

2023

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Recommended Citation

March, Birgitta E. Mrs; Williams, Kim Dr; and Winter, Caroline Dr (2023) "Giving Voice to Australia's Professional Tour Guides: Perspectives of their Social Identity," *International Journal of Tour Guiding Research*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 1.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.21427/YHSZ-WW27>

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijtgr/vol4/iss1/1>

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Giving Voice to Australia's Professional Tour Guides: Perspectives of their Social Identity

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Professional tour guides (PTGs) play an instrumental role in Australia's tourism industry, however, there is little understanding of their perspectives regarding their challenges, expectations, belonging, and recognition. Anecdotal evidence suggests that they lack a voice and feel neglected within the tourism industry. This study adopted an interpretivist approach to capture the voices and perspectives of 19 Australian PTGs, through focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews. This qualitative study was seen through the lens of Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (1974). A key finding is that the tour guides' strong sense of belonging is the motivating factor to address the lack of recognition, unmet expectations, as well as numerous challenges framed around Australia's unregulated tour guiding industry. Belonging is the attribute that motivates them to engage and strive for better recognition.

Key Words: Australian tour guides, challenges, expectations, social identity, staff shortage, safety issues

Introduction

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Australia's professional tour guides (PTGs) lack an industry voice and feel neglected within the larger tourism sector. Mak, Wong and Chang (2011) described tour guides as the Cinderellas of the tourism industry: very useful but often neglected. Limited attention is paid to their

voice, experiences, opinions and views that are critical in understanding the tour guiding industry and the life of a tour guide, both professionally and personally (Weiler & Black, 2015:176).

Nevertheless, an increasing number of overseas studies have offered tour guides' perspectives of their work-related challenges (Jahwari & Sirakaya-Turk, 2016; Tsaur & Teng, 2017) and their own expectations (Albayrak, 2018; Hwang & Lee,

2019). However, none of these studies have made the connection to any aspects of tour guides' social identity. PTGs, the participants in this study, are members of a professional tour guide association who work alongside 'guides' with potentially vastly differing professional standards.

The research question in this study was: 'How do PTGs see their social identity within a professional tour guiding association and the larger tourism industry in Australia?' Subsequently, this study's objectives were to explore and understand PTGs' cognitive social identity based on the challenges they experience and expectations they hold, and also to assess PTGs' ensuing emotional identity related to their sense of belonging and recognition. The study adopted an interpretivist approach to capture the voices and perspectives of 19 Australian PTGs, through focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews.

Context

According to Tourism Australia, Australia welcomed 9.25 million tourists for the year ending May 2019 (Tourism Research Australia, 2021), representing 2.5% of Australia’s GDP. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2021) states that pre-COVID-19, tourism typically supports one in 11 of all jobs in the world. According to Job Outlook, an initiative of the Australian Federal Government, Australia had 4,700 tour guides in 2016, of whom 47% worked part-time and were, on average, 44 years of age (National Skills Commission, n.d.). More recent statistics cannot be found, which may be linked back to two things: the PTGs’ anecdotal evidence that they feel neglected within the larger tourism industry as well as the gap in the literature on Australia’s PTGs.

Australia’s tour guiding industry can be split into three distinct classifications: government-regulated, unregulated, and company-regulated categories (refer to Table 1). Classification 1 comprises government-regulated tour guides typified by funding, clear rules, and compliance regulations relating to

mountain and adventure tour guides offering high-risk kayaking, canyoning, or mountain climbing tours. This classification also covers tour guides working in Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Kakadu National Parks, Approved Destination Status Scheme (ADS) tour guides with Chinese government-approved tours, eco-guides as well as tour guides working in Queensland.

In clear contrast, Classification 2 is a government-unregulated classification that includes ‘guides’ with limited or no training, lack of due diligence standards, professional memberships and public liability, as well as online tour guiding platforms that are the employers of these ‘guides’. PTGs, the participants in this study, belong to this category and are thus highlighted in the table. These PTGs share one thing in common: they are members of the Professional Tour Guide Association of Australia (PTGAA, 2021). This association had 270 members at the time of the study, who were mainly located in Victoria (72%), followed by New South Wales (13.7%) and Queensland (8.8%). There were a few members in other States and Territories, though none in the Australian Capital Territory, and one

Table 1: Overview of the Regulatory Base of the Australian Tour Guiding Industry with Participants Highlighted

Classification 1 Government-regulated	Classification 2 Unregulated	Classification 3 Company-regulated
Specialist licenses for mountain and adventure tour guides (International Standards Organisation, 2014)	Professional membership of a professional tour guiding association – includes their association’s Code of Conduct (TGA, n.d.)	Venue-specific site guides
Park licences for tour guides working in Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Kakadu National Parks (Parks Australia, 2013)	‘Guides’ with limited or no training, lack of public liability, professional due diligence standards or professional memberships	Volunteer guides
Licences for Chinese tour guides falling under the Approved Destination Status (ADS) Scheme (Austrade, n.d.) Professional Certification: EcoTourism Australia, operated by Savannah Guides (Savannah Guides, n.d.) Queensland Code of Conduct / Tourism Services Act 2003 (Tourism Services Act 2003, 2003)	Online tour guiding platforms	ITO in-house trained guides

(Adapted from Weiler & Black, 2015)

international accredited member. The PTGAA was renamed Tour Guides Australia (TGA, n.d.) in mid-2021 and now includes Guiding Organisations Australia (GOA, 2019). Other professional tour guiding membership groups include the Institute of Australian Tour Guides in New South Wales (IATG, n.d.) and the South Australian Tourist Guides Association (SATGA, n.d.)

Classification 3 relates to a company-regulated tour guiding category that comprises tour guides trained within their own organisations, such as Inbound Tour Operators (ITOs), volunteer guides in museums and churches, and venue-specific site guides.

It is within this rather confusing, unregulated context that this study was undertaken. To date, literature by a few foundational writers has mainly focused on Classifications 1 and 3 and focused on eco-tourism (Boswell, 2014; Weiler, 2016; Weiler & Black, 2015), leaving a gap for the present study's area of focus.

Tour Guides' Roles and Attributes

More recently, studies have linked tour guides' roles to tour management, experience management and destination / resource management (Weiler & Black, 2015). Tour guides also hold the roles of storytellers (Hansen & Mossberg, 2017; Mathisen, 2017), cultural ambassadors and interpreters (Látková, Jordan, Vogt, Everette & Aquino, 2018; Zerva & Nijkamp, 2016) and they play a crucial role in achieving tourism satisfaction (El-Sharkawy, 2015). Sezgin and Duz (2018) used their GuidePerf scale to suggest that a tour guide's most important attributes are his / her personality, efficiency, presentability and proficiency. Brito (2020) focused on the attributes required by quality guides which includes adaptability to the clients' increasing demands by acting as mediators.

Identity Theories including Tajfel's Social Identity Theory

Many social psychologists and scholars have offered identity definitions; however, most are similar in their scope:

identities allow us to understand ourselves, not just as individuals but as part of the larger collective (Jetten, Haslam, Haslam, Dingle & Jones, 2014:115).

Falk (2016) suggests that each person possesses many identities, which are shaped by their collective personal experiences.

In contrast, Tajfel described social identity as

that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his (sic) knowledge of membership of a social group together with the emotional significance attached to that membership (1974:69).

This definition recognises the interconnection between the cognitive and emotional aspects of one's social identity, which is the reason this theory was selected for this study.

A review demonstrates a general gap in social identity studies within tourism literature, with only a handful referring to 'identity' generally without substantiating the theoretical constructs of social identity. The literature on each component of the Social Identity Theory, which Tajfel labelled 'a conceptual three-legged tripod' (Turner & Reynolds, 2010:16) is reviewed below.

Social Categorisation

The first component, *social categorisation*, is a means for individuals to make sense of the world around them (Turner, 1981). Social categorisation can be linked to attitudes, behaviours (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and organisational benefits (Haslam, Van Knippenberg, Platow & Ellemers, 2014). It is also connected to emotions: Tajfel noted that

'in-group' members could either accept a situation for what it is and remain a member or leave the group (1974:70).

Social categorisation suggests that members define themselves based on a collective sharing of attributes (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). In this study, attributes refer to the collective challenges and expectations.

Over the past decade, authors have increasingly documented the perspectives of tour guides related to their overall challenges (Bogdan & Łasiński, 2019), remuneration issues (Ababneh, 2017) as well as the lack of monitoring of professional standards (Zammit, 2020). However, these studies do not offer any insight into the nature of challenges experienced within the Australian context, nor do they describe how challenges are at the core of how PTGs categorise themselves. Farrugia, Miguel and Griffin (2020) suggest that studies overfocus on the challenges of the visitors rather than the tour guides.

According to the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (WFTGA, 2012), a PTG is expected to provide professional services to tour visitors, however, what do PTGs expect of their association and the visitors?

This study focuses on the expectations of PTGs themselves, conscious of the fact that there has only been a small number of (overseas) studies focusing on tour guides' expectations (Aloudat, 2017). However, these studies were set in different overseas contexts and highlight the lack of focus on tour guides' expectations at the core of their cognitive social identity.

Social Comparison

The second component, *social comparison*, suggests that people construct their identities based on who they are and with whom they are compared. Social comparison can be established after individuals form a group in which they can share the same social category perceptions and emotional involvement (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to Hornsey,

groups are not islands, they become psychologically real only when defined in comparison to other groups (2008:207).

Tajfel split groups into two categories: those to which members belong or 'in-group', and those to which they do not belong, or 'out-group(s)' (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy & Flament, 1971; Tajfel, 1974). This is known as the 'us' versus 'them' concept. Social comparison is linked to social standing (Ellemers,

2020). A few studies in the wider tourism context have focused on social comparison (Chen, Hsu & Li, 2018), however, a literature search identified the paucity of tour guide research on this second component.

Social Identification

The third component, *social identification*, proposes that a person behaves in a certain way within the membership group, and those individuals are personally more motivated to respond to group challenges if they can identify with the group strongly (Tajfel, 1974). Social identification suggests that there is a link between group membership and the emotional aspect of belonging (Jetten *et al.*, 2014), as well as purpose and meaning (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Belonging can be linked to pride and place in society (Tajfel *et al.*, 1971) as well as social support or feelings of efficacy (Brown, 2020). Social identification is the only component of Tajfel's 'tripod' that has gained a place in tourism studies (Liu & Cheng, 2016; Zhang, Pearce & Chen, 2019), but few studies have focused the concept in relation to tour guides (Irigüler & Güler, 2016).

Method

The inductive approach used in this study facilitated understanding and offered meaning to the PTGs' cognitive and emotional social identity. An inductive approach allows for alternative explanations of what is going on, because of its less rigid methodology compared to a deductive approach (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). The study design, seen through the lens of Tajfel's Social Identity theory, was underpinned by an interpretive philosophy to 'interpret' the reality and subjective meanings, thus allowing the researcher to be more personally engaged with the participants (Veal, 2017).

Research Methodology

A qualitative approach provides the participants with the opportunity to 'construct' their own realities and allows the researcher to capture individuals' thoughts and feelings (Muratovski,

Table 2: Verb Cards Used During the Focus Group Discussions

Drive	Lead Tours	Display a Positive Attitude
Work Flexibly	Instruct / Communicate / Present	Think on Your Feet
Complete First Aid	Provide Customer Service	Sort Out Problems
Coordinate Tasks	Work Outdoors	Have Patience
Research	Learn Local Facts	Build Relationships
Build Trust	Write Reports	Be Available at All Times

2016) which can then be analysed in greater detail (Flick, 2017). To understand the PTGs' social identity, it was important to comprehend why they see their challenges and expectations the way they do, but also the way this makes them feel in terms of belonging and recognition. In Stage 1, two focus groups were set up to address low-risk questions related to the PTGs' challenges and expectations. In contrast, the individual interviews in Stage 2 were set up for questions that might have potentially evoked sensitive feelings and emotions linked to sense of belonging and recognition.

Participants

An advertisement labelled 'I want to hear your voice' was emailed to the PTGAA with a request to distribute it among its 270 members. Its membership is slightly skewed with 56% females and 44% males, 70% of which are full members.

Only 21 members responded and these were asked to complete and return basic Profile Survey questions. An analysis of this Profile Survey shows that the majority of respondents were above 55 years of age, female and monolingual. More than half of the respondents usually attended at least 4-5 professional workshops a year. 50% had memberships for four to six years, whilst 25% had been members over 15 years.

There was just one criterion for selecting participants: they had to have a minimum of two years' membership of a professional tour guiding association to ensure that they had enough experience to answer all questions, especially in relation to their sense of belonging to their 'in-group'. As two respondents

had memberships of less than two years, they were not selected to participate.

The 19 participants were then randomly selected to join either the focus groups or individual interviews. In this random selection process, the participants had equal chance of being chosen for the focus groups or the individual interviews.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Preparation

The first stage in the data collection process involved two focus group discussions, during which 10 participants were asked semi-structured questions pertaining to their challenges and expectations. The introductory question was an icebreaker exercise created in the form of verb cards that were designed specifically for this study (refer to Table 2). Each verb card had one verb relating to the advertisement for a particular tour guiding role. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest the use of visual materials as one of the tools for data collection. The verbs were put in numerical order based on the frequency of appearing in job advertisements. Such visual tools can be recommended in future tourism research as the verb cards triggered the participants to stay on topic while offering their perspectives on their challenges and expectations.

The second stage in data collection involved nine semi-structured interviews, during which a different cohort of PTGs was asked to discuss their emotional social identity (belonging to the membership association and sense of recognition by others).

The data analysis was approached systematically and included a four-step process as proposed by

Saunders *et al.* (2016). This included coding for existence as stated in the relevant context (Bryman, 2016) before rereading and condensing paragraphs into smaller sentences.

Each smaller sentence was aligned with the objectives of this study, based on keywords that became the themes. This process resulted in ten themes for challenges, six for expectations, six for belonging, and seven for recognition. During each session, it became evident that the participants always described their challenges, expectations, sense of belonging, and recognition in relation to others. To reflect this social comparison, the themes were split into columns because the participants referred to their challenges in relation to the Inbound Tour Operators (ITOs) they worked for, the suppliers, their clients, the public, and the tourism industry bodies. The final step was to place each theme with its full sentence in separate Excel sheets, and the discussions were collated around these themes.

Results

Challenges

According to Tajfel (1974), members identify with a group when they acknowledge they share common attributes. The PTGs share the same challenges and this influences how they see themselves, how they interact with each other, but also what binds them together as a cohesive membership group. The participants acknowledged that Australia's unregulated tour guiding industry was the overall challenge (refer to Figure 1). To them, all the other challenges are seen through the lens of Australia's unregulated tour guiding industry and all their interlinked challenges would be vastly different without this core challenge.

The PTGs are challenged by competition that affects them directly and indirectly. Direct competition comes from three different sources: untrained 'bored housewives' or 'someone's best friend' who felt that they knew their local area, and from individuals who wished to be 'guides'. The term 'guides' was used in a pejorative tone by the respondents:

These 'guides' are people off the street who get hire cars to do an Uber version of touring. But what really worried me is that they have no insurance, nothing. And the online platforms have a \$1000 liability limit – they are doing things that are really risky and ultimately that is going to bring all of us (PTGs) down.

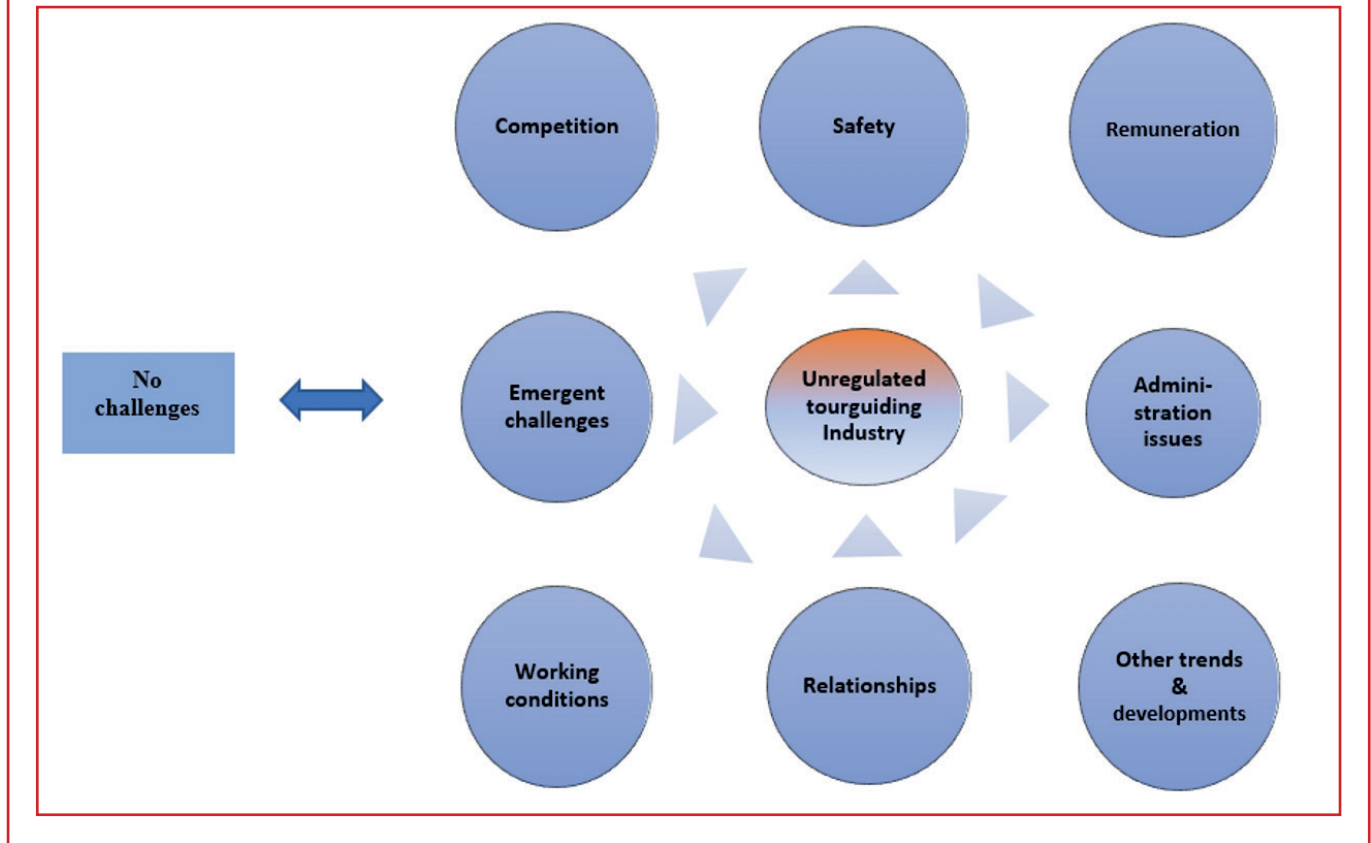
PTGs did not view members of other tour guiding associations or specialist and in-house trained tour guides working in Classifications 1 or 3 as direct competition. This finding partly contradicts Billig and Tajfel (1973:27), who stated that 'groups discriminate against those assigned to another category'. At the same time, this finding affirms Tajfel's view that members prefer *positive distinctiveness* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Brown, 2020). The research participants sought to positively distinguish themselves from 'guides' by implementing the group's strict due diligence processes, including minimum qualifications and / or industry experience, taking out public liability insurance, maintaining First Aid certification, abiding by the group's Code of Conduct, and attending regular professional training sessions.

The PTGs' indirect competition is linked to Australia's high cost of living, which drove respondents' concerns about Australia's reputation as a holiday destination:

We are not a cheap country to visit, and when you come here and get a mediocre experience with an 18-year-old 'guide' who has never been on a sightseeing tour before, you are not getting what you paid for. You will go home and tell your friends that you did not learn much. People choose somewhere cheaper to go where tour guides are registered and have qualifications or even a university degree before they are allowed to guide.

Safety was a challenge that drew more ardent views. Examples were given of PTGs with high public liability insurance (of up to \$1 million or more) having to work alongside online guiding platforms or 'guides' with no or limited public liability insurance (of up to \$1,000 per visitor). The

Figure 1: Professional Tour Guides' Challenges
Through the lens of Australia's Unregulated Tour Guiding Industry



participants suggested that this safety challenge was not addressed by ITOs or tourism industry legislators, which made them concerned for the visitors' safety. The participants were further concerned about the long-term implications on their reputation of each well-publicised accident with a 'guide' (Coroners Court, 2015; Percy, 2018; Worrall & Cowie, 2017). The PTGs are frustrated because the public does not know who caused such accidents nor the difference between a 'guide' and a PTG. They acknowledge that after each accident, they were socially categorised by others, although they wanted it to be clear that none of the accidents had involved PTGs. There were also other safety concerns for casually employed 'guides' working without public liability insurance because they assume that ITOs cover them in case they themselves or their clients have an accident when, in reality, only contractors and employees are covered by ITOs.

Furthermore, the PTGs are challenged by low remuneration, non-payment of superannuation and overtime, commission-taking by some bus drivers,

and the lack of recognition of seniority in comparison to new 'guides' who are paid equal rates. Similar remuneration challenges have been described in overseas tour guiding studies by Melubo and Buzinde (2016).

The participants also described an array of administrative challenges such as working with poorly planned itineraries and expressed their impacts on the visitors' experience:

These itineraries are set and totally unmanageable. The tourists are often too tired and not happy with everything crammed in. Then the guests say 'That is not feasible, we don't want that!'

Participants described how writing tour reports is challenging because their practical recommendations are not used by ITOs to adjust itineraries. The participants asked why ITOs or overseas agents do not conduct more familiarisation tours with experienced tour guides, as they felt that doing so would eliminate recurring itinerary issues.

The participants were also challenged by a number of new trends including the growth in demand for driver-guides. The more experienced participants further described a decline in the bus drivers' knowledge by offering historical perspectives:

You used to ring the office (ITO), and there was someone who worked as a driver or tour guide. We now have lots of people in the administration who have never been out in the field. This is very sad because sometimes, they have no clue what they're talking about.

Challenges were also framed around the relationships with 'out-groups'. The participants described emotionally draining relationships, especially those involving their clients on tour. Examples were given of having to deal with the partner of a visitor who suddenly passed away on a tour, a knife-wielding visitor who had to be picked up by police, and an ill patient who was stranded overnight on the coach because of major flooding in the outback. Such events evoke emotions including stress and trauma for PTGs, as confirmed in Houge-McKenzie and Raymond (2020).

In terms of working conditions, the PTGs were quite pragmatic about their casual employment status, the isolating nature of their job, their inherent responsibility, the expectation of '24-7' availability, and long working days that include ambiguity about overtime. They accepted these challenges on account of their passion for their profession.

Chronic staff shortages, especially for bi-lingual and multi-lingual members, were another major challenge. Every participant agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated staff shortages and created multiple safety concerns for themselves, their clients or their business. However, the biggest concern for every participant was the loss of short- and long-term income, and staff attrition, especially among the older PTGs. Tajfel *et al.* (1971) linked group membership and pride together. However, the current study demonstrates that it is not the lack of pride in their profession that made some PTGs leave the membership group, but rather

the prolonged impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the challenges discussed above. A few participants were challenged by changes in booking and marketing technologies, whereas others took the opportunity to run virtual tours during the pandemic.

The last circle in Figure 1 indicates emerging challenges introduced by two of the participants. Their statements were unexpected because they were not deemed standard professional behaviour that is expected of the members of this group, for instance, failing to notify an ITO when clients left the tour, not writing tour reports or adding stops to a set itinerary. This behaviour reflects Tajfel and Turner's notion (1979) that group threats can occur when the group's perceived competence and value are diminished by certain actions. These statements were not included to indicate reckless behaviour but to suggest that non-adherence to the in-group's professional standards may have lasting impacts on how the ITOs recognise all PTGs.

Figure 1 suggests that a few participants did not experience any challenges as they considered tour guiding a post-career activity rather than their primary career or because they were driver guides or business owners who worked in slightly different contexts. The difference in perception of challenges and the ensuing motivation to act could be linked to the salient social identity of PTGs. A salient social identity is derived from the groups they belong to and the social context (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019).

Expectations

When it comes to expectations, first, PTGs expect uniformity in safety due diligence processes across all personnel in the tour guiding industry. They felt that rogue operators and individuals acting as tour guides endanger the safety of unwitting visitors which demonstrates that their expectations were very customer centric.

Second, the participants expected staff attrition to be reversed by tourism industry bodies. The participants further expected ITOs to provide a safe working environment, including a safe vehicle and / or a

licensed driver. There were also several expectations around itineraries and remuneration: they anticipated receiving realistic, timely, and feasible itineraries that included their practical recommendations.

Furthermore, they expected the ITOs to remunerate PTGs according to seniority and actual hours worked, provide immediate reimbursements for out-of-pocket expenses, and promptly pay their invoices. They wanted to be paid superannuation in accordance with Australian law but lamented that tour guiding ‘agencies’ or ITOs did not always comply. There were signs of different attitudes towards remuneration. Some participants expected the association to be more politically assertive so they could demand more rights, negotiate better conditions, and demand recognition of PTGs. Others were keener to applaud the voluntary work done by the President and Committee because they acknowledged that the lack of government support and funding hindered their achievement of greater recognition for their profession.

They further shared their internal expectations pertaining to the membership group’s Code of Conduct and, to a lesser extent, their professional image. These expectations were customer-focused and based on setting high professional standards:

I almost double-check every fact from two different directions before I include them in my talking points. I set high expectations and mostly achieve or exceed them. If not, I try and learn what I can do differently or better next time.

In general, the PTGs were self-reflective about their situation. For example, participants pondered whether the membership association explains their professional standards clearly enough to ITOs and tourism bodies. Only one participant stated, with astonishment and admiration, that these professional membership standards are self-imposed and accepted automatically by the group members.

Whereas challenges and expectations are linked to the professional tour guides’ cognitive social identity, the section below summarises their emotional social identity framed around belonging and recognition.

Belonging

Belonging is linked to the second component of Tajfel’s tripod, namely *social identification*, because

every individual strives to achieve a satisfactory concept or image of him (sic) or herself (Tajfel, 1974:68).

In this study, the importance of belonging to the ‘in-group’ was based on several collective values, including collegiality, respect for each other, sharing of knowledge, high professional standards, strong client focus, love for storytelling, passion for their profession, city, and country, as well as membership advantages.

I belong and identify with the people in that group who genuinely want to give good, accurate information on the tours. That sort of drives your own need or want to improve your offering, your accuracy of what you are saying.

What became evident is that their sense of belonging reflects Tajfel’s (1974) notion that belonging influences members’ decisions to remain or leave the membership group. The combination of qualities is what makes them feel like they belong to their association, but more importantly, triggers a dilemma with respect to staff retention. This suggests that the strong sense of belonging lies at the core of the PTGs’ social identity and therefore warrants attention, as belonging can have positive staffing outcomes. This study enhances the limited literature on social identification in tour guiding (Torland, 2013) and tourism contexts (Azmi & Ismail, 2016).

Recognition

The third component of Tajfel’s (1979) tripod, *social comparison*, proposes that individuals construct their own identity based on who they are and with whom they are compared. In this study, Tajfel’s social comparison notions were valuable in interpreting the PTGs’ sense of recognition by others because the participants made references to ‘us’ versus ‘them’.

PTGs believed that they get a mixed sense of recognition from the public, which affected their emotions. When the public recognised their careers as vital, the PTGs felt good and vice versa. With each well-publicised accident, however, PTGs felt that their reputation and identity were somehow threatened. This finding enhances the limited literature that has described the lack of or poor recognition of tour guides by the public (Lamont, Kennelly & Weiler, 2018). Some overseas studies, set in vastly different environments, link lack of recognition of tour guides to visitor dissatisfaction (Prakash, Chowdhary & Sunayana, 2011).

There was no consensus on whether the participants felt recognised by their clients. To them, visitors who booked PTGs while travelling overseas acknowledged the additional value they brought to each tour. When PTGs did not feel recognised by the visitors, they expressed negative emotive words such as 'challenging' or 'frustrated':

Most people don't know what it takes to be a guide or become a guide. Maybe the public should be more or better educated, that it is a full profession, that you need proper training, and so this definitely would change how they see PTGs.

Most PTGs expressed the lack of recognition by ITOs, whereas a few felt a slight shift towards better recognition. Only one felt highly recognised by the ITOs and claimed not to face any challenges, suggesting a potential link between PTGs feeling recognised by the ITOs and not experiencing challenges. This enhances the tour guiding literature, adding to the work of Kuo, Cheng, Chang and Chuang (2018), who suggested that the ITOs receive recognition from loyal customers because of their satisfaction with their tour guides.

The participants express perceptions of recognition from the suppliers they worked with, including museums, restaurants, attractions, airlines, cruise companies, and hotels. While some linked positive recognition by suppliers to their membership badge and professional demeanour, others lamented the lack of respect and awareness of the potentially powerful position of the professional tour guide.

The participants expressed their frustration at the complete lack of recognition by the tourism industry bodies, reflecting Tajfel's view (1974:66) that 'out-group attitudes can create frustration in certain social contexts'. These feelings are consistent with those described by Brito (2020), linking Portugal's deregulated tour guiding industry to tour guides feeling 'disrespected' and mistreated.

Most respondents were frustrated by this lack of recognition, but how they reacted and behaved was influenced by their own contexts and salient identity. For example, two participants suggested that they did not seek recognition by the 'out-groups' because of their strong their sense of self or because they considered tour guiding their post-career activity. Whereas some PTGs were puzzled that tourism organisations did not recognise their efforts to professionalise the tour guiding industry, other business owners stated that they felt abandoned by the large tourism organisations in terms of business support.

Recognition by others impacted PTGs emotionally, however, despite their frustration they exhibited a positive identity to combat negative recognition. This motivational desire lies at the core of their group engagement and is simultaneously admirable but also hard to rationalise.

Future Implications

As evidenced in the review of the tour guiding literature, Australian PTGs feel neglected. The perspectives of the PTGs presented in this paper, suggest that they are experiencing a myriad of challenges including safety issues, discrepancies in training, and staff shortages within the unregulated tour guiding industry. These have implications for the tourism industry bodies who are made aware of safety issues that go unnoticed, but also for ITOs who will increasingly struggle to find monolingual but especially multilingual PTGs. However, more importantly, these challenges impact visitors on a guided tour for reasons described in this paper.

Further research could help provide solutions, possibly from an overseas tour guiding model or one already implemented in Categories 1 or 3 (refer to Table 1).

This study's findings on the importance of belonging can also have wider implications for many volunteering or membership groups that wish to maintain or strengthen membership numbers.

Conclusion

The study confirms the interconnection among the three theoretical constructs of Tajfel's Social Identity Theory: social categorisation, social comparison, and social identification. The PTGs share the same challenges and expectations, and this lies at the heart of how they socially categorised themselves. Their strong sense of belonging is clearly at the core of their social identity. Belonging is the most important motivating factor that helps them overcome their frustration with their situation and gives them the drive to engage towards greater recognition.

This key finding raises broader questions that should be addressed: how much time will it take before PTGs' strong sense of belonging no longer equates to a willingness to engage? What will happen if their sense of belonging is not fostered, thus resulting in greater staff attrition? How many accidents with 'guides' can Australia tolerate before the consequences affect its reputation as a safe country? These questions emphasise the importance of understanding the social identity of Australian PTGs. The findings offer insights into the potential consequences of ignoring their voices.

Disclosure

The authors report that there are no competing interests to declare.

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