

ON THE ROLE OF PRINTED MEDIA ON CHOICE OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the role of brochures and allied printed materials for tourists, in terms of determining their chosen destinations and also, deciding upon activities to engage in at these destination sites. Data was collected during 2016; we examined 1,560 responses of hospitality professionals at multiple locations in the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland and Greece. The key finding is that the role of brochures and printed material still play a significant role in tourists' choices, and has not been adequately replaced by the Internet, kiosks, or other "more modern" marketing/promotional channels.*

KEYWORDS: Travel, Tourism, Brochures, Visitor information sources

INTRODUCTION

The travel and tourism industry is one of the biggest and fastest growing industries. It is a complex industry made up of many different businesses, the common theme being that they provide products and services to tourists. Tourist information has been shown to have an important influence on the choice of vacation destinations. With internet and new technologies upgrading, it has greatly impacted the way tourists use information sources for tourism activities. The effectiveness of print media, such as guides and brochures, posters, and pamphlets has been questioned. However, we still note that money and other resources are invested in setting up billboards, banners, and posters. Research has demonstrated that this mode of information is a valuable concept in understanding the destination-choice process.

Tourist brochures are a form of print media advertising (Hiippalla 2013), they are part of the pre-travel materials intended to inform, convince, lure and eventually sell tourist packages. Potential tourists usually have limited knowledge about a new destination which has not been previously

visited. They try to obtain information not only from the media or their social groups, but they also access print media, photos, videos, and maps concerning potential tourist destinations. These are critical elements in the destination-choice process (Um and Crompton, 1999). Tourists' behavioral intention has been viewed as an important research topic both in academia and the tourism industry. In contemporary marketing activities, tourists' behavioral intention has become a crucial part in the determination of tourist destination (Wang, Lu, & Xia, 2012).

An increasing number of public relations practitioners and government organizations are using various methods (e.g., e-mails, websites, multimedia, RSS feeds, social media, etc.) to better communicate with journalists so they can enhance their media relations with tourists. More corporate/governmental organizational websites tend to provide online pressrooms that provide journalists with access to essential organization information and media materials such as press releases, fact sheets, backgrounders, newsletters, brochures, photographs and audio/video clips, and many downloadable materials (Yoo & Kim, 2013).

In this paper, we discuss and analyze a recent survey concerning this issue. The aim is to demonstrate the usefulness of brochures in hotels and local destinations so as to reveal a relationship among these three influences upon tourists' needs for information. For instance, it is believed that potential consumers compare brochures and, on that basis, decide on their preferred destination.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The studies concerned with destination choice and factors influencing the decisions have focused upon identifying the dominant attributes of images, brochures, and guides and exploring their role in selection. Different desired experiences and satisfaction are relevant in formulating preferences for recreational sites. Information sources and varying attributes of destinations form the basis for different experience expectation, and level of satisfaction.

Print media, such as brochures, posters, and maps should correspond with effective promotional objectives: convenience, destination choice, and satisfaction. The information about the destination, which is required by tourists, is also an important means of promotion for the tourism industry. The value of this information depends on its reaching consumers and satisfying their interests and needs. The means of promotion (brochures, guides, and tourist offices among them) are an active and open way of getting information to tourists. Since tourists use external information sources as a first step when planning (Goossens 1994), entrepreneurs and promoters need to know what to include in brochures and guides, to aid decision making and, at the same time, to analyze the effect of information on tourists' behavior. Sources of information about a destination have a great influence on the decision making process for tourists, and their behavior determines usage of search and information (Andereck and Caldwell 1993; Capella and Greco 1987; Snepenger, Meged, Snelling and Worrall 1990; Snepenger and Snepenger 1993). The previous studies have found that the word-of-mouth (WOM) communication is the strongest marketing channel (Koth and Norman, 2001; Lee et al., 2003; Stokes and Lomax, 2002). Such

communications exert a powerful influence on consumer's purchase behavior including tourist sites, products and hospitality service (Murray, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

For data collection, by means of a structured questionnaire, we created a survey using Qualtrics. The purpose of this survey was to understand the usage and effectiveness of hospitality visitor information. Data was collected during 2016 for Center for Marketing Technology, Bentley University and The International Association of Visitor Information Provider (IAVIP). In the process, we examined 1,560 responses of hospitality professionals at multiple locations in the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland and Greece. The responses were logged into Qualtrics, and were exported into a raw file (.csv). Raw data comes from the survey answers provided by the front office staff within the hospitality industry. These are the opinions of the professionals at the check-in and concierge desk that have the greatest potential to impact guest satisfaction with their accommodation. All responses and data were analyzed using the statistical software, SPSS. With application of multiple functions such as cross-tabulation, and descriptive statistics, we analyzed the results and data.

ANALYSIS

Source of information

Table 1 displays the percent of respondents who viewed different channels as an important source of information for visitors during a trip.

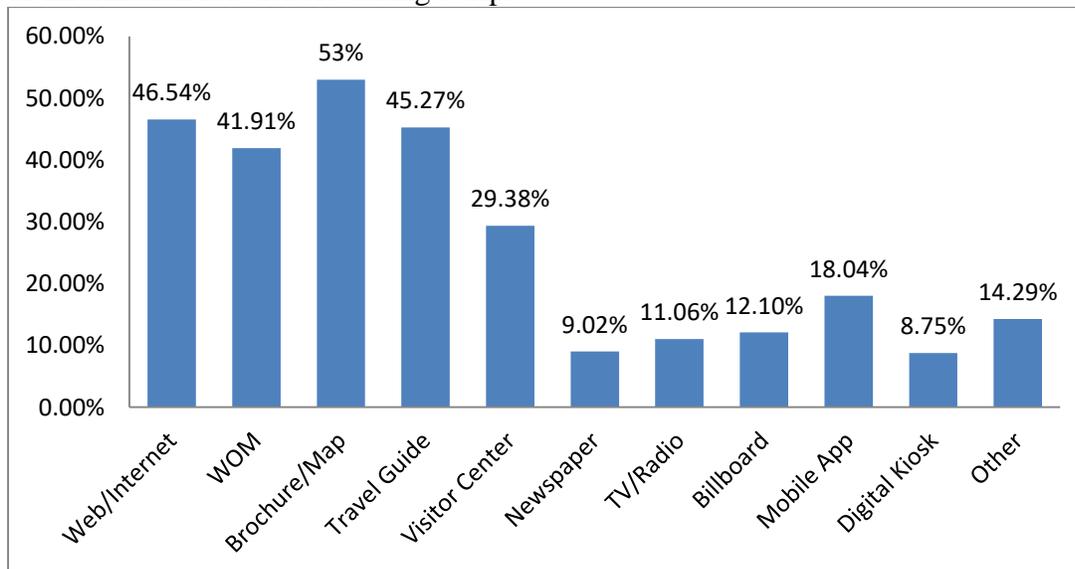


Table 1: Percent who found sources important DURING the trip

It can be seen in Table 1 that 53% of respondents believe that an important source of information for a visitor during their trip is a brochure from a display stand. This value exceeds any other individual value in the table. It leads over websites (**46.54%**) and all other channels. Although not

present in Table 1, if we add the percent of tourists who view the channel as “somewhat important,” the number for brochures jumps dramatically (**74%**) and still outpaces websites (**70%**). Although the total number of visitors actually *picking up a brochure* at their destination was (**64%**), if we include visitors from far outside the area, it increases to (**84%**).

Source used to plan a trip

In advance of taking the trip, indeed, for the specific task of planning the trip, Table 2 reports which channels were view as important.

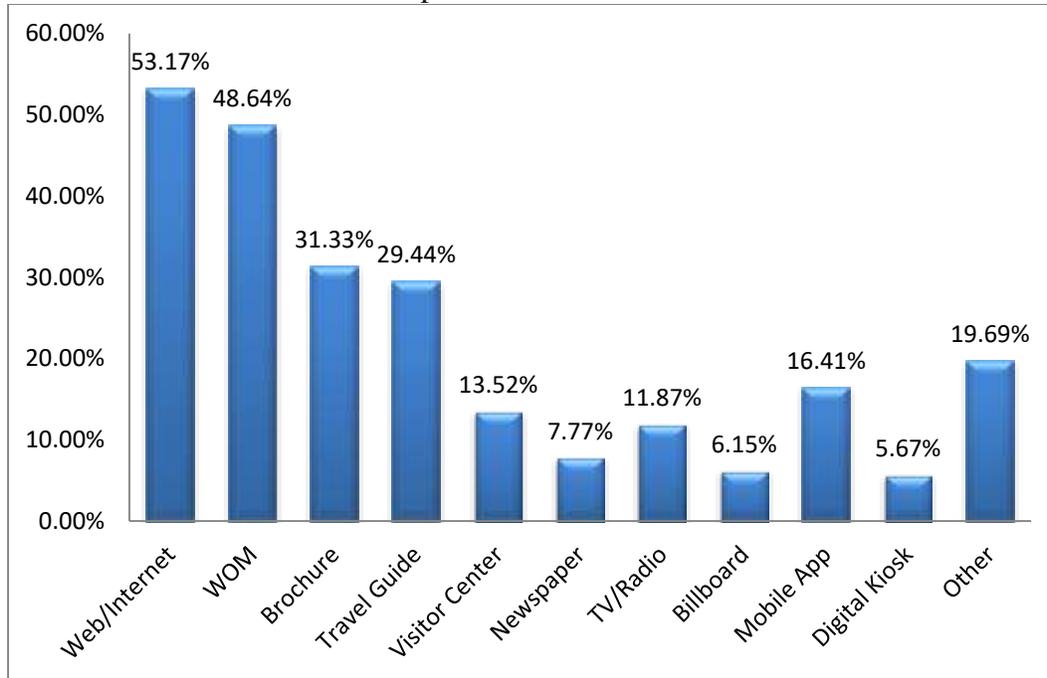


Table 2: Important sources in PLANNING the trip

From Table 2, we can see that the Internet is considered an important source of information for tourists *planning* a trip, (**53.17%**), the highest value for any of the listed channels, followed by personal recommendations from family and friends (**48.64%**). The web and mobile apps are gaining ground. Traditional media, such as television, newspaper and radio lag far behind most other marketing channels that influence trip planning. However, travel guides, maps and brochures from display stands are still influential in trip planning – i.e., before a tourist arrives at their destination (**31.33%** for brochures). Traditional media has continued to decline in importance - television (**11.87%**), newspapers (**7.77%**), and billboards (**6.15%**).

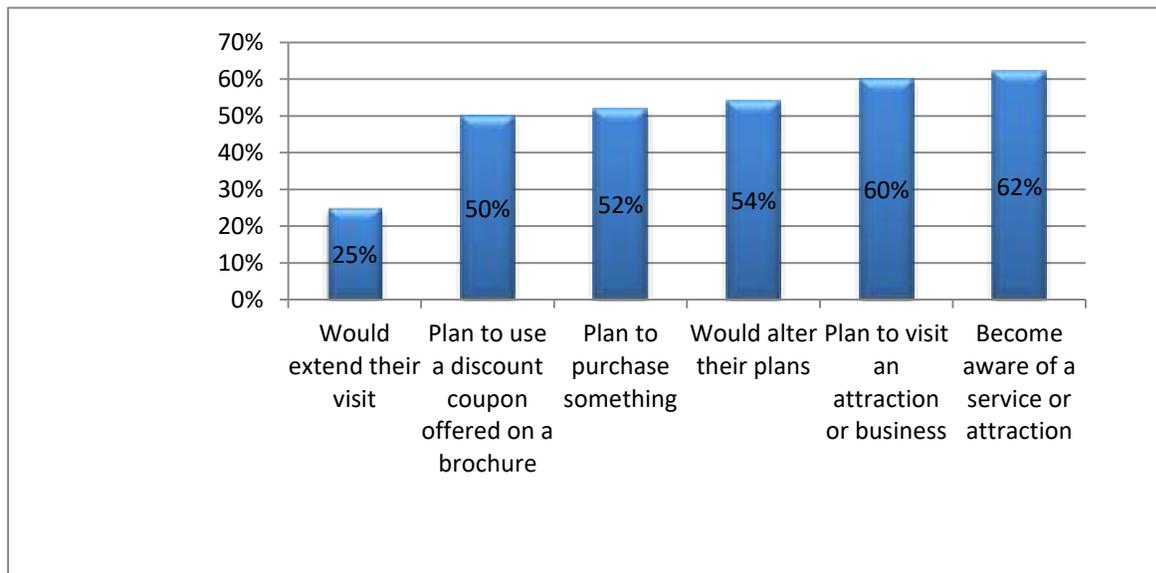
Effect of Brochures During a Trip

Table 3: brochures uses during a trip

Table 3 indicates the uses for brochures during a trip. We can note that 6 out of 10 visitors (**60%**) used a brochure to aid in planning out a visit to attractions or a business, and a large number of visitors (**62%**) were informed about an attraction or service as a result of reading a brochure. Brochures are not only effective in shaping the plans of leisure visitors, but also play a significant role in affecting the plans of visitors. Area vendors and business owners also benefit from brochure distribution in tourist areas with visitors (**52%**) planning to purchase something as a result of reading about the product or service in a brochure.

Use of Brochures from display racks

The data collected leads one to believe that tourists enjoy reading brochures about local attractions, as well as about products and services. While not cataloged directly on Table 3, data revealed that a relatively large number of surveyed visitors who picked up a brochure *from a display rack during their trip* believe that brochures are a valuable local information source (**62%** of them). Individual data results indicate that, more importantly, they expect to discover new attractions from easy-to-use brochure display racks. Many visitors (**65%**) believe that display-rack brochures are a valuable visitor information source. Visitors appreciate the convenience of brochures located in display stands in popular locations to learn about retail opportunities and attractions. They like hard copy in an easy to use/easy to read format they can carry away with them (**42%**). Nearly half the visitors use display-rack brochures to find timely information about current exhibitions and events as well as special deals and time sensitive offers (47%). Other uses for brochures include scrapbooking and free maps to guide them in their visits.

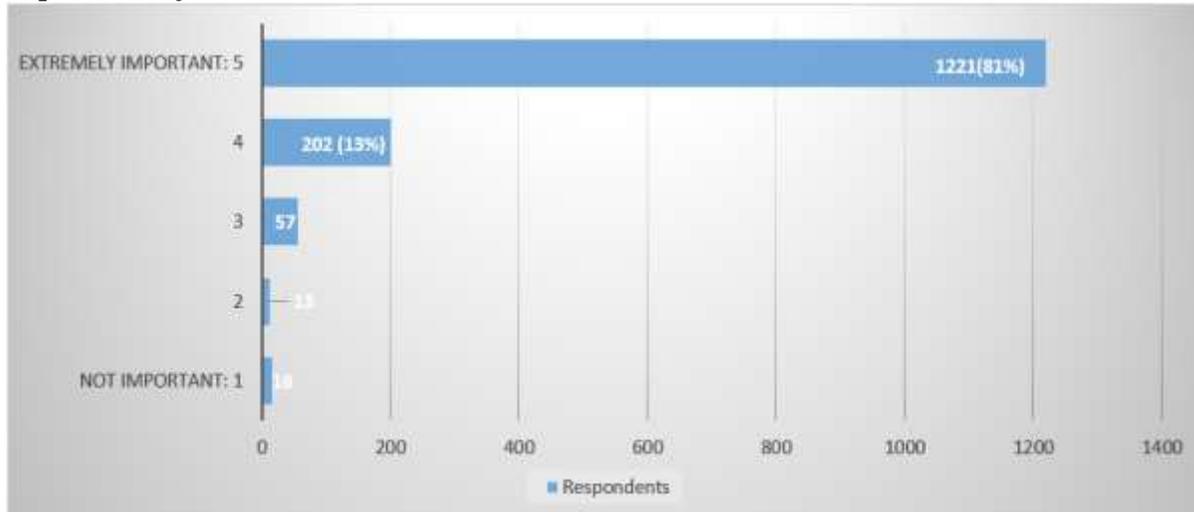
Importance of Brochure

Table 4: Overall importance of (print) brochures

Table 4 reveals the overall importance of brochures surveyed as a stand-alone category. Over 1200 hundred of the 1560 respondents indicated that brochures were “Extremely Important” on the 1-5 scale depicted in Table 4. Overall, as can be seen, **81%** indicated this category. If we look at the “top two boxes,” in this case the 4’s and 5’s, we arrive at a value of 94% of the 1509 respondents who answered this question. This is very telling, for evaluations of “success” or “importance” of an attribute or product is often measured not just by its “average” rating (4.72 in this case), but also by its top-two-box percent. As we noted earlier, print media is often more highly valued by guests than electronic and kiosk information. Printed brochures, maps and guides placed in the lobby are much more likely to be used by guests during their stay. If the favorability of in-room printed materials is also considered, then printed materials outperform hotel electronic kiosks and information by a large margin. This is also true of hospitality professionals who have expressed the view that printed materials are not of value to their guests. The survey shows that hospitality professionals overwhelmingly favor the use of printed media to assist guests in their properties. Of the hotels surveyed, **94%** provided visitor information for their guest by way of a printed brochure display.

Importance of visitor information at the location

Table 5 considers the specific use of visitor information on site, separately for those who do have a brochure display on site and those who do not have a brochure display on site.

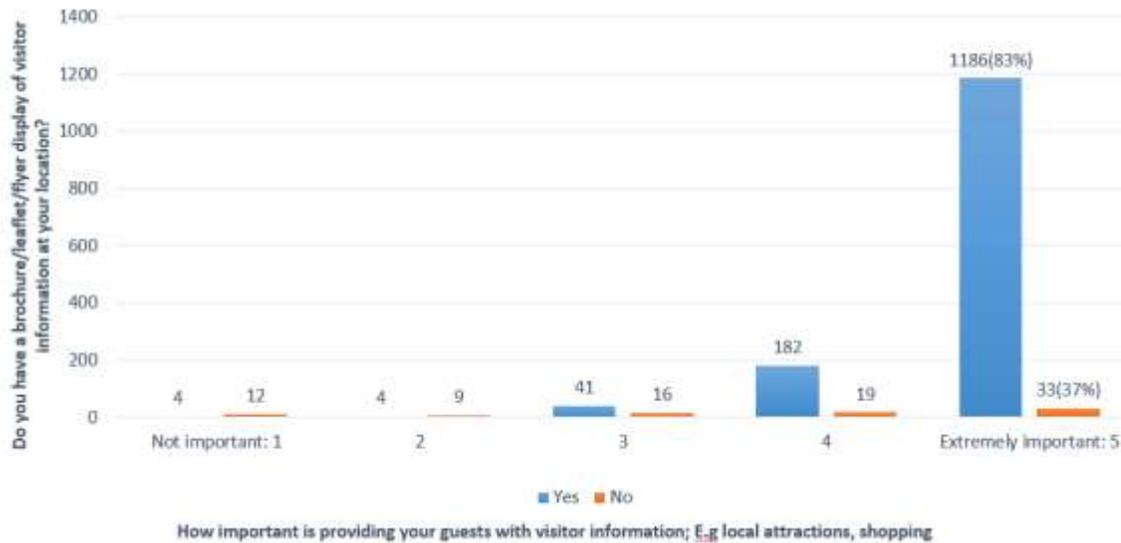


Table 5: Importance of providing visitor information *on site* – those with and without an onsite brochure display

Table 5 shows that **(83%)** of respondents who have a brochure display (the blue columns in the histogram illustrated in Table 5) consider providing visitor information extremely important. **(37%)** of respondents who do not have brochure display (the red columns in the histogram illustrated in Table 5) consider providing visitor information to be extremely important. Of course, it makes sense that those with a brochure display view having such a display as more important as those who do not have such a display.

Hospitality professionals reported observing that, if a property has a brochure display *in the lobby*, guests are (visibly) carrying and using brochures **(83%)** of time, but guests are (visibly) carrying and using only **(53%)** of time in hotels not having a brochure display in the lobby. This data points to the value of a brochure display at a central point where guests tend to either pass by often, if not congregate.

Services used by visitors

Usage percentage of visitor information services

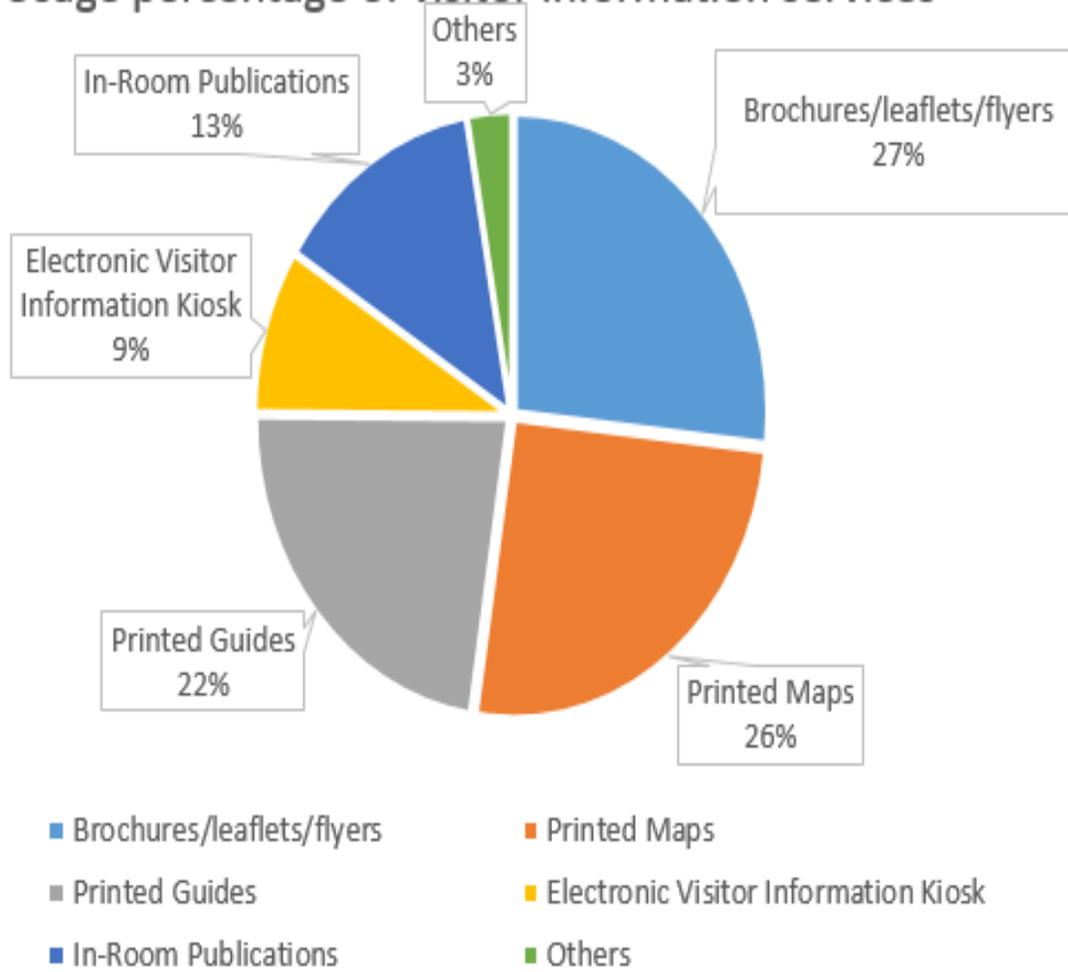


Figure 1: Uses of visitor information services

Figure 1 shows a pi-chart of the *most frequent use* of visitor information services (values adding to 100%.) Brochures of attractions and events are the most popular (**27%**), while printed maps are the second most popular choice for guests and concierge staff. Maps are easy to use, easy to share and easy to trace a route along (**26%**); place-based guides came in third (**22%**).

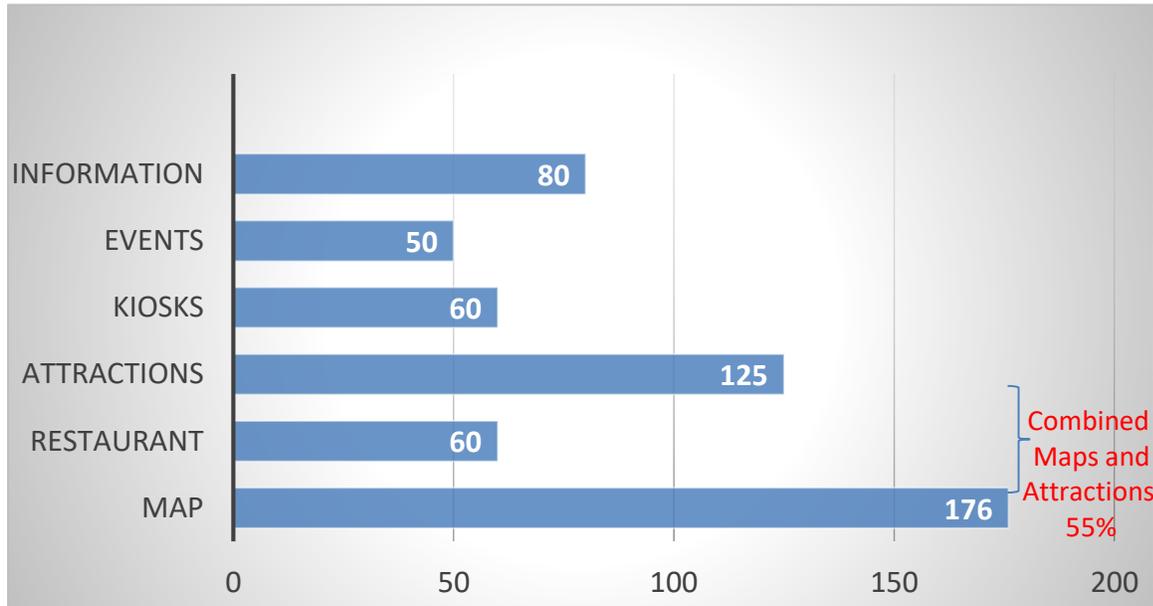
Sources of information other than brochures

Table 6: Information used at the time of traveling

In the age of mobile phones guests still look to the front desk for printed maps, restaurant and attractions (**261[55%]** of the 551 responses in Table 6) rather than kiosks (**60 [11%]** of the 551 responses in Table 6). The use of the Internet and kiosks at properties is much lower than hypothesized, which suggests that guests look to their own mobile Internet devices to conduct their own place-based research. However, this data suggests the importance of well-placed printed materials in displays to catch the attention of the guest and assist the front desk staff in their advice to guests on where to go and what to do while visiting.

CONCLUSION

From our data, we can reach several conclusions -

- Hotel front desk staff in the US and Europe overwhelmingly favor brochure displays in their properties.
- Brochures play a much larger role in travel decisions than conventional wisdom might suggest.
- Hotel front desk staff overwhelmingly prefer to assist their guest with printed media
- Brochures and maps are almost equally popular to share with guests
- The use of printed maps is interesting in the age of mobile Google maps and suggests there is a shared connection with the concierge and the guest using a printed map together to highlight locations
- Even hotels without displays still prefer to help guests with printed media
- Kiosks and web-based information sources are seldom preferred by hotel front staff to assist their guests.

In the digital age printed media is the most preferred and a highly valuable support to the local knowledge of the front desk and concierge.

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