How alluring is the online profile of tour guides?

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Abstract: This paper examines the effects of tour guides' online profile on Internet users looking to book a vacation in terms of four aspects: perceived usefulness of the profile, hedonic attitude toward the tour guide, utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide, and purchase intention for the package tour. An experiment was conducted with 285 participants. A happy facial expression on the profile picture and a detailed profile description generally drew favorable responses. Moreover, the participants preferred male to female tour guides, thereby highlighting how the tourism industry is plagued by gender stereotype. Besides having implications for tour guides and travel agencies, the paper calls for a globally agreed policy on gender equality in tourism.

1. Introduction

Group package tours have long been money-spinners for travel agencies (Wong & Lee, 2012). By bundling services such as accommodation, meals, sightseeing and transportation, they appeal to holidaymakers looking for hassle-free vacations. The global market of package tours is forecast to steadily surge northward at least until 2022 (Orbis Research, 2018).

Satisfaction with package tours is highly contingent on tour guides who bear the responsibility of fronting the entire chain of travel-related services. As direct points-of-contact throughout the tours, they wear many hats ranging from hosting travelers and keeping them entertained to showing leadership in times of crisis (Tsaur & Teng, 2017; Wong & Lee, 2012). Hence, their performance plays a huge role in shaping the image of the travel agencies they represent (Chang, 2014; Huang et al., 2015).

In recent years, an increasing number of independent guides who do not belong to any agency have started offering package tours via peer-to-peer services such as Vayable (vayable.com) and Viator (tourguides.viator.com). Beyond merely publishing detailed itineraries as traditional industry players would, these tour guides share information about themselves through profile pictures and textual descriptions. The idea is to add a human touch to their services to compensate for the lack of corporate branding.

While the tourism literature has shed much light on the role of tour guides (Luoh & Tsaur, 2014; Tsaur & Teng, 2017; Wong & Lee, 2012), two research gaps still exist. First, it is silent on the extent to which tour guides' online profile can allure Internet users looking to book a vacation. Prior research, albeit in other contexts, has shown that pictures of happy faces evoke positive feelings more readily than those with neutral faces (Fagerstrøm et al., 2017; Todorov et al., 2015). Moreover, message length is known to be a predictor of information quality (Blumenstock, 2008). However, how users' perception of a given tour

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guide is influenced by facial expression on the profile picture and length of the textual description has yet to be studied. Plugging this gap would help understand the desirable characteristics of a tour guide's online profile.

Second, the literature has not yet shed light on how the gender of tour guides affect users' perception. The tourism industry has been largely male-dominated, and resistant to gender equality (Ferguson, 2018). Tourism service providers are expected to be men by default (Lin et al., 2008). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the tourism and leisure research initially resisted studying women (Henderson, 1994; Swain, 1995). Nonetheless, women's representation in the tourism industry is on the rise (Goyanes, 2017; Smith, 2012). As of 2016 in the US, for example, women accounted for some 40% of tour guides (The Boston Globe, 2019). Meanwhile, the literature too is witnessing a growing trend of studies on women (e.g., Brown & Osman, 2017; Guimarães & Silva, 2016). Concurrently, there is a shift toward a more gender-balanced use of the Internet (Pew Research Center, 2017; Wasserman & Richmond-Abbott, 2005). At such a point in time, examining the effect of gender on users' decision to choose a tour guide, based on the latter's online profile, offers the scope to break new ground (Ferguson, 2018; Guimarães & Silva, 2016; Lin et al., 2008; Smith, 2012).

For these reasons, conceptualizing online profile in terms of facial expression on the profile picture, length of the textual description, and gender of the tour guide, this paper examines its effects on users in terms of four aspects: (a) perceived usefulness of the profile, (b) hedonic attitude toward the tour guide, (c) utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide, and (d) purchase intention for the package tour.

Perceived usefulness was included because it has been a construct of interest for new technological affordances and web-based systems. For the purpose of this paper, perceived usefulness is defined as the extent to which users perceive a tour guide's online profile to be

helpful when evaluating a package tour on the Internet (Davis, 1989; Purnawirawan et al., 2012).

The decision to include attitude and purchase intention was informed by Lin et al. (2008), which had examined advertisement effectiveness of travel brochures on these two constructs. Nonetheless, this paper goes further to granularize attitude into its hedonic and utilitarian components. Hedonic attitude is related to feelings about the tour guide while utilitarian attitude refers to the functional effectiveness of the tour guide (Tsaur et al., 2017; Voss et al., 2003). Purchase intention is defined as individuals' willingness to buy the package tour led by the tour guide (Huang et al., 2010a).

Overall, the paper contributes in two ways. First, it extends the literature on the role of tour guides (e.g., Tsaur & Teng, 2017; Wong & Lee, 2012) by starting a relatively new line of academic discourse focusing on the relationship between the online profile of tour guides and users' purchase intention. The findings offer insights into how tour guides can use the Internet to cast themselves in a favorable light in order to get travelers to tour with them. Second, the paper is one of the earliest to check for gender bias on tour guides. Building on prior research that showed a gender wage gap in the tourism industry (Guimarães & Silva, 2016), this paper suggests that this disparity could well be traced to the unfavorable perception of female tour guides.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Related Works

The tourism literature has delved much into the role of tour guides, one of the most established strands of research. In an early related work, Cohen (1985) pointed out that it is necessary for tour guides to play at least four roles: instrumental, social, interactional, and communicative. The instrumental component relates to tour guides' ability to conduct tours

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smoothly. The social component reflects their ability to maintain cohesion and morale among tourists. The interactional component is associated with their function of serving as a middleman between tourists and the local population. Finally, the communicative component is a measure of the extent to which tour guides are able to interpose themselves between tourists and the sights as a culture broker (Cohen, 1985). Later works added other practically-relevant items to the list that include emergency response management as well as meeting travelers' physical and psychological needs (Huang et al., 2010b; Luoh & Tsaur, 2014).

As tour guides shoulder a myriad of responsibilities during tours, the way they lead their charges has also been studied. Three dimensions of leadership style have been found to be particularly relevant: concern for tasks, concern for travelers, and concern for controlling the group climate (Wong & Lee, 2012). Recent research has even progressed to develop scales to measure tour guiding style (e.g., Tsaur & Teng, 2017).

A relatively less-explored strand of research focuses on potential travelers' perception of tour guides. Lin et al. (2008) was the first to investigate the advertising impact of including information about a tour guide in travel brochures. No marked difference in advertisement effectiveness could be identified. Nonetheless, it called for similar research in the online setting. More recently, Luoh and Tsaur (2014) studied travelers' perception of tour guides' photos, and found that it was affected by age-based stereotype. Middle-aged tour guides were viewed more favorably than those who were young, perhaps because the former was seen as being more experienced.

This paper extends the current literature in two ways. One, while works such as Luoh and Tsaur (2014) were conducted offline, this paper focuses on the online context. This shift is significant as traditional travel brochures are increasingly becoming web-based (Lin et al., 2008; Wong & Lee, 2012), and that travelers commonly rely on the Internet to make bookings. Concurrently, the ranks of independent tour guides are also on the rise.

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Two, the paper is a deliberate response to the call for an examination into the role of tour guides' gender on potential travelers' perception (Luoh & Tsaur, 2014). This is also an important step at a point in time when more women are joining the traditionally male-dominated tourism industry (Goyanes, 2017; Smith, 2012).

2.2. Tour Guides' Online Profile: Profile Picture and Textual Description

Online profile of tour guides commonly contains two parts: a profile picture, and a textual description. Any image ranging from iconic buildings and breath-taking natural spectacles to attractive avatars and cute pets can be used as a profile picture. However, if the purpose is to foster a favorable impression, the tour guide's face needs to be featured. After all, users would obviously want to be assured that there is a real person behind the profile picture.

Facial expression on the profile picture creates the first impression of what to expect from the tour guide. According to cognitive psychology research (Asch, 1946; Todorov et al., 2015), facial expression is a powerful non-verbal cue that intuitively informs personality assessments. Even when viewed momentarily, it contributes to a gut feeling about the individual, which often shapes any subsequent decision to engage with the person in the picture (Bar et al., 2006). People watching unfamiliar faces for durations in the order of milliseconds can develop impressions about the targets almost unanimously (Todorov & Uleman, 2004). Recent tourism research particularly in the context of Airbnb—the popular peer-to-peer accommodation rental service—found that hosts' profile pictures with smiling faces were viewed more favorably compared with those showing serious expressions (Fagerstrøm et al., 2017). Hence, the paper posits the following:

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H1: A happy (vs. neutral) facial expression on a tour guide's online profile has a positive effect on (a) perceived usefulness of the profile, (b) hedonic attitude toward the tour guide, (c) utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide, and (d) purchase intention.

When it comes to textual description, message length is a noteworthy parameter. It has traditionally been used as a proxy for information quality in a variety of settings. For example, the word count of Wikipedia articles is known to be a predictor of their quality (Blumenstock, 2008). In online question answering websites such as Yahoo! Answers, length has been shown to correlate with the quality of answers (Blooma et al., 2012). The online community generally perceives online product reviews that are lengthy as being helpful (Chua & Banerjee, 2015). Applying such findings in the present context, one would expect that detailed textual descriptions in tour guides' online profile are preferred over brief ones. Hence, the paper posits the following:

H2: A detailed (vs. brief) description on a tour guide's online profile has a positive effect on (a) perceived usefulness of the profile, (b) hedonic attitude toward the tour guide, (c) utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide, and (d) purchase intention.

The need for a happy facial expression notwithstanding, showing smiling faces is not a panacea. This can be attributed to the concept of "resting bitch face" (RBF), which suggests that some individuals chronically have serious-looking faces, and are perceived as disengaged and unapproachable (Bennett, 2015; Camia, 2016). Their faces unintentionally express contempt through a subtle raising of lip corners and tightening around the eyes (Gilbee, 2016). While RBF was traditionally viewed as a sexist expression ascribed only to females, recent evidence suggests that men are just as likely to have it as women (Harrison, 2017). Being afflicted with RBF has negative career repercussions for individuals (Allen et al., 2016). Hence, applications such as Test your RBF (https://www.testrbf.com/) have now emerged, allowing people to test if they have the malady (Lewinski et al., 2014).

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There is also a catch to presenting detailed profile descriptions. Reading long text can be time-consuming and cognitively challenging, and has the potential to shift the reader's attention toward the profile picture. Explained in the theory of selective attention, individuals' responses to messages are constrained by their information processing capacity (Treisman, 1969). Instead of wading through a complex textual anecdote, many individuals tend to rely on their gut feeling roused by the accompanying profile picture as a heuristic to form an overall impression about the tour guide (Garrett et al., 2013). While this is desirable for happy faces, it may not be ideal for faces afflicted with RBF (Allen et al., 2016).

This line of reasoning suggests that neutral faces of tour guides—may or may not be due to RBF—are unfortunately a distinct disadvantage. With a long profile description, attention will be redirected to the not-so-pleasant profile picture (Bennett, 2015; Hirudayaraj & Clay, in press). Neither does a short profile description help because it may not inspire confidence (Blooma et al., 2012; Chua & Banerjee, 2015). On the other hand, happy faces of tour guides should work well (Fagerstrøm et al., 2017), regardless of the length of profile descriptions. In other words, one would not expect any interaction effect between facial expression and profile length. Tour guides' online profile showing happy faces should be received more favorably compared with those showing neutral faces. Hence, the following null hypothesis is posited:

H3: Facial expression (happy vs. neutral) and description length (detailed vs. brief) on a tour guide's online profile do not exert any interaction effect on (a) perceived usefulness of the profile, (b) hedonic attitude toward the tour guide, (c) utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide, and (d) purchase intention.

2.3. The Role of Gender

The role of gender is an important point for consideration when examining how tour guides' online profile influences users' responses. Gender refers to "a system of culturally constructed identities, expressed in ideologies of masculinity and femininity, interacting with socially structured relationships in divisions of labor and leisure, sexuality, and power between women and men" (Swain, 1995, pp. 258-259). Any travel facility depends on relations between tourists and tourism service providers, all of whom are gendered (Kinnaird et al., 1994). Men and women tend to consume tourism differently. This is partly vestige of the differences in their travel and leisure patterns. Men have historically been less constrained than women (Jackson & Henderson, 1995; Seow & Brown, 2018). For example, alcohol consumption, a prominent travel and leisure activity, by women in public is stigmatized more often than men's drinking (Moore, 1995).

As the literature has unequivocally suggested that all travel facilities are impacted by gender relations (e.g., Kinnaird et al., 1994; Seow & Brown, 2018), package tours are not foreseen to be any exception. Yet, the question of how male and female Internet users differ in responding to tour guides' online profile remains unanswered hitherto. An attempt to address this question now is particularly timely. For one, while the tourism industry has been traditionally male-dominated (Henderson, 1994; Lin et al., 2008), women's representation among tour guides is gradually on the rise (Goyanes, 2017; The Boston Globe, 2019). Moreover, with the continuous evolution of gender relations over time (Swain, 1995), women are now beginning to outnumber men in terms of travel frequency (Losada et al., 2016; Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017). They are also serving as the main decision-makers in vacation planning among couples and families (Khan et al., 2017). Furthermore, the gender gap of Internet users has narrowed significantly in recent years (Pew Research Center, 2017; Wasserman & Richmond-Abbott, 2005). Therefore, while browsing the Internet, men and

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women stand a good chance to be exposed to the online profile of both male and female tour guides.

The John-Jane effect could be brought to bear in this context. It suggests that men are more likely to be appointed and/or offered higher salaries than women with identical resumés (Moss-Racusina et al., 2012; Pritchard & Morgan, 2017; Steinpreis et al., 1999). Masculinity has long been recognized as a better predictor of workplace success compared with femininity (Franzway et al., 2009; Lefkowitz & Zeldow, 2006). This could ring true in the traditionally male-dominated tour guide profession (Goyanes, 2017; Smith, 2012).

Moreover, due to gender stereotype, males are usually expected to perform well in providing outdoor services while females are thought to work best on desk-bound, indoor tasks (Fischer et al., 1997; Lin et al., 2008; Tajfel, 1981). Given the perceived lack of occupational fit for female tour guides (Eagly, 2005; Heilman, 1983), travelers may assume that men make for better tour guides than women, all else being equal. Hence, the paper posits the following:

H4: Compared with a female, a male tour guide's online profile receives more favorable responses in terms of (a) perceived usefulness of the profile, (b) hedonic attitude toward the tour guide, (c) utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide, and (d) purchase intention.

While there is little theoretical basis to posit any alternative or null hypothesis regarding the impact of travelers' gender on the effectiveness of tour guides' online profile, opposite-sex attraction could come into play. Opposite-sex attraction refers to a felt desire to become romantically involved with a target (Elliot & Niesta, 2008). Personality research suggests that individuals show preference for extraversion in the opposite gender more than they would in the same gender (Ciarrochi & Heaven, 2009). Moreover, advertising research indicates that when a customer and a model in an advertisement are of different gender, an

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emotional romantic appeal is stimulated. This opposite-sex attraction in turn contributes to greater advertisement effectiveness (Joseph, 1982; Lin et al., 2008).

Applying these arguments, female users should have a preference for male tour guides, and male users for female tour guides (Addis & Holbrook, 2010; Amyx & Amyx, 2011; Holbrook & Schindler, 1994). In other words, the unfairly advantaged position of male tour guides, a result of gender stereotype, should be particularly conspicuous when travelers are mostly women. Conversely, the scale could tilt in favor of female tour guides when travelers are mostly men. Hence, the paper posits the following:

H5: The gender of a tour guide interacts with that of a user to influence (a) perceived usefulness of the online profile, (b) hedonic attitude toward the tour guide, (c) utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide, and (d) purchase intention.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

A 2 (tour guide's facial expression on the profile picture: happy vs. neutral) × 2 (length of the tour guide's profile description: brief vs. detailed) x 2 (tour guide's gender: male vs. female) between-participants factorial experimental design was implemented. It assigned participants randomly to one of the eight experimental conditions.

In each experimental condition, the participants were told that they were taking part in market research, and the experimental stimuli were newly designed web-based promotional materials. This was guided by previous works such as Tsaur et al. (2017) to heighten the contextual importance among participants, who were asked to imagine that they were planning for a package tour in Paris and had identified an affordable option. Paris was selected as the destination because it is one of the best known and most visited cities of the world (Tan, 2018).

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Next, the participants were exposed to the experimental stimuli—the online profile of a tour guide (cf. Section 3.2). After exposure to the experimental stimuli, they were required to fill out a questionnaire (cf. Section 3.3).

3.2. Pre-Tests and Construction of the Experimental Stimuli

Two websites—vayable.com, and tourguides.viator.com—that offer package tours in Paris were used as the sources from which online profiles of bona fide independent tour guides were identified. After an initial inspection of the websites, three observations were noted. One, most tour guides appeared Caucasian. Two, not all tour guides revealed their faces fully. Three, while some tour guides' profile pictures had a plain background, others used striking settings such as the Eiffel Tower or the Louvre Pyramid.

Based on these observations, three criteria were developed to filter profile pictures. First, all tour guides' profile pictures to be used as the experimental stimuli should appear Caucasian. This allowed tour guides' race to be controlled. Second, their full-face frontal headshots with eye contact must be clearly visible without any need for cropping or zooming. To ensure eye contact, pictures with eyeglasses were ignored. Third, the pictures must have a plain background. Striking settings such as the Eiffel Tower in the background would have confounded the experiment.

Bearing these criteria in mind, pictures of tour guides were iteratively visited. If a picture failed to meet a criterion, it was ignored. If it met the three criteria, it was downloaded and archived.

The iteration continued until a corpus of 20 pictures uniformly distributed with respect to gender and facial expression was created. Thus, the corpus included pictures of five female tour guides with a happy facial expression, five male tour guides with a happy facial

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expression, five female tour guides with a neutral facial expression, and five male tour guides with a neutral facial expression.

By way of induction check, these 20 profile pictures were subjected to a pre-test. Fifteen participants (60% males), who were postgraduate students selected using convenience sampling, evaluated each of the pictures presented in a random sequence. On a five-point scale, they indicated the extent to which facial expressions in the pictures were happy and neutral. Four profile pictures (2 males and 2 females) with the highest mean scores for happy and neutral facial expressions respectively in each gender category were admitted as the pictorial experimental stimuli. These are shown in Figure 1.
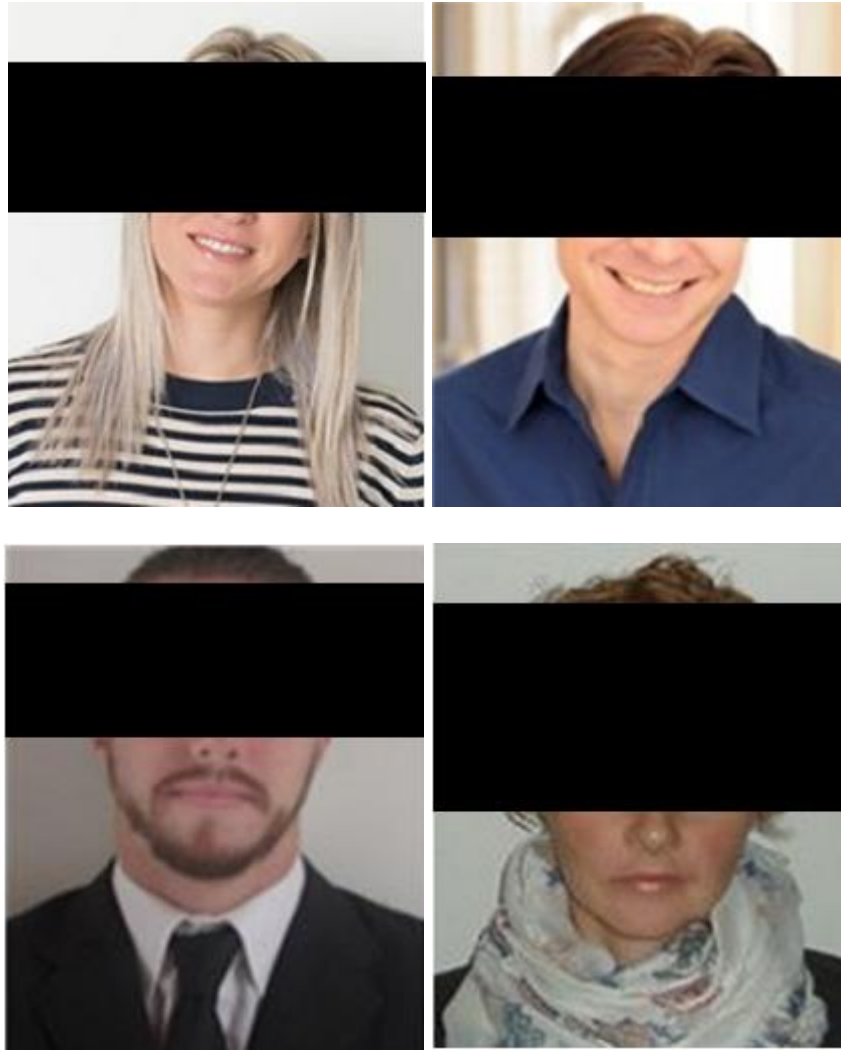
Figure 1: Selected facial expressions as experimental stimuli (clockwise from top left: female with happy face, male with happy face, female with neutral face, male with neutral face).

Table 1 shows the brief (35 words) and the detailed (177 words) versions of profile description—the former being a subset of the latter. Since length is an objective difference, no induction check was necessary (O'Keefe, 2003; Walther et al., 2018). Its potential effects are revealed in the analyses that follow.

Both the descriptions used a fictitious brand name 'PQR Travel Agency'. This was necessary to eliminate potential confounding effects from pre-existing products or similar brands (Tsaur et al., 2017). To prepare these, a few actual profile descriptions of tour guides were read by the researchers to develop a template. Many of the actual entries were found to

contain references to specific landmarks, which may conjure either positive or negative

emotions among participants and hence were avoided in the experimental stimuli.

Additionally, content was drawn from the literature on tour guides' roles (Huang et al.,

2010b; Luoh & Tsaur, 2014; Tsaur & Teng, 2017).

Table 1: Brief and detailed profile descriptions used as experimental stimuli.

Brief profile description
Dear Tourists,
I am a licensed tour guide for PQR Travel Agency. I specialize in guided tours within Paris. Thank you for visiting my profile.
I look forward to seeing you during your forthcoming trip.
Detailed profile description
Dear Tourists,
I am a licensed tour guide for PQR Travel Agency. I specialize in guided tours within Paris. Thank you for visiting my profile.
Being a tour guide over the last few years, my passion has always been to keep tourists happy, meet their expectation, and leave them with a positive impression of the touring sites. I prepare extensively to ensure that my tours run smoothly. I play the roles of a pathfinder, a mentor, an entertainer, and a communicator. As a pathfinder, I give directions to tourists. I present sites in an organized manner, and provide safe access to territories. As a mentor, I set consensus rules after getting the agreement of all tourists. Thereafter, I request everybody to obey them. As an entertainer, I use humour to maintain group morale. As a communicator, I not only disseminate information but also encourage a pleasant atmosphere within the group by promoting harmony and cohesion. Overall, I love to take care of tourists' physical and psychological needs.
I look forward to seeing you during your forthcoming trip.

Finally, the four profile pictures shown in Figure 1 were combined with the two

profile descriptions provided in Table 1. This resulted in the eight stimuli for the 2 (tour

guide's facial expression on the profile picture: happy vs. neutral) × 2 (length of the tour

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guide's profile description: brief vs. detailed) x 2 (tour guide's gender: male vs. female) experimental conditions.

3.3. Participants and Measures

Purposive sampling was used for the main experiment. The study invitation was disseminated using online social networks of the researchers and those of the 15 pre-test participants. Informed by Tsaur et al. (2017), participants were selected based on two criteria. First, they must have had experienced at least one package tour in the last three years. Second, they had never visited Paris.

Complete responses were eventually obtained from 285 eligible participants, the majority being Asians (91.9%). Of all the participants, 59.3% were females while the rest were males. The dominantly represented age groups were 21-30 years (55.1%), followed by 31-40 years (30.2%). Educational level was high in the sample as most of them (85.6%) held or were pursuing postgraduate degrees.

After being randomly assigned to one of the 2 (tour guide's facial expression on the profile picture: happy vs. neutral) × 2 (length of the tour guide's profile description: brief vs. detailed) x 2 (tour guide's gender: male vs. female) experimental conditions, the participants answered a questionnaire based on the stimulus. The questionnaire measured (a) perceived usefulness of the tour guide's online profile, (b) hedonic attitude toward the tour guide, (c) utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide, and (d) purchase intention.

Perceived usefulness was measured by asking the participants the degree to which they agreed (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) with the following three statements: "I found the tour guide's online profile useful," "The tour guide's online profile helped me to assess the package tour," and "The tour guide's online profile helped me to make a decision

regarding the package tour" (Cronbach's α = 0.89). These were adapted from Purnawirawan et al.'s (2012) items to measure perceived usefulness of online reviews.

Items to measure hedonic and utilitarian attitude were drawn from Voss et al. (2003), and used a seven-point scale semantic differential scale. For hedonic attitude, the participants indicated whether the tour guide would be not fun/fun, dull/exciting, not delightful/delightful, not thrilling/thrilling, and unenjoyable/enjoyable (Cronbach's α = 0.78). For utilitarian attitude, they indicated whether the tour guide would be ineffective/effective, unhelpful/helpful, not functional/functional, unnecessary/necessary, and impractical/practical (Cronbach's α = 0.80).

Purchase intention was measured by asking the participants their likelihood (1 = very low, 7 = very high) of the following: "I would purchase this tour guide's package tour," "I am inclined to take the package tour led by this tour guide," and "I would consider buying this tour guide's package tour" (Cronbach's α = 0.83). These were adapted from works such as Ainscough (2006) and Tsaur et al. (2017).

3.4. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using two sets of multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). This statistical procedure is apt when there are several dependent variables, and the shared variance among them should be controlled for as a protection against inflating Type I error. The dependent variables were travelers' responses in terms of (a) perceived usefulness of a tour guide's online profile, (b) hedonic attitude toward the tour guide, (c) utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide, and (d) purchase intention. All pairwise correlations among these four dependent variables were below 0.8, confirming no multicollinearity (Pallant, 2005). The highest correlation was 0.74 between perceived usefulness and utilitarian attitude.

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One set of MANCOVA examined how the dependent variables were affected by tour guides' online profile. The two independent variables included facial expression on the profile picture (positive vs. neutral), and length of the profile description (brief vs. detailed). Participants' age and gender as well as tour guides' gender served as covariates.

The other set of MANCOVA examined how the dependent variables were affected by the gender interplay. Hence, the two independent variables included travelers' gender and tour guides' gender. Participants' age served as a covariate.

For both the sets of MANCOVA, the underlying assumptions were checked. Scatterplots did not reveal any evidence of non-linearity between each pair of the dependent variables. A visual inspection of the Probability-Probability plot and the Quantile-Quantile plot pointed to mild departures from normality in residuals. There were five multivariate outliers with Mahalanobis distance higher than the Chi-square critical value of 18.47 (Pallant, 2005). Levene's test for homogeneity of variance detected moderate violation of the assumption of equality of variance only for utilitarian attitude in the first set of analysis, $F(3, 281) = 2.47$, $p = 0.013$. Nonetheless, MANCOVA is robust to modest deviations from these assumptions with a large enough (n > 30 in each cell) sample size (Dattalo, 2013; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2000; Pallant, 2005).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the four dependent variables as a function of facial expression on the profile picture, and the length of the profile description in tour guides' online profile. Unsurprisingly, participants' responses appeared most favorable when tour guides' profile contained a positive facial expression coupled with a detailed

description. In contrast, their responses were least favorable when the facial expression was neutral and the description brief.

Table 2: Mean (SD) as a function of tour guides' online profile.

Facial Expression	Description Length	N	Perceived Usefulness	Hedonic Attitude	Utilitarian Attitude	Purchase Intention
Happy	Brief	67	4.60 (1.11)	4.59 (1.17)	4.55 (1.10)	3.79 (1.23)
Happy	Detailed	65	5.50 (0.83)	5.10 (1.11)	5.61 (0.80)	4.89 (1.22)
Neutral	Brief	76	4.18 (1.10)	4.01 (1.22)	4.46 (1.14)	3.55 (1.23)
Neutral	Detailed	77	5.09 (1.00)	4.86 (1.26)	5.28 (0.94)	4.50 (1.39)
Happy	All	132	5.04 (1.07)	4.84 (1.16)	5.08 (1.11)	4.33 (1.30)
Neutral	All	153	4.64 (1.14)	4.44 (1.31)	4.87 (1.12)	4.02 (1.39)
All	Brief	143	4.38 (1.12)	4.28 (1.23)	4.50 (1.13)	3.67 (1.23)
All	Detailed	142	5.28 (0.95)	4.97 (1.19)	5.43 (0.89)	4.67 (1.28)

Table 3 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the four dependent variables as a function of the interplay of gender. Participants' responses toward male tour guides generally appeared more favorable than that toward female tour guides.

Table 3: Mean (SD) as a function of the interplay of gender.

Travelers' (Participants') Gender	Tour Guides' Gender	N	Perceived Usefulness	Hedonic Attitude	Utilitarian Attitude	Purchase Intention
Female	Female	59	4.72 (1.13)	4.14 (1.22)	4.79 (1.16)	3.88 (1.44)
Female	Male	57	5.01 (1.08)	4.91 (1.26)	5.18 (1.15)	4.37 (1.33)
Male	Female	85	4.69 (1.17)	4.61 (1.28)	4.88 (1.11)	4.03 (1.40)
Male	Male	84	4.92 (1.10)	4.79 (1.19)	5.03 (1.06)	4.37 (1.23)
Female	All	116	4.86 (1.11)	4.52 (1.29)	4.98 (1.17)	4.13 (1.41)
Male	All	169	4.80 (1.14)	4.69 (1.24)	4.96 (1.09)	4.20 (1.32)
All	Female	144	4.70 (1.15)	4.42 (1.27)	4.80 (1.13)	3.97 (1.41)
All	Male	141	4.95 (1.09)	4.84 (1.22)	5.10 (1.10)	4.37 (1.27)

4.2. Inferential Statistics

MANCOVA with respect to tour guides' online profile. The results detected statistically significant positive effects of happy facial expression on perceived usefulness

[F(1, 278) = 12.32, p < 0.01, η_p^2 = 0.04], hedonic attitude [F(1, 278) = 9.08, p < 0.01, η_p^2 = 0.03], and purchase intention [F(1, 278) = 4.60, p < 0.05, η_p^2 = 0.02]. As shown in Table 2, participants' responses in terms of these three aspects were more favorable for happy vis-à-vis neutral facial expression on the profile picture of tour guides. This lent support to the hypotheses H1(a), H1(b) and H1(d).

However, the relation was non-significant for utilitarian attitude. Hence, H1(c) was not supported. The fact that the effect of facial expression on hedonic attitude was not the same as that on utilitarian attitude supports the original premise of the paper to study attitude granularly. While a happy face seems effective in forging an emotional connection between a tour guide and potential travelers, it could not promote the perceived utility of the tour guide.

Statistically significant positive effects emerged for detailed descriptions on all the four aspects of travelers' responses: perceived usefulness [F(1, 278) = 54.11, p < 0.001, η_p^2 = 0.16], hedonic attitude [F(1, 278) = 20.07, p < 0.001, η_p^2 = 0.07], utilitarian attitude [F(1, 278) = 58.90, p < 0.001, η_p^2 = 0.18], and purchase intention [F(1, 278) = 43.43, p < 0.001, η_p^2 = 0.14]. As shown in Table 2, participants' responses were more favorable for detailed vis-à-vis brief descriptions on the profile of tour guides. This lent support to the hypotheses H2(a), H2(b), H2(c) and H2(d).

Furthermore, no statistically significant interaction effects arose between facial expression (happy vs. neutral) and description length (detailed vs. brief). This lent support to the null hypotheses H3(a), H3(b), H3(c) and H3(d).

MANCOVA with respect to gender. Male and female participants did not differ from each other in terms of travelers' responses. Nonetheless, male and female tour guides gave rise to statistically significant differences on hedonic attitude [F(1, 280) = 10.18, p < 0.01, η_p^2 = 0.04], utilitarian attitude [F(1, 280) = 3.90, p < 0.05, η_p^2 = 0.01], and purchase intention [F(1, 280) = 6.34, p < 0.05, η_p^2 = 0.02]. As evident from Table 3, participants' responses in

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terms of these three aspects were more favorable for male vis-à-vis female tour guides. This lent support to the hypotheses H4(b), H4(c) and H4(d).

However, the relation was non-significant for perceived usefulness of the profile. Hence, H4(a) could not be supported. Perceived usefulness of the profile is the only dependent variable of the four studied in the paper that does not directly relate to satisfaction with the tour guide. This is probably why it was not susceptible to gender stereotype.

The interaction between travelers' gender and tour guides' gender was significant only in terms of hedonic attitude [$F(1, 280) = 3.91$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$]. Hence, H5(b) was supported. Male participants were quite similar in their hedonic attitude toward male and female tour guides. However, among female participants, hedonic attitude was more favorable toward male vis-à-vis female tour guides. Figure 2 depicts the interaction plot.

However, the relations were non-significant for perceived usefulness, utilitarian attitude, and purchase intention. In other words, no support could be found for the hypotheses H5(a), H5(c) and H5(d). Opposite-sex attraction is an inherently emotional phenomenon (Elliot & Niesta, 2008). This could be why its effect was only detected on hedonic attitude—which has an emotional element to it—but not on perceived usefulness, utilitarian attitude, and booking intention, all of which have a relatively more rational flavor. Table 4 summarizes the results of testing all of the posited hypotheses.
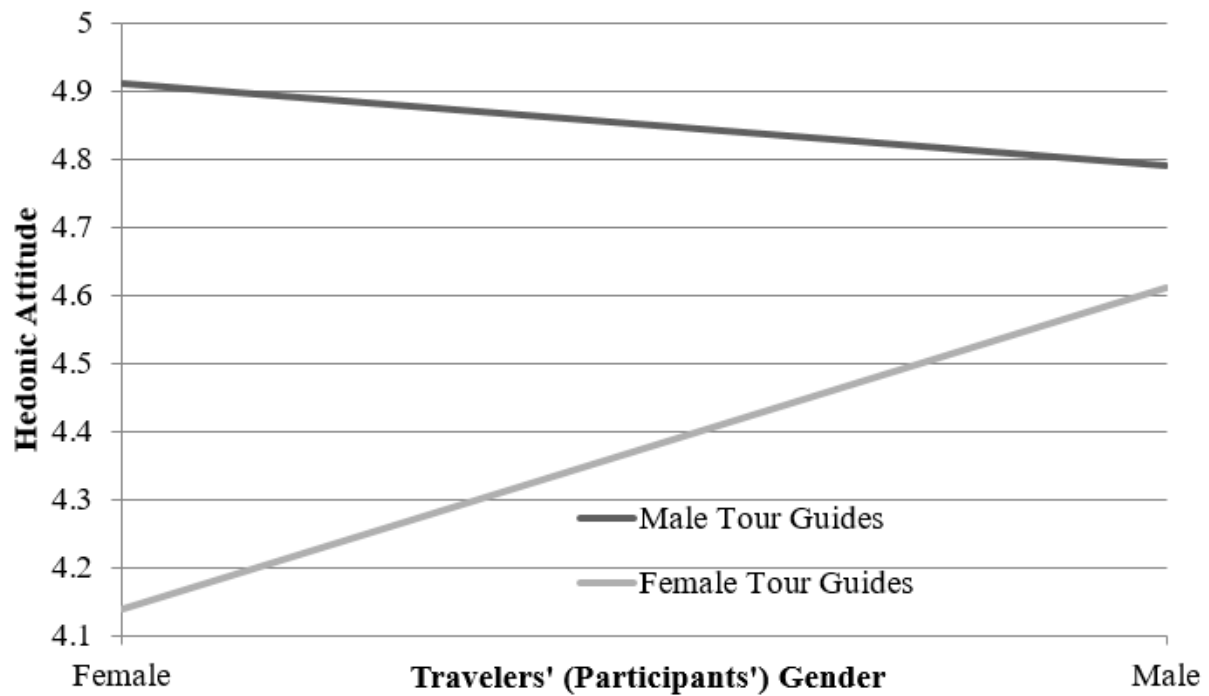
Figure 2: Interaction effect of travelers' and tour guides' gender on hedonic attitude.

Table 4: Results of the hypotheses testing.

Hypothesis	Test result summary
H1	• A happy (vs. neutral) facial expression on a tour guide's online profile had a positive effect on perceived usefulness of the profile, hedonic attitude toward the tour guide, and purchase intention. • However, no similar effect was detected for utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide.
H2	• A detailed (vs. brief) description on a tour guide's online profile had a positive effect on perceived usefulness of the profile, hedonic attitude toward the tour guide, utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide, and purchase intention.
H3	• Facial expression (happy vs. neutral) and description length (detailed vs. brief) on a tour guide's online profile did not exert any interaction effect on perceived usefulness of the profile, hedonic attitude toward the tour guide, utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide, and purchase intention.
H4	• Compared with a female, a male tour guide's online profile received more favorable responses in terms of hedonic as well as utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide, and purchase intention. • However, no similar effect was detected for perceived usefulness of the profile.
H5	• The gender as reflected through a tour guide's online profile interacted with the gender of a user to influence hedonic attitude toward the tour guide. • However, there was no interaction effect for perceived usefulness of the profile, utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide, and purchase intention.

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5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Key Findings

Three major findings can be gleaned from the results. First, a happy facial expression and a detailed profile description are desirable for a tour guide's online profile. This corroborates the cognitive psychology literature that has long advocated the power of facial expressions in informing viewers' decision-making (e.g., Asch, 1946; Todorov et al., 2015). It is also a note of caution for people afflicted with RBF (Allen et al., 2016). They should reconsider displaying their faces in their online profile. But if they so wish, they need to put on a smile. The finding also corresponds highly with previous literature conducted in non-tourism contexts that has shown length to be an indicator of perceived information quality (e.g., Blooma et al., 2012; Blumenstock, 2008).

Second, a male tour guide is viewed as being more alluring and competent than a female one. This contradicts the previous finding that travelers exhibited a higher willingness to purchase from travel brochures that carried photos of female tour guides compared with those that had photos of male tour guides (Lin et al., 2008). A possible reason for the inconsistency is that Lin et al. (2008) studied the impact of tour guides endorsing tour packages—but not as actual guides who will lead participants, which is the focus of the current work. Nonetheless, the finding lends support to the John-Jane effect (Moss-Racusina et al., 2012; Pritchard & Morgan, 2017; Steinpreis et al., 1999) and gender stereotype (Fischer et al., 1997; Lin et al., 2008) in the tourism industry. It highlights how stereotypes about gender can result in unfair treatment and sexism toward females who join a traditionally male-dominated profession.

Third, opposite-sex attraction is not overly conspicuous toward tour guides. This finding is not entirely consistent with previous evidences from personality and advertising

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research (e.g., Addis & Holbrook, 2010; Amyx & Amyx, 2011; Ciarrochi & Heaven, 2009; Joseph, 1982; Lin et al., 2008). While opposite-sex attraction increases advertisement effectiveness when customers come across a model of the opposite gender (Joseph, 1982; Lin et al., 2008), this paper finds the effect of opposite-sex attraction limited only to travelers' hedonic attitude toward the tour guide. It seems that results from the advertising literature cannot be readily generalized to e-tourism. Therefore, the paper calls for more research focusing on how online profile of tour guides can shape the perception of potential travelers on the Internet.

5.2. Contributions and Implications

Theoretically, the paper extends the literature on the role of tour guides (e.g., Tsaur & Teng, 2017; Wong & Lee, 2012) by starting a relatively new line of academic discourse focusing on how the online profile of tour guides affect Internet users' perceptions, attitudes and purchase intentions. Moreover, it responds to the research call to examine possible gender bias toward tour guides (Ferguson, 2018; Guimarães & Silva, 2016; Lin et al., 2008; Smith, 2012).

Furthermore, the paper has developed and tested a set of hypotheses that have their theoretical roots in cognitive psychology (H1), information quality (H2), RBF and the theory of selective attention (H3), the John-Jane effect and gender stereotype (H4), as well as opposite-sex attraction (H5). It shows how the two components of online profile—profile picture and textual description—separately affect (a) perceived usefulness of the profile, (b) hedonic attitude toward the tour guide, (c) utilitarian attitude toward the tour guide, and (d) purchase intention for the package tour. Overall, it represents one of the earliest theoretically-informed works on the effectiveness of tour guides' online profile.

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The paper also offers several implications for practice. For one, it recommends independent tour guides to set up their online profile with a photo of a happy facial expression and a detailed description to get users to tour with them. A happy facial expression evokes positive responses in terms of perceived usefulness, hedonic attitude, and purchase intention, while a detailed description does so for utilitarian attitude. These lessons could also be implemented by corporate travel agencies whose tour guides have an online presence.

However, there is a caveat to the above recommendation. Since the paper shows that neutral faces of tour guides are unfortunately a distinct disadvantage, tour guides who seem to have RBF should try smiling in front of the camera to make themselves more alluring. Alternatively, they could try other options ranging from iconic buildings and breath-taking natural spectacles to attractive avatars and cute pets as their profile picture to offset the potential negative effects of RBF.

Furthermore, the paper paints a picture of a gendered environment in the tourism industry. There does not exist any globally agreed policy, guideline or programme on gender equality in tourism (Ferguson, 2018). Hence, it is perhaps not a surprise that this paper finds evidence of ingrained gender roles and stereotypes on tour guides. Clearly, organizations such as the United Nations World Tourism Organization (http://www2.unwto.org/) and Equality in Tourism (https://equalityintourism.org/) have their work cut out to ensure that females are able to challenge the status quo. Travel agencies can play a part too. For example, they can help women tour guides gain experience through all-female package tours, which is a growing trend in the tourism industry (Song, 2017).

In addition, tourists are recommended to be aware of the potential gender bias. They should objectively look at track record and experience when assessing women as tourism service providers.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The paper has two limitations that future research should address. First, it is purely quantitative in nature. Hence, there was little room to obtain nuanced findings about travelers' perception of tour guides' online profile. In consequence, the questionnaire asked participants whether a tour guide was, for example, unnecessary/necessary, and impractical/practical, without delving deeper into the issues of why and how. Second, the experiment in this paper traded internal validity for ecological validity. While this offers confidence about the robustness of the results, caution is advocated in generalizing its findings.

To address these limitations, future research could augment the current questionnaire with other qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Scales dedicated to measuring hedonic attitude and utilitarian attitude toward tour guides could also be developed and validated. Besides, the context of the study could be expanded to involve tour guides who are not Caucasians, wear eyeglasses, and serve cities other than Paris as well as travelers from various geographical and cultural backgrounds.

In addition, interested scholars could pick up from where this paper left off by studying travelers' actual purchase behavior rather than purchase intention. Travelers could be classified according to their profiles, namely, business, couple, family, friend and solo (Banerjee & Chua, 2016). Their perception of a tour guide's online profile prior to the tour coupled with their post-tour satisfaction need to be investigated in tandem. Furthermore, these lines of inquiry could be extended to study the influence of cultural congruence between travelers and tour guides, as well as to analyze differences between international and domestic travelers.

To overcome the obvious methodological and logistical challenges, a possible solution for scholars is to develop collaborative relationships and facilitate knowledge exchange with independent tour guides. Such a direction of inquiry stands to be an exciting one in tourism research.

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