Tour Guides and Emotional Labour: An Overview of Links in the Literature

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Abstract:
This paper is based on literature utilised in my PhD research into particular areas of the tourism industry comprising both tour guides and emotional labour. I have chosen to concentrate on this particular area of under developed inquiry as there has only recently been a demonstrated interest in examining these two divergent areas (see Guerrier and Adib 2003; see also Sharpe 2005). Tour guides present themselves to the public through their interactions with tour groups. Emotional labour can also be one of the methods they use to interact with the public on their tours. Guides can also incorporate the emotional side of their interpretive work into their tourist products and tours, through the ways they impart both education and knowledge to the tourists. In many cases, educative and cultural expertise is also informed by usage of emotional labour. Theories ranging from Goffman (1959) and Hochschild (1983), and more recent literature surrounding the notions of emotional labour and tour guides have been juxtaposed in this paper to provide an insightful linkage between these areas of burgeoning interest.

Introduction

This paper develops an independent theory of tourism and tour guides by investigating the theories and literatures from the fields of sociology, tour guides, emotional labour, management and the service economy. Each of these literatures...
contributes to an understanding and analysis that examines the emerging occupation of the tour guide as opposed to the ‘role’ status previously conferred by Cohen (1985). The paper also examines, through the theme of emotional labour, the experience provided by the guide for the tourists.

The sociology of tourism literature recognises that the occupation of tour guide is a different form of employment (Cohen 1985: 6). The literature pertaining to tour guides has identified areas of interest and expansion relevant to the emergence of a ‘new’ tour guide occupation. Previously, the work of the tour guide has been considered a ‘role’ in the service of tourists (Cohen 1985, 1982; Crick 1992; Gurung, Simmons and Devlin 1996). However, I would argue that the evolving form of the tour guide is developing into an interactive service provision orientation in the competitive workplace of an experience economy (Hochschild 1983; Leidner 1999, 1993; Smith 1992; Tolich 1993). In other words, the guides now act as mediators of the environment and flora and fauna, rather than an all-knowing tour leader. This is different from the ‘role’ representation where guides were perceived as fulfilling the ‘function’ of the tour leader. This new perspective on tour guides has been used extensively throughout this paper.

The theory of emotional labour underpins my examination of guide performance as interactive service work, where direct interaction with customers or tourists is the primary function of the worker. Emotional labour can be defined as a particular type of service employment, where employers often endeavour to manage the emotions of their workers, while the workers endeavour to control the emotional responses of clients (Leidner 1999). These theories inform the subsequent analysis of guides as members of both the service industry and the experience economy because they provide the framework to examine the tour guides’ production and delivery of the ecotourism experience to their tourist groups.

Tour Guides and Emotional Labour

This paper fills an important gap in the literature about tour guides and emotional labour. Very little recent literature has been presented with an amalgamation of these two areas of investigation in mind. In recent times, the sociology of emotional labour has informed the reactions and interactions between service providers and service receivers; for instance, in this paper the interactions between tour guides and tourists.
Any analysis of the occupation of the tour guide would be incomplete without a discussion of how they are employed as workers in the service economy. In presenting this position, it is important that the guides’ use of emotional labour and performance should be examined. Performance also forms part of the concept of emotional labour, which can be linked back to Crang’s (1997) work on the character of the tourism product, and its performance.

Emotional labour, once prevalent in low-status employment, is becoming more important across all job levels in the emerging service economy. What makes emotional labour different from other forms of labour is that it is used up in the delivery of the service to the customer. For example, when the guides are on tour they use the ‘emotional labour’ mechanism to bond with the tourists and to create a relaxed atmosphere so that the tourists enjoy the tour.

The purpose of the guide is to incorporate the emotional side of their interpretive work into their tourist products and tours, by the ways they impart both education and knowledge to the tourists. This, in turn, creates rapport and group cohesion. Implicit in the tour guide’s position, is emotional labour. In other words, it is the exchange in the commodification of relationships.

At all times, the guide must appear to be in control of the tour group, even though people may be working individually, or in small groups. The job of the interpreter is to assure, encourage and endorse all responses and questions. They supply guidance for the tour. Careful consideration of individual idiosyncrasies and contrary opinions within the group is also a trait that is required of the tour guide. Guides must recognise feelings and emotions of tourists and interact accordingly.

The responsibility for achieving customer satisfaction is mostly delegated to the tour guide, who, throughout the tour’s entire duration, is in a continuous and intense contact with the tour participants (Geva and Goldman 1991: 178).

Much of the literature confirms that the guides must possess knowledge and education. The tour leader is responsible for observing and lessening visitor impact on the environment so as not to exploit natural ecosystems over and above their human carrying capacity. Thus, the tour leader is responsible for the moderation of visitor conduct to guarantee that it is accountable. Likewise, the tour guide improves guests’ knowledge and comprehension of their environment (Weiler and Davis 1993: 93).
Symbolic Interactionism

Erving Goffman (1959) was the first to theorise about performance and interaction between individuals using his concepts of ‘frontstage-backstage’. Goffman’s theory is the predecessor to Hochschild’s (1983) theory of emotional labour. The work of Erving Goffman includes two valuable ideas: that of the emotional deviant, the person with the incorrect feeling for the circumstances and for whom the correct feeling would be a mindful problem; and that of the observer, for whom each moment of human accomplishment is an extensive story (Hochschild 1979, 1983).

Social organisation, according to Goffman, is only our impression of what many circumstances of a certain kind amount to (Hochschild 1983). In the group situation of the tour guide leading the tour group, the guide has exclusive organisation of the group. This leads to group dynamics, where the guide initially lays down the ‘ground rules’ for the tour and explains the intricacies of the tour and itinerary to the tourists. However, any group has group dynamics. Just because a guide has exclusive responsibility for a group does not change the existence of group dynamics. But, it does impact upon how these group dynamics are perceived. Thus, an emotional bond between the group and the individuals within that group occurs.

Goffman’s theory of regulations and his theory of self are not consistent. He conceives a comparison between regulation and emotion. But the actors he suggests, have insufficient inner speech, no enthusiastic aptitude for feeling management that might enable them to react to such regulations. While such regulations and actions thrive in Goffman’s work, the self that might carry out such acts, the self that might accept, conform, or contest such regulations, is respectively artificial. Goffman argues as if his actors can generate, or inhibit, or repress feeling – as if they had an ability to mould feeling. Similarities can be drawn here with the sensing of and dealing with emotions. Whatever other dilemmas they put forward, William James and Sigmund Freud anticipated a self that could sense and deal with emotion, Goffman does not do this (Hochschild 1983).

Emotional Labour

For Hochschild (1979) emotions are subject to ‘social rules’, and are not controllable entities. These ‘conventions of feeling’ only become obvious when complicated, recognisable and controlled social regulations of emotion are contravened (1979:
138). Individuals do not acknowledge that they or others are following the social regulations of emotion. However, when an individual is not miserable at a burial or cheerful at a marriage, to use Hochschild’s examples, then the social customs become apparent (Hochschild 1979:138). Hochschild’s seminal work *The Managed Heart* (1983), extended her assessment of the connection between social organisation, feeling regulations and emotion control. Through the expansion of the idea of ‘emotional labour’, Hochschild highlights how managers in the service sector depend on workers to interrelate with customers, to elicit the required emotion. Eliciting the required control of emotion is a central ingredient of the competitive advantage of service-oriented industry, though the exertion that is needed by the personnel is not really recognised and rewarded (Hochschild 1983).

Hochschild’s analysis was a reaction to the growth of the service industry and the increase of what is known as service encounter-type interactions. While the variety, intensity and degree of contact between the service supplier and the receiver has varied, companies still insist that their employees behave as if they have a bond with the client. For Hochschild the fundamental emotional management display for service givers is to freely exhibit an emotion that they may not automatically feel.

Tourists feel an experience is worthwhile if it satisfies certain criteria (Botterill and Crompton 1996; Cohen 1979). Cohen’s (1985) four models of the tourist guide set out this formula. By providing structure and supervision (organiser responsibility) and by mediating contact with host societies (group leader), the tour guide fulfils those group and personal emergencies that involve mediation outside the immediate travel group. For instance, in a remote or isolated situation, being able to locate a doctor or hospital for a sick tourist may be a challenge to the tour guide. By leading the group in social communication and fun (entertainer) and instruction/interpretation (teacher), most eventualities can be catered for from within the group itself. In all four positions, tasks are directed towards the group members and not towards outsiders (Gurung, Simmons and Devlin 1996: 109-10; Weiler and Davis 1993).

Although the description of emotional labour first put forward by Hochschild has prevailed, many researchers have improved and developed a variety of features, using the model in diverse situations. Erikson and Wharton (1997) and Leidner (1999) found that Hochschild’s simple connection between emotional labour and well-being was not sufficient. Erikson found that the theory was reliant on the level of occupation
independence an employee underwent: those with elevated employment independence experienced a smaller amount of harmful effects of emotional labour than did individuals with depleted employment independence (Morris and Feldman 1996: 1001). Wharton was unable to argue conclusively that employees who carry out emotional labour are more likely to endure emotional fatigue. Moreover, Wharton found that employment fulfilment was certainly connected to emotional labour (1993: 218-220). Other writers, such as Leidner (1999) and Erikson and Wharton (1997), have also highlighted that some employees are thankful for the self-assurance that the practice of emotional labour is able to give them (Rowan 2003). This is achieved through the sense of satisfaction and gratification felt by the employees.

Service Employees

Countless employees in the tourism industry can be categorised as service workers in the frontline. Their occupations, which entail close client communication, are at the very spirit of numerous tourism endeavours (Wharton 1993). Thus, the principal obligation of the tourist guide is to produce a social atmosphere and environmental awareness that benefits both the tourist and the guide. Gurung, Simmons and Devlin (1996) suggest that the tour guide characterises a meaningful function in tourism by improving the calibre of experience for tourists and by lessening unacceptable effects of tourism for the host locations (Gurung, Simmons and Devlin 1996: 113-114).

Specifically, service employees must handle their own emotions and emotional exhibition to generate a constructive ambience in which a delicate operation happens. While this emotion control has become recognised as ‘emotional labour’, it is still mostly unidentified in everyday work situations (Karabanow 1999). Guiding is not just about imparting knowledge, but involves the care of people involved in the tour.

Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) propose that the service employee is perceived ‘as an actor performing on stage for an often discriminating audience’ (1993: 90). Indeed, Hochschild (1983) considering the recruitment of airline trainees, observed:

The trainees, it seemed to me, were also chosen for their ability to take stage directions about how to ‘project’ an image. They were selected for being able to act well – that is, without showing the effort involved. They had to be able to appear at home on stage (Hochschild 1983: 98).
Larsen and Aske (1992) contend that there is an accord between researchers and ‘that the theatre analogy may be used to describe the role-play between the frontline employee in the hospitality industry and the guest in the role of customer and prospective buyer of services’ (Larsen and Aske 1992: 12).

While Hochschild originally focused on the damaging or negative consequences of emotional labour, other authors have indicated that she has overstated the ‘human’ sacrifice connected with this kind of work (Seymour 2000). For these critics, emotional labour can be either beneficial or harmful for employees depending on how it is carried out (Kruml and Geddes 2000), that is, the degree of agency taken by the worker. Tour guides engage in ritual behaviour that has become part of their daily work obligation in dealing with tourists. An example of this would be, consistently ritualised greetings and welcoming addresses to tour groups. Clearly determined work tasks have become ritualised and provide interaction with the tourists. Where there is more than one facet of professional responsibility towards the tourists, the aptitude of the guide’s performance is not as easy to explain. To some extent, the guides are also dependent upon how the customers engaging in the journeys interpret the destinations and attractions for themselves (Holloway 1981: 385).

Of equal concern to employers and employees is the one direct harmful effect of the use of emotional labour: exhaustion. Maslach and Jackson (1981) point out that ‘burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do “people work” of some kind’ (Maslach and Jackson 1981: 99; see also Hochschild 1983). Exhaustion can bring about decline in the worth of service offered and seems to be a source of employment turnover, absence and low self-esteem (Maslach and Jackson 1981). These are familiar conclusions about the high expenditure that companies frequently suffer through absence, employment turnover and mistakes (Ivancevich 1995: 639, 668). This appears not to matter too much to tourism businesses, as burnout and other related matters seem to ensure a high turnover of staff. In fact, the tourism operators probably welcome it. This is related to long working hours, extended time periods away from family and loved ones, and low rates of pay.
Conclusion

Emotional labour is essential to the performance of interactive work in the service economy. Tour guide work involves constant interaction with clients and customers. In this type of work, employees endeavour to manage the reactions of their clients. Acting out the task of interpreter places a large amount of stress or strain on tour guides as they lead tourist groups. Displays of emotion about places of touristic interest may be either genuine or staged. Nevertheless, tour guides provide an ‘exclusive’ service in the experience economy. Their own education and knowledge base are important tools for the generation and sustainability of their employment. Without specialist knowledge and wisdom the tour guides referred to in this paper would not be in position to interact emotionally and professionally with their tourist clients.

References


