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AMSRS recognises the contribution of Associate Professor David Bednall and Deakin University.
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Appendices are not encouraged.

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A New Era in Survey Research

Response rates in market and social research continue to decline. Two fundamental issues are responsible. First, people are subject to many more requests to participate in surveys, whether a short, but ubiquitous Net Promoter Score survey or multiple approaches from consumer internet panels. People are clearly becoming more selective and refusing more often. Second, contactability is becoming more problematic. In developed societies fixed phones are gradually becoming less common. Mobile phones, especially smartphones, are becoming the communication medium of choice in most societies. Internet access is patchy, with some demographic groups hard to reach and in many societies access is still limited to less than half the population. In this world of fragmented contactability, old approaches of a single survey sample frame and single contact method are becoming insufficient to address this new reality.

Welcome to the era of multimode surveys that involve multiple approach methods, coupled with multiple response methods. This presents numerous challenges for the management of fieldwork. More problematic is the management of sampling from the perspective of the gold standard of random and representative sampling. Papers that address these issues from an industry and academic perspective are welcome in what will become a special section in the December 2014 issue of this journal.

David Bednall
Editor
December 2013
Testing for telepresence: A naturalistic decision theory perspective

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ABSTRACT
This article examines one intended effect of marketing realism: the sense of telepresence often experienced via the World Wide Web. We sought to test for telepresence generation in the domain of online cultural tourism. Using interactivity and vividness as major determinants, two separate websites delivering identical content presenting Taiwan’s Dalongdong Boan Temple were created for members of a cultural tourism organisation. Given the particular nature of the interaction between user and entity via website, the methodology of the present study adopted current Naturalistic Decision Making (NDM) research logic, whereby participants’ field experience and previously acquired expertise drive experimental task development and inform the validity of its findings. Potential participants thus opted in or out of the study within a natural sequence of events, from their natural setting. Results indicated no perceived difference in telepresence between the two websites. Women appeared to favour the temple and both websites, irrespective of interactivity and vividness levels. The research establishes a precedent as regards online behavioural research, and underscores a complexity inherent to user/website interaction that warrants further study. It is suggested that the notion of verisimilitude needs to extend beyond stimuli, and that NDM research methodology may provide a useful model for application in marketing communications research.

Keywords: telepresence, verisimilitude, NDM research methodology, cultural tourism

1. INTRODUCTION
It has been argued that marketers should strive for verisimilitude in their digital communications (Klein, 2003). There are compelling reasons for this: evidence indicates that digitally simulated settings induce behaviour corresponding to that encountered in real world settings [Reeves & Nass, 2002], engender trust in shopping behaviour [Papadopoulou, 2007], positively influence users’ attitudes [Fogg, 2003], enhance users’ decision-making [Chuah, Roland, & Teh, 2008], and facilitate tactical decisions by marketers [Burke, 1996].

The technical generation of verisimilitudinous experience tends to be equated with virtual reality, whereby mediated environments are created in which scenes and objects are simulated realistically. The notion of virtual reality has usually been associated with information technology, and the use of specific hardware. Steuer [1992] however contends that virtual reality is a type of human experience. Its essential feature is the sense of presence – called “being there”, by Reeves (1991) – within a simulated environment. Costello [1997] and Bertal [1997] contend that a sense of immersion or degree of presence in the mediated environment is the primary feature of virtual reality. Costello categorises virtual reality as non-immersive, semi-immersive and fully immersive. Desktop, non-immersive systems, whereby virtual environments are viewed via monitor, solicit interaction through conventional hardware such as a keyboard and a mouse, while semi-immersive environments consist of large screens providing wide angles, and fully immersive systems involve head-mounted equipment. Regardless of the type of system, virtual reality can be defined as an immersive, interactive experience in a computer-generated environment [Pimentel & Teixera, 1993]; a feeling of presence is induced during this experience. From a marketing standpoint, the merits of non-immersive systems [e.g., computer, monitor and mouse] are their general accessibility, low cost and capacity to reach large audiences via the Internet.

2. THEORY
2.1 Telepresence
Extending from the concept of presence is that of telepresence. This has been defined as the experience of presence embedded in departure, arrival and return from a mediate place [Kim & Biocca, 1997], and as
With telepresence, a sense of presence is not generated only from virtual environments, but can result from interaction with such media as books, magazines, and television (see e.g., Lombard & Ditton, 1997, for further discussion). In this paper, the notion of telepresence follows Coyle and Thorson’s (2001) definition of a ‘simulated perception of direct experience’. In addition, the present research focuses upon non-immersive, computer-mediated experience of an entity (i.e., that of a computer user surfing the web).

Telepresence is a fairly recent concept and, perhaps unsurprisingly, its operational definition is far from uncontested (Freeman, Lessiter & Ijsselsteijn, 2001; Lombard & Snyder-Duch, 2001). Here we have adopted the definition elucidated by Steuer (1992), Shin (1998), Coyle & Thorson (2001) and Klein (2003), that its two major dimensions are ‘interactivity’ and ‘vividness’. There is general consensus that user control is the key feature of interactivity (Coyle & Thorson, 2001; Lombard & Snyder-Duch, 2001, McMILLAN & HWANG, 2002; TEO, OH & LIU, 2003). This includes user control of available information, information order and flow (SICILIA, RUIZ & MUNUERA, 2005) and such site features as the viewing angle and distance (JEONG & CHOI, 2004). Furthermore, there is evidence that interactivity is positively associated with favourable attitudes toward websites and advertised products (SICILIA, RUIZ, MUNUERA, 2005; JEONG & CHOI, 2004; WU, 1999). Vividness is less clearly defined, particularly as it contains essential features of interactivity. Steuer (1992) associates vividness with the richness of information representation and the concepts of ‘sensory breadth’ and ‘sensory depth’. The former refers to the number of sensory channels available to the user (c.f. interactivity), while the latter refers to the quality of information available. Hence, in theory, sensorily rich media presentations such as animation, audio, video, and QuickTime Virtual Reality (QTVR) should increase vividness. Interactivity and vividness are hardly orthogonal.

In their study of marketing in so-called ‘hypermedia computer-mediated environments (CMEs)’, i.e., the Web, Hoffman and Novak (1996) define telepresence as the simultaneous perception of two environments: the user’s physical environment and the environment created by the CME. They argue that the degree of telepresence felt is a function of the “extent to which a person feels present in the CME, rather than in current physical surroundings” (1996, p. 54), and hypothesise that this telepresence is an antecedent contributing to the feeling of flow users may experience on the Web. Flow has been defined as an intrinsically enjoyable (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) intrinsically motivated (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) “holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.36). The optimal flow ‘state’ emerges when a critical balance is achieved between user skill level and the given task, while boredom, apathy, or anxiety associated with an (online) experience can result from a less optimal interplay between these two factors. The experience and influence of the flow state vis-à-vis the Web has been the subject of much research, and has been found to impact consumer attitudes (Koufaris, 2002; Skadberg & Kimmel, 2004), consumer intent to purchase (HAUSMAN & SIEKPE, 2009), learning outcomes in e-learning environments (CHOI, KIM & KIM, 2007) and retention of Web content (SKADBERG & KIMMEL, 2004). However, an operationalisation of flow theory and its experience in during Web-related activity was not the direct intent of the present research. We have limited ourselves to observations regarding perceived attractiveness, felt enjoyment, and participants’ sense of the site’s informativeness: factors known to contribute to a sense of flow (e.g., Koufaris, 2002), which are also factors contributing to telepresence, as discussed previously.

2.2 The World Wide Web and Cultural Tourism

A challenge for an online marketer is to generate a convincing degree of verisimilitude among other factors in the user experience – enough to influence behaviour. This has been compounded by the exponential development of the Web as a platform. Use of the Internet has “empowered” the emergence of the “new tourist” (Buhalis & Law, 2008, p. 610), a sophisticated, experienced traveller who compiles, synthesises and utilises a wide variety of impressions, information and services that attempt to meet increasingly individual personal demands. Online cultural tourists are among those whose needs, skills and technological challenges are constantly evolving. These factors may contribute directly to their perception of enjoyment. They also point to the complexity of attempting to test the interaction between a person and an entity through a hypermediated environment. Study subjects are simultaneously computer-users whose expertise in hypermediated environments may vary considerably. This expertise is constantly evolving and may or may not be commensurate with their knowledge of the domain. Furthermore, the level of ‘virtuality’ evinced by the “eTourism” industry has been enhanced and is now dictated to by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (Buhalis & Law, 2008).
2.3 Naturalistic Decision Making

Building upon the traditions of Brunswick and Hammond in decision theory is the work of, among others, Orasanu and Connolly (1993), Zsambok and Klein (1997), and Lipshitz, Klein, Orasanu, and Salas (2001). Collectively, they develop a decision theory methodology shared by the present research. In the field of what has become ‘naturalistic decision making’ (NDM), researchers have contended that decision-making research fails to take into account the situational variables that everyday life involves (Montgomery, Lipshitz, & Brehmer, 2005). According to Orasanu and Connolly, decision event research in the laboratory tends to require decisions apart from any meaningful context. In natural settings, making a decision is not an end in itself. Usually it is a means to achieving a broader goal (Orasanu & Connolly, 1993). They argue that utilising naive subjects in context-limited environments (Orasanu & Connolly, 1993), e.g. university students obliged to participate in surveys as a part of their degrees, excludes situational, lifestyle, time-constrained, and aspirational variables which provide real-world motivators that vary over time and circumstance, ones that “establish the eliciting conditions for making decisions and shape decisions through their constraints and affordances” (Lipshitz et al., 2001, p. 334). This paper seeks to illustrate the parallel between the methodological constraints that have emerged in NDM research, i.e., test subjects’ experience, test setting and task performed are integral to the validity of results/findings and participants’ decision-making in the realm of marketing communications research, which, it can be argued, is moderated – and even inspired – by a composite of such situational and goal-driven variables.

Supporting this, a considerable literature was assembled in the 1960s on the shortcomings of laboratory studies (Rosenthal, 1966) though this since seems to have been largely overlooked: there are, after all, comparable conveniences to the laboratory paradigm. A central tenet of this work was that laboratory studies could give deceptively distorted results. It is akin to observing animals from within the zoo, instead of in their natural habitat. The course of NDM research development encountered and addressed this challenge, turning to “field research” (Klein, 2008, p. 456) which looked specifically at experts who demonstrated a high degree of decision-making ability “under difficult conditions” in fields such as medicine and the military.

The intention of this study was to design an experiment in which what we call “NDM verisimilitude” (of situation, test subject, and task) would be the guiding principle, and in doing so to experiment with a current research position that is characterised by its lack of NDM-like experimentation verisimilitude: telepresence and its application in the domain of cultural tourism. Cultural tourism presents two distinct advantages in this regard: the target group is demographically well defined, and the typical channels of communication that they take advantage of are familiar.

Given its significant Chinese-Taiwanese heritage and its relative lack of tourists 6,087,484 in 2011 according to the Taiwanese Tourism Bureau website, 2012; vs. 41,921,310 to Hong Kong, according to the Hong Kong Tourism Commission website, 2012), Taiwan was selected as the destination of interest. The cultural setting selected was the Dalongdong Boan Temple, a UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Award winner and one of the most important cultural attractions in Taiwan. Two websites promoting the temple were specifically designed for the target group; each offered participants a different degree of richness in media content to enhance vividness, and a distinctly different level of interactivity.

2.4 Testing Telepresence

Relevant empirical studies of telepresence cited in the present research share two defining characteristics: (1) the use of convenience samples of subjects—typically undergraduate students culled from university populations—and (2) laboratory settings (Klein, 2003, Coyle & Thorson, 2001, Suh & Chang, 2006). The realisation of verisimilitude in such empirical research settings is naturally limited, at best, for it may be compromised by the sheer difficulty of (1) extending beyond the artificial setting of the laboratory (2) engaging interested participants, as distinct from disinterested participants (3) devising a decision-making task that is relevant to every participant and (4) using relevant stimuli that have been deliberately constructed to engage them.

Empirically ‘authentic’ testing of telepresence should therefore engage participants organically in meaningful relationship with appropriate stimuli and a pertinent task. An authentic test of interactive verisimilitude would have to engage a naturally defined, or naturally occurring online community (see Jones’s discussion of virtual community, 1995). In essence, the stimulus content should be relevant to the participants, designed expressly for them, and delivered via a medium that they would typically use. It is difficult to imagine omitting these components from ‘real-world’ marketing research. The present study specifically avoided the use of a convenience sample to provide an added measure of authenticity to the testing behaviour of participants, and the
results they provided. In the present research, it was hypothesised that participants who are naturally motivated to navigate to a given webpage and engage in a given information gathering task would then reflect their underlying status as members of the demographic under examination, and contribute to the veracity of the results achieved.

A second hypothesis sought to test the sense of telepresence elicited in these ‘real-world’ participants, by using two websites with intentionally varying degrees of vividness and interactivity; interactivity being perhaps the one tangible dimension determining telepresence, with vividness appearing as a less well-defined by-product. The sites were labeled “High-” or “Low-User Control and Vividness”. Both sites were professionally designed for the purposes of the study: one incorporated (then) state-of-the-art interactive elements [e.g., slideshows, mouse-controllable 360° panoramas] while the other offered zero interactivity, consisting essentially of still images and text. Because the websites were widely differing in interactivity levels, pre-testing to validate the “High-/Low-UCV” labels was unnecessary.

In addition to using scales derived from Klein (2003) to measure telepresence, other scales incorporated would afford the opportunity to relate telepresence to a wider range of dimensions underlying website evaluation. Enjoyment emerges as important in a number of studies (Koufaris, Kambil & LaBarbera, 2002; Leonard & Riemenschneider, 2008; Zhang & von Dran, 2002). Similarly, attractiveness is a salient dimension underlying user satisfaction (Chu, 2001; Han & Mills, 2006; Park & Gretzel, 2007; Perdue, 2001) and also information value (Han & Mills, 2006; Perdue, 2001; Castañeda, Frías, & Rodríguez, 2007; Petrick & Backman, 2002).

3. METHOD

3.1 Stimuli

These consisted of two individual websites featuring the Dalongdong Baoan Temple. To enable the degree of telepresence to be tested, the two websites differed in levels of interactivity and vividness, both considered to be measures of telepresence. Each website used the same interface, and contained identical information covering five categories (Home, History, Deities, Architecture, and Ritual). The Low User Control and Vividness, or Low-UCV, website used Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) to present the temple simply as still images accompanied by text: participants had no control over the text or images (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Screenshot of the Home Page for the Low-UCV Website
The High-UCV website used the Adobe Flash multimedia authoring program and Pano2QTVR to present the temple via auto-play slide shows, multiple still images, flat panoramic images, and 360-degree omnidirectional panoramas (Figure 2). It provided much higher user control and vividness than the HTML website. Standard slideshow playback controls (e.g. play, pause, stop) were provided, and participants could modify the viewing area by clicking and dragging images in order to navigate the temple. Zoom facilities were incorporated, and also facilities for altering the angle of view and the size of the 360-degree omnidirectional panoramas. The site was state-of-the-art in terms of user control, vividness, and content access.

3.2 Subjects
Cultural tourists have specific characteristics: they tend to be well educated, have a professional background, a relatively high income, and are motivated to acquire new cultural knowledge (McKercher & du Cros, 2002; Richards, 2001). Sixty participants were recruited from the members of Australians Studying Abroad (ASA) and some staff of the Faculty of Design, Swinburne University. (The latter were included out of a misplaced concern that insufficient ASA members would participate.) ASA is a commercial tourism provider that leads cultural tours to numerous countries. Clearly, the members of ASA were naturally motivated to join that organisation; one benefit is access to ASA’s website, which provides information on cultural tours of potential interest to its members.

3.3 Procedure
In order to simulate real world website navigation, and replicate the practices of the ASA, the target group received an e-mail notification that information regarding the Dalongdong Baoan Temple was available on a specified website. Participants received a link to only one of the two versions of the site, which they viewed using their own hardware, in their own time. Participation was voluntary: participants chose to access the site if it interested them. The landing page for each website explained the purpose of the study, and provided basic instructions. Naturally, those who did not want to participate were free to decline at this point. Those who continued then accessed the Home page and were free to navigate without time constraint. Having completed their navigation they received the questionnaire. In order to unobtrusively observe participants’ behaviour, PHP (Hypertext Preprocessor), a general-purpose...
scripting language, was embedded to generate a MySQL database. This would monitor how much time each participant stays on each page, providing a behavioural measure of interest (Berlyne, 1971). The questionnaire covered four areas: telepresence, user enjoyment, website attractiveness, and a multiple-choice recall. Except for the multiple-choice recall, all questions used a 7-point Likert ‘Disagree – Agree’ scale (Table 1).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Telepresence

Three scales taken from Klein (2003) were used to measure the degree of telepresence of the two sites. Naturally, we would expect the High-UCV (User Control and Vividness) site to outperform the Low-UCV site on all three measures. The results proved disappointing. Using ANOVA, for Q1 the main effect

| Table 1. Research Questionnaire |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Telepresence | Q1 | While on the website, I felt I was in the world that the computer created. |
| value | Q2 | The computer-generated world seemed to me "somewhere I visited" rather than "something I saw." |
| | Q3 | I forgot about my immediate surroundings when I was navigating through the website. |
| Enjoyment | Q1 | I will return to this website. |
| value | Q2 | I felt a strong sense of active involvement. |
| | Q3 | I found the website enjoyable to navigate. |
| | Q4 | I could have stayed on this website longer. |
| | Q5 | I have a favourable impression of the temple after my visit to the website. |
| | Q6 | The website looks attractive. |
| | Q7 | The temple looks interesting. |
| Informative | Q1 | The temple was established in 1635 1760 1796 1865 |
| value | Q2 | The God dedicated in the main hall is Mastu Guanshiyin Budda Confucius Baosheng Dadi |
| | Q3 | The most important religious activity of the temple is Baosheng Cultural Festival Mastu Birthday Ceremony New Year Blessing Ceremony Burn Wang Boat Festival |
| | Q4 | The temple mainly consists of two halls two halls with right and left protecting rooms three halls with right and left protecting rooms four halls |
| | Q5 | The delicate decoration on the temple’s roof is wood carving stone carving “cut and paste” of bowl pieces golden painted wood |
| | Q6 | When worshiping the God in the temple, people place their offering at facade of front hall inside of front hall main hall back hall |
| | Q7 | People seek advice about their future at facade of front hall inside of front hall main hall back hall |
| | Q8 | There is a pair of stone lions at the facade of the front hall. Which one is female? on the right on the left there is no gender difference |
of interest, website, was non-significant \(F_{1,58} = 1.52, p = .539\), as were gender and age (a covariate). Q2 yielded similar results with the website main effect being non-significant \(F_{1,58} = .42, p = .509\), as were gender and age. Q3 again yielded a non-significant website main effect \(F_{1,58} = 3.46, p = .068\), along with gender and age. While Q3 approaches statistical significance, it fails to combat the distinctly non-significant outcomes for Q1 and Q2 (see Table 2). The conclusion is unavoidable that neither site achieved higher telepresence on the measures used. However, given that the two sites were expressly designed to exhibit strong differences in UCV, the question remains as to whether the measures are appropriate, or whether other factors were operating that may reflect the subject group and the naturalistic setting. These will be discussed later.

### 4.2 Enjoyment

Given the domain of interest (cultural tourism), the nature of the sites, and the ‘expert’ subject group, we anticipated that the High-UCV site would be found more enjoyable than the Low-UCV site. We also anticipated that the site that wished to generate a higher degree of telepresence would be found more enjoyable than the site generating a lower degree of telepresence, though this must now be discounted, given the questionable empirical status of telepresence above. For Q1 the main effect of website obtained a non-significant difference \(F_{1,58} = 1.57, p = .216\), with no gender or age effects. Q2, however, achieved a significant main effect for website \(F_{1,58} = 5.83, P = .019\) and a significant website by gender interaction \(F_{1,58} = 4.30, p = .043\). Q3 obtained no significant differences, though the direction of the website main effect was in the anticipated direction \(F_{1,58} = 3.41, p = .070\). Q4 achieved a significant website main effect in the direction predicted \(F_{1,58} = 4.49, p = .039\), while Q5 again achieved a significant website main effect in the direction predicted \(F_{1,58} = 5.06, p = .029\). However, this main effect was overshadowed by a strong gender main effect \(F_{1,58} = 8.60, p = .005\).

### Table 2. Means for High- and Low-UCV website user questionnaire responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High-UCV</th>
<th>Low-UCV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Telepresence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>M 4.50</td>
<td>F 4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M 4.29</td>
<td>F 3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>M 4.25</td>
<td>F 4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M 3.76</td>
<td>F 3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>M 4.75</td>
<td>F 4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M 2.82</td>
<td>F 3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enjoyment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>M 3.88</td>
<td>F 4.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M 3.06</td>
<td>F 3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>M 5.25</td>
<td>F 4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M 3.06</td>
<td>F 3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>M 5.00</td>
<td>F 5.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M 3.88</td>
<td>F 4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>M 4.88</td>
<td>F 4.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M 3.47</td>
<td>F 4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>M 5.25</td>
<td>F 6.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M 4.31</td>
<td>F 5.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attractiveness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>M 4.62</td>
<td>F 5.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M 4.53</td>
<td>F 5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>M 5.12</td>
<td>F 6.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M 4.71</td>
<td>F 6.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results for enjoyment are mixed. They are in the anticipated direction, and suggest that the High-UCV site was found to be more enjoyable, but are confounded by a strong gender effect for one measure and a website by gender interaction for another measure.

4.3 Attractiveness
As with enjoyment, we anticipated that the High-UCV site would be more attractive. The results for Q1 indicate no website main effect (F 1,58 = 1.20, p = .278), though there is a significant gender effect (F 1,58 = 5.13, p = .028), with women rating both sites higher than men. While Q1 focused upon the website, Q2 focused upon the subject of the website, the Dalongdong Boan Temple. The High-UCV site provided considerably more information via interactivity and vividness than the Low-UCV site. The results indicate no difference in the perceived attractiveness of the temple (F 1,58 = 1.02, p = .317), but a significant gender effect (F 1,58 = 13.03, p = .001), with women rating the temple higher than men, irrespective of the website.

4.4 Informative Value
Finally, we anticipated that the High-UCV site would have higher informative value than the Low-UCV site, and that a test of retentive memory would support this. Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted comparing performance on each site for each question. The results reveal no significant difference in performance between the two sites, and no result even approaching significance. Also, no gender difference was found.

5. DISCUSSION
Contrary to expectations, the results indicate no difference between the High-UCV and Low-UCV sites for perceived telepresence and attractiveness, and informative value. Significant differences emerged for three of the five measures of enjoyment, though two of these are confounded by a gender by site interaction [Q2] and a highly significant gender main effect [Q4]. At face value these results put into question the modalities of telepresence generation in hypermedia CMEs, and the validity of the scales typically used to measure it. They also posit an interesting gender effect whereby gender appears to exert equivalent, if not greater, statistical influence than the websites. An alternative explanation may lie in participants’ actual behaviour while using the sites. It is relevant to emphasise here that this was not a laboratory-controlled experiment using disinterested subjects: it was conducted outside the laboratory with no time constraint, and with participants whose motivation was interest in the content.

As indicated, PHP was embedded into the HTML code so that an unobtrusive measure of participants’ behaviour could be obtained. Data concerning click throughs, pages visited, and time spent per page was recorded to this database. Examination of the database revealed that many participants using the High-UCV site did not take advantage of its full potential. In fact, by their actions, some were exposed to less content than those on the Low-UCV site. [The database indicated that Low-UCV participants followed the more rigid content protocol.] This may account for the non-significant site difference for the information measures. A key feature of the High-UCV site was the provision of 360-degree omnidirectional panoramas. In order to test for differences between those who accessed the panorama features and those who did not, it was decided to run the analyses again, but using only the High-UCV participants, and replacing ‘website’ as a main effect with ‘panorama’.

5.1 Telepresence
For Q1, no statistically significant difference was found between those who accessed the panorama facility and those who did not (F 1,25 = .67, p = .422): similarly, no gender or age effects emerged. Q2 (F 1,25 = 1.92, p = .181) and Q3 (F 1,25 = 1.76, p = .197) delivered similar non-significant results for panorama, and no gender or age effects. (Table 3).

5.2 Enjoyment
For Q1, a significant panorama effect emerged (F 1,25 = 6.37, p = .020), whereby those who engaged with the panorama indicated a stronger wish to return to the website. Q2 delivered a highly significant panorama effect (F 1,25 = 9.59, p = .006), whereby those who engaged with it felt a stronger sense of active involvement. Interestingly, there was a strong gender difference (F 1,25 = 6.65, p = .018), with men more positively affected than women. Q3 and Q4 delivered no significant differences, while Q5 observed a significant gender difference (F 1,25 = 6.66, p = .017), whereby women had a more favourable impression of the temple whether they had engaged the panoramas or not.

5.3 Attractiveness
Q1 observed a significant gender difference only (F 1,25 = 4.79, p = .040), whereby women found the website more attractive whether they had accessed the panoramas or not. Again for Q2, women found the temple more attractive irrespective of whether they accessed the panoramas or not (F 1,25 = 7.48, p = .017).

These results suggest that users’ motives, choices and responses may be more complex and nuanced than the concept of telepresence (as it was defined for the purposes of this study) can accommodate.
Of course, the possibility must be considered that some users of the High-UCV site did not access the panorama feature because they did not understand how, not because they were not interested. The strong gender effect suggests an even more complicated set of factors. A number of studies have demonstrated that women’s self-perception of computer and Internet skills, commonly termed computer self-efficacy (Compeau & Higgins, 1995) is lower than that of men with the same level of experience (Broos, 2005; Hargittai & Shafer, 2006) and that women generally experience more computer related anxiety than men, regardless of experience levels (Broos, 2005). Thus, if the use of the panorama feature was a novel experience for many users, this could have resulted in some anxiety, or at least hesitation, for the women either using or unsure how to use the feature. Indeed, for those who did use what may have been an unfamiliar function, even if their use patterns resembled those of men, their sense of involvement might have differed as an effect of their attitude towards their own perceived experience. A further complicating point is that women generally found the site more attractive regardless of their use of the panorama feature, suggesting that the level of interactivity was not a determinant of their overall impression of both the site and the temple. Even if women have been shown to be less confident in utilising an unfamiliar function, this may not matter to them in the context of their overall experience of the site and its content. If attractiveness rating is taken as one parameter of a satisfying experience, then overall experience for women would appear to be more affected by factors other than perceived telepresence.

Another confounding factor is that research indicates that the visual appeal of a website – its attractiveness – appears to be established in the user within 50 milliseconds (Lindgaard, Fernandes, Dudek, & Brown, 2006). Clearly, such brief exposure would precede any interaction with the website.
The domain of computer-mediated telepresence clearly deserves further questioning and investigation. Given that interactivity is one of its two central parameters, and that an increased sense of active involvement was the most consistent result found in this field study, the telepresence investigated here needs to be reconciled with another facet of presence, which reflects participants’ technical abilities or takes into account their experience with similar websites. Users’ technical skills, experience, and even self-perception of these may play a large part in their ability to use and enjoy these sites, while user experience paradoxically acts as a measure of a website’s success.

The fact that no effect was found for telepresence, yet the sense of active involvement was increased in the High-UCV site suggests that something approaching telepresence was enacted. It may also be worthwhile considering that while this result may reflect that the site is somehow lacking in the potential to create telepresence, perhaps such a strong notion of presence is unreasonable to expect in this particular non-immersive situation. In the context of a website, rather than a game, for example, people might generally be less inclined to make sweeping statements about their experience, such as “While I was using the website, I felt I was in the world that the computer created.” If we take the increased sense of involvement as a more realistic measure of presence, then the unclear results with respect to enjoyment, attractiveness and informative value suggest that the generation of telepresence may be rather inconsequential in some current real world computer-mediated settings, or perhaps that the locus of telepresence shifts as each individual user interacts with the character and challenges presented by the hypermediated environment. Of course, we can only make tentative suggestions, but the point that verisimilitude must extend to the context of use and experimentation is worth making. In addition, we can imagine telepresence to be very important in some settings, such as gaming, but less so in others.

6. CONCLUSION

The application of NDM research techniques within the domain of online market research could lead to useful insights. Naturally, this has advantages and disadvantages. In the study reported here, its strength can be seen in using stimulus material professionally designed for the target group of interest, in the naturalistic setting of the task, and the real motivation of participants to engage in it. Interestingly, the telepresence measurement scale items adopted from a laboratory study failed to replicate results with voluntary participants. Weaknesses are in the lack of precise control as encountered in the laboratory setting, and convenient, if involuntary, participants who will do what is asked of them. The pursuit of this level of verisimilitude in online marketing environment testing opens up new opportunities for research that, while logistically challenging, may provide pertinent, reliable, customer-driven insights. Certainly, the narrow scientific definition of verisimilitude as pertaining only to the stimuli appears insufficient. A broader definition would incorporate both the participants and the task.
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Country of origin labelling of fresh produce: consumer preferences and policy implications

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ABSTRACT
This study examines the effect of country of origin (COO) on New Zealand consumers’ purchase probabilities for three categories of fresh produce: tomatoes, apples and pork, for local and overseas sourced produce. Purchase probabilities for all three product categories suggest a clear COO effect. Consumers prefer New Zealand sourced produce to both unlabelled and overseas-labelled produce. When price increases, a COO effect is still apparent; however, less so than at the lower price point. This finding suggests that a competitive advantage exists for fresh produce which is labelled of New Zealand origin; however, the advantage is in volume rather than price increase. Further findings contribute to public policy debate about the provision of COO labelling of food items. Consumers’ desire to know the origin of fresh produce is high and support is strong for mandatory COO labelling of fresh produce.

Keywords: Purchase probabilities, country of origin, food labelling, competitive advantage

1. INTRODUCTION
To date, the country of origin (COO) literature has focused predominantly on purchasing of high-involvement durable products; in particular, well-recognised branded products (Knight et al., 2007). The effect of COO on consumers’ purchase of food products has generated less interest (Juric & Worsley, 1998, Orth & Firbasova, 2003; Chryssochoidis et al., 2007; Krystallis & Chryssochoidis, 2009). Yet Hoffmann (2000) notes that in food surveys consumers consider COO important, and there are indications that food origin can influence purchase decisions independent of other cues (Skaggs et al., 1996; Loureiro & Umberger, 2005).

Studies that have examined consumers’ stated preferences for food origin typically report that food items are favoured from one country in preference to identical or similar items that originate from elsewhere. For example, Menapace’s et al. (2011) study, which investigated preference for extra virgin olive oil, found that Canadian consumers’ purchase preferences are influenced by country of origin and they are willing to pay a premium for products originating from a favoured geographic region. Camgoz and Ertem (2008) also report that respondents’ intention to purchase chocolate changed, both favourably and unfavourably, when COO was revealed, depending on whether the item originated from Turkey, Germany, Holland or Switzerland. Similarly, Krystallis and Chryssochoidis (2009) noted that Greek consumers expressed a marginal preference for locally produced ham and cheese to similar products originating from Italy and the Netherlands. Thus COO labelling of food presents both as a potential marketing tool to gain competitive advantage and as providing benefit to consumers by enabling them to make informed purchase decisions (Verbeke & Vaene, 1999).

This study aims to address the existing gap in knowledge of the effect of COO on purchase decisions for fresh food. The paper also aims to address a noted limitation in previous COO research; namely, the reliance on attitude and opinion surveys (Gao & Knight, 2007). Specifically, this paper reports findings on the effect of COO on New Zealand consumers’ purchase probabilities for three categories of unbranded fresh produce, for which price and product origin are the only cues. First, we provide the rationale for our focus on country of origin labelling of fresh food. We then present the methodology and results of our study, and then discuss the policy implications and avenues for further research that arise from our findings.

2. BACKGROUND
The lack of interest in the relationship between country image and food purchase decisions is likely to be the result of earlier beliefs that food items are a low involvement purchase (Pecher & Tregear, 2000). However, while purchase decisions relating to food...
items could be considered low involvement on the basis of monetary outlay, increasing food related health concerns and food safety issues among consumers have made food purchase decisions high involvement (Skaggs et al., 1996; Loureiro & Umberger, 2005). The view that food safety concerns influence purchase decisions for meat, fruit and vegetables is supported by the findings of two Greek studies. Tsakiridou et al., (2011), who examined Greek consumers’ awareness, attitudes, and buying intention toward food quality cues for fruits and vegetables report that the majority of survey respondents demonstrated high knowledge and awareness of features of food origin, certification and, to a lesser extent, traceability. Moreover, respondents indicated a willingness to pay a premium for fresh fruits and vegetables in accordance with one or more of the food safety features examined. Similarly, a study of Greek consumers’ willingness to pay extra for ‘quality assured’ certified meat found that while demographic factors influenced price sensitivity towards pork and beef purchases, certain consumer segments were willing to pay a premium for meat labelled to identify quality certification (Botonaki et al., 2009). These findings suggest that country of origin labelling may also influence consumers’ willingness to pay for fresh produce if used as a cue for food quality.

Product country image is believed to influence consumers’ confidence and trust in integrity or production, certification and regulatory systems of the supplier nation (Knight et al., 2007). In terms of food selection for instance, consumers may choose not to purchase dairy products originating from China since traces of melamine were found in Chinese produced milk products. Other reasons that COO may act as a cue to influence consumers’ food purchase decisions include a desire to support local producers; concerns associated with transportation, including freshness, fumigation and pest control measures; and concerns associated with the proximity of country of origin and the distance produce travels to reach consumers. Country of origin is believed to act as an extrinsic cue that infers product quality, either positive or negative, which can vary according to an individual’s knowledge, beliefs and experience with the food category (Alfnes, 2004; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Studies that have examined consumer preference for the origin of meat report that COO serves as a quality cue that likely influences purchase decisions. For instance, findings suggest that Swedish consumers use COO as a quality cue for meat purchases, perhaps in response to marketing of locally produced meat as processed according to standards based on animal welfare considerations, a prohibition of antibiotics in animal feed, and a salmonella control programme (Hoffmann, 2000). It should be noted, however, that traditionally only limited volumes of meat have been imported by Sweden, but as volumes of cheaper imports increase, trade-offs between the importance of price versus food quality may alter alignment between food preferences and actual purchase behaviour. A Norwegian study which examined consumers’ food preferences using food preference statements (e.g., “The quality of Norwegian agricultural products is better than the quality of comparable foreign products”), and a stated choice experiment involving COO alternatives, found that, on average, survey participants preferred domestic to imported beef (Alfnes, 2004). Interestingly, the study found that survey participants also preferred Swedish beef to other imported beef, beef from a neighbouring country to a distant one, and beef from developed countries to those from a less developed country. A conjoint study involving consumers in Spain, France and the United Kingdom, which investigated the effect of COO on purchase decisions for fresh meat, also found that the country of origin of meat influenced purchase intentions, with consumers generally preferring locally produced lamb (Furnols et al., 2011).

Thus findings to date suggest that potential to gain competitive advantage for a favoured country of origin exists if consumers’ knowledge and interest in COO influences their purchase decisions in line with their country image preferences and concern about food production and safety issues. Sustainable competitive advantage arises when a country cue positively influences consumers’ actual purchase behaviour over and above other product cues (Baker & Ballington, 2002). Competitive advantage could be manifested in a price advantage if consumers are willing to pay more for produce from a favoured country of origin (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1999). Alternatively, competitive advantage from a favourable country of origin effect could be expressed in a quantity advantage. For example, Tootelian and Segale (2004) suggest that consumers perceive produce from locally grown California, USA to signify quality and they prefer to serve locally grown produce to their families, but are unwilling to pay a higher price for the benefits. Hence advantage associated with COO would come in the form of higher quantities of local produce than imported produce purchased.

Identifying competitive advantage linked to country cues which positively influence consumers’ purchase of food items presents a key research opportunity (Nancarrow et al., 1998). However, interest extends beyond identifying competitive advantage opportunities linked to the effect of country cues on purchase behaviour, to findings that inform public policy debate; namely, whether labelling of food origin should be mandatory. Consumers’ interest in knowing the
Country of origin of food and the provision of labelling to inform their purchase decisions is currently the subject of domestic and international policy debates [Menapace et al., 2011]. Clearly, consumers’ ability to make informed purchase decisions in line with their food choice preferences or concerns is dependent on information about a product’s country of origin being available. Some proponents of compulsory COO labelling argue that it is consumers’ right to know the origin of the food they purchase and COO labelling should therefore be mandatory to inform food purchase decisions [Lusk et al., 2006].

Country of origin labelling is of particular interest in New Zealand as, while many grocery items including food items do provide labelling to indicate COO (Insch & Florek, 2009), it is not mandatory to identify the origin of fresh produce. New Zealand’s rejection of mandatory COO labelling is in contrast with the position in Australia, where mandatory COO labelling has been introduced [see Insch & Florek, 2009]. Similarly, the US Farm Security Act introduced in 2002 made it mandatory for all meats, vegetables, fruits and peanut sold in the United States to provide COO labels from 2004 (see Lusk & Anderson, 2004). Legislation to require food labelling requirements is proposed in countries in the European Union (see, http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/labellingnutrition/foodlabelling/index_en.htm). Voluntary country of origin labelling of fresh produce remains a topical issue in New Zealand, with proposed legislation for mandatory labelling supported by the NZ Green Party.

In response to calls for mandatory labelling of fresh food items to identify COO, the two major New Zealand supermarket conglomerates, Foodstuffs and Progressive Enterprises, introduced COO labelling for the majority of single ingredient fresh foods in the fruit, vegetable, meat and seafood categories. However, not all fresh produce in the major supermarkets is labelled and smaller supermarkets and other grocery stores have not adopted voluntary labelling. Therefore COO information to inform consumers’ purchase decisions for fresh food is not always available. For example, to provide year round availability of fresh produce categories in New Zealand, it is standard to import fruit, vegetable and meat items. Italian grown kiwifruit are imported to New Zealand to supplement what would otherwise be a shortfall in availability to meet consumer demand. Unless labelled, consumers would be uncertain as to whether the kiwifruit they purchase is locally grown or imported.

Opponents of country of origin labelling believe the costs associated with mandatory provision of labels would outweigh the benefits [Lusk & Anderson, 2004; Miranda & Konya, 2006], and argue that COO labelling is a marketing issue that should be left to retailers to decide rather than a public policy issue [New Zealand Food Safety Authority, 2005]. This view is prompted by the assumption that consumers are largely disinterested in COO and their behaviour is largely uninfluenced by the COO of food items, at least not to the extent that it overrides other cues including price.

Research designed to address the existing gap in understanding the effect of food origin on consumers’ purchase decisions is identified as an emerging theme in the food consumption literature [Luomala, 2005]. Of particular note, Pharr’s (2005) review of COO studies indicates that more research is needed to examine the effect of COO on fresh food purchases. Moreover, Loureiro and Umberger (2005) conclude that research is needed to examine COO effects on purchase decisions for vegetables and fruit as findings to date predominantly relate to fresh meat categories.

3. METHOD

Three products, representing the vegetable, fruit and meat categories, were tested in this study: tomatoes, apples and pork. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with members of the general public via mall intercept in Palmerston North, New Zealand. Each respondent viewed a series of nine showcards, including three showcards for each product category. For each showcard viewed, respondents were asked to state the chance that they would buy the product displayed, using Juster’s probability scale. The Juster Scale is an 11-point purchase probability scale, ranging from “0” (no chance) to “10” (practically certain), which has been successfully used to predict consumer purchase rates for a range of items including durables, services and fast-moving consumer goods. Since its development in the 1960s, the Juster Scale has consistently been shown to be a better predictor of consumer purchases than verbal buying intentions [see Brennan & Esslemont, 1994].

Two versions of the showcards were used, with 50 respondents viewing each version. One version depicted New Zealand as the displayed product’s COO, and the second version depicted the COO as the overseas country which supplies the product to New Zealand; namely, Australia for tomatoes, USA for apples and Canada for pork. The first showcard for each product displayed only the name of the product, a picture and the price per kilogram. These showcards were the same in both versions, referred to in this study as the ‘anchor’ card, and were used to produce a base measure, from which the COO effect
was estimated. The second showcard in each product category contained the same information as the ‘anchor’ card; however, this card also contained the respective COO according to whether the respondent was in the New Zealand or overseas version subsample. The third showcard differed from the second only in price, with an increase of one dollar to test how respondents’ purchase probabilities changed when the price was increased. Pilot testing revealed that the price increase was sufficient for consumers to notice, but did not result in unrealistic prices that consumers would be unlikely to pay. Prices were based on average current market prices for the selected product categories, as identified during a preliminary investigation of in-store, on-line and retail fliers of prices for the respective product categories.

To examine consumer opinion towards COO with respect to fresh fruit, vegetables and meat, respondents were asked how often they looked for COO information, how important it is for stores to provide COO labelling, and whether COO labelling should be mandatory in New Zealand stores. Respondents were also asked to rank seven countries according to where they would prefer their tomatoes, apples and pork to originate: New Zealand, Australia, Canada, USA, Denmark, China, and Taiwan. These countries were chosen since they account for a number of different cultures, and New Zealand imports at least one of the products used in this study from the countries listed.

To determine respondents’ knowledge of where fresh produce in New Zealand stores is sourced, they were also asked to estimate what percentage of each of the fresh produce categories tested in this study is imported to New Zealand.

To increase the likelihood that the views obtained represented the views of the New Zealand population, a screening question was used to select participants who had lived in New Zealand for eight of the last ten years. A second screening question was used to select respondents who had bought the produce examined in the survey at least once in the previous 12 months. Chi-square tests revealed no significant differences in the demographic composition of the two survey sub-samples. The total sample comprised 42 males and 58 females, ranging in age from 18 to 80, with a mean age of 45 years. The showcards depicting New Zealand sourced produce were viewed by 18 males and 32 females, ranging in age from 20 to 72, with a mean age of 43. The sub-sample who viewed showcards depicting overseas sourced produce comprised 24 males and 26 females, ranging in age from 18 to 80, with a mean age of 46.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Country of origin effects

Table 1 presents the mean purchase probabilities for each product and net percentage point differences between New Zealand produce and overseas sourced produce. The overseas probabilities have been scaled to equalise the ‘anchor’ probabilities, generated by showing the same, unlabelled stimulus to each sub-sample, thus allowing for a direct comparison between the purchase probabilities for New Zealand and overseas produce. Differences between mean purchase probabilities were tested for significance using independent sample t-tests.

Purchase probabilities for all three products increased when country of origin information was available to respondents, suggesting a clear COO effect. In general, the results suggest that respondents prefer to purchase fresh produce labelled as originating from New Zealand, rather than unlabelled or overseas-labelled produce. The net differences in purchase probabilities for New Zealand produce compared to overseas-sourced produce ranged from 30% to 58%, depending on the price level concerned. The largest COO effects were seen for apples and pork, with smaller effects for tomatoes.

Our results also indicate that respondents were more likely to buy fresh produce labelled as produce of New Zealand over unlabelled produce of identical price. In fact, for pork the purchase probability for New Zealand produce at $12.99/kg is actually higher than for unlabelled pork at $11.99/kg. Though this difference in probabilities is small, together with the COO effect previously mentioned it suggests that consumers may be more concerned about where their meat comes from than about the origin of fruit and vegetables. While reasons for consumer interest in the origin of pork were not examined in this study, our findings are consistent with earlier studies in which consumers’ preference for meat origin is linked to their awareness of animal welfare and farming production methods. Hence, our findings for pork may be related to widespread publicity concerning animal welfare issues in the pig farming industry in New Zealand, thus potentially generating greater consumer interest in the origin of pork.

In terms of New Zealand produce, the mean purchase probability for all products increased significantly once the New Zealand COO label was presented to respondents. The largest effect was for pork; the average purchase probability increased by 38% when the product was identified as New Zealand produced produce.
When the price of the New Zealand-sourced produce was increased by $1/kg, the purchase probabilities decreased slightly, but for apples and pork were still higher than the purchase probabilities for overseas produce that was $1/kg cheaper, while the purchase probabilities for New Zealand tomatoes at $6.99/kg and Australian tomatoes at $5.99/kg were the same. These results are important because there is a cost to COO that either has to be borne by producers or, more likely, passed on to consumers. We did not attempt to estimate this additional cost, and it would vary for different products, but it seems unlikely it would amount to $1/kg for any fresh produce. Thus the fact that preference for New Zealand-labelled produce was at least as high as that for overseas-labelled produce, even with a price differential of $1/kg, suggests that the cost of COO labelling would have to be very significant before it affected consumers’ preferences.

However, though a COO effect was still apparent at the higher prices tested, the effect was less than at the lower price points. This suggests that, while respondents were concerned about where their fresh produce originated from, this concern was reduced as the price increased. This finding is consistent with an earlier study of USA consumers’ purchase preferences, in which local produce is preferred but competitive advantage relates to volume increase, not price advantage (Tootelian & Segale, 2004).

The COO effect was also detected for overseas sourced produce. In this case, the mean purchase probabilities decreased when the respondents were presented with the foreign COO labels and then decreased further when the higher price was presented. Overall, the results suggest that respondents were more likely to purchase unlabelled produce than pay the same amount, let alone more, for overseas sourced produce. This finding was replicated for all three products in this study and suggests that if COO labels were available for the fresh produce categories examined, New Zealand products would experience higher demand than produce sourced from foreign suppliers. Thus, in general, the findings suggest that a competitive advantage exists for produce which is labelled of New Zealand origin, however, as noted above, the advantage is in volume rather than price increase.

Table 1: Mean Purchase Probabilities for New Zealand and Overseas Sourced Produce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Produce</th>
<th>New Zealand Produce</th>
<th>Overseas Produce</th>
<th>Net Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% point1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomatoes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomatoes_Anchor $5.99</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomatoes_COO1 $5.99</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>31^2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomatoes_COO2 $6.99</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apples</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apples_Anchor $2.99</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apples_COO1 $2.99</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>52^4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apples_COO2 $3.99</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>49^3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork_Anchor $11.99</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork_COO1 $11.99</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>58^4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork_COO2 $12.99</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>56^3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. ((New Zealand produce probability – Overseas produce probability)/ New Zealand produce probability)* 100
2. Difference between means for New Zealand produce and Overseas produce significant at p<.05
3. Difference between means for New Zealand produce and Overseas produce significant at p<.01
4. Difference between means for New Zealand produce and Overseas produce significant at p<.001

[(6.2 - 4.5)/4.5]*100. The comparable figures were 18% for apples and 11% for tomatoes.
4.2 Country of origin rankings

Respondents were also asked to rank New Zealand and six countries from which at least one of the produce items examined in this study is imported, in the order of most preferred country of origin to least preferred. Table 2 presents the mean and mode scores, which indicate respondents’ COO ranking preferences for each country examined.

The results in Table 2 suggest a very strong ethnocentric trend, defined as a bias towards favouring local goods over foreign-sourced goods (Kaynak & Kara, 2002; Shankarmahesh, 2006). In terms of preferred country of origin, New Zealand was ranked consistently above the other countries included in the study, namely Australia, Canada, USA, Denmark, Taiwan and China. Based on lowest mean scores, not only is New Zealand the most preferred country of origin for fresh produce, but respondents also reported it first (mode score) more than the other countries, with all but one respondent ranking New Zealand first for all three products.

There were very few differences between the products in terms of preferred origin of the other countries with Australia, typically ranked second, followed by Canada and USA, next preferred was Denmark, followed by Taiwan and lastly China. Of particular note are the small differences detected between the rankings for Taiwan and China, and Canada and USA, for each product. It is plausible that due to the close geographical location and similar cultures of these countries, respondents ranked them close together.

The order of ranking is in line with cultural similarity to New Zealand, suggesting that after ranking New Zealand as the most preferred COO, respondents may have ranked the other countries according to their similarity to New Zealand’s culture; that is, Western cultures were typically ranked higher than Eastern cultures. Hence, the overseas countries used in this study could have affected the results. Specifically, the smaller COO effect for Australian tomatoes could be due to Australia’s close proximity and similar culture to New Zealand. Thus, respondents may have had less concern about their fresh produce coming from Australia, than for produce originating from the lower ranked USA and Canada.

A further consequence of the finding that COO preference alters according to the source of fresh produce is that consumer choice could be influenced by an absence of COO information. That is, the finding detailed in the previous section, that unlabelled produce generates higher purchase demand than overseas sourced produce suggests that, in the absence of COO labelling, consumers may assume that produce originates from New Zealand. Hence our findings suggest that mandatory COO labelling would favour domestic suppliers as consumers could easily identify produce from New Zealand, enabling New Zealand suppliers to reap the benefits of their preferred COO status. Conversely, the lack of mandatory COO labelling on fresh produce in New Zealand is beneficial to foreign suppliers as it means that their produce is not affected by consumers’ COO preferences.

| Table 2: Preferred COO Ranking for Each Product |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Produce        | NZ              | Australia       | Canada          | USA             | Denmark         | Taiwan          | China           |
| Tomatoes       | 1.0             | 2.2             | 3.7             | 4.0             | 5.1             | 6.0             | 6.0             |
| Mean           | 1.0             | 2.2             | 3.7             | 4.0             | 5.1             | 6.0             | 6.0             |
| Mode           | 1               | 2               | 3               | 3               | 5               | 6               | 7               |
| Apples         | 1.0             | 2.3             | 3.6             | 3.8             | 5.1             | 6.1             | 6.1             |
| Mean           | 1.0             | 2.3             | 3.6             | 3.8             | 5.1             | 6.1             | 6.1             |
| Mode           | 1               | 2               | 3               | 3               | 5               | 6               | 7               |
| Pork           | 1.0             | 2.3             | 3.5             | 4.0             | 5.0             | 6.1             | 6.1             |
| Mean           | 1.0             | 2.3             | 3.5             | 4.0             | 5.0             | 6.1             | 6.1             |
| Mode           | 1               | 2               | 3               | 4               | 5               | 6               | 7               |

Note: 1 = Most preferred, 7 = Least preferred
4.3 Consumer knowledge and opinion of country of origin

One perspective on country of origin labelling of food items is that it is largely a marketing issue. That is, as the previous sections suggest, COO can be used to obtain a competitive advantage if a positive country image cue favourably influences consumers’ purchase decisions. Another perspective on COO labelling is that it should be mandatory, irrespective of actual influence on purchase decisions, as the issue is one of public policy and relates to consumers’ right to know the origin of the food they purchase. Moreover, in the absence of information to determine COO, purchase decisions may be based on the assumption that food items are locally produced. In fact, fresh produce items are commonly sourced from both domestic and offshore suppliers to meet consumer demand.

To gauge consumer knowledge of the product categories examined in this study, respondents were asked to estimate what percentage available in New Zealand stores is imported from overseas. Table 3 presents respondents’ estimation of the percentage of imported produce for each category, and the actual percentage of imports for each category according to publically available data from sources including Statistics New Zealand and the New Zealand Pork Industry Board.

Mean percentage estimates indicate that, in general, respondents were more accurate in terms of estimating the percentage of pork imported to New Zealand than they were for estimating import percentages of tomatoes and apples. As noted previously, this higher accuracy for pork may be due to publicity surrounding COO labelling, which uses pork as an example of a product that is often imported from overseas. However, since the estimates that respondents provided for all three products were similar, the estimation obtained for pork could be due to chance. The inflated estimate for apples and tomatoes suggests that consumers assume that a greater percentage of the apples and tomatoes available in New Zealand stores is imported than is actually available. Lack of knowledge of imported versus locally sourced produce is an issue because COO is not mandatory for fresh produce in New Zealand, therefore it is difficult for consumers to accurately distinguish between New Zealand-sourced and foreign-sourced produce to inform their purchase choice.

To further gauge consumer interest in the COO of fresh produce, respondents were asked whether it should be mandatory for New Zealand stores to identify the country of origin of all fresh fruit, meat and vegetables. In addition, they were asked to indicate how often they look for country of origin information, and how important it is for stores to provide COO labelling. Table 4 presents percentage scores relating to each question and indicates differences in responses by gender.

Most respondents (87%) indicated that COO labelling should be mandatory for all fresh fruit, meat and vegetables sold in New Zealand stores, with a slightly

Table 3: Mean Estimates of the Proportion of Produce Imported to New Zealand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Produce</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tomatoes</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apples</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Consumers’ Perspectives of COO as a Factor in Food Purchases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mandatory COO</th>
<th>Look for COO</th>
<th>Importance of COO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree %</td>
<td>Always %</td>
<td>Often %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
higher percentage of females in favour (93%) compared with males (79%). Likewise, in answer to the question “How important is it to you that stores provide information to allow shoppers to identify the country of origin of fresh fruit, meat and vegetables?”, over 75% of respondents indicated that they felt it was “very important” or “important”, which suggests that most respondents place a high level of importance on the availability of COO labelling. When asked how often they looked for COO labels, over half of respondents indicated that they look “often” or “always”, with female respondents generally indicating greater interest in seeking COO information. Of interest, however, 18% of respondents indicated that they never look for COO labels at all. Whilst the reasons for consumers’ preference for locally-sourced produce were not investigated, our results suggest that respondents’ view COO of fresh produce as important and their views align with the purchase probability findings which favour locally sourced produce. Thus, these results support arguments in favour of mandatory labelling of COO for all fresh produce available in New Zealand stores on the basis of consumers’ right to know the origin of the produce they purchase.

5. CONCLUSION
This paper provides insight into competitive advantage arising from COO labelling of locally produced fresh produce. The findings also have implications for public policy decisions regarding mandatory versus voluntary COO labelling of fresh produce.

This study found that COO can influence consumers’ purchase probabilities for fresh, unbranded food products. Overall, our research suggests that when New Zealand consumers are aware of the origin of their fresh produce, their purchase preference is for items displaying a ‘Product of New Zealand’ label, rather than for produce that is overseas-sourced or of unknown origin. Furthermore, this advantage is likely to persist even if the cost of COO labelling is passed onto consumers.

In line with the COO effect detected, which favoured locally sourced produce over foreign sourced produce, we also found that consumers support calls for mandatory labelling of COO for fresh produce sold in New Zealand stores. In general, the results suggest that knowledge of actual levels of fresh produce categories imported to New Zealand is low; however, respondents expressed strong interest in knowing the origin of fresh produce. Moreover, New Zealand ranked as the most preferred source of the produce we tested, with other countries included in our study also consistently ranked in order of most preferred source of produce to least preferred country of origin. In order for consumers to make informed purchase decisions for fresh produce in line with their COO interest and preferences, COO labelling is required.

This paper reports consumers’ purchase probabilities rather than their COO preferences, thereby extending previous studies which predominantly report less reliable intention measures or attitudes. Thus our study provides a useful methodological platform for further research. While the sample sizes in the study were relatively small, the effects observed were large and, with one exception, statistically significant, and the research included a range of fresh produce. However, additional studies, using larger samples, a wider range of fresh food product categories and differential price increases to reflect the cost of implementing COO in different product categories, would extend the generalisability of the findings reported in this paper.
REFERENCES


Research in the first person: 
Reflection on the research experience using a research journal.

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ABSTRACT  
This paper draws on a phenomenological study based study (Waters, 1994) to demonstrate the applicability of collecting and recording data using a research journal. The study focused on two key life stages, first-time pregnancy and first-time parenthood, which is an under developed area of research in family leisure studies, as previous approaches have tended to concentrate on all phases of family life (Beck & Arnold 2009). The study collected data in two phases using focus groups and interviews with pre-birth and post-birth groups and interviews with leisure facility managers. The paper discusses the meaning and importance of reflections as a means of evaluating the experiences of the researcher. A number of key research issues emerging during the study in terms of the validity of using journals as a method recording data are discussed and evaluated. The paper concludes with affirming the benefits of reflection through journal writing as an alternative to traditional qualitative methods.

Key words - reflection, research journal, research extracts, phenomenology, research experience, qualitative research

1.0 INTRODUCTION  
The main objective of this paper was to examine and record the researcher experience in the field, through the use of a research journal to help fill a gap in the research literature. In the research literature, principally within the fields of psychology and sociology (Dewey, 1933) has identified that reflective writing practices are principally concerned with giving serious thought to experiences that are unfolding. Also, another key objective was to open up my research experience and impressions in written format to other researchers to challenge assumptions, offer different viewpoints and provoke new insights into research. This approach facilitates learning about research and helps makes connections between experience and learning [Van Gyn, 1996]. Although, the core focus of this paper is on reflection in the field of research, it is appreciated that reflective practice is a vital component of training in the professional fields of nursing and social work and in management education. For example, Gray (2007) has advocated a range of reflective tools in management education, which include coaching, mentoring and action learning, but Hibbert (2013) argues this is problematic for undergraduate students with little or no experience to reflect upon. However, Hibbert (2013) suggested a teaching model to prepare and encourage reflection and Cunliffe (2002, 2009) has identified a range of reflective practices in teaching management education that have witnessed some success. With specific regard to research, reflection involves complex processing of information which helps the researcher to examine and evaluate their experience, rather than focus on the research outcome [Murray & Kujunzic, 2005]. The research journal is one of many tools that can be used by a researcher in reflecting and examining their experience and at the same time collect valuable research data. Qualitative researchers have predominantly used traditional methods of collecting data such as interviews and focus groups, whereas this paper advocates the use of a research journal [Ortipp, 2008]. However, the lack of literature that discusses and evaluates the experiences of researchers in using research journals is limited [Borg, 2001]. As a result little is known about the benefits of using research journals as part of the research process to capture additional data and develop the skills of the researcher.

1.1 Organisation of the paper  
The first section of this paper explains the key concepts of ‘reflection’, after which the benefits of using a research journal are highlighted. Next, the specific research journey embarked upon in the field of family life and leisure is described. Then, in order to give context to this paper a number of research extracts sourced from the research journal are introduced and discussed and evaluated. The paper concludes with affirming the benefits of reflection through journal writing as an alternative to traditional qualitative methods.
1.2 Defining reflection

Reflection involves an action or as Boyd and Fales (1983, p.101) assert is concerned with “the process of creating and clarifying the meaning of experience [present or past] in terms of self [self in relation to self and self in relation to the real world]”. This requires the researcher to write ‘something down’ which gives reflection more purpose and power (Yinger & Clark, 1981) and “the process of reflection helps to bring the unconscious into consciousness” (Ortlipp, 2008, p.698.) or as Van Gyn (1997) asserts makes the researcher more critical and introspective. This involves cognitive activity, where we are able to evaluate our experiences to give what Ellis (2001) refers to as a ‘measure of perspective’. According to Schön (1991) reflection is useful in helping bridge the gap between theory and practice and enables the researcher to identify ideas and start to make connections between different aspects of the research aids the transfer of learning. Reflection involves higher order thinking processes (Wertenbroche & Nabeth, 2000) to analyse, reconsider and qualify our experiences as a researcher (Murray & Kujundzic, 2005).

2.0 THE REFLECTIVE PROCESS

The act of writing helps facilitate the process of reflection in expanding our thoughts onto paper in a research journal, which provides evidence from which we are then able to draw conclusions about our research (Cui, 2012). Jasper, (2005, p.250) provides a more detailed account, in that “reflective writing is, by its very nature …written in the first person and is essentially subjective [and is connected] to the experiences and perceptions of the author”. Consequently, it could be argued that journal writing lacks objectivity and there is a danger of over indulgence of the ‘self’ in embellishing what is recorded. Nonetheless, this needs support and guidance and enables the researcher to start to make connections between different aspects of the research aids the transfer of learning. Reflection involves higher order thinking processes (Wertenbroche & Nabeth, 2000) to analyse, reconsider and qualify our experiences as a researcher (Murray & Kujundzic, 2005).

Writing the reflective journal allowed the researcher to acknowledge the thoughts and emotions being experienced and the thoughts shared with the people involved in the focus group studies and in the interviews. In many ways, the research journal provided an outlet for observations that were not recorded elsewhere and encouraged critical analysis and thinking. Writing the journal provided time out to think about the research and make informed decisions about what was important and critical and what was not. The practicalities of recording thoughts on the focus group process and interviews did result in a time lag in the recording of some reflections in the journal. As a result, this had the potential to impact upon the quality of a research journal, largely influenced by the researcher’s memory. This is one of the limitations of using this method highlighted in the literature (Cui, 2012) as the researcher needs time and space to record their observations. Taking time out from undertaking the research, through compiling the research journal was a useful exercise to analyse my own thoughts during the research in a systematic way. In reflecting on the research process, it was possible to focus on thinking and looking in order to understand the experience of the researcher as it unfolded to question personal beliefs and expectations which Gidman (2007) argues helps develop a researcher. For example, during the early stages of planning the interviews with couples, it was intended just to interview couples together. However, as a result, of reflecting on the gender dimensions of the interview process with couples in the research journal, it was decided to interview couples on their own which allowed for interviewees to talk more freely.
without interruption from their partner. The process of reflection helped in examining and evaluating the research methods utilised, rather than focusing on the outcome of the research [the data] as through reflection it was possible to gain additional insights in relation to the lived experiences of the individuals involved in the research which helped facilitate a deeper level of questioning.

In the planning stage of the research project it was intended to run the pre-birth focus group for one hour, when couples had arranged this time to be available. In reality though, this focus group ran over time as conversations often turned to many areas of discussion not originally planned for and into areas that were not relevant to the research project. This only became clear after reflections had been recorded on these focus groups in the research journal concerning observations on the pre-birth focus group. As a result, a much tighter rein was kept on the post-birth focus group discussions by following the pre-determined questions more closely. This still allowed for flexibility, but gave the post-birth focus group discussions more direction and purpose in line with the key research questions. The knock on effect was that the skills and ability to better manage the focus group meetings was improved. Furthermore, during the focus group discussions and interviews it was possible to reflect on hidden data, concerning the feelings, attitudes and emotions that research participants were expressing. Without using a research journal this detail would have been lost to the researcher.

Gaining insights into the world of the researcher is often problematic, but the compilation of a research journal provides a window into their experience through personal reflection and can be utilised as an important methodological tool in “contributing to the trustworthiness of a research study” [Jasper, 2005, p.248]. This has the potential to provide the researcher with information to discuss less well documented issues in research with their research supervisor and can help identify any research difficulties or problems from the researcher’s perspective that might not be evident to the supervisor. Compiling information in a research journal provides evidence and another source of data for the researcher which “becomes a tangible way to evaluate our own experience, improve and clarify one’s thinking and finally become a better scholar” [Janesick, 1998, p.24]. The data presented in a research journal can be used as another form of data and to supplement primary sources of data. Also, as [Jasper, 2005, p.256] has noted the “data contains the researcher’s interpretation within their own cultural, social and experiential parameters”, which can be very empowering to the researcher [Finlay, 2002]. However, one of the limitations in terms of research outputs which all academics are subject to, in universities worldwide, is the observation that accounts of reflective writing are very difficult to publish or disseminate [Finlay, 2002]. Nadin and Cassell [2006, p.210] assert this is often due to “the positive hegemony that permeates many of our research outlets. Also, it is important to consider whether the researcher’s views about what participants experience make sense to the participants when relayed to them.

During the study on family life and leisure, the research journal became a useful vehicle to document experience and has the potential to increase the awareness of the ‘self’ in research as an individual and as a professional [Borg, 2001]. The journal acts as a vehicle to improve researcher development and “enables the researcher to continuously think about their own research practices and assumptions, by recording their thoughts in a systematic way” [Nadin & Cassell, 2006, p.210]. However, there is a lack of guidance on writing reflectively in the research literature. This is especially the case for novice researchers with regards to “the purposes of keeping a reflective journal from a methodological perspective and how to use their perceptions as an integral part of the research process” [Ortlipp, 2008, p.696]. Clearly more work is needed in this area to give future researchers the opportunity to record their experiences in a logical and structured manner with the objective of using this information as a source of data for the research.

4.0 INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH EXTRACTS

In this part of the paper, five of the key issues (extracts) that emerged as part of writing the research journal based on my experiences throughout the time of the research project are outlined and discussed. In essence, the process of recording reflections by the physical act of writing became another form of data. When writing up the findings, the researcher was able to refer to the research journal and provide further evidence on the key themes that arose as part of the study. Each extract below is given a title and is related to the broader context of the study to give meaning, to provide the reader with insights into the study from the researcher’s own personal perspective, which was only made possible by the compilation of a research journal.

4.1 Extract one– viability of the study

The initial interest in family life and leisure as a viable area of study can be traced back to the researcher’s personal experience, when becoming a parent and the impact, this significant life event had on his personal life and leisure. As a ‘first-time’ parent, he was able to easily establish rapport during the focus group studies.
and interviews with pre-birth and post birth couples to establish context, which built trust and confidence, enabling this study to progress [Creswell, 1998]. In this research study, glimpses were gained into the lives of couples experiencing a similar life event. Cui [2012] has described this as ‘insider research’ where the researcher has some familiarity and connection with the people they are researching. This was the case in this research study, as one cannot claim to have uncovered the ‘real truths’ about family life and leisure, but to have contributed to the literature and debates surrounding family leisure and the experiences of parenting for couples. Within the research journal, observations were recorded with respect to the initial contacts the researcher had with the research participants.

4.2 Extract two- the qualitative method
In this study, as proposed by Mittelstaedt (2002, p.152), the research design made it, ‘possible to assess each method used, providing information on their limitations as well as their strengths and clarifying their presuppositions and their consequences’ . The research journal provided a means to record the thoughts on these issues. By adopting a qualitative approach to seek out the opinions of couples, the researcher sought to add to the research methods literature and offer additional insights into the lived experiences of couples, from both a male and female perspective. The focus group studies combined with the interviews from a user and management perspective facilitated a deeper understanding into the phenomenon of family leisure and provided a means of questioning at a deeper level. This approach led to a better understanding of the lives of couples involved in the study, but it is acknowledged that a researcher is only able to tell part of the story.

This story is obviously selective, as decisions needed to be made concerning what would be included in the final version of the study. At the conclusion of the both the pre-birth and the post-birth focus group studies detailed notes were taken and this strategy was replicated at the end of each interview with pre-birth and post-birth couples and with leisure facility managers. This was a difficult and challenging task as the primary purpose during the focus groups and the interviews was to concentrate on the participant’s feedback. Taking notes immediately after the focus group discussions and after each interview, was at times inconvenient and impractical, but very useful evidence for the research journal and limited the time lag between the reporting of data and the recording of data.

4.3 Extract three- focus groups
Gaining the confidence and trust of those selected as research participants was initially problematic, in the early stages of the research. However, prior to the design of the methodology, informal meetings were arranged with both men and women at the pre-birth and post-birth stages to clarify the purpose of the research. The conversations that unfolded as part of this process were recorded in the research journal to reflect upon, when deciding on the final focus group questions and format. Therefore, reflection helped the researcher reflect on the level of understanding by participants regarding the phenomenon of the research. Consequently, their trust and willingness to participate in this study was acquired, which is a key factor in motivating people to give up their time to take part in research studies [Kenny, 1996]. Assembling the focus groups took a lot of time, effort and energy and although many participants had initially given their consent to take part, they still needed further encouragement, persuasion and reminders. In the research journal notes were made to determine the reasons why participants decided to take part in the study, which greatly helped in encouraging other participants who had yet to confirm their participation. Regular email contact and a number of personal phone calls encouraged participants to give their full commitment to the study. Therefore, regular and constant communication recorded in the research journal was the key to elicit their involvement in the study. Both pre-birth and post- birth focus group participants were concerned that they might be discussing highly personal and sensitive matters with people they might not know in the focus groups. Consequently, some individuals needed re-assurance of the processes involved and the fact that the research findings were to be confidential and reported as themes that emerged from the data that participants had uncovered. For this purpose, they were given further guidelines on how the focus group conversations would be evaluated and analysed and were reminded that their comments could not be identified in the write up of the discussions. Also, all pre-birth and post-birth focus group participants were sent a summary of the findings of their discussions by email and asked for comment, before the findings were confirmed in written form as part of this study. This strategy enabled participants to check what they had reported was a true reflection of what they said. The majority of the focus group participants described their experience as relaxed, comfortable and interesting. Furthermore, it became evident that the research journal became a learning resource to improve moderator skills during the focus groups and delivery of questions in conducting interviews as the study advanced.

4.4 Extract four- the interviews
The justification for using interviews was based on the premise outlined by Behringer [2006] as interviews are
capable of producing rich, detailed information about the meaningful dimensions of lived experience, the dimensions being family life and leisure. After each interview notes were recorded in the research journal to reflect upon how the interviews had proceeded and problems were recorded to inform and improve future interview practice. This objective of each interview was directed towards allowing interviewees to describe the world as they perceived it, to be described in their own terms and to highlight what ‘things’ and events meant for them. The interviews with couples took a lot of time, negotiation and effort on the part of the researcher and were more problematic than the individual interviews. During the couple interviews, the researcher was conscious of one person dominating the other and the need to be careful around issues of conflict and sensitivity between couples on issues that arose. Nevertheless, a number of couples did argue with each other during the interviews, but fortunately disagreements never got out of hand. The couple interviews offered insight into the interactions and nature of the relationship between couples, with the researcher being mindful that the couple interviews could produce consensual data, where they might be an attempt to generate a unified reality (Paul, 1989).

Also, the researcher was fully aware of the possible inconsistencies in the data, in that the construction of events during individual interviews might be quite different, when compared to the couple interviews. The opportunity to reflect on the interview process in the research journal was a useful device in identifying such concerns. Fortunately, these concerns did not eventuate, but during the couple interviews men had to be encouraged to be more engaged in contributing to the interview discussion as this had been noted in the research journal at the pilot stage of interviewing. As part of this strategy, a number of ideas to fully engage men in the interviews were made note of, then put into practice to encourage men to be more open. One of the key barriers to men talking in the couple interviews was due to women often dominating the interviews.

The pre-birth and post-birth couples were generous enough to give up their time and for both partners to be there at the same time for the ‘couple’ interview and post-birth couples managed to arrange childcare so the interviews could go ahead. Flexibility was required in terms of days and date for the interviews and it was not unusual for parents to cancel at short notice, which caused difficulties with planning the research study. The frustrations recorded in the research journal around these issues again were useful to deal with such situations. When arranging the interviews for post-birth couples, it became clear that contingencies had to be planned for, as the demands of parenting were often unpredictable (Shaw, 2008). As a result, a number of interviews had to be re-arranged for a number of post-birth couples at relatively short notice. Likewise, a number of interviews had to be re-arranged for pre-birth couples that were in the last trimester of theirpregnancy, as a number mentioned they had no time to be interviewed or simply did not feel like taking part. Obviously, looking after a young child or dealing with the demands of pregnancy were a lot more pressing than undertaking a study on family life and leisure and again the research journal provided a useful vehicle to document reflections on the realities of pregnancy and parenting. Nevertheless, most couples were accommodating and did their utmost to meet pre-arranged interview dates. Some interviews took much longer than first anticipated, which impacted upon the time management plan for the rest of this research study. Fortunately, a number of contingencies had been put into place that allowed extra time for the interviews to be completed without impacting upon the master plan and timings of the research, so some slack time was built into the research plan to meet the needs of couples. This strategy came about as a result of recording problems in the research journal with the pre-birth couple interviews that were resolved with the post-birth interviewees.

Generally, families were very generous with their time and most spoke openly about their feelings and thoughts and most interviews became a kind of conversation, where, interviewees were able to speak for themselves [Tolich & Davidson, 1999, p.60]. The majority of the interviews took place at the home of the interviewees, where most felt relaxed and comfortable. Throughout the interviews, the guiding principles outlined by Tolich and Davidson (1999, p.109) were utilised to ensure questions were asked in “the right way” to ensure accurate recording of responses to the questions asked. A number of interviews were undertaken at the workplace of the interviewee, as they were more comfortable with this arrangement. The research journal provided a useful means to document the researcher’s feelings to reflect back on at a later date. The interviews were enjoyable and stimulating and provided a source of motivation to help progress and give impetus to the research study. On a number of occasions, once the interviews were completed, other discussions would ensue on a range of different issues, not all necessarily linked to the topic of this study, but still interesting and often useful data to reflect upon and record in the research journal. At the end of each interview, interviewees were asked to reflect on their interview experience and their feedback provided useful information for the research journal, to be reported as important research data in the final write up of the study.
During the solo interviews, individuals remarked that they had enjoyed their experience, especially the one-on-one interaction with the interviewer, as this helped them remember important details about the questions they were asked. In particular, they appreciated the open-ended nature of the interviews they were involved with, as this gave them the flexibility and opportunity to express themselves freely in their own words. As a result, valuable data was compiled in the research journal and made visible with regard to the researcher’s feelings, thoughts and opinions, which would not have been recorded elsewhere.

4.5 Extract five- the manager interviews

Completion of the manager interviews took a long time to arrange, because many of the managers were far too busy to allocate time to sit down and be asked questions about family leisure. In reality, many of them were very busy and had to cancel pre-arranged interview appointments on several occasions. All these observations were recorded in the research journal and provided a useful means of documenting the realities of undertaking a research project with busy people with senior management responsibilities. This proved frustrating at times in terms of progressing the research, but patience was needed as managers were prepared to give up their time freely to be involved in this study. Most of them had to cancel initial interview appointments, as they had other priorities that had arisen between the time of contact and the proposed interview date. In order to plan for this contingency, each manager was asked to offer two dates for a possible interview. If the first date was cancelled, which it invariably was, a second date was available to fall back on, which in some cases was confirmed. This risk management strategy in using contingencies seemed a good idea in practice, but in reality a number of managers had to cancel both dates. In the majority of cases, the ‘actual’ interview took place on the third date agreed upon. However, in the case of two managers, the actual interview took place on the fourth arranged interview date. As a result of the manager interviews, and it became apparent that conducting interviews was ‘hard work’ (Rothman, 1986) and required patience and determination on the part of the researcher.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In this paper, the practicalities and purposes of writing a research journal were outlined and the importance of learning and developing as a researcher by writing a journal were emphasised. Within this paper, it was argued that writing a personal research journal is critical for a number of reasons. This includes the documentation of the researcher’s personal research journey, the research framework and the process to validate the authenticity of qualitative research. Narratives that derive from research journals have a better capacity to inform other researchers and help document experiences that might be lost. In particular, early career researchers are more able to learn about the realities of research, “not available from any other sources” (Borg, 2001, p.160) and learn more about the researcher’s journey into research. However, it seems that there is a lack of guidance and academic debate on how to do it and the difficulties and practicalities involved. Journal writing for research purposes was a challenging and tedious process, but the aim was to write constructively with purpose by continually asking questions about the research journey as it unfolded. In writing the research journal, a researcher is able to communicate their thoughts, feelings and opinions to make them what Ortlipp (2008) has described as visible. The writing of a research journal is one of a number of methods of reflection that a researcher can utilise to record their experiences in a simple and effective manner in a number of disciplines where this method of research has been limited (Mittelstaedt, 2002).

Although, this research study was based in New Zealand on the topic of family life and leisure the outcomes of this study are transferable to other research contexts. Also, this research provides some guidelines on how other researchers might record their own research journey. This context is useful and of interest to those involved in all disciplines of research as the issues and concerns raised in this paper, have the capacity to challenge all types of researcher. This paper provides an account of the practicalities and challenges of writing a research journal and encourages other researchers to consider use of this method in their own research. Taking time out from the ‘doing’ of the research and finding space to compile a research journal provides the opportunity for the researcher to put reflection into practice by creating and clarifying the meaning of their own experiences “in terms of....self in relation to self and self in relation to the world” (Boyd & Fales, 1983, p.101). Also, the research journal provides a means to reflect on the experience of research, which in turn gives researchers an opportunity to improve their skills of reflection. Furthermore, reflection provides a useful strategy to process the research experience and develop learning and professional growth as a researcher. As a result, the researcher gains confidence in being critically reflective. This is a fundamental principle that needs to be applied in all original research.
REFERENCES


Researching the ‘researched’ about research
A fresh perspective on the power of focus groups

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INTRODUCTION
The idea for this study originated from an impromptu conversation started by a research respondent at the end of a focus group, hypothesising the reasons as to why people attended focus group discussions.

The raising of this issue prompted other respondents to join in and resulted in a mini-discussion being held. Probing at the end of further focus groups again revealed a similar willingness and enthusiasm amongst respondents to talk about the research process they were involved in. As a result of this organic research process, the research team soon amassed a wealth of qualitative insight into this subject.

What to do with this information, as well as an apparent need for respondents to have their say about the research process prompted further deliberation and a realisation that, while the market research industry asks research participants many things, it seldom asks them about the research process itself. The research team felt that the insights that formal research into this area could generate would be beneficial to the industry, aiding understanding of the components of an optimal research experience.

To this end, the research team undertook further, formal market research to both further explore and measure the reasons behind focus group attendance and how the focus group methodology compared to other types of research in terms of respondent perceptions of degree of self-expression, contribution and engagement.

The findings of this research were presented at two AMSRS seminars attended by a cross-section of client-side and agency-side researchers (conducted in Sydney and Melbourne). Outcomes from these discussion sessions, in terms of implications for the industry have been included as a separate commentary at the end of each section of the report.

RESEARCH METHOD
In order to obtain both further understanding of the topic and to quantify the key issues raised so far, the research team developed a semi-structured survey as the data collection tool for the formal phase of research.

The survey was seven minutes in length and was dispatched to a demographically broad cross-section of people who had participated in at least one focus group discussion within a 24-month period prior to the research. The respondents were recruited from the databases of two established qualitative recruiters, Alta Research in Sydney and Cooper Symons and Associates in Melbourne.

To enable respondents to record their feedback independently and autonomously, the research was conducted via an online methodology.

This research was undertaken in May 2012 and 386 people completed the survey.

Respondents were recruited to be broadly representative of age, socio-economic status and gender in respect of main grocery buyers.

Survey structure
- Demographics and screening question (The last time they took part in a focus group)
- ‘Tick-box’ association of 8 common research methods (both qualitative and quantitative) with the following statements:
  - They had participated in, in the last 12 months
  - They enjoyed the most
  - That made them feel uncomfortable or challenged in some way
  - That they felt helped them really contribute
- The research method that gave them the best opportunity to express how they really felt and why
- Verbatim responses were recorded for:
- The best and worst focus groups they have attended
- Their opinions on what makes a great Moderator/Facilitator

- Selection of their top three options from a list:
  - Factors that make a focus group a good experience
  - Factors that make a focus group less enjoyable
  - Skills a great moderator should possess

- Ranking of the importance of the components of a group discussion (e.g. venue, moderator, topic etc.) and the contribution they make to the quality of the group.

Sample composition
The following table (figure 1) shows the composition of the sample obtained from the formal survey phase of the research:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 25-34 years</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 35-44 years</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 45-54 years</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 55 years plus</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper White Collar Profession</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower White Collar Profession</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Collar Profession</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Duties</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed/student</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key considerations underpinning the development of the survey
Unsurprisingly, during the initial exploratory discussions, incentives came up as an important (but no means the only) factor in encouraging participation. To get beyond this factor and bring to light other, less immediately considered motivators, all questionnaires in the survey were prefaced with the wording “beyond receiving an incentive...”.

As an additional control on the quality of responses, all open-ended (verbatim) questions were asked before the corresponding closed [pre-coded] questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents participate in plenty of other research
Participation in other research methods was reasonably high. On average, respondents had participated in 5.28 research methods in addition to focus groups. This number dropped to 1.31 for participation in the last 12 months.

In addition to attending focus groups, 81% had ever participated in online surveys, 71% in telephone interviews, 68% in mini groups, 58% in depths, 55% in postal surveys and 38% in online groups (figure 2). 48% had participated in at least one focus group in the last 12 months, followed by 30% in an online survey and 19% in a telephone interview.

This finding poses the following question; how much of an issue is regular participation in research? Should we keep away from so-called ‘professional respondents’ because they know too much? A potential counter to this argument is that the true value of a respondent should be perhaps based on the quality of their contribution rather than the frequency.

Industry commentary
This question was discussed at depth in the industry stakeholder sessions. The general feeling was that regular respondents would be more comfortable with the research process, easier to ‘get going’ and would engage better with solving a particular issue. However, in some cases prior knowledge would be potentially detrimental to the study, potentially those focused on obtaining a ‘cold read’ on, for example, a social issue.

Focus groups are considered the most enjoyable methodology
61% said this compared with 29% for mini groups and 24% for depths. Other methodologies were a long way behind (Figure 4). This is probably not a great surprise given that we are generally social animals. However the pay-off for any marketer should not go unmentioned, a focus group is ideally an environment where people enjoy opening up about a product, service or category. The importance of connection and a good group dynamic was highlighted in respondents’ unprompted answers when asked what it was that made the best group they’d ever attended so good (Figure 3).
Industry commentary
Perhaps having a good time should be mandatory? After all, few people will really open up at a gathering they’re not having a good time at, particularly when establishing social connection was hypothesised by a number of industry stakeholders as a key driver for respondent participation.

Focus groups make respondents feel they are really contributing
68% said this for groups versus 39% for mini groups, 35% for depths and 26% for online (Figure 4). A surprising finding given that mini groups and depths arguably allow for more individual self-expression. However, from verbatim responses collected in the survey focus groups are seen to provide the better opportunity to formulate fuller, more thought out responses through the weighing up of one’s own opinions versus others.

Industry commentary
Again this question provoked a great deal of debate in the stakeholder follow up sessions with positive sentiments expressed such as ‘people don’t form opinions in isolation’. However, there were concerns raised that too much consideration could lead to modification of real opinions and behaviours. There

Figure 2: Incidence of participation in the main research methodologies

![Graph showing participation in different methodologies](image)

Figure 3: What ‘made’ the best group they’d been to? (Top spontaneous mentions, coded) [Base: All respondents=386]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interesting topic</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good dynamic and productive discussion - we clicked/discussion flowed/all engaged and participated</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good moderator/well run</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying samples/having a sneak peek at products/gifts to take home/trial</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important topic</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learnt something new</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing interesting ideas</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
is clearly a balancing act to achieve within a group discussion, perhaps break-out sessions and collection of individual responses prior to open discussion could go some way to addressing this?

**Focus groups give the respondents the best opportunity to express how they feel**

59% stated this for groups (focus and mini) compared with 30% for depths and fewer than 8% for all others (Figure 5). All methods are valid but factors such as the time available for reflection and the assimilation of a range of views offered by groups is clearly empowering.

**Size matters to respondents**

Feedback from the survey indicated that a group of 8-10 participants could be too large and swamp a respondent’s ability to be heard. Conversely, mini groups could be too exposing for some and pressure can be felt to speak up and perhaps contribute too quickly without consideration. Analysis of verbatim comments from the findings suggest there is a ‘sweet spot’ of 6-7 in a group, which allows for both ample contribution and consideration.

**Industry commentary**

Industry stakeholders fed back a mix of views in response to this proposition, with equal numbers stating that they had conducted successful groups with both larger and smaller group sizes. It may be that the optimal group size depends upon the depth of the discussion required, i.e. fewer respondents for more ‘deep-dive’ work. However, the nature of the respondents recruited (talkative or quiet) and the dynamic when they interact are also likely to impact on the optimal size.

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**Figure 4: Self-assessed enjoyment level and contribution level of key research methodologies**

![Graph showing enjoyment and contribution levels for different research methodologies]

**Figure 5: Method that enables most freedom of expression**

(Base: All respondents=386)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group discussion</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F discussion</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone interview</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal survey</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online survey</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online discussion group</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Don’t blame the food or the décor
The top 2 factors having the most impact on the quality of a group were the Topic of discussion and the Moderator, which were four times more important than the impact of other respondents and up to eight times more than the tasks set, the food or the décor (Figure 6). There’s a cost of entry of course and most venues meet and surpass this. Nevertheless stale sandwiches or broken air-conditioning is likely to get remembered.

Respondents have a code of honour
The majority of respondents believe they are there to contribute and do an important job but not at the expense of others. One participant not talking and contributing is almost as annoying as one who talks too much and disrupts the experience. Figure 7 highlights the importance of the creation of a good, positive group dynamic in avoiding a bad group experience and the key role of the moderator in doing this.

Moderating is like great performance; you can’t fake it
The role of a moderator appears to be at least a dual one, as a professional referee and a genuinely nice and interested person. The highest open-ended responses for what determines a great moderator (Figure 8) is their ability to ensure that all get heard and are treated equally (27%) as well as having a great personality and inter-personal skills (21%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 6: Percentage ranking each factor as having most impact on the quality of a focus group (Base: All respondents=386)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The moderator/ facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The other respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative tasks/ exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food/ drink available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The decor/ layout of the rooms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 7: What 'made' the worst group ever? (Top spontaneous mentions, coded) (Base: All respondents=386)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other participants talked too much/ overpowered discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested in the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator who can’t control the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration issues (location, incentives, not being informed about cancellation, office locked up etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many tasks/ exercises, group ran over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor group dynamic - angry people, people not wanting to talk etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt like we were being led to come to specific conclusions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 8: Qualities of a great moderator/facilitator (Top spontaneous mentions, coded) (Base: All respondents=386)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Makes sure everyone gets heard/everyone is treated equally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to talk to, great personality (not overbearing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates a fun and relaxed environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the ability to control the ‘flow’ of the conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the ability to engage people with the topic in hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is well organised and time efficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the ability to control loud respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes everyone feel important and that their opinion is valued</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Great moderators should possess a wide range of skills with around 40% of respondents stating at least one of the following attributes were important after prompting:

- To control the flow
- To put respondents at ease
- To enable them to speak without judgment
- To create opportunity for all to speak.

**Industry commentary**

The moderator is there first and foremost to manage and nurture respondents. The moderator must be the catalyst for creating a relaxed and fun (when appropriate) environment that has a very real sense of purpose.

A moderator needs a wide range of skills from a mentor and guide, to referee, to a host. Whatever skills are deployed, they must serve as a tool for the betterment of the group dynamic, to obtain the most useful responses whilst ensuring psychological safety for all.

Moderating is like great refereeing; it usually goes unnoticed.

It takes a rare set of skills to guide a discussion that you’re not really part of. How respondents are treated can make or break a group and our findings point to a need to treat them as active constituents not subjects in an experiment.

Follow up discussions with a cross-section of industry stakeholders revealed a number of layers of engagement in a group, building up from basic and uncomfortable Q&A, to:

- A group that is connecting and co-operating
- A group that makes solving the task their own
- A group that gets so involved they forget that the moderator is there
- A group that helps to reframe the marketing issue in a completely new way and provides new insight.

These higher levels of group engagement where, in effect, the moderator is taking a back seat, merely serving to guide the discussion don’t come easily, they depend upon a number of factors coming together, not least a good group dynamic, a suitable environment, an engaging topic (or at least one presented in an engaging way), as well as the set up by the moderator. And as several members of the industry stakeholder groups mentioned, good groups seldom arise from a time-pressured discussion and packed discussion guide.

**Do Moderators really know who they are dealing with?**

We undertook a factor analysis of the statements underpinning the questions relating to what made a focus group good or bad. (Q8 and Q9 in the survey). These questions were multi-coded, tick-box questions (0 or 1) and covered areas such as the provision of creative tasks, samples to trial, the value of the topic discussed, the skills of the moderator, the other people in the group, the environment in which the group was held, the quality of the discussion. We converted them to scale questions and ran a Principal Components Analysis using Varimax rotation and cases excluded listwise. Bartlett’s test of sphericity significance was at 0.00 and the KMO was at 0.5. The KMO figure was fairly low, but just adequate to undertake a factor analysis. Values below 0.45 were suppressed.

This analysis revealed the following underlying dimensions [highly correlated variables] that accounted for 70% of the variance seen in the sample. It was around these factors that the segmentation was built:

1. ‘A poor moderator’ makes a bad group and ‘Learning something new’ makes a good group
2. ‘Food and décor’ make a good group and ‘Too many tasks’ make a bad group
3. ‘Other respondents talking too much’ made a bad group and ‘Having my ideas and thoughts challenged’ made a good group
4. ‘Not being able to get up and walk around’ and ‘Too few tasks’ made a bad group
5. ‘Trialing, tasting and sampling something’ made a good group and ‘Contributing to something that really matters’ was not important in making a good group
6. ‘Creative tasks’ made a good group and ‘A boring, unengaging moderator’ made a bad group.

It appears that the key underlying dimensions are:

- The skills of the moderator
- The provision of creative tasks and activities
- The environment in which the group was held
- Provision of samples
- The quality of the discussion, in terms of the topic, the other respondents.

A K-means cluster analysis was then undertaken with 5 clusters specified and cases excluded listwise. The resultant ANOVA table did not reveal any attribute F values that were disproportionately large.
The segments were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLUSTER</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When profiled by attitudes and demographics the following respondent segments were revealed:

‘Have my say’ (31%)
Holding their corner and having their say is what it’s all about. Mid aged and slightly more likely to be Blue collar or retired. Having their opinion heard is key to them and they like lively discussion and interaction as long as the moderator controls the dynamic to allow this to happen. The topic is less key to them.

‘The good honest debater’ (19%)
Loves a good old-fashioned debate. More likely to be older and male. They like a moderator with a good sense of humour and a good topic they can sink their teeth into. They hate unclear questions and too many tasks that distract from the discussion.

‘The explorer’ (14%)
Really enjoys focus groups and making a difference. Motivated by trying new things and having their views challenged. Slightly more likely to be male and white collar. Likes a moderator that gets people talking and they like a group to share interesting ideas and to have a good lively discussion from a range of view-points. They want to speak without judgement and love creative tasks – there are never too many creative tasks for them!

‘The P Plater’ (18%)
Still finding their way with groups and can feel a little challenged. Likely to be younger and female and slightly more likely to be lower white or blue collar. They want a comfortable group environment without pressure and to be given time to consider their responses. They love listening to different peoples’ experiences and learning about new topics that interest them. They’re more likely to say they’ve never had a bad group (perhaps because they are just starting out as a respondent?). They aren’t keen on interaction and like a moderator that controls the dynamic and disruptive others.

‘The deal seeker’ (17%)
‘WIIFM’ is the dominant driver. Happy to discuss most things providing they get some decent food and get to try stuff. Home duties or lower white collar, more likely to be in their 40s. As well as the opportunity to trial samples, they love a sneak peek at new products and ads and evaluating ads. They love to see their input ‘actioned’ via seeing development of new campaigns and product modifications that reflect what they said in the session.

This is by no means an exhaustive study into the attitudes of respondents, further segments may emerge with the provision of further attitudinal statements, but it serves to highlight that a range of different mindsets could be sitting around any focus group table, all of whom require management and nurturing in different ways.

Industry commentary
Is it remiss of a Moderator to let the P-Plater sit in silence for some of the group, when they may be simply finding their feet? Should a particularly vocal ‘Have my say’ be managed or banished?

As well as mindset, there is representativeness of demographics and life-styles to consider – a key question asked by industry stakeholders is, what is the ideal balance and what smacks of ‘tokenism’?

CONCLUSIONS
In summary:

• On average respondents took part in more than one research method over a 12 month period and had ever taken part in 5, which comprised a mix of qualitative and quantitative research.

• Focus groups were considered to be significantly more enjoyable than other methods and were significantly more likely to enable contribution and freedom of expression. A key component of this was the ability of respondents to listen to the views of others and weight them up against their own, allowing a fuller, more considered response.

• Feedback from respondents indicated that the optimal environment that facilitated this dynamic was a group of around 6-7 respondents.
• The moderator was a critical component of a good group discussion, having first and foremost to wear the hats of professional referee and friend to control the flow and put respondents at ease. However, respondents are also impacted negatively by other respondents who talk too much or, to a lesser extent not talk at all.

• People come to groups for a range of different reasons and have different expectations for the experience. There are people motivated by learning and creative expression, those motivated by trialing something or gaining a sneak-peek at something new and those who like the cut and thrust of good, honest debate.

IMPLICATIONS AND POINTS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION
This research project and subsequent discussion has provided useful insight into the respondent point-of-view on research methodologies, particularly in relation to focus groups and raises some interesting issues, including:

• The judicious use of ‘professional respondents’. While market research must have a scientific robustness to it, it is also an exercise in social interaction and engagement. To this end, what better discussion could a client listen into about their brand, than one undertaken by people who are familiar with the brand, the market and who feel at ease with the research process and understand it enough to know that they need to pull together to help solve a specific issue?

• While individual views, unadulterated by the opinions of others are always sought from research, there is considerable value in allowing respondents to come together to consider and re-evaluate their opinions in the context of hearing others’ viewpoints. After all, isn’t that the way the real world works?

• Pressured research often leads to poor research. Short lead-times for recruitment and discussion guides that allow for little more than a question and answer session hardly provide the fertile ground needed for a good group dynamic to develop, ideas to grow and flourish and for real insights to be generated.

• When it comes to recruitment, what should the optimal balance be between a good mix of respondent personalities and ‘box-ticking’ representativeness of demographics and attitudes? A focus group discussion is just that, people coming together to talk and perhaps there should be a trading-off of prescriptive recruitment for the selection of people who are likely to really contribute to a productive discussion?
Benefits of membership

Top 10 reasons to be an AMSRS member

1. Professional standing & credibility
   Membership of the Society brings you into the body of the profession and is a sign to others that you take your role as a market and/or social research professional seriously. Full members can use the postnominals MMSRS and all members can use the pictured Member Mark to promote their membership of the Society.

2. Member discounts for conferences, courses, seminars, webinars & insurance
   AMSRS members receive substantial discounts to Society and affiliated association events. AMSRS members also receive significant insurance discounts through our insurance partner Parmia.

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4. Powerful advocacy
   AMSRS is committed to protecting the interests of the Profession by promoting the use of market and social research to government. AMSRS works with AMSRO on this through the Research Industry Council of Australia. The AMSRS also represents the profession when it is threatened by legislation, ill-informed comment or by the unethical practices of others.

5. Professional recognition QPMR
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