

The competency and service of tour guides affecting satisfaction of Muslim tourists

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Abstract: The study of how tour guide competence level and service quality have affected Muslim travelers' satisfaction. The objectives of this study were: 1) to confirm the factors of tour guide competence and service quality that affect the satisfaction of Muslim travelers, and 2) to study how the aspect of tour guide competence affects the service quality and satisfaction level of Muslim travelers. A closed-ended questionnaire was used to gather information from 400 Muslim travelers who traveled with a leader guide. The outcomes were explored using the statistical packages SPSS and AMOS, with SEM used to analyze the demographic data. The proposed conceptual framework and hypotheses approach were used for evaluation. The first step was to estimate the general paradigm. Then, hypotheses were checked through measurement modeling. SEM was used to estimate the overall fit of the proposed model to verify the hypotheses. Subsequently, CFA was conducted. The results indicated that most of the respondents were male (55.75%), above 36 years old (49.75%), married (51.00%), had a bachelor's degree (50.25%), and were employees (31.00%). When considering the attributes and capacities of tour guides, it was found that skills (DE = .75), knowledge (DE = .24), ethics (DE = .12), and characteristics (DE = .07) were at a high level. The conclusion was that the structure and quality of guide services had a significant influence on tourist satisfaction. It was found that tour guide skills had a direct and positive influence on the level of service quality. In addition, service quality had a direct and positive influence on the level of tourist satisfaction, which would lead to repeat service use. Therefore, this study recommends that tour companies organize tour guide potential development training on the five pillars of Islam to meet the needs of Muslim tourists.

Keywords: Competency, Service quality, Tourist satisfaction.

1. Introduction

Thailand is a prominent destination for Muslim tourists, largely due to its abundant natural attractions, distinctive culture, and geographical proximity to Muslim-majority regions. Consequently, it ranks as the 20th most halal-friendly destination among non-Islamic countries [1]. Modern Muslim travelers have exhibited shifts in their behaviors, adopting a more cosmopolitan outlook and embracing cultural diversity, likely attributed to enhanced English proficiency and a growing passion for exploration. Currently, Muslim tourists can be categorized into two groups: those who prefer self-guided experiences and those who opt for tour operators. In contemporary settings, many Muslim travelers favor package tours for the reassurance that comes with having a guide. These packages typically encompass airfare, lodging, and entry fees to various attractions.

Guides play an important role in the tourism sector by providing guidance, ideas, and understanding of the country to Muslim tourists. If tour guides lack knowledge of Islamic principles and prohibitions, it will directly affect the impression they make on this group of tourists, such as taking

them to places that sell alcoholic beverages, recommending non-halal restaurants, taking them to places that are intoxicating, or even not being able to recommend places to practice religion, etc. They are essential for the success of tourism businesses at local, regional, and national levels. Beyond the allure of scenic sites, the warmth of local communities, and the convenience of travel, the presence of knowledgeable tour guides contributes to visitor satisfaction and fosters a positive national image.

However, concerns regarding cultural misunderstandings and differing traditions between various races and religions can deter Muslim tourists from traveling to Thailand. This cultural gap is reflected in Thailand's ranking as the 20th most halal-friendly destination among non-Muslim countries. If the competence and service quality of tour guides can be improved to meet the needs of Muslim tourists, it will be even better. Thailand could potentially ascend the rankings among non-Muslim nations. To solve this problem, government agencies such as the Office of Tourism and Sports, and even the National Sports University have implemented projects in various areas to enhance the competence and quality of tour guides. The Ministry of Tourism and Sports has set standards that are developed specifically to enhance the qualifications and competence of tour guides in Thailand, as tourists have different social, cultural, and religious backgrounds, with preferences regarding service quality, travel styles, reviews, product loyalty, and satisfaction being diverse and very different.

Although tour guide standards have been established to gain acceptance, there are no specific guidelines and criteria that suit the needs of Muslim tourists [2] There is currently no manual for the quality certification and supervision of professional tour guides. Although there are many certification standards, none of them clearly specify the competencies, qualifications and experience required to provide Muslim-friendly tour services. Therefore, further research should explore the competency characteristics of tour guides that influence the service quality and the complacency levels of Muslim travelers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Competence

Competency encompasses the behavioral characteristics resulting from a person's knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics that enable that person to excel over his or her peers in the same industry. These characteristics are essential for effective performance and are instrumental in achieving career objectives [3]. Introduced the concept of "competency", arguing that factors such as attitude, knowledge, understanding and personality traits are essential to be present alongside traditional knowledge and skills for effective performance.

For tour guides, professional knowledge is essential when leading a tour as it can greatly increase knowledge, satisfaction and safety. Competence is therefore essential for the tour guide profession. It is included of 3 aspects: knowledges skills and attitudes in order to perform tour-leading duties to the greatest benefit. The Department of Tourism and the Professional Qualification Institute of Thailand have set professional standards for tour guides, which consist of a set of indicators that set out standards of essential competencies, covering knowledge of tourism and the hospitality industry, proficiency in foreign languages and Thai, understanding of Thai identity, history and culture, as well as sustainable tourism practices, safety, roles, responsibilities and ethics related to being a tour guide.

Therefore, practical skills, including tourist transport management, facilitation, safety, problem-solving, professionalism, and appropriate attire, are very important for being a professional tour guide. Considering the ethics of tour guides, the nation, religion, and the monarchy, adherence to democratic principles, understanding of responsibility, and demonstrating honesty and responsibility, the characteristics of competencies identified in this study were derived from a comprehensive review of relevant literature on this topic, with a focus on knowledge, skills, qualities, and ethical standards.

2.2. Quality of Service

Kotler [4] Service is an action or activity that one party provides to another, typically lacking physical ownership and often encompassing both tangible and intangible elements. Consequently,

Service quality refers to the difference between the service provider's expectations before providing the service and the level of satisfaction that the service recipient receives. When the service meets or exceeds the recipient's needs, it is deemed to be of high quality; conversely, if it falls short of expectations, it is regarded as subpar.

The SERVQUAL model is widely recognized as a valuable tool for assessing service quality. This model comprises five dimensions: 1) Intangibles are related to the appearance of the agent, facilities, materials, and communications; 2) reliability, emphasizing the importance of consistent service, product quality, and staff performance; 3) responsiveness, which entails the ability to address service requests swiftly, minimizing wait times; 4) assurance, encompassing service competence, courteous customer interactions, effective communication, and a customer-first approach from employees; and 5) empathy, which focuses on providing individualized attention and care to each customer [5]. Further elaborated on empathy as the capacity to be accessible, sensitive, and attuned to the needs of customers [6].

2.3. The Relationship Between Efficiency and Service Quality

The characteristic of service quality is the degree of difference between expected service standards by the customer and the actual perception during or after the service is provided. The SERVQUAL model covers five dimensions: tangibility, credibility, responsiveness, confidence, and empathy. The results indicate that SERVQUAL is more effective in identifying service deficiencies within an organization compared to other tools. Consequently, the following assumptions were formulated based on the exploration [6]:

H₁: Tour guide's Knowledge has a positive providing service quality

H₂: Tour guide's Skill has a positive providing service quality

H₃: Tour guide's Trait has a positive providing service quality

H₄: Tour guide's Ethic has a positive providing service quality

2.4. Satisfaction of Tourist

Tourist satisfaction refers to the relationship between the actual emotions of travelers following their journeys or experiences with services and their anticipations prior to these events. It encompasses anything that alleviates human discomfort or anxiety, which often stems from unmet human needs. As individuals encounter more needs, they exert effort to fulfill them. When these needs are satisfied, discomfort or anxiety diminishes or disappears, leading to an overall sense of satisfaction. Thus, tourist satisfaction can be interpreted as a positive emotional response and attitude that arises from the travel experience. The greater the satisfaction of tourists, the more they tend to appreciate their travels, resulting in an enhanced emotional state compared to their feelings before embarking on their journeys or being acquainted with various products and services.

The elements contributing to service satisfaction can be categorized into two main components:

1. Product Quality Acceptance: This pertains to consumers' perceptions of whether the services received align with the promised commitments associated with each type of offering.

2. Service Quality Acceptance: This involves consumers' evaluations of the appropriateness of the service processes, the ease of access to services, the demeanor of service providers, the language used for communication, and the overall execution of the service.

2.5. The Relationship Between Providing Quality Service and Pleasure to Tourists

Quality Service has been recognized as the most important factor in determining the tourist pleasure's level. Therefore, the study indicates that a significant positive relationship between the quality of guide services influences tourist satisfaction, which is an important factor in the Greek retail sector. A study on how service quality influences customer pleasure in the rural tourism industry concluded that there is a strong positive association between the two [7]. Research investigated the role of tour guides' professional competence in determining service quality and subsequently affecting tourists' pleasure levels. In this study, a comprehensive survey and data collection was conducted with

345 participants using the tour guide service. To confirm the hypotheses and the suggested research framework, a conceptual model analysis was conducted, Use partial least squares method. The result appears that tour guides' professional competence had a significant impact on both quality's service and pleasure's tourist. In addition, the results of the research also indicate that the level of service provided by tour guides also has a positive effect on overall tourist pleasure. These results thus emphasize the importance of developing tour guides' skills and provide a guideline for tour companies to allocate resources to support them, which will help improve service quality and increase tourist pleasure. The hypothesizes' research follows: H5: the service quality of tour guide is positively associated with Muslim Tourist pleasure.

2.6. Muslim-Friendly Destination Behavioral Intention

Understanding tourists is one way for marketing strategies. Tourism and hospitality studies have concluded understanding behavior is a tool to attract tourists to visit based on their true needs and preferences, which indicate their intention to revisit in both the short and long term [8].

The attraction place characteristics are an important motivating factor, especially in the tourism industry. For example, Lee, et al. [9] the characteristics of festival experiences are factors influencing the perceived festival participants in the South Korea. Service characteristics and appeal are significantly related to tourists' perceived value. In terms of quality of service, such as concreteness Trustworthiness, empathy, confidence, and empathy. is considered to be an important factor. Therefore, it is necessary to consider religious regulations as well. Muslim tourists use Islamic law or Sharia law to decide where to visit. Sharia has a significant effect on traveler activities and services tourists.

A tangible and intangible model of five Muslim-friendly destination attributes as the social environment is an influential variable in determining tourist satisfaction in terms of satisfaction. First, there are few suitable environments for Muslim tourists [10] so preparing a suitable environment for Muslim tourists is important. The second, in terms of facilities, such as mosques, prayer rooms, fitness centers, and separate male and female swimming pools in tourist areas are important options [11]. Muslim-friendly accommodations serve the Quran, Qibla, prayer mats, alcohol-free, and toilets with bidets. Third, Food and beverages are important selling points in promoting cultural heritage [12]. In addition, Halal food is another important factor. Therefore, tourist attractions should design menus that are accessible to Muslim tourists within the Islamic framework [13] which means avoiding serving non-halal food, no pork, and alcoholic beverages out of respect for Muslim tourists. Fourth, service is an important feature of the tourism industry a cause of satisfaction, and a factor of business competitive differentiation. To provide the service for Muslim travelers should strictly adhere to principles Islamic. And finally, the important role is the local people who play in creating a friendly atmosphere. A warm welcome is considered the most important basic element in creating a good impression for tourists [14].

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Conceptual Framework

The objectives of this study were 1) to confirm tour guide competency, service quality and satisfaction factors of Muslim tourists and 2) to study the effects of tour guide competency characteristics on service quality level and service quality level on satisfaction of Muslim tourists. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a model was designed showing

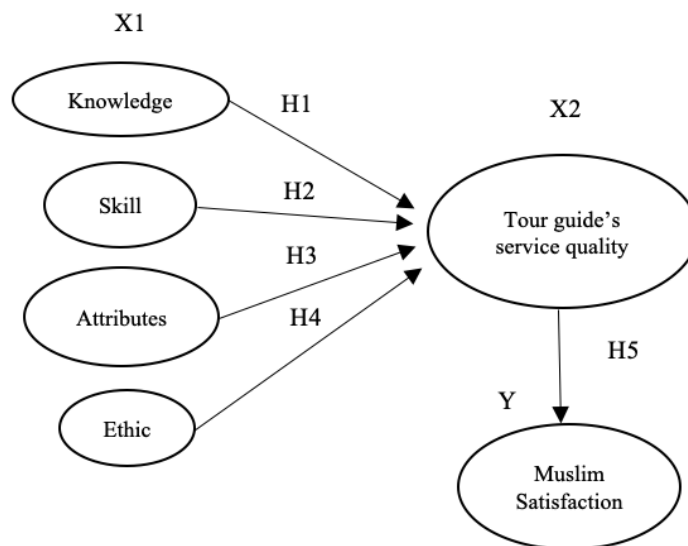


Figure 1.
Conceptual framework.

This investigation employs a quantitative approach to examine the competency traits of tour guides and to formulate a structural equation model that integrates tour guide competency characteristics, service quality, and the Muslim travelers' pleasure levels. Data was collected from Muslim tourists aged 25 and older who had utilized tour guide services in Krabi Province. A probability sampling technique was implemented to ensure equitable representation, specifically through simple random sampling, which involved drawing lots without a predetermined return date. The researcher identified tour companies in Krabi Province and randomly selected ten of these companies to distribute a total of 400 questionnaires, with each company receiving 40 sets.

The study sought to identify the competencies essential for tour guides while developing a structural equation model that links these competencies with service quality and the satisfaction experienced by Muslim tourists in Krabi Province. The questionnaire employed in this research was structured into four sections, each assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. Likert scales are widely recognized for their effectiveness in survey research, as they enable the measurement of respondent perceptions. The collected data were coded and analyzed by SPSS and the AMOS program to facilitate the structural equation modeling process.

Initially, descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic characteristics. A two-step analytical strategy was applied to examine the proposed conceptual framework along with its associated hypotheses, begin by evaluating the measurement model before proceeding to the structural model. SEM was used to measure the overall performance of the proposed model and to test the hypothesis. Following this, CFA was used to evaluate the following measurement models.

Table 1.
Demographic characteristics of participants (n=400).

Gender of respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Male	223	55.75
Female	177	44.25
Age of respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Under 25 years	85	21.25
26 – 35 years	116	29.00
Above 36 years	199	49.75
Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	178	44.50
Married/ Cohabiting	204	51.00
Divorce/ Separated	18	4.50
Education	Frequency	Percentage
Below graduate degree	123	30.75
Graduate degree	201	50.25
Postgraduate degree	71	17.75
Other	5	1.25
Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Student/ College	116	29.00
Government officials	53	13.25
Company Employee	124	31.00
Business owner	98	24.50
Other	9	2.25

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents. From 400 participants, 223 were male (55.75%) and 177 were female (44.25%). The age demographics indicate that 85 respondents (21.25%) were under 25, 116 respondents (29%) were between the ages of 26 and 199 respondents (49.75%) were over 36. Regarding marital status, the majority were single, totaling 178 individuals (44.50%), while 204 respondents (51.00%) reported being married or cohabiting, and 18 respondents (4.50%) were divorced or separated. Educational attainment revealed that 123 respondents (30.75%) had completed less than a bachelor's degree, 201 respondents (50.25%) held a bachelor's degree, 71 respondents (17.75%) had qualifications beyond a bachelor's, and 5 respondents (1.25%) had pursued other forms of education. In terms of occupation, the largest group comprised Company Employee, numbering 124 (31.00%), followed by Student/ College at 116 (29.00%), business owners at 98 (24.50%), government officials at 53 (13.25%), and other professions at 9 (2.25%).

Result of the 1st Objective: To confirm the factors of tour guide competence and service quality that affect the satisfaction of Muslim travelers

Table 2.
Mean and standard deviation of competence (n=400).

Competence	CG	Mean	SD
Knowledges	CG1	3.85	0.64
Skills	CG2	4.24	0.68
Attributes	CG3	3.44	0.51
Ethics	CG4	3.50	0.58

Table 2 displays the tour guides competencies' mean and standard deviation. The findings indicate that the highest level of competence is associated with skills, which has a mean of 4.24 (SD = 0.68). This is followed by knowledge, with a mean of 3.85 (SD = 0.64), and ethics at a mean of 3.50 (SD = 0.58). The lowest rating is for Attributes, with a mean of 3.44 (SD = .51).

Table 3.

Analysis of tour guide service quality indicators and tourist satisfaction (n=400).

Tour Guide Service Quality Indicators	QS	Mean	SD
A tour guide ought to offer services tailored to the specific requirements of the tourist.	QS1	3.57	1.01
A tour guide ought to convey information to tourists with enthusiasm and engagement.	QS2	3.77	0.98
A tour guide must be thoroughly prepared with the necessary travel equipment.	QS3	4.11	0.87
A tour guide must promptly address the needs of tourists.	QS4	3.36	0.93
A tour guide ought to deliver services tailored to the specific needs of the tourist.	QS5	3.97	0.88
Satisfaction of Tourist	ST	Mean	SD
What degree are you satisfied with the tour arrangements made by the guide?	ST1	4.45	0.76
What degree do you find the coordination from the tour guide satisfactory?	ST2	4.12	0.92
The guide's readiness to assist	ST3	4.00	1.03
In the future, to what degree will you engage in the role of a tour guide?	ST4	4.60	0.65

Table 3 Analysis of Service Quality Metrics for Tour Guides and Tourist Satisfaction

Evaluation of tour guide service quality using average QS1 to QS5, shows the following results: QS1 has a mean of 3.57, QS2 has a mean of 3.77, QS3 reveals a mean of 4.11, QS4 is noted at 3.36, and QS5 presents a mean of 3.97.

Satisfaction of Tourist, mean value of ST1 is 4.45, ST2 is 4.12, ST3 is 4.00 (SD = 1.03) and ST4 is 4.60.

The evaluation of quantification framework was performed using the highest likelihood approximation method. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to determine the degree of fit between the research model and the data collected from the sample, highlighting both reliability and the correctness of the related structures. As a consequence, CFA was used to examine the factor loadings associated with the three structures, the collection comprises a total of 13 components. Furthermore, there are five hypotheses being evaluated.

Table 4.

Estimated metrics for assessing the constructs of tour guide competency.

Competences	Tag	β	SE	CR	R²
Knowledges	GC1	0.66	-	-	0.40
Skills	GC2	0.55	0.13	7.02	0.36
Attributes	GC3	0.60	0.10	8.61	0.32
Ethics	GC4	0.62	0.12	7.57	0.45

$\chi^2 = .74$, $df = 1$, $\chi^2/df = .74$, $p = .38$, RMSEAR = .00, NFI = 1.00, CFI = 1.00, GFI = 1.00, AGFI = .98

Table 4 presents the CFA model concerning the competencies of tour guides. This model shows significant positive results. Measurement of overall fit, with symbols and significance levels, show that the complete model is deemed acceptable. The findings reveal that Knowledges exhibits the highest factor loading ($\beta = 0.66$), succeeded by Ethics ($\beta=0.62$, CR=7.57), Attributes ($\beta=0.60$, CR=8.61), and Skills ($\beta=0.55$, CR=7.02).

Result of the 2nd Objective: to study how the aspect of tour guide competence affects the service quality and satisfaction level of Muslim travelers

Table 5.
Service quality confirmatory factor analysis results.

Variable	SQ		TS		IE		Ranking
	TE	DE	TE	DE	IE	IE	
Knowledges	0.24	0.24	-	-	-	-	2
Skills	0.75	0.75	-	-	-	-	1
Attributes	0.07	0.07	-	-	-	-	4
Ethics	0.12	0.12	-	-	-	-	3
QS				0.74	0.74	-	
R ²		0.96			0.55		

$\chi^2 = 88.38, df = .55, \chi^2/df = 1.91, CFI = .96, GFI = .96, RMSEA = .047$

Table 5 presents the Quality-of-Service Confirmatory Factor Analysis results, which were evaluated simultaneously using AMOS. The findings reveal that Skills (TE=.75, DE=.75), Knowledges (TE=.24, DE=.24), succeeded by Ethics (TE=.12, DE=.12), and Attributes (TE =.07, DE=.07).

Table 6.
The hypothesis’s conclusion.

Hypothesis testing	No.	Hypothesis	Statistical testing	Results
	H1	Tour guide’s Knowledge has a positive providing service quality	PA	Supported
	H2	Tour guide’s Skill has a positive providing service quality	PA	Supported
	H3	Tour guide’s Trait has a positive providing service quality	PA	Supported
	H4	Tour guide’s Ethic has a positive providing service quality	PA	Supported
	H5	the service quality of tour guide is positively associated with Muslim Tourist pleasure.	PA	Supported

Table 6 and Figure 2 show the results all of hypothesis positively associated.

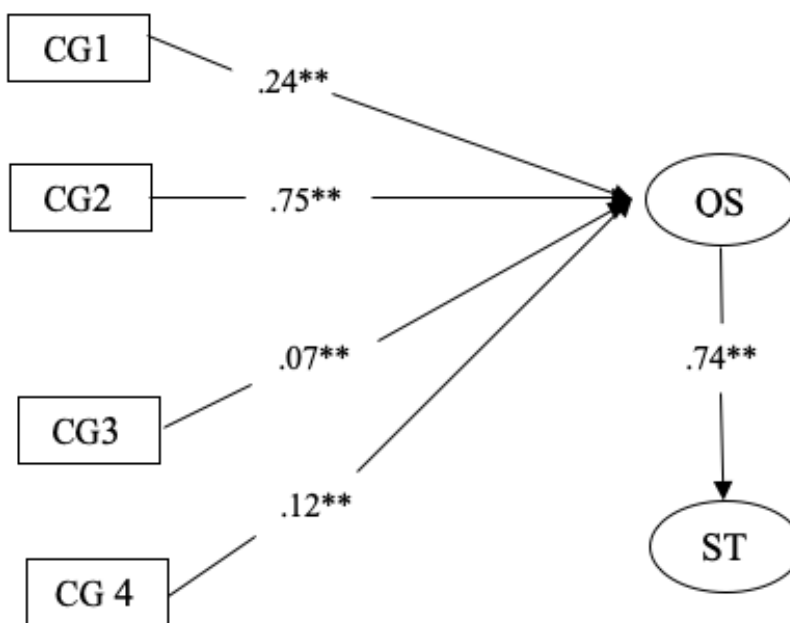


Figure 2.
Path model of Muslim tourist satisfaction.

The findings indicate a positive correlation between quality of tour guide service and the complacency of Muslim tourists, with a direct effect (DE) of .74. Furthermore, the analysis highlights that the quality of tour guides' services is significantly associated with this satisfaction. In terms of ranking, the results reveal that the highest level of importance is attributed to skills (DE=.75), followed by knowledges (DE=.24), ethics (DE=.12), and attributes (DE=.07).

5. Conclusion

The research revealed that tour guides possess the most advanced skill set, encompassing language and communication abilities, problem-solving prowess, effective time management, and a keen awareness of the needs of Muslim tourists. Additionally, they must understand the complexities and challenges faced by Muslim travelers. The second crucial aspect is the knowledge base of the tour guides. Proficiency in the Arabic language, comprehension of the five pillars of Islam, familiarity with religiously significant tourist attractions, awareness of airport regulations, first aid skills, and IT knowledge pertinent to Muslim tourism are essential. When Muslim tourists opt for tour guide services, their primary consideration is the guide's level of knowledge, which must be complemented by additional supportive skills. Positive attributes, expertise, and ethical standards serve to connect Muslim tourists with tour guides and operators.

As illustrated by McClelland [3] knowledge and skills are the most visible components, as depicted in Figure 2, which outlines the competency characteristics of a Muslim tour guide. Among the various elements of competency, skills and knowledge are readily observable, whereas ethical values and personal character are more subtly and require time to assess. Consequently, understanding competency necessitates an examination of behavior.

The effects of this study can be shown as a framework for tour operators for select guides that are suitable for the specific needs of Muslim tourists and to conduct training programs that focus on enhancing the capabilities of guides to provide services specifically to Muslim tourists. Furthermore, these insights can help government agencies and relevant organizations set appropriate standards for Thai tour guides serving Muslim tourists. Competence as encompassing knowledge, skills, and relevant characteristics that contribute to work performance, which can be cultivated through targeted training.

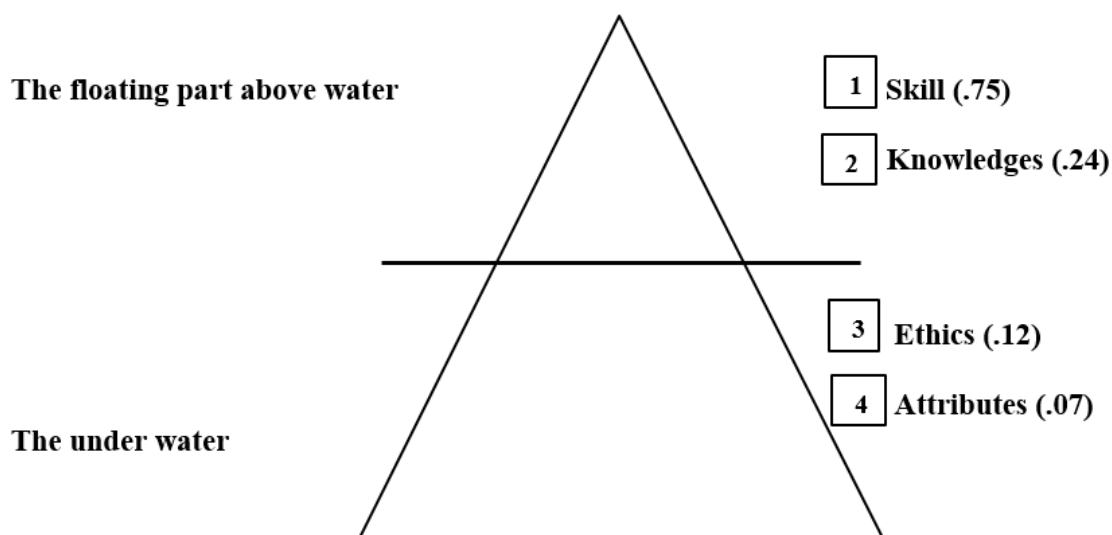


Figure 3. Simulates' iceberg model of competencies as follow: McClelland [3].

5. Recommendation

The research results showed that tour guides' competence has a significant influence on the service quality related to tour guides' expertise. Therefore, improving service quality and promoting professionalism in providing services to Muslim tourists are important for the Thai tourism sector. In order to improve Thailand's ranking as a destination for Muslim tourists, increase profits, and ultimately increase operational efficiency, tour guides need to have comprehensive knowledge of the destination and provide information that facilitates Muslim tourists.

The effects of study found that quality of service of tour guides related to competence is directly related to the level of satisfaction of Muslim tourists. Therefore, tour guides must demonstrate their professional competence in terms of honesty, reliability, and respect for Muslim customers. The standards governing these tour guides should be raised and improved to meet the satisfaction expectations of Muslim tourists.

Under the Joint Agreement for Tourism Professionals, efforts are being made to increase the mobility of tourism workers among ASEAN Member States [15]. Based on regional policies, each ASEAN Member State has established criteria, certifications, and regulations for the certification of tourism workers. Governments must ensure that these standards, which specifies the specific knowledge and skills required to perform work effectively and service standards, consider that tourists come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds and, importantly, have different expectations for quality service.

This research used probability sampling and purposeful sampling methods. The sample consisted of 400 Muslim tourists who used tour guide services in Krabi Province. However, the sample may not be statistically representative, and future research may benefit from using random sampling methods to ensure that everyone in the population has an equal opportunity for selection. Additionally, the researcher aims to explore trends in related variables and identify other factors influencing tour guide competency in relation to service quality and Muslim tourist satisfaction.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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