



Tour guide research in tourism scholarship: a critical review and future research agenda

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Abstract

Tour guiding has emerged as a prominent research topic within tourism scholarship, reflecting the growing interest in understanding the role of tourist guides and their influence on visitor experiences. This study presents a critical review of the evolution and current state of tour guide research, using a bibliometric analysis to map key trends and intellectual developments in the field. While early research (1960–1980 s) focused on establishing foundational theories, recent studies have emphasized qualitative aspects such as tourist satisfaction, guide performance, and emotional intelligence. Since 2018, a noticeable shift towards integrating technology in tour guiding has occurred, with topics like mobile guides and augmented reality gaining traction. Despite the increasing volume of research, gaps remain in theoretical development and comparative cross-cultural studies. This paper highlights the dominant themes, including sustainability and ethical tourism, and identifies future research opportunities, particularly in exploring the emotional labour of guides, the integration of technology, and the dynamics of guide-tourist interactions. The review concludes with a research agenda aimed at deepening the understanding of tour guiding practices, offering insights for improving visitor experiences and guiding the future of tour guide scholarship.

Keywords Tour guiding · Tourist guide · Tourism · Systematic literature review · Bibliometrics

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1 Introduction

After tourism was accepted as an academic field of study, studies in the field of tourism increased rapidly. Although tourism management issues were primarily studied in the tourism literature in previous years, tour guiding studies have also been one of the famous research topics in recent years. The study by Black et al. (2019) reveals that there are more than 200 research articles in the field of tour guiding until 2018, including research articles published in journals with high impact factors. These studies include the role of tourist guides (Ormsby and Mannle 2006; Tsaur and Teng 2017), satisfaction with guided tours (Poudel and Nyaupane 2013), tourist guides' performances (Henning 2008; Huang 2010), emotional intelligence (Min 2012), eco-guides (Shephard and Royston-Airey 2000) and issues related to mobile guides (Rasinger et al. 2007). Since 2018, these subjects have continued to be studied, with a noticeable post-pandemic shift towards integrating emerging technologies such as AI, VR, and hybrid tour experiences (Meng et al. 2023; Wang and Xu 2024), and renewed attention to the emotional resilience and sustainability practices of tour guides (Min and Han 2024; Gonzalez and Vázquez 2024).

In the tour guiding literature, the first scientific study belongs to Smith (1961), and a limited number of studies emerged from this date to 1980 (Black et al. 2019). Until Cohen's pioneering work "on the role of the modern tourist guide," research in the field of tour guiding was quite limited. After many years, it is appropriate to evaluate the current theoretical and empirical research on tour guides and guiding to identify knowledge gaps and areas that could benefit from additional study to improve tour guiding practices in the modern era.

According to the bibliometric analysis, the field of tour guiding has shown significant evolution over time. The analysis indicates that the volume of publications on tour guiding has increased since 2000, reflecting a growing interest and research activity in this area (Chen et al. 2018). Furthermore, the development of risk communication in tourism has moved from an emerging topic to a developing field of knowledge, highlighting the dynamic nature of research topics within the broader domain of tour guiding (Black et al. 2019). Additionally, the development of studies on tour guiding and technology has been a focus of international publications, particularly examining trends and patterns in sustainable tourism research. These findings suggest that the field of tour guiding has experienced a shift towards addressing contemporary issues, embracing technology, and emphasising sustainable practices, reflecting the evolving landscape of the tourism industry.

The book by Weiler and Black (2015), which examines research on tour guiding, is the first bibliometric study. Authors group articles, books, book chapters, conference proceedings, reports and the doctoral thesis published between 1965 and 2015 theoretically. They focus on both quantitative and qualitative development of research. In tour guiding's scholar area, another bibliometric study is the study of Chen et al. (2018). The authors examine 140 studies related to tour guiding between 1980 and 2016 by the categories of year, journal field, journal impact factor, first author's institution, research field, methodological approach, data collection, the theory(s) discussed and the testing of the theories and developing of a new theory. In the study conducted by Black et al. (2019), it is stated that there were more than 200 studies in the field of tour guiding until 2018. Most of them are in top-tier journals. These studies are: The role of tourist guides (Ormsby and Mannle 2006) in guided tours satisfaction (Luoh and Tsaur 2013; Poudel and Nyaupane 2013), tourist guides performances (Henning 2008; Huang 2010), emotional intelligence (Tsaur and Ku 2019),

eco-guides (Shephard and Royston-Airey 2000) and mobile guides (Lai 2015). There are few available bibliometric studies in the field of tour guiding despite the growing quantity of studies in this area.

Weiler et al. (2014) conducted a bibliometric and content analysis of 280 academic papers. Studies have revealed several trends, patterns and gaps in tour-guiding research. It has been revealed that most of the authors and publications are from the USA and Australia, and more theory is needed. The authors have presented the intellectual structure and evolution of tour-guiding literature. They also provided critical directions for future research. Though scholarly attempts to visualise the intellectual structure and evolution of the knowledge domain are still in their infancy, these review studies have helped scholars recognise the development of tour guiding. We are among the first to investigate it thoroughly using our research.

The tour guiding profession is intertwined with different stakeholders and disciplines, which is also reflected in academic studies. Subjects studied under tour guiding are cultural, social, economic, and management organisations. It is associated with many fields. Despite the increase in research studies in the field of tour guiding, there is a limited number of bibliometric studies. This study plays a crucial role in outlining the overall nature of tour guiding research, providing guidance to scholars who wish to do tour guiding research, and showcasing current practices. In addition, the research will contribute to bibliometric research in the literature. The objectives in establishing these links are as follows:

- To pinpoint significant studies and clusters of foundational knowledge in tour-guiding research through the mapping of intellectual relationships.
- To trace intellectual relationships by examining the origins, development, and themes within tour-guiding research from tourism sources.
- To present emerging topics in tour guiding as a prospective framework for future research.
- To investigate potential differences in tour-guiding research across countries and cultures.
- To uncover the prevailing themes studied across diverse locations.

The aim of this study is to provide an overview of the current body of knowledge on tour guiding. It includes a detailed description of the research methodology. The remaining research presents the most significant findings, authors, as well as central themes and emerging clusters within the tour guiding research in tourism scholarship. The study concludes with a research agenda for tour guiding, highlighting important topics for further research, as well as the implications and contributions of this study. Moreover, this research offers one of the most comprehensive and up-to-date bibliometric and thematic reviews of tour guiding research to date. While previous reviews (e.g., Weiler and Black 2015; Black et al. 2019) provided foundational insights, our study uniquely combines co-citation, keyword co-occurrence, and thematic evolution analyses to map how the field has developed over the past four decades. It not only visualizes the intellectual structure of tour guiding scholarship but also identifies emerging themes such as technological integration, emotional labour, and sustainability. This work contributes a forward-looking research agenda grounded in empirical patterns, providing scholars and practitioners with actionable insights for advancing both theory and practice in tour guiding.

Previous research on tour guiding has evolved from foundational theoretical explorations to more nuanced empirical investigations. Early studies, such as Cohen's (1985) typology of tourist guides, laid the conceptual groundwork by defining guide roles and functions. Subsequent works examined key themes such as tourist satisfaction (Luoh and Tsaor 2013), guide performance (Zhang and Chow 2004), emotional intelligence (Tsaor and Ku 2019), and eco-guiding (Shephard and Royston-Airey 2000). In recent years, there has been growing interest in the integration of technology, including mobile apps and augmented reality, into guiding practices (Meng et al. 2022; Podsukhina et al. 2022). Despite this expanding body of literature, prior reviews have been largely narrative or descriptive, and few have systematically mapped the field's thematic development or source knowledge. Notably, bibliometric reviews by Weiler and Black (2015) and Black et al. (2019) covered limited time periods and did not incorporate advanced network analysis tools. What remains missing is a comprehensive, data-driven overview of how tour guiding research has evolved over time, what clusters of knowledge have emerged, and where future research can contribute most effectively. This study addresses these gaps by applying co-citation, keyword co-occurrence, and thematic evolution analyses to nearly four decades of literature, thereby offering a more holistic and dynamic understanding of the field's development and future directions.

2 Methodology

In order to investigate the conceptual framework and thematic development of studies on tour guiding in tourism literature, this study uses an integrated bibliometric approach. This approach uses co-citation analyses, co-occurrence network analyses, thematic evolutionary analysis to enable a thorough and impartial assessment of the state of the research field. In order to answer the research questions, the methodology comprises data collection, data processing, and interpretation of results.

2.1 Data collection

We used the Web of Science (WoS) database to review the scholarly literature on tour guiding. WoS is a multidisciplinary and selective resource that includes a range of specialized indexes organized by subject area or content type (Pranckutė 2021). Since its establishment in 1945, it has developed a comprehensive database of references, citation records, and bibliographic information covering a wide range of subjects, including the social sciences, humanities, technology, and science (Sánchez et al. 2017). Although other platforms like ProQuest, Google Scholar, and Scopus also provide access to scholarly literature, WoS is widely regarded as a leading and trustworthy source for conducting bibliometric analyses (Kim and So 2022; Murgado-Armenteros et al. 2015; Zupic and Čater 2015).

Defining content limitations pertaining to concerns relevant to tour guiding was the first step in the selection process. The search was conducted a Boolean search in December 2023 with the keywords "tour guide" OR "tourist guide" OR "tour guiding" OR "tour guidance" OR "tourist guidance". We adopted the widely accepted review method known as the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), utilizing its four-stage flow diagram to structure our review process and enhance the clarity and transparency of our reporting (Moher et al. 2009). After screening 1,140 articles based on their

titles, abstracts, keywords, and full texts (when available), we excluded three book chapters, resulting in a final dataset of 553 journal articles. In line with previous research (e.g., Koç et al. 2025; Tanova and Bayighomog 2022), which emphasizes that books, book chapters, and conference proceedings are not typically viewed as the most up-to-date sources of knowledge in a field, we limited our analysis to peer-reviewed journal articles only. We exported a text file containing titles, keywords, abstracts, and other metadata for the 553 articles and cleaned the dataset following the approach of Arici et al. (2021), primarily to eliminate duplicate entries caused by inconsistencies in author name spellings. We then applied two content-specific selection criteria (Koseoglu et al. 2016): (1) Does the article specifically addresses tour guides within the tourism sector, and (2) Does it contributes to our understanding of tour guides? Based on these criteria, 117 articles were selected for analysis (see Fig. 1).

2.2 Data analysis

The data was analyzed using VOSviewer and R, together with the Biblioshiny utility, for the bibliometric study. The two main bibliometric techniques were used co-citation network analysis and keyword co-occurrence network analysis.

Co-citation network analysis finds papers that are frequently mentioned together, suggesting a theme. Through the identification of important research clusters and foundational works, this approach aids in revealing the intellectual structure of the area. To determine the topics within each cluster, the abstracts and keywords of all co-cited papers were taken from the reference lists (Arici et al. 2023). Also, keyword co-occurrence network analysis was used to characterize the present state of research and extract the main points of the research topics. Aria and Cuccurullo (2017) provided visualizations that demonstrated the most popular terms and their linkages, as well as the links between keywords and frequency of repetition.

Network analysis, in this context, serves as a powerful tool to visualize and interpret the structural relationships among themes and publications. As demonstrated in recent social science studies (e.g., Xu and Zhang 2021, 2022a, b), network-based approaches are particularly effective for uncovering complex relational patterns among numerous variables, without the dimensionality limitations of traditional econometric models. In alignment with these developments, our study uses co-citation and co-occurrence analysis to examine the knowledge and evolution of studies on tour guiding, thus providing a comprehensive view of both its intellectual foundations and its current thematic landscape.

3 Results

3.1 Descriptive inferences

Table 1 presents the most productive sources in the field of tour guide research. *Annals of Tourism Research* stands out as the leading journal with ten citations, followed by *Tourism Management* and the *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*. The distribution indicates that high-impact journals in tourism and hospitality consistently contribute to scholarly discussions on tour guiding.

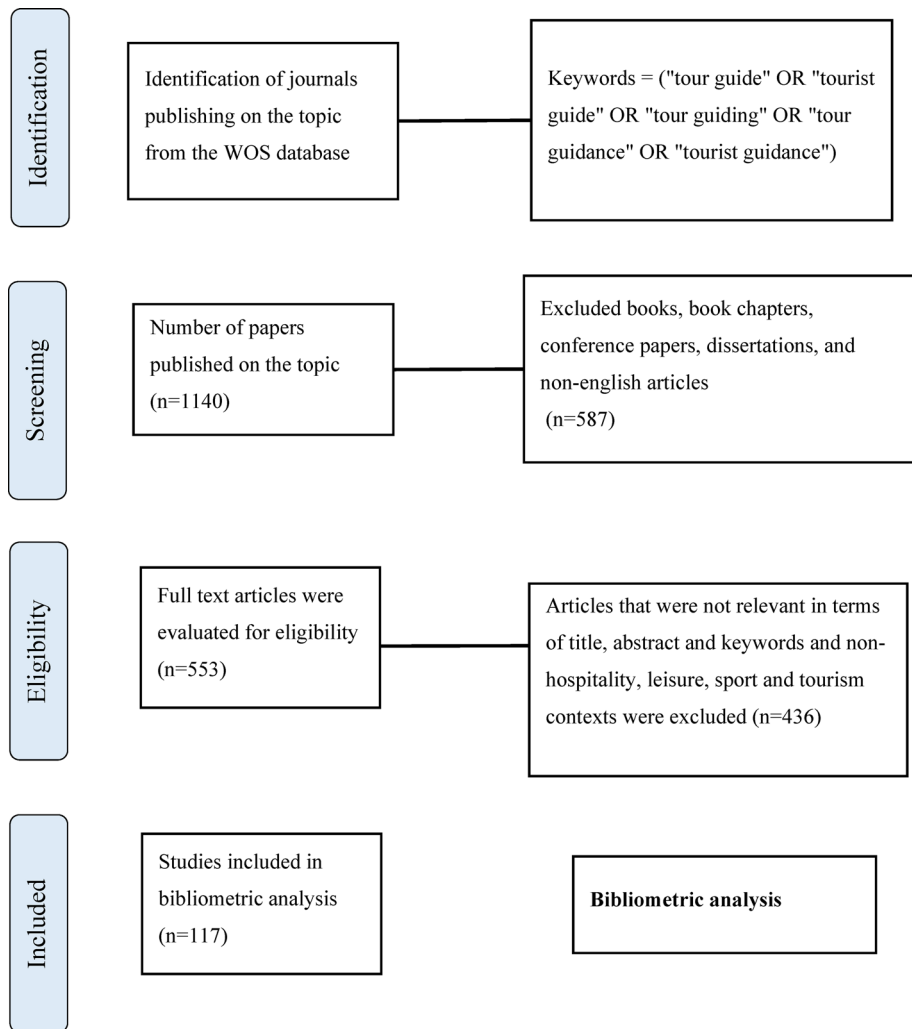


Fig. 1 PRISMA flowchart for bibliometric analysis

Table 1 Most productive sources

Journal	Citation
Annals of Tourism Research	10
Tourism Management	7
Asia Pacific journal of Tourism Research	6
Tourism Recreation Research	6
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	5
Journal of Travel Research	5
Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism	5
Tourism Management Perspectives	5
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	4
Tourist Studies	4

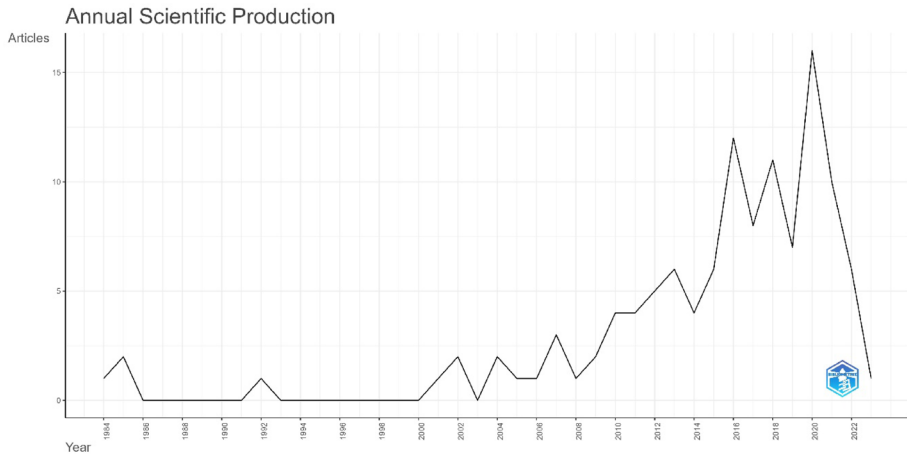
Table 2 highlights the most globally cited documents in tour guiding research. Cohen's (1985) seminal research stands out as the foundational study in the field, frequently cited for its theoretical contributions. Other highly cited papers, such as those by Zhang and Chow (2004) and Ap and Wong (2001), emphasize tour guide performance and professionalism, reflecting key areas of scholarly interest over time. The table shows that impactful research spans a variety of journals.

Figure 2 illustrates the increase in publications and references on tourist guides within tourism research. The earliest articles in this field appeared in 1984, with notable surges in publications occurring in 2016 and 2020. By 2020, the publication of over 15 articles suggests that this topic has garnered significant academic interest. There is a decrease in the articles published from 2020 to the present. The Covid 19 pandemic process can explain this situation. The average yearly citation count in this field highlights the significance of these publications. Figure 2 shows the 2016, 2018, and 2020 peaks.

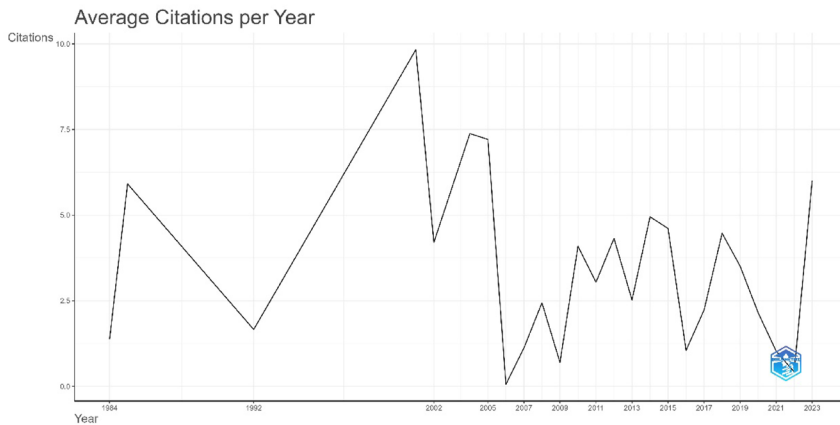
Figure 3 presents a country collaboration map depicting international cooperation. The colour gradient represents the quantity of scientific publications in the field, with light blue signifying low output and dark blue indicating high output. Additionally, pink lines highlight

Table 2 Most global cited documents

Author	Year	Title	Journal
Cohen	1985	The tourist guide: The origins, structure and dynamics of a role.	<i>Annals of tourism research</i>
Zhang and Chow	2004	Application of importance-performance model in tour guides' performance: evidence from mainland Chinese outbound visitors in Hong Kong.	<i>Tourism management</i>
Ap and Wong	2001	Case study on tour guiding: Professionalism, issues and problems	<i>Tourism management</i>
Salazar	2012	Community-based cultural tourism: Issues, threats and opportunities	<i>Journal of Sustainable Tourism</i>
Dahles	2002	The politics of tour guiding: Image management in Indonesia.	<i>Annals of Tourism Research</i>
Salazar	2005	Tourism and glocalization "local" tour guiding.	<i>Annals of Tourism Research</i>
Zatori et al.	2018	Experience-involvement, memorability and authenticity: The service provider's effect on tourist experience.	<i>Tourism management</i>
Huang	2010	Tour guide performance and tourist satisfaction: A study of the package tours in Shanghai.	<i>Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research</i>
Chang	2014	Examining the effect of tour guide performance, tourist trust, tourist satisfaction, and flow experience on tourists' shopping behavior.	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research</i>
Mak et al.	2011	Critical issues affecting the service quality and professionalism of the tour guides in Hong Kong and Macau	<i>Tourism Management</i>



a) Scientific growth in issues relevant to tour guiding research



b) Annual average number of citations in issues relevant to tour guiding research

Fig. 2 Annual scientific growth and average citations

collaborative partnerships, such as those between the USA and China, China and Australia, and Canada and China. The cooperation between the UK and China is also noteworthy.

3.2 The findings of co-citation analysis

We identified important research by using the weights of the citation documents in the publications' reference lists. After examining the reference's citation, this study focused on the citation's references link on tour guiding (see Fig. 4). Co-citation analysis elucidates intellectual connections using quantitative and statistical approaches to address study citations or references as data (Arici et al. 2021). Over time, this approach facilitates the establishment of major databases, which enhances impartiality in the investigative process. Scholars are assisted by this kind of research in recognizing, defining, and developing various fields

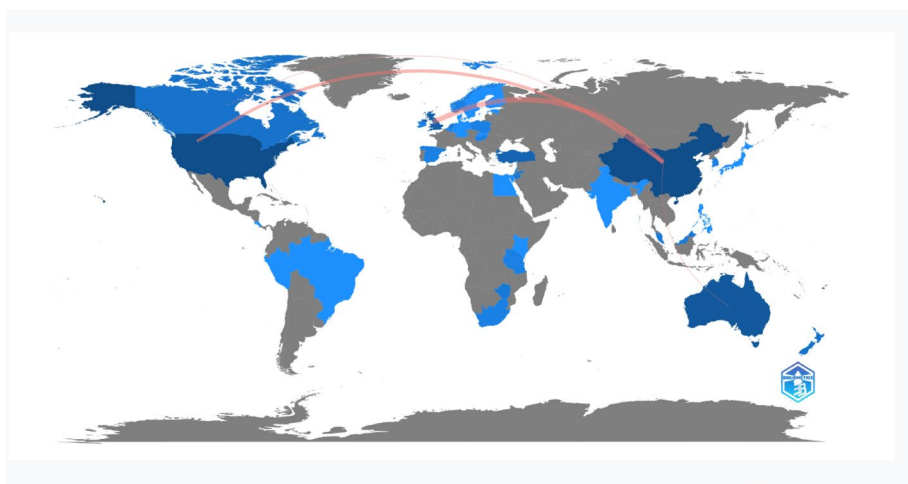


Fig. 3 Country collaboration map in issues relevant to tour guiding research

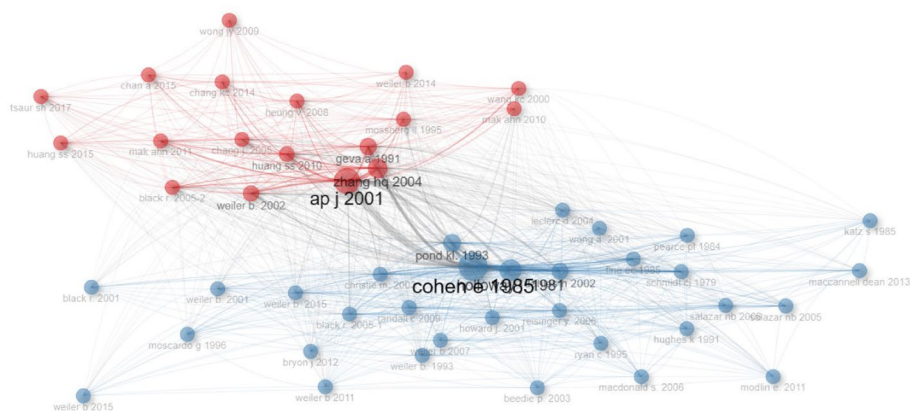


Fig. 4 Co-citation network on tour guiding

as well as their connections (Arici et al. 2022; Köseoglu et al. 2021). As a result, by conducting a co-citation analysis for the knowledge network linked to a substantial amount of significant tour guiding references, the present research seeks to provide the knowledge of tour guiding's scientific research in tourism literature. Different groups are symbolized by different colors. The relationship between two related texts is represented by the knot's width, which indicates the number of cited references.

Figure 4 represents two major clusters. The first cluster (blue) comprises 32 papers, and the second cluster (red) includes 18 articles. Cohen (1985) and Zhang and Chow (2004) were cited as the ranking was dominated, as shown in these clusters. The article by Cohen (1985) led the blue cluster and the red cluster in the article by Zhang and Chow (2004).

According to the most cited sources, the most crucial topic that scholars have examined is the origins, roles, and performance of tour guides. Remarkably, conceptual or review

papers represent many cited publications. For instance, the most cited article investigated that the pathfinder and the mentor are the two lines of origin for the modern tourist guides and suggested that the roles of tourist guides consist of four main components (instrumental, social, interactional, and communicative) (e.g., Cohen 1985–1st most cited). One remarkable research article focused on the perceived importance of tour guides' service quality attributes and tour guides' performance (e.g., Zhang and Chow 2004–2nd most cited). Another exceptional paper by Ap and Wong (2001) examined the nature of tour guiding, assessed the state of professional service standards, and identified problems and challenges in the twenty-first century using qualitative research methodologies (3rd most cited).

It implies that these important papers established the foundation for tour guiding research on tour guiding services and had a substantial impact on future research in this scholarly field.

3.3 The findings of co-occurrence network analysis

We examined the keywords in scientific papers related to tour guiding to find the most frequently used keywords. The most influential and prominent academic organizations that have researched various facets of tour guiding are depicted (see Fig. 5). Figure 5 shows the connections and thematic division of the important subjects in the context of tour guiding. The diameter of the groups in Fig. 5 reflects the terms' occurrences. Many subtopics are closely related to “satisfaction” and “performance”. How frequently a keyword appears in the articles evaluated is shown by the wide globe. Five clusters have been created from the keywords. Satisfaction, guides, visitors and perceptions, and performance had the most power in relation to experience, impact, customer satisfaction and quality. Analysing the co-occurrence of keywords provides advantages as they refer to related subjects. The findings indicate that the two most popular topics in the literature review are “the impact of tour guides' performance on visitors' satisfaction and experiences” and “the perceptions of tour guides' service quality”.

After examining Fig. 6, it becomes clear that the annual growth of various keywords offers insights into their increasing relevance over time. Initially, from 2004 to around 2008, most terms showed very low or no cumulative occurrences. However, a noticeable shift

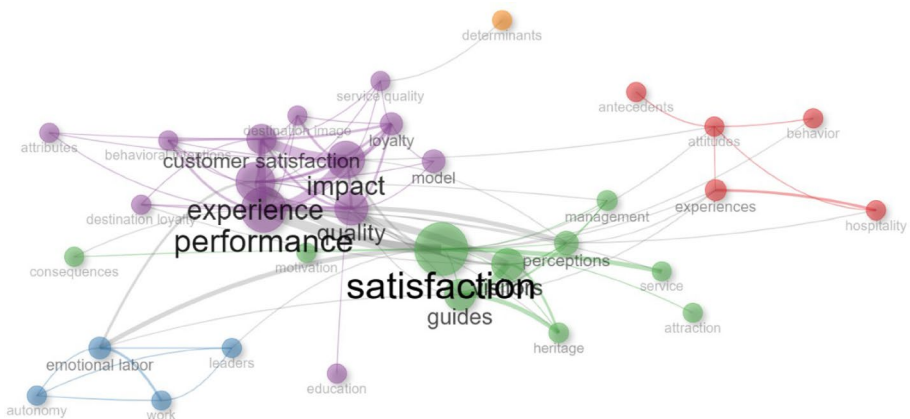


Fig. 5 A network analysis of keyword co-occurrence

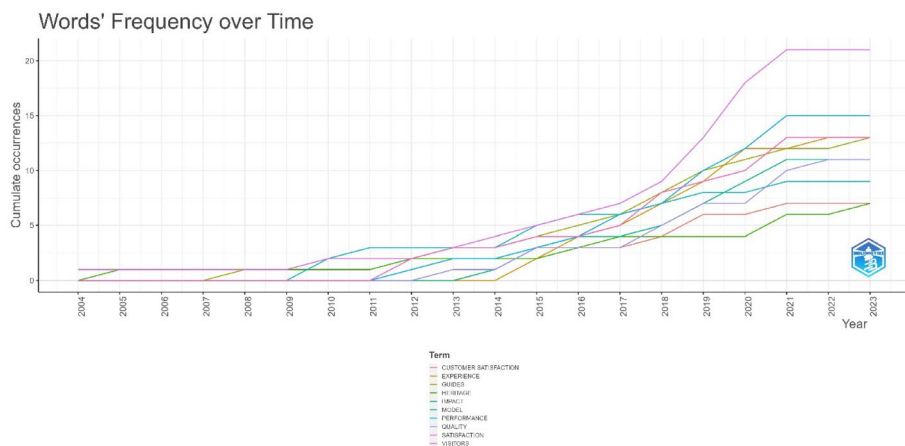


Fig. 6 Annual growth of most relevant keywords based on their occurrences

began around 2009–2010, with terms like “customer satisfaction” and “impact” starting to show a gradual increase.

A significant acceleration in the cumulative occurrences of several keywords is evident from 2018 onwards. Specifically, “customer satisfaction,” “tourist experience,” “impact of tour guide on tourist,” “tour guide’s performance,” and “quality of tour guide’s service” all demonstrate a sharper upward trend, indicating a growing emphasis on these aspects within the tourism industry. The period around 2019 marks a particularly clear introduction or increased focus on these terms, suggesting a heightened awareness of their importance, potentially linked to the emergence or formalization of tour guiding practices that prioritize these elements. By 2021–2022, “customer satisfaction” shows the most dramatic rise, reaching over 20 cumulative occurrences, highlighting its paramount importance. Other terms like “tourist experience” and “tour guide’s performance” also continue to climb steadily, reinforcing the idea that the industry is increasingly valuing and tracking these metrics.

In order to emphasize the hottest issues, our analysis in Fig. 7 sets an acceptable recurrence threshold of five for phrases and concentrates on the three most often occurring keywords annually to highlight the popular issues. According to the findings, between 2011 and 2018, it is seen that researchers conducted studies on tour guiding mostly to develop models. In addition, researchers focused on “the impact of tour guides on visitors experience and attitudes”, “the impact of tour guides’ performance on tourists’ destinations loyalty, satisfactions and, experience” “, “the satisfaction and perceptions of tourists on heritage service”. According to these findings, it can be said that the focus of research during this period was expanded to include various human-centered and experience-based aspects. It seems that the dominant focus on satisfaction was the potential effects of tourist satisfaction on the revisit intention, tourist loyalty and accordingly economic development of tourism destinations.

Furthermore, a significant quantity of research has concentrated on “hospitality” and “perceptions”. This indicates that future scientific research should focus more on these two subjects. This suggests that these areas are critical to the field, likely due to their direct impact on the quality of service, customer satisfaction, and overall experience. Hospitality

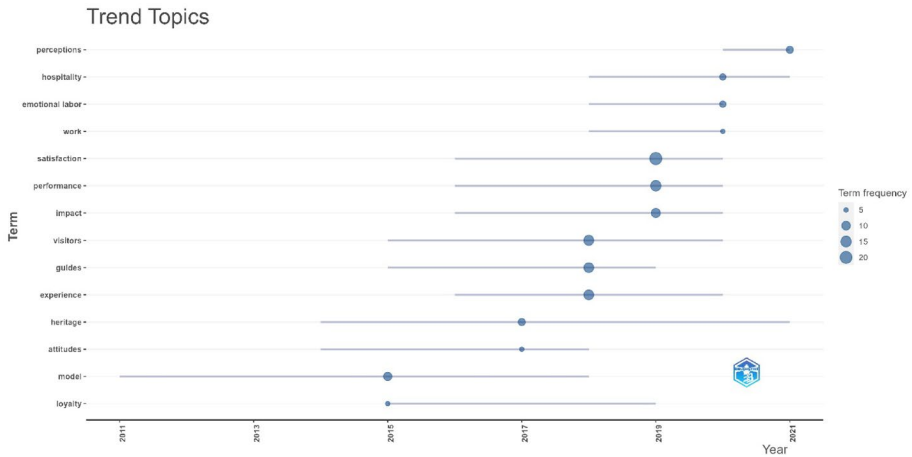


Fig. 7 The trending topics in research on tour guiding

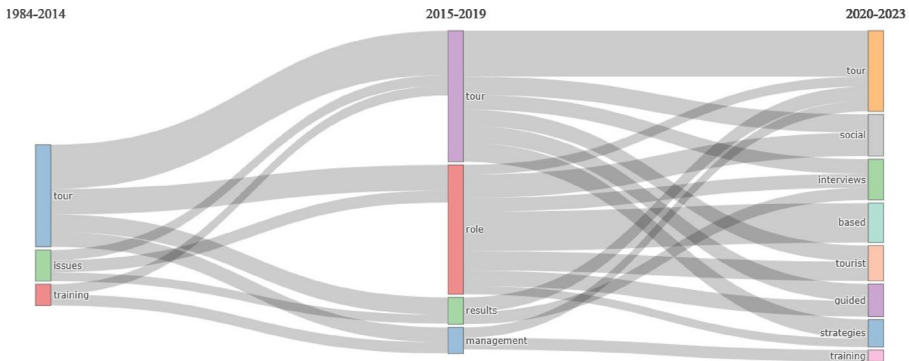


Fig. 8 Thematic evolutionary analysis of research on tour guiding

research might cover a range of topics from service quality, staff training, and operational efficiency to cultural and psychological aspects of hosting guests. Perceptions research implies a focus on how different stakeholders (e.g., tourists, local communities, industry professionals) view and interpret various aspects of tourism and events.

3.4 The findings of thematic evolutionary analysis

Examining the developmental paths, evolutionary relationships, and changing patterns of thematic content and structures across time is made easier with the assist of thematic evolution analysis. Thematically, development is essential to illustrating how themes evolve throughout academic domains. A Sankey diagram is used in Fig. 8 to illustrate how a graph can be used for graphical information interpretation. The study demonstrates how several subtopics are related to one another and grow throughout time (Ocak et al. 2024). The forty years were divided into three separate periods: 1984–2014, 2015–2019 and 2020–2023. Each node indicates a particular subject, and the size of the node shows how many sentences

are related to that subject. The flow that unites the nodes shows how the research topic has developed over time. The graph shows that “tour” is the fundamental concept that has been the primary focus of research improvements in tour guiding. However, between 1984 and 2014, themes: tours, issues, and training drew attention. The process of grouping subjects to define components clearly illustrates how the core area developed, beginning with the establishment of foundations and the formulation of theories regarding events and ending with the emergence of research themes as roles and management. These subjects have changed over time as research fields, focusing on social studies (i.e., the impact of tourism and events on society, and the tourists’ experiences and behaviors) and strategies. This implies that it is a shift from foundational theories to practical applications and strategic considerations, reflecting both the maturation of the field and the evolving needs of the industry. This progression demonstrates the responsiveness of academic research to real-world developments and challenges.

4 Discussion and conclusion

4.1 Discussion

The analysis of the evolution and current state of research on tourist guides within the tourism field reveals several key trends and shifts over the past four decades. From the establishment of foundational theories and models in the 1980s to a more nuanced exploration of human-centric and experience-based aspects in recent years, the field has demonstrated considerable growth and diversification.

The initial phase of research (1984–2014) was marked by efforts to establish theoretical frameworks and foundational concepts, with significant contributions from seminal works such as Cohen (1985) and Zhang and Chow (2004). These early studies laid the groundwork for understanding the roles, origins, and performance of tour guides, which has been crucial for subsequent empirical and theoretical developments.

The period from 2015 onwards has seen an increased focus on qualitative aspects of tour guiding, such as satisfaction, performance, emotional labor, and the overall visitor experience. This shift reflects a broader trend in tourism research towards considering the subjective and experiential dimensions of tourism, highlighting the importance of understanding the human element in tour guiding.

The analysis also reveals significant international collaboration, particularly between the UK, China, and the USA, underscoring the global nature of tour guiding research. This collaboration is essential for addressing the diverse and context-specific challenges in the field, promoting the exchange of knowledge and best practices across different regions.

Furthermore, the study identifies key themes and topics that have dominated recent research, including the impact of tour guides’ performance on visitor satisfaction, the perceptions of service quality, and the emotional and psychological aspects of tour guiding. These themes highlight the multifaceted nature of tour guiding and the need for a holistic approach to understanding and improving this critical aspect of tourism.

4.2 Theoretical contributions

Foundational studies, such as Cohen (1985), established a theoretical framework that identified the dual role of guides as both pathfinders and mentors, emphasizing instrumental, social, interactional, and communicative functions. These constructs remain highly relevant as they provide a basis for understanding the impact of tour guides on visitor experiences. Co-citation analysis (Fig. 4) further underscores the durability of these theoretical frameworks, demonstrating that core theories continue to inform new research directions, such as studies focusing on guides' influence on satisfaction, loyalty, and perceptions.

The thematic evolution analysis (Fig. 8) illustrates a shift in the field's theoretical emphasis from foundational constructs to broader social and experiential dimensions. This shift indicates that tourism research increasingly views tour guiding not just as a service but as a critical mechanism for fostering positive cultural exchanges and enhancing tourist satisfaction. This progression from the traditional theories on the structural role of guides to more dynamic and interactive perspectives reflects the evolving demands of the tourism industry. Consequently, the theoretical foundation laid by early studies has enabled researchers to develop and refine models that assess the impact of guides on customer satisfaction, experience quality, and destination loyalty, thus contributing to the conceptual advancement of tourism as a discipline.

4.3 Practical contributions

From a practical standpoint, this body of research offers essential insights for tourism practitioners, policy-makers, and educational institutions involved in tour guide training and professional development. The growing focus on performance metrics and satisfaction outcomes, as revealed by the co-occurrence network analysis (Fig. 5), highlights the practical implications of guide behaviour on customer satisfaction and destination image. Findings indicate that guides play a substantial role in shaping tourists' experiences, perceptions, and, ultimately, loyalty to destinations. For practitioners, this emphasizes the importance of investing in training programs that prioritize customer satisfaction and quality service attributes, including hospitality, communication, and cultural competence, which are instrumental in improving tourist experiences.

Furthermore, the collaboration patterns between countries (Fig. 3) highlight the potential benefits of cross-national partnerships in tourism development. These collaborations, particularly among high-output countries like the USA, China, and Australia, suggest opportunities for global knowledge exchange on effective tour guiding practices, thereby raising industry standards. Countries can leverage these partnerships to adopt best practices and share innovative approaches in guiding, service quality, and visitor engagement, enhancing the overall appeal and competitiveness of their tourism offerings.

The thematic evolution towards issues related to social impact, hospitality, and perceptions (as seen in Figs. 5 and 8) also provides practical implications for future training curricula. For instance, as research points to the critical role of guides in fostering satisfaction and loyalty, programs should focus not only on traditional guiding skills but also on relational and interpersonal skills, enabling guides to connect more deeply with tourists. Additionally, the focus on satisfaction, loyalty, and economic impact supports the argument

for regular performance evaluations and professional development, helping guides continuously improve and adapt to the evolving expectations of modern tourists.

Overall, this study underscores the importance of tour guides as intermediaries between tourists and destinations. As the tourism industry continues to evolve, there is a pressing need for research that bridges theoretical constructs with practical applications. Future studies could expand on the identified themes by incorporating interdisciplinary approaches that draw from psychology, sociology, and management to provide a holistic understanding of tour guiding. Moreover, given the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global tourism, future research might examine how tour guiding practices adapt to health and safety concerns and shifting visitor expectations.

4.4 Future research agenda

While foundational theories, such as those of Cohen (1985) remain influential, new conceptual models are needed to address evolving topics, including social relations, emotional labor, digital mediation, and sustainable guiding. Questions for future theoretical development include: *How do tour guides act as agents of ethical and sustainable tourism behavior? What new theoretical perspectives can better explain guide-visitor social relations?* Further, the digital transformation of the field presents rich opportunities for exploration. Future studies might ask: *How do AI-based or virtual guides contribute to training in tour guiding profession? What are the implications of AR/VR-guided experiences on visitor satisfaction and engagement compared to human-guided tours?*

Moreover, emotional labor has emerged as a crucial issue in tour guiding, yet research remains limited. Future studies could explore: *What are the emotional and psychological challenges faced by tour guides? How do coping mechanisms and institutional support systems influence tour guides' job satisfaction and service performance?* Moreover, cultural and geographical diversity significantly shape guiding practices and expectations. Future comparative studies might examine: *How do tourists' perceptions and expectations vary across cultures? In what ways can guides tailor their techniques to maximize satisfaction among diverse visitor groups?* Lastly, more investigations into interactional dynamics are needed. For this scope, the following questions could be investigated: *What role do tour guides' leadership styles, storytelling, humour, and charisma play in shaping visitor experiences? How do different communication styles affect tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and learning?*

In addition, as new challenges and expectations have emerged in tourism in the wake of the pandemic, future studies investigating how guiding practices adapt to concerns around health, safety, personalization, and sustainability will be essential for understanding the future of the profession. By addressing these areas, future research can enhance theoretical understanding while offering actionable insights for practitioners, policymakers, and educators aiming to strengthen the effectiveness and impact of tour guiding within the evolving tourism industry.

4.5 Limitations

While this study offers a comprehensive and data-driven analysis of tour guiding research, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis was restricted to the WoS

database, which, although extensive, may omit relevant studies indexed elsewhere (e.g., Scopus, EBSCO, Google Scholar), potentially narrowing the scope of the findings. Second, by focusing exclusively on peer-reviewed journal articles, the review excludes insights from books, dissertations, and conference papers, which often contribute novel or practice-oriented perspectives. Third, the keyword-based analysis depends on author-supplied terms, which may vary in precision and consistency, potentially affecting the thematic mapping. Given these limitations, future researchers may add asterisks to keywords to access a wider range of studies, and they should pursue a broader multi-database bibliometric analysis and incorporate additional publication types to provide a more inclusive picture of the field. Moreover, while this study mapped past and present research trends, further work is needed to explore emerging technologies (e.g., AR, VR, AI-guided experiences), the emotional labor and well-being of tour guides, and the cross-cultural dynamics of guide-tourist interactions. Investigating how tour guiding adapts in the post-pandemic tourism landscape - where expectations of safety, sustainability, and personalization are rapidly evolving -, represents another promising avenue for future scholarship. Future research should examine how tour guides might foster ethical and sustainable behaviour, as sustainability becomes increasingly significant in the tourism industry. A possible field of research study might be how tour guides teach visitors about ethical travel practices, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation. Furthermore, different cultural and geographical situations can be compared to conduct comparative studies that offer greater insights into the expectations and perceptions of tourists. Tour guides can better adapt their techniques to suit the varied needs of their clients and increase satisfaction on a worldwide scale by being aware of these distinctions. Extensive research on the dynamics of interactions between tour guides and visitors can provide crucial insights into the elements that influence both good and bad experiences. Future scholars could examine how people communicate, the function of narrative, and the impact of tour guides' personalities on how satisfied guests are.

4.6 Conclusion

Following PRISMA methodology, we conducted bibliometric analysis on tour guiding research in tourism. The co-citation analysis revealed two major clusters. According to these clusters, scholars have examined the origins, roles, and evolution of tour guiding research, focused on the perceived importance of tour guides' service quality attributes and their performance, and identified challenges. Co-occurrence network analysis also identified five clusters from the keywords: "satisfaction," "guides," "visitors and perceptions," and "performance" had the most power in relation to "experience," "impact," "customer satisfaction," and "quality." Moreover, we utilized Biblioshiny for determining descriptive inferences, such as annual scientific growth, average citations, and country collaboration. After that, we provided directions for further investigation in the knowledge field and offered research questions for future researchers.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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