

TRAVEL AND TOURISM RESEARCH GUIDELINES

Travel research has multiple benefits, not only for individual tourism businesses, but also for government agencies and development organizations seeking to bolster tourism revenues. This document was originally compiled for individuals and organizations seeking a basic understanding of travel and tourism research by Paige Schneider of Michigan State University.

Contents:

TYPES OF TRAVEL RESEARCH.....	1
FUNCTION OF TRAVEL RESEARCH:	1
BASIC RESEARCH METHODS	2
THE TRAVEL RESEARCH PROCESS.....	4
RESOURCES	6
EVALUATING SECONDARY RESEARCH	6
THE PROBLEM OF MEASUREMENT	7

TYPES OF TRAVEL RESEARCH

Examples of travel research are:

- American Airlines investigating consumer attitudes and behaviors to enable the airline to better serve the flying public
- Marriott Hotels, Resorts, and Suites studying the leisure travel market
- The Aspen Skiing Company conducting a market profile study to understand consumers
- Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) measuring the economic impact of travel in the United States

FUNCTION OF TRAVEL RESEARCH:

1. To delineate significant problems

a. Isolation of causes and problems that create inefficiency is often one of the most important single contributions that travel research makes to management

2. To keep an organization or a business in touch with its markets

a. Travel research identifies trends, interprets markets, and tracks changes in markets so that policies can be developed that are aimed in the right direction and are based on facts rather than on hunches or opinions

b. The research is insurance against these changes to make sure that a business does not stick with a product until it becomes obsolete

3. To reduce waste

a. Research has always been effective in measuring methods of operation to eliminate those methods that are inefficient and to concentrate on those that are the most effective

b. Example: The energy crises led to research that has produced dramatic savings in aircraft fuel requirements

4. To develop new sources of profit.

- a. *Research can lead to the discovery of new markets, new products, and new uses for established products*
- b. *Example: Research can show the lodging industry the types of rooms and the type of facilities that should be offered to meet consumers' needs*

5. To aid in sales promotion

- a. *Results of research are interesting not only to the firm but also to the public and can be used in advertising and promotion*
- b. *Particularly true of consumer attitude research, as well as research where consumers are asked to rank products and services*

6. To create good will

- a. *Consumers react favorably to travel research; they feel the company that is involved in research really cares about them and is trying to create a product or service that will meet their needs*

BASIC RESEARCH METHODS

1. Focus Groups

Form of qualitative research

Useful prior to, during, and after programs, events, or experiences

Focus groups have proved helpful in:

- Assessing needs
- Generating information for constructing questionnaires
- Developing plans
- Recruiting new clientele
- Finding out how customers make decisions to use or not use a product or service
- Testing new programs and ideas
- Improving existing programs
- Evaluating outcomes

For those interested in really digging into the subject:

Focus Groups, 3rd Edition

By Krueger & Casey

Published by: Sage in 2000

Purpose: To understand how people feel or think about an issue, product, service or idea

- Brings together a small number of individuals (usually 8 to 12)
- In-depth discussion regarding the topic of interest to the client.

- Typical topics include the most-desirable/least desirable characteristics of a planned attraction or service, reaction to a planned advertising theme or program, or the probable public reaction to developments in an environmentally sensitive region

2. **The Survey Method**

- Most frequently used
- Includes factual surveys, opinion surveys, or interpretive surveys
- Conducted by personal interviews, mail, Internet, Email or telephone techniques

3. **Observational Method**

Relies upon the direct observation of physical phenomena in the gathering of data
Observing some action of the respondent is more objective and accurate than is utilizing the survey method

Information can be collected either by:

- Personal observation
- Mechanical observation (automatic counters at attractions or mechanical recorders on highways)

Advantages

- Tends to be accurate and can record consumer behavior
- Reduces interviewer bias

Disadvantages

- More costly than survey method
- It is not possible to employ in many cases
- Shows what people are doing but does not tell why they are doing it
- Cannot delve into motives, attitudes, or opinions
- If the WHY is important, this would not be a good method to use

4. **Experimental Method**

The experimental method of gathering primary data involves setting up a test, a model, or an experiment to simulate the real world

- The essentials of the experimental method are the measurement variations within one or more activities while all other conditions and variables are being controlled
- Hard to use in tourism research because of the difficulty of holding variables constant
- Tourism researches have no physical laboratory in which to work
- It is possible for resort areas to run advertising experiences or pricing experiments or to develop simulation models to aid in decision-making.

- Such test marketing is being conducted successfully; and as time passes, we will see the experimental method being used more.

THE TRAVEL RESEARCH PROCESS

The key to good travel research is to define the problem and work through it in a systematic procedural manner to a final solution.

Basic **procedures** that will produce a good research result:

1. Identify the problem

a. First the problem must be defined or identified, and then you are in a position to proceed in a systematic manner

2. Conduct a situation analysis

a. In this step you gather and digest all the information available and pertinent to the problem

b. The purpose is to become familiar with all the available information to make sure that you are not repeating someone else's work and you have not overlooked information that will provide a ready solution for the problem

c. The situation analysis is an exhaustive search of all the data pertinent to the company, the product, the industry, the market, the competition, advertising, consumers, suppliers, technology, the economy, the political climate, and similar matters.

d. The organization will get the most from research result when you understand the organizations internal environment and its goals, strategies, desires, resources, and constraints.

e. In addition to a trip to the library, the Internet is an ideal tool to use in conducting a situation analysis

3. Conduct and information investigation

a. Talk informally with consumers, distributors, and key people in the industry to get an even better feel for the problem

b. During both the situations analysis and information investigation, you should be developing hypotheses that can be tested

c. A hypothesis is a supposition, a tentative proposal, or a possible solution (liken to a diagnosis). Example: If your car quit running on the highway, you might hypothesize that (1) you were out of gas, or (2) the fuel pump had failed, or (3) you had filter problems. An investigation would enable you to accept or reject these hypotheses

4. Develop a formal research design

a. Once This step is the heart of the research process.

- b. Here you develop the hypotheses that will be tested and determine the types and sources of data that are to be obtained. Are secondary sources available, or will it be necessary to conduct primary research?*
- c. If primary research is to be conducted, then it is necessary to develop the sample, the questionnaire, or other data collection forms and any instruction sheets and coding methods and tabulation forms.*
- d. Conduct a pilot study to test all of the foregoing elements*
- e. The results are written up in a detailed plan that serves as a guide that any knowledgeable research should be able to follow and conduct the research satisfactorily*

5. Collect the data

- a. If the data are available from secondary sources, then collecting the data becomes primarily desk research*
- b. If primary data are collected, this step involves actual fieldwork in conducting survey research, observational research, or experimental research*
- c. The success of data gathering depends on the quality of field supervision, the caliber of the interviewers or field investigators, and the training of investigators*

6. Tabulate and analyze

- a. Once data have been collected, they must be coded, tabulated, and analyzed*
- b. It is likely that tabulation will take place on the computer. One of the most used is SPSS, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*

7. Interpret

- a. Tabulate results, with a series of statistical conclusions*
- b. These data must now be interpreted in terms of the best action or policy for the firm or organization to follow-a series of specific recommendations of action*
- c. This reduction of the interpretation to recommendations is one of the most difficult tasks in the research process.*

8. Write the report

- a. Presentation of the results of research is extremely important*
- b. Emphasis should be put on this step in the research process to produce a report that will be clearly understand and recommendations that will be accepted*

9. Follow up

- a. A study sitting on the shelf gathering data accomplished nothing*
- b. The work is not completed until the results of the survey are put into action*
- c. Research is an investment, and an ultimate test of the value of any research is the extent to which its recommendations are actually implemented and results achieved*
- d. It is the task of the researcher to follow up to make the previous investment of time and money worthwhile*

RESOURCES

Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality Research: A Handbook for Managers and Researchers

Published by John Wiley & Sons in 1994

Tourism Analysis

Published by Longman in 1995

Journal of Travel Research

Sage Publications

Travel and Tourism Research Association

The Travel and Tourism Research Association (TTRA) <http://www.ttra.com>, is an international organization of travel research and marketing professionals devoted to improving the quality, value, scope, and acceptability of travel research and marketing information. Its mission is to be a global leader in advocating standards and promoting the application of high-quality travel and tourism research, planning, management, and marketing information.

EVALUATING SECONDARY RESEARCH

Primary and secondary data, or both may be used in a research investigation. Secondary research is that which has been collected for some other purpose and is available for use by simply visiting the library or other such repositories of secondary data.

Advantages

- Low cost
- Quickly collected

Disadvantages

- Information does not fit the problem for which you need information
Timeliness; many secondary sources become outdated

The following criteria may be used to appraise the value of information obtained from secondary sources:

1. The organizations supplying the data

- a. What amount of time went into the study?*
- b. Who conducted the study?*
- c. What was the cost of the study?*

2. The authority under which the data are gathered

- a. Data that are required by law, such as census data, are much more dependable than is information from other sources (Ex. Census, IRS)*

3. Freedom from bias

- a. Look at the nature of the organization furnishing the data*

4. The extent to which the rules of sampling have been rigidly upheld

- a. What is the adequacy of the sample?*

- b. *Deficiencies in the sampling process can be hidden*
- c. *Will the sponsor release sampling details*
- 5. The nature of the unit in which the data are expressed**
 - a. *Here even simple concepts are difficult to define. In defining the term house, how do you handle such things as duplexes, triplexes, mobile homes, and apartment houses?*
 - b. *Make sure that good operational definitions have been used throughout the research so there will be no problems in understanding it*
 - c. *Research results that are full of terms such as occasionally and frequently are not likely to be useful; these terms have different meanings to different people*
- 6. The accuracy of the data**
 - a. *Inquire into the way in which the data were acquired, edited, and tabulated.*
 - b. *If possible, check the data against known data from other sources that are accurate.*
Example: check the demographics in a study against known census data
- 7. Pertinence to the problem**
 - a. *Even a good study is not useful to you if it does not pertain to your problem*
 - b. *Relevance of secondary data to the problem must stand up for the study to be used*
- 8. Careful work**
 - a. *Throughout your evaluation, always look for evidence of careful work.*
 - b. *Are tables constructed properly? Do all totals add up to the right figures or 100%*
 - c. *Are conclusions supported by the data?*
 - d. *Is there evidence of conflicting data?*
 - e. *Is the information presented in a well-organized, systematic manner?*

THE PROBLEM OF MEASUREMENT

Measurement is a critical element in research activity, and lack of standard or precise definitions has hampered the development of travel research (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003).

Without definitions, measurement cannot be taken and data cannot be generated and compared from study to study. Economic projections or analytical findings made by sophisticated models or pure intuition must be based on some kind of data. Without a quantitative record of past experiences, only individual, isolated studying making a limited contribution to the state of the art are possible. This is that state of affairs in the area of travel research at the present time. Giant strides are being made, improving travel research by adopting techniques; however, the existing body of literature largely consists of individual isolated studies utilizing different definitions that were set up to solve only the immediate problem at hand.