

Exploring tour guiding styles: The perspective of tour leader roles

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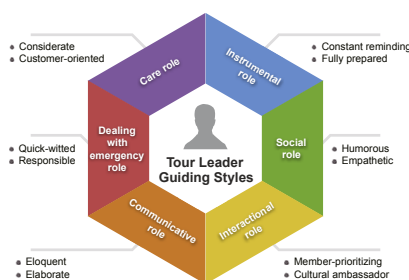


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HIGHLIGHTS

- We developed a reliable and valid measurement for assessing tour guiding styles from the perspective of tour leader roles.
- The 12-style, 43-item tour guiding style scale was adapted.
- We contribute to relevant knowledge by expanding the understanding of the guiding styles of tour leaders.
- The TLGS scale is a useful tool for tour leaders to measure their guiding styles.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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ABSTRACT

Although previous studies have investigated the tour leadership styles of tour leaders, no scale is available for evaluation. The purpose of this study was to develop a reliable and valid measurement for assessing tour guiding styles from the perspective of tour leaders' roles. Following in-depth interviews, content analysis, and a Q-sort method, we generated the initial items. Twelve tour guiding styles were extracted from an exploratory factor analysis on 243 tour leaders. A confirmatory factor analysis on 474 tour members was then performed to identify the validity of the 43-item tour guiding styles scale. This study extends current knowledge of the tour guiding styles of tour leaders and provides a foundation for building future theoretical concepts of related constructs. The scale provides a useful tool for tour leaders to measure their guiding styles. Furthermore, the results can serve as a reference for travel agencies in arranging tour leaders.

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1. Introduction

A group package tour (GPT) constitutes an extremely popular overseas travel pattern in Asian countries (Tsaur & Lin, 2014; Wang, Ma, Hsu, Jao, & Lin, 2013). According to statistical data from the Taiwan Tourism Bureau, over 32.1% of tourists in Taiwan chose group tours for overseas travel (Taiwan Tourism Bureau, 2015). Tour leaders are the essence of GPTs and they play a crucial role in achieving tourist satisfaction. Previous studies have highlighted the

roles of GPT leaders, which include those of a mentor, communicator, and entertainer (Cohen, 1985; Weiler & Black, 2014; Wong & Wang, 2009). GPTs require tour leaders to deliver core products and services, including guiding and keeping tourists happy. Throughout a trip, tour leaders maintain contact with tourists; therefore, the tour leader's performance affects satisfaction and service quality as perceived by tourists and their decision of whether to repurchase tours (Chang, 2014; Wang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2002). A tour leader's performance influences not only the travel agency's image but also its reputation and customer loyalty (Chan, Hsu, & Baum, 2015; Heung, 2008; Huang, Weiler, & Assaker, 2015). Tour leaders must fulfill their duties and interact with tourists during the journey, and play multiple roles to "service" tourists. The job of a tour leader is complex challenging, and paramount in GPTs.

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Cohen (1985) indicated the following roles of tour leaders: instrumental, social, interactional, and communicative. Tour leaders play a crucial role in group tours, because they serve as information deliverers and mentors for the group. Tour leaders impart their traveling experience and knowledge to tourists. Through their accumulated work experience, tour leaders can establish their own preferred method for tour guiding to suit the expectations and needs of tourists (Wong & Lee, 2012). Tour leaders must also fulfill tourists' needs, care for their physical and psychological requirements, and resolve problems and conflicts during the tour. Luoh and Tsaur (2014) summarized Chen, Hsin, and Shen (2010), and Huang, Hsu, and Chan (2010), proposing that other than the roles described by Cohen (1985), emergency response management and taking care of tourists' needs are also duties and tasks of tour leaders on the China route. Because of their job characteristics and content, tour leaders must exert effort, expend time, and adopt diverse role functions to achieve tourists' GPT purposes, thereby enabling them to have fun. This contributes to a successful tour guiding experience.

Past studies have shown that people display different styles because of the requirements of their careers, roles, and job tasks. People are not bound to any single style profile, but may deploy different styles in response to different situations (Sternberg, 1994). A style may be provisionally defined as a system of adherence to ways or patterns of engaging in certain actions (Kroeber, 1963), including an individual's habitual behaviors and attitudes (Sauerländer, 1983). Tour leaders must constantly present new ideas and adopt different roles during tours (Tsaur, Yen, & Yang, 2011), and their related experience accumulates and forms individual leadership styles. The leadership style of a tour leader is his or her habitual behavior and attitude regarding a task (Wong & Lee, 2012). According to leadership theory, Lopez (1980) divided leadership styles into authoritarian and democratic styles, and research results have shown that leadership styles have a substantial impact on tour satisfaction. On the basis of service features, Wong and Lee (2012) derived three aspects that cover different leadership styles: concern for tasks, concern for customers, and concern for the group atmosphere. The leading style of a tour leader affects the tour experience of tourists: Positive results enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty, whereas negative results lead to complaints (Chang, 2014; Huang et al., 2015). This indicates the significance of leadership styles in GPTs.

Although Lopez (1980) and Wong and Lee (2012) have investigated the leadership styles of tour leaders through leading styles and service features, tour leaders prioritize customers over staff during work, because customers are their source of income and thus should be guided and served well; this is relatively different from superior–subordinate leadership and management behavior. Aside from the role of a leader, tour leaders must also adopt the various roles of a communicator, entertainer, and cultural messenger (Cohen, 1985; Luoh & Tsaur, 2014; Weiler & Black, 2014). Tour leaders utilize their multiple roles during tour guiding to present consistent habits or patterns that form personal styles and features. Therefore, the style of guiding entails the full demonstration of the role function, and the tour guiding style as perceived by tourists is the overall impression of the various roles and functions of the tour leader throughout the tour. Investigating tour guiding styles through the roles of tour leaders enables clarifying the consistent methods and patterns a tour leader applies for fulfilling his or her role successfully. In management practice, different types of travel services have different attributes. Different tour guiding styles may result in different tour member perceptions (Wong & Lee, 2012). For example, shopping tours emphasize product sales. Tour leaders may play an interactive role and coordinate both supplier and tour member needs. Compared with

educational tours, tour leaders adept at communication are more likely to fulfill the expectations of tour members. Thus, the expectations of tour members vary according to the tour guiding style. In addition, customers in various age groups prefer different types of tour guiding styles. For instance, tour leaders must pay more attention and provide more care to senior customers than to young customers. Because different groups have varying preferences for tour guiding styles, the tour guiding style scale proposed in this study can serve as a reference for travel agencies in arranging tour leaders.

Because research on tour guiding styles of tour leaders is scant, no scale is available for evaluations (Wong & Lee, 2012); therefore, this lack of knowledge requires exploration. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to investigate the core of a tour leader's guiding style, as well as the indicators that can be applied for an effective evaluation. On the basis of the models proposed by Cohen (1985) and Luoh and Tsaur (2014) for tour leaders' roles, we developed a scale for measuring tour guiding styles. Because a tour guiding service is the core component of any GPT, it is reasonable to argue that whether tourists are satisfied with a tour guiding service plays an essential role in their satisfaction with services provided by travel agencies. Past studies have found that tourists' evaluation of a tour guiding service positively affected tourist satisfaction with package tour services and the overall tour experience (Huang et al., 2010, 2015). Therefore, the results can be applied to enhance tourist satisfaction and loyalty to tour leaders and travel agencies.

The present study fills the gap in the literature in three ways. First, this study proposes a scale for measuring tour guiding styles according to the roles of tour leaders. Second, this article responds to the call of Wong and Lee (2012) for developing an instrument for assessing the guiding styles of tour leaders. Finally, the tour guiding styles derived from the results of this study may assist tour leaders in demonstrating optimal performance.

2. Literature review

2.1. Tour leader

According to the definition of the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (2010), a tour leader is a person who guides visitors in the language of their choice and interprets the cultural and natural heritage of an area. A tour leader typically possesses an area-specific qualification generally issued and/or recognized by an appropriate authority (WFTGA, 2010). Poynter (1993) defined tour leaders as people who function as guides, leaders, translators, and tour organizers. Tour leaders are in charge of managing group dynamics, and over the course of an overseas trip, they should fulfill their guiding responsibilities to the extent stated in the tour contract. They play the crucial role of coordinating between tour suppliers including, hotels, restaurants, and tourist attractions. Schmidt (1979) indicated that tour leaders are indispensable in a GPT, and the tourists' perception of the tour leader's performance is a crucial factor for determining the quality of a GPT service. A tour leader can also generate delight and pleasure during a tour (Agrusa, 1994; Mossberg, 1995). Ap and Wong (2001) stated that a successful tour leader keeps travelers happy; leaves them with a strong, positive impression of the touring sites; provides correct and useful services that meet the tourists' expectations; and increases their willingness to participate in future tours.

2.2. Role of the tour leader

A role is a pattern that can be regarded as the consistent behavior of a single type of actor (Tumer, 1956). In service settings, service providers can be viewed as actors who perform on stage to

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