Assessment Of Professional Tour Guides' Performances By Local Tourists

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Extensive Summary

Introduction

Professional tour guide (PTG) can be very effective on satisfaction of tourists with their qualifications. On the other hand, PTGs need to develop themself according to the changed tourist structures since tourist are able to have the information about tour destinations via social networks, web or forum pages from their tablet or smartphones easily. With this reason, PTGs should have differentiated and detailed information and also should be able to pass along this information in an effective way. Information giving is just one of PTG functions. It is expected that a PTG fulfils complex services such as, time, group, relation managements and relations with service providers, entertaining, relaxing, interpreting, mediating etc. For this reason, determination of the current qualification levels of PTGs from tourist perspective and improvement of the quality of services by strengthening the determined weak points is a must.

It is important to realization of tour guiding with its different aspects and sustainability capacity with its crucial role in tourism activities. It has been seen that almost all researches on PTGs qualifications and tourist satisfactions from guiding services were planned and conducted on only foreign tourists (Güzel, 2007; Şahin, 2012; Nebioğlu, 2013). This research will serve for filling the space in this field with its results related about determination of the PTGs qualifications importance levels and assessments of the performances from local tourist perspective. This research will also bring suggestions to all tour guide associations, chambers of tour guides and educational institutions related about ways to improve the qualities of PTG services and effectiveness of PTG trainings.

Methodology

The main aim of this study is determination of importance level of expected prominent qualifications of PTGs such as knowledge, skills and characteristics from local tourist perspective. This study also aims to identify if there is significant differences between frequency of local tourist package tour participating and their education level on their perceptions of PTGs' qualifications.

Total field under this survey is local tourists visited Gaziantep in 2014. According to tourism statistics, Gaziantep was visited by 149.310 local tourists in 2014 (www.gaziantepturizm.gov.tr). Sample taken for the survey is 472 local tourists visited Gaziantep with a guided package tour in March and April. Correspondingly it can be told that the sample has ability to represent the population.

Findings are argued under 3 sections. The first section consists of local tourists' demographical findings. Second section covers determination of importance levels of the PTG's qualifications as such knowledge, abilities/skills and personal-characteristics. Related statements called as importance ratings and the means of the importance ratings analysed with standard deviation. Findings of assessments of the PTGs at the end of the package tours by local tourist also discussed under this section. Performance ratings analysed by arithmetic means and standard deviations and the comparison of importance level standard deviations.

In third section, it examines whether there are any statistically significant differences based on %5 between ratings of local tourists and means of educational levels, genders and frequencies of package tours participating.

Before the analyses, results examined according to their variances. Since the reliability tests of data n>30, calculation was done with Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows there are no regular data variances. Akbulut (2010) suggests that with some certain techniques it needs to be transformed to regular variance level. To have regular variance, variables squared and LOG10 methods implemented but it has been seen that results of variances has never been changed and because of this reason, usage of non-parametric tests has been seen as appropriated.

Study Findings and Discussion

This research reflects the current situation of the PTGs qualifications from local tourists. When the performance ratings assessed it has been seen that performance level of PTGs are average but as a whole, it shows that performance level of the PTGs are lower than qualification importance level. This result is noteworthy because performance levels of PTGs are not low. It has been seen that local tourists are in a very high expectations about PTGs qualifications as such knowledge, abilities/skills and personal characteristics.

Local tourists were randomly selected from guided package tour groups visited Gaziantep in March and April. Data was collected by distributing questionnaires to the package tour participants. The sample consisted of a total of 472 survey collected; demographical findings shows that slightly more female tourists, biggest age range between 35 to 64 years old. Frequency of taking package tours annually is low among

them, mostly once a year. Their leading motivation for choosing the guided package tours is to have more information during their tours.

Regional culture and itinerary information have the highest rating among PTG knowledge qualifications. Politics has the lowest importance rating among the knowledge disciplines.

When performance levels are considered about knowledge of PTGs, communication has the highest and general knowledge has the lowest means. With this result, it can be told that PTGs are expected to have more general knowledge. On the contrary this result is not consistent with the Müküs (2009) findings which were showed that the tourist finds PTGs' general knowledge level as satisfactory with   % 57 rates. Secondly, research results of Şahin (2012), was determine that comparing the Russian tourists, German and English tourists find communication skills are more important. As a result of considering that this research field is local tourists perceptions findings are striking. Local tourists are in high expectations of communication level since both PTG and local tourists' mother tongue is same. As a conclusion, it is quite possible to say that from local tourists' perspective, general knowledge level and the communication abilities of PTGs have the utmost importance.

Assessment of the abilities and skills of PTGs show that, the highest importance level was given to time management skills and responsibility taking initiatives. As a skill, empathy and making clever remarks have been found the lowest importance level among the skill qualifications of PTGs. Weiler & Walker (2014), identified in their research that, lack of abilities and skills of tour leaders is one of the most common complaint reason for the tourists.

Highest performance ratings for the PTGs' abilities come from speaking, leadership, interpreting and practices of body languages. These four skills means are exactly same and this is a noteworthy result. Lowest performance ratings of PTGs are come from responsibility taking initiatives, empathy, handling the difficult situations. Chang (2006) suggests in his study that service approach of tour leaders are satisfactory but interpretation skills of a tour leader has the potential about increasing the satisfactory levels of tourists. These results shows that to increase the satisfaction levels of tourists, PTGs needs to have the ability of taking initiatives and follow a solution oriented approach to the matters.

Personal characteristics ratings show that the highest importance is given to respectfulness, kindness and dutifulness. Highest ratings on performance belong to respectfulness, kindness and hospitality. The lowest ratings come from being a good listener and disciplined.

Significance level comparison about knowledge indicates that with tour participating frequency and importance level of qualifications and also performance level have the statically significance based on %5. Frequency of taking package tours, education levels and genders of local tourists are significant variables on their perceptions and ratings. This finding is consistent with Tetik (2012)'s research findings.