

# How Tour Guides' Professional Competencies Influence on Service Quality of Tour Guiding and Tourist Satisfaction: An Exploratory Research

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## Abstract

Drawing upon the theoretical perspectives from activity competency model and prior tourism literature, this study proposes a conceptual framework to explain the impacts of professional competencies on service quality and tourist satisfaction. Empirical data were gathered from a large-scale online survey with 345 experienced group package tour (GPT) tourists to test the proposed hypotheses and research model. The proposed conceptual framework was validated using the partial least squares (PLS) technique. The empirical results indicate that tour guides' professional competencies significantly impact on service quality and tourist satisfaction. The results also show that tour guides' service quality positively influences tourist satisfaction. The findings provide insight into practical implications for the competence development of tour guides and proffer instrumental contributions to help travel

agencies strengthen tour guides' professional competences for effectively enhancing service quality of tour guiding and improving tourist satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Professional Competencies, Service Quality, Tourist Satisfaction, Package Tour Product.

## 1. Introduction

Tour guiding professionals play an important role in keeping sustainable operation for travel agencies in the tourism industry (Pereira & Mykletun, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2008). They are the tour leaders, pathfinders, interpreters, storytellers, and mentors for tourists. In recent years, the tourism industry increasingly recognized the important role that tour guides play in the entire tourism system. The performances of tour guides can influence tourists' feelings toward business image of travel agencies. They are the key characters regarding the success of group package tour of travel agencies. Their professional competencies can make or break tourists' experiences with guided tours and memories of a destination (Al Jahwari et al., 2016; Mak, et al., 2011; Frochot & Batat, 2013). The tourism industry was beginning to work on ways to enhance the level of professional competencies of tour guides that is regarded as highly critical in affecting tour guide performances (Mak, et al., 2010; Mossberg et al., 2014).

Tour guides professional competencies can be seen as part of travel products, since such competencies can influence tourists' perceptions on service quality of tour guiding and improving tourist satisfaction. For travel agencies, tour guides are one of the critical human capitals to make profits in today's severely competitive market of the tourism industry. In order to acquire customers of niche market, modern tourism firms not only have to provide high-quality travel products and innovative services, but also need to cultivate their tour guides' professional competencies, thereby enhancing tourists' satisfaction on group package tours (Lin et al., 2014; Chiang, & Chen, 2014). Tour guides should not only maintain travel quality, but also need to guarantee tourists' rights. They are the bridges between destinations and tourists. In addition, tour guides should provide immediate, proper, intangible, inseparable and positive services.

While tour guides have existed virtually as long as there has been travel, tour guides' professional competencies have received relatively little attention in the tourism literature, and there is a dearth of theoretical literature in this field. Also, unexpectedly little effort has been devoted to improving our understanding of the impacts of tour guides' professional competencies on service quality of tour guiding, tourist satisfaction of group package tours (GPTs). Thus, this current study was proposed to investigate the theoretical and practical implications of tour guides' professional competencies and explore its contributions on service quality and tourist satisfaction of GPT guiding. Specifically, this study develops a conceptual framework to investigate the impact of professional competencies on service quality, and tourist satisfaction of GPTs. Three major research objectives are proposed to examine: (1) what are the specific contents of knowledge, skills and attitude characterizing tour guides' professional competencies? (2) how will tour guides' professional competencies

influence service quality and tourist satisfaction of GPT guiding? (3) how will tour guides' service quality influence tourist satisfaction with GPTs?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Activity Competency Model

According to job characteristics theory (JCT), people with sufficient knowledge and skills to perform well will feel positive about their job performance, while people with insufficient knowledge and skills will have negative feelings. People with a need for personal growth are expected to develop higher internal motivation, especially when they work on a challenging job. Hackman and Oldham (1980) argued that skill variety is one of the critical characteristics that contribute to a person's feelings about their works and whether it seems to be meaningful. Skill variety is the degree to which a job role requires a variety of different activities while it is carried out; it may involve the use of several skill and knowledge sets. They suggested that knowledge and skills are the job characteristics that foster people's psychological states and that it is the knowledge, skills and attitude enhancing work motivation and job performance.

Based on job characteristics theory, Wu et al. (2007) proposed the activity competency model (ACM) to establish the working perspective of professional workers' job functions and roles that guide the exploration of what critical activities they do and what knowledge, skills and attitude they need. At the top of the activity competency model are professionals' roles and functions, which determine what job activities professional workers perform. At the next level of activity, professional workers must have mastered their job activities to perform certain job functions and roles. Proficiency in each of the critical activities depends on a command of the more elemental competencies at the bottom level of knowledge, skills and attitude. This level can be thought of as the most fundamental competencies contributing to all sorts of organizational success. Viewed from ACM, a skill, knowledge and attitude or is defined as an ability that can be developed, is not necessarily inborn, and is manifested in performance, not merely in potential. Note that a professional worker's competency at a lower level is likely to support more than one competency at a higher level. Similarly, many competencies at the lower levels are likely to support a specific competency at a higher level.

Tour guides, who are tour leaders, pathfinders, animators, and mentors for tourists in the whole trip of tours, assume the critical responsibility to provide immediate, proper, intangible, inseparable and positive services to the tourists in GPTs as well as help supportable operation for travel agencies or firms in the tourism industry (Wang et al., 2010; Wong & Lee, 2012). They must completely recognize the important scope of their own responsibilities and the contributions of their jobs and be able to effectively enhance their job functions and role performances (Su et al., 2014). The ACM provides a strong basis and instrumental guideline for the exploration on the hierarchical dimensions of tour guides' knowledge, skills, and attitude requirements regarding GPT guiding effectiveness and performance outcomes of their job functions in this study.

### 2.2 Tour Guides' Professional Competencies

In various sort of industries, professional works must have different professional

competencies required in order to fulfill their own jobs. It is the requirement to successfully accomplish the goals of job. McClelland (1973) proposed the term “competency” and indicated that intelligence (i.e. knowledge and skills) is not the only factor to determine job performance. Attitude, cognition and personality traits are also the underlying factors to achieve excellent job performance. Jarvis (1983) suggested that professional competencies are mainly associated with individuals’ jobs. It is the professional knowledge, skills and attitude required for a person when playing a specific role in his or her professional job to fulfill the responsibility in an organization. For a tour guides, professional knowledge refers to tour guides’ understandings required when guiding tour groups.

Tour guides are the critical members in tourism industry and their services are mainly based on their professional competencies (Chen et al., 2012; Hoarau, 2014; Mao & Wang, 2010). When guiding the tour groups, they must have broad tourism related knowledge in order to satisfy different tourists’ needs (Çetinkaya & Öter, 2016). Moreover, they need to possess professional skills to solve specific travel problems. Such a professional specialty is the critical skills, techniques or crafts for their enduring career development in the tourism industry (Bhatia, 2012; Hu & Wall, 2013; Zillinger et al., 2012). Tour guides’ main job function is to guide and bring the tourists with wonderful travelling experiences. They effectively submerge the tourists within the sightseeing spots thoughtfully. Therefore, in order to guide tourists to the pleasant journey, they should have some professional techniques. In addition, regarding the dimension of their professional attitude, it means the drive of affection and it is a person’s behavioral performance and the learning related to attitude and affection. It is the attitude or value required when tour guides guide or work on tourists’ travel business. Positive professional attitude is the key factor for excellent tour guides to successfully guide the tour groups (Curtin, 2010; Green & Jones, 2010).

Tour guides’ professional competencies are a mixed-up concept with various sorts of tourism related knowledge, skills and attitude. From acquisition of certificates to cultivation of professional competencies, tour guides must experience long-term learning and training (Curtin, 2010). Such kind of specialty of tourism not only may result in and influence tour guides’ better and more efficient job performance and outcomes, but also can be measured by certain standard (Chowdhary & Prakash, 2008). Since such professional competencies are extended from their professional knowledge, skills, attitude characterized by job-related dimensions through constant learning and self-development of higher level of capabilities possessed by them. These sort of competencies can be continuously learned and upgraded. In this study, tour guides’ professional competencies are based on trained and developed parts. It means professional knowledge, skill and attitude can be learned and cultivated.

### *2.3 Service Quality of Tour Guiding*

Service quality in tourism is created by the processes of service delivery (e.g., friendliness, courtesy, efficiency, reliability, staff competency) and outcomes of services (e.g., accommodation, food, leisure facilities) delivered by tour guides. In that sense, tour guides are the moderators for tourists, travel agencies and local environment of sightseeing spots or tourist attractions. Tour guides’ service quality is one of the most critical success factors of

the tourism industry. Good tour guides can guide the tourists to approach local landscape of sites and customs (Chen & Chen, 2010; Cho & Wang, 2011; Žabkar et al., 2010). They enhance tourists' knowledge, relax their physical, mental and spiritual states, and leave tourists with good memories. Tour guides' service quality can not only be identified by tourists, but also influence tourists' overall image of travel agencies. The service quality of a tour guide can be determined by the judgement on the gap between expectation of service and actual feelings as perceived by tourists. In tourism, it is generally believed that high service quality and resulting satisfaction lead to positive word-of-mouth endorsements, referrals, and repeat visits, which ultimately affect the performance of travel agencies and tourism firms (Žabkar et al., 2010). Based upon the prior works of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988; 1993), service quality can be defined as the gap between consumers' perceived service level and expected one. Tour guides' service quality includes their service attitude, friendliness, service efficiency and tourists' unforgettable experience (Chand, 2010; Chen et al., 2016). It might significantly influence tourist satisfaction. Hence, upgrading or improvement of tour guides' service quality not only creates more tourist benefits, but also are the critical factors for travel agencies' continuous operation of (Mason & Nassivera, 2013; Ryu & Han, 2010).

In some cases, tour guides' works are to sell intangible products to tourists, such as knowledge, services and travelling experiences of attractions and sightseeing spots. Also, they may need to guide tourists to the shopping stores of destinations to convince them to purchase souvenirs and featured native products or encourage them to participate in extra activities. They are the key salesmen of the future tour products for travel agencies. The strengthening of tour guides' professional competencies can upgrade their service quality and job performance considerably. Thus, it is an important and urgent issue for tourists and travel agencies. In this study, the construct of tour guides' professional competencies is adopted as the core influencing factor of service quality. It can predict how tour guides' professional competencies may affect tourists' perceptions on the service quality regarding GPT guiding. Based upon the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Tour guide professional competencies are positively associated with service quality.

#### *2.4 Tourist Satisfaction*

Customer satisfaction has become the key of modern enterprises in current severe competition of tourist market. Improving customer satisfaction can save costs and create profits for enterprises and establish word-of-mouth of enterprises and repurchase intention (Alegre & Garau, 2010; Chen et al., 2011). Kotler (1997) indicated that satisfaction is consumers' pleasure or disappointment with the gap between expectation and perceived effectiveness of product. Therefore, satisfaction is associated with consumers' subjective evaluation and perceived feelings (Oliver, 2014; Song & Cheung, 2010; Song et al., 2011). Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard (1995) indicated that customer satisfaction depends on the realization of customers' expectation of product or service benefit. Customer satisfaction is the mental state or real experience and the attitude or image, feelings and affection influenced by external factors such as actual atmosphere, social factors, group interaction and psychological state or interaction between individuals and destinations (Albayrak et al., 2010).

In that sense, tourist satisfaction can be obtained by tourists' various mental experiences after leisure activities. It is tourists' mental outcomes after the recreational experiences.

Given that tour guides and travel agencies can improve GPT travel packages and service quality in order to upgrade tourist satisfaction by fascinating tourists' various need and requirements, the underpinning of tour guides' professional competencies can reinforce job performance and tourists' perceptions on service quality (Padma et al., 2010). It is reasonable to infer that tour guides' professional competencies can influence tourist satisfaction with GPT products. Generally speaking, when service quality is higher, tourist satisfaction will be higher. Tour guides' service quality can influence tourists' first impression and satisfaction with GPTs of travel agencies or tourism firms (Kuo et al., 2016). Tourist satisfaction has been the main goal pursued by outdoor recreation business managers. It is an important measure of tourists' satisfied recreational and leisure experiences and quality in the research field of tourism. Thus, we infer that tour guides' service quality directly influences tourists' satisfaction with GPTs of travel agencies. The following hypotheses are then proposed:

*H2: Tour guide professional competencies are positively associated with tourist satisfaction.*

*H3: Tour guides' service quality are positively associated with tourist satisfaction.*

Based upon the above discussions, this study develops an explanatory model and a set of hypotheses to examine the impacts of professional competencies on service quality and tourist satisfaction of GPTs as shown in Figure 1. We theorize that tour guides possess greater professional competencies will increase tourists' perceptions on service quality and their satisfaction. In addition, tour guides' service quality may influence tourist satisfaction.

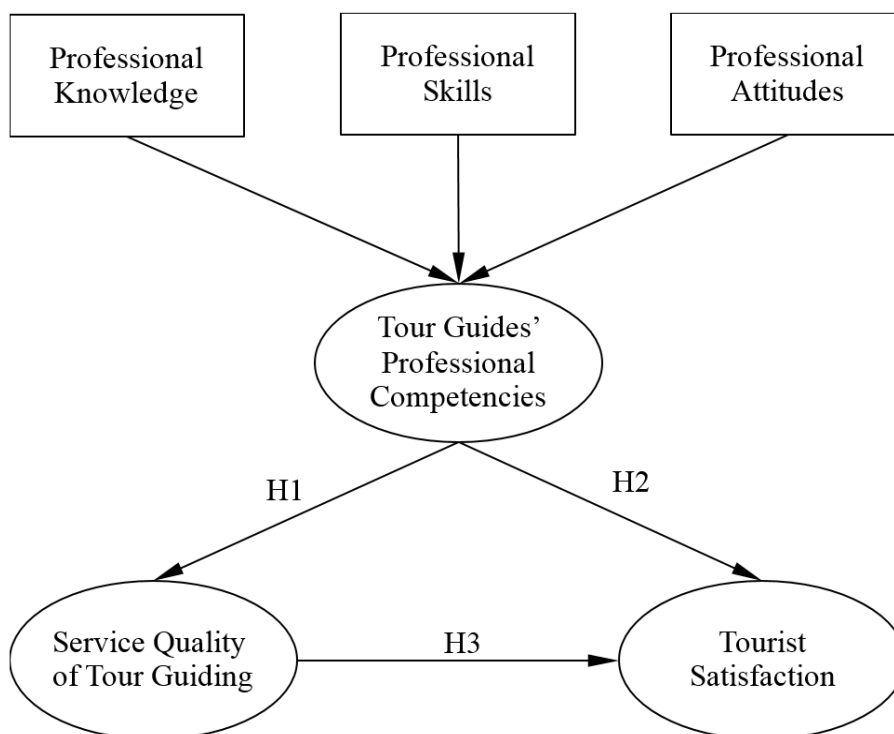


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Measurement Development

The first stage in this study is to construct a conceptual framework and develop the measures. We began the scale development process by surveying the extant literature for validated scales that could be used in our study. Although we did not find complete scales that were suitable for this study, we were able to identify several items and scale fragments. We included these in the initial pool of items. Since insufficient coverage of the construct domain was deemed an issue, some new items were self-developed based on the definitions provided by the prior literature. The majority of the scale items were adopted from prior works in tourism and hospitality literature but modified slightly for our research context. Those items regarding tour guides' professional competencies were integrated and adapted from Al Jahwari et al. (2016), Pereira (2015) and Rosi and Jurše. (2016). The measures for service quality were adapted from Heung (2008), Min (2016) and Rodger et al. (2015). The measures for tourist satisfaction were taken from Chi and Qu (2008) and Žabkar et al. (2010).

The questionnaire for the study consisted of two parts, one including participants' demographic data and the other their responses to the scale items of the major constructs. The participants' basic information included gender, age, marriage, monthly income, experiences on participating tours with tour guides and yearly amount of tourism activities. The second part contained the scale items for the major constructs of the proposed research model. See Table 2 for a final list of questionnaire items. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). We provided a clear definitions of the major constructs at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure that the respondents would have the same understanding of the core of research theme.

#### 3.2. Sampling and Survey Administration

The proposed research model was tested with data collected from a large-scale survey through a convenience sampling procedure after taking informed consent. Consumers or tourists with experience on participating tours with tour guides were cordially invited to support this survey. Finally, 360 questionnaires were collected. An attention check question was included in the survey questionnaire to examine if the participants paid attention to the survey questions to ensure the quality of the data. After a strict screening and examining procedure, 15 participants who did not pass the attention check question or gave incomplete responses were excluded. This left us with 345 valid questionnaires (valid-return rate = 95.83%) for further data analyses. The profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The profile of the respondents (N=345).

Variable	Classification	Freq	%	Variable	Classification	Freq	%
Gender	Male	179	51.9	Education	Junior High School	10	2.9
	Female	166	48.1		Senior High School	69	20
Marriage	Unmarried	112	32.5		College/University	244	70.7
	Married	233	67.5		Graduate School	22	6.4
Age	Less than 20	13	3.8	Experience on Participate Tours with Tour Guides	Once	133	38.6
	21-30	59	17.1		Twice	99	28.7
	31-40	69	20		Thrice	72	20.9
	41-50	72	20.9		Four times	27	7.8
	51-60	85	24.6		Above Five times	14	4.1
	Above 61	47	13.6	Yearly Amount of Tourism Activities (NTD\$)	Less than 20,000	79	22.9
Monthly income (NTD\$)	Less than 20,000	33	9.6		20,001-30,000	49	14.2
	20,001-40,000	66	19.1		30,001-40,000	48	13.9
	40,001-60,000	196	56.8		40,001-50,000	58	16.8
	60,001-80,000	41	11.8		50,001-60,000	69	20
	Above 80,000	9	2.6	Above 60,000	42	12.2	

### 3.3. Analysis Methods

The two-stage approach was applied to estimate the proposed conceptual framework and plausible hypotheses, particularly when the formative second-order constructs (i.e., tour



guides' professional competencies) with three reflective first-order factors (i.e., tour guides' professional knowledge, skills and attitude) were involved in this study. The model fit was also evaluated using a two-phase approach, i.e., a measurement model and a structural model. In the measurement model the psychometric properties of all scales were first assessed through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). This step was used to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model and to test whether the empirical data conformed to the presumed model. Then, a bootstrapping procedure was used to estimate the statistical significance of the parameter estimates for path coefficients of the structural model.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) techniques such as LISREL, AMOS, EQS and partial least squares (PLS) are second generation data analysis techniques that can be used to perform path analytic modelling with latent variables (Chin, 1998). PLS employs component-based estimation. It does not require the data to have multivariate normality (Gefen et al., 2011) and it can handle formative constructs. In general, PLS is better suited for explaining complex relationships as it avoids two serious problems: inadmissible solutions and factor indeterminacy (Lohmöller, 1989). Because of the aforementioned reasons, we chose this approach because PLS's ability to assess the measurement model within the context of its theoretical mediated model makes it superior to multiple regression.

## **4. Data Analysis and Results**

### *4.1. Measurement Properties*

As mentioned above the research model (see Figure 1) to be tested in this study is a second-order factor model with reflective indicators for the first-order factors and three formative dimensions for the second-order factor (i.e., tour guides' professional competencies). Specifically, all of the six first-order sub-constructs (i.e., tour guides' professional knowledge, skills and attitude as well as service quality, and tourist satisfaction) were modelled as reflective and the second-order constructs (i.e., tour guides' professional competencies) were modelled as formative. The measurement model relating the scale items to their latent constructs was analyzed using SmartPLS 2.0 (Ringle et al., 2005). The assessment of item loadings, reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity was performed for the latent constructs through PLS analysis. Factor loadings of scale items should be above 0.707, showing that over half of the variance is captured by the constructs (Straub et al., 2004). As shown in Table 2, the loadings for all constructs with reflective measures were well above the 0.707 guideline, indicating satisfactory item reliability for the reflective measures (Chin, 1998). These results collectively suggest good measurement properties for all constructs.

Table 3 shows the composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha reliability, average variance extracted (AVE) and square root of the AVE, as well as the correlations between the constructs. The composite reliability values for all constructs were above the recommended level of 0.70, indicating adequate internal consistency. All constructs shared more variance with their indicators than with other constructs. Thus, the convergent and discriminant validity of all constructs in the proposed research model can be assured.

Table 2: Descriptions analysis and confirmatory factor loadings of scale items.

Construct	Dimension	Scale item	Mean	Loading
Tour guides' Professional Competencies	Professional Knowledge	Tour guides should have knowledge of travel business.	4.39	0.731
		Tour guides should fully understand and well prepare the content and things explained.	4.47	0.716
		Tour guides should have broad tourism knowledge.	4.46	0.800
		Tour guides should have simple first-aid knowledge.	4.31	0.782
	Professional Skills	Tour guides should have communication skills.	4.37	0.766
		Tour guides should deal with things calmly in emergency.	4.40	0.785
		Tour guides should have good language fluency.	4.30	0.856
		Tour guides should satisfy different tourists' needs.	4.31	0.806
		Tour guides should understand tourists' actual thoughts.	4.27	0.807
	Professional Attitude	Tour guides should have honest attitude.	4.43	0.785
		Tour guides should properly deal with their emotions.	4.37	0.815
		Tour guides should be optimistic.	4.51	0.822
		Tour guides should be humorous.	4.48	0.724
		Tour guides should be modest.	4.40	0.812
	Service Quality of Tour Guiding		The tour guide can provide specific and friendly service.	4.42
		The tour guide can be seriously dedicated in	4.42	0.737

	explanation.		
	The tour guide can have clear and organized explanation.	4.37	0.717
	The tour guide can immediately respond to tourists' needs.	4.38	0.748
	The tour guide's overall service quality is satisfactory.	4.36	0.781
Tourist Satisfaction	It is wise to participate in the GPT of travel agency.	4.32	0.850
	It is out of my expectation to participate in the GPT.	4.18	0.886
	If I participate in the GPT again, I will still be satisfied.	4.15	0.868
	I am willing to re-participate in such a GPT next time.	4.29	0.837

However, some of the coefficients were relatively high among the first-order dimensions in the tested second-order factor model, so the tolerance values and variance inflation factor (VIF) values were further computed to test for any possible problems with multi-collinearity. Following the guidelines of (Diamantopoulos and Siguaw 2006) and (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001), we further examine multi-collinearity among the first-order dimensions. Formative higher-order model are essentially based in regression of the formative construct against its lower-level dimensions. Namely, the stability of the coefficients of the lower-level dimensions can be affected by the strength of the dimension inter-correlations. Thus, excessive collinearity among dimensions makes it difficult to discriminate the specific impact of the individual dimensions on the formative construct (Bollen, 1989). In addition, if a dimension is a linear combination of other dimensions, it would imply that the dimension is redundant (in the context of the formative construct) and should therefore in the interests of parsimony be excluded from the construct.

Table 3: Composite reliability and inter-correlations among major constructs.

Construct	Dimension	PK	PS	PA	SQ	TS
Professional Competencies (PC)	Professional Knowledge (PK)	0.76*				
	Professional Skills (PS)	0.68	0.80			
	Professional Attitude (PA)	0.60	0.71	0.79		
Service Quality (SQ)		0.65	0.62	0.63	0.76	
Tourist Satisfaction (TS)		0.57	0.61	0.59	0.67	0.86
Average variance explained (AVE)		0.58	0.65	0.63	0.57	0.74
Composite reliability		0.84	0.90	0.89	0.87	0.92
Cronbach's alpha coefficients		0.75	0.86	0.85	0.81	0.88

\*Diagonal elements are the square roots of the AVE.

#### 4.2. Test of the structural model

With replacement using 500 subsamples, a bootstrapping procedure was used to estimate the statistical significance of the parameter estimates. The structural model was examined and the effects among those latent constructs were also tested. A test of the structural model was used to assess if the causal relationships specified by the research model were consistent with the available data. The PLS method does not directly provide significance tests and path coefficient confidence interval estimates in the proposed model. Hypotheses and corollaries testing were performed by examining the size, the sign and the significance of the path coefficients and the weights of the construct dimensions, respectively. The statistical significance of weights can be used to determine the relative importance of the indicators in forming a latent construct. The path coefficients and explained variances for the conceptual model in this study are shown in Figure 2. Correspondingly, 51.0 percent of the variance in service quality and 52.8 percent of the variance in tourist satisfaction were explained by the related antecedent constructs.

The causal relationship from tour guides' professional competencies to service quality in the proposed research model, hypothesis H1, is strongly supported by the significant path coefficient of 0.71 (t-value = 19.24,  $p < 0.01$ ). This result implies that tourists who perceived higher levels of tour guides' professional competencies will perceive higher service quality experienced in the GPT tours. Hypothesis H2, effectively drawn from tour guides' professional competencies to tourist satisfaction, is also supported with significant path coefficients of 0.40 (t-value = 5.33,  $p < 0.01$ ). For hypothesis H3, the direct effects drawn

from service quality of tour guiding to tourist satisfaction is also confirmed by the significant path coefficient of 0.39 (t-value = 4.73,  $p < 0.01$ ). That is, the construct of service quality apparently directly influences tourist satisfaction resulting also from tour guides' professional competencies (i.e., tour guides' professional knowledge, skills and attitude). The magnitude and significance of these path coefficients provides further evidence in support of the nomological validity of the research model. As a whole the research model has strong explanatory power for the construct of tourist satisfaction towards travel agencies' GPT products.

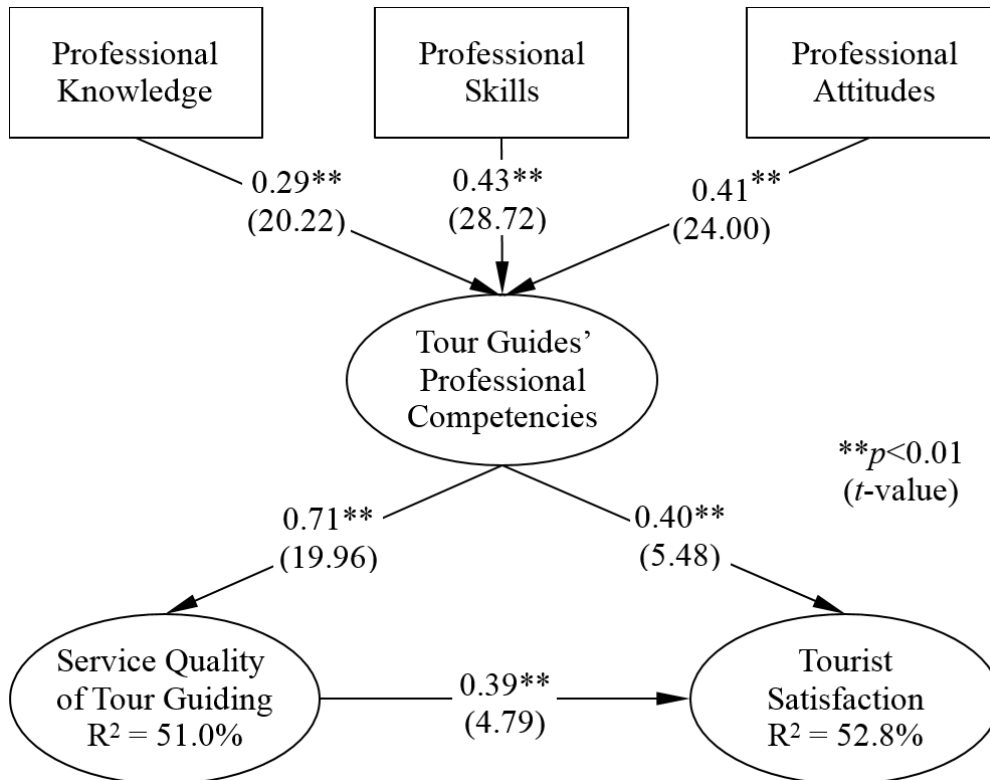


Figure 2: Results of PLS analysis.

## 5. Discussions and Conclusion

According to our empirical results, tour guides' professional competencies significantly influence service quality. Tour guides' professional competencies are a kind of psychological characteristics that may influence their external behaviors and performance of tour guiding. Therefore, tourists' perceptions on service quality of tour guiding were significantly influenced by tour guides' professional competencies. As can be seen from Figure 2, for tour guides, their professional skills are the most important dimension of professional competencies followed by professional attitude and professional knowledge, correspondingly. When travel agencies recruit or select tour guides, they should first concern about tour guides' professional attitude with the support of professional knowledge and professional skills. The tourism industry is the business in which people serve the people. Positive professional attitude can bridge the gaps among tourists, tour guides and travel agencies.

Travel agencies can recognize tourists' real thoughts and needs by tour guides in order to satisfy tourists when designing package tour or activities.

Our empirical results also show that tour guides' service quality significantly and positively influences tourist satisfaction. Therefore, enhancing tour guides' professional competencies and allowing tourists to perceive high-quality service will effectively enhance tourist satisfaction. When tourists highly perceive tour guides' professional competencies, the service quality of tour guiding and tourist satisfaction will be higher. It means that tour guides' professional competencies are a critical factor influencing service quality of tour guiding and tourist satisfaction. When tour guides guide the tourists, they should have broad knowledge in order to satisfy different kinds of tourists' needs. In addition to basic common sense, it also includes knowledge of travel business, simple first-aid knowledge and cross-cultural life knowledge. Tour guides' main task is to guide and explain to the tourists. They effectively connect tourists with the sites. Therefore, in order to introduce tourists in the pleasant trip, they should have the techniques to guide the tour groups, including language, explanation, communication, negotiation and management. Good professional attitude is one of the critical factor for excellent tour guides. Such an attitude also includes optimistic, modest, honest personal characters and enduring learning all the time. Excellent tour guides should have sufficient professional knowledge, excellent professional skills and good professional attitude. The three dimensions of professional competencies are the basic qualifications of tour guides and the base for tour guides' advanced career development. Therefore, regarding professional competencies which they are not familiar with, they can join in professional tourism-related courses regarding competency development and specific proficiency training as for their career progresses.

In normal educational training or before guiding the tourist group, tour guides should fully understand what tourists desire, think, want and need. They reinforce and learn tour guiding competencies and strengthen tourist satisfaction by excellent service quality and contents. In addition, after tourists participate in the travel activities or itineraries, tour guides should treat the opinions of advantages and disadvantages filed in by tourists as criteria for future improvement or examination. The advantages should be sustained and well-maintained. Thus, tour guides can precisely take the best advantages of tourists' actual needs and provide thoughtful service to further improve their satisfaction. Tour guides should reinforce service quality to tourists, quality and service competencies in order to demonstrate their friendliness. Through tour guides' positive service attitude and service efficiency, their customers (i.e. tourists) will perceive high-quality service contents that can enhance tourist satisfaction considerably. As a consequence, travel agencies and tourism firms can identify tour guides' professional competencies needed, demanded and concerned by tourists. They will truly approach tourists and realize how to satisfy tourists to strengthen their service quality and tourist satisfaction. Our research findings can serve as instrumental guidelines for travel agencies to recruit employees and make decisions on training as well as for the competency development of tour guides and those who will work as tour guides.

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