

Increasing Trail finders Customer Satisfaction: The Role of Tour Guide Performance and Perceived Value at PT. EXO Travel Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This research was motivated by a decrease in the percentage of customers who used the services of PT EXO Travel Indonesia-Bali from 2020-2023, and there were customer complaints from agent Trail finders regarding the tour guide's performance, which impacted customer satisfaction. Tour guide performance is one of the important components of a travel company that affects customer satisfaction. The perceived value has the potential to be mediated in this research model. Therefore, this research aims to determine the influence of tour guide performance on customer satisfaction mediated by customer perceived value. The research method used is quantitative descriptive with collecting respondent data by distributing questionnaires to Trail finders customers who have used EXO Travel Indonesia-Bali tour guide services and obtained 227 valid samples. Samples were taken using nonprobability sampling-purposive sampling techniques. The results of the respondents' data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4 software and the Partial Least Square Structural Equation Model (SEM-PLS) technique. The study's results explore that the direct performance of tour guides positively and significantly affects customer satisfaction and perceived value. The customer's perceived value directly affects customer satisfaction, and indirectly, the tour guide's performance positively and significantly affects customer satisfaction through the customer's perceived value as a mediator.

1. INTRODUCTION

Destination Management Company (DMC) is a professional services company in a destination specializing in local resources to provide engaging, creative, and satisfying local experiences (ADMEI, 2024). DMC companies help provide transportation services, tours/activities, manage events, and provide tour guide services (Fernandez-Villaran et al., 2022; Spasić & Pavlović, 2015). PT EXO Travel Indonesia is a business-to-business DMC (Destination Management Company) in Yogyakarta and Bali. Its destination branch has been inaugurated since 2010. Fourteen years of experience in tourism, especially travel, prove that EXO Travel Indonesia is an expert in its field. EXO Travel's primary goal is "To expand horizons and create lasting positive impacts through travel" by consistently providing the best service and extraordinary experiences (EXO Travel, 2024). Working with the best hotels, providing comfortable and safe transportation, and hiring trained, experienced, knowledgeable, and professional tour guides is the first step towards achieving the goal. As of January 2024, the total number of tourists using EXO Travel Indonesia-Bali services per year has begun to increase since the post-pandemic, as shown in the following table.

Table 1. 1
Number of Travelers who use EXO Travel Indonesia Services in 2020-2023

Year	Number of tourists	Percentage increase
2020	4.021	-
2021	2.127	-89%
2022	6.698	68,2%
2023	9.531	29,7%

Source: Management of PT EXO Travel Indonesia, 2024

Table 1.1 represents that there has been an increase in EXO Travel Indonesia-Bali service users in the last two years. The transition from the 2021 pandemic to the 2022 post-pandemic has experienced a significant increase. However, in 2022-2023, the percentage of users of EXO Travel Indonesia-Bali services decreased by 38.5%. It only increased by 29.7%, which means that the number of visits only increased by less than 1/2 of the visits compared to 2022. This gap needs to be known as a causative factor.

In 2023, EXO Travel Indonesia-Bali received customer complaints about the performance of the tour guides provided. The following is a list of guest complaints from EXO Travel Indonesia-Bali travel agent partners.

Table 1. 2
List of Guest Complaints by Travel Agent Networking in 2023

Travel Agent	Guest Complaints
Asia Seti	The guide did not deliver the best service during the tour, such as not counting the number of participants, not using a mic, and not being aware of safety. The guide lacks knowledge. The guide is tired and chooses not to complete the tour.
Trailfinders	Wrongly took the client. The guide did not follow the actual itinerary. The guide took a picture of the client without permission. The guide had poor knowledge, was unhelpful, and effortless. and the tour was not according to the itinerary. The guide looked tired and silent during the tour.
Worldia	Missed pick-up. The guide looks tired and unmotivated.

Source: PT EXO Travel Indonesia Customer Service Manager, 2024

Table 1.2 shows that guests from Trail finders agents, which is a large *travel agent* from the United Kingdom that has collaborated with EXO Travel Indonesia, have the most complaints compared to the other two *travel agents*, namely related to the wrong pick-up of guests, tours that are not in accordance with the itinerary, taking pictures without permission, lack of knowledge and *tour guides* who look tired when on duty. This makes it clear that EXO Travel Indonesia's customers from Trail finders agents are dissatisfied with the performance of their assigned tour guides, thus creating a bad impression on their trip. Satisfaction in the context of tourism is a positive emotional outcome if the performance results are equal to or exceed expectations (Shyu, 2016) and a form of positive response to the quality of products and services provided (Kuo et al., 2016). Good service can shape future tourist behaviour such as word-of-mouth promotion, recommending and making repurchases (Sarraf et al., 2015). However, providing customer satisfaction is certainly not easy (Hansen & Mossberg, 2017). So company management needs to make efforts to improve the competence and performance of staff to ensure that customers are satisfied (Syakier & Hanafiah, 2022).

The tour guide's performance is a successful factor in a trip and tourist satisfaction. The *tour guide* must be able to coordinate the trip well to match the wishes and expectations of tourists. Previous research proves that high tour guide performance can positively affect tourist satisfaction (Syakier & Hanafiah, 2022). Kuo et al. (2018) Also asymmetrically examined the influence of tour guide knowledge quality, problem-solving ability, communication ability, and professionalism on customer satisfaction, obtaining results that show the lack of tour guide knowledge and problem-solving ability negatively impacts tourist satisfaction. However, based on partial tests, tour *guide* knowledge did not affect customer satisfaction (Lestari et al., 2022). To strengthen the influence of *tour guide* performance on customer satisfaction, this

study uses customer value perception variables as mediation. The key to perceived value is what is given according to what is obtained. Improving service quality affects the perceived high service value (Ghosh et al., 2023; Zeithaml, 1988). Cheng et al. (2019) found that the perceived value has the potential to be mediated. Paulose & Shakeel (2022) found that perceived value can strengthen the relationship between service perception and customer satisfaction. The more positive/higher the value tourists feel, the more tourist satisfaction increases (Aizat et al., 2023). If *the tour guide* provides benefits for tourists, tourist satisfaction will increase (Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2021).

The existence of a gap in the correlation between the performance of tour guides and customer satisfaction can expand the results of previous findings by adding the value perceived by customers as a mediator so that this study aims to determine the direct influence of tour guide performance on customer satisfaction and customer perception, the value felt by customers on customer satisfaction and the indirect influence of tour guide performance on customer through customer perceived value as mediation.

2. METHODS

This study used a quantitative approach with primary data from questionnaires distributed to Trail finders agent customers who used EXO Travel Indonesia-Bali tour guide services with a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The sample was collected using the Probability Sampling-Purposive Sampling technique based on the criteria of Trail finders agent customers aged 18 years and over who have used EXO Travel Indonesia-Bali tour guide services. The sample size is calculated by multiplying the number of statements by 5-10, which can represent an unknown number of populations. The data were analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) technique with the help of SmartPLS 4 software to measure the correlation between several independent, dependent, and intervening variables and can be used on a relatively small sample size (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 2.1 Operational Variables and Indicators

VARIABLE	DIMENSION	INDICATOR	REFERENCE
Tour guide performance	Sufficient knowledge	- Knowledgeable about the destination (e.g., culture, history, attraction, people's lifestyle).	(Al-Okaily, 2022; Kuo et al., 2018; Syakier & Hanafiah, 2022)
	Interpersonal communication and organization	- Good at interpersonal communication.	
		- Good sense of humor.	
	Problem-solving ability	- Good personality.	
- Capable of handling customer complaints properly.			
- Take good care of customer needs.			
Customer Perceived Value	Professional competence	- Accessible whenever customers need.	(Paulose & Shakeel, 2022; Suhartanto et al., 2020; Tsaur et al., 2021)
		- Proficient in the tour-guiding language.	
	Overall comparison Value (based on benefits & cost)	- Grooming and appearance are neat and appropriate.	
		- Good at time management.	
Customer Satisfaction	Overall satisfaction	- Good "value for money".	(Alazaizeh et al., 2022; Jamaliah et al., 2021; Syakier & Hanafiah, 2022)
		- Tour guide service provided good value	
		- Great value as compared to others.	
		- Pleased with the outcome of performance.	
		- The tour guide's performance has exceeded my expectations.	
		- Delighted with the tour guide services	
		- Overall, the tour guide's performance is up to a satisfactory level.	
		- Overall, satisfying with the tour guide	

Source: Author,2024

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Respondent's Characteristics

Based on the results of distributing questionnaires, 227 people were collected. The number of EXO Travel Indonesia customers who use tour guide services is dominated by women: 115 people (50.7%) and 112 people (49.3%) are male. Moreover, regarding age, most customers' responses are 46-55 years old.

Table 3.1 Respondent's Characteristics

		Number of Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Perempuan	115	50,7%
	Laki-laki	112	49,3%
Age	<18	0	0 %
	18-25	11	4,8%
	26-35	42	18,5%
	36-45	52	22,9%
	46-55	112	49,3%
	>55	10	4,4%

Measurement Model Assessment: Reliability & Validity Convergent

This study uses the Structural Equation Modeling Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) analysis technique to measure the relationship between several independent, dependent, and intervening variables. It can be used on a relatively small sample size (Hair et al., 2021) The results of the SEM-PLS analysis were assessed using the measurement model, which included reliability and validity tests, and the structural model, which included hypothesis testing, R2, and F2.

A reliability test is carried out to assess the durability of each indicator that can represent its variable. An indicator is reliable if the outer loading > 0.70, Cronbach's alpha > 0.60, rho_a > 0.70, and rho_c < 0.95 (Hair et al., 2021). The data in Table 3.2 show that each indicator in this study is reliable. Meanwhile, the validity test validates the extent to which each variable is formed by its indicators, as seen from the AVE value > 0.50, so the data in Table 3.2 representing convergent validity are valid.

Table 3.2 Reliability & Validity Convergent Test

Variable	Item Code	Outer Loading	Cronbach's alpha	rho_a	rho_c	AVE	Conclusion						
Tour Guide Performance (X)	TGP1	0,797	0,928	0,929	0,939	0,608	Reliable & Valid						
	TGP2	0,735											
	TGP3	0,735											
	TGP4	0,799											
	TGP6	0,755											
	TGP8	0,819											
	TGP9	0,755											
	TGP10	0,834											
	TGP11	0,762											
	TGP12	0,800											
	Customer Perceived Value (M)	CPV1						0,880	0,822	0,829	0,894	0,738	Reliable & Valid
		CPV2						0,892					
CPV3		0,803											
Customer Satisfaction (Y)	CS1	0,839	0,900	0,902	0,926	0,715	Reliable & Valid						
	CS2	0,782											
	CS3	0,844											
	CS4	0,877											
	CS5	0,880											

Measurement Model Assessment: Discriminant Validity

A discriminant validity test is conducted to assess the extent to which a variable is empirically different from other variables. The HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait) method is used to assess discriminant validity. The recommended HTMT value is < 0.85 to avoid high correlation problems (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 3.3 Discriminant Validity: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio Statistics

Variable	Customer Perceived Value	Customer Satisfaction	Tour Guide Performance
Customer Perceived Value			
Customer Satisfaction	0,778		
Tour Guide Performance	0,823	0,845	

Based on Table 3.3 shows that the HTMT value <0.85, which represents the perceived value variable, is different from customer satisfaction and tour guide performance, and the satisfaction variable is different from the tour guide performance variable.

Structural Model Assessment: Hypotheses Testing

After knowing the value of collinearity that is not problematic, then conduct hypothesis testing by evaluating the significance value and relevance of the path coefficient. The path coefficient value of less than 0.05 (p-values <05) is stated to have a positive influence, and if the t-values > 1.96 indicates that there is a significant influence (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3.4 Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Path	Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-values	p-values	Bias	Confidence Interval		Conclusion
							Bias Corrected 2,50%	97,50%	
Direct Effect									
H1	Tour Guide Performance -> Customer Satisfaction	0,775	0,041	18,896	0,000	0,002	0,678	0,843	Supported
H2	Tour Guide Performance -> Customer Perceived Value	0,722	0,055	13,173	0,000	0,003	0,587	0,810	Supported
H3	Customer Perceived Value -> Customer Satisfaction	0,235	0,096	2,444	0,015	0,008	0,071	0,439	Supported
Indirect Effect									
H4	Tour Guide Performance -> Customer Perceived Value -> Customer Satisfaction	0,170	0,079	2,160	0,031	0,010	0,046	0,343	Supported

Table 3.4 shows the path coefficient value on the direct correlation between tour guide performance and customer satisfaction, namely 0.000 <0.05, tour guide performance on perceived customer value 0.000 <0.05, perceived customer value on customer satisfaction, namely 0.015 <0.05 and the indirect correlation between tour guide performance and customer satisfaction through perceived customer value, namely 0.031 <0.05, which means it has a positive influence. In addition, each t-value is

18.896, 13.173, 2.444, and 2.160, greater than 1.96 ($t > 1.96$), which has a significant effect, so it concludes that H1, H2, H3, and H4 are supported.

Coefficient of determination (R^2)

The R^2 value shows the amount of variance in endogenous variables determined by exogenous variables. An R^2 value ranging from 0-1 is a greater explanatory power. The general guideline for the R^2 value is 0.75, which means strong, 0.50 is medium/sufficient, and 0.25 is weak (Hair et al., 2019, 2021).

Table 3.5 Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Variabel Endogen	R-square	R-square adjusted
<i>Customer Perceived Value</i>	0,521	0,519
<i>Customer Satisfaction</i>	0,627	0,624

Based on Table 3.5 above shows that the coefficient of determination of the customer perceived value variable is 0.521, which means that 52.1% of the variance in perceived customer value is determined by tour guide performance, while 46.9% is influenced by other factors not included in this research model. Then, the R^2 value of customer satisfaction is 0.627 or 62.7% of the variance in the customer satisfaction variable is determined by tour guide performance and perceived customer value, while 37.3% are other factors not included in this research model.

Effect Size (f^2)

The f^2 value measures how much the exogenous variables contribute to the endogenous variables. The f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate that the exogenous variables contribute little, medium, and large amounts to the endogenous variables (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 3.6 Effect Size (f^2)

	<i>f-square</i>
<i>Tour Guide Performance -> Customer Satisfaction</i>	0,470
<i>Tour Guide Performance -> Customer Perceived Value</i>	1,088
<i>Customer Perceived Value -> Customer Satisfaction</i>	0,071

The results in Table 3.6 show that tour guide performance on customer satisfaction and customer perceived value have an f^2 value of 0.470 and 1.088, meaning they have a large effect size. Meanwhile, the f^2 value of perceived customer value on satisfaction shows a small effect size of 0.071.

Discussion

This study measured the influence of tour guide performance on customer satisfaction through perceived value as mediation. The research results show that tour guide performance is the outcome of a tour guide's work during the tour implementation process. Tour guide performance is an important component of a successful tour, which can affect the level of tourist satisfaction. The research results show that direct tour guide performance positively and significantly affects customer satisfaction. This clarifies that the better/increasing the EXO Travel Indonesia-Bali tour guide performance level, the more Trail finders' customer satisfaction level will be. Therefore, the findings of this research are in agreement with the research of Arabacıoğlu & Dedeoğlu (2023), Syakier & Hanafiah (2022), Alazaizeh *et al.* (2019), which states that tour guide performance positively affects tourist satisfaction. However, this research does not support the results of Jamaliah *et al.* (2021) which found that tour guide performance has a low effect size on satisfaction. The results of this research, which are shown in Table 3.6, show that tour guide performance greatly affects customer satisfaction.

This study's findings are that tour guide performance has a direct positive and significant effect on customer perceived value, thus supporting research from Cheng *et al.* (2019) and Tsaour *et al.* (2021). Table 3.5 and Table 3.6 show that tour guides can determine 52.1% of the value perceived by customers, and there is a significant effect size of tour guides on customer value perceptions. Customers have perceived the overall value of the tour guide's performance in accordance with the costs that the customer has incurred. This illustrates that the better the tour guide's performance, the better the customer's perceived value. Tour guide performance is critical to creating positive value perceived by customers. The higher the tour guide's performance, the more positive the customer value perception will be. So that there is a reciprocal social exchange between the costs the customer has incurred and the benefits obtained. For this

reason, actions and strategies to increase benefits and reduce sacrifices can increase customer value perceptions.

Satisfaction is the positive effect of service quality that matches expectations. The results of the research show that customer-perceived value positively and significantly affects customer satisfaction, thus supporting previous research from Morton (2018) and Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2021) that perceived value positively affects customer satisfaction. This research also found that most customer satisfaction is determined by 62.7% of tour guide performance and customer perceived value. This finding shows that the value/benefit customers feel for the tour guide's performance is in accordance with the price spent and provides satisfaction to customers (Zeithaml, 1988).

The research result analysis found that customer-perceived value intervenes in the indirect correlation between tour guide performance and customer satisfaction, indicating that indirect tour guide performance positively and significantly affects customer satisfaction through customer-perceived value as mediation. This result is consistent with the research of Paulose & Shakeel (2022), Cheng *et al.* (2019), and Tsaour et al. (2021), who also found that perceived customer/tourist value perceptions can play an important role and contribute to the indirect relationship between independent and dependent variables. Tour guide performance that is in accordance with the customer's expectations and the total cost/expense spent in accordance with the benefits obtained can increase customer satisfaction through reciprocity.

4. CONCLUSION

This study analyzes tour guide performance that can affect EXO Travel Indonesia-Bali customer satisfaction, which is supported by perceived customer value as the mediation. This study proposes five hypotheses for the direct relationship between tour guide performance and customer satisfaction and customer perceived value, the direct relationship between customer perceived value and customer satisfaction, and the indirect relationship of tour guide performance to customer satisfaction through customer perceived value as mediation. The results showed that in direct correlation, tour guide performance positively and significantly affects Trail finders' customer satisfaction, tour guide performance positively and significantly affects Trail finders' customer perceived value, customer perceived value positively and significantly affects Trail finders' customer satisfaction, and indirect correlation, tour guide performance positively and significantly affect customer satisfaction through Trail finders customer perceived value as mediation.

Based on the discussion and conclusions of the results, it is recommended that the EXO Travel Indonesia-Bali company consider this study's results a consideration in developing strategies and improving tour guide performance to increase Trail finders' customer satisfaction and perceived value. EXO Travel Indonesia-Bali tour guides are advised to improve their ability to handle customer problems or complaints, humor skills and tour guide readiness when needed by customers. Future researchers can expand the research model for measuring customer satisfaction in the travel field by adding other variables, such as transportation services, searching other DMC or Travel Agent companies, and modifying the appropriate mediating variables.

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