

THE INNOVATIVE SERVICE MODEL: A STUDY ON TOUR GUIDE SERVICE DESIGN IN TAIWAN BY ICT APPLICATION

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ABSTRACT

Tour guiding issues were identified through a series of in-depth and focus interviews and integrating many secondary data. Based on some new findings, a set of recommendations was formulated. A key recommendation includes the establishment of a service system to ensure high standard of service performance by the tour guides. ICT (Abbreviate by Information & Communication Technology) applied on tour guide is new trend. So far, some studies have invented tour guide service cases by RFID or IT, but ICT is few. This study tries to establish new combination service system with ICT. The new service design will make use of 6 dimensions to meet tourists' demand and promote tour guide service quality. The tourists' necessary information will be provided ubiquitously by mobile phone deliver.

Keywords: Tour guide service, Cultural service, Tourism Industry, Culture quality, ICT

INTRODUCTION

Tour guides are one of the key front-line players in the tourism industry. Through their knowledge and interpretation of a destination's culture, communication and service skills, they have the ability to transform the tourists' visit into an experience and knowledge level. Service professionalism has become an important issue as destinations compete for tourists in a very competitive environment, especially in Asia as it reels from the effects of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. This study examines the attribute of tour guiding in Taiwan, assessing the existing level of professional service standards, and identifying issues and challenges facing the profession in the 21st century.

Tour guiding issues were identified through a series of in-depth and focus interviews and integrating many secondary data. Based on some new findings, a set of recommendations was formulated. A key recommendation includes the establishment of a service system to ensure high standards of service performance by the tour guides. It is recognized that the experiences faced by the Taiwanese tour guides are unlikely to be unique and there may be some issues and problems raised that are common to the guiding profession in most other countries. However, very few studies about the professional status and issues faced by the tour guiding profession have been reported in the English-based literature. This study would represent one of the first attempts to do a prototype from integrating tour guide service, and discover potential value after ICT technology apply on tour guide service processes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tour guides are the essential interface between the host destination and its visitors. In fact, they are front-line employees who are very much responsible for the overall impression and satisfaction with the tour services process by a destination.

The performance of the tour guide (Geva and Goldman, 1991) was an important attribute to the success of the tour, while Mossberg (1995) noted that the tour guide was regarded an important element in selecting a charter tour. While there are various definitions of a tour guide, an internationally accepted definition given by the International Association of Tour Managers and the European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (EFTGA) is that a tour guide is a person who guide groups or individual visitors from abroad or from the home country around the monuments, sites and museums of a city or region; to interpret in an inspiring and entertaining manner, in the language of the visitor's choice, the cultural and natural heritage and environment (EFTGA, 1998).

Key areas of a tour guide's job description as defined above include environmental interpretation in an inspiring and entertaining manner, operation in a clearly defined cultural/ geographical area and specialized linguistic knowledge. Another definition provided by the Professional Tour Guide Association of San Antonio (1997) is that the guide is 'a person with an effective combination of enthusiasm, knowledge, personality qualities and high standards of conduct and ethics who leads groups to the important sites (in our city), while providing interpretation and commentary. This definition conducts tour essential ingredient that constitute the work of the tour guide. That means tour guide should have a passion for each tour subject and take an interest in each guest. In essence, the work of a tour guide not only involves the transmission of information, but also presenting it in an interesting and sincere manner. (John, 2001)

Tour guides have also been described by several authors as 'an information giver and fount of knowledge, mentor (Cohen, 1985), a mediator (de Kadt, 1979; Nettekoven, 1979), and 'culture broker. The mediator and cultural broker functions, as suggested here, refers to the interpretive aspects of the tour guide's work which plays a vital role in enhancing the visitors' experience at a destination and their understanding of the destination and its culture.

Cross (1991), Mancini (1990) and Pond (1993) provide useful practical hands-on information about tour guiding practice, professionalism, and address issues such as the role of guiding, guiding skills and techniques, and the problems and issues that a guide may face when leading a tour. Pond (1993), for example, indicated that the role of the guide includes one who is: (1) A leader capable of assuming responsibility; (2) An educator to help the guest understand the places they visit; (3) An ambassador who extends hospitality and presents the destination in a way that make visitors want to return; (4) A host who can create a comfortable environment for the guest; and; (5) A facilitator who knows how and when to fulfill the previous four roles.

Geve et al (1991) suggested that tour guides are responsible for tourist satisfaction with the service provided in destinations. Their performance can generate repeat and new business, and also affect the image of their tour companies and even the destinations themselves (Mossberg, 1995; Pearce, 1982; Schmidt, 1979; Whipple & Thach, 1988; Wong, Ap, 1998).

ANALYSIS

According to the International Association of Tour Managers, the role of a tour guide is "to guide groups of individual visitors to monuments, sites, and museums of a city or region; to interpret about cultural and natural heritage and environment in an inspiring and entertaining manner by using the language of visitor's choice" (Wong et al., 1998b).

The above literature shows that tour guide professional abilities being more important than comfortable environment provided. That means tour guide hold an responsibility with an effective combination of enthusiasm, knowledge, personality qualities and high standards of conduct and ethics who leads groups to the important sites (in a city), while providing interpretation and commentary. Tour guide is regarded as an important element in selecting a charter tour. Therefore, a good travelling experience for a tourist is higher related with professional tour guide. The profession of tour guide covers two perspectives: service matters and knowledgeable information with local culture elements. Most tourists' purposes to take a trip are to satisfy their curiosity and to experience different culture of travel destination, so tourism information how could be accurate, rapid, and complete is vital factor for tourists. If tour guide service should promote qualities or travel agencies try to attract their customers' re-back travel opportunities, it is necessary to resolve tourists' possible problems as soon as they can during tour.

The concept of design ICT tour guide includes content of possible solutions to resolve potential problems. Mostly, tourists worry about how to resolve unpredictable problems. If they want to have high efficient travel experience, it should arrange travel schedule. But something can't still controlled by individual tourists. These difficulties are:(1) Taking too much time to find a hotel (Destination) without guide book or map at first. (2) Taking wrong transportation or miss it. (3) They scared the language disability or hard to communicate with passengers.(4) It's hard to find representative restaurants, or important travel place. (5)Transportation time is hard to control.(6) Can't figure out local culture meaning.(7) Worry about local climate uncertainty.

As prior literature review, many countries develop their tour guide e-service by on-line searching (Dickson K., W., 2009), Mobile instant service (Barry, 2003). Engineers make appropriate use of IT technology on tour guide service have been developing new tour guide service models in developed countries. In recent years, this study derived from literature contents, found those countries, for example, Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan try to develop e-service for promoting their tourism industry.

No matter in Mobiles, Internet, RFID fields application on tourism service industries, Asian countries seems to own strongly motivation to 'Open' this new markets. Particularly, when cultural creative industries spring up, many limited territory countries aggressively try to attract foreign tourists to consume culture products or services in order to promote their economic positions.

TOURSIM SERVICE DESIGN MODEL

Many literatures show us that good quality travel experiences, tourists need very often to continuously resolve many unanticipated problems during traveling. Barry et al (2003) found it useful to consider tourist 'problems' and 'solutions'. One example from the fieldwork is that tourists often need to use public transport to get between places. To do this they need to solve a number of practical problems, such as finding where bus stops are, finding out which bus to get, where to buy tickets, and which stop will be the correct place to get off and so on.

The design will cover six dimensions of tourists need. Internal and external demands ought to be considered. Those factors which can satisfy customers' needs could be divided into two parts: Internal and external feeling. The internal factors as psychology levels (see Figure 1) include of tourist's psychological feel, knowledge anxiety level, and service environmental atmosphere; the other is external factors as culture impact dimensions, contingency planning, and guiding perspectives. From the guiding perspective, the tour guide service process can help properly to describe the interaction steps between demanders (tourists) and suppliers (tour guide, or travel agencies).

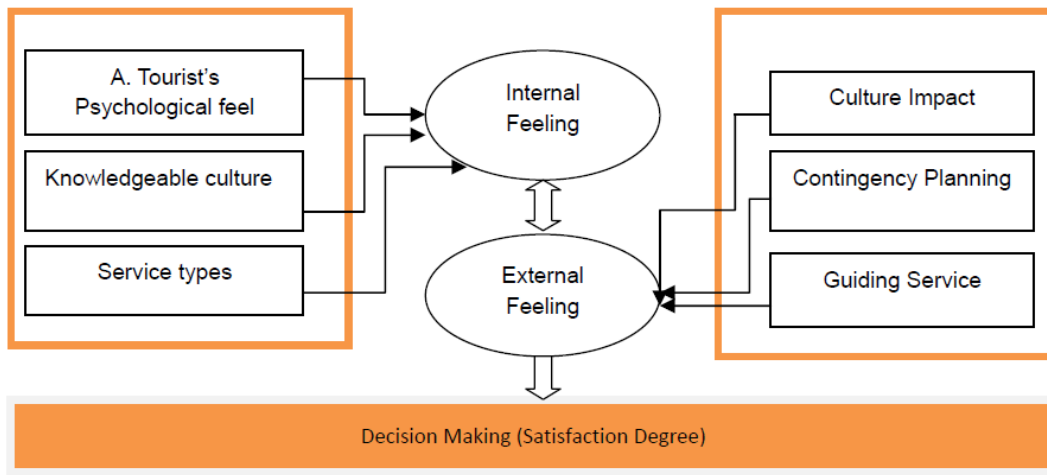


Figure 1. Tourism service demand type

As for six dimensions about tour guide service system, there were three factors of internal feeling and three factors of external feeling. A tourists' psychological feel means tourist's emotional differences and satisfaction degree. Knowledgeable culture means those can satisfy tourists' curiosities to discover the related cultural experience. Culture impact of external feeling means tourists' language, living habits, and transportation were influenced by different culture gap. Contingency planning means possible complain or crisis in scenic spots during traveling. Guiding means all must-be process consists of required procedure from start of trip to back to home (as Figure 2).



Figure 2. Tourism service process

The above service process, provide the different and diversity service sections. Each step has various service demand and offering models.

- (1) Pre-arrival: tourists have to make decision. Where to go? How to buy air tickets? When to departure? How to program personal travel plan?
- (2) At arrival: How to get to the place you will stay? What's the regulation of Immigration Bureau of this country? Where to deposit personal luggage?
- (3) During tour- How can tourist get in-depth interview for their visiting sites? Can tourists understand local culture? Can they communicate with local residents for asking travel destination?
- (4) Hotel check-in: Is this hotel trust-worthy? Are there personal property or life security guaranteed?
- (5) Departure: Can get to airport on time? How to get there? Are there any more required conditions to follow?

(6) Post-Tour: What have kept in tourists memories? Is it a good experience? Have tourists recognized this local or state or country culture?

Many cases show that tour-guide service could be engineering as automatic service model. It is a kind of service process promotion, but can't figure out whether meet tourists/ customers' needs. For example, tour guide facilitated tool by RFID to trace group tourists' step route or design Internet channel to give different contents and travel information. It was still unable to resolve tourists' needs (i.e. security, food sustain supply, and experience local deep culture.)

In past, tourists must depend on their personal traveling experience to collect information. Some of them will ask people who owned physical experience at that destination sites. The rest of tourists will buy the travel guide book. If time is limited, then they usually request hotel service center to arrange a short trip. It only can offer a package short trip plan. It's just a "kill time" way to travel and experience local scenery.

Table 1. Tour Guide Service Flow

Domestic Route		Overseas Route		
Buy decision	→ Travel Agency contact	→ Local Travel Agency contact	→ Scenic spots	→ End trip
Trip Program Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visa Application • Hotel Booking, • Air tickets purchasing • Restaurant Arrangement • Confirmation of trips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Culture Introduction (Local tour) • Information from Web or local tour guides supply information • Read trip guide books, maps. • Transportation Schedule 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local tour guide or narrator • Scenic spots selection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check out, Airport check in Back to home.

From table 1 show tour guide service flow. The ICT application on service, as mobile phone, should include domestic and overseas schedule. Mostly, domestic route (see table 1) can be done by individual tourist, but overseas can't be. Usually, overseas trip have some uncertain risks. Therefore, instant information ought to provide by ICT tour guide service system. The information content includes local culture introduction, transportation message, and mobile map. The Tour guide service flow explores travelling procedure. And the six dimensions demands of tourists are index how to design moveable tour guide service. As Apple Inc. produces i-phone, it offers quite a lot of map information. If this facility can extend a large tourist industry, it will create a lot of commercial benefits.

CONCLUSION

This paper integrated literature to find problems from existing tour-guide. Many engineer designs have been done to improve tour guide service. When engineers design only consider what service process can be changed, and what new technology could be used, but less of them consider how to design high-quality and professional service promotion model. This study faces many difficulties that two dimensions researchers to change service model. One field is technology background, the other field is hospitality.

There still many difficulties to resolve in this tour guide service. Obviously, Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia produce many research papers focused on hospitality service in tourism industry. We find Taiwan technology level in communication application or software engineer design depth is

higher than other Asian area. If telecommunication charge can be lower than other Asian area, it will help to develop telecommunication service and content service industry. Due to communication fee rate reduce, service cost down indirectly help to develop ICT or IT application on service industry as tourism industry. We still need to clarify many business strategies in order to compete with nearby countries. Especially, Taiwanese government have tried to develop tourism industry and culture industry, good and quality service item will promote foreign tourists to visit Taiwan.

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