increased specificity (2001). While the concept of social capital can be general and miss the nuances that shape and are responsible for decision-making within more specific aspects of social networks, this paper is focused on applying them to a specific community (backpackers) within a well-defined context (hostels) and technology (Facebook).

### **Applying Social Capital Theory to Computer Mediated Interactions**

The application of Social Capital Theory in today's world requires research that includes the significant impacts of the internet and social networking platforms. With roughly one seventh of the

world's population on Facebook (Facebook, Inc., 2013) the influence of social networking sites is pervasive across many aspects of our lives. This transition from non-influencer to component of our day-to-day lives has inserted web 2.0 and social networking into a large percentage of the world's social experience (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison et al., 2007) and made it of central import to understanding social behavior within modern backpacker culture. When considered within the context of social networking based in, and centered upon, the forging of our relationships, it becomes clear that these networks must be better understood (Toomey et al., 1998). The theoretical framework offered by Ellison et al., (2007), has re-framed the three core components of social capital as bonding, bridging, and maintained forms of social capital.

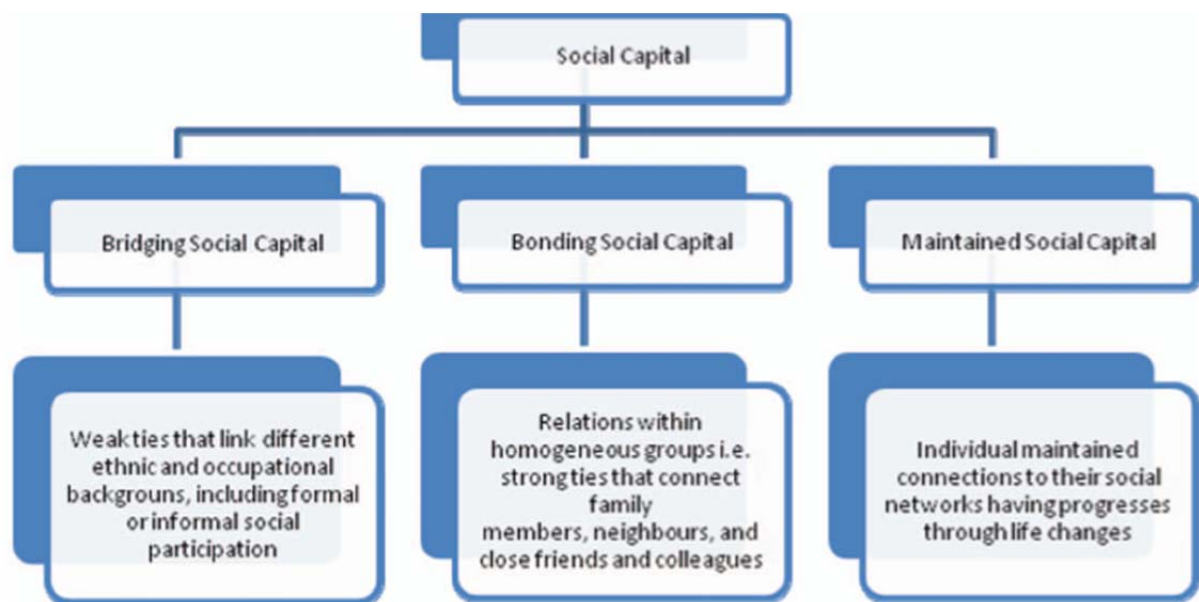


Figure 1 (Johnston et al., 2013, 26)

Figure 1 by Johnston et al., (2013) provides an overview of this updated framework. Johnston et al., note that the definition provided is constructed predominantly from recent social capital research by Fukuyama (2001), Adler and Kwon (2002), Islam et al., (2006) and Putnam (2000).

In his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Putnam goes into great depth to frame the fundamental differences and significance of the bridging and bonding concepts within social capital. Putnam describes bridging social capital as inclusive in nature, a sociological lubricant, and a resource for advancement which can, “generate broader identities and reciprocity” (2000, pp 23). Bonding social capital, on the other hand, is described as exclusive in nature, a sociological superglue, tool for maintaining relationships, and behavior that helps, “...bolster our narrower selves” (Putnam, 2000, pp 23). Further, Putnam notes that, “Bonding social

capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity ... Bridging networks, by contrast, are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion" (2000, pp 22).

When applying these concepts to the backpacker community the need for a blended approach quickly becomes apparent. Some aspects of the backpacker community tend to meet Putnam's criteria for more exclusive groups. As an illustration he notes exclusive country clubs which he states create an identity that often judgmentally differentiates itself from non-members. The same can be said of backpackers who see themselves as a group of travelers who *connect* with local communities they visit versus more traditional groups of mainstream tourists who are seen as merely *observing* them (Uriely et al., 2002, pp 523). Other aspects serve as illustrations of bridging social capital. The backpacker community is, by its inherent nature as an incredibly diverse population, the embodiment of bridging social capital similar. This duality is viewed as a central aspect of social capital theory. Putnam notes,

"In short, bonding and bridging are not 'either-or' categories into which social networks can be neatly divided, but 'more or less' dimensions along which we can compare different forms of social capital ... Many groups simultaneously bond along some social dimensions and bridge across others" (2000, pp 23).

Putnam notes that chat groups are an example of a situation where this might occur. These are particularly relevant in light of this thesis' analysis of Facebook, a similar form of technology, which also allows both groups and individuals to bridge obstacles such as geography, and demographics. At the same time these technologies allow a platform that brings together individuals with shared interests such as hostels, backpacking, and international budget travel (2000).

There is, however, also a secondary risk which must be considered which is the potential, particularly in the case of bonding social capital, to simultaneously result in strong and at times antagonistic out-group sentiments. This happens as the bonded group begins to view outsiders as threats or overly exotic (Putnam, 2000). One place where we might begin to see this register is between various types of backpackers utilizing hostels. As the hostel demographic continues to expand and change, with older individuals and families becoming more prevalent, and more styles of hostels being introduced such as the party and luxury hostels discussed earlier, we may see backpacker resentment or dislike spike towards these secondary groups causing rifts within the community and member interactions.

Within this framework a third dimension is provided: that of maintained social capital. Maintained social capital is a component of social capital designed specifically for use when

analyzing Facebook networks. It was originally introduced by Ellison et al., (2007) and later elaborated on by (Johnston et al., 2013) as part of an analysis of the role Facebook friends play among students who have left behind their high school social network, with its accrued social capital, for college and the new social network that comes with it. In their original paper on the theory the authors note,

“Our three measures of social capital—bridging, bonding, and maintained social capital—were created by adapting existing scales, with wording changed to reflect the context of the study, and creating new items designed to capture Internet-specific social capital (Quan-Haase and Wellman, 2004)” (Ellison et al., 2007, pp 10).

Maintained social capital is a measure that allows researchers to explore an individual’s ability to access, and/or be influenced by, a community that they are no longer as directly engaged in. Thus Ellison et al., explain that maintained social capital, “permits us to explore whether online network tools enable individuals to keep in touch with a social network after physically disconnecting from it” (Ellison et al., 2007, pp 4). This is of particular relevance to how Facebook may enable backpackers to continue relationships and retain their freshly acquired social capital after they have completed their in-person hostel visits and returned home.

This model suggests that individuals who are active in their online activities will use tools such as Facebook and email for social maintenance behaviors, not as a way of replacing in-person interactions as was initially feared. It also offers strong correlation between active maintenance of social capital and an ongoing level of interaction and willingness by those weaker connections to engage and act on the individual’s behest. In parallel this continued interaction helps to offset sentiments of loss or isolation that would otherwise occur with the termination of older relationships (Ellison et al., 2007; Johnston et al., 2013; Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2004; Wellman et al., 2001). Illustrations of this between backpackers might include offering travel advice, making introductions between peers, hosting an individual during future visits, or otherwise engaging with an individual socially, romantically or professionally on a re-occurring basis.

While initial analysis explored how this maintained capital might impact groups that re-located from, and left behind, one strong community to migrate to a new strong community, it can be applied to backpacker culture in a slightly different way. In the case of the backpacker community a complex mixture is occurring. While direct interactions can be classified and explored more directly through bridging (weak) and bonding (strong) social capital/ties Granovetter (1973, 1982), the transition from weak to stronger ties through the use of Facebook can be better understood by way



of maintained social capital. As such it is possible to envision what are initially extremely weak ties formed in or at a hostel, which are then maintained through Facebook and other social networking sites. Over time, this maintained social capital allows increased socialization, rapport, and paves the way for potential future in-person interactions. This may mark the transition of what were initially weak ties predominantly consisting of bridging social capital into stronger ties, moving towards the bonding category of social capital. Examples of this are explored in greater depth in the results section of this paper.

This thesis stresses the significance of the three dimensions of social capital theory laid out by Ellison et al., (2007). However, it is important to bear in mind that the theory, which is to say the concept of social capital, on a more general and descriptive level, will be used throughout this paper. In this way social capital will provide a mechanism to analyze and explain shifts, occurrences, and motivations while unlocking Facebook's role in changing user behavior within the backpacker and hostel communities.

There are also two differing schools of thought as to the level at which social capital theory is applied. While Putnam (2000), as a political sociologist, predominantly seeks to apply social capital theory at a macro network or social systems level the theory can also be applied at a more individual level (Ellison et al., 2007; Johnston et al., 2013). This is similar in fashion to how Putnam explains that bonding and bridging behaviors can simultaneously occur. Thus this research is able to explore not only the impact of social capital on the backpacker and Facebook community, it is able to explore the significance of social capital as a way of evaluating an individual's personal motivations and decision-making within larger trends.

While this paper primarily focuses on the role social capital plays in explaining and understanding how Facebook is shaping backpacker culture, there are a number of secondary theoretical concepts which shape the final framework being used to evaluate this data.

### **Social Facilitation - How Group Dynamics Shape Behavior**

The concept of social facilitation provides a useful method for framing how attempts to realize, build, or process the fear of losing social capital may shape individual's behaviors. This is particularly the case in relation to Facebook and the backpacker community where a backpacker's Facebook network serves in the role of facilitator and a source for external behavioral modification.

The term social facilitation which was coined by Allport in 1924 incorporates the concepts previously explored by Triplett (1898) and Moede (1920) while offering the following definition:

Allport suggests that social facilitation is, “an increase of response merely from the sight or sound of others making the same movements” (1924, pp 262).

Nearly a century of research has provided a wealth of different theories tied to this definition and expanding upon these concepts, however, the research has painted a somewhat different picture than Allport initially envisioned. The literature suggests that while an increase in response often occurs, the nature of that response varies between positive and negative performance. This has led to modern definitions such as that provided by Bordens & Horowitz, “The performance-enhancing effect of an audience on your behavior is known as social facilitation. If, however, you are performing a non-dominant skill, one that is not very well learned, then the presence of an audience detracts from your performance. This effect is known as social inhibition” (2008, pp 286).

Newer definitions suggest that perceived presence, not specific movement, plays a fundamental role in changing behaviors (Strauss, 2002). In light of this, I will operate using a basic definition for social facilitation theory that merely suggests that when in the presence of others (regardless of the medium) an individual’s behavior will change. In short, that the presence of another, or set of others facilitates a social shift in behavior.

In the context of this paper and social capital, this can be used to better conceptualize why behavioral modification is a fundamental part of backpacker culture, as individuals are exposed to an increasingly larger social population and forced to manage their social capital within that growing context. The reductions in anonymity (both negative and positive) as well as opportunities to posture and present information that have resulted from Facebook's mass-adoption create an exciting opportunity to better understand the influence of Facebook's social role shaping backpacker behavior and the hostel environment. This can be used on a more specific level to better understand how different types of social facilitators, such as friends, family, employers, romantic relations, and others can have varied impacts on different aspects of a backpackers behavioral process and how they manage their social capital.

### **The Social Self - How We Manage Our Relationships and Seek New Social Capital**

Another component of understanding and relating to how the maintenance of social capital can shape backpackers behavior is through Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical concept of a social self, and more particularly, his idea of front and back stage components in an individual’s identity. This theory mirrors the basic concept of social facilitation discussed in the previous section – that our behavior is changed by those around us – and expands upon it by suggesting that there is a key break between socially open and socially closed behaviors. Thus, Goffman (1959) argued that we

want to show and perform different *personas* to different parts of our social community. These are our outward facing or public faces which we present to people on the front stage and our private or back stage faces which are closer to our more authentic, private self. In this back stage persona we are less concerned about how we are perceived, as it is typically only shared with individuals who we trust and are able to be more relaxed with. This includes behaviors and character attributes that may not be as readily accepted, or sufficiently polished, for public exposure. Thus the backstage is also a place of perceived privacy where more experimentation and polishing can occur.

This split between different aspects of ourselves and the way we portray who we are is one area where Facebook has the potential to be a significant influence and cause behavioral modification among backpackers. On the one hand Facebook allows us to put together and to craft a very carefully honed version of ourselves which conveys our most positive attributes. Within the travel space, this is embodied by carefully selecting an adventurous profile photo that highlights positive elements of how a backpacker wants to be perceived (Zhao et al., 2008).

At the same time, however, Facebook also offers the potential for leakage between front and back stage or, two parallel but different front stage identities. These leakages can occur in a variety of different ways and will be explored further through the survey data. These include through technological changes like the introduction of Facebook's Timeline feature as discussed earlier in this paper (Facebook Inc., 2013) or the collision of different social groups such as an individual's conservative parents, professional boss, and liberal party friends. Each of which will have a very different take on specific photos, or event participation and how it reflects on their perception of the individual's identity.

These types of collisions and a desire to avoid or at least facilitate how they occur can be understood through Goffman's concept of front region control. He states, "Front region control is one measure of audience segregation. Incapacity to maintain this control leaves the performer in a position of not knowing what character he will have to project from one moment to the next, making it difficult for him to effect a dramaturgical success in any one of them" (Goffman, 1959 pp 83).

An example of this might be explored through the lens of traditional nerd/socialite social stereotypes. While an academic individual might seek to present their ultra nerdy identity to academic peers and some professional networks, they could simultaneously be a similarly competent socialite. Expectations for behavior depending on which persona and group the

individual is engaged in can serve as dangerous threats to their social capital and the credibility of each front-stage persona.

These network management techniques are, however, somewhat irrelevant in the context of Facebook's ability to change behavior within the social, romantic/sexual and professional social capital of backpackers if behavioral change based in an online communication tool (Facebook) cannot enact in-person, face-to-face changes that evolve the individual's core identity. This is something which the Proteus Effect helps us better understand.

### **The Proteus Effect - Exploring How Virtual Personas Re-Shape Our Real World Identity**

To better understand how Facebook may be reshaping backpacker behavior, it is important to briefly touch upon existing research exploring how significant an impact our virtual front and back stage identities have on our non-virtual selves and related social capital. This identity research provides powerful evidence that not only do our in-person personas and interactions shape our virtual ones, but the same occurs in reverse. Thus, evidence is shown that virtual and in-person social capital are inter-connected and cross over interchangeably or in short; that Facebook and its related ability to change individual's social capital should be able to influence backpacker's behavior in face-to-face environments.

To do this I draw upon the Proteus Effect, a theory proposed by Yee and Bailenson (2007) as an adaptation of Postmes, Spears & Lea's Social Identity Model of De-Individuation Effects or SIDE theory which can be used to analyze social boundaries and the formation of group norms in computer-mediated communication (1998, 2000). The Proteus Effect differentiates itself from SIDE theory in part because unlike SIDE which focuses on group behaviors and norms, the Proteus Effect looks at the lasting effect of behavior changes, including periods where the individual is no longer active within a group. This applies to a backpacker who continues to travel who is no longer physically co-present with peers or travelers met on the road.

The Proteus Effect posits that this is the case because of shifts in internalized forms of self-perception as an extension of Bem's self-perception theory (1972). Bem proposed that,

"Individuals come to 'know' their own attitudes, emotions and other internal states partially by inferring them from observations of their own overt behavior and/or the circumstances in which this behavior occurs. Thus, to the extent that internal cues are weak, ambiguous, or un-interpretable, the individual is functionally in the same position as an outside observer, an observer who must necessarily rely upon those same external cues to infer the individual's inner states" (Bem, 1972, pp 2).

The Proteus Effect expands upon the idea that internalization occurs when the subjects evaluate themselves from a third-person perspective. For backpackers this likely occurs while constructing their Facebook page and identity over time through the analysis and selection of interests, photos, and videos and even custom friends lists. The Proteus Effect also expands upon individual identity as it may relate to expected vs. socially-enforced behavior and instances where these can be complimentary or alternately divergent (Yee & Bailenson, 2007). This offers invaluable insight into how Facebook profiles, a digital avatar, can have a very significant real world behavioral impact and change a user's core identity.

Previous social-perception theory research highlighted the potential for changes in perception to translate into behavioral change. Yee et al., note the following three face-to-face research projects as examples. The first was Valins' (1966) study on attraction tied to heart rate, level of arousal and photography. The second was Johnson and Downing's (1979) study which evaluated people's willingness to administer electric shock depending on the authority of the order-giver. The third was Frank and Gilovich's (1988) study which analyzed the role of uniforms and the related level of aggression (2009, 290-291). Each of these illustrated the power of perceived identity to re-shape actual behavior. More recently researchers have sought to re-produce these studies in an online context. Findings by Morela et al. (2006), Pena et al. (2009), and Yee et al. (2011) have all shown significant evidence that these behaviors are not limited to face-to-face interactions, and cross over to online identity. This supports that perceived opportunities and threats to backpacker's social capital through Facebook, a digital platform, will translate into non-digital behavioral modification and vice versa.

Other research has highlighted the limitations of early research into computer-mediated communication formats such as Kiesler et al. (1985), which found computer-based interactions to be significantly less effective than face-to-face interactions. As media has become increasingly instantaneous, rich, and multi-layered its effectiveness has increased. The research suggests that the level of immersion shapes an individual's feelings of presence and relevance (Loomis, 1992; Lombard & Ditton, 1997; Persky & Blascovich, 2008). As a result, depending on how an individual seeks to communicate, we will see varied levels of communication effectiveness, involvement, and engagement.

This paper looks at Facebook which is an extremely rich and multi-layered resource and its ability to modify backpacker behavior through changes in individual's front stage management behaviors. Built into Facebook is the capability for real time, semi-real time, and delayed interactions. All are available simultaneously. These include text-based media, as well as pre-

recorded and live audio and video. Thus there is a growing body of evidence to support the idea that due to Facebook's rich media bandwidth, it can serve as a highly influential social resource capable of building, shaping, and in some cases diminishing social capital. This section provides important evidence that these changes are not just limited to backpackers online identities, but will be integrated into their blended personality and core behavior in turn causing changes in the individual's front and back stage identities. The following section will illustrate how these concepts can be applied to backpacker culture more directly to evaluate behavior change, perceived value, and decision making.

### **Applications to Social, Romantic/Sexual and Professional Social Capital**

The survey executed as part of this thesis seeks to better understand three key aspects of backpacker culture. These three aspects look at the role of Facebook in modifying backpackers and the hostel space from a social, romantic, and professional perspective based on perceived threats, or benefits to an individual's social capital. For the sake of the paper these have been referenced using the blanket term intimacy.

However, it is necessary to specify that intimacy is being used in the widest possible sense as a way to convey people's maintenance of their relationships. While one of the three categories provided includes romantic and sexual relationships, both of which are more closely associated with the term intimacy, it also includes social intimacy such as that between friends, family, and fellow travelers. It also includes intimacy within the context of professional relationships. These include things such as level of information shared and/or made available during job applications, in professional interactions and through the concept of professional social capital. Thus, through this type of intimacy, this paper explores how Facebook enables and hinders relational development and maintenance among backpackers and the role that awareness plays on backpacker behavior within the hostel context.

This section will draw upon the existing research outlined in the previous sections and seek to briefly outline how it combines with the theoretical framework provided relative to the three levels of intimacy (social, relational/sexual, professional) to prepare for an in-depth analysis of the survey data collected.

### **Facebook's Impact on Social Capital Within Peer Groups**

Modern backpacker culture is more social than at any point in its history. The advent and widespread availability of Facebook, e-mail, instant messaging, voice/video chat, international text messages, and the ease of movement is unparalleled (Mascheroni, 2007; Tufekci, 2008; Urry, 2000). However, as one works their way back in time, these technologies become less common and more

expensive before mostly vanishing all together. As a truly global community, backpackers have seen the environment they socialize within change significantly. With these changes has come shifts in the amount of time and energy needed to maintain the new opportunities and threats to their social capital which stem from increased interconnectivity.

Imagine an interaction between backpackers in a hostel two and a half decades ago - between two male backpackers, one from rural Arizona in the United States, the other from St. Petersburg in Russia. The backpackers share a dorm room and quickly strike up a friendship. Over the following three days they are collectively in the same city. They eat together, drink together, and explore the city. They form a friendship and sense of camaraderie but both realize that logistics make that friendship fleeting. At the end of the three days they exchange mail addresses and local phone numbers before continuing their travels. Without a significant amount of effort to maintain communication by way of traditional mail, the two would quickly lose touch. Even if they were diligent in exchanging letters, those letters would be few and far between. Issues such as national geo-politics would also play a direct role in hindering interaction.

Had the interaction occurred a decade later, the process would have been somewhat easier with the advent and widespread access to e-mail. Still, these interactions would by necessity be proactive in nature requiring both individuals to actively offer and send requests for data (Bennett & Regan, 2004; Germann Molz, 2006). Should one or the other grow busy or disinterested in maintaining the relationship a simple failure to respond would lead to the fading or dissolution of the relationship.

Before the advent of Facebook and social networking platforms, what existed was an embrace-the-moment philosophy among backpackers. Backpacking provided an opportunity to make rich friendships, but these friendships were the embodiment of weak ties and assumed to be memorable but short-lived. In a sense, these interactions mirrored the places being explored: They were deeply enjoyed and lasted as long as the visit to a location, but then were maintained purely as a memory after the individual moved on to the next destination and group of acquaintances. While this discouraged maintenance of long-term friendships and maintained social capital, it also encouraged a sense of anonymity and openness among backpackers. Understood through Goffman's (1959) conceptualization, this openness resulted in very different portrayals of individual's front stage selves, and an increased willingness to reveal elements of their back stage selves to semi-strangers. The sentiment often embodied a philosophy of, *"I'll never see or talk to these people again so what do I have to lose?"* A phrase still used within the backpacker community, but far less often as it is quickly becoming clear that the new answer is – *"Quite a bit."* In the words of Bennett

and Regan the days of anonymity are fading and movement is no longer, “a means of evading surveillance but has become the subject of surveillance” (2004, pp 453; Germann Molz, 2006).

Social networking sites mark a significant shift in the nature of backpacker social interactions. With a few casual pieces of information about someone gathered in passing, it is possible to use powerful search features to identify their online profile (Facebook Inc., 2013b). This has major ramifications for individual's anonymity. The previously insurmountable task of staying in touch and keeping information up-to-date is made simple using an internet connection and a series of clicks (Germann Molz, 2006). Once added to an individual's Facebook account, we opt into a constant co-sharing of life events, key data, and extended interaction which allow us to take a lax, or pro-active, approach to outreach and engagement. In so doing, we also open up elements of our existing social network to others, as they in turn grant us access to a large cross section of their social community. These technologies are not just simple social tools, they have quickly become stand alone sites for sociality (Germann Molz, 2006, pp 377). This increased access provides a complex mixture of wonderful new opportunities – such as staying in touch with fellow travelers – and challenges – such as the collision between various social groups, conflicts between our various social identities, and a loss of anonymity. These can be understood through the lens of social facilitation, front stage management and the shifts that result within individual's ability to build and maintain social capital.

It should come as no surprise that users utilize Facebook predominantly to explore and follow their friends and friend's networks. The result of this surveillance leads to direct impacts on relationships and can either strengthen or weaken them depending on the information that is uncovered (Golder et al., 2006; Vitak, 2008). This information can range from issues with authenticity and behavior to aspects of political and religious principles which would otherwise remain unknown and can have a significant impact on a person's social capital. In line with Goffman's concept of a front stage, and the concept of social facilitation, Facebook users have shown an acute awareness of this and as a result work to assemble, craft, and present socially desirable profiles that combine actions, images, and information that enhances their social capital (Zhao et al., 2008). In line with predictions made by the Proteus Effect studies such as that done by Vitak have already begun to identify how Facebook is having a very real impact on face-to-face interactions and offline relationships. The survey noted that 13% of users surveyed admitted that Facebook had damaged their relationships, an illustration of loss of social capital, due to information shared on Facebook. Of those 13 more than half stated that Facebook has resulted in disagreements



with friends and 18% with family members reflecting damage to both bridging and bonding forms of social capital (2008, pp 89).

As media have become richer, and Facebook a more pervasive and open network, this concept of surveillance has grown significantly. The technologies that enable such effective and flexible communication also provide complex opportunities for our networks and outsiders to monitor our behavior and interactions (Green, 2002; Green & Smith, 2004; Kaplan, 2002). In line with this, Mansson & Myers' review of literature noted that the majority of people's time on Facebook is centered on the maintenance of their existing network, not pro-active networking with outside groups which embodies what is expected based upon existing social facilitation research. This reflects the backpacker practice of adding individuals who were first met in person, or referred to them through an existing member of their social network. Browsing profiles, photos, status updates, and keeping tabs on romantic interests were all primary aspects of user's regular activity (2011, pp 156). This type of surveillance has become so ingrained in our culture that verbiage such as 'facebooking' someone is a core part of our social vernacular (Vitak, 2008, pp 41).

The rise in importance of Facebook's privacy settings has served as one way of attempting to control the mixture of different networks that collide through Facebook. These are the embodiment of Goffman's (1959) concept of front region control and managed social capital (Ellison et al., 2007). They provide users tools that simultaneously allow for the controlled distribution of messages/updates and data through custom, user-selected, privacy levels, or more sweeping privacy settings that limit an individual's visibility. While these privacy controls do allow for more precise network management, the more complex the attempt at control, the more likely it is to fail.

Facebook's own evolving nature is one such threat. Both Facebook's transition from a closed university-based system initially to a public, global, open system, and its roll-out of the Timeline feature (Facebook Inc., 2013b) serve as prime illustrations of where changes to the system can open users up to significant social ramifications. The social nature of Facebook is also another complicating factor, as it is impossible to control absolutely the chaotic element introduced by an individual's Facebook friends. These individuals may post data, images, or other content that unintentionally breaches whatever security steps have been taken, in turn revealing compromising information about an individual's activities, past, location, or involvements.

This raises the point that not only does Facebook provide us with the opportunity to stay in touch with weak ties embodied by the concept of bridging social capital, individuals we would otherwise likely lose contact with almost immediately, it also allows different individuals within our

network the opportunity to discover and interact with each other. These social crossovers, when positive, provide significant increases to our social capital while strengthening our network's opinion and connection to us. The nature of these interactions and their impact on our social capital can vary drastically from group to group. Travel activities that may build social capital with one group – say college peers – such as involvement in drinking culture, or data about sexual exploits may at the same time severely damage our social capital with others such as family members or romantic partners.

Despite this need for a more careful approach to our activities, the backpacker and hostel community have shown an eagerness to take advantage of these fantastic benefits. Not only does Facebook provide an opportunity to build maintained social capital with individuals that would otherwise be lost to the depths of geography and time, it allows for the construction of an attractive profile which helps to showcase the larger group identity with its inherent social capital, as well as that of the individual. This is done through the sharing of photos, stories, videos, and conversations accrued while traveling. It also opens up an entirely new level of access to media captured by other backpackers during shared experiences. Thus, the same individual that might inadvertently post an incriminating photo of a backpacker passed out in the hostel bathroom may alternately post photos of that individual reflecting in a museum, or bungee jumping over Victoria Falls.

Exploring how these changes in anonymity have impacted backpacker behavior within the hostel environment, both in positive and negative ways, is the central goal of this thesis' first research question. It sets the stage for exploring the second which delves into a more specific analysis of benefits and risks posed to romantic and sexual relationships.

### **Facebook's Impact on Social Capital Within Romantic & Sexual Relationships**

Many believe there is something deeply charming and romantic about travel. Perhaps it is the ability to explore and discover new sights, smells, flavors, and experiences. Or perhaps it is just an attraction to the exotic. Regardless of the trigger, romantic and sexual interactions play an ever present role in backpacker's lives. The fact that the typical backpacker is usually more likely to be single, and in their 20s or early 30s no doubt adds to a temptation to explore both romantic and sexual discovery while on the road (Berger & Paris, 2013; Mercer et al., 2007; Paris, 2010).

To better understand what Facebook's impact on backpacker culture has been this section looks more closely at backpacker dating culture. Specifically, the positive and negative influences it has had on backpacker's behavior relative to perceived needs to manage reputation. Positives include the opportunity to keep in contact with romantic and/or sexual partners discovered on the road, as well shared romantic experiences with existing significant others all of which are

advantageous to social capital. At the same time negatives included increased accountability in the shape of more clear cut, and readily occurring ramifications for cheating behavior, the loss of social capital with friends or family, and the loss of the freedoms associated with cultural expectations such as more free sexual or romantic experiences. The scope of these experiences can range significantly from traveling long-term couples sharing romantic dinners, to newly made acquaintances enjoying a lounge chair and romantic sunrise. Others may be more carnal in nature such as alcohol and drug induced sex with a fellow backpacker in a full hostel dormitory.

While not backpacker specific, a study by Bellis et al., of travelers found that just under 15% of travelers reported traveling for sex while more than 50% noted that they had engaged in sexual activity at least once during their trip. Of these 26.2% of men and 14.5% of women reported sleeping with multiple partners (2004). Another study, looking at sex partner acquisition while abroad using a British audience found, “13.9% of men and 7.1% of women reported having new sexual partner(s) while overseas in the past 5 years. Among respondents who were aged 16–24 and never married, the proportions were significantly higher (23.0% of men and 17.0% of women)” (Mercer et al., 2007). A third study found that 35% of male and female tourists visiting the Canary Islands reported having sex with a non-regular partner. The same study found a large behavioral difference based on age with 50% of those 25 or younger and 22% of those 26 or older reporting having sex with a new partner (Batalla-Duran et al., 2003).

While the generalizability of these figures varies from population to population and based on nationality, age, and other socio-economic factors, they illustrate the central role that sex often plays in the traveler’s experience. Given that these figures only look at actual instances of sexual activity, the number of individuals engaging in romantic interactions that do not end in sex is likely much higher.

This group of data also reflects other research which points to a mentality among young adult travelers that views sexual or otherwise culturally unacceptable sexual interactions as an inherent part of travel. This has been connected to the reduced sense of accountability and increased feelings of freedom that stem from the increased anonymity and reduced social pressures experienced while abroad. These behaviors are further encouraged by the open and permissive mentality which is present within the backpacker community. The result historically has been a reduction in individual responsibility which in turn encourages more aggressive sex-seeking behaviors with less well-known or proven social connections (Eiser & Ford, 1995; Herold & Van Kerkwijk, 1992; Milhouse et al., 2006; Sonmez et al., 2006; Schaffer, 2012). This helps to highlight why researchers have found that travelers consistently have more romantic partners while traveling

when compared to similar time periods when not on the road (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2003; Schaffer, 2012). But, if a large part of this increased activity is tied directly to anonymity, then it seems highly likely that Facebook's recent mass acceptance among travelers and the associated reduction in anonymity should begin to shift backpacker sentiments and risk taking behavior abroad.

Based on these data and first-hand observations, I theorize that Facebook is subtly changing the way people view, relate to, and engage in both sexual and romantic relationships within the hostel and backpacker community by increasing accountability and posing an increased threat to individual's social capital. As is the case with social interactions in general, Facebook, and the increased levels of surveillance that come with it, result in a radically different environment than pleasure-seeking backpackers were exposed to several years ago.

In Vitak's analysis of Facebook's impact on relationships more than 45% of the 13% of individuals who stated Facebook had harmed their relationships noted that the problems resulted in the termination of the relationship (2008). While getting caught cheating abroad is a more common place and obvious example of where Facebook's reduced anonymity might harm backpackers, a less obvious example might include a lesbian from an ultra conservative family that aggressively rejects homosexuality. While within her home country, she may be forced to present herself as heterosexual out of fear of being disowned. Taking advantage of the separation from her traditional social network, that individual might explore her sexuality, her true back stage identity, while traveling. At some point, however, through the posting of photos, wall comments, or other media, news of her homosexuality could reach her traditionally bonded ties resulting in a catastrophic loss of bonding social capital and unintended revealing of the individual's back stage persona. Depending on the culture, this might go beyond the severing of relationships, and financial ties by resulting in physical harm. While both of these examples could have still occurred in a pre-Facebook backpacker environment, the introduction of Facebook has radically increased their probability.

Contrary to these negative examples, however, Facebook also provides extremely positive opportunities for the formation, maintenance, and continuation of relationships. With the increased connectivity covered in the social section of this paper it is much more likely than in the pre-Facebook era for individuals to meet, continue their friendship online, expand it into something romantic, and then set up potential future opportunities to explore a romantic relationship. This is an illustration of the progression through all three stages of Ellison et al., (2007)'s forms of social capital. At the same time, romantic or sexual interactions that begin during travel between backpackers within the hostel environment can be continued and maintained even after the co-travel period has terminated. Perhaps to the chagrin of hopeless romantic authors, there is no

longer a reason to fall in love, share an incredible experience abroad, and then be forced not to explore the long-term potential of the relationship. Humphrey Bogart may be famous for his line, “We’ll always have Paris” but the modern backpacker need not face that choice (Casablanca, 1942).

Thus far this section has sought to explore how social capital and Facebook's reduction in anonymity is positively or negatively impacting backpacker's social and romantic relationships. The next section delves into the third area being studied - that of the professional implications Facebook's increased connectivity has for potential job seekers and current employees.

### **Facebook's Impact on Social Capital Within Professional Relationships**

Due to the recreational nature of backpacker culture, a majority of this paper has focused on more general behaviors without delving deeply into potential professional considerations backpackers face. It is, however, a key area worthy of analysis. Social capital often plays an essential role in aiding career seekers in locating jobs, attaining those jobs once located, and their job performance once in a job (Portes, 1998; Lin, 1999).

Social capital research also suggests that it is neither close ties nor traditional bonding social capital that is most beneficial to the job search. Rather it comes from weak ties that are those connections which fall within the bridging and maintained classifications of social capital. The research suggests that these weak ties are more effective for networking due to the similarities and limited social diversity between the job seeker and the individuals they share strong ties/bonding social capital with. The more homogenous a group, the more similar peer groups and available resources will be. Thus it is the bridging and maintained forms of social capital that serve as the best resources for professional advancement (Ellison et al., 2007; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Lin, 1999; Toomey et al., 1998).

This provides an excellent opportunity for backpackers who, through hostels and their travels, are able to greatly extend and diversify their social networks. Where an individual who never travels or only travels in an isolated fashion is unlikely to greatly expand their social network, backpackers and hostels provide a highly socialized travel environment. That community, and the bridging social capital acquired through it, provide weak ties which are truly international in scope. As a result, backpackers have the opportunity to not only make contacts with other backpackers from all over their home country, but also from all over the globe. Given that the demographic data presented earlier in this paper also suggests that backpackers are better educated than the average population (Berger & Paris, 2013; Paris, 2009; Loker-Murphy, 2010), it is suggested that these contacts may also be of even higher value than normal, everyday, social acquaintances.

This would seem to offer support for the backpacker belief that the experiences, knowledge, and connections they make while traveling will greatly enhance their social capital and professional appeal. This stems largely out of the ability to convey the increased social capital accrued by being immersed in different cultures, overcoming the adversity of the road, cultural education, and perception of increased independence associated with independent travel (Towner, 1985; Ooi & Laing, 2010; O'Reilly, 2006). These attributes and skills equate to an experienced, creative, flexible, self-reliant, self-starter. Valued skills in the modern workplace (Pearce & Foster, 2007).

Despite these positives, there is the impending threat of crippling losses to social capital should aspects of the backpacker and hostel experience reach employers in inopportune or unintended ways. The highly social and experiential nature of backpacking can lead to the posting and discovery of unflattering activities. These may be depictions in the form of photos or other content of general drunken behavior, cultural ineptitude or more extreme behaviors such as documented drug use or vandalism (Bellis et al., 2007; Cohen, 1973; Paris & Teye, 2010; Riley, 1988).

Recent statistics suggest that at least 35% of potential employers now do social media searches and that a third of those that do have found information which prevented the hiring of the candidate. The top two categories of content that blocked applicants were inappropriate photos/info and information tied to alcohol and drug use (PR Newswire, 2012). It should be noted, however, that here too employers also stated that they evaluated the profiles for positives which were documented and in many cases helped the employee's application.

Other research that has investigated the impact of Facebook on an individual's relationships and social capital suggests a wealth of career-related pitfalls associated with Facebook content. These range from accidentally costing people their jobs, individuals being terminated, and severe disciplinary actions taken in response to content discovered on, and/or posted on Facebook. This data indicates that not only can Facebook data be an issue for potential employees, it can cause significant issues for existing ones as well (Wang et al., 2011). Given that backpacker demographic data suggests that many backpacker's trips are taken while on vacation or summer breaks, this highlights an area where activities on the road may pose long-term issues that carry forward after the trip ends should travelers front stage management practices fall short or prove poorly thought out.

To better understand how and if the knowledge that experiences in hostels and within the backpacker community might be monitored by current or future employers, the survey posed a

series of questions to respondents seeking to better understand if this changed their behaviors, and/or factored into their decision-making.

## **METHODS**

Due to the global nature of the backpacker community, geographic limitations inherent in its composition, and the focus of the paper on the social networking website Facebook.com, the decision was made to utilize a quantitative electronic survey instrument. This was chosen to better explore backpackers relationship to specific viewpoints and opinions across a large sample size while evaluating for significance. This approach provided the most direct access to the survey sample being targeted. When evaluated against limited time and financial constraints, it also provided the opportunity to access a more varied cross section than a small, geographically limited, in-person format would have allowed. This was in-line with previous research on Facebook and the backpacker space (Berger & Paris, 2013; Paris, 2013) it also conformed with best practice suggestions for web survey selection (Punch, 2010; Schonlau et al., 2002).

### **Survey Design**

#### **Instrument**

To administer and collect the survey responses the website SurveyMonkey.com was chosen. Of the various levels of service they provide their premium monthly “extended” subscription was used. This was selected as it provided survey functionality with unlimited questions and up to 1,000 responses per month which was deemed to be within the range of what was needed. It also provided the option for a customized web address and custom survey design. Additionally, its format is familiar to respondents and has been carefully streamlined for effectiveness.

SurveyMonkey.com was also chosen because the researcher had used it previously to positive effect resulting in the survey data utilized in Berger and Paris (2013) which generated 132 usable responses collected from within the backpacker community. For the sake of this paper, the earlier survey was used as an early-pre test. The original questions developed by Berger for the Berger and Paris study were analyzed for answer relevancy, errors, and clarity. In cases where the question was still found to be valid it was included as-is. In other cases questions were either re-worded or changed to a more applicable format (eg: from likert-type to yes/no multiple choice). Where questions were retained an opportunity was provided to directly cross-reference data. This was deemed as particularly useful for checking the validity of the things like demographic data. It also provided a pre-tested survey which had provided effective data. Due to the expanded scope and nature of the survey being administered for this thesis, additional questions were added to further

understand respondent's relationship with Facebook and hostels. New questions designed specifically to test each of the three areas embodied by the research questions (social, romantic/sexual, professional) were also added along with questions that better illustrated how respondents managed their social capital.

The survey was divided into three pages. These were marked, "Your Facebook & Travel Profile", "Your Experiences" and "Demographic Info". Of these the first page collected specific data about an individual's use and experience with Facebook and hostels. The second and most time intensive section of the survey focused on gathering data about users personal experiences and observations. This was done through several question formats, chosen to ensure the clearest possible answer. The third and final section focused on demographic data and respondent travel experience before ending with an open-ended response for comments on the survey.

Due to the personal nature of some of the questions, it was structured in a completely anonymous way which excluded identifying data about the individual. While a final copy of the study's findings was made available upon request, e-mail addresses were collected independent of the survey to ensure anonymity.

Questions were pre-tested on a small convenience sample which consisted of seven individuals from the backpacker and education community. These individuals were targeted because of their expertise as backpackers and/or their advanced academic credentials. Based on feedback generated by the test group, a number of small changes to format, phrasing and question composition were made. The revised and updated survey was finalized and prepared for distribution.

### **Measurement**

Questions were chosen based on an extensive review of literature (eg: Germann Molz, 2006; Mascheroni, 2007; O'Regan, 2008; O'Reilly, 2006; Paris, 2013; Paris & Teye, 2010), the researcher's experience as a member of the community, existing research questions from Berger & Paris' initial survey (2013)<sup>1</sup>, and areas of key interest in evaluating the role of intimacy relative to three degrees of interaction. These were social relationships, romantic/sexual relationships, and professional relationships. Demographic and usage questions were selected based on their ability to create a profile to contextualize an individual's experience, and behaviors as part of their use of Facebook, hostels and as a member of the backpacker sub-culture. Web survey best practices were used in the

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<sup>1</sup> Data is based upon my original research and is a collaborative analysis written with Cody Morris Paris.



survey and factored into the inclusion and/or exclusion of questions (Punch, 2010; Fink, 2009; Schonlau et al., 2002).

Each page was introduced by a brief prompt which encouraged the completion of the survey, thanked the participant, and stressed the type of data being collected. The first page consisted of ten questions. These questions included single and multiple answers with one open-ended question (Punch, 2010; Fink, 2009). They sought specific data about respondent behaviors and travel experience such as number of hostels visited and typical relationship status while traveling.

The second page was the most comprehensive. It is also the page where a majority of those respondents who failed to complete the survey quit, likely due to the added length of the questions. It consisted of four sub-sections comprised of thirty one 5-point likert-type scale-based questions (Johns, 2010) and eight single or multiple option questions where more definitive answers were deemed important. The likert-type questions ranged from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. All likert-type questions also included a not applicable (N/A) option and utilized one sentence natural text, single topic statements.

The third page consisted of seven single-option, multiple-option, or short answer demographic questions focusing on topics such as age and education as well as one open-ended catch all question asking for feedback on general experiences or the survey (Punch, 2010; Fink, 2009).

### **Sampling**

Distribution was accomplished through convenience and snowball sampling procedures over a 10-day period in the spring of 2013. These were selected due to the highly mobile and geographically diverse nature of the backpacker community as they provided the greatest level of access and exposure possible with limited resources (Paris, 2013; Punch, 2010; Sills & Song, 2002). A link to the survey was posted with a brief introduction specifying that the survey was specifically targeted at backpackers who had previously used hostels and were on Facebook. It also requested that in addition to taking the survey, respondents share it.

Facebook was chosen due to the site's complexity, size, and prevalence within the backpacker community. While widely popular, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and other similar social network sites provide functionality that is duplicated by or imported into Facebook. Additionally, the decision to focus exclusively on Facebook was made in part based on my first-hand experiences in hostels. I regularly observe individuals adding each other on Facebook and referencing Facebook as

part of their social identities as a form of staying in contact. The same is not true of other sites. From the standpoint of intimacy and social capital, only LinkedIn and Google Plus come close to providing the level of comprehensive profile that Facebook offers while both Instagram and Twitter provide much more limited data. However, LinkedIn, unlike Facebook, is used predominantly for professional purposes while Google Plus similarly lacks widespread adoption. A third SNS, Couchsurfing, was also ruled out because of the site's size and primary use as a non-hostel accommodation booking site.

The link was posted to an assortment of backpacker, blogger, study abroad, and internationally- themed Facebook groups. This included the researcher's personal Facebook (1,755 friends) and Google Plus (1,648 circles) pages. In total the 12 Facebook groups utilized contained 28,277 members. Due to the way that Facebook and Google Plus work, these figures are somewhat inflated as it is impossible to know how many of the members present in each group's total membership count occupied membership across multiple groups. It is also impossible to know how many times the link was shared or re-shared and the corresponding reach. The practice of "bumping" the posting back to the top of the group discussion threads was used to ensure maximum visibility.

In addition to Facebook and Google Plus, the survey link was distributed through Twitter. This was done through the researcher's account, which has 5,839 followers, most of which are tied to his involvement within the backpacker community as a travel writer. Through industry relationships both Hostelworld and Hostelbookers, the two largest backpacker hostel booking websites, were contacted about issuing tweets about the survey. Both did repeatedly. This expanded reach to about 40,000 additional highly relevant twitter accounts. Tweets included the use of #hashtags, which are search terms that help access a wider audience.

The final distribution method used was a single posting on the HostelManagement.com forum and a single posting in the travel section (/r/travel) of the popular social discussion site Reddit. The forum is viewed as one of the definitive resources for backpackers interested in working and managing hostels. It has 10,758 registered users while Reddit's travel sub-reddit has an active travel community regularly engaged in discourse with 100,308 subscribers.

### **Data Analysis**

In total 339 individuals began the survey. Of these, 216 completed the survey in its entirety and provided responses that met the survey criteria. Due to the nature of how the data was collected it is impossible to calculate an accurate response rate. At 63.4% the survey completion rate was satisfactory for a survey of this nature. A relatively low completion rate was anticipated due to the length of the survey and nature of the audience and the platforms through which responses

were collected (Sills & Song, 2002). By their inherent nature Facebook, and Twitter in particular, encourage short attention spans as users are constantly bombarded with a flow of new information.

Upon completion of the study's 10-day sampling period the web survey was locked. Data was exported in two formats to Excel spreadsheets. The first utilized a default summary format generated by SurveyMonkey.com that included aggregate results. The second was a more complete export which included numerical or full text values for all responses. Analysis was done through Excel and IBM's SPSS Statistics 21 software.

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics including an analysis of mean and standard deviation where relevant.

### **Limitations**

While this survey is designed to provide insights into backpacker demographics, perceptions and behavioral shifts, its generalizability is limited by the composition of the backpacker community. While estimates exist for economic impact, the actual size of the backpacker community is constantly changing and unknown. To attempt to account for this changing landscape the first portion of this paper provided a general look at the backpacker and hostel community as it exists today. This was done by analyzing previous backpacker research, hostel data, and referencing study abroad data which is a related and overlapping population. This helps account for, but does not eliminate challenges provided by the constantly evolving nature of the backpacker community.

Another challenge stems from the loose nature of the backpacker definition. While there has been significant consolidation of the backpacker identity and this paper treats it largely as one community, it is still composed of highly fragmented sub-categories and different styles of backpacker. There are some, for example, that consider themselves backpackers but almost never use hostels, instead preferring CouchSurfing or low-budget hotels. The more inclusive backpacker definition and identity that this thesis focuses on is believed to be representative of the dominant population, but by no means assumed to be all-encompassing.

The method and nature of distribution also limits the generalizability of the data through self-selection bias, and non-response/completion errors (Paris, 2013; Sills & Song, 2002). The use of an online survey such as this seeks to combat the limitations that stem from doing in-person surveys or ethnographic sampling which may only represent the specific backpacker enclave being surveyed. However, the use of backpacker Facebook groups, Twitter messages, and discussion websites that predominantly use English may exclude a subset of international backpackers who exclusively rely on native-language resources and communities.

Despite these limitations, a web survey is viewed as one of the best ways to gain insights into the backpacker and hostel population. While these limitations reduce the concrete generalizability of the data, they do not preclude it from being representative and providing pivotal insights into how Facebook shapes backpacker's behaviors as they seek to manage their social capital.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section will report and seek to frame the results of the study. This will be done by grouping respondent data to explore the profile of the backpackers surveyed and compare it to existing research findings. It will then explore user's relationships with Facebook and hostels by analyzing a series of specific questions which were posed. The final three sections will report the findings drawn from the thirty one Likert-like questions as they relate to the three areas of intimacy that this paper has targeted (social, romantic/sexual, professional) and explore them through the lens of the framework provided earlier in this thesis.

### Respondent Demographics

TABLE 1: Demographic Data		
GENDER	Number	Percent
Male	64	30.2
Female	148	69.8
No response	4	
AGE	Number	Percent
17 or younger	0	0
18-22	20	9.3
23-27	99	45.8
28-32	52	24.1
33-37	20	9.3
38-50	17	7.9
51 or older	8	3.7
RELATIONSHIP	Number	Percent
Single	128	59.8
Relationship, traveling alone	27	12.6
Relationship, traveling with partner	25	11.7
Relationship, even split alone and with partner	34	15.9

As anticipated, the majority of respondents were between the age of 23 and 32 with a full 69.9% falling within this age range. When 18-22 year olds are included just under 80% of respondents were under the age of 32. This was comfortably within age demographics for previous

studies which found that between 65.5% (Paris, 2009) and 90% (Loker-Murphy, 1997) of backpackers are under the age of 35. Interestingly, there were no respondents under the age of 17. While deemed less likely due to issues of financial dependency, this may mean that the small, but still present population of pre-bachelors, gap-year backpackers were not fully accessed, though some might have been included in the 18-22 age range (9.3% of respondents).

This age data would seem to support that the demographic data is representative of the backpacker population. It also highlights an increasingly large number of older individuals who are using hostels with 20.9% of respondents reporting their age as 33 or older. This is somewhat more than Loker-Murphy's findings in 1999. The finding that 11.6% of respondents were 38 or older is also slightly below but in line with Hostelworld's (2010) recent announcement that 13% of their users were over the age of 45.

Survey respondents were disproportionately female, with just 30.2% reporting they were male, and 69.8% reporting they were female. While it was anticipated that there would be a significant difference between the number of male and female respondents, this was more pronounced than in any of the other previous studies. However, it appears to be in line with previous, recently executed like-kind studies such as the 66/34% split (Berger & Paris, 2013) and 57/43% split found by Paris (2010). Based on the high level of education, age dispersion, the North America/Euro-Scandinavian centric nature of the respondent population, and existing data about study abroad ratios, as discussed in this paper's literature review, this appears to be reasonable.

The backpackers sampled were predominantly single with 59.8% reporting that they are normally single while traveling while 40.2% reported being in a relationship. More specifically, within the 40.2% who reported being in relationships, 12.6% reported predominantly traveling alone while 11.7% reported that they are usually traveling with their partner. The largest majority, 15.9%, reported a roughly even split between traveling with/without their partner. This creates a compelling profile for the relational/sexual portion of this research which will predominantly explore changes in behavior among single travelers and those traveling without the co-presence and associated direct monitoring of their romantic partner. This data suggests a profile in line with previous descriptions of the backpacker population. Data that supports previous studies which have found that while changing, the backpacker community is still dominated by mostly young, relationally independent travelers (Paris, 2010).

<b>TABLE 2: Education Data</b>		
<b>Education</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Less than high school degree	1	0.5
High school degree or equivalent	7	3.2
Some college but no degree	16	7.4
Associate degree	3	1.4
Bachelor degree	111	51.4
Graduate degree	78	36.1

Based on a review of literature (Berger and Paris, 2013; Loker-Murphy, 1997), a highly educated backpacker population was expected. Table 2 further confirms that the profile of the backpackers surveyed is in line with previous research. A vast majority, 87.5%, of respondents reported attaining their Bachelors degree or higher while 96.3% had at completed at least some part of a higher education based degree program. 3.7% of respondents reported that they had attained a high school degree or less. This was within the reasonable range between Loker-Murphy's (1997) finding that 74% of respondents held partial or complete higher education degrees, and Berger and Paris' (2013) finding that 97% of respondents were engaged in higher education. While in part expected due to the correlation between inclination towards travel, resource attainment to support travel and level of education, this may also reflect some limitations of the sampling method which partially relied upon Facebook groups associated with international study abroad programs.

<b>TABLE 3: Employment Data</b>		
<b>Employment</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Employed, working part time	14	6.5
Employed, working full time	74	34.3
Self employed	38	17.6
Student, not working	26	12
Student, working (part time/full time)	45	20.8
Not employed, looking for work	7	3.2
Not employed, NOT looking for work	9	4.2
Retired	3	1.4
Disabled, not able to work	0	0

Table 3 illustrates respondent's current level of employment. Roughly one third of respondents (32.8%) were students. This was in line with Paris and Teye's (2010) finding of 34.9% and Berger and Paris' (2013) 36%. If students engaged in studies are considered as employed 91.2% of respondents were engaged in some degree of employment. If unemployed students are excluded that number drops to 79.2%. Of those unemployed and/or retired (8.8%), just under half (3.2%) were looking for work which may signify that they are returning from trips, using travel as a

transition period, or have stopped traveling and are currently seeking employment. Three individuals reported being retired while eight individuals reported being 51 or older as noted in Table 1. This suggests that among the older population both the employed and retired are roughly evenly represented.

<b>TABLE 4: Nationalities</b>	
<b>Regional Representation</b>	
North America	87
Europe inc. Russia	96
Australia / New Zealand	13
Asia	12
South America	6
Central America	2
<b>Total Countries Represented</b>	<b>40</b>

As anticipated the sample heavily favors European, North American, and Australian/New Zealanders. Despite the heavy western-centric nature of the focus, there were still 40 countries represented providing a better than anticipated cross-section of people and cultures. Respondents ranged from Norway to Nepal with the largest number of respondents coming from the USA, UK, Denmark, Canada, Germany and Australia. The largest anomaly was the high number of Nordic countries represented with 28 respondents. While disproportionately high, as with the large number of Americans (32%) who responded, it reflects the composition of the researcher's network as an American engaged in a full degree program at a major Danish University. Given their reputation as prolific backpackers and the historical focus of backpacker research on Australia and New Zealand, the fact that only 6% of respondents were from these countries is lower than anticipated.

<b>TABLE 5: Countries Visited</b>		
<b>How many countries have you visited in total?</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1-5	11	5.1%
6-10	25	11.6%
11-15	44	20.4%
16-20	45	20.8%
21-25	28	13.0%
26-30	21	9.7%
31-35	13	6.0%
36-50	21	9.7%
50-100	7	3.2%
100+	1	0.5%

In total the survey population was extremely well-traveled with more than 83% having visited 10 or more countries. Of these one had visited more than 100 countries. An incredible achievement. The majority of respondents seemed to have visited between 6 and 30 countries. Two of the respondents had been to Antarctica, while a vast majority had visited Europe (95.4%) and North America (82.4%). More than half (58.3%) had been to Asia, while a surprisingly high 45.8% had been to Africa. After Antarctica, Australia had the lowest number at 28.7% while South America came in at 37% of respondents.

### **Analysis of Backpacker Facebook Usage and Profiles**

The survey revealed that the backpackers surveyed were, for the most part, long term Facebook users. Just over 36% joined between 2004 and 2006 while the network was still mostly closed and limited to university students. The largest number of signups occurred in 2007, shortly after it was opened to a wider public audience with 34.7% of individuals joining that year. Interestingly none of the respondents were new to Facebook, as none reported joining in 2012 or 2013. When prompted if travel played a role in people's decision to sign up for Facebook, 62.5% stated it did not play a role while 23% stated that it had some or a significant influence.

<b>TABLE 6: Facebook While Traveling</b>		
<b>Do you access Facebook while traveling?</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>
Yes, occasionally	64	29.6%
Yes, several times a week	66	30.6%
Yes, every day	52	24.1%
Yes, several times a day	27	12.5%
No	7	3.2%

In addition to being relatively early adopters of Facebook, Facebook played a role in just under 40% of backpackers decision to sign up for the social networking site. This supports evidence that backpackers appear to be fairly heavy Facebook users while traveling and reflects a perceived social value benefit among backpackers to using the site. An impressive 66.6% of respondents reported using the site at least several times a week while on the road suggesting that these individuals are staying highly connected to their online networks and that social facilitation considerations through Facebook will be persistent, even when backpackers are traveling.



<b>TABLE 7: Adding Other Travelers</b>		
<b>After making a new backpacker acquaintance, how long do you wait before adding them on Facebook?</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
As soon as I have Facebook access	61	28.5%
20 - 60 minutes	0	0.0%
1 - 6 hours	7	3.3%
7- 12 hours	6	2.8%
13 - 48 hours	34	15.9%
Several days	50	23.4%
A week or more	19	8.9%
I do not add other backpackers on Facebook	37	17.3%
no response	2	

Table 7 reveals that not only are backpackers using Facebook regularly while on the road, they are using it to connect with other travelers. While the length of time between when individuals meet and when they add and/or approve each other varies, the majority of additions occur within the first several days (70.9%) while 17.3% stated that they do not add other backpackers. It appears that backpackers are prone to either add other travelers right away (28.5%) or wait at least 13 hours (48.2%). Only 6.1% of respondents said they waited between 20 minutes and 12 hours. The significant increase at the 13 hour mark may reflect the nature of backpacker and hostel culture where heavy socializing typically either occurs in the mornings during trips into the city or evenings during socialization and nights out, resulting in Facebook additions/discussion after a night on the city or day exploring a town.

<b>TABLE 8: Facebook Rejections</b>		
<b>I have rejected friend requests from people I have met in hostels because:</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
I never reject friend requests from other travelers	80	38.6%
I did not know them well enough	98	47.3%
I did not like them	80	38.6%
I thought they were strange	52	25.1%
I did not trust them not to post embarrassing material	8	3.9%
I was worried they would share things that might hurt my reputation	4	1.9%
I did not want my romantic partner to know about them	4	1.9%
I did not want my friends or family to hear about experiences I shared with the person	2	1.0%
I was worried they would harm my future career prospects	3	1.4%
Other (please specify)	13	
no response	9	

This begs the question, how do backpackers decide who to add and who not to add? Table 8 indicates that a full 38.6% of respondents never reject other travelers. The primary reasons for

rejecting individuals appear to be based in lack of familiarity with the person (47.3%), and/or a general dislike for the person (63.7%). A limited number of individuals expressed concerns about damage to their social capital in the form of their social reputation, existing romantic relationships, or future career prospects. For those that provided answers in the "other" category, reasons predominantly consisted of fear for their safety or general apathy about the individual which reflects similar research by Germann Molz and Paris (2013).

Questions 18 and 19 (Table 9) suggest that while not perceived as a threat, there is some evidence that Facebook does provide a source of potential risk to individual's social capital and front stage management.

<b>TABLE 9: Relational Impact</b>		
<b>Has content posted by people you added on Facebook while traveling ever led to problems in your existing relationships?</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes, multiple times	5	2.3%
Yes, once	17	7.9%
I am not sure	30	13.9%
No, never	164	75.9%
<b>Facebook has negatively impacted my relationships at home.</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
True	13	6.0%
False	203	94.0%

Question 19 asked directly about Facebook's negative impact on relationships when not traveling. It found that only 6% of respondents believed Facebook was responsible for issues. However, when asked in Question 18 if the people they've met while traveling had caused problems in existing relationships the number was much larger with 10.2% saying it had at least once which reflected previous findings by Vitak (2008). Another 13.9% were unsure while the vast majority (75.9%) did not report any negative impact.

This paints a positive picture of how Facebook is being used and the role it is playing in backpacker's lives. It indicates that there is some risk to individual's social capital, but that risk is negligible. Particularly when understood within the context of photo sharing. Questions 16 and 17 asked backpackers about their travel photo sharing and viewing habits. It found that only 8.8% of respondents did not share travel photos on Facebook and only 4.6% never accessed photos other travelers had uploaded. In both cases a majority (52.3% shared, 56.9% accessed) photos regularly. This supports earlier data that suggested that backpackers use Facebook to facilitate the building

and maintenance of social capital through experience-sharing behaviors which occur during and after an initial meeting.

These figures help frame data which indicates that backpacker communication continues after traveling ends and reflects the use of bridging and maintaining social capital.

<b>TABLE 10: Keeping in Touch</b>		
<b>Have you used Facebook to meet up with people you met during a previous trip?</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes, on one occasion	39	18.1%
Yes, on multiple occasions	127	58.8%
No, never	47	21.8%
No, I do not use Facebook	3	1.4%
<b>How often do you meet up again with the people you met while traveling?</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Often	6	2.8%
Often	13	6.1%
Occasionally	86	40.2%
Rarely	95	44.4%
Never	14	6.5%
no response	2	
<b>After a trip, on average how many times a year do you interact with other travelers you Facebook friended?</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
0	11	5.1%
1 - 5	104	48.1%
6 - 20	72	33.3%
21 - 50	20	9.3%
51+	9	4.2%
no response	0	

Table 10 aggregates responses to questions 15, 20, and 21. Does Facebook help facilitate people's ongoing connections and ability to re-connect? This data suggests it does in a major way with 76.9% of respondents saying they had used Facebook to meet up again, at least once. This data indicates that even though backpacking is highly nomadic in nature, and combines people from all over the world, they are bridging those gaps in a major, if not regular, way. Only 6.5% of respondents noted they had never re-connected with people met during their travels while just under half met up occasionally or more often.

Given this surprisingly high level of face-to-face re-connection, it is less surprising that backpackers are keeping in touch using Facebook at a fairly high level. Only 5.1% stated they never/almost never interact with other travelers they've added. A very similar number to the 6.5%

which have stated they have never met up in person. While the majority, 48.1%, only interact a few times a year, 42.6% of respondents interact on a fairly regular basis, and 4.2% interact on what equates to a near-weekly basis. This is a very strong indication that Facebook has become an extremely influential enabler and is playing a key role in how backpackers build upon and realize their social capital. It can also be better understood as an extension of the Proteus Effect, through which people's relationships are aggressively bridging the digital/non-digital divide.

This data also suggests that while Facebook is a key facilitator, and likely plays a larger role than people initially appreciate, other methods are still being used to enable meet-ups. While 23.2% stated they had never used Facebook to meet up with people from a previous trip in Question 15, only 6.3% reported never meeting up with people met during travel in Question 21. This may in part be because of the rise of budget friendly messaging apps like iMessage, or it may account for other forms of travel, such as international business travel. Alternately, it might also be explained by differences in perceived vs. actual impact and tied to survey question location.

### **Data on Backpacker's Hostel Usage**

The survey featured a wide variety of both experienced and novice hostel users. The earliest first used a hostel in 1973 while the most recent started in 2013. Twenty three of the respondents, about 10%, reported that they stayed in their first hostel before 2000 while 96, about 44% stayed in their first hostel between 2008 and 2013. This indicates that the sample group spans the recent evolution of the modern hostel and has ties to both traditional and more contemporary hostels.

<b>TABLE 11: Hostel Stays</b>		
<b>How many times have you stayed in a hostel?</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1-5	35	16.2%
6-10	40	18.5%
11-15	35	16.2%
16-20	14	6.5%
21-25	14	6.5%
26+	74	34.3%
I have never stayed in a hostel	4	1.9%
<b>How many times have you stayed in a hostel over the last 36 months.</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1-5	76	35.2%
6-10	41	19.0%
11-15	19	8.8%
16-20	14	6.5%
21-25	8	3.7%
26+	27	12.5%
I have not stayed in a hostel over the last 12 months.	31	14.4%

Table 11 highlights data from Questions 5 and 6. These questions surveyed total hostel experience and recent hostel experience. However, due to a typo in Question 6, the period specified in the 7th response option was 12 months instead of 36 months. While undermining the weight of the data for specific use, the primary goal was to evaluate if respondents had stayed in a hostel recently. The data in the question, despite the error, still makes the data useful.

For total number of hostel stays, the largest category was 26+ at 34.3% suggesting that respondents were heavy hostel users. At 34.7% of the sample, hostellers that had stayed in 10 or fewer made up a roughly identical percentage of the population. This indicates a well-balanced spread across the spectrum of hostel usage with similar numbers of individuals with veteran, novice, and intermediate experience.

Question 6 indicated that a majority of the population is still actively using hostels with only 14.4% reporting that they had not stayed in a hostel in the last 12-36 months. While activity was mostly centered around 1-10 stays over the last 12-36 months, the activity of the respondents reflected a positive spread reflecting many different levels of hostel activity and that the respondents are active members of the hostel community and travel on a regular basis. This is viewed as a very positive confirmation of the accuracy of the data and that it is representative of the backpacker population.

### **Respondent's Views on Facebook's Impact on Backpacker Culture**

To better explore backpacker's personal views, the study asked a series of 5-point likert-like questions to explore backpacker's perception of other backpackers. This data is shown in Table 12.

<b>TABLE 12: Views On Other Backpackers</b>								
<b>Please note how well each statement applies to your travels and your impression of the hostel/backpacker experience:</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Mostly Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Mostly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>Avg.</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
Facebook has made travel less anonymous.	12	11	47	85	50	11	3.73	1.072
Before Facebook hostel/backpacking was anonymous.	15	51	72	37	14	27	2.92	1.038
Facebook makes hostel/backpacking more anonymous.	62	98	36	6	1	13	1.95	0.803
Facebook has changed the nature of sexual encounters in hostels.	25	30	90	19	4	48	2.68	0.942
Facebook has increased the frequency of sexual encounters in hostels.	32	39	89	9	0	47	2.44	0.858
Facebook is detrimental to the hostel experience.	53	77	55	12	3	16	2.18	0.943

This data suggests that while there is fairly widespread agreement (10.6% disagree) that Facebook has reduced anonymity in travel, backpackers overwhelmingly see this as a good thing

with 85.6% neutral or rejecting the premise that Facebook is detrimental to the hostel experience. This provides further valuable insight into the perception among backpackers of Facebook as a source of positive social capital. However, when asked if pre-Facebook backpacking was anonymous, respondents are much more prone to disagreement. Slightly more expressed the belief that Facebook had removed anonymity from the hostel/backpacker environment, while the majority (33%) were unsure. When the question was slightly re-phrased as a definitive - "Facebook makes hostel backpacking more anonymous" only 3.2% of respondents believed it does.

In addition to probing general questions of anonymity and social involvement, this section also sought to explore how backpacker's perceived Facebook's impact on sexual encounters. While these two questions had some of the strongest levels of agreement, they also had nearly 2 to 3 times the number of N/A responses as other questions. These questions mirrored the questions about anonymity in general with only 10.6% of respondents expressing a belief that Facebook has changed the nature of sex in hostels while a majority were unsure or believed it had not made a change. Yet when asked if Facebook had led to an increase, the second highest level of consensus was found with only 4.2% expressing the belief that it had increased encounters.

This appears to suggest that while providing less support for Facebook's role as a negative influence on sexual interactions in hostels than was anticipated from the literature (eg Batalla-Duran et al., 2003; Bellis et al., 2004; Mercer et al., 2007), it likely still plays a role, just in a reduced fashion. It is also possible that this reduced support reflects people's unwillingness to divulge, even in an anonymous format, information about their sexual relations. Earlier questions focusing on anonymity and social interaction offer support for the premise that there has been a reduction in anonymity introduced by Facebook, which has in turn been a positive source of social capital and benefit to backpackers and the hostel community as a whole. This section did not seek to sample individual's views on professional factors.

### **Self Descriptive Analysis of Facebook's Impact on Backpacker Behavior**

In this section I explore questions which prompted backpackers about their personal behaviors and experiences using a 5-point likert-like format to evaluate level of agreement with a series of pre-selected statements. The goal of these questions was to provide increased insight into how individuals related to the environment and how they saw Facebook as an influencing factor on their social capital maintenance behaviors and ability to perform front stage maintenance. Due to the lengthy nature of the section, results have been broken up into three sub-tables and corresponding discussions. These reflect the focus of the research question that is most applicable (social, romantic/sexual, professional) to their analysis. Because both romantic/sexual and

professional behavior are also colored by general social factors, the analysis in the social section should be used to better frame the more specific romantic/sexual and professional categories.

<b>TABLE 13a: Social Self Reflection</b>								
<b>Please state how well the following statements apply to your personal travel experiences:</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Mostly Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Mostly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>Avg.</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
Facebook has made my hostel experience more social (photos, communication, events, etc.).	14	17	47	90	43	5	3.62	1.099
I worry about other travelers sharing my personal activities on Facebook.	45	96	48	20	5	2	2.27	0.975
I feel more accountable for my actions while traveling due to Facebook.	41	65	54	41	11	4	2.6	1.153
I was able to sustain relationships with people I met during my trip more easily prior to using Facebook.	50	50	21	43	43	9	2.9	1.499
Facebook is essential for maintaining relationships with people I met while traveling.	7	7	14	102	85	1	4.17	0.927
I have travel contacts whom I met in hostels that I keep in touch with without the use of Facebook.	56	56	22	52	20	10	2.63	1.369
Making friends is a primary motivator for me when choosing to stay in a hostel.	31	28	43	73	35	6	3.25	1.297
I regularly add other travelers on Facebook whom I just met.	34	54	46	64	14	4	2.86	1.204
I have maintained friendships made while traveling which would not have been possible to retain without Facebook.	8	9	20	81	93	5	4.15	1.015
I am more connected to my fellow travelers because of Facebook.	8	6	23	91	83	5	4.11	0.947
Traveling alone in hostels is a lonely/socially isolated experience.	69	80	31	18	4	14	2.05	1.016
I am more social when using backpacker hostels.	4	20	29	97	57	9	3.88	0.983
I have used Facebook to monitor a family member while they traveled.	29	20	21	87	42	17	3.47	1.325
I have created custom lists to keep my travel friends separate.	94	54	18	22	12	16	2.02	1.244

### **Analysis of Facebook's Impact on Social Capital**

Backpackers appear to be drawn to hostels at least in part because of their reputation and ability to provide highly social environments. Most view Facebook as a tool that further enhances opportunities for social engagement. Of those surveyed, 61.6% thought it had created a more social environment. 14.4% mostly or strongly disagreed with the statement. This data paints a profile of a backpacker community that largely, but not exclusively, views Facebook as an enabling tool for a more social hostel experience

Two questions had strong levels of agreement, and pronounced answers. One dealt with the idea that hostels are lonely with 69% rejecting the idea, while 14.4% were neutral. The other dealt with Facebook as an essential tool for maintaining travel relationships. Results found that 86.6% mostly or strongly agreed while only 6.5% disagreed. This is a strong endorsement of Facebook's positive role as a tool that enables better management, development and maintenance of backpacker's social capital.

This picture of Facebook as a powerful enabler finds further support in response data that shows 51.9% of respondents mostly or strongly disagreed that they would maintain contacts without Facebook; that is, that Facebook helped to maintain them. Interestingly, 33.3% viewed Facebook as a non-essential tool in their relational maintenance. This indicates that Facebook is essential to social maintenance in more than half of the backpacker relationships the respondents are maintaining. Thus it follows that when asked if Facebook has allowed individuals to maintain friendships that would have been lost without Facebook (maintained social capital), 80.6% of respondents expressed some or significant agreement. Only 7.9% expressed mild or significant disagreement. When asked if Facebook left the individual more connected to their fellow travelers, a similar 80.6% stated it did. Slightly fewer (6.5%) said that it did not.

This seems to suggest a slight cognitive dissonance among respondents. When asked earlier in the survey if it had been easier to maintain relationships with people met while traveling before Facebook, responses were significantly more divided. At 46.3%, a small majority thought it was more difficult to maintain relationships before Facebook. 39.8% mostly or strongly agreed, it had been easier to maintain travel relationships before Facebook. It is possible that while Facebook makes maintaining and building friendships much easier, the time, energy and involvement required to perform, manage, and maintain Facebook contacts, an illustration of front stage maintenance, makes these relationships more difficult to sustain. The complexities of the technology for certain people may get in the way. This is one alternative interpretation of why respondents who generally view Facebook as a builder of social capital, would respond in this instance that it had been easier to maintain social relationships before Facebook.

The social draw of hostels appears to be a primary attractor for many backpackers. This would support why Facebook has become such a pivotal component of the backpacker tool set. Backpackers responded nearly 2:1 with agreement that, "Making friends is a primary motivator for me when choosing to stay in a hostel". While individuals reported that their own behavior changed as a result of staying in a hostel with 71.3% stating they mostly or strongly agreed, 11.1% expressed



disagreement. This might either convey reduced sociality, a lack of change in behavior, or a differentiation between long term friends vs. short term acquaintances.

Responses seemed to support earlier findings that individual's behaviors for adding other travelers varied. 40.7% did not regularly add travelers they had just met (with some limited exceptions). 36.1% of respondents stated they did. Once an individual was added, however, backpackers seem to show relatively little concern about what information might be shared through Facebook with 87.5% disagreeing with or being neutral about the risk.

Despite this general lack of concern, as predicted, there was a sizeable minority group of respondents who felt that Facebook left them feeling more accountable for their actions while traveling. This group consisted of 24% of respondents. An additional 25% were neutral. Of the group who disagreed that Facebook left them feeling more accountable 30.1% mostly disagreed, while just over 19% strongly disagreed. In the context of surveillance and understood through the potential costs associated with members of an individual's network constantly re-evaluating an individual based on their profile this is a valuable insight. Not only does Facebook appear to be a surveillance tool used for positive social capital building and maintenance. It also provides an enforcement platform where at least part of the community experienced increased need for better monitoring and control of their front stage personas.

This might help explain why only 15.7% have expressed most or strong agreement about the creation of custom lists to keep travel friends separate from their main social network despite 60% of respondents saying they've used Facebook to monitor a family member while they traveled, indicating that the individuals are aware of Facebook's potential as a surveillance tool, a concept explored in depth by Germann Molz (2004; Germann Molz, 2006; Germann Molz & Paris, 2013).

This leaves little doubt that Facebook is playing an increasingly essential role in facilitating social interaction and maintained social capital. This is occurring between relatively newly established weak links (new Facebook contacts) that can similarly be classified as individuals who provide bridging social capital to the individual's network. Despite some risk to backpacker's home networks and existing social infrastructure, the benefit of adding other travelers is seen as a significant positive, and an opportunity to create lasting relationships that were difficult, if not impossible, without Facebook. This in turn makes up for the occasional awkward Facebook update and increased need for individuals to carefully engage in front-stage management.

<b>TABLE 13b: Romantic/Sexual Self Reflection</b>								
<b>Please state how well the following statements apply to your personal travel experiences:</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Mostly Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Mostly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>Avg.</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
The opportunity for romantic (kissing/cuddling/sex) interactions is a primary motivator for me when choosing to stay in a hostel.	120	51	24	10	1	10	1.65	0.903
I have sex with people who I am not currently in an ongoing relationship with while staying in hostels.	93	41	22	23	9	28	2.01	1.241
I have sex with people who I am in an ongoing relationship with while staying in hostels.	59	34	28	37	23	35	2.62	1.439
I have used Facebook to monitor a romantic partner while they traveled.	58	42	25	52	12	27	2.57	1.342
I am more sexually active when traveling as a backpacker than when I am not traveling.	53	46	58	20	8	31	2.37	1.136

### **Analysis of Facebook's Impact on Romantic/Sexual Social Capital**

As was found in Table 12, respondents were significantly more likely to select N/A for questions related to issues of romantic and sexual interactions in hostels. While most questions in Table 13a had fewer than 10 N/A responses, the majority in Table 13b have closer to 30. This is partially anticipated due to the sensitive nature of the questions. However, it may reflect an issue with sentence structure, lack of belief that the survey was sufficiently anonymous, co-presence of their partner, or an unwillingness to share intimate information. Earlier data suggests that about 59.8% (Table 1) of respondents do most of their travel while single. Additionally, this thesis' literature review indicates that roughly half of travelers engage in sexual activity while abroad and that particularly among the younger backpacker demographic, individuals regularly report having more partners while traveling than when not (Batalla-Duran et al., 2003; Bellis et al., 2004; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2003; Mercer et al., 2007; Schaffer, 2012). The data in Table 13a further suggests that Facebook plays an essential role in enabling social interaction and facilitation on a general level, while only having a minimal limiting impact on a subset of people's risk-taking behaviors through a fear of threats to a backpacker's social capital.

This data indicates that the backpacker sample studied is drawn to hostels predominantly for their social potential, but not primarily for romantic reasons. More than 55% of respondents strongly disagreed that it was a primary motivator in their choice to use hostels, while another 34.7% mostly disagreed or were neutral. Only 5.1% stated it was a primary motivation. This may reflect a partial rebuke of the existing data which suggests that backpackers are more sexually active or it may stem from the use of the word primary in the description. It is possible that while backpackers are drawn to hostels because of the romantic opportunities they provide, other factors rank more highly in their decision making, such as financial and social considerations.

This might better align with answers provided to questions about backpacker's sexual activity abroad vs. home. Just under 13% of respondents noted that they mostly or strongly agreed with increased sexual activity while traveling. 48.1% were neutral or mostly disagreed. "Mostly

disagree" in this context might suggest a low level of agreement. The 24.5% of respondents who stated they "strongly disagree" could reflect the actual population who does not engage in more sexual activity while traveling abroad. If re-framed in this way, 61% of backpackers might be understood to have anywhere from slightly to significantly more sexual activity while abroad. This would more closely reflect the existing research on backpacker and traveler romantic involvement while traveling.

As an extension of this, the two questions exploring sex in hostels among people who are either in or not-in an ongoing relationship with their partner may be better understood. While 14.8% of respondents noted they mostly or strongly agreed that they engaged in sexual activity with people they were not-in an on-going relationship with, that figure rises to 43.9% when neutral and mostly disagree are included. Grouping all but the strongly-disagree respondents. This figure more closely mirrors the 59.8% of backpackers who predominantly travel single (highlighted in Table 1) as well as existing data about backpacker behavior.

This does not, however, seem to fit as well when analyzing those who are in-ongoing romantic relationships. 27.8% stated that they mostly or strongly agreed that they engaged in sexual activity while traveling. This is a near-identical match to the 27.6% of individuals who reported that they travel while in a relationship, and travel in a relationship part of the time. Reframing this question in a future survey would provide more conclusive data and better insight into how perceived threats to social capital or front stage maintenance as a result of Facebook may be changing backpackers sexual behavior.

The most valuable insight provided from this section of the survey involves backpacker responses to the concept of surveillance. When asked if they used Facebook to monitor their partner while traveling, just under one-third (29.6%) expressed agreement. Only 26.8% strongly disagreed with the statement This suggests that as anticipated (Germann Molz, 2004; Germann Molz, 2006; Germann Molz & Paris, 2013), Facebook serves as a powerful surveillance tool within a romantic context. This poses significant potential threats to longer term relationships and maintained social capital. This might also explain data collected in Question 4 which found that only 17.7% of respondents had their relationship status publicly visible on Facebook. 52.1% did not list their status at all. In this case, omission may allow for greater control of an individual's front-stage personality as he/she presents publicly as an unattached individual open to interpretation. This allows the back stage relationship to be hidden.

Despite the anonymous nature of the survey, individuals are still hesitant to discuss Facebook's role in shaping their intimate behavior. A future survey could gain stronger data by applying a different framework for questions associated with sex and intimacy. While these results do not paint the picture exactly as anticipated based on the literature review, they do provide support for the application of similar findings from studies of other travel communities. The data does indicate that even in the case of romantic and sexual interactions, Facebook is seen largely as a positive influence. It helps facilitate interactions that lead to the building of social capital.

<b>TABLE 13c: Professional Self Reflection</b>								
<b>Please state how well the following statements apply to your personal travel experiences:</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Mostly Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Mostly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>Avg.</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
I have used Facebook to monitor a potential/current employee's behavior while traveling.	87	29	27	10	3	60	1.8	1.062
The knowledge that my behavior can be documented on Facebook keeps me from doing things I would have otherwise done while traveling.	77	85	38	11	4	1	1.98	0.954
People I've met in hostels and kept in contact with through Facebook improve my professional network.	13	34	82	51	23	13	3.18	1.049
Experiences that I have posted on Facebook from my time hostel/backpacking have harmed my career.	115	59	23	2	1	16	1.58	0.773
I feel that travel makes me a more appealing job candidate.	16	10	34	75	75	6	3.87	1.177
I list my travel experience on my resume.	33	29	43	61	42	8	3.24	1.351

### **Analysis of Facebook's Impact on Professional Social Capital**

Data in Table 13c highlights a continuation of the trend found in Table 13a, which is that Facebook's role as a social facilitator and information disseminator is largely seen as a positive while backpackers as a whole show relatively little concern for its potential adverse impact on their social capital. Just under 50% (47.8%) of backpackers stated they mostly or strongly agreed with including their travel experience on their resumes while 69% stated it made them a more appealing job candidate which showed support for the existing literature (Pearce & Foster, 2007). Reflecting this 34.3% note a positive belief that the people met in hostels and added to individual's social networks through Facebook are positive additions to their professional network. Another 38% did not feel it made a positive or negative difference. The high number of neutral responses may reflect the belief that people's travel contacts are too distant or geographically remote to be of tangible benefit.

This data offers a strong indication, as discussed in the existing literature, that individuals believe the bridging social capital they are able to access and build upon through the weak ties they make while traveling helps their overall career prospects and marketability (Pearce & Foster, 2007). When prompted as to their level of agreement with the statement, "I have used Facebook to

monitor a potential/current employee's behavior while traveling." Only 31.9% noted using Facebook to monitor traveling employees as evaluated by combining those who mostly disagreed, were neutral, mostly agreed, and strongly agreed with the statement. 40.2% strongly agreed and 27.8% selected N/A indicating they had not been in the position to make such a decision. Of the 31.9% that exhibited some level of agreement, only 6% conveyed a strong level of agreement. While this does not reflect the habits of all employers, it does mirror the roughly one-third of employers who perform social media searches on prospective job applicants.

Despite existing data about the number of employers doing social media searches and the potentially detrimental impact it can have, only 6.9% stated they mostly or strongly agreed with the statement, "The knowledge that my behavior can be documented on Facebook keeps me from doing things I would have otherwise done while traveling." Only 1.4% of respondents stated that things they had posted had harmed their career compared to 53.2% who strongly disagreed that, "Experiences that I have posted on Facebook from my time hostel/backpacking have harmed my career". This suggests that while the number of respondents who are aware of damage to their professional social capital occurring is quite low, that backpackers likely underestimate the threat their actions and the material posted to Facebook poses to their professional career prospects.

This data presents a picture of a community that views their actions and activities as largely positive, with a positive net benefit to their professional social capital. They are aware of, even if they slightly underestimate, the value of the weak ties they are making through the backpacker experience as a resource that will help their professional prospects. It also indicates that backpackers underestimate the actual risks posed by Facebook to their social capital as a result of their activities and contacts made while traveling.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper set out to explore a simple, but largely unexplored premise: has Facebook had a fundamental impact on re-shaping backpacker behaviors within the social environment of today's hostel culture and if so, how do backpackers perceive those changes? The paper exhibited extensive evidence that Facebook has resulted in core structural shifts within the way the backpacker community behaves and operates due to reduced levels of anonymity. While much of the general public discourse surrounding Facebook's impact on social, relational, and professional capital is negative, this study found that backpackers view it as a largely positive addition that enables significant social capital building behaviors. Backpackers using Facebook have easier access to

people they meet, can turn bridging social capital into deeper bonding relationships over time due to access via Facebook, and can maintain contact more readily.

While the modern backpacker may have lost a large part of the anonymity that marked the community several decades ago, it has gained increased global cohesion and prolonged social engagement with the new friends made, and retained during an individual's travels. This indicates a largely positive net impact, one that has resulted in a community that knows its members better and which is able to cement long lasting global relationships.

## **Summary of Findings**

The hostel environment is the location of first contact and Facebook is the vehicle for ongoing connection, information sharing, and intimacy. It is the crucible wherein social capital is earned or lost. This section discusses how we can better understand this process, and the factors shaping it through the three core research questions posed in this thesis.

**Research Question #1** asked how Facebook's reduction in anonymity impacted social behavior while traveling. After a comprehensive review of literature that looked at backpacker, hostel, Facebook, identity, and social capital research the anticipated answer was that it had resulted in a two-fold shift consisting of both detrimental and beneficial changes. This data was framed by using the backpacker, hostel and Facebook research which in turn was analyzed utilizing a modified theoretical framework based in the concept of social capital (Ellison et al., 2007; Portes, 1998). Through this framework the anticipated positive and negative changes resulting from Facebook could be better explored and understood as motivating influencers that would result from the individual's drive to protect and accrue social capital.

The first shift anticipated was that Facebook's reduction in anonymity would have adverse effects on people's more impulsive and spur of the moment social interactions; it would discourage them from doing things they might not otherwise do. This would occur due to the awareness that they were being monitored by the rest of their network (Allport, 1924; Bordens & Horowitz, 2008). This level of surveillance is not new, but the widespread level of access to an individual's entire social network and associated data is (Germann Molz, 2006). This new occurrence resulting from Facebook's role as information disseminator in turn was anticipated to mean that any information which was unflattering or contrary to the individual's presented self would result in moderate to severe losses in social capital (Ellison et al., 2007; Goffman, 1959; Yee & Bailenson, 2009). Thus, in an attempt to employ risk aversion techniques to counter this reduction in anonymity, an individual's risk taking behavior would change in order to better protect their identity and social capital.

The second anticipated shift indicated that this reduction in anonymity and the resulting increased level of connectivity would be viewed as an extremely positive benefit. The literature indicated that the increases in media bandwidth and connectivity would provide previously unparalleled resources through which the backpacker community would be able to keep in contact with each other (Mascheroni, 2007; Germann Molz & Paris, 2013). This increase was anticipated to greatly improve social capital between backpackers by strengthening their connections and extending their ties and ability to remain connected over large spaces and long periods of time. The net benefit of these increased ties and powerful gains to backpacker social capital were in turn expected to strengthen the global backpacker identity by creating a more cohesive community that leveraged relationships formed in hostels and resulted in a truly global network. This shift away from relying upon very limited and unreliable forms of older media, and near exclusive in-person interactions in hostels was believed to be seen as a key driver behind backpackers' adoption of Facebook.

Due to the potentially negative side effects of the first shift, it was predicted that these threats to social capital would have a potent impact on both people's digital sharing behavior and in-person decision-making. This was expected to result in clearly identifiable sentiments in the survey data which would support a love-hate relationship with Facebook and the reduction in anonymity that it brought with it through its use as a powerful surveillance tool.

While moderate support for this was found, the evidence was not as pronounced as expected. Nor was the degree of confidence among backpackers as extreme as literature implied it might, and potentially should be. While a sizeable number of respondents showed an awareness of Facebook's risk to their privacy and social capital, only a small subset reported experiencing negative ramifications with only slightly more viewing it as a threat significant enough to cause behavioral change.

In the case of the second shift, however, significant support was found. These findings indicate that backpackers view Facebook as an extremely positive social enabler that allows them greater access to their network with the potential for significant opportunities for increased engagement by way of chat messages and photo sharing. These opportunities to build and maintain social capital also translate into high-value communication that leads to and facilitates, in a majority of cases, future in-person reunions. Given the central role Facebook plays in the facilitation of maintained social capital among bridging ties, Facebook is seen as a highly effective and extremely positive social enabler. Additionally, through its reductions in anonymity, Facebook has had a very

tangible net positive impact on social capital within the backpacker community while simultaneously improving interconnectedness.

The result of this is a drastically different backpacker landscape than existed a decade ago and one in which Facebook and hostels enable unparalleled interconnectivity between backpackers. This added interconnectivity greatly increased travelers' social capital, but comes with some increases in complexity as backpackers are forced to pay increased attention to how they manage their front stage personas and craft their social identities.

**Research Question #2** built upon Research Question #1 and explored how Facebook's reduction in anonymity has impacted romantic and sexual behavior while traveling. The literature review (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2003; Schaffer, 2012) and personal experience suggested that the historically higher level of anonymity and partial disconnect with backpackers home networks resulted in increased risk-taking and more aggressive pursuit of romantic and sexual interactions. Based on this, this question was formulated to analyze what was anticipated to be one of the most clear-cut areas where a reduction in anonymity would result in behavioral change. If the semi-anonymous nature of backpacker travel had led to increased sexual behavior while traveling, then threats to anonymity and social capital introduced by Facebook should be of concern. This was especially true as Facebook introduced a more persistent connection to an individual's home networks while simultaneously enabling increased longevity and ease-of-contact with the backpacker's new travel network.

Unfortunately, several structural issues with the survey limited the value of the data. Due to length limitations posed by the use of an online questionnaire, the questions failed to properly differentiate between romantic interactions and purely sexual ones. While not initially believed to be significantly different, an analysis of the results indicates that the two should be treated in the future as similar, but separate. The use of Likert-like scales for these questions, while initially seeming as though they would generate more precise answers, left too much room for interpretation. A future targeted survey would provide more refined data.

The survey results indicate that similar to the findings of Research Question #1, the adverse impact Facebook has had on anonymity is not seen as a major concern or believed to have had a significant adverse impact on backpacker's romantic and sexual behavior within the hostel environment. The data does suggest that while sex and romantic interactions are a factor in people's decision to stay in hostels, it is not the primary driver for the vast majority.



Instead, a robust social environment, economics, and logistics are factors that play a stronger role. It also suggests that while many backpackers are aware that it is common-place to use Facebook to monitor romantic partners while traveling, the average individual is not overly concerned about damage to their bonding social capital in the form of harmed romantic relationships. While most respondents felt that Facebook had little impact on or only slightly changed the nature of sexual encounters in hostels this changed when specifically asked if Facebook had increased the number of sexual interactions in hostels. When prompted in this fashion a majority of respondents stated it had not, illustrating what may be contradicting internal beliefs or uncertainty.

Though the survey was not comprehensive, there was evidence to support previous research (Eiser & Ford, 1995; Milhousen et al., 2006) which suggested increased promiscuity among backpackers while traveling. These findings, however, were much less pronounced than in topic-specific surveys and the previous literature.

The data suggests that while Facebook has likely had a relatively minor negative impact on hostel romance in the immediate and transient form, it has facilitated increased connectivity and interactions allowing individuals the opportunity to explore romantic interactions in a more long-term context where interest is available. This has resulted in an overall positive view of Facebook's impact on social capital within the hostel and backpacker community while likely having a very minimal impact on backpacker's impulsive decision making.

**Research Question #3** asked how the knowledge that employers review Facebook profiles impacts backpacker disclosure. It was anticipated that there would be a relatively mixed level of concern about the potential harm to backpackers' professional social capital, but as with RQ1, the perceived benefits would outweigh the generally under-appreciated risks.

This survey found that while there were instances where individuals had suffered a loss of professional social capital due to Facebook showcasing their activities while backpacking or information posted to Facebook by people met while traveling, these were limited and not seen as a major risk. The majority of respondents viewed Facebook's role in enabling backpacker connections and showcasing backpacker experiences as a resource to build a large number of new social connections, who increased the individual's bridging social capital. In addition to the perception that these individuals added value to the person's network, the use of Facebook to showcase the individual's travels and interactions was viewed as a source of positive social capital which helped

improve and advance their professional opportunities. This was in line with previous research on backpacker beliefs (Pearce & Foster, 2007).

Thus, while aware of the potential threat, and admitting to some minimal behavioral modification, this paper finds evidence that backpackers are only moderately inclined to refrain from engaging in specific behaviors they would otherwise embrace due to the threat of damage to their professional capital. As with Research Questions #1 and #2 the net benefits posed by Facebook's reduction in anonymity within the backpacker and hostel space is viewed as a huge boon to members of the community's social capital and ability to engage positively with their peers.

## **Limitations**

This study is based upon a quantitative survey utilizing a convenience and snowball sampling approach. As a number of the questions feature responses designed to evaluate the degree of individual's agreement, it is impossible to know if backpackers over or under-estimated their responses. In some cases questions were posed which dealt with more sensitive topics such as sexual activity or unflattering behavior. In these instances a much higher number of N/A responses were given. Despite steps taken to administer the survey anonymously, and to stress the anonymity of the study, it seems likely that respondents were still hesitant to answer some of these questions. Of those who did answer, it is possible that individuals over/under reported their behaviors or feelings in these cases.

This thesis set out to answer three relatively open-ended research questions. While this has provided excellent context and insights, it's in no way considered an exhaustive analysis of each of the three areas of inquiry. This thesis also uses descriptive statistics to analyze the overall population and trends within the hostel using backpacker population. It does not delve into specific subsets, such as flashpackers, or specific backpacker enclaves. The results and analysis within this paper are specifically targeted at and based upon backpackers who have and/or continue to use hostels. While this represents a majority of the greater backpacker population, it is not inclusive of the community in its entirety as some backpackers may identify as part of the community, but not utilize hostels.

As outlined in the methods section of this paper, the generalizability of these results is limited due to how the sample population was selected. The use of a quantitative survey, administered in English through a mixture of western-centric media platforms and Facebook groups, biases the study towards an Anglo/European population. This can be seen in the composition of respondents' nationalities through the over-representation of Danish backpackers and the underrepresentation of Australian backpackers. Similarly, while 40 nationalities were represented,

only one Chinese respondent participated in the study. This was likely due to a mixture of issues such as language, distribution, and Facebook being illegal in China.

## **Practical Applications**

The hostel and backpacker space is an increasingly important segment of the travel and hospitality industry. Better understanding the impact Facebook and other networks have had is essential to engaging with the backpacker community and servicing it. This data is relevant for any private, educational or professional parties interested in understanding the backpacker community, its motivations, and how it socializes. It provides a strong theoretical perspective that is backed up by real-world analysis of backpackers. This data may be used by hostel owners, travel organizations, backpacker-themed publications and other similar groups to better understand the demographics of the backpacker community, and the world-view which drives them to embrace a backpacker lifestyle.

For academics, this data helps fill in existing gaps in the body of research by providing new demographic data and an in-depth analysis of Facebook's impact on backpacker relationships, which is only starting to be explored. This data might be further used to help enrich the experiences of other similar types of travel, including study abroad opportunities and voluntourism travelers.

The findings of this thesis call into question traditional stereotypes about backpackers as unemployed, young, male travelers with an education that is either relatively minimal or in-progress. This research can be used to further help dispel these myths while simultaneously lending evidence that supports the viability of backpacker travel for single women in their twenties and thirties; a group that has traditionally been discouraged from this type of travel.

These data also suggest that the hostel and backpacker population is growing increasingly more inclusive. As it does it is expanding to include a more evenly distributed population which is still dominated by twenty to thirty year olds, but also includes an increasingly more mature audience with different needs and expectations.

Lastly, this analysis provides compelling insights into how Facebook and similar technologies are perceived by communities, which were formerly highly fragmented and predominantly anonymous. These findings may be explored in the context of other populations and help to explain why communities are willing to sacrifice anonymity for increased connectivity.

## **Theoretical Applications**

This paper contributes to previous studies within the backpacker, tourism and Facebook spaces, that have utilized social capital. It relies upon an expanded social capital framework built

upon existing social capital theory, which illustrates the effectiveness of social capital as a method for understanding and explaining behavioral shifts that result from reductions in anonymity due to new communication technologies.

It further contributes to existing theoretical research by providing support for an update to early mass communication research, which suggested that online services like Facebook resulted in reduced face-to-face interaction and connectivity. This survey supports newer findings, that indicate that these early theories' findings are no longer representative of what is actually occurring. It also contributes to existing theory on the effectiveness and useful approaches for surveying a highly geographically dispersed ultra-mobile sample population. Lastly, it contributes to the greater understanding of backpackers' relationship with advanced communication technologies.

## **Future Research Directions**

This thesis has sought to contribute to the latest trends in backpacker research by exploring the social implications posed by state-of-the-art social networking technologies on the backpacker and hostel communities. It has provided a clear picture of Facebook's relationship with the backpacker community and highlighted areas where the community relates to Facebook as both an enabler and hindrance to their social performance and success. By isolating three different forms of social engagement where this occurs, this research lays the foundations for more specialized analysis of each area independently while suggesting it be expanded from three to four. This should be accomplished by separating the romantic/sexual category while retaining the social and professional categories as they current are.

Additional research might also be expanded from a single-mode to a double-mode survey method that employs in-person surveys and ethnographic interviews at multiple hostels across several countries to improve evidence for the generalizability of the data (Paris, 2013). As an extension of this, additional efforts might be made in future studies to explore how these findings apply to non-English speakers and the developing backpacker communities populated by travelers from countries such as Brazil, India and China.

## **Final Thoughts**

In closing, the backpacker community was selected because it provided an unusual opportunity to analyze Facebook's role in reducing anonymity across a global community. A community that had previously experienced relatively high levels of anonymity but seen those levels reduced drastically over a short period of time. This study sought to better understand how those shifts were perceived by the impacted population and the sentiments that resulted. What was found was somewhat surprising, and offered insights that stretch beyond the backpacker community. It

could have implications for all communities struggling with the threats posed to individual's social capital by increased surveillance technologies. This thesis contributes an analysis of a less-anonymous backpacker community and the emerging use of social networking sites as a formative tool that is shaping and evolving the backpacker experience.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix A - Survey Instrument

Hostels, Backpackers and Facebook																																															
<div>Exit this survey</div>																																															
Your Facebook & Travel Profile (1 of 3)																																															
<p>This information is COMPLETELY anonymous and will help me to better understand your relationship with Facebook and the hostel and backpacker community.</p> <p>Thank you in advance for completing the entire survey - your input is crucial to my research!</p> <p>This survey consists of three pages and should not take you more than 8 minutes.</p> <p>This survey is being distributed through social media. Please feel free to share the link with your friends and/or fellow travelers who are on Facebook and part of the hostel/backpacking community.</p> <p>If you would like a copy of the survey results (all identifying data will be removed) please e-mail alex@virtualwayfarer.com and I will be happy to provide one.</p> <p>Safe travels and open roads!</p> <p><b>* 1. What year did you join Facebook?</b></p> <table><thead><tr><th></th><th>2004</th><th>2005</th><th>2006</th><th>2007</th><th>2008</th><th>2009</th><th>2010</th><th>2011</th><th>2012</th><th>2013</th><th>N/A</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Year:</td><td><input type="radio"/></td><td><input type="radio"/></td><td><input type="radio"/></td><td><input type="radio"/></td><td><input type="radio"/></td><td><input type="radio"/></td><td><input type="radio"/></td><td><input type="radio"/></td><td><input type="radio"/></td><td><input type="radio"/></td><td><input type="radio"/></td></tr></tbody></table> <p><b>* 2. Do you access facebook while traveling?</b></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, occasionally</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, several times a week</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, every day</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, several times a day</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p><b>* 3. Was travel a factor in your decision to sign up for Facebook?</b></p> <table><thead><tr><th></th><th>No Influence</th><th>Minimal Influence</th><th>Neutral</th><th>Some Influence</th><th>Significant Influence</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Please choose one.</td><td><input type="radio"/></td><td><input type="radio"/></td><td><input type="radio"/></td><td><input type="radio"/></td><td><input type="radio"/></td></tr></tbody></table> <p><b>4. Is your relationship status visible on Facebook?</b></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, publicly</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, but only to friends and friends of friends</p>													2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	N/A	Year:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		No Influence	Minimal Influence	Neutral	Some Influence	Significant Influence	Please choose one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	N/A																																				
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Please choose one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>																																										

- ☐ Yes, but only to friends
- ☐ No

**\*5. How many times have you stayed in a hostel?**

- ☐ 1-5
- ☐ 6-10
- ☐ 11-15
- ☐ 16-20
- ☐ 21-25
- ☐ 26+
- ☐ I have never stayed in a hostel

**\*6. How many times have you stayed in a hostel over the last 36 months.**

- ☐ 1-5
- ☐ 6-10
- ☐ 11-15
- ☐ 16-20
- ☐ 21-25
- ☐ 26+
- ☐ I have not stayed in a hostel over the last 12 months.

**\*7. What year did you first stay in a hostel?**

**8. When traveling as a backpacker and staying in hostels I most often:**

- ☐ Am single
- ☐ Am in a relationship, but traveling alone
- ☐ Am in a relationship, but traveling with my partner
- ☐ Am evenly split between travelling with my partner and alone

**9. After making a new backpacker acquaintance, how long do you wait before adding them on Facebook?**

- ☐ As soon as I have Facebook access
- ☐ 20 - 60 minutes
- ☐ 1 - 6 hours
- ☐ 7- 12 hours
- ☐ 13 - 48 hours
- ☐ Several days
- ☐ A week or more
- ☐ I do not add other backpackers on Facebook

**10. I have rejected friend requests from people I have met in hostels because:**

- ☐ I never reject friend requests from other travelers
- ☐ I did not know them well enough
- ☐ I did not like them
- ☐ I thought they were strange
- ☐ I did not trust them not to post embarrassing material
- ☐ I was worried they would share things that might hurt my reputation
- ☐ I did not want my romantic partner to know about them
- ☐ I did not want my friends or family to hear about experiences I shared with the person
- ☐ I was worried they would harm my future career prospects

Other (please specify)

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## Your Experiences (2 of 3)

This information is anonymous and will help me to better understand your relationship with Facebook as a traveler. This information is very important, so thank you for completing this page. You're nearly halfway through the survey.

**\* 11. Please note how well each statement applies to your travels and your impression of the hostel/backpacker experience:**

	Strongly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Neutral	Mostly Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
Facebook has made travel less anonymous.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Before Facebook hostel/backpacking was anonymous.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook makes hostel/backpacking more anonymous.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook has changed the nature of sexual encounters in hostels.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook has increased the frequency of sexual encounters in hostels.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook is detrimental to the hostel experience.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**\* 12. Please state how well the following statements apply to your personal travel experiences:**

	Strongly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Neutral	Mostly Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
Facebook has made my hostel experience more social (photos, communication, events, etc.).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I worry about other travelers sharing my personal activities on Facebook.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel more accountable for my actions while traveling due to Facebook.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was able to sustain relationships with people I met during my trip more easily prior to using Facebook.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook is essential for maintaining relationships with people I met while traveling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People I've met in hostels and kept in contact with through Facebook improve my professional network.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Experiences that I have posted on Facebook from my time hostel/backpacking have harmed my career.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I regularly add other travelers on Facebook whom I just met.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have maintained friendships made while traveling which would not have been possible to retain without Facebook.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am more connected to my fellow travelers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

because of  
Facebook.

**\*13. Please state how well the following statements apply to your personal travel experiences:**

	Strongly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Neutral	Mostly Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
The knowledge that my behavior can be documented on Facebook keeps me from doing things I would have otherwise done while traveling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Traveling alone in hostels is a lonely/socially isolated experience.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am more social when using backpacker hostels.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am more sexually active when traveling as a backpacker than when I am not traveling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have created custom lists to keep my travel friends separate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have used Facebook to monitor a romantic partner while they traveled.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have used Facebook to monitor a family member while they traveled.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have used Facebook to monitor a potential/current employee's behavior while traveling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>



**\* 14. Please state how well the following statements apply to your personal travel experiences:**

	Strongly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Neutral	Mostly Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
I have travel contacts whom I met in hostels that I keep in touch with without the use of Facebook.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have sex with people who I am not currently in an ongoing relationship with while staying in hostels.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have sex with people who I am in an ongoing relationship with while staying in hostels.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making friends is a primary motivator for me when choosing to stay in a hostel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The opportunity for romantic (kissing/cuddling/sex) interactions is a primary motivator for me when choosing to stay in a hostel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that travel makes me a more appealing job candidate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I list my travel experience on my resume.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**\* 15. Have you used Facebook to meet up with people you met during a previous trip?**

- ☐ Yes, on one occasion
- ☐ Yes, on multiple occasions

- ☐ No, never
- ☐ No, I do not use Facebook

**\*16. Do you use Facebook to share photos from your trip with other travelers?**

- ☐ Yes, regularly
- ☐ Yes, sometimes
- ☐ No, never
- ☐ I do not use Facebook

**\*17. Do you use Facebook to access photos other travelers have posted?**

- ☐ Yes, regularly
- ☐ Yes, sometimes
- ☐ No, never
- ☐ I do not use Facebook

**18. Has content posted by people you added on Facebook while traveling ever led to problems in your existing relationships?**

- ☐ Yes, multiple times
- ☐ Yes, once
- ☐ I am not sure
- ☐ No, never

**19. Facebook has negatively impacted my relationships at home.**

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

**20. After a trip, on average how many times a year do you interact with other travelers you Facebook friended?**

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1 - 5
- ☐ 6 - 20
- ☐ 21 - 50
- ☐ 51+

**21. How often do you meet up again with the people you met while traveling?**

- ☐ Very Often
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

**22. Before Facebook I used the following to keep in touch with people I met while traveling:**

- ☐ E-Mail
- ☐ Written Letters
- ☐ Telephone Calls
- ☐ Fax Messages
- ☐ Mailed Packages
- ☐ Instant Messenger
- ☐ Pre-Recorded Video
- ☐ Video Chat
- ☐ Skype
- ☐ None of the above

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## Demographic Info (3 of 3)

This information is anonymous and will help me to better understand your demographic profile. This information is very important, so thank you for completing this final page!

**\*23. What country are you from?**

**24. Are you male or female?**

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

**\*25. Which category below includes your age?**

- ☐ 17 or younger
- ☐ 18-22
- ☐ 23-27
- ☐ 28-32
- ☐ 33-37
- ☐ 38-50
- ☐ 51 or older

**26. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?**

- ☐ Less than high school degree
- ☐ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- ☐ Some college but no degree
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor degree
- ☐ Graduate degree

**\*27. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?**

- ☐ Employed, working part time

- ☐ Employed, working full time
- ☐ Self employed
- ☐ Student, not working
- ☐ Student, working (part time/full time)
- ☐ Not employed, looking for work
- ☐ Not employed, NOT looking for work
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Disabled, not able to work

**\*28. Which continents have you visited?**

- ☐ Africa
- ☐ Antarctica
- ☐ Asia
- ☐ Australia
- ☐ Europe
- ☐ North America
- ☐ South America

**\*29. How many countries have you visited in total?**

- ☐ 1-5
- ☐ 6-10
- ☐ 11-15
- ☐ 16-20
- ☐ 21-25
- ☐ 26-30
- ☐ 31-35
- ☐ 36-50
- ☐ 50-100
- ☐ 100+

**30. Are there any additional comments you would like to share with us concerning this survey, your experiences as a traveler, or the impact of Facebook on your travel experience?**

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Done

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