Humour and scams in guided tours; synthesising issues from embodied international experiences

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ABSTRACT

Electronic guiding tools challenge the future of tourist guides in some settings. In an attempt to generate new insights into the human qualities of interpersonal interaction in "live" guided tours, ten cases were systematically drawn from a larger listing of documented, personally familiar tours featuring humour and tourist scams. Using a repertory grid style sorting task and the researchers' judgements, it was suggested that humour and incidents involving tourist scams were perceived by well defined constructs. For humour, specific humour and generic overall amusing qualities of the tour were important; for scams the dominant construct was the scam's seriousness.

KEYWORDS: Guided tours, humour, tourist scams, interpersonal interaction

INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges in tourism study is to generate new and fresh ideas pertaining to the topics under scrutiny. There are several possible ways to generate novel insights. One approach lies in borrowing or incorporating concepts from other and older areas of study. This approach has been a standard way to develop the tourism field and the recent reviews of the foundation of the study area attest to the multiple applications of this approach (Nash, 2007; Smith, 2011, Dwyer, 2011). An additional technique lies in extending the established tourism based conceptual schemes. Since many of these schemes have been derived within western cultural traditions it is potentially insightful to explore the operation of these approaches in other continents and cultures (cf. Butler, 2006; Pearce, 2004). Other researchers contend that we can usefully change the paradigm with which we view a topic or phenomenon and extract new and varied perspectives, some of which are highly contested, in this fresh way (Ateljevic et al., 2012). All of these techniques have a valuable place in stimulating the study of tourism but will by passed in this paper by gazing more closely and in a particular way at a well worked study area- that of guided tours.

The way in which this fierce focus will be employed is through a technique suggested and embodied in the work of Eisenhardt (1989), Diamond (2005) and Yin (2009). The approach taken by these analysts consists of extracting richer meaning from the close study of special cases, often outlying or unusual cases, and then inductively asserting the value of the observations for the wider study topic. The approach has analogies with the well known grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) but is more audacious in the sense that the selection of the initial cases is deliberately structured in a planned manner and seeks to capture distinctive components of the phenomenon. In summary, the aim of this study is to invigorate the analysis of guided tours by garnering insights from two specific guided tour activities-the use of humour and the nature of tourist-guide scams. The detailed stimuli and guidance for choosing these topics and using the present approach lie in the existing literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an important stimulus in contemporary tourism study to better understand the topic of guided tours. In the last decade, in particular, considerable effort has been expended in developing what are referred to as mobile recommender systems (Kramer et., 2007; Paganelli and Giuli, 2008; Tan et al., 2009). The designs vary but in essence the mobile recommender systems can provide locational information and interpretive commentary on the buildings and attractions close to or in front of the visitor. The work spans the continents with much commercial as a well as academic interest in

the development of these hand held tools (Pearce, 2011a). Clearly the new electronic guides perform many of the functions which were formerly filled by tourist guides. The existing research suggests that tourists prefer the electronic guides to operate in what has been termed the planner mode, a form of information delivery which suggests routes to suit tourists' interests rather than explorer mode which constantly updates the users with information in their immediate environment (Modsching et al., 2007; Kramer et al., 2007). In a broad sense the mobile recommender systems may be seen as answers to the classical tourist questions of where to go, what to see or do and how to understand the locations and settings in their field of view. For the study of tourist guides it is germane to ask the question what is it that "live" guides offer which help define or detract from their continuing role in tourism operations.

Over twenty five years ago four foundation studies analysing the topic of guided tours were completed. These four studies have formed the basis of much subsequent work. The studies which can be identified as building this area are the work of Schmidt (1979) who examined the situations where guided tours were seen as highly desirable; Holloway (1981) who observed the ways in which individual guides interpreted and responded to their role; Pearce (1984) who concentrated on the interactions between guides and the tourists they served; and Cohen (1985) who produced a comprehensive categorisation of the guide's roles. They were not the only early studies and some contributions were made by Lopez (1980, 1981) on the communication style and personality of tour leaders while historical information about guides and their role in tourism was offered by Towner (1985). The issues of the communication competency of the guide was illustrated in studies of guides in attractions with modest appeal by Fine and Speer (1985) working in Texas, while Almagor (1985) highlighted the power relations which influenced the guide's behaviour in African wildlife trips.

The four foundation studies as well as these supplementary publications have resulted in three principal lines of work concerning the guided tour. The contributions of Schmidt (1979) and Cohen (1985) in particular have directed attention to the generic concern with the role of guides in tourism. Topics of interest within this domain include when, where and how guides operate. There have been extensions and refinements to the four core roles -the guide as an instrumental or location oriented leader, as animator, as interaction controller and as information agent- which Cohen (1985) identified. Some representative examples of this continued interest in the multiple roles of the guide are apparent in the work of Howard, Thwaites and Smith (1991) who emphasised cultural mediation and Haig and McIntyre (1992) who highlighted differences between ecotourism guides and other tourism communicators.

A second tradition of work has focussed on the qualities and skills of guides with a particular emphasis on their knowledge, accreditation procedures and their effectiveness in influencing tourist behaviour. The derivation of this work lies most clearly with the foundation studies of Holloway (1981) and to a lesser extent Pearce (1984) and the work of Lopez (1980, 1981). Additionally, this line of interest is closely linked to studies of the effectiveness of interpretation in general (Moscardo, 1999; Falk, et al., 2011).Clear examples of this continuing interest in the guides' skills and effectiveness include Ballantyne and Hughes (2001) with their interest in learning through interpretation and guide communication and Black and Weiler (2005) who focus directly on accreditation and certification issues. The training of guides in countries such as China and the further understanding of what skills and content emphases are needed to interpret settings to multiple nationalities is a growing issue in that cultural context (Hongying & Hui, 2009).

A third sub-field of inquiry is more directly concerned with tourist guide interaction and the way guides and tourists see one another. The derivation here springs in part from Pearce (1984) but the work of Almagor (1985) is an important addition to this study of interpersonal perception and behaviour. In the 1990s one of the most active and prominent contributors to these studies of tourists and guides and how they interact was Abraham Pizam. In a series of studies with colleagues Pizam observed the ways in which tourists and guides view one another noting in particular the strong role of nationality as a key variable defining the perceptions and forming the basis for the treatment of the respective parties (Pizam and Sussman, 1995; Pizam and Reichel, 1996; Pizam et al., 1997). Some more recent work has appeared on the perception of tourist guides in Hong Kong (Zhang and Chow, 2004). The emotional labour of tourist guides has been considered in recent studies. Emotional labour which is closely linked to emotional intelligence is the ability to produce the right affective reactions consistently to foster positive interaction (Goleman, 1998: Harris, 2004). Emotional labour might be seen as a skill and thus this kind of work belonging to the second category of studies. Nevertheless, the

information collected on this topic suggested these emotional sensitivities are also central to the quality of the interpersonal interactions which is the central concern of this third set of studies.

By way of summary, in this paper it is proposed that the continuing role of the "live" tourist guide will hinge on the third component identified in the previous tourism studies - the quality of their interpersonal interactions with the people they guide. Several small studies offer pathways to begin to explore this quality of interaction. In an account of the critical service features of international group tours made by over 300 Taiwanese travellers, Wang et al. (2000) suggested that creativity and compassion were winning features. By way of contrast, undisclosed charges and the addition of shopping locations which were not requested were low points. Ap and Wong (2001) suggest that making people happy is an overarching issue for guides and the ability to engender wellbeing is achieved through communication skills as well as providing useful information. Zhang and Chow (2004) assessed the performance of tour guides in Hong Kong. The respondents in the Zhang and Chow study were mainland Chinese visitors. Their study identified key informational abilities and communication as important but also noted the role of humour in making the guided tour experience a success.

Two further recent studies suggest related directions which may be of value in closely focussing on tourist guide interaction. The first issue is that of the use of humour by guides (Pearce, 2009). Humour can be scripted but it is often most appreciated when it is a spontaneous part of the live interaction between individuals. Pearce reports that humour in the tour guide and attraction situations he studied was useful for achieving concentration, comfort and security about the setting and interpersonal connections. The logic of the argument to be developed here is that electronic guiding systems are going to have difficulty building in spontaneous humour to their information presentation. It is therefore valuable to explore further how humour may work in the tourist guide interpersonal domain. The Wang et al. (2000) study highlighted the negative side of some tourist guide encounters, specifically the devious practices to extract extra money from the tourists. These practices may be cast under the rubric of tourist scams where a scam is an intentional and essentially fraudulent practice intended to gain financial advantage from a tourist (Pearce, 2011b).

The preceding literature review suggest that the exploration of the interpersonal components of tourist guide interaction are worthy of close attention. The approach taken in this study is to examine a select number of diverse guided tours drawn from different countries but richly familiar to the researchers through direct experience and participant observer roles. The touchstone for selecting these tours is an explicit focus on well remembered and recorded instances of the use of humour and or deceptive practices since the previous literature provides important prompts suggesting that these critical components may define much of the remembered qualities of tours. The defining aim of the study can therefore be encapsulated in the following aim. This study, through the close inspection of well remembered guided tours, seeks to add insights into tourist guide relationships as a contemporary topic of tourism research concern

METHODOLOGY

In common with other insight seeking approaches to tourism study, such as focus groups and key informant interviews, the number of instances or elements of the phenomenon under study need to be carefully selected. Many such insight seeking studies suggest that 10-15 instances of a topic are needed to formulate ideas (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Gomm, 2004). The strategy used in this study was to use the combined experiences of the two researchers to review their recollections of over 60 guided tours. One of the researchers manages an international tour company and has much international experience and detailed records describing tours while the other researcher has benefitted from 25 years of international travel including detailed note taking of tourist experiences. From these 60 elements a core of 10 tours were selected because of the richness of documentation and the balance of instances required for the insight generating approach. Notes collected from these tours in personal diaries or where appropriate as recorded in previous research (Pearce, 2008) were redeployed to give a rich content base for the results and discussion section. The selected tours are highlighted in Table 1.Together they represent a stratified selection in terms of country of origin, duration, tour type and the defining remembered elements of the existence of a scam or notable humour.

Table 1
Structured selection of tourist guide situations

Country/region and location	Duration	Theme	Defining element	Comment
USA: Los Angeles	4 hours	City tour	Scam	Guide attempted to sell own music
Thailand: Bangkok	4 hours	City tour	Scam	Tour spent long time at unrequested shops
United Kingdom: London	2 hours	City tour	Humour	Humour embedded in information
Singapore: Singapore river	1 hour	City tour	Humour	Humour embedded in information
New Zealand: Waitomo Caves	5 hours	Adventure tour	Humour	Humour directed at nationalities
Australia; Tully river	5 hours	Adventure tour	Humour	Humour directed at nationalities
Taiwan: Taipei	1 hour	Attraction	Scam	Time spent not requested
China; Shanghai	3 hours	Attraction	Scam	False promises of product
Europe: Spain/Portugal	10 days	Extended travel	Scam	False promises of product; guide dishonest
South Africa Kruger National Park	4 days	Extended travel	Humour	Humour generated by guide and other tourists

The strategy used to explore the commonalities among these themed (humour/scam based) guided tours followed the repertory grid procedure initiated by Kelly (1955) and developed in the work of Bannister and Maier (1968). The approach consists of systematically investigating three elements and asking what do two of them have in common which is different to the third? For each of the five tour types 15 such triads or comparisons were reviewed. The appeal of this approach is that it offers a structured way to identify commonalities through a stimulating a range of possible descriptions rather than relying on immediate and obvious dimensions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The comparative focus on humour and scams in the embodied instances itemised in Table 1 produced two sets of primary constructs informing the recollection of these guided tours. The results are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2
Constructs used to differentiate the humour and scam themed guided tours based on 15 triads for comparisons of each tour type

Humour themed tours	Scam themed tours
Primary constructs	Primary constructs
Specific humour: (7 instances)	Serious scams: (8 instances)
Key stories, targets towards funny people, particular jokes, nationality comments, jokes against the guide himself	Loss of money, loss of major time, threat to safety and self esteem; commissions

Generic humour (6 instances)	Relationship breakdown: (4 instances)
Overall good times, sustained feeling of enjoyment, lot of amusing comments	Trust lost; guide disliked; anger and frustration; desire to abandon tour
Secondary constructs	Secondary constructs
Sexual humour; low level humour for children (2 instances)	Minor scams: Personal greed, attempts to get a bigger tip, guide self interest (3 items)

For the humour oriented tours there were clear and multiple instances of differentiating among the cases by recalling specific instances of humour. Jokes tailored to the setting and participants and humorous stories were identified as examples of specific defining characteristics. Importantly, the researchers identified reflexively that some of these stories and humorous episodes were incorporated in their own accounts of their travels. Specific humour is pivotal in having something to say about a guided tour (cf. Moscardo, 2010). A second and somewhat different construct defining the use of humour was also identified. This perspective can be classified as generic humour recall. On these occasions the researchers were able to remember the affective tone of the tours rather than specific jokes tales and accounts. This form of construct identification was most apparent in those tours where the humour was episodic such as the city tours where it accompanied rather than dominated the guide's presentations. Taken together these specific humour and generic humour constructs provided an overview of the repertory grid based differentiations. Other minor differences were noted in terms of whether the humour was directed at the guides or other people and whether the humour was sexual or more family-oriented. The results suggest that humour in guided tours can be seen in an analogous way to the broad overarching constructs which characterise how others are seen and described. In personality theory, for example, the dimension warm-cold acts as a super ordinate construct which drives other interpretations of people (cf. Gardner et al. 1981). A parallel claim can be made for the role of humour in the guided tours with humorous/amusing/entertaining constituting an organising and pivotal recall dimension and dull/boring representing a contrasting and less positive position.

For the theme of scams the major construct which described the tour situations studied was seriousness. This dimension reflected a view that serious scams fractured the trust which is implicit in the teacher-student, mentor-disciple, aware- unaware roles played by guides and those who rely on them. In every comparison of the scam situations it was recalled that as soon as the problem or difficulty was identified the tourist guide relationship was irreparably damaged. These dimensions of seriousness and relationship breakdown are supported by the literature which identified the importance of trust and compassion in guide behaviour (Wang et al., 2000).

CONCLUSION

The two themes of humour and scams represent opposing forces in the consideration of person to person guided tours compared to electronic guides. Humour as suggested by this study of recall can be a positive specific or generic super ordinate construct; one which is probably difficult to replicate in electronic versions of information delivery. Scams by way of contrast may be reduced by electronic guide information since the user is in control and less likely to be subject to fraudulent practices. For the development of contemporary research on guided tours additional researcher engagement with these themes of humour and scams offers opportunities, particularly in exploring these ideas with more tour types and tourist profiles.

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