

Examining the Impact of Tour Guides' Professional Competences on Service Quality, Tourist Satisfaction and Repurchase Intentions towards Package Tour Products

Yi-Chien Lin¹, Ed.D, Mei-Lan Lin², M.A. & Yi-Cheng Chen³, Ph.D.

Abstract

Tour guide's professional competences might affect the service quality of tour guiding, thereby affecting tourists' satisfaction on traveling and their repurchase intentions towards travel agencies' package tour products. This empirical study was proposed to investigate the impacts of professional competences on service quality, tourist satisfaction and repurchase intentions of package tour products. Data gathered from tourists was based on a convenience sample of 345 respondents to test the proposed hypotheses. The conceptual model was validated using the partial least squares (PLS) technique. The empirical results indicate that (1) tour guides' professional competences significantly impact on service quality and tourist satisfaction; (2) tour guides' service quality positively influences tourist satisfaction and repurchase intentions; (3) tourist satisfaction has a positive significant effect on repurchase intentions. The research predicts a good amount of variance to 70.7% of tourists' repurchase intentions. The findings of this study are expected to provide practical implications for the competence development of tour guides and proffer instrumental contributions to help travel agencies strengthen tour guides' professional competences for effectively enhancing service quality of tour guiding, tourist satisfaction and repurchase intentions towards package tour products.

Keywords: Professional Competences, Service Quality, Tourist Satisfaction, Repurchase Intentions, Package Tour Product

1. Introduction

The tour guiding professionals play an important role in keeping sustainable operation for travel agencies in the tourism industry: eye-catching, instrumental, but often neglected (Black & Ham, 2005; Mak et al., 2011). Tour guides are the pathfinders, animators, tour leaders, and mentors for tourists. As employees of travel agencies, they are the spokespersons representing the image and reputation of the company, and the salespersons who sell the next tour (Heung, 2008). From the viewpoint of host destinations, they are the interpreters making sense of the destination culture and heritage, the mediators mediating between the host community and its visitors (Ap & Wong, 2001), and the ambassadors entrusted with the public relations missions of the destination (Mak et al., 2011). In recent years, the tourism industry increasingly recognized the important role tour guides play in the entire tourism system. The industry was beginning to work on ways to enhance the level of professional competences of tour guides that is regarded as highly critical in affecting tour guide performances (Ap & Wong, 2001; Heung, 2008; Mak, et al., 2010).

The performances of tour guides can influence tourists' feelings toward business image of travel agencies. They are the key characters regarding the success of group package tour of travel agencies. Moreover, tour guides are cultural ambassadors of a country.

¹ Department of Applied Foreign Language, Meiho University, 23, Pingguang Rd., Neipu, Pingtung 91202, Taiwan, x00003179@meiho.edu.tw

² Taiwan Taitung Prison, 317, Guangdong Rd., Taitung City, Taitung County 950, Taiwan, linlan7786546@yahoo.com.tw

³ Department of Information Systems and Management Science, National Taitung University, 369, Sec. 2, University Rd., Taitung 95092, Taiwan, yc_bear@nttu.edu.tw, Tel: 886-912-799-056; Fax: 886-89-571-343

Their professional competences can make or break tourists' experiences with guided tours and memories of a destination (Al Jahwari et al., 2016; Mak, et al., 2010; 2011). In general, tour guides' main tasks may include explanation of sites, introduction of geographic environment and human history, guide tour, entertainment and more diverse, successful and rich itineraries (Carmody, 2013). Excellent tour guides focus on successful and pleasant trip that may bring wonderful travelling experiences for tourists. The professional competences of a qualified tour guide can thus have great influences on consumers' perceptions on service quality, tourist satisfaction and repurchase intentions toward future package tour product (Chan, Hsu, & Baum, 2015; Jin, He, & Song, 2012). Professional and dedicated tour guides' key position and role in tourism industry are critical. Therefore, it is critical to well develop and reinforce tour guides' professional competences the development of the tourism industry (Burns & McInerney, 2010).

Tour guides' professional competences can be seen as part of travel products, since such competences can influence consumers' perceptions on service quality of tour guiding. For travel agencies, tour guides are one of the critical human capital to make profits in today's severely competitive market of the tourism industry. In order to acquire customers of niche market, modern tourism firms not only have to provide high-quality travel products and innovative services, but also need to cultivate their tour guides' professional competences, thereby enhancing tourists' satisfaction on traveling and increasing their future repurchase intentions towards package tour products (Chiang, & Chen, 2014). Tour guides should not only maintain travel quality, but also guarantee tourists' rights. They are the bridges between destinations and tourists. In addition, tour guides should provide immediate, proper, intangible, inseparable and positive services. If tourists think their tour guides are reliable and friendly, tourists may experience a relaxed and pleasant feeling in the whole trip. Moreover, tour guides' professional competences are related to and service quality tourist satisfaction with the trip and travel products. It may further influences tourists' repurchase intention of travel products of travel agencies.

While tour guides have existed virtually as long as there has been travel, our guides' professional competences have received relatively little attention in the tourism literature (Ap & Wong, 2001), and there is a dearth of theoretical literature in this field. Different from past research which explored impact of professional competences and service quality on tourist satisfaction and repurchase intention from perspectives and cognition of tour guides, this study adopts tourists' perspectives and feelings to probe into impact of tour guides' professional competences and service quality on tourist satisfaction and repurchase intention. In this study, we propose a conceptual framework to investigate the impact of professional competences on service quality, tourist satisfaction and repurchase intentions.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Model Development

2.1 Tour guides' professional competences

In various sort of industries, professionals must have different professional competences required in order to fulfill their own jobs. It is the requirement to successfully accomplish the goals of job. McClelland (1973) proposed the term "competences" and indicated that intelligence is not the only factor to determine job performance. Attitude, cognition and personality traits are also the underlying factors to achieve excellent job performance. Jarvis (1983) also suggested that professional competences are mainly associated with individuals' jobs. It is the professional knowledge, skills and attitude required for a person when playing specific role in professional job to fulfill his or her responsibility in an organization. For tour guides, professional knowledge refers to tour guides' understandings required when guiding tour group. Tour guides are the critical members in tourism industry and their services are mainly based on their professional competences. When guiding the tour groups, they must have broad knowledge in order to satisfy different tourists' needs. Moreover, a professional skill refers to the ability required for tour guides to solve specific problems by such kind of knowledge and it is the learning of skill, techniques or crafts. Tour guides' main task is to guide and explain to the tourists. They effectively connect the tourists with the sightseeing spots. Therefore, in order to guide tourists to the pleasant journey, they should have some professional techniques.

Professional attitude means the drive of affection and it is a person's behavioral performance and the learning related to attitude and affection. It is the attitude or value required when tour guides guide or receive tourists' travel business. Positive professional attitude is the key factor for excellent tour guides to successfully guide the groups. From acquisition of certificates to cultivation of professional competences, tour guides must experience long-term learning and training. Professional competences are a mixed concept. It not only results in and influences individuals' better and more efficient job performance and outcome, but also can be measured by certain standard. Definition of professional competences is extended from individuals' original knowledge, attitude, technique and characteristics to job-related dimensions, constant learning and development of higher level of knowledge and skill possessed or not

possessed by individuals.

It can be continuously learned and upgraded. In this study, tour guides' professional competences is based on trained and developed parts. It means professional knowledge, skill and attitude acquired which can be learned and cultivated.

2.2 Tour guides' service quality

Tour guides are the moderators for tourists, travel agencies and local environment. Tour guides' service quality is one of the most critical success factors of tourism industry. Good tour guides can guide the tourists to approach local landscape of sites and customs. They enhance tourists' knowledge, relax their physical, mental and spiritual states, and leave tourists with good memories. Tour guides' service quality can not only be identified by tourists, but also influence tourists' overall image of travel agencies. The service quality of a Tour guide can be determined by the judgment on the gap between expectation of service and actual feelings as perceived by tourists. Based upon the prior works of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985; 1988; 1993), service quality can be defined as the gap between consumers' perceived service level and expected one. Tour guides' service quality includes service attitude, friendliness, service efficiency and tourists' unforgettable experience (Chen & Chen, 2010; Chen, Weiler, Young, & Lee, 2016; Mason & Nassivera, 2013; Ryu & Han, 2010). It might significantly influences satisfaction and repurchase intention. Hence, upgrading or improvement of tour guides' service quality and attitude not only creates more benefits, but also are the critical factors of profits of travel agencies (Quintal & Polczynski, 2010).

Tour guides' service quality can not only be identified by tourists, but also influence tourists' overall image of travel agencies. Tour guides' works are to sell intangible products to tourists, such as knowledge, services and travelling experiences of attractions and sightseeing spots. In addition, sometimes, they guide tourists to the stores to convince them to purchase things or encourage them to participate in extra activities. They are the key salesmen of the future package tour products for travel agencies. Reinforcement of tour guides' professional competences can upgrade service quality and job performance and it contributes to development of tourism industry. In addition, it is important and urgent for tourists and travel agencies. Professional competences are one of variables of service quality. It can predict tour guides' behavior of professional competences and degree of service quality. Thus, this study infers that professional competences can influence tour guides' service quality. As a result, we propose:

H1: Tour guide professional competences are positively associated with service quality.

2.3 Tourist satisfaction

Customer satisfaction has become the key of modern enterprises in current severe competition of tourist market and increase of consumers' consciousness. Improving customer satisfaction can save costs and create profits for enterprises and establish word-of-mouth of enterprises and revisit or repurchase intention (Oliver, 1981; 2014). Kotler (1997) indicated that satisfaction is consumers' pleasure or disappointment with the gap between expectation and perceived effectiveness of product. Therefore, satisfaction is associated with consumers' subjective evaluation and perceived feelings. Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard (1995) indicated that customer satisfaction depends on the realization of customers' expectation of product or service benefit. Customer satisfaction is the mental state or real experience and the attitude or image, feelings and affection influenced by external factors such as actual atmosphere, social factors, group interaction and psychological state or interaction between individuals and destinations (Baker & Crompton, 2000). In that sense, tourist satisfaction can be obtained by their various mental experiences after leisure activities. Positive satisfaction triggers their repurchase behaviour and better word-of-mouth.

According to tourists' different opinions, tour guides and travel agencies can improve travel packages and service quality in order to upgrade tourist satisfaction. The underpinning of tour guides' professional competences can reinforce job performance and tourists perceptions on service quality. When tourists are satisfied with service quality enhanced by tour guides' professional competences, their revisit or repurchase intention will be increased (Chang, 2014; McQuilken, Breth & Shaw, 2001). It is reasonable to infer that tour guides' professional competences can influence tourist satisfaction with travel package products. Generally speaking, when service quality is higher, tourist satisfaction will be higher. Service quality significantly influences satisfaction. Tour guides' service quality directly influences tourists' first impression and satisfaction with travel package of travel agency and it even influences revisit and repurchase intention (Kuo, Chang, Cheng, & Lin, 2016). Tourist satisfaction has been the main goal pursued by outdoor recreation business managers. It is an important measure of tourists' satisfied recreational experience and quality in research of outdoor recreation and one of the goals of recreation business managers.

Tour guides' service quality directly influences tourists' first impression and satisfaction with travel package of travel agency as well as revisit and repurchase intention. Based upon the above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Tour guide professional competences are positively associated with tourist satisfaction.

H3: Tour guides' service quality are positively associated with tourist satisfaction.

2.4 Tourists' repurchase intentions towards package tour products

Repurchase intention refers to mental attitude of re-consumption after tourists' cognitive and affective comparison of consumption of certain product or service in specific period of time (Liu, Li, & Fu, 2016). However, since repurchase intention does not guarantee actual repurchase behavior, it might not be sufficient to only treat repurchase intention as the measure. In recent years, the studies have expanded the point to word-of-mouth, feedback to suppliers and loyalty. Most of findings demonstrated positive correlation between consumers' satisfaction and repurchase intention. Based on the previous perspectives, past research validated the association between customer satisfaction and customers' repurchase intention. When satisfaction is higher, repurchase intention will be higher. Customers tend to treat the destination as the priority and recommend it to others. However, since repurchase intention can be regarded as intention, attitude, possibility or behavioral cognition, it cannot be measured by single factor and multiple measures are required (Chan, Hsu, & Baum, 2015; Wang, 2014).

Based upon the prior literatures, tourists' repurchase intention leads to preference for certain brand because of impact of good product or service. In other words, when tourists' total attitude toward certain object depends on their affection and faith toward the object, tourists' attitude will determine their behavioural intention which further affects their ultimate behaviour. In this study, tourists' repurchase intention is defined as tourists' willingness or psychological tendency to repurchase the travel package or other products, recommend, and distribute positive word-of-mouth. Consumers are willing to repurchase product or service and even situations change, it will not change their purchase intention. Tourists' repurchase intention leads to preference for certain brands influenced by the service quality of products or travelling services. Thus,

H4: Tour guides' service quality is positively associated with tourists' repurchase intentions towards package tour products

When tourists are satisfied with travel products, their repurchase intention will be higher. In the same itinerary and site guided and introduced by different tour guides, there can be different effects. Since hardware facilities are fixed, software can lead to benefits of several times (Han & Hyun, 2015). The key is that people with different professional competences and service quality have different characteristics and abilities to use resources and the outputs will be varied. Regarding service quality of tourism, tour guides' interaction with tourists when guiding the tour groups is a critical factor influencing the travel quality (Haynes & Egan, 2015; Lai, 2014). Hence, tour guides' individual difference not only influences the image of their travel agencies, but also affects international reputation of a country (Heung, 2008). Good satisfaction will trigger customers' repurchase behavior. From the perspective of behavior, repurchase intention emphasizes purchase frequency and the variable is measured by monitoring the purchase behavior and brand switch. From perspective of attitude, repurchase intention includes consumers' preference and favor to certain brand as the measure to determine repurchase intention (Buckley & Mossaz, 2016).

The difference of repurchase intention is mainly caused by tourists' evaluation after purchase and the following behavior and attitude. Most of findings demonstrate positive correlation between consumers' satisfaction and repurchase intention. After consumption, consumers have satisfaction. Besides, their repurchase intention is the reflection of mental and behavioral satisfaction after purchasing and using products. The purpose is to recognize consumers' feelings after using products and their repurchase intention. In the recreational service industry, there is significant interaction and positive impact between service quality and satisfaction. Therefore, interaction can enhance explanation and prediction capacities of customers' repurchase intention. Increase of customer satisfaction can save costs and create profits for enterprises and establish word-of-mouth and enhance revisit or repurchase intention (McQuilken et al., 2002). Therefore, this study infers that tourist satisfaction can influence tourists' repurchase intention. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H5: Tourist satisfaction is positively associated with tourists' repurchase intentions towards package tour products

The target of a tour guide's service need to focus on his or her customers (i.e. tourists). Thus, tour guides need to cultivate a wide range of skills/knowledge to be able to meet the requirements of different sorts of tourists (Mak, et al., 2011).

They often need to effectively escort tourists in to the sightseeing points or attractions through good professional guiding skills and affective attitude with deep emotional input, thereby leading tourists into the pleasant travel experience (Heung, 2008; Mak, et al., 2010). It may be quiet for different tour guide can create entirely different travel experiences in the same sort of tours. In addition to the invisible commodities such as tourist goods, professional services and leisure experiences, tourist guides are required to bring tourists into shops, persuade tourists to spend their shopping or encourage visitors to participate in additional activities (Ap & Wong, 2001; Heung, 2008; Mak, et al., 2010). Strengthening the professional competences of tour guides not only can improve the quality of service and their job performances, when tourists for professional staff to enhance the quality of service, the repurchase intentions towards package tour products will also be improved. Thus,

H6: Tour guide's professional competences is positively associated with tourists' repurchase intentions towards package tour products

Based upon the above discussions, this study develops an explanatory model and a set of hypotheses to examine the impacts of professional competences on service quality, tourist satisfaction and repurchase intentions of package tour products as shown in Figure 1.

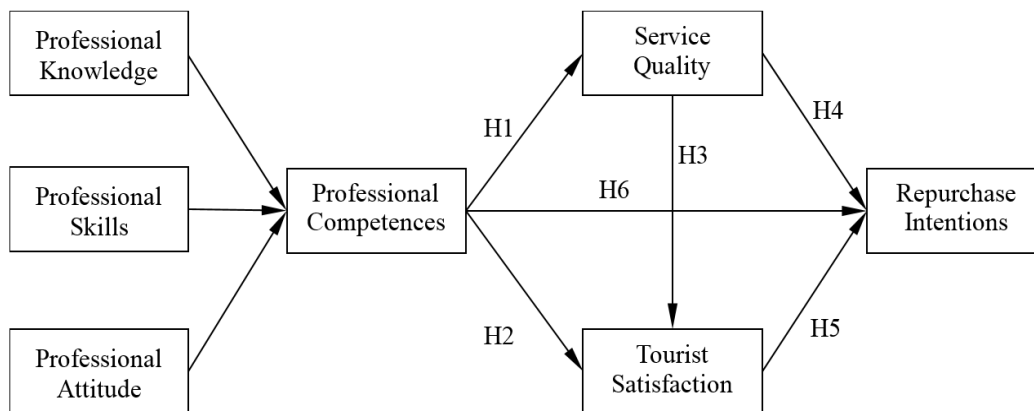


Figure 1: Research model.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Measurement development

The first stage in this study is to construct a conceptual framework and develop the measures. We began the scale development process by surveying the extant literature for validated scales that could be used in our study. Although we did not find complete scales that were suitable for this study, we were able to identify several items and scale fragments. We included these in the initial pool of items. Since insufficient coverage of the construct domain was deemed an issue, some new items were self-developed based on the definitions provided by the prior literature. The majority of the scale items were adopted from prior works in tourism and hospitality literature but modified slightly for our research context. Those items regarding tour guides' professional competences were integrated and adapted from Al Jahwari et al. (2016), Carmody (2013), Pereira (2015) and Rosi & Jurše. (2016). The measures for service quality were adapted from Heung (2008), Min (2016) and Rodger et al. (2015). The measures for tourist satisfaction were taken from Chi and Qu (2008) and Žabkar et al. (2010) and other prior literature. The scale items for repurchase intentions were modified from Kim et al. (2013) and Quintal & Polczynski (2010).

After completing the construct development and related scale items several small-scale pre-tests were conducted with a group of twelve panellists to ensure the completeness and appropriateness of the scale items developed. There are one formative second-order constructs with three reflective first-order factors included in our research model. The goal is to have a smaller number of items per construct while maintaining sufficient measurement properties. All measures developed in this study were reviewed by the panel of twelve academic and practical experts to ensure content validity. The final questionnaire for the study consisted of two parts, one including participants' demographic data and the other their responses to the scale items.

The participants' basic information included gender, age, marriage, monthly income, experiences on participating tours with tour guides and yearly amount of tourism activities. The second part contained the scale items for the major constructs of the proposed research model. See Table 2 for a final list of questionnaire items. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). We provided a clear definition of the major constructs at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure that the respondents would have the same understanding of the research context.

3.2. Sampling and survey administration

The proposed research model was tested with data collected from my Survey website and its members. From January 1 to March 15, 2015, tourists with experience on participating tours with tour guides were cordially invited to support this survey. Fifty randomly selected respondents were offered an incentive in the form of cash amounting to NTD\$1000. The first page of the questionnaire explained the purpose of this study and ensured the confidentiality. By the time this survey was concluded, 360 questionnaires were collected. An attention check question was included in the survey questionnaire to examine if the participants paid attention to the survey questions to ensure the quality of the data. After a strict screening and examining procedure, 15 participants who did not pass the attention check question or gave incomplete answers were excluded. This left us with 345 valid questionnaires (valid-return rate = 95.83%) for further data analyses. The profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The profile of the respondents (N=345).

Variable	Classification	Freq.	%
Gender	Male	179	51.9
	Female	166	48.1
Marriage	Unmarried	112	32.5
	Married	233	67.5
Age	Less than 20	13	3.8
	21-30	59	17.1
	31-40	69	20
	41-50	72	20.9
	51-60	85	24.6
	Above 61	47	13.6
Education	Junior High School	10	2.9
	Senior High School	69	20
	College/University	244	70.7
	Graduate School	22	6.4
Monthly income	Less than NTD20,000	33	9.6
	NTD 20,001-40,000	66	19.1
	NTD 40,001-60,000	196	56.8
	NTD 60,001-80,000	41	11.8
	Above NTD80,000	9	2.6
Experience on participate tours with tour guides	Once	133	38.6
	Twice	99	28.7
	Thrice	72	20.9
	Four times	27	7.8
	Above Five times	14	4.1
Yearly amount of tourism activities	Less than NTD20,000	79	22.9
	NTD 20,001-30,000	49	14.2
	NTD 30,001-40,000	48	13.9
	NTD 40,001-50,000	58	16.8
	NTD 50,001-60,000	69	20
	Above NTD60,000	42	12.2

3.3. Analysis methods

The two-stage approach was applied to estimate the proposed conceptual framework and plausible hypotheses, particularly when the formative second-order constructs (i.e., tour guides' professional competences) with the reflective first-order factors (i.e., service quality, tourist satisfaction and repurchase intentions) were involved in this study. The model fit was also evaluated using a two-phase approach, i.e., a measurement model and a structural model. In the measurement model the psychometric properties of all scales were first assessed through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). This step was used to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model and to test whether the empirical data conformed to the presumed model. Then, a bootstrapping procedure was used to estimate the statistical significance of the parameter estimates for path coefficients of the structural model.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) techniques such as LISREL, AMOS, EQS and partial least squares (PLS) are second generation data analysis techniques that can be used to perform path analytic modelling with latent variables (Chin 1998, Gefen et al. 2000). Because of the greater flexibility that a researcher has for the interplay between theory and empirical data, SEM-based procedures have substantial advantages over first-generation techniques such as principal components analysis, exploratory factor analysis, discriminant analysis, or multiple regression. Such techniques offer social scientists with the flexibility to model nomological relationships among multiple predictor and criterion variables, construct unobservable latent variables, model errors in measurements for observed variables and statistically validate a priori theoretical assumptions against empirical data (Chin 1998).

We chose this approach because PLS's ability to assess the measurement model within the context of its theoretical mediated model makes it superior to multiple regression, especially when using new scales. PLS employs component-based estimation. It does not require the data to have multivariate normality (Gefen et al., 2011) and it can handle formative constructs. In general, PLS is better suited for explaining complex relationships as it avoids two serious problems: inadmissible solutions and factor indeterminacy (Lohmöller, 1989). Because of the aforementioned reasons, we chose this approach because PLS's ability to assess the measurement model within the context of its theoretical mediated model makes it superior to multiple regression, especially when using new scales.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1. Measurement properties

As mentioned above the research model (see Figure 1) to be tested in this study is a second-order factor model with reflective indicators for the first-order factors and three formative dimensions for each of the two second-order factors. Specifically, all of the six first-order sub-constructs were modelled as reflective and the second-order constructs (i.e., tour guides' professional competences) were modelled as formative. The measurement model relating the scale items to their latent constructs was analysed using Smart PLS 3.0 (Ringle et al., 2005). The assessment of item loadings, reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity was performed for the latent constructs through PLS analysis. Factor loadings of scale items should be above 0.707, showing that over half of the variance is captured by the constructs (Straub et al., 2004). As shown in Table 2, the loadings for all constructs with reflective measures were well above the 0.707 guideline, indicating satisfactory item reliability for the reflective measures (Chin, 1998). These results collectively suggest good measurement properties for all constructs.

All constructs in the measurement model exhibit good internal consistency as evidenced by their composite reliability scores. The composite reliability coefficients of all constructs in the proposed conceptual model are more than adequate. There are two requirements used in assessing discriminant validity: (1) indicators should load more strongly on their corresponding construct than on other constructs in the model; and (2) the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) should be larger than the inter-construct correlations (Chin, 1998). The amount of variance explained by a construct is given by its average variance extracted (AVE). The discriminant validities of the major constructs of the conceptual framework are also assessed using the PLS analytical method. Table 3 shows the composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE) and square root of the AVE, as well as the correlations between the constructs. The composite reliability values for all constructs were above the recommended level of 0.70, indicating adequate internal consistency. All constructs shared more variance with their indicators than with other constructs. Thus, the convergent and discriminant validity of all constructs in the research model can be assured.

Table 2: Descriptions and confirmatory factor loadings of scale items

Construct	Dimension	Scale item	Mean	Loading
Professional Competences (PC)	Professional Knowledge (PK)	Tour guides should have knowledge related to travel business.	4.39	0.732
		Tour guides should fully understand and prepare the content and things explained.	4.47	0.716
		Tour guides should have broad knowledge of different dimensions.	4.46	0.800
		Tour guides should have simple first-aid knowledge.	4.31	0.783
	Professional Skills (PS)	Tour guides should have communication and negotiation capacity with tourists and business.	4.37	0.766
		In emergency, tour guides should be flexible and deal with things calmly.	4.40	0.785
		Tour guides should have good language fluency.	4.30	0.856
		Tour guides should do their best to satisfy different tourists' needs.	4.31	0.806
		Tour guides should be able to understand tourists' thoughts and needs.	4.27	0.807
	Professional Attitude (PA)	Tour guides should have honest attitude.	4.43	0.785
		Tour guides should properly deal with their emotion and undertake the jobs assigned.	4.37	0.815
		Tour guides should be optimistic.	4.51	0.822
		Tour guides should be humorous.	4.48	0.725
		Tour guides should be modest.	4.40	0.812
Service Quality (SQ)	Tour guides should provide specific and friendly service.	4.42	0.790	
	Tour guides should be serious and dedicated in explanation.	4.42	0.740	
	Tour guides should have clear and organized explanation.	4.37	0.717	
	Tour guides should immediately repond to tourists' needs.	4.38	0.750	
	I feel satisfied with tour guides' professional competences and service quality.	4.36	0.781	
Tourist Satisfaction (TS)	It is wise to participate in this package trip of travel agency.	4.32	0.845	
	Actual feeling to participate in package tour of travel agency is out of expectation.	4.18	0.888	
	If I participate in package tour of this travel agency again, I will still be satisfied.	4.15	0.870	
	I am willing to re-participate in package tour of travel agency.	4.29	0.840	
Repurchase Intentions (RI)	I am willing to recommend this package tour of travel agency to relatives and friends.	4.27	0.879	
	I am willing to share this experience of package tour of travel agency to relatives and friends.	4.17	0.901	
	If I have another opportunity to participate in package tour, I will make the same choice.	4.22	0.863	
	Tour guides should provide specific and friendly service.	4.20	0.922	

Table 3: Composite reliability and inter-correlations among major constructs

Construct	Dimension	PK	PS	PA	SQ	TS	RI
Professional Competences	Professional Knowledge (PK)	0.76*					
	Professional Skills (PS)	0.68	0.80				
	Professional Attitude (PA)	0.60	0.71	0.79			
Service Quality (SQ)		0.65	0.62	0.63	0.76		
Tourist Satisfaction (TS)		0.57	0.61	0.59	0.67	0.86	
Repurchase Intentions (RI)		0.49	0.48	0.48	0.61	0.85	0.89
Composite reliability		0.58	0.65	0.63	0.57	0.74	0.79
Average variance explained (AVE)		0.84	0.9	0.89	0.87	0.92	0.94

*Diagonal elements are the square roots of the AVE.

4.2. Test of the structural model

With replacement using 5000 subsamples, a bootstrapping procedure was used to estimate the statistical significance of the parameter estimates. The structural model was examined and the effects among those latent constructs were also tested. A test of the structural model was used to assess if the causal relationships specified by the research model were consistent with the available data. The PLS method does not directly provide significance tests and path coefficient confidence interval estimates in the proposed model. Hypotheses and corollaries testing were performed by examining the size, the sign and the significance of the path coefficients and the weights of the construct dimensions, respectively. The statistical significance of weights can be used to determine the relative importance of the indicators in forming a latent construct. The path coefficients and explained variances for the conceptual model in this study are shown in Figure 2. The PLS analysis results show the direct and indirect effects from all of the antecedents in the conceptual framework, accounting for 74.1 percent of the variance in tourists' repurchase intentions towards travel agencies' package tour products. Correspondingly, 50.8 percent of the variance in service quality and 52.7 percent of the variance in tourist satisfaction were explained by the related antecedent constructs. The magnitude and significance of these path coefficients provides further evidence in support of the nomological validity of the research model. As a whole the research model has strong explanatory power for the construct of tourists' repurchase intentions towards travel agencies' package tour products.

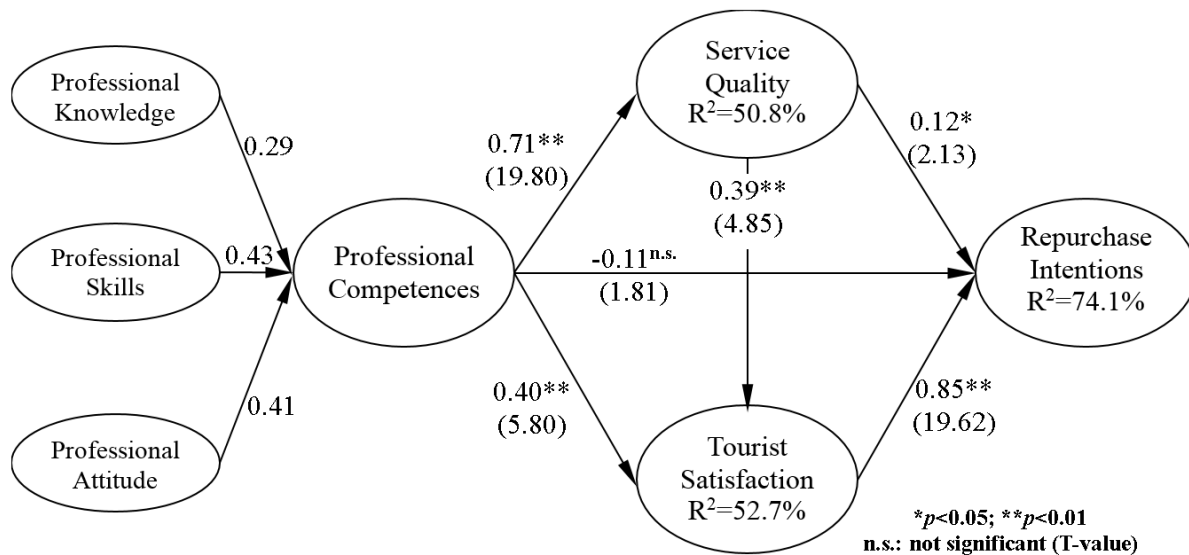


Figure 2: Results of PLS analysis.

The causal relationship from tour guides' professional competences to service quality in the proposed research model, hypothesis H1, is strongly supported by the significant path coefficient of 0.71 (t-value = 19.8, p < 0.01). This result implies that consumers who perceived higher levels of tour guides' professional competences will perceive higher service quality experienced in the package tour. Hypothesis H2, effectively drawn from tour guides' professional competences to tourist satisfaction, is also supported with significant path coefficients of 0.40 (t-value = 5.8, p < 0.01).

For hypothesis H3, the direct effects drawn from service quality to tourist satisfaction is also confirmed by the significant path coefficient of 0.39 (t -value = 4.85, $p < 0.01$). That is, the service quality construct apparently directly influences tourist satisfaction resulting also from tour guides' professional competences. Consistent with our hypotheses, with significant path coefficients of 0.12 and 0.85, the analysis results also provide support for hypotheses H4 and H5, effectively drawn from service quality and tourist satisfaction to the construct of repurchase intentions, respectively. That is, the perceptions on service quality and satisfaction of tourists will positively affect their repurchase intentions. However, for hypothesis H6, tour guides' professional competences have no direct, significant effects on tourists' repurchase intentions. This interesting result implies that there are the plausible mediating effects of service quality and tourist satisfaction on the causal relationship between tour guides' professional competences and tourists' repurchase intentions towards travel agencies' package tour products.

5. Discussions and Conclusion

Driven by the need for a theoretical and practical implications for understanding how tour guides' professional competences will influence on service quality, tourist satisfaction and repurchase intentions of package tour products, this empirical results of this current study helps to understand the complex process regarding the importance of tour guides' professional competences and the nature of such competences affecting service quality, tourist satisfaction and repurchase intentions of package tour products. According to our empirical results, tour guides' professional competences significantly and positively influences service quality. Tour guides' professional competences is a kind of psychological characteristics that may influences their external behaviours and performance. Therefore, tourists' perceptions on service quality of tour guiding were significantly influenced by tour guides' professional competences. In addition, for tour guides, professional attitude is also one of the most important dimensions of professional competences and the second is professional knowledge and professional skills. When travel agencies recruit or select tour guides, they should first concern about tour guides' professional attitude with the support of professional knowledge and professional skills. The tourism industry is the business in which people serve the people. Positive professional attitude can bridge the gaps among tourists, tour guides and travel agencies. Travel agencies can recognize tourists' real thoughts and needs by tour guides in order to satisfy tourists when designing package tour or activities.

Our empirical results also show that tour guides' service quality significantly and positively influences tourist satisfaction. Therefore, enhancing tour guides' professional competences and allowing tourists to perceive high-quality service will effectively enhance tourist satisfaction. When tourists highly perceive tour guides' professional competences and service quality and have high satisfaction, their repurchase intention will be higher. It means that tourist satisfaction is the key factor of repurchase intention. However, inconsistent with our hypothesis H6, tour guides' professional competences have no significant, positive effects on tourists' repurchase intentions. From the whole PLS analysis results, we infer that tour guides' professional competences may influence tourists' repurchase intention through mediating effects of service quality and tourist satisfaction. Namely, when tourists have higher perception of tour guides' professional competences, they will tend to identify with tour guides' service quality and it indirectly and positively influences tourist satisfaction and repurchase intention which will be reinforced. This interesting finding is worth of further theoretical and experimental investigation in the future research.

In spite of its valuable findings and implications, this study contains several limitations that also represent opportunities for future research. First, the research findings are from this single study conducted in Taiwan; the implications might not hold true in other countries. Therefore, research should use caution when generalizing the findings to other countries. Second, this study was limited to tourists who participate in package tour of travel agencies through convenience sampling. The survey subjects might not thoroughly represent all tourists. Different tourists' characteristics, cultural background and social conditions are different and may have different perspectives. Thus, demographics, cultural background and social conditions must be considered when drawing conclusions from the results of this study. Besides, since package tours planned by different travel agencies are various, it should be cautious when generalizing findings of this study to impact of professional competences of tour guides with different trip and fields (such as guides or narrators) on service quality, satisfaction and consumer behavior. A further confirmatory analysis and cross-context validation using another large sample gathered elsewhere is required for improving the generalizability to other tourism situations. Besides this, measure validation requires the assessment of the measurement properties over a variety of samples in different tourism contexts. More attention can also be directed toward understanding the antecedents and consequents of other tourist subjects and/or research contexts.

In addition, questionnaire in this study is based on self-administration and the researcher assumes that the subjects respond to the questions honestly. Hence, when tourists fill in questionnaires, they might be influenced by their comprehension of the meaning of items and it results in errors of findings. Besides, this study adopts convenience sampling and conducts questionnaire survey on consumers who purchase package tour of travel agencies without in-depth interview with subjects. It cannot explore the subjects' profound feelings and thoughts. Therefore, it is suggested that future researchers can adopt qualitative research based on this study to expand variables in order to enrich the findings.

When tour guides guide the tourists, they should have broad knowledge in order to satisfy different kinds of tourists' needs. In addition to basic common sense, it also includes knowledge of travel business, simple first-aid knowledge and cross-cultural life knowledge. Tour guides' main task is to guide and explain to the tourists. They effectively connect tourists with the sites. Therefore, in order to introduce tourists in the pleasant trip, they should have the techniques to guide the tour groups, including language, explanation, communication, negotiation and management. Good professional attitude is one of the critical factor for excellent tour guides. Such an attitude also includes optimistic, modest, honest personal characters and enduring learning all the time. Excellent tour guides should have sufficient professional knowledge, excellent professional skills and good professional attitude. The three dimensions of professional competences is the basic qualifications of tour guides and the base for tour guides' personal advanced study. Therefore, regarding professional competences which they are not familiar with, they can join in related course and training as personal growth and upgrading. In normal educational training or before guiding the tourist group, tour guides should fully understand what tourists need, think and desire. They reinforce and learn service competences and strengthen tourist satisfaction and repurchase intention by excellent service content and quality.

In addition, after tourists participate in the travel activities or itineraries, tour guides should treat the opinions of advantages and disadvantages filled in by tourists as criteria for future improvement or examination. The advantages should be continued and passed. Disadvantages should be modified and treated as the reminders. Thus, tour guides can precisely control what tourists need, think and desire. Tour guides should reinforce service quality to tourists, quality and service competences in order to demonstrate their friendliness. By positive service attitude and service efficiency, tourists perceive high-quality service content. It can enhance tourist satisfaction and indirectly influence tourists' repurchase intention. Travel agencies can launch the training and courses regarding professional competences items which tour guides are not familiar with. Course planning and design should be flexible, multiple and practical. For instance, they can increase the sections of courses to allow tour guides to select the time according to personal situations. By internet, they access data related to the courses on the website. Thus, tour guides can break through the obstacles such as time and inconvenient locations. Besides, they can also cooperate with related institutions or units by strategic alliance and reinforce tour guides' foreign language fluency, response to crisis and ability to deal with conflicts. They encourage tour guides to participate in learning and properly use and distribute training resources for optimal training effectiveness and lower training cost. It establishes the study system for tour guides and guarantees their job opportunity in order to enhance total competitiveness of travel agencies.

Thus, travel agencies and tour guides can recognize travel service quality and tour guides' professional competences needed, demanded and concerned by tourists. They will truly approach tourists and realize how to satisfy tourists to strengthen tourist satisfaction and repurchase intention as well as tour guides' professional competences and service quality. Our research findings can serve as instrumental guidelines for travel agencies to recruit employees and make decisions on training as well as for the competence development of tour guides and those who will work as tour guides.

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