

Tour guide performance through the eyes of tourists: An analysis of user-generated reviews on Expedia

Neşe Yılmaz, Aybüke Özsoy*, Nilgün Demirel İli

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Guided tours,
Tour guides,
Ugc,
Expedia,
Cappadocia,
Qualitative research

This research aims to evaluate the impact of tour guides on the overall tour experience and to improve the destination experience for tourists by measuring tour guide performance. As a research pattern, a case study of qualitative research and web content analysis method was applied in the study. The analysis was conducted based on 260 comments related to tour guides. Content analysis was conducted according to 2 main themes (personality traits and guiding skills) and 18 sub-themes determined by reading the comments. Word clouds, word frequencies, theme and sub-theme frequencies, and percentages were utilized in the analysis. The content analysis showed that tour guides had comprehensive professional knowledge, were friendly and helpful towards tourists, and were also proficient in the language they spoke, which in turn contributed to a more satisfying tour experience. The research highlights the significant impact of tour guides' behavior on the overall tour experience and the importance of measuring their performance to enhance the destination experience for tourists and explores the use of User Generated Content (UGC) on Expedia to achieve this.

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1. Introduction

UGC has become a critical factor in the travel industry and has influenced the decision-making process of many consumers. Platforms such as Expedia, Orbitz, TripAdvisor, Airbnb, and Booking.com contain user-generated comments and ratings that help travelers make informed choices about their accommodations, activities, and destinations (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). UGC is therefore a valuable source of data for the travel and tourism industry, enabling businesses to identify their customers' needs, measure satisfaction levels, and pinpoint areas for improvement.

While UGC has been extensively used in the hospitality and tourism industry, there is limited research (Chugh & Phumchusri, 2020; Haris & Gan, 2017; Haris, Gan & Tan, 2020; Liang et al., 2024) when it comes to using UGC for tours and events. Consequently, this research aims to fill this gap in the literature by focusing on user-generated data related to guided tours and the important role tour guides play in tour experiences.

Tour guides have the crucial role of leading and guiding visitors in unfamiliar destinations, particularly in countries where language barriers and cultural differences can pose a challenge. The quality of guided tours heavily depends on the professional expertise and overall demeanor of the

tour guides, which can significantly impact visitors' satisfaction with the service and their holiday experiences (Black & Weiler, 2005; Carù & Cova, 2006; Chang, 2014; Zhang & Chow, 2004; Pereira, 2015). Tourist satisfaction is significantly related to customer loyalty, repeat visits, and positive word of mouth (Ellis & Vogelsong, 2002). When tourists leave a tour satisfied, they are more likely to recommend it to others or revisit the same destination. Moreover, the performance of tour guides also affects other aspects of tourism, such as the shopping behavior of tourists (Chang, 2014) and the satisfaction of other tourism actors, such as travel agencies, food and beverage businesses, and transportation firms (Bayram, 2019; Geva & Goldman, 1991). Furthermore, the services provided by tour guides are important in terms of eliminating tourists' prejudices about the region, improving negative image perceptions, and providing information that is lacking in the tourists' minds (Zengin et al., 2017). In short, the performance of tour guides is crucial in ensuring tourists have a positive experience and promoting a destination's tourism industry.

For all the reasons mentioned above, it is crucial to evaluate comments about guides in destinations where guided tours are offered. Doing so can help identify and address problems related to guides and facilitate the training of professional and qualified tour guides

*Corresponding Author

Neşe Yılmaz: Asst. Prof., Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Nevşehir, Turkey, Email: neseyilmaz@nevsehir.edu.tr, Orcid Id: 0000-0003-0168-2907 

Aybüke Özsoy: Res. Asst. Dr., Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Nevşehir, Turkey, Email: aybuke.ozsoy@nevsehir.edu.tr, Orcid Id: 0000-0001-6906-5679 

Nilgün Demirel İli: Asst. Prof., Iğdır University, Iğdır, Turkey, Email: nilgundemirel90@gmail.com, Orcid Id: 0000-0003-2407-9932 

Research Paper



(Balıkoğlu et al., 2020). Despite the importance of such evaluations, there are limited studies in the literature on tourist-generated data about guides and guided tours, highlighting the need for more research in this area. To address this gap, this research utilizes user-generated data to understand tour guide performance through the eyes of tourists. Evaluating positive feedback from satisfied tourists and highlighting the strengths, personalities, and professional skills of tour guides are evidence of quality guiding services in the hospitality and tourism industry. Uncovering the positive attributes of tour guides provides valuable insights into their education, professional ethics, and personalities throughout the implementation process of their profession. Therefore, this research emphasizes the importance of successful guiding services in the tourism sector.

2. Literature Review

Tour Guide

A tour guide is generally defined as a person who accompanies travelers in their preferred language and provides information about the natural and cultural heritage of a particular region, usually recognized and authorized by an appropriate authority (World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations, 2022). From a broader perspective, tour guides are individuals who undertake many tasks such as promoting and representing countries and regions, contributing to the image of the destination, and guiding visitors about every issue they need within the scope of touristic activities. When considered from a professional dimension, tour guides have many roles that can be expressed as responsibilities. The meanings and responsibilities assigned to tour guides are also expressions that define them. As one of the initial studies in the field, Schmidt (1979) argued that problem-solving skills are the most important role of tour guides. Holloway (1981) stated that the primary role of a tour guide provide information. While Pearce (1984) talked about the organizer role of the tour guide, Cohen (1985) suggested that the tour guide is a mentor.

The role of mentoring is spiritual and intellectual guidance, in contemporary terms, it can be thought of as the transmission of knowledge and the interpretation of this knowledge. According to Adler (1989), what a tourist observes is the words of his mentor and what he encounters during the tour. In this sense, it is important for the guide to integrate with the destination and reflect this to the tourist. Tour guides manage the perspectives of travelers by informing them about what to pay attention to, what to observe, and how to interpret them (Urry, 1990). In addition to these roles, in recent studies, roles such as having developed humor, paying attention to details, having a good education, and contributing to the sustainability of destinations are also attributed to the tour guide (Heung, 2008; Rabolic, 2008; Weiler & Yu, 2007). In summary, a tour guide is a leader, advisor, and mentor.

While all these roles and responsibilities define tour guides, they also shed light on how they should perform their job.

Being creative, energetic, and inquisitive, working in a disciplined manner, having expertise in tour guiding, having a comprehensive general culture, and using language skills effectively are the main factors that determine the performance of tour guides. In terms of the qualifications required by tour guides, effective communication, and a sound education are the most critical characteristics. Tour guides should have a good knowledge of natural attractions, cultural heritage elements, historical background, characters, legends, and economic and political developments of the regions they operate in, and convey this information to tourists in the most appropriate manner (Lovrentjev, 2015). Effective transmission of knowledge will have a positive impact on the perceived performance of the tour guide.

In addition to knowledge, the personality traits and characteristics of the tour guide also affect their performance. Tour guide who has developed themselves intellectually, can present their knowledge in a clear and fluent manner, and can effectively interact with others, will find a more privileged place in the tourism industry (Eser et al., 2018). On the other hand, negative situations that tour guides may encounter during the tour such as service errors (eg. transportation issues) and disruptions in plans can be resolved by the tour guide's personality traits. Therefore, not only professional qualifications, but also various personality traits such as being responsible, having problem-solving skills, being communicative, positive, cooperative, emotionally stable, and being motivated for success can be effective in achieving a successful tour and ensuring tourist satisfaction (Eser et al., 2018).

Tour Guide Performance

Performance refers to the act of carrying out a task or event, executing it, or fulfilling it (Özmutaf, 2007, p. 42), and is an occurrence that indicates the output and results obtained as a result of an action (Akal, 2005, p. 17). Performance is influenced by many factors, the most important of which are talent, mode, and motivation. The level of performance varies depending on a person's personal characteristics, mental abilities, beliefs, and values (Barutçugil, 2002). Essentially, performance is the results obtained when a person completes their task. If these results are positive, it is understood that the person has successfully fulfilled their responsibility and has a high level of performance. If the results are negative, it is accepted that the employee was not successful or did not meet the required level of performance (Bingöl, 2003, p. 273). When it comes to employees, factors such as receiving expected wages, obtaining deserved positions, fair distribution of rewards or bonuses, ensuring social rights and opportunities are provided correctly, having a positive organizational climate, and respecting ideas are all factors that increase motivation (İraz & Akgün, 2011). On the other hand,

negative situations can lead to a decrease in performance. Job performance, on the other hand, is the realization of the total value expected from an individual during a specific time period (Motowidlo et al., 1997). Therefore, according to this definition, performance is translating expectations into behavior. The behavior referred to by performance is the value of the organization (Motowidlo, 2003). When it comes to tour guides, the expectations of tourists, travel agencies, other tourism stakeholders, destinations, and even the entire country are the values that need to be translated into behavior.

Tourists seek activities that they can interact with, explore, participate in, and use all their senses (Bryon, 2012). Tour guides, on the other hand, are storytelling performers (Dahles, 2002) and image creators who perform according to a selected theme, reflecting their knowledge, stories, clothing, and equipment (Zhang & Chow, 2004). Therefore, tour guides are important in directing how tourists perceive the entire tour, as one of their most important responsibilities is to ensure customer satisfaction (Heung, 2008). The performance and quality service provided by tour guides are essential for the success of the tour.

In general, research on tour guide performance is based on the perspective of service quality, and these studies assume that guide performance is crucial for tourist satisfaction and level of contentment. Many studies in the literature prove that guide performance affects tourist satisfaction (Agyeman & Antwi-Bosiako, 2022; Almasoodi & Rahman, 2023; Alzghoul et al., 2023; Andelkovic et al., 2022; Arabacıoğlu & Dedeoglu, 2023; Binti et al., 2022; Eylül Koç & Ulema, 2024; Ho, 2023; Hwang, Joo & Moon, 2023; Kılıçlar & Çevrimkaya, 2019; Marković et al., 2022; Rutledge, 2023; Shi et al., 2023; Syakier & Hanafiah, 2022). Tour guiding service has the highest impact on the satisfaction of the tour (Chan et al., 2015). Tourists' satisfaction and their return to their countries with a good experience depend on their expectations being met, and therefore, on the performance of tour guides.

The performance of the tour guide is a concept related to the education and training qualifications received (Prakash & Chowdhary, 2010) and is revealed by the fulfillment of the roles and tasks. In addition, knowledge level, punctuality, politeness (Zhang & Chow 2004), responsibility, enthusiasm about the profession, patience, having a sense of humor (Lin et al., 2014), job responsibility, personal characteristics, being professionally competent and managing group responsibilities (Bak, 2015) are performance qualities of tour guides.

The performance of tour guides affects tourists' overall perceptions of the tour (Mossberg, 1995). A tour guide's positive performance throughout the tour also increases the enjoyment that tourists experience. If the guide's performance meets or exceeds expectations, it leads to tourist satisfaction (McDowall, 2010). On the other hand,

a negative perception of a tour guide's performance will negatively impact the satisfaction that tourists derive from their vacation (Chang, 2014). When a tour guide's performance is liked, the trust that tourists have in them also increases proportionally. Therefore, a tour guide with good performance during the tour will help tourists feel safe and reduce their perceived risk in unfamiliar destinations (Chang, 2014; McDonnell, 2001).

The quality of service provided by tour guides is also extremely important for the image of the destination (Zhang & Chow, 2004). Tour guides are the individuals who can best fit into the thematic context of the tourists and the destination and play the most appropriate roles on stage (Carù & Cova, 2006). In this sense, meeting the expectations of tourists visiting an area depends not only on what the destination has to offer but also on the performance of the guides (Chang, 2014; Black & Weiler, 2005; Pereira, 2015). Tour guides facilitate the adaptation of tourists to the destination and help them experience the region. According to Zhang and Chow (2004), guides are the ones who create "real moments" for tourists and can either enhance or ruin the trip. Even if a tourism destination is well-prepared to offer perfect experiences to tourists, the performance of an unprofessional tour guide can hinder the region from being perceived positively by tourists (Aksaray & Ateş, 2019).

According to Çetinkaya and Öter (2016) and Chan et al. (2015), the performance of tour guides also affects the loyalty of tourists. Tourist satisfaction is significantly related to customer loyalty, repeat visits, and positive word of mouth (Ellis & Vogelsong, 2002). When tourists leave a tour satisfied, they are more likely to recommend it to others or have a tendency to revisit the same destination.

The performance of tour guides also affects various issues such as the shopping behavior of tourists (Chang, 2014) and the satisfaction of other tourism actors such as travel agencies, food and beverage businesses, and the transportation sector (Bayram, 2019; Geva & Goldman, 1991). The performance of tour guides is also influential in many aspects, from providing satisfaction to tourists' vacations to promoting the country. All services provided by tour guides are important in terms of improving the negative image perceptions that tourists may have about the region (Pu et al., 2023; Zhu & Xu, 2021).

User-generated content (UGC)

UGC specifically refers to online comments created by consumers, which can take the form of text, images, audio, and video. As a component of Big Data, UGC provides a vast amount of information about people. For businesses, UGC serves as a dependable source of data on customer behavior, needs, and expectations. It is an essential tool for businesses to communicate with current and potential customers, gather feedback for organizational change or brand co-creation, and determine customer preferences (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015).

The fact that UGC is generated by real customers rather than paid marketing professionals can increase its credibility and trustworthiness among readers (Schuckert et al., 2015). In the travel industry, UGC has become an important factor in the decision-making process for many consumers. Sites such as TripAdvisor, Expedia, Orbitz, AirBnB.com. and Booking.com delivers objective reviews and ratings that enable travelers to make informed choices about accommodation, activities, and destinations (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). What are the top restaurants in the area? Is Hotel X really worth the price? What attractions are available in the destination? People today spend hours looking at objective reviews on these popular UGC sites to find answers to these questions and make decisions about their vacations.

Tourism is a service-oriented industry where UGC has become an increasingly important research topic. Utilizing UGC can accelerate the development of destinations, as it plays a pivotal role in creating destination image (Lam et al., 2020; Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015; Marine-Roig, 2019; Marine-Roig & Anton Clavé, 2016; Qi & Chen, 2019; J Wang et al., 2021) and identifying tourist mobility patterns through digital footprints (Fisher et al., 2019). As such, UGC has become an influential tool for researchers studying the tourism industry.

It's worth noting that UGC can have a profound impact on the reputation and success of small businesses in the tourism industry. With the rise of social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook, even small guesthouses and local tour operators can build a solid online presence through positive reviews and user-generated content. However, negative reviews can also be destructive, so it's crucial for businesses to monitor and respond to feedback in a timely and professional manner. Overall, UGC is a very important tool for consumers and businesses alike, and it will likely continue to form the tourism industry in the coming years.

Expedia

Thanks to the increasing use of social media, one of the most preferred travel service providers for holiday planning is Expedia (Zhang et al., 2019). Expedia, based in Washington, is a travel shopping company created for consumers and businesses that has been in operation since 1996 (Expedia Group 2021 Annual Reports, 2022). Since then, Expedia has provided direct access to many travel product providers and services, including hotels, airlines, car rental companies, cruise operators, and tour packages in more than 70 countries (Expedia Group 2021 Annual Reports, 2022). Through Expedia, users can develop a comprehensive travel plan, explore more destinations, and make reservations in the details they want. Expedia's services generally include the following (Law & Chen, 2000): Reservation options for airlines, hotels, and rental cars, viewing and accessing these options through agents who sell vacation packages in different categories, cruise tickets in addition to vacation packages, transportation to

relevant tourist attractions and activities related to interests in targeted destinations, comprehensive information on accommodations, meals, and visa requirements. While Expedia primarily focuses on online services such as reservation, search, and matching in this scope area, it offers multiple options.

Using data collected from Expedia.com can provide a good understanding of the general holiday industry. Unlike many other travel websites, Expedia allows members who have made a booking and completed their trip to post reviews on the website. This policy ensures the authenticity and accuracy of published reviews. Therefore, all reviews on Expedia are verified content posted by real customers, making them more accurate and reliable than other online review websites without a verification system (Wang et al. 2015; Zhang et al. 2019). Furthermore, Expedia provides word-of-mouth (WOM) information through four channels on its webpage. These are individual guest ratings and reviews, the average Expedia guest rating, the guest recommendation rate, and the total number of reviews (Wang et al. 2015). Since each of these channels includes real customer interactions, the data provided is reflective of reality.

3. Methodology

Method and research pattern

The research method was designed as qualitative research and followed the steps of qualitative research, which include determining the topic and social world, collecting data, conducting content analysis, and reporting the findings. Qualitative research allows for flexible and interpretive approaches to analyzing and interpreting data or participants' views. Unlike quantitative research, it emphasizes expressing results in words rather than numbers (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p.3). Depending on the research purpose, there are various qualitative research designs available. The research design chosen for this research was a case study. Traditionally, case studies are associated with qualitative methods of analysis. Case studies are considered a broad topic that includes a range of qualitative processes such as participant observation, process tracing, or textual analysis. Case studies, which can be supported not only by qualitative techniques but also by quantitative techniques, focus on the intensive study of a single case (Gerring, 2006, p.10). Specifically, the research examined the status and favorability of tourists' perceptions, judgments, and experiences of tour guides' performance in the case of Expedia.

Social world and sample

The social context for this research was provided by the Expedia website, which is recognized as one of the largest travel platforms worldwide, with over 20 years of experience and more than 70 petabytes of data. Expedia Group offers travelers and business partners a range of innovative features to explore local and global mobility,

destination attractions, and tourist experiences through filtering options (Expedia Group, 2023). Since Cappadocia is an important cultural tourism destination in Türkiye, it is selected as a social world for this research. On September 30- October 6, 2022, data collection began by searching for tours and day trips in the Cappadocia region on the Expedia website under the "Things to Do" tab. Out of 87 tours under the "Tours and Day Trips" heading, 78 tours were identified by limiting the search to tours conducted within the city and those with at least one review. After grouping tours based on their characteristics, the research found 9 tours available in the region:

- *Green Tour (includes Ihlara Valley and Underground City tours)*
- *Red Tour*
- *Hot Air Balloon Tour*
- *Private Tour*
- *ATV Adventure Tour*
- *Horseback Riding Tour*
- *Camel Safari Tour*
- *Jeep Safari Tour*
- *Night Tour*

The balloon tour or balloon flight with a guide was not included in the research since it was not among the 9 tour groups listed above. The total number of reviews for the remaining tours was determined to be 383. The criteria and justifications established by the authors for limiting the comments are as follows: (1) Only comments directed towards tour guides were examined as the research focuses on their performance. (2) Due to the authors' proficiency in the English language, only comments written in English were compiled. (3) Complaints were excluded, and only positive comments were considered to emphasize the positive attributes of tour guides, which is the aim of the research.

Out of these 383 reviews, 260 comments related to the guide were filtered according to these criteria, and the analysis was conducted based on these 260 comments.

Data analysis

The rise of the World Wide Web (www), a globally connected, decentralized network of hyperlinked multimedia objects, has created new opportunities for content analytics research and has necessitated the development of new empirical techniques. Researchers can now access data that was previously unavailable or excessively costly through global networks and electronic databases (Weare & Lin, 2000). Web content analysis is an option for obtaining and analyzing data for qualitative research. In this research, content analysis examines written documents based on communication, as well as transcribed or compiled verbal communication documents. Content analysis is a technique used to draw inferences

from written or visual texts (Krippendorff, 2018). Through content analysis, two main themes and 18 sub-themes were identified, both in the context of deductive (from literature to data) and inductive (from data to literature) research. The main theme for the sub-themes created deductively was inspired by the research conducted by Prakash and Chowdhary (2010) on tour guides. The inductively created main themes and sub-themes were obtained by reading and classifying the data individually. First, the data obtained from Expedia were read and categorized into themes by the coders. For the themes to have the same meaning for the coders, they were detailed with the explanations in Table 1, and a road map was created for coding. In fact, this road map constitutes the first step of content analysis. All comments obtained were analyzed according to the themes and explanations in the table. In this research, MAXQDA software was used to make qualitative data understandable, interpretable, and visualizable thanks to coding, categorization, document management, and statistical analysis of a wide variety of data. It offers researchers collaboration and sharing features with professional reporting capabilities to effectively manage research projects (MAXQDA, 2024). In the context of content analysis, word cloud, word frequencies, main theme and sub-theme frequencies, and graphical sub-theme percentage results were included.

Reliability and validity

In qualitative research, such as in quantitative research, ensuring reliability and validity is important. Studies that adopt a positivist approach require data to be based on credible and realistic foundations (Golafshani, 2003). Therefore, in this research, the Kappa reliability value (0.69) was obtained through the intercoder agreement tab in the MAXQDA software program. In studies that contain a large amount of data, it is important to increase the clarity of coding, achieve consistent coding to obtain accurate themes, and ensure the data is interpreted accurately. In qualitative content analysis, it is expected that the reliability value obtained from the coding of multiple coders is high (Burla et al., 2008). Kappa indicates the random determination of coding matches between two or more coders. In other words, it refers to the level of agreement between two coders understanding and interpreting an expression in the same way (Brennan & Hays, 1992). Cohen's Kappa value ranges between -1 and +1. A value of +1 shows an absolute agreement between the coders. Values at or below 0 indicate decreasing agreement. A high Kappa value is an indicator of consistent coding (Burla et al., 2008). The levels of Kappa value obtained are as follows: 0.00 (unacceptable), 0.01-0.20 (slight), 0.21-0.40 (fair), 0.41-0.60 (moderate), 0.61-0.80 (substantial), and 0.81-1.00 (almost perfect) (Everitt, 1996). Kappa is calculated by combining the files of both coders and comparing their codes. It is important to determine and categorize the meanings in the data before analysis and to create a roadmap like the one in Table 1.

The word cloud consists of 100 words arranged from the center outwards based on their frequency, with the most frequently used word positioned at the center. While the colors used in the cloud are arbitrary, the highest-frequency word is displayed in the center. The data file contained 5,495 words, which resulted in 1,092-word groups after excluding identical words, stop words, and word combinations (e.g., "guides," "guide," "tour," "tours"). Table 1 shows the top 25 most frequently used words in the data file, with "guide" and "tour" being the most commonly used words, which is not unexpected given the focus of the research on tour guides and tours. Notably, the word "knowledgeable" (142) is frequently used to describe the guides' expertise. Moreover, the word "great" (86) is frequently used as an adjective to describe tours and guides. The guides' tendency to explain details during the tour is expressed through the use of the words "explain," "explained," and "explaining." The guides' friendly behavior is emphasized by the frequent use of the word "friendly" (62), and it is seen that their names are mentioned frequently (e.g., Ali, Hakan, Kadir, Elif, Selim, Murat, Mustafa, Rana, Ahmet, Funda, Merve, and Ferhan).

Table 2: Word Frequencies For Reviews About Tour Guides

Word	Frequency	Percentage
guide	474	8,97
tour	256	4,84
knowledgeable	142	2,69
great	86	1,63
explained	68	1,29
friendly	62	1,17
Ali	58	1,10
amazing	58	1,10
good	54	1,02
history	54	1,02
informative	50	0,95
helpful	44	0,83
place	44	0,83
Cappadocia	42	0,79
knowledge	42	0,79
area	40	0,76
time	40	0,76
English	38	0,72
best	34	0,64
information	34	0,64
fun	32	0,61
Hakan	32	0,61
Kadir	28	0,53
nice	28	0,53

Source: Elaborated by Authors

In Table 2, the sub-themes under the main themes are explained. Describing the sub-themes is important for qualitative research as it increases validity and reliability. These descriptions serve as a roadmap for the coders and are defined by reading the data individually and reaching a consensus between the coders to ensure that the same

meaning is derived from the data. However, since different interpretations and understandings are possible, similar meanings may likely be extracted.

Table 3: Sum of Main Themes Frequencies and Frequencies of Sub-Themes

Code System	Frequencies (Total)	Frequencies (Coder-1)	Frequencies (Coder-2)
Personality	Σ 383	Σ 195	Σ 188
Friendly	99	52	47
Entertaining	89	44	45
Helpful	62	33	29
Polite	55	26	29
Thoughtful	27	12	15
Intellectual	19	11	8
Patient	18	10	8
Honest	14	7	7
Guiding Skills	Σ 626	Σ 312	Σ 314
Knowledge	313	154	159
Language	60	30	30
Presentation	57	29	28
Experience	40	19	21
Time management	34	20	14
Extra service	33	16	17
Responsibility	29	14	15
Enthusiasm	25	13	12
Hospitality	18	10	8
Flexibility	17	7	10
Total Codes	Σ 1009	Σ 507	Σ 502

Source: Elaborated by Authors

Table 3 shows the frequencies and totals of the sub-themes obtained as a result of the coders' coding of the same document. According to these results, the most prominent skill for tour guides is their guiding skills ($\Sigma 312 + \Sigma 314 = \Sigma 626$). Within the theme of guiding skills, the most repeated sub-theme was "knowledge= $154 + 159 = 313$ ". Additionally, the language skills of tour guides ("language= $30 + 30 = 60$ ") are notable. Presentation is an important professional qualification for tour guides, and this is a characteristic that tourists consider positively: "presentation= $29 + 28 = 57$ ". The least mentioned sub-theme within the guiding skills theme was found to be "flexibility= $7 + 10 = 17$ ".

When the personality theme is examined, it is noteworthy that the most prominent personality trait of tour guides is being "friendly= $52 + 47 = 99$ ". Being entertaining ("entertaining= $44 + 45 = 89$ ") is the second most commonly repeated sub-theme, which contributes to making the tour unforgettable. Additionally, the fact that tour guides are "helpful= $33 + 29 = 62$ " is another important factor that tourists value. The percentages for each sub-theme are provided in the following charts, and examples of comments related to the sub-themes are presented to help interpret them.

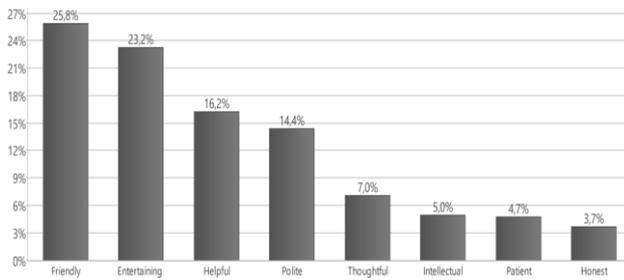


Figure 2: Percentages of Personality Sub-themes

Source: Elaborated by Authors

Friendly; Analysis shows that tourists pay attention to the friendly and warm behavior of tour guides and analyze these criteria after purchasing a tour. Tour guides who work in Cappadocia are friendly and amiable. It is also possible to say that they are successful in communicating and influencing tourists in this context.

“Well done Hakan for showing us the sights of the Red Tour. Well explained in a friendly and informative way.”

“The guide was incredible, friendly, and charming.”

“Informative and friendly tour guide not to mention he had a good sense of humor”

Entertaining; Tour guides are expected to make the tour process fun and enjoyable. When tour guides love their profession and show it sincerely, it is another aspect that tourists pay attention to. In Cappadocia, it can be noted that the tour guides who provide guidance are well-versed in humor and behave in an entertaining manner.

“We had Ali as our tour guide, he was excellent, very helpful, and used humor in his stories which made it very entertaining!”

“Yasser is the best tour guide, we had a lot of fun a learned a lot with him, treated us like friends, and took beautiful pictures of us!”

“This review is for Elif. She’s one of the best tour guides I’ve ever had! Very knowledgeable, sweet, patient, and fun.”

Helpful; Tour guides in Cappadocia provide assistance and support to tourists in case of any issues or problems. They approach tourists with great care and show empathy towards them in order to understand their concerns and needs. With their expertise and knowledge of the area, they can offer valuable insights and advice to help tourists have a safe and enjoyable trip.

“The tour guide had pretty great information about the area. He was supportive.”

“Special mention to our sweet tour guide Elif (Ellie) . She was good in explaining all the details in depth and was looking after the guests quite well.”

“Our guide Irem was so informative and understanding and helped us in taking some of our group photos.”

Polite; The adherence to etiquette rules during the tour is indicative of the high-quality service offered to tourists. Tour guides are expected to exhibit polite, thoughtful, and

considerate behavior towards tourists, which is the most important behavioral rule. According to research, tourists highly value politeness, making it a crucial aspect of their experience. Based on the feedback received, it can be said that tour guides in Cappadocia are polite and provide excellent service.

“Great Experience with Alican: he is very polite and helpful.”

“Guide was very kind and friendly with a lot of knowledge.”

“He was polite and always kept us in the loop for everything we were doing and had planned to do”

Thoughtful; Tour guides should be attentive to the diverse needs and expectations of each tourist group, and tailor their approach accordingly. In Cappadocia, the comments of tour guides practicing their profession indicate that they are mindful of this important aspect of their job. Specifically, they are said to show extra care and attention to elderly or young tourists, as needed. Additionally, they prioritize the safety of all tourists and strive to make the tour experience as enjoyable as possible.

“She was very professional and considerate.”

“Our tour guide was Ferhan. He really was a very thoughtful guide spending time with each person on the tour to provide personal attention and even helping those in need who weren’t part of our tour (which speaks volumes). Super appreciated his thoughtfulness and friendliness to all.”

“She is also sensitive about challenges pertaining to travel with small children and old tourists.”

Intellectual; It can be said that tour guides in Cappadocia possess a high level of intellectual knowledge. They are not only knowledgeable but also skilled in providing insightful commentary on a wide range of topics. Moreover, they are adept at adapting to different situations and effectively engaging with tourists, thereby leaving a lasting impression on their visitors.

“Our guide arranged a new itinerary; plus, he gave us a quantity of information about Turkish culture and way of living!”

“Ali was also very smart about navigating through the crowds, and made sure that we could get through the express routes.”

“We were fortunate to have Ali, a professional archaeologist, as our guide. His extensive knowledge of this historic region added so much depth and breadth to our appreciation of the sites we visited.”

Patient; When considering the intensity of tours, it's clear that tour guides may become physically and mentally exhausted, which can negatively impact their ability to exhibit patient behavior. Despite these challenges, it's crucial for tour guides to maintain patient behavior throughout the tour, both in explaining each point thoroughly without skipping any details and in effectively managing the group. By doing so, they can ensure that the tour is informative, enjoyable, and safe for all participants.

“Kadir was an amazing guide. He spoke good English and had a great deal of patience in explaining to us the history of the places we visited.”

“A great guide named Ali who was very patient and knowledgeable, made the tour fun.”

“We had an excellent tour with our tour guide Saigú. He has a lot of knowledge in his field, patience, and is an excellent professional.”

Honest; This is the sub-theme that receives the least amount of evaluation for tour guides. While providing fair treatment to tourists during the tour, guides also ensure that they do not provide them with inaccurate or misleading information. Tourists have emphasized that guides do not exhibit behaviors that are overly focused on selling souvenirs and they do not persistently pressure tourists to make purchases.

“The trip was a great one solely because we had a great guide, Bayram. He was detailed in his explanation, with a sense of humour, and was also a very honest guide. We saved a lot of money because of him.”

“He asked us before stopping at souvenir stops, if we wanted to, and if we all said no, didn't force us.”

“The guide was really nice and gave us an answer to all of our questions. Luckily, we hadn't put in any undesirable stops on sales either”

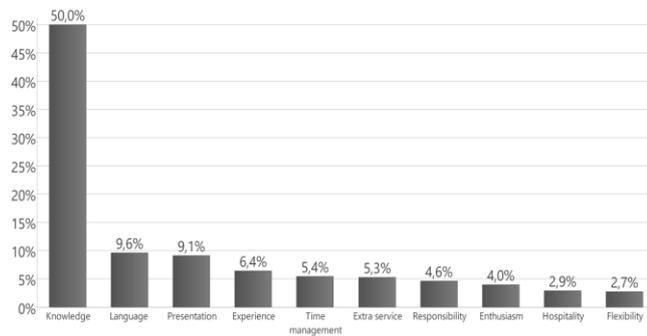


Figure 3: Percentages of Guiding Skills Sub-themes

Source: Elaborated by Authors

Knowledge; Knowledge is not only the most prominent sub-theme within the main theme of guiding skills, but it is also the most frequently mentioned aspect after the words "guide" and "tour" in all the comments that we reviewed. In fact, when it comes to guiding skills, tourists are most interested in the knowledge possessed by their guides, with 50% of them indicating so. The tour guides in the region of Cappadocia leave a lasting impression on tourists due to their extensive knowledge about the area, as well as their expertise in subjects such as history, archeology, mythology, and religion. Furthermore, these guides are skilled at effectively conveying this information to the tourists.

“What an amazing and educational trip with Kadir. I don't think there is a more knowledgeable guide than Kadir!”

“Well done Hakan for showing us the sights of the Red Tour. Well explained in a friendly and informative way.”

“Tour guide Mehmet was a pleasure to spend time with and incredibly knowledgeable.”

Language; Comments regarding the language proficiency of tour guides are just as noteworthy as those pertaining to their knowledge. Tourists frequently praise their guides for their excellent and fluent command of foreign languages. Additionally, tour guides take special care to use language that is easily understood by everyone. It is also noteworthy that some guides can speak multiple languages, which is particularly pleasing to tourists. From the comments we reviewed, it is clear that tour guides in the region exhibit a high level of proficiency in foreign languages and use them professionally.

“The guide(Murat) was wonderful and the guide knew plenty of English and gave us so much interesting knowledge of every place we visited.”

“Umit was a great tour guide. Spoke English very well and explained a lot of history.”

“Our tour guide Ali Kaya speaks perfect German, he used to live in Berlin. He is a professional in his field, very personable and we would never have learned so much without him.”

Presentation; Tourists have praised tour guides for their detailed and engaging introductions to each point visited on the tour. Guides are careful to explain things clearly so that everyone can easily understand. Additionally, from the comments we reviewed, it is clear that tour guides are highly skilled in their ability to communicate effectively.

“Ayse, our guide is wonderful, she explained everything clearly”

“The guide has a lot of knowledge and knows how to explain himself very well (both in English and Spanish), it is a worthwhile tour.”

“Mustafa guide made a perfect and clear explanation of all the information in each place visited our itinerary”

Experience; The experience of tour guides is another important factor that attracts the attention of tourists. In particular, tourists are impressed by guides who exhibit a high level of experience in the region, with knowledge of every destination and a detailed understanding of the area. Experienced guides not only inspire confidence in their clients but also manage tours effectively and handle crises professionally. Furthermore, tourists have noted that experienced guides create unforgettable experiences for their clients.

“Professional & Informative: We enjoyed it with Ece, she took us all to the marvelous valley.”

“Many thanks to the very experienced and well-spoken English guide.”

“Great experience: perfect guide, he knows all the history of Cappadocia, polite, professional.”

Time management; Tour guides diligently follow the tour itineraries and take tourists to all the designated routes. They ensure that all phases of the tour program are

completed on time, making efficient use of the tour time. Tourists are pleased with the punctuality and unhurried attitude of the guides. Guides take the time necessary to ensure that no important place is overlooked, and tourists are given ample time to enjoy each destination.

“The tour was punctual, accommodating, and gave us just the right amount of information to keep us interested.”

“Really enjoyed the tour, the guide was knowledgeable, plenty of opportunities for pictures without being rushed.”

“Was worth the money and the visits to the sites were well timed.”

Extra service; In addition to providing comprehensive tour services, tour guides also assist tourists with any additional needs they may have. These requests can include taking photos for tourists, bargaining during shopping excursions, procuring desired local products, and accommodating requests for additional time. Tour guides strive to meet the needs of their clients and ensure that their tour experience is as enjoyable as possible.

“He had me picked up from the airport for 10 Euros which is much cheaper than other companies. He also uses good transport and arranges the tour very well.”

“He also stopped at a bakery upon my wife’s request so that we could buy some Turkish cookies. He was a wizard with the iPhone and I’m particularly in love with a video he took of me and my wife.”

“Our guide Irem was so informative and understanding and helped us in taking some of our group photos.”

Responsibility; Tour guides are attentive to fulfilling all the requirements of the tour. They are sensitive to the needs of the elderly and children, act with caution in dangerous places, and take precautions to ensure the safety of all tourists. Guides also show consideration for physical differences and provide support to tourists who may be experiencing difficulties. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that tour guides are respectful of the cultural sensitivities and regional structure of the area, which is appreciated by tourists.

“She is also sensitive about challenges pertaining to travel with small children and old tourists.”

“Ferya’s attention to the physical challenges was appreciated. She was always thinking of our safety. We will always appreciate Ferya’s guidance on our tour.”

“Excellent! Mr. G was informative and attentive.”

Enthusiasm; According to the results, tourists think that tour guides have exciting and energetic personalities. Their enthusiasm and passion for their profession are evident in their high energy levels and their willingness to provide exceptional service. Tourists admire the tireless efforts of tour guides who go above and beyond to ensure a memorable tour experience.

“Ozy, our tour guide was a riot, full of energy, cracking jokes and keeping us thoroughly entertained throughout the trip.”

“Not to mention that he works with such enthusiasm that I’m sure he loves what he does.”

“He is Excellent Faruk, he is someone who really loves his job and does it with a lot of love.”

Hospitality, According to tourists, tour guides in the region are benevolent and helpful. They were willing and attentive while meeting the needs of the tourists. It is also stated in the comments that they are good companions.

“Our guide Rana was excellent! She was super accommodating and very knowledgeable.”

“The tour guide was very knowledgeable, entertaining, and accommodating.”

“Ali is knowledgeable, efficient, and accommodating.”

Flexibility, Tour guides are attentive to the moods, physical condition, and needs of tourists while fulfilling the requirements of the tour. They make sure to adjust the timing and routes to suit the preferences of the tourists without disrupting the flow of the tour. Guides are flexible and accommodating when necessary, and they take into account the requests of tourists. Their non-strict behavior during the tour creates a helpful and friendly image that is appreciated by tourists.

“He was friendly and kind enough to take photos for us - he was flexible to suit our mood - if we were tired he could reduce the walking.”

“Alper, our guide, was tolerant, informative, and customized our day well according to what we wanted to do.”

“He never rushed us at any of the sites and gave us options for how we wanted to spend the day.”

5. Conclusion

Tour guides play a critical role in leading and directing visitors in unfamiliar destinations, particularly in countries where language barriers and cultural differences can be challenging (Chang, 2014; McDonnell, 2001). The quality of guided tours depends heavily on the professional expertise and demeanor of the tour guides (Zhang & Chow, 2004). This can significantly impact visitors' satisfaction with the service and overall holiday experience (Chan et al., 2015). Therefore, evaluating comments about guides in destinations where guided tours are offered is crucial. Such evaluations can help identify and address problems related to guides and facilitate the training of professional and qualified tour guides. However, despite their importance, there is limited research on tourist-generated data about guides and guided tours, showing the need for further investigation in this area.

To shed light on the impact of user-generated content on the tourism industry, this research analyzed the reviews and ratings posted on the widely used platform, Expedia, to explore tourists' opinions and experiences of Cappadocia tours. As one of the most popular tourist destinations in Türkiye, Cappadocia offers a unique blend of cultural and natural attractions that make it an ideal setting for this

research. Furthermore, the use of Expedia as a data source provides a significant advantage for this research. Expedia.com is an invaluable source of data for understanding the holiday industry. Unlike other travel websites, Expedia only allows members who have completed their trip to share reviews. This policy enables the authenticity and accuracy of published reviews, making them more reliable than reviews on other online platforms without verification systems (Wang et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2019). Also, Expedia provides word-of-mouth (WOM) information through four channels on its website: individual guest ratings and reviews, the average Expedia guest rating, the guest recommendation rate, and the total number of reviews (Wang et al., 2015). As these channels represent real customer interactions, the data provided is reflective of reality. Overall, Expedia's data is a trustworthy source for gaining insights into the holiday industry.

One of the most important sources reflecting the impact of the development of digital technologies on tourism is user-generated comments. It is a fact of today's world that these comments are becoming more and more important for both destinations and businesses. Tour guides, who are in one-to-one communication with tourists, and user-generated comments for them also play an important role in the selection of tours in any destination. So, it contributes to the literature to investigate the comments on tour guides created on Expedia, especially the positive ones, in terms of reflecting the impression and image of the destinations in terms of the performance of the tour guides providing services in the destination.

In addition to highlighting important themes in tour guide performance from the perspective of tourists, this research highlights another significant finding as well. It is found that the names of tour guides are frequently mentioned (e.g. Ali, Hakan, Kadir, etc.) in comments. This reveals that tourists remember their guides by name, suggesting that the guides can play an important role in creating memorable tour experiences.

Even though this research provides valuable insights, it is crucial to acknowledge its limitations. First, the research only utilized tourist-generated data from Expedia, which may not necessarily represent the broader population of online platforms. Second, the research only considered English comments due to the researchers' proficiency in English, potentially excluding important insights expressed in other languages. Finally, this research provides information only about the performance of tour guides in Cappadocia, and tourists' expectations of guide performance may vary depending on the characteristics of different destinations.

This research provides several recommendations for future research. First, while the research focused solely on tour guides in Cappadocia, future research could explore tourist performance in other destinations to determine whether tourists have varying expectations from their guides based

on the location. Second, as individual websites possess unique qualities that may not be representative of other platforms (Lam, et al., 2020), future research can utilize other UGC platforms such as TripAdvisor or Booking.com. Third, it would be valuable to examine whether tourists from different countries hold varying expectations and opinions regarding guide performance. Also, identifying service failures by evaluating negative comments will contribute to the differentiation of new studies. Finally, incorporating a combination of qualitative methods such as interviews and quantitative methods could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic, allowing for comparisons between the results of these methods.

The results of the research highlight the important factors that tourists consider when evaluating the performance of their tour guides, providing valuable insights into their expectations during their visit to Cappadocia. By identifying these factors, the results of this research can inform the development of training programs for tour guides, which can help ensure that they possess the necessary guiding skills (knowledge, language, presentation, experience, time management, extra service, responsibility, enthusiasm, hospitality, flexibility) to meet the expectations of tourists. This, in turn, can lead to an improved overall experience for tourists visiting the region and contribute to the sustainability of the tourism industry. Also, the research results can benefit travel agencies and professional organizations involved in the employment of tour guides, providing them with guidance on which personality traits they should pay attention to when hiring a guide (friendly, entertaining, helpful, polite, thoughtful, intellectual, and patient) and how to best prepare and assist their guides.

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INFO PAGE

Tour guide performance through the eyes of tourists: An analysis of user-generated reviews on Expedia**Abstract**

This research aims to evaluate the impact of tour guides on the overall tour experience and to improve the destination experience for tourists by measuring tour guide performance. As a research pattern, a case study of qualitative research and web content analysis method was applied in the study. The analysis was conducted based on 260 comments related to tour guides. Content analysis was conducted according to 2 main themes (personality traits and guiding skills) and 18 sub-themes determined by reading the comments. Word clouds, word frequencies, theme and sub-theme frequencies, and percentages were utilized in the analysis. The content analysis showed that tour guides had comprehensive professional knowledge, were friendly and helpful towards tourists, and were also proficient in the language they spoke, which in turn contributed to a more satisfying tour experience. The research highlights the significant impact of tour guides' behavior on the overall tour experience and the importance of measuring their performance to enhance the destination experience for tourists and explores the use of User Generated Content (UGC) on Expedia to achieve this.

Keywords: User Generated Content (UGC), Expedia, Guided Tours, Tourist Guides.

Authors

Full Name	Author contribution roles	Contribution rate
Neşe Yılmaz:	Conceptualism, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization, Supervision	34%
Aybüke Özsoy:	Conceptualism, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Resources, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization	33%
Nilgün Demirel İli:	Conceptualism, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization	33%

Author statement: Author(s) declare(s) that All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. **Declaration of**

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