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Exploring the Roles of Tour Guides in Trekking Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Trekking is a popular form of ecotourism in the Himalayas. Tour guides has very important roles in trekking tourism as they help not only to make the travel experience enjoyable but also to educate the visitors through interpretation that contribute to sustainability of local environment. The purpose of this study was to explore the roles of tour guides in trekking tourism to develop a role structure model. Field data were collected from Annapurna Conservation Area, Nepal using survey method. Results indicated that group leader, tour leader, teacher, organizer, interpreter, and organizer were the six major roles of tour guides. The roles of trekking guides can be organized into a 3X2 matrix where the rows represent the types of roles (social, instrumental, and educational) and the column represents the orientation of roles (inside the group or outside the group).

Keywords: *trekking, ecotourism, tour guides, Annapurna.*

INTRODUCTION

Trekking refers to a multi-day trip on the trails of relatively unspoiled natural areas with the purpose of exploring and enjoying natural scenery. Trekking has been discussed in tourism literature under the framework of adventure tourism (Bhattarai, Conway, & Shrestha, 2005; Christiansen, 1990; Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2004; Johnston & Edwards, 1994; Zurick, 1992), ecotourism (Holden, 2003; Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002), cultural tourism (Cohen, 1982; Dearden & Harron, 1994), or a combination of all three (Fennell, 2008; Weaver, 2002). Trekking in the Himalayas, though born as an offshoot of mountaineering expedition, is a form of ecotourism (Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002). Ecotourism, a responsible form of tourism, should provide an enjoyable experience and educational opportunities to the visitors, encourage conservation of socio-cultural and ecological environment, and contribute to local development (Beaumont, 1998; Blamey, 2001; Buckley, 1994; Fennell, 2008; Weaver, 2005). Mountain trekking is a responsible form of tourism and it relies on the stakeholders, including tour guides, to achieve the objectives of responsible tourism.

ROLES OF TOUR GUIDES

The roles of tour guides have been a subject of scholarly discussion for the last three decades (Cohen, 1982; Dearden & Harron, 1994; Haig & McIntyre, 2002; Randall & Rollins, 2009; Schmidt, 1979; Weiler & Davis, 1993). Most of the studies on tour guides in the past presented descriptive details of the functions of specialized forms of tour guides, e.g. cultural tour guides in Bali (McKean, 1976), heritage tour guides in Peru (van den Berghe, 1980), coach tour guides in the UK (Holloway, 1981), and jungle guides in Thailand (Cohen, 1982). Cohen (1985) first proposed the roles of tour guides in a 2x2 matrix (Figure 1). Cohen's (1985) role structure model shows that tour guides' roles fall into either leadership or mediatory sphere, and they are both outer-directed (i.e., facilitate and mediate interaction between tourist and host communities) and inner-directed (i.e., facilitate tourists' learning and enjoyment, and nurture and manage interaction between tourists). According to Cohen (1985), the contemporary role of tour guides in leadership and mediatory spheres corresponds to the historical pathfinder and mentor roles, respectively. The function of pathfinder is to lead the way through an unknown territory and to provide access to a socially defined territory (Cohen, 1985). The role of mentor is to teach as well as monitor the conduct of pupils.

Figure 1
The Structure of Tourist Guide's Role Model

	Outer-Directed	Inner-Directed
Leadership Sphere	Instrumental Component	Social Component
Mediatory Sphere	Interactionary Component	Communicative Component

Source: Cohen (1985, p. 10)

Figure 2
Roles of Tour Guides in Nature-based Tourism

	Outer-Directed	Inner-Directed
Tour Management (focus on group)	‘organizer’	‘entertainer’
Experience Management (focus on individual)	‘group leader’	‘teacher’
Resource Management (focus on environment)	‘motivator’	‘environmental Interpreter’

Source: Weiler & Davis (1993, p. 97)

Cohen (1985) developed the role structure of tour guide by considering the dominant form of tourism at that time, i.e. mass tourism, and all the four components that have orientation towards the tourists. The major focus in mass tourism is in visitor satisfaction, but in responsible forms of tourism the focus should be placed equally in both visitors' satisfaction and sustainability of the host environment (Weiler & Davis, 1993). Recognizing the responsibility of guides towards the host community and their environment, Weiler and Davis (1993) argued that the role structure should incorporate resource management sphere with the role of motivator (i.e., encouraging visitors to behave in environmentally responsible manner) in outer-directed and interpreter (i. e., helping visitors to understand and appreciate their environment) in inner-directed sphere. Weiler and Davis' (1993) presented a model for nature-based tourism in a 3x2 matrix with three spheres: tour, experience, and resource management spheres and two directions: outer- and inner-directed (Figure 2). However, neither Cohen's (1985) nor Weiler and Davis' (1993) tour guide role structure model have been empirically examined for its dimensionality. Therefore, the objective of this study is to empirically examine the dimensions on functions of trekking guides and propose a role structure model for tour guides in trekking tourism.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted in Annapurna Conservation Area, Nepal over one month period between mid-December, 2009 and mid-January, 2010 using survey method. Tourism in Annapurna Conservation Area is based on its unspoilt physical and cultural characteristics (Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002). Trekking is the most popular tourism activity in the Annapurna region with 70,000 international tourists every year on more than 300 km of trail network (Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2009). The surveys were administered by using a self-administered questionnaire to the randomly selected participants in four different locations: Ghandruk, Tadapani, Ghorepani, and Pokhara. A total of 400 trekkers were requested to complete the survey, but only 250 of them accepted to participate. The major reasons for low participation were lack of time because the visitors had to walk from early morning to the evening to get to their next stop, fatigue from the long trek, and language barriers since the questionnaires were designed only in English. Out of 250 questionnaires distributed, 230 of them were completed with the response rate of 92 percent. The data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis.

RESULTS

An exploratory factor analysis (principal component with varimax rotation) was performed for 12 items related to the functions of tour guides to explore the dimensions of tour guides roles. The number of factors extracted from the analysis was determined by the review of eigenvalues of one or greater, and factor loading of $\geq .40$ was used as the criterion to define salient factor loadings. The factor analysis of the 12 tour guides function items revealed a three-factor solution that accounted for 64.64% of the total variance (Table 1). The first factor *educational sphere* ($\alpha = .83$) has four functions related to ensuring environmental sustainability by stimulating the trekkers to enjoy, study, and protect socio-cultural and natural environment of the areas visited. Five functions pertaining to enhancing visitors' experience through smoothing interface of visitors with the local environment, ensuring comfort and safety, and pointing out the

attractions constituted the second factor *instrumental sphere* ($\alpha = .77$). The third factor *social sphere* ($\alpha = .77$) consisted of three functions related to enhancement of group cohesion, and morale and satisfaction of visitors. The total variance accounted by the factors educational sphere, instrumental sphere and social sphere were 41.60%, 13.64%, and 9.40%, respectively.

The functions in all the three spheres were both outer-directed, i.e. to facilitate and mediate interaction between visitors and host communities and inner-directed, i.e. to facilitate learning and enjoyment of individual visitors. Therefore, we came up with a 3x2 role structure model consisted of three inner-directed roles: group leader, teacher, and interpreter; and three outer-directed roles: tour leader, organizer, and motivator in the social, instrumental, and educational spheres respectively (Figure 3). *Group leader* enhances the morale of the visitors by managing the conflicts emerged within group and performing humorous activities. *Tour leaders* go-between or interpose themselves between the own group and social setting of areas visited to insulate (or integrate, if necessary) to reduce conflict between visitors and local people, park staffs, tourism entrepreneurs, or other visitors.

Table 1
Factor Loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis of Role Scale Items

Scale Items	Factor 1 Educational Sphere	Factor 2 Instrumental Sphere	Factor 3 Social Sphere
To stimulate the visitors to develop a keener knowledge, awareness, concern, and appreciation of local environment	.802	.057	.157
To discuss the possible impacts of visitors' activities in the region	.786	.208	.086
To encourage and support the visitors in the adoption of environmentally responsible behaviors	.752	.194	.194
To notify code of conducts to the visitors to ensure no or minimum disturbance to the local environment	.724	.287	.223
To lead the way through different places in the Annapurna region	.073	.726	.076
To ensure safety, security and comfort of visiting group	.258	.674	.318
To organize dining, lodging, medical care, and other arrangements for the visitors	.130	.622	.381
To provide information on the areas visited *	.467	.608	-.094
To point out areas of natural and cultural significance*	.586	.600	-.007
To prevent the emergence of tension or conflict within the tour group and to handle them if they emerged	.157	.031	.894
To promote morale and happiness of visitors in the group	.007	.235	.795
To reduce the conflict between visitors and local people, park staffs, tourism entrepreneurs, or other tour groups	.380	.118	.662
Number of items	4	5	3
Eigen value	4.99	1.64	1.13
Variance explained (%)	41.60	13.64	9.40
Cronbach's alpha (α)	.83	.77	.77
Mean	4.10	4.35	3.31
SD	.68	.45	1.01

Note. Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

* Items included in factor 2. Factor loadings $\geq .40$ are in boldface.

Figure 3
Role Structure for Trekking Guides in Nature-based Tourism

	Inner-Directed	Outer-Directed
Social Sphere <i>(focus on group)</i>	Group Leader	Tour Leader
Instrumental Sphere <i>(focus on experience)</i>	Teacher	Organizer
Educational Sphere <i>(focus on environment)</i>	Interpreter	Motivator

The functions of *teacher* include the selection of attractions of cultural or natural significance, arrange opportunities to have encounter with such attractions, and supply basic information about them. The *organizers* travel with visitors and help them to navigate, provides the information on what kind of precautions to take to avoid danger, and so on to ensure safety, security and comfort of the trekking groups. The functions of *environmental interpreters* include stimulating visitors to enjoy and learn significance of local environment such that they have good knowledge, higher awareness, and deeper concern, positive attitudes, and subsequently they behave in environmentally responsible way. Sensitizing the visitors on the local code of conducts and discussing the possible impacts of their activities on the local socio-cultural, economic, ecological environment come under the domain of *motivator of responsible behavior*.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This is one of the few studies that empirically examined the roles of tour guides in trekking tourism. The factor analysis of 12 functions of tour guides revealed that the roles of tour guides fall under social, instrumental, and environmental spheres; and the functions in each sphere were both inner- and outer-directed. The role of trekking guide is composed of six different roles: group leader, tour leader, teacher, organizer, interpreter, and motivator in a 3X2 matrix. The rows represent the different spheres: social, instrumental, and environmental. The columns signify whether the roles are outer- or inner-directed. This structure differs from Cohen's (1985) expanded role model, which has three rows for leadership, mediatory, and environmental spheres; and two columns for inner- and outer directed aspects (Weiler & Davis, 1993). The findings have implications to tour guides, travel agencies, and conservation area management authorities. By knowing the expectations of visitors regarding the roles of tour guides, the guides can enhance their capabilities. The travel agencies can provide appropriate tour guiding services, and conservation area management authority can provide suitable trainings to the guides. Hence, it contributes to the visitors' satisfaction and sustainability of trekking tourism destinations. The findings can also be useful to other destinations similar to Annapurna Conservation Area to enhance the quality of trekking and other nature-based tourism experience.

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