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*Guidebook use by Japanese tourists: a qualitative study of Australia inbound travellers*

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**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF AUSTRALIA INBOUND TRAVELLERS**

**GUIDEBOOK USE BY JAPANESE TOURISTS:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF AUSTRALIA INBOUND TRAVELLERS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative investigation into guidebook use reports on in-depth interviews conducted with 26 Japanese individuals and one couple who had visited Australia during the five previous years. Focussing on the stages before, during and after travel the research framework was based on Vogt and Fesenmaier's model of information needs (1998). It was found that functional needs were the dominant influences during the prior to travel phase, with some non-functional needs, (hedonic, aesthetic, and innovation) also being influential. During the travel phase, only functional needs were evident. Some respondents were identified as being deliberate non-users of guidebooks. The variable "tourist type" was found to be helpful for distinguishing between users and non-users and for identifying those with functional needs. The use of guidebooks by those whose needs are both functional and non-functional may be unaffected by this variable. When the attitudes of those who actively dislike guidebooks and those who hesitate to use them are aggregated, a view emerges of guidebooks as a symbol of standardised tourism.

## **KEYWORDS**

Guidebook, extended information use, qualitative study, Japanese tourists

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since Nolan's pioneering study (1976), information search has been a prominent topic for research in the tourism literature. Chen and Gursoy recently asserted that information search has become one of the most frequently examined research topics in tourism (2000: 191). Despite the widespread interest in travel information sources generally, travel guidebooks (henceforth described simply as "guidebooks") have been underrepresented in the literature (Bhattacharyya 1997). This is surprising since empirical studies have repeatedly identified guidebooks as being one of most important sources of information for tourists (Gitelson and Crompton 1983; Nolan 1976; Snepenger et al. 1990). This exploratory study seeks to enhance our understanding of the use of guidebooks.

## **USE OF GUIDEBOOKS**

One of the few empirical examinations of guidebooks was conducted by Lew who noted that 'it (travel literature including guidebooks) not only helps shape the expectations, but also the destination behaviour of tourists as they seek to create a restorative experience' (1991: 126). He also stated that 'possibly more important than the factual information they contain, guidebooks provide a framework for experiencing a place' (1991:126). Similarly McGregor indicated that guidebooks facilitate and encourage the formation of certain images of places without actual visitation, concluding that 'texts provide lenses for viewing the world' (2000: 47), further. This may or may not lead potential travellers to proceed with a prospective trip.

Carter stressed that ‘the importance of guidebooks as providing a sense of place for travellers before they have experienced it themselves’(1998: 351).

In addition to providing a general framework for viewing places, Lew and others have suggested that guidebooks may influence individual travel decisions either positively or negatively (1991). By stressing certain features, guidebooks provide ‘proportional assertions’ conveying the character of a destination and what is worth seeing and experiencing (Lew 1991: 126). The process of inclusion and exclusion may influence knowledge about a destination. These observations indicate that guidebooks provide an important means of labelling both desirable and undesirable aspects of a destination and assisting tourists to select from the available product options (Lew 1991; Carter 1998). The contents and the chosen perspectives of guidebooks are likely to vary (Bhattacharyya 1997; Carter 1998; Lew 1991). Guidebooks include descriptions of a range of places, though whether tourists accept the proposed perspectives depends on their travel interests and needs (Lew 1991).

Guidebooks may influence the formation of destination images which may subsequently guide the criteria that determine tourist expectations and satisfaction. As is well documented, the perceptions that prospective visitors hold of a destination may influence the effectiveness of any marketing targeted at them (Gartner 1993; Gunn 1972). A distinct and favourable

destination image is likely to influence the decision to visit and the length of stay. Stronger destination preferences are associated with more favourable perceptions. Gunn distinguished between ‘organic images’ resulting from non-tourist specific information conveyed through media such as TV, films, newspaper, books and magazine, and ‘induced images’ resulting from purposeful promotion undertaken by the tourism industry (1972). The latter may be exercised through marketing, whilst the former is accumulated in the individual’s daily life independently of such activities, even when s/he has no intention of travelling. However, what if some sources of information such as guidebooks influence both organic and induced images? Some authors have suggested that tourists make use of travel information on an ongoing basis. In this context guidebook use may extend beyond the traditional scope of information search and use and the present study investigates this wider context.

## **EXTENDED USE OF INFORMATION SOURCES**

Though information search behaviour has been closely associated with travel decision-making, a number of studies have indicated that the use of travel information sources may extend beyond the pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives (Fesenmaier et al. 1993; Messmer and Johnson 1993). In particular, Vogt and Fesenmaier’s model has acknowledged the existence of multiple information needs and roles (1998). Supplementing the long established acknowledgment of functional information needs the model proposes four additional and “non-functional” needs - hedonic, innovation, aesthetic, and sign. Functional needs refer to

needs as motivated efforts which are directed at or contribute to a purpose. Of the non-functional type hedonic needs involve the pursuit of enjoyment. Aesthetic needs involve the search for visual stimulation for the imagination and for fantasy. Innovation needs involve an inclination towards new products and information. Finally sign needs involve symbolic expressions and social interaction. The model was tested empirically on a group of respondents who requested travel information from a destination marketing organization in the Midwest of the USA. Consistent with the findings of the previous studies, it was identified that functional needs are the most important (Vogt et al 1993). In terms of importance, innovation, aesthetic hedonic and sign needs were rated second, third, fourth and fifth respectively.

The studies by Vogt and colleagues have highlighted a neglected aspect of research into travel information search (Vogt et al. 1993; Vogt and Fesenmaier 1998). However their empirical research was restricted to a sample of those who had proactively requested a specific pack of information. It remains unclear to what extent travel information sources used for purposes other than decision-making. In the present study, the Vogt and Fessenmaier model is used to identify and synthesise guidebook uses in the wider context of information use, thereby building upon the previous more narrowly focussed research.

## **THE FOCUS OF THE PRESENT STUDY**



The population selected for the present study consisted of Japanese outbound tourists who had travelled to Australia during the previous five years. Previous studies dealing with the search for and use of travel information by Japanese tourists have concluded that relative to tourists from other countries Japanese tourists prefer printed media such as guidebooks and brochures (Andersen et al. 2000; Mihalik et al. 1995; Milner et al. 2000; Uysal et al. 1990). Some of this reliance on print media may be due to the difficulties encountered when communicating in the language of the destination areas. They may also have a preference for using sources which originate in Japan with printed media viewed as more authoritative (Milner et al. (2000)). The present study set out to investigate such assumptions about the use of guidebooks by Japanese tourists.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS**

The following exploratory research questions were formulated:

Question 1:

Is the use of guidebooks amongst prospective Japanese travellers restricted to pre-purchase search for travel information as part of the decision-making process? If not, what are their other uses?

The Vogt and Fesenmaier model (1998) was used as a framework for data analysis purposes

with a view to placing guidebooks within the wider context of travel information use.

#### Question 2:

Are there any behavioral differences between guidebook users and non-users over the course of an equivalent trip?

In recognizing that the type of tourist is likely to influence the search for and use of information, this research question aimed to ascertain the incidence of guidebook use and non-use amongst identifiable groups of respondents. Drawing upon Cohen's tourist typology, Snepenger (1987) had previously found that first-time travellers to Alaska used information sources to varying degrees. The sources considered included travel agent, state-sponsored advertisements, tour brochures and guidebooks, and friends and relatives. He found that 'tour brochures/guide books', were used most by 'individual mass tourists', followed by 'explorers', and 'organized mass tourists' In their study of Swiss tourists Bieger and Laesser (2001) identified a significant relationship between the extent to which a trip is packaged and the information sources that are used. Of the four clusters the one which scored highest (46%) in terms of the importance attached to 'travel guides/travel books/journals' was 'no package at all'. 'Single package tour' recorded 30% and 'group package tour' 9%. In the current study the authors wished to investigate whether similar patterns are evident in the case of an alternative international market which exhibits distinct cultural characteristics. The Japanese

were considered to be an appropriate population since the researchers are Australia-based, Japan is consistently one of the top three inbound markets and has a reputation of substantial use of guidebooks.

Reflective of the exploratory nature of the study a qualitative approach was employed. In-depth interviews in Japanese were conducted in Japan during mid 2001 with respondents who had travelled to Australia during the previous five years. Using purposive sampling, 26 individuals and one couple (who chose to be interviewed together) were interviewed. The sample size is small, reflective of the intention to collect 'rich' information from a small number of respondents using in-depth interviews. The small number does however satisfy the threshold of eight proposed by McCracken as sufficient for generating themes or categories in the process of conducting qualitative research (1988:17). The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations, including university campuses and local community centres, and varied in length from 20 minutes to an hour. It is acknowledged that some recall bias may have occurred since the relevant trips may have occurred up to five years previously. Nevertheless for purposes of qualitative assessment, broad impressions and how these may have affected overall consciousness were considered a valid contribution to our understanding of consumer recollection.

Respondents ranged from 18 to 68 years of age, with almost equal gender representation.

Their occupations included university student, financial consultant, travel agency manager, retiree, and housewife. The extent of their overseas travel ranged from once (where a trip to Australia was their first overseas trip) to more than 30 times. While two-thirds of the respondents had visited Australia only once, the rest (many of them with friends or relatives in Australia) had visited more than twice. The purpose of travel ranged from holiday, school excursion, student exchange and attending a language school to visiting friends and relatives. As far as the type of trip is concerned, nearly half of the respondents used either package tours or group tours organised by a school. The others travelled on trips which were fully or partly independent and allowed for flexibility and freedom during travel. Even though the interviewees represent a range of demographic characteristics on the basis of age, gender, occupation, education, overseas travel experience, type and purpose of the trip, and region of Australia visited, they do not represent a random cross-section of Japanese tourists who have travelled to Australia. This is acknowledged as a limitation of the research.

All interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and then translated into English by a qualified professional translator. The data analysis adhered to the Miles and Huberman approach where qualitative research is conducted in the context of a theoretical framework (1994). The Vogt and Fesenmeier model was the chosen framework in this case (1998).

Of the 27 interviewees, 14 individuals and the couple indicated that they had used guidebooks

for their recent trip to Australia. The other 12 said that they had either hardly used them or else had not used them at all. A separate analysis was then conducted on the two respondent groups and the results are presented individually. With a view to protecting anonymity, respondents were assigned a number somewhere between one [1] and twenty seven [27] based upon an alphabetical ordering of their names. For reporting purposes, gender ('M' for male and 'F' for female) and age are noted. Whilst the focus of the interviews was to generate discussion about the most recent trips by respondents to Australia, some comments about other overseas trip experiences were accommodated since these may provide a useful point of reference for respondents.

## **GUIDEBOOKS USERS**

Through the course of the interviews, it was found that guidebook use was not confined to the period prior to and leading up to travel, but also occurred during other phases of travel, namely to the destination, at the destination, returning from the destination, and in some cases, even after travel. Table 1 summarises the responses from users on the basis of Vogt and Fesenmaier's framework (1998) and outlines the perceived need for guidebooks during various stages of the trip. Of the five Vogt and Fesenmaier constructs (functional, hedonic, aesthetic, innovation, and sign needs), only the final constraint (sign) was not referred to by any respondents. Of the other four constructs, functional need was mentioned most frequently with hedonic, aesthetic, and innovation needs referred to by fewer respondents. This result

was broadly consistent with the Vogt and Fesenmaier findings (1998), although as will be noted later, some problems were identified with the application of the framework.

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### **Guidebook Use Prior to Travel**

Various uses were reported during the prior to travel stage.

#### ***Functional Needs***

During the prior to travel phase, functional needs were most frequently detected. All respondents strongly indicated their need for knowledge about the destinations. Guidebooks were identified as the major source of background information about the destination after it had been selected. According to respondent [24] (F, 20), ‘We looked at it (guidebook) before the trip to get some idea of where we were going ...’ Those with free-time available during their trip were more specific about their uses which included the formulation of a preliminary travel itinerary and collecting detailed destination information. In making her travel plans, respondent [5] (F, 21) used various sources of information including guidebooks as follows:

Before I travel, I get all kinds of brochures from travel agents and then decide where I want to go. If I

read a guidebook once I've decided on my destination, then I find that there are even more places (within the destination) that I'd like to visit. ... Like where to go and what to see, what to eat, what to buy ... that gives you a rough idea of what you're going to do when you get there.

Many users who consulted a guidebook to develop a rough plan admitted that they did not necessarily execute their plans as originally intended. Guidebooks were sometimes used prior to travel as a basis for discussion with travel companions, thereby avoiding prospective conflicts and assisting problem-solving. Using guidebooks may also be a pleasurable activity. Respondent [15] (M, 21) travelled to Australia with his family. He referred to using guidebooks as an aid to family discussion as follows: 'Our family likes to discuss all sorts of things before we go anywhere, and to us, that's part of the enjoyment of going away'. Some respondents reported the process of joint decision-making using guidebooks as a pleasurable activity.

The use of guidebooks prior to travel is sometimes associated with feelings of uncertainty. Solo travellers displayed a particular need for geographic information such as maps, directions to key attractions, and destination transport networks. Most respondents expressed a desire for the inclusion of detailed and accurate maps within guidebooks.

### ***Hedonic Needs***

Some users expressed positive emotions about their use of guidebooks prior to travel including feelings of enjoyment, excitement and enthusiasm. Some purchased guidebooks without making any specific travel plans. This is a form of ‘ongoing search’ (Bloch et al. 1986), in which tourists accumulate knowledge, construct images, and accrue experiences about travel and destinations. Respondent [15] (M, 21) described the emotions that he feels when reading guidebooks:

I enjoy reading guidebooks anyway, and tend to buy a guidebook to a country that I’ve never been to, when I suddenly have this urge to go there. So a guidebook, for me, is not so much a guidebook, but something that transcends this, with a much greater meaning.

A small number of respondents commented that guidebook use can involve learning about new experiences, or gaining new perspectives that appear to be quite independent of travel decision-making. Respondent [15] (M, 21) dissociated his use of guidebooks from making specific travel plans. The needs that he articulated were more phenomenological in nature:

Interviewer: So it (guidebook) is something that you might read even if you’re not going anywhere?

Respondent: Yes, that’s right. If it’s a region I’m interested in. I think it’s the best way of finding out



about other countries.

Some users indicated that they make extensive use of guidebooks both instances where they have and do not have specific travel plans.

### *Aesthetic Needs*

In articulating aesthetic needs during the prior to travel stage some users referred to imagery and fantasy, particularly concerning photography. When used prior to the decision to travel guidebooks may function as a motivator. After the decision has been made, the guidebook functions more as an image expander. Respondent [13] (M, 22) related that whilst he had not searched actively, he had been motivated to travel by photographs that he had encountered in guidebooks.

With my trip to Pakistan, I opened '*Chikyu no Arukikata*' (a popular guidebook series in Japan) and saw some beautiful photographs. I happened to be killing time at the library, and I just happened to pick up this guidebook on Pakistan. And there were these beautiful photographs. And I got this urge to go there ... I had been thinking of going somewhere ... the photographs really were beautiful. And afterwards you start to really want to go, but initially it was because of the beauty of the photographs that ended up with my going.

For respondents who are fulfilling functional decision-making needs, guidebooks may be used for trip planning, and then for stimulating or expanding their mental picture of the destination. In providing a chronology of her prior to travel use, respondent [9] (F, 21) emphasised the importance of the imaginary component:

Well, at first you buy a guidebook because you're going somewhere for the first time. So if you're going to Australia you'd buy a guidebook for Australia. Then you'd first gather the information, and you start having all these dreams, and you want to go everywhere. And so the travel guidebook acts as a bridge to your destination, and so it's very important to me.

Several users, including both frequent and infrequent travellers, indicated that they sometimes read with a view to 'fantasizing' or 'daydreaming.' Respondent [4] (F, 53) who is a frequent traveller, indicated that she likes to undertake an ongoing information search:

It (guidebook) is something that enables me to buy a dream, whether I actually go or not. Even when I have no plans to actually go somewhere, I just enjoy reading them, looking forward to the time I can go. Because you can immerse yourself in that world.

Female respondent [11] (F, 50), a homemaker, confines her use to non-functional needs, apparently defying traditional assumptions about information needs. The authors have

categorised such comments which do not specify actual travel plans within the 'prior to travel use' category.

I don't really like travelling that much, and so if I was going to read a guidebook, then I could easily travel using my imagination. That's what the guidebook is for me. ... I like reading them.

### ***Innovation needs***

Some respondents purchased guidebooks for destinations that they had neither visited nor had any immediate intention of visiting. One respondent who possessed 'a lot of guidebooks'. [27] (F, 19) expressed his innovation needs as follows:

I even have guidebooks to places I haven't been to. ... I'd look through it and think how I'd love to go there. ... I buy guidebooks to places that I have some interest in, where I'd like to go one day.

As will be discussed later, some respondents who did not use guidebooks for their Australian trip expressed an alternative view.

Functional and non-functional needs are clearly in evidence during the prior to travel phase. Functional needs were dominant, through non-functional hedonic, aesthetic, and innovation needs were also identified.

## **Use of Guidebooks During Travel**

All respondents who reported that they used guidebooks prior to travel also mentioned using them during the course of travel. The authors then categorised these responses using Vogt and Fesenmaier's framework. Given the concentration on functional needs during travel, it was perhaps not surprising that no non-functional needs were noted for the during travel phase.

### ***Functional needs***

The dominant terms expressed by respondents for guidebook use during travel were the need for product knowledge and basic content as a source of travel information. Most users considered descriptions of the various components of travel including product information, as being a necessity. Examples included facts about destinations (climate, currency and customs), descriptions about places of interest, and how to access them, how to use local transport, lists of accommodation and restaurants, available activities, shopping suggestions and advice about safety issues.

Several respondents used guidebooks during travel with a view to 'confirming' whether the description was consistent with what they were seeing or had just seen. Respondents who responded accordingly were generally those less able to exercise freedom and less likely to use guidebooks for decision-making during travel (eg. package tour participants). Guidebooks were used to evaluate what they had chosen and purchased prior to travel. Respondent [26]

(M, 20) who travelled on a package tour with his family commented that he ‘didn't have that much free time’ illustrative of the role of guidebooks as a confirmation of places visited during travel:

Well, we might have a look at it after we got back to our hotel room, to look up where we'd just been, and confirm the place. ... I remember saying that we'd gone that day by bus to see such and such, and describing the places you could see.

Respondent [14] (M, 60), who was the husband of the joint respondent and travelled in a group tour with a full and tight schedule described his use of guidebooks during travel as follows:

My wife bought a book (guidebook) about Australia. So I read that, and I took it with me on the trip to check things. The tour guide told us things but I'd forget what she said almost immediately, so I'd read the guidebook once more and it was like ‘Oh, this is where we went today’, or ‘This place has been standing for so long’, and refer to the book in this way.

The *raison d'être* of guidebooks appears to be reversed in the case of some respondents. Guidebook descriptions and photographs were often considered to be trustworthy and even ‘real’. What was seen or experienced briefly on-site was viewed as being a representation of

the guidebook contents which had already provided them with some familiarity prior to travel. During travel, respondent [1] (F, 20) was more excited about confirming destinations with her guidebook than with actually visiting them:

Even when I decided that I wanted to go to a certain country, it's not as though I know much about that country. ... But if the photo ... is in the book, and you're travelling by car, then if you see it, you can recognize it. 'That's it!' And that's just a great feeling.

Siegenthaler has provided a useful perspective on the unique need of 'confirming' amongst Japanese tourists (2002). He noted MacCannell's criticism (1989: 41) that guidebooks function as 'markers' of the sites which they describe and by signalling that the site is worth seeing contribute to "sight sacralization".. He then referred to Graburn's observation that Japanese tourists tend to visit only 'well-known "culturally approved" attractions', such as those featured in guidebooks (1995: 48). Graburn has also argued that 'modern tourists are often more involved with the markers than the sites themselves' and that this applies very well to ancient, modern, and overseas Japanese tourism perhaps even more than it does to typical Western tourism' (1987: 20). This suggests that the behaviour of Japanese tourists may involve an element of 'place confirming needs'. For some tourists, 'discovering' well-known or named scenes because it is listed in my guidebook may be fun and lead to the idea that this place is worth seeing'. The meaningfulness or otherwise of the place may be unimportant in

such cases with the signs or representations of what they consume and appreciate during travel being considered as valuable.

McGregor (2000) expressed a different view of the confirmatory role noting that guidebooks may be used to verify information obtained from other travellers by word-of-mouth and to assess the merits of the destination prior to visitation. In the present study, it was discovered that respondents use guidebooks on-site to confirm whether the content accurately represents reality.

Some respondents involved in 'free time tour/skeleton tours' (a package of air ticket, accommodation plus transport to and from airport only) and some independent travellers used guidebooks during travel to discuss their immediate plans with travel companions. Enjoying a greater degree of freedom during travel, and such travellers appreciate the assistance that guidebooks providing offering a type of tentative plan to guide their on-trip decision-making. Respondent [1] (F, 20) who travelled on a skeleton tour with two friends commented as follows:

Because we hadn't decided exactly what we were going to do, we'd look at it (the guidebook) at the hotel to decide what we were going to do the next day, or deciding which shops we were going to.

Respondents who travelled independently for short periods such as a week viewed guidebooks as a mechanism for saving time during travel. Respondent [25] (F, 20) noted that:

And if you didn't have one (guidebook) then you'd waste a lot of time. You can use your time more efficiently ... because there are always time constraints when you travel. I'd definitely take one with me if I was going away.

Respondent [10] (F, 30) notes the importance of guidebooks for him personally both prior to and during the trip:

It (guidebook) is something that is extremely important when you spend time in an unfamiliar place. I wouldn't even be able to start travelling without one ... you can't start doing anything when making plans before going on the trip, and also when you want to do something once you're at the destination, you can't even start doing anything without a guidebook. Of course, you could go to the information centre and ask the people there, but if you had a guidebook, then you could find what you wanted to see and go straight there.

For those with no fixed travel itinerary and with limited time at the destination, guidebooks are a convenient information source. Within the Japanese outbound travel market the trend towards less structured but still short trips (JTB Corp. 2002) may explain the preference



amongst this group for guidebooks over other sources of information.

For several respondents, guidebooks were a tool for reducing psychological risk over the course of the trip and for making them feel better. Respondent [1] (F, 20) noted that, 'You feel safe just having it (guidebook) with you'. One regular overseas backpacker respondent [13] (M, 22) explained his need for a guidebook during travel:

I feel more secure having it (guidebook) with me. If I go somewhere with no information whatsoever, then I'd be terrified on that first day ... But I think the first, most important purpose of having a guidebook is that it makes you feel secure. I always take one with me ... When you ask me what a guidebook is, I guess it's security, something that I can't do without.

Respondent [16] (M, 67), a habitual overseas traveller noted his personal preference for being accompanied by a guidebook during his travels.

It (guidebook) is a necessity. I don't think I'd travel without a guidebook. If I was told to go somewhere without a guidebook, I think I'd be too scared to go. I'd be so apprehensive.

Respondent [14] (F, 60) a wife who travelled with her husband noted that:

‘For me, the guidebook is a tranquilliser’. Even if we were travelling with our daughter, each of us would have a guidebook with us, no matter how heavy it is ... I’ve used guidebooks since our first overseas trip, and I don’t know what I’d do without it ... I always put the hotel’s address and phone number in the guidebook, and even when we get off the bus, I make sure I have it. Even if it’s heavy. ... When I went to Lyons this year with my daughter, a festival happened to be on at the time, and it was 10 at night and we still couldn’t find the hotel, and when my daughter told me ‘Just stay here and don’t move’. I was clutching my guidebook to my chest (laughs).

From the previous section we may conclude that for some users, guidebooks are viewed as a trustworthy source of information during travel – a type of ‘talisman’ or ‘security blanket’.

### **Use of Guidebooks After Travel**

Several users continued to use their guidebooks after returning home, implying an hedonic type of need. One respondent commented that it provided an opportunity ‘to reflect on those times’ (Respondent [27], F, 20).. Respondent [11] (F, 50) viewed her guidebook as ‘a souvenir of my trip’. Others talked about using their guidebooks for ‘confirmation’ purposes. Respondent [14], a couple aged in their sixties spoke in unison as follows:

Husband: When I get back, I’d read sections of the guidebook that I hadn’t read before the trip, and confirm certain details.

Wife: I do that too. I read about the places we've visited during the flight back. And things are much more clear and fresh after the trip than before.

Respondent [24] (F, 20) noted the tightness of her itinerary as the reason for not consulting a guidebook prior to and during her trip. Interestingly she did consult guidebooks after the trip with a view to 'confirming' her prior experience.

I looked at it (guidebook) when we got back to Japan, to confirm the places that we'd been to, but I didn't look at it much before we left. ... and also to remember the places that I'd been to.

Given that the trip is already complete why are guidebooks still used after the return home? Perhaps they help to stimulate vivid recollections of the experience.

The 'after travel' period of one trip may coincide with the 'prior to travel' period of another. This highlights the limitation of viewing a trip in simple linear terms. A traveller may plan to visit the same or a similar destination and guidebook use 'after travel' may be consistent what has been described by Bloch et al. (1986) as the 'ongoing search'. Respondent [4] (F, 53) illustrated this as follows:

We travel once or twice a year, and I am constantly aware of obtaining information. I didn't used to be like that. When I'd travel with my older daughter during the summer holidays, I'd leave everything up to her, but if you do that, then I don't think the actual experience of the trip stays with you. And on 2 or 3 occasions, I'd come back from somewhere and look at a guidebook, and thought 'Oh, is this what that place is really like', or 'What a wonderful place. I should have looked at the guidebooks'. Since then, I've learnt to enjoy reading guidebooks.

Various respondents indicated that they use guidebooks for a variety of purposes, prior to, during and even after travel. Through all of these phases functional needs were dominant with product knowledge, efficiency, and uncertainty being key components. The dominance of functional needs was particularly evident during travel. Non-functional aspects, such as hedonic, aesthetic, and innovation needs were more evident at the prior to and after travel stages, albeit still less prominently than functional needs. No sign needs were evident during the discussion with guidebooks users, perhaps indicative that such needs are not irrelevant.

## **GUIDEBOOK NON-USERS**

Of the various respondents, 12 identified themselves as having never or having rarely used guidebooks for recent trips to Australia. With a view to identifying the possible reasons, these respondents were asked about their use of guidebooks on other occasions. Since the Vogt and Fesenmaier framework was not suitable for analysing the interview contents of non-users, the

researchers opted to identify frequently-appearing words and documented the patterns associated with them.

Non-users exhibited two distinct characteristics. The first group reported that their trips to Australia were pre-planned/organised by someone else and that ‘there wasn't much free-time’ (Respondent [5] (F, 21)). A smaller group of respondents expressed scepticism towards the value of guidebooks.

### **Occasional Users: Tour Participants**

Consistent with the stereotypical view of Japanese travellers, all of those who commented on the lack of free time were members of package groups. Whilst the proportion accounted for by such travel has been decreasing, it remains significant in the Japanese outbound market (Yamamoto and Gill 2000). Japanese package tours do not necessarily include full, comprehensive package tours in which participants are accompanied by tour leaders or local tour guides and all meals and sightseeing are included. Flexible package tours (frequently called ‘free-time package tours’ or ‘skeleton tours’) increased in popularity. Such tours typically include a return air ticket, accommodation and airport transfers during the 1990s, with (an option is also often available to add short guided trips from the destination or activities to the tour). Full package tours have recently accounted for about 31%, and free-time type tours for about 25% of all overseas trips (JTB corp. 2002).

Respondent [24] (F, 20) who visited Cairns, Uluru (Ayers Rock), and Sydney on a six-day package tour with her family was asked why she did not use a guidebook prior to or during travel:

Because our activities were pretty much organized. Once we'd done some sightseeing, then we'd be off to the next place, and we didn't have a lot of free time.

Those travelling to Australia in groups gave similar reasons for not using guidebooks and partly associated this with the circumstances surrounding their trip. They suggested that they would be more likely to use guidebooks for certain other destinations. Respondent [27] (F, 19) participated in a three-week student exchange programme and stated that 'I buy guidebooks to places that I have some interest in, where I'd like to go one day', so:

If I was deciding on the course I was taking, then I would buy one (guidebook) and have a lot of discussions and imagine the various destinations, but for this Australian trip, it was very much leaving everything to the organisers and others.

Respondent [3] (M, 21) indicated that his guidebook use would be different if he was travelling independently.

The only time I'd use one (guidebook) was if I was going somewhere on my own. And when you're on a school trip it's not as though you can get around on your own.

Some respondents attributed tightness of schedule and a pre-determined travel itinerary as reasons for non-use. They may be expected to resume their use of guidebooks for future travel since they may not always participate in package or group tours. Such choices are clearly associated with the degree of freedom.

### **Purposeful Non-Users: Scepticism towards Travel Guidebooks**

A number of non-users suggested that their likely use would vary depending on the type of trip and the level of involvement in the trip process. Other non-users were more determined non-participants. Respondent [2] (M, 20), for example, chose specifically not to use guidebooks because he was sceptical of their value:

My friends and I ... came to the conclusion that it would be better not to look at any guidebooks. We decided that if we thought somewhere looked good at the time, then we'd just go there. And we all agreed that whatever's listed in the guidebook would be full of people and not that enjoyable. ...I don't want to go overseas and see Japanese people. I want to go places where there aren't any Japanese...

A small number of other respondents expressed concern about the concentration of Japanese tourists at particular sightseeing spots and a desire to be independent of the places suggested in the guidebooks. This attitude is an insight into Vogt and Fessenmaier's five 'innovation needs' (1998). Some non-users clearly view guidebooks as contributing no valuable information and that relying on them will lead to a 'non-innovative' trip experience. McGregor reported similar attitudes in his study of independent travellers (2000:35). A 'few travellers indicated that they had intentionally visited places that were not mentioned in their guidebooks (despite expressing an obvious pride in experiencing "non-guidebook" places)'. If we aggregate the attitudes of those who dislike guidebooks and those who hesitate to use them, a view emerges of guidebooks as symbols of standardised tourism. Those seeking 'adventure' and 'off the beaten track' locations may have a low need for guidebooks and are likely to remain non-users.

Respondent [23] (M, 18) a solo traveller noted that 'I personally don't really like guidebooks'. He had used a guidebook on an earlier family trip to Sydney, where he viewed safety as an issue:

I think it's more interesting overall if there's a bit of trouble (when travelling). If everything goes too smoothly, it might be enjoyable, but it's a bit normal ... But not if I was with my family.



For those who might otherwise not use guidebooks, safety or psychological risk reduction is an important issue. This provides some support for the ‘uncertainty’ component in Vogt and Fesenmaier’s ‘functional needs’ category. Though a guidebook user, respondent [8] (F, 19) expressed some ambivalence:

It (guidebook) is something that I would prefer to have, because I would feel a bit concerned if I were going somewhere for the first time. It’s something that alleviates my concerns. I read an article recently in which the writer commented on the excitement of visiting an unfamiliar place and finding a fantastic shop on your own without the help of a guidebook, and how the feeling’s not the same if you find it through the guidebook because the shop’s already been described in the book.

Those who did not use a guidebook may be classified either as sceptics or as those with freedom in their decision-making during travel. The attitudes of the latter may change at the next opportunity, depending upon the type of trip whereas the former are likely to persist indefinitely as non-users. Such sceptics regard guidebooks as providing less innovative information to shape their experience and decline to use them in order to maintain the ‘adventurousness’ of their trip. In the case of some other respondents this need to reduce perceived risk prevents them from resisting the impulse to use guidebooks.

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

In addressing question one, the research identified that guidebooks are used for a range of purposes following the pre-purchase phase. A range of non-functional needs were in evidence, including 'hedonic', 'aesthetic', and 'innovation' needs (1998). 'Sign' needs were the only category not in evidence.

As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) and with a view to identifying patterns among cases, matrices were adopted as the analytical tool in the case of Question Two ('Are there any behavioural differences between guidebook users and non-users over the course of an equivalent trip?'). Two main variables were evident. One consisted of guidebook users (with three conceptual sub-variables functional needs only, functional and non-functional needs, and non-functional needs only) and non-users (with two subvariables purposeful non-users and occasional users). The other variable consisted of a range of respondent characteristics including tourist type, previous overseas travel experience, fluency in English and socio-demographics.

Interesting results emerged from the matrix displays concerning the type of trip variable. Table Two proposes a matrix of guidebook use/non-use, based on the level of flexibility evident in the travel itinerary. The most concentrated cell consists of occasional users within the broader category of guidebook non-users who are undertaking a comprehensive (lower

flexibility) package tour. Strikingly, no further case was evident in any of the other cells within the same column. This suggests that current non-users who reported using a guidebook for previous trips, had minimal opportunity to exercise freedom in the case of their current trip. In all of these cases, respondents were participating in either a package tour or on a school excursion. In the column ‘travel guidebook users - functional needs only’, no cases were reported in the comprehensive package tour (lower flexibility) category. Multiple cases were reported in two other cells, namely those who used guidebooks for functional needs and those who travelled with either slightly limited or else with full freedom in their travel decision-making. Those with no intention of using guidebooks may have been users in cases where they were able to exercise freedom over their decision-making. Those whose guidebook use was confined to functional needs might have been non-users in instances where they had no opportunity to exercise freedom in their travel decision-making.

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Insert Table 2 here

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With the exception of the column ‘guidebook users - non-functional needs only’ which has a single case, no concentration of any magnitude is evident in the remaining columns. It appears probable that purposeful non-users are likely to remain so, regardless of the type of trip.

Those who use guidebooks to address both functional and non-functional needs, are likely to be continuous users. This finding suggests that the extent to which individuals with functional needs use guidebooks varies according to their type of travel. Those with non-functional needs appear to use guidebooks regardless of their type of travel and such use extends well beyond pre-trip travel decisions. In such cases use appears to have become habitual and ongoing.

The present study has extended the scope of the Vogt and Fesenmaier conceptualisation by exploring new themes, notably the confirmatory role of guidebooks. In adopting an holistic approach, the study has enhanced our understanding of the information context within which potential and actual tourists make use of guidebooks. The findings suggest that future research should use the broader context of guidebook use as a point of reference and not focus exclusively on pre-trip information search. It was found that the Vogt and Fesenmaier conceptualisation was useful for classifying and explaining pre-travel guidebook uses though less so during the subsequent stages of travel. Sign needs were found to be at best a very subtle influence and in other cases completely absent. The model was also of limited use in attempting to understand the behaviour of non-users. For future research it may be appropriate to restructure the Vogt and Fesenmaier dimensions, taking full account of the wider context of guidebook use.

The present study has provided empirically tested evidence that guidebooks may be used over the entire course of a trip from anticipation through to retrospective reflection and for extended periods of time. The frequency and purpose of use varies according to both traveller type and the nature of the trip. Some travellers refuse to use guidebooks, because of their association with 'non-innovative' trip experiences.

The most prominent factors determining guidebook use were found to be the degree of freedom exercised in travel decision-making (degree of packaging) and the type of tourist. It has been found that the various functional needs for guidebooks may be understood in the context of before, during and after travel. It is recommended that future studies undertake more in-depth investigations of guidebook use during different phases of travel as well as into the major influences over guidebook use.

Travel is an intangible and the total experience is greater than the individual parts that are offered to consumers. Guidebooks offer insights into prospective experiences and can provide comprehensive information and imagery about all travel components and destinations including the likely atmosphere that may be encountered. Compared with the more fragmented information provided to potential and actual tourists by some other information sources, guidebooks synthesise a range of information which has the capacity to inspire the traveller. Accessible anytime and anywhere, guidebooks offer multifunctionality and

flexibility. Much remains to be understood about their use, notably about planning trips and for their own sake. Filling a notable gap in the literature, the present study has provided particular insights into the use of guidebooks by adding the perspective of its extended use.

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**Table 1****Information Needs for Guidebooks at Different Stages of the Trip**

	Prior to the trip	During the trip	After the trip
Functional needs	○	○	○
Hedonic needs	○	×	○
Aesthetic needs	○	×	×
Innovation needs	○	×	×
Sign needs	×	×	×

○ = This need was indicated by respondents

× = This need was not indicated by respondents

**Table 2****Use of Guidebook by Type of Tourist**

	Guidebook Users			Guidebook Non-Users	
	Functional and Non-Functional Needs	Functional Needs Only	Non-Functional Needs Only	Occasional Users	Purposeful Non-Users
Lower Flexibility in Travel Itinerary (Comprehensive package tour)	[14][27]		[11]	[1][5][6][17] [20][24][26]	[2][3]
Middle Flexibility in Travel Itinerary (Flexible package tour)	[9][16]	[8][18][25]			[23]
Higher Flexibility in Travel Itinerary (Independent Traveller)	[4][13] [15][22]	[7][10] [12][21]			[19]