

Researching tour guides and guiding: Mapping the past, charting the future

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Abstract

This paper systematically reviews peer-reviewed tour guiding literature from 1980-2016. An analysis of 140 empirical studies on tour guides and tour guiding during this period provides a basis for identifying patterns, trends and gaps in relation to methods and theory engagement. The analysis reveals little use of mixed methods and innovative data collection and analysis methods in tour guiding research. Engagement with theory is evident, particularly since 2010, however, while theory is being used by tour guiding scholars to inform their research, the testing, refinement and building of new theory is limited.

Key words:

tour guiding, methods, theory, review, tour guide

Introduction

This paper systematically reviews how tour guiding and tour guide research makes use of research methods and how it engages with theoretical activity including trends over time. A review of the theoretical engagement of empirical tour guiding research has not been undertaken even though tour guides are recognised by many tourism researchers as key to the tourist experience and as key tourism stakeholders (Weiler & Black, 2015).

To date there are now nearly 200 published articles in peer-reviewed English-language journals that focus specifically on tour guides and tour guiding, thus it is now appropriate to explore the extent to which this field of investigation is theoretically-driven.

In this study we adopt Bramwell's (2015) definition of theoretical activity, i.e. "any level of explanatory approach that works with relatively abstract notions or ideas to explain the world" (p. 205) and include typologies, conceptual frameworks, conceptualising processes and relationships, looking at issues or concepts in new ways, and developing and evaluating concepts. A number of tourism researchers (Crouch & Perdue, 2015, Donohoe & Bricker, 2015) and tour guiding researchers (Weiler & Black, 2015) have suggested this field needs to embrace and use theory to a greater extent.

The aim of the paper is to systematically review the use of methods and theory in empirically-based tour guiding literature. Following an overview of the paper's methods, the findings are presented with respect to use of methods and theoretical engagement, followed by a discussion of the findings.

Methods

This study reviews empirical research on tour guides and guiding from 1980 until 2016 published in English peer reviewed journals. A subset of the 196 publications that appeared in peer-reviewed journals was created using two criteria: papers *published in tourism-focussed and tourism-related peer-reviewed journals* and papers that *include empirical research*. A tourism-focused journal is one with the word of tourism, travel, destination or vacation in the title, for example, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*. A tourism-related journal has hospitality, leisure, recreation, park, interpretation, sport, museum, or environmental creation in the title, for example, *Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing*. This subset of 140 empirical studies provided the dataset for this systematic review of research on tour guides and guiding. Each paper was coded with regard to its use of methods and theory (see Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of system for coding empirically-based tour guiding research

Theme	Variable(s)	Label
Methods	Methodological Approach	Quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods
	Data collection	Specific data collection methods such as interview, survey, or focus groups
Theory	Engagement with theory	Whether 1) theory was used to inform/design, 2) theory was tested, 3) theory was refined/built
	Theory name	Name of the theory used

¹*this table is for illustrative purposes and does not present the full range and detail of variable labelling and coding*

Assessing the methods used in the empirical research on tour guides and guiding involved systematically reviewing each paper. If all sources of the data from a study were quantitative (e.g. numerical survey data), the study was categorised as quantitative. If all sources of the data from a study were qualitative (e.g. open-ended responses from interviews; unstructured observational data), it was categorised as qualitative. If a study used a mix of quantitative and qualitative data, it was categorized as mixed. Actual data collection methods were also recorded. Each of the 140 papers was also reviewed and assessed as to whether one or more theories were used and named in the paper, then coded with respect to one or more types of theory engagement: (i) theory was used to inform the study, (ii) theory was tested, and/or (iii) the paper refined and/or built new theory.

There are some study limitations. Conceptual papers (e.g. Cohen, 1985) were not included in the analysis. Twenty-six papers in non-tourism journals were not included as they were viewed as being disconnected to the main tour guiding discourse. Papers published in edited books and conference proceedings were not included. Finally, this review is limited to papers published in English-language journals.

Results

The results with respect to *methods used by empirical researchers* provide an analysis of patterns and trends in the use of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods by tour guiding researchers. The *theoretical results* provide an insight into tour guiding researchers' engagement with theory.

Results: Use of methods by researchers undertaking empirically-based research on tour guides and guiding

The number of publications on tour guides and tour guiding has increased over time with a steady growth since 1990 and peaking between 1991 and 1995, however this growth is from a small base (Figure 1).

Analysis of methodological approaches used by tour guiding researchers was undertaken, with studies coded as outlined in the methods section of this paper. Analysis revealed that 44% of empirically-based tour guiding studies were qualitative, 39% were quantitative, and 17% used mixed methods. There were no apparent trends over time in the use of methods (Table 2).

In quantitative studies, a questionnaire-based survey (typically conducted on-site, on-tour or post-trip) was found to be the most frequently used method for data collection, while in qualitative studies, interviews were found to be used most often. Various methods have been used in mixed-method studies, with surveys and interviews used most often. Methods used less often in tour guiding research include ethnographic methods, focus groups, Delphi and other group consensus techniques, and on-line surveys.

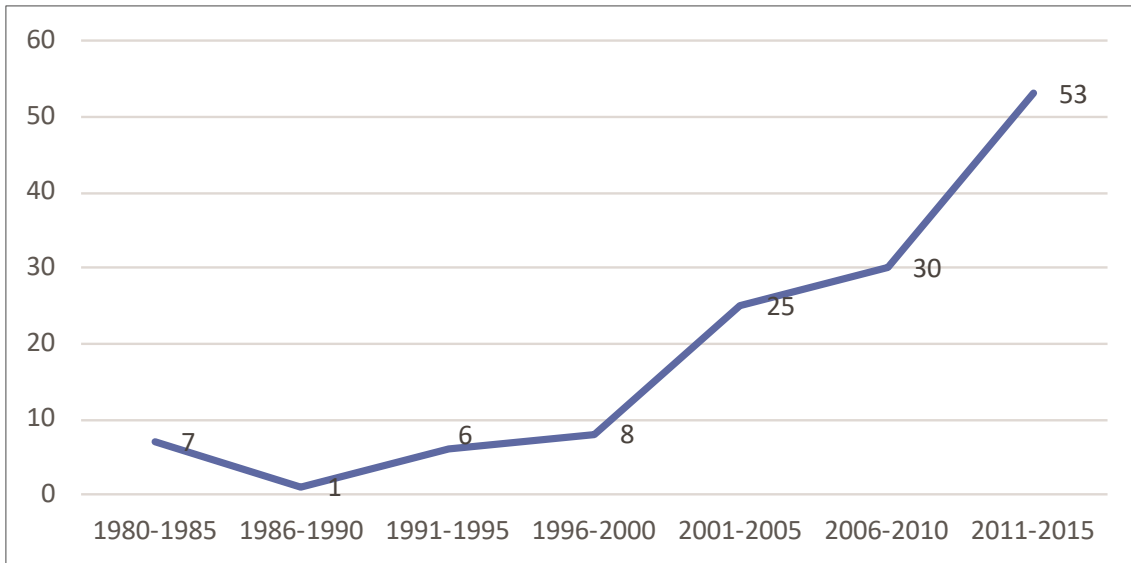


Figure 1. Number of empirically-based tour guiding studies over time, 1980-2016. Note: January to June 2016* is not shown in the figure because it is a 6-month period as compared to the 5-year block.

Table 2: Methodology of empirically-based tour guiding research, 1980-2016

Methodology	Methodology			Total
	Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed Methods	
	55	61	24	140
	39%	44%	17%	100%

Results: Engagement with theory in empirically-based research on tour guides and guiding

An analysis of the 140 empirically-based tour guiding studies found that 62% (87) engaged with theory, while 38% (53) either made no mention of theory or did not engage with theory in any apparent way. *The majority (almost two-thirds) of empirical research on tour guides and guiding published in tourism journals engaged with theory.* Among the 87 studies, 74 were informed by theory; 33 studies tested theory and 29 studies refined theory. Individual studies could be coded in more than one of these categories so the total exceeds 87.

An analysis of trends over time regarding engagement with theory in these studies found that there was less engagement with use of theory prior to 2010, and all three uses of theory have increased post-2010. *The trend is for empirically-based research on tour guiding research published in tourism journals to be increasingly engaged with theory.*

Finally, cross-tabulation analysis of engagement with theory and methodology in tour guiding research revealed there were no significant differences in the empirical studies

in relation to overall levels of engagement in theory and the use of different methodological approaches, though more quantitative studies engage in theory-testing (51%), while more qualitative studies engage in theory-building (16%).

Discussion: Use of Methods and Engagement with Theory

The use of methods

The finding that more quantitative studies engaged with theory-testing (51%) and that a third of qualitative studies engaged with theory-building probably reflects the general trend in research that quantitative studies often test theory and qualitative studies frequently build theory. If the trend toward more theoretical engagement continues, we can expect to see more of both types of research, and hopefully greater use of mixed methods, which are arguably underutilised in the field of tour guiding research.

Theory engagement

The analysis found two-thirds of the 140 empirically-based studies published between 1980 and 2016 engaged in theory. This was surprising, as to date the literature has generally been considered largely atheoretical (Black & Weiler, 2015; Weiler & Kim, 2011). With most empirically-based studies that engaged with theory being published since 2010, it appears that theory-driven research in tour guiding is a recent trend.

The coding process and analysis revealed some authors simultaneously referred to a theory and a concept, or a theory and a model, suggesting these terms are sometimes used interchangeably and in an ad hoc manner. In other instances, some authors failed to include bibliographic references for the cited theories rather than citing the original source. Tour guiding scholars and others would benefit from clear identification of theories and citing of the primary source of the theory.

Most (74) of the studies were informed by theory (see for example Fine & Speer, 1985; Beedie, 2003; Ryan & Dewar, 1995; Io & Hallo, 2011; Salazar, 2005; 2006). In thirty-three studies, the researcher(s) tested theory (see Min, 2012; 2014). The findings indicate that theory testing, which may or may not result in theory building or refinement should be encouraged among tour guiding scholars to advance a more sophisticated body of knowledge.

Conclusion

The aim of the paper was to critically review the use of methods and theoretical engagement in empirically-based tour guiding literature from 1980-2016. The fact that most studies used qualitative and quantitative methodologies and few used mixed methods suggests future researchers could utilise the latter approach and explore the use of a wider range of data collection methods.

An important result from the study was an increase in studies that have engaged with theory since 2010. This is significant, as until recently tour guiding research has been criticised as being generally atheoretical. These criticisms were certainly valid for many studies prior to 2010. The study findings have identified some of the limitations as well as opportunities for future research on tour guiding and tour guides that will ensure this trend in engagement in theory continues and broadens to all areas of tour guiding research. Our research suggests that future studies need to continue to engage with theory and that researchers need to be more explicit in outlining their engagement with theory. Further engagement with theory and use of a range of methodological approaches will strengthen this important area of tourism study.

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