

Tutors or Hosts? Examining the Role of Tour Guides in History Museums. A Netnography Study.

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Abstract. In cultural heritage tourism, visitors expect a higher degree of perceived value and experience throughout a service. Due to intercultural differences between tourists and destinations, cultural tourists usually receive guiding services in their preferred language (Kul et al., 2023). Tour guides have a greater potential to not only enhance the visitor experience with a destination but also help visitors attach some meaning to a destination (Cheng et al., 2019). The competence of tour guides plays a significant role in history museums, which are largely characterized by knowledge and authenticity. A plethora of previous studies on tour guides' competence have overly emphasized cognitive aspects of the guide's competence, such as (a) handling the group within the museum environment; (b) communication skills; (c) knowledge and pedagogy; and (d) professionalism (Schep et al., 2018), and their significant learning outcomes for museum visitors (Demirović Bajrami et al., 2022).

Despite the widespread body of knowledge on tour guiding, contemporary research provides a minimal understanding of the complex role of tour guides in museums (Ferguson et al., 2016) and of the attributes of a tour guide holding visitor attention for a longer visit time. For instance, a tour guide has a greater opportunity to deeply engage their visitors in the museum gallery (Tsybulskaya and Camhi, 2009) by connecting them with universal concepts such as love, beauty, and peace (Brochu and Merriman, 2002). Similarly, Crespi-Vallbona (2020) emphasized that a tour guide may adopt various ways to get visitors involved and hold their attention and interest for one hour or one and a half hours by involving them in conversation and asking about their views, emotions, and memories about certain artifacts. However, many guided tours are conducted based on preplanned presentations with minimal effort for visitor engagement (Camhi, 2008). Consequently, the role of the tour guide in the emotional aspects of museum visits remains ambiguous.

The aim of the present study is to contribute to this stream of research by exploring tour guide attributes and gestures that make museum visits more engaging for visitors. In particular, the present study examines the attributes of tour guides to enhance visitor engagement in history museums. Considering Su (2021), the present study selected a sample of 10 history museums based on the number of visitors and the number of reviews on TripAdvisor as of April 2024. Subsequently, authors extract all reviews containing information regarding tour guides. The contents of online reviews were analysed through a netnography approach (Kozinets, 2002). The findings highlight the key attributes of tour guides that significantly influence visitors' emotional experiences at a history museum, including being empathetic, sensitive, and engaging. These results offer museum managers valuable insights to formulate training and professional development programs for tour guides. This research contributes to the literature on museum management, particularly museums' effectiveness in training staff to enhance performance and visitor engagement.

Keywords: history museums, tour guide, visitor engagement, netnography, professional development programs

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