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***Stereotypes About New Zealand:
Culture, Contact, and National Identity***

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Management in Communication Management
at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.**

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Stereotypes About New Zealand: Culture, Contact, and National Identity

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Abstract

From a sociocultural perspective, this study aims to describe stereotypes about New Zealand and New Zealanders and to compare them to New Zealanders' self-perceptions. Objectives are to determine whether differences across cultures exist that relate to stereotypes and how stereotype use and content relate to the amount of contact with New Zealanders. An extensive review of literature introduces general and intercultural concepts of stereotypes and links them to the national identity of New Zealanders. Focus group interviews and a qualitative pilot study are conducted in order to prepare and test an online survey targeted to young, educated people from selected Western cultures. More than 1,100 people participated, including New Zealanders, tourists, international students studying in New Zealand, and people who had not been to New Zealand at all. Results indicate that increased contact with New Zealanders may increase stereotype use. People who have not been to New Zealand mainly hold traditional stereotypes, whereas New Zealanders differentiate more between reality and stereotypical myths. As such, contact is closely related to stereotype use and content. By contrast, cultural membership shows no relation to stereotyping. Further, a theoretical framework, adapted from the Johari window, is developed that links stereotypes, national identity, and national image. As the study is limited because of non-random sampling techniques, its findings cannot be generalised to a larger population. Indications for future research opportunities include the use of larger random samples, particularly of alternative cultures, the application of qualitative measures, and the suggestion to replicate the theoretical framework.


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Preface

Research Background

Before I came to Aotearoa/New Zealand as an international student from Germany, I did not know much about the country and its people at all – apart from the odd stereotypes, of course. During my stay in that beautiful land of the long, white cloud, on the other side of the world, my perceptions about New Zealand changed, grew, and changed again several times. Now, I am left with a bag full of experiences collected in one and a half years. Not surprisingly, my own encounters are the starting point of this research about stereotypes of New Zealand.

From the beginning, I had contact with people from a wide range of cultures: Americans for a start, Asians, a couple of Germans, and, not the least, Kiwis. Thus, it came as no surprise that from my classes at Massey University in Palmerston North, I enjoyed Cross-cultural Communication very much. As someone from another culture, many topics applied to my own situation in some way. Accordingly, although the German and the New Zealand culture appeared not to be totally different, I encountered a lot of exciting variations. Therefore, as it was obvious that New Zealand differed a lot from, say, Asian cultures, I became particularly interested in variations across Western cultures. This interest explains the focus of the study on Western cultures as targets of participants.

Further, the choice of target groups reflects my own development from someone who has not been to New Zealand, to a tourist during the breaks, and eventually, to a sojourner for more than a year. The fact that I eventually stayed longer than expected almost gave me the feeling of starting to become something of a resident. This final

stage of my time in New Zealand offered me the chance to observe the effect of intercultural contact with New Zealanders from a distance. Hence, I aimed to conduct the study objectively in an empirical way, and not driven by my own emotions.

I am not a New Zealander, which may have both helped and hindered me in making claims about the New Zealand identity. Nevertheless, I aimed to make up for the lack of knowledge of and involvement in New Zealand society by presenting an extensive review of the literature. In fact, by conducting this kind of study, I learned a lot more about Aotearoa, its society, history, and cultural challenges, than I could have by just staying there. As such, the thesis about stereotypes of New Zealand is also a personal vehicle to identify myself with and understand the land and the people with whom I spent an important and joyful part of my life.

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Needless to say, I could not have achieved the results without the more than 1,100 participants of the survey. In addition, some of my friends had to test and re-test the questionnaire, I acquired them for pilot studies and focus groups, asked them to proofread parts of the thesis, and still, they seldom complained. From these friends, I would like to mention some who contributed the most, and with whom I also shared the great time I had in New Zealand: Cheers to Sophie Borchert, Hanna Diehl, Anna Finn, Kane Hopkins, Kathrin Ludewig, Aaron Oliver, Jan van Remmen, and Rebecca Smith. Furthermore, I say thank you to my family, who had to wait longer and longer until I eventually got home, and who supported me throughout.

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