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THE IMPACT OF TOUR GUIDES ON TOURIST SATISFACTION LEVEL

ABSTRACT:Over the last seven years, there has been a positive trend in tourist guiding in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Especially, in sphere of tour guiding. As the number of tourists visiting Uzbekistan increases, and the demand for professional guides has increased. In this context, this paper emphasizes the importance and significance of tour guides in the development of Uzbek tourism and tourist satisfaction. The study collected and analyzed data from 20 surveys were completed by international tourists who visited Uzbekistan. The findings demonstrate a significant association between tourist satisfaction, intentions to revisit, and the quality of the tour guiding service.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of tour guides as representatives of destinations and the significant impact they have on tourist satisfaction and intentions to revisit. The recommendations provided can assist the tourism industry in enhancing the quality of tour guiding services and ultimately improve the overall tourist experience. Future studies could consider overcoming the limitations of this study by conducting surveys in multiple languages and including domestic tourists and those who travel independently. Such studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of tour guides on tourist satisfaction and the development of tourism in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Tourist destinations, tour guide, tourist satisfaction, international tourist

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's largest service sectors and plays a vital role in the global economy. According to Hui & Wan, with the liberalization of the airline industry, technical advancements, the emergence of e-commerce, and demographic shifts, tourism is expected to continue producing GDP and jobs. (Hui & Wan, 2007). Countries around the world have opened up to and invested in tourism, transforming the industry into a vital driver of socioeconomic progress through export profits, job creation, and infrastructure development. Uzbekistan has also recognized the potential of tourism and has become one of the world's most popular tourist destinations, owing mostly to its historical, natural features, and cultural legacy. In 2022, 1 million international tourists visited Uzbekistan, and it was ranked as the ninth Best Place to Travel in 2023. (Travel Lemming, 2022)

Undoubtedly, Uzbekistan is one of the countries which are rich in historical cities such as Bukhara, Kharezm, and Kashkadarya. To be clear, Samarkand is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Uzbekistan. Samarkand is a world center of great value in the past as well as in the present, city allures international tourists with its unique natural and numerous scenic and historical beauties. It attracted over 1 million tourists in 2022 (Ministry of Tourism). Samarkand, known as the "Tourist Gate of New Uzbekistan", is the capital of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 2023.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In terms of human activity, guiding can be dated back thousands of years. Since the beginning of recorded history, humans have traveled the globe, and those who show the way are referred to as "pathfinders," "bear leaders," "proxemos," and "cicerones"—all of which were the forerunners of modern tour guides (Powell, 1993). As can be seen that the profession has a particular derivation. Even though guides have been around for more than 2,600 years, they only started playing a significant role in the travel industry with the rise of mass tourism. Today, organized tourism would be very challenging without the assistance of tour guides, both tour managers and tour leaders (who accompany the group

during the journey) and tour guides (who welcome the group at the destination) (Rabotic, 2008). It is true that tour guide is a face of the nation and considered as a front line server.

The job of tour guides was the subject of early studies on tour guides. According to Cohen (1985), the terms 'pathfinder' and mentor were used to describe the origins of the modern tour guide. Customer satisfaction in the tourism business has become a challenging and intriguing research topic to investigate since customers have unique features such as heterogeneity, and their perceptions and expectations alter over time (Leguma, 2013). In this regard, the evaluation of tourist satisfaction with guided tours is viewed as a complex procedure due to the composition of guided tours. There are various tangible and intangible factors that comprise the guided tour, such as the physical service features of the tour operator and intangible services offered by employees such as tour leaders or tour guides (Huang et al., 2010). Customer loyalty is composed of both hard and soft intangible services. On the one hand, it is a combination of the customers' anticipation and perception of the vacation, their expectations prior to the tour, their attitudes and behavior (past travel experience), and their perceptions of equity and unforeseeable events during service encounters (Bowie & Chang, 2005).

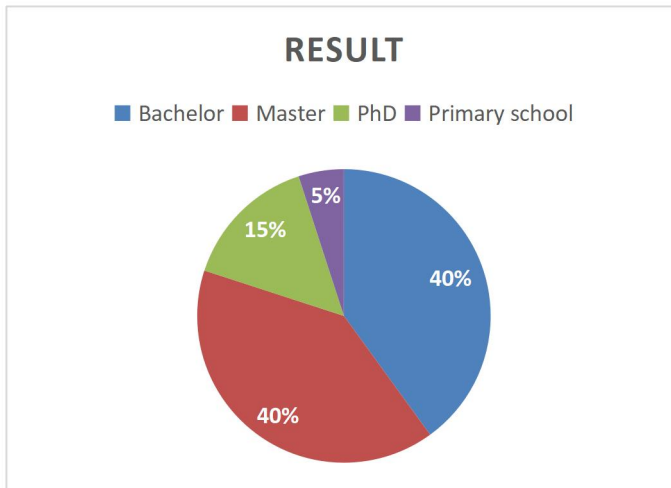
METHODOLOGY

So that data is collected, online questionnaire survey form is divided into three sections. The first section consisted of respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, and preliminary questions were posed to the participants of the survey including the questions such as which country they are from, what is their gender, The purpose of their visit, which cities they have traveled, they had traveled to Uzbekistan before, if they traveled how many times, have they used a tour guide service. In the second part they evaluated the tour guide's guiding skills asking by questions such as their level of language proficiency, what was their knowledge of the sights, had they sense of humor, how likely they recommend their holiday in Uzbekistan, how likely they are come to Uzbekistan again, ranging from "highly dissatisfied", to "highly satisfied"; from "very unlikely", to "very likely". In the third segment of the study, tourists were prompted to document their impressions of the tour experience, as well as the extent to which the tour guide's presence altered their perception of Uzbekistan. Additionally, participants were asked to specify the magnitude of change in their views of Uzbekistan, and to offer viable suggestions towards enhancing the quality of tour guides as communicated in their own words. The questionnaire form was designed in English language. This study was conducted in Samarkand, and its scope includes international tourists who took guided tours.

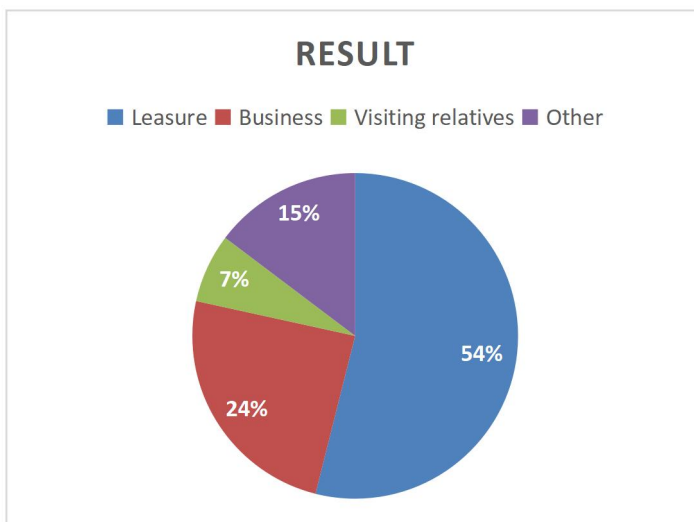
RESULT

The majority of the respondents are males (65 %), followed by females (35%). Most of the respondents have a bachelor's degree (40 %), followed by a master's degree same as bachelor's degree (40%), the lowest indicator is in Ph.D. degree (15%) Examining the findings the respondents' justifications for choosing Uzbekistan as their travel destination, 55 % of the respondents considered as a leisure country Uzbekistan to have holiday. The respondents who chose business are (25%), and lastly, 15 % of the respondents chose Uzbekistan for other reasons. Almost 90 % of tourists who traveled to Uzbekistan visited Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara.

When tourists were asked how tour guides were able to change their opinion about Uzbekistan, Norwegian respondents answered that way- "I didn't know much about Uzbekistan before visiting the country. Now I really want to visit it again! The guide showed us how beautiful the country is! The Uzbekistan people we met were some of the most generous people I have ever met. I love the country Uzbekistan!" And some of them gave positive answers, while others said that the guides did not have much effect on it.



1.The survey as dedicated to the level of education of respondents. The graph below the result of the responses to the question. Most of the respondents have a bachelor’s degree (40 %), followed by a master’s degree same as bachelor’s degree (40%), the lowest indicator is in Ph.D. degree (15%)



2.Respondents’ purpose of the visit. The figure below shows the Respondents’ purpose of the visit. The respondents’ justifications for choosing Uzbekistan as their travel destination, 55 % of the respondents considered as a leisure, 25% of the respondents considered as a business, and 15 % of respondents chose Uzbekistan for other reason.

CONCLUSION

A notable point is that travel guides, despite their importance, are already attracting researchers' attention in the areas of satisfaction, loyalty, and revisit intentions. In this context, the tour guide, as one of the most important frontline players in the tourism industry, transforms a tourist's visit from tour to experience through his knowledge and interpretation of the destination's sights and cultures. Hence, the success of the service quality in the tourism industry very much relies on the performance of tour guides. In conclusion must be mentioned that points which were above) The research's findings also make it obvious that it is important to analyse what respondent want. According to the study's findings, the majority of respondents planned to return to Uzbekistan. As a result of the respondents' recommendations which they give to relatives and friends, the applied analysis revealed that almost 100 % of respondents said they would suggest Uzbekistan to relatives and friends. As a result of the fact

that the majority of travelers want to go on a guided tour in Uzbekistan, it can be argued that the performance of the tour guide plays a principal role in generating customer satisfaction and loyalty. In other words, a tour guide's performance can impact visitors' expectations in relation to the performance of other tour guides. On the contrary, tour guides should provide a service that meets tourists' expectations by taking their requirements, desires, and cultural differences into account.

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APPENDIX

Tourist name?

Which country are you from?

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

What is your level of Education?

Primary school

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

PhDs

What is your purpose for the visit?

Leisure

Business

Visiting relatives

Other

Which cities have you visited?

Did you have a guided tour?

Yes

No

Gender of your guide

Male

Female

What age of your tour guide?

>20

20-29

30<

Level of language proficiency?

Elementary

Intermediate

Advanced

Proficiency

What was his/her knowledge of the sights?

Bad

Good

Excellent

Does he/she have a good sense of humor?

Yes

No

How did the guide change your view of Uzbekistan?

How has your view of Uzbekistan changed?

How likely are you to recommend your holiday in Uzbekistan to your relatives and friends?

Uncertain

Unlikely

Very unlikely

Likely

Very likely

What suggest would you give to improve the quality of tour guides?