



Marketing

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**The influence of the guide's personal brand on the formation of trust in
author's excursions in a competitive environment**

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Abstract. With the growing diversification of tourism services and increased competition in the market, author-led tours are becoming increasingly relevant due to their uniqueness, emotional intensity, and the guide's leading role as a key figure in the tourist experience. The relevance of this research is further reinforced by the rising importance of digital self-presentation, social media activity, and online reviews, which create a new reality of interaction between guides and potential clients even before the tour begins. The **purpose** of the article is to analyze the relationship between the personal brand of a guide and the formation of consumer trust in the segment of the author's excursions, as well as to identify effective branding practices that enhance competitiveness. **Methods:** analysis of scientific literature – to study the current state of the research issue; generalization and systematization – to clearly and consistently present the research results. **Results.** It is demonstrated that a well-formed and strategically supported personal brand has a significant impact on the level of trust, particularly in contexts of information overload and high market saturation. Elements such as authenticity, emotional openness, professional expertise, and consistent storytelling through various



communication channels create a multidimensional image of a tour guide that tourists perceive as reliable and attractive. The presence of a personal brand reduces uncertainty in decision-making and increases customer loyalty, particularly when the guide's online and offline representations are aligned. The analysis of practical cases shows that guides who specialize in thematic content, actively engage with their audiences on social platforms, and respond to feedback are more successful in building long-term relationships and generating repeat bookings. The **conclusions** confirm that a personal brand serves not only as a marketing asset but also as a trust-building mechanism, forming both the emotional and rational basis for choosing excursions. In the long term, personal branding becomes a key factor in the sustainable development of a guide's professional career and the overall competitiveness of an author's excursions in the modern mobile tourism environment.

Key words: emotional interaction, market differentiation, social media, brand loyalty, digital marketing.

Вплив персонального бренду гіда на формування довіри до авторських екскурсій у конкурентному середовищі

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Анотація. В умовах зростання диверсифікації туристичних послуг та посилення конкуренції на ринку все більшої актуальності набувають авторські екскурсії завдяки своїй унікальності, емоційній насиченості та провідній ролі гіда як центральної фігури туристичного досвіду. Актуальність дослідження посилюється зростанням ролі цифрової самопрезентації, активності в соціальних мережах та онлайн-відгуків, які формують нову реальність



взаємодії між екскурсоводами та потенційними клієнтами ще до початку екскурсії. **Метою** статті є аналіз взаємозв'язку між особистим брендом екскурсовода та формуванням довіри серед споживачів у сегменті авторських екскурсій, а також виявлення ефективних практик брендингу, що сприяють підвищенню його конкурентоспроможності. **Методи:** аналізу наукової літератури – для вивчення поточного стану проблематики дослідження; узагальнення та систематизації – для чіткого та послідовного представлення результатів дослідження. **Результати.** Показано, що добре сформований і стратегічно підтримуваний персональний бренд суттєво впливає на рівень довіри в умовах інформаційного перевантаження та високої насиченості ринку. Такі елементи, як автентичність, емоційна відкритість, професійна експертиза та послідовний сторітелінг через різні канали комунікації створюють багатовимірний образ екскурсовода, який туристи сприймають як надійний та привабливий. Наявність особистого бренду зменшує невизначеність під час прийняття рішень і підвищує лояльність клієнтів, особливо коли онлайн і офлайн-представництва гіда узгоджені між собою. Аналіз практичних кейсів показує, що гіди, які спеціалізуються на тематичному контенті, активно взаємодіють зі своєю аудиторією на соціальних платформах та адаптуються до зворотного зв'язку, є більш успішними у побудові довгострокових відносин та генеруванні повторних замовлень. **Висновки** підтверджують, що персональний бренд виступає не лише маркетинговим активом, а й механізмом побудови довіри, формуючи емоційне та раціональне підґрунтя для вибору екскурсій. У довгостроковій перспективі персональний брендинг стає ключовим фактором сталого розвитку професійної кар'єри екскурсовода та загальної конкурентоспроможності авторських екскурсій у сучасному мобільному туристичному середовищі.

Ключові слова: емоційна взаємодія, ринкова диференціація, соціальні медіа, брендова лояльність, цифровий маркетинг.



Problem statement. In today's competitive tourism sector, author tours represent a new, rapidly developing niche, characterized by personalization, thematic uniqueness, and the active role of the guide as both a service provider and a central figure in the tourist experience [1]. Traditional marketing approaches are becoming insufficient to attract increasingly demanding and experience-oriented travelers, so the personal brand of the guide is becoming a decisive factor influencing consumer choice. Unlike mass tours, where the guide's personality often takes a secondary role, author tours depend primarily on the perception of the guide's personality, values, and storytelling style. It creates a special market dynamic in which trust is not only related to product quality. Still, it is also based on interpersonal perception, emotional resonance, and symbolic associations with the guide's brand. However, despite the growing practical significance of this phenomenon, the mechanisms by which a guide's brand contributes to the formation of trust remain insufficiently systematized in scientific research.

The relevance of the research topic is further enhanced by the transformation of consumer behavior in the digital age, when trust is often established even before direct contact and is transmitted through digital platforms, social media presence and online reviews. In such an environment, a personal brand serves not only as a marketing tool but also as a mechanism for building trust, reducing perceived risks, and facilitating emotional interaction. In addition, the increase in the number of guides creating authorial products intensifies competitive pressure, necessitating more sophisticated differentiation strategies based on authenticity, expertise, and the ability to establish long-term relationships with customers. Understanding the relationship between personal branding and trust building is essential for developing effective branding practices, supporting the professionalization of tour guide services, and increasing the competitiveness of authored tours. It necessitates a theoretical understanding and practical analysis of how personal branding influences consumer trust in this specific segment of the tourism industry.



Analysis of recent research and publications. Modern scientific research and publications indicate a growing interest in the transformations of excursion activities in the context of digitalization and increasing requirements for the quality of tourist services. S. G. Melnychenko and L. M. Bohadorova [1] analyzed the spatiotemporal aspects of the hotel industry in Ukraine, which enables a better understanding of the context for developing tourist infrastructure as a basis for effective guide branding. T. Lysiuk [2] in his work focuses on methodological and innovative approaches to excursionology in the digital age, which creates the prerequisites for the use of a personal brand in the online environment. The study of T. V. Lysiuk, L. L. Roiko, and Yu. V. Biletskyi [3] reveals the possibilities of digital innovations in Ukrainian tourism, which opens up new horizons for building trust in guides through interactive tools. In the work of Marusei T. [4], virtual excursions outline the vector of development of the author's routes in digital format, which enhances the personalization of interaction between the guide and the client. S. Bazhenova, Yu. Pologovska and M. Bykova [5] investigated modern aspects of the domestic tourism sector's functioning and development.

Statistics of tourist activity, analyzed by S. G. Melnychenko, L. M. Bohadorova and I. V. Okhremenko [6], serve as a basis for identifying changes in demand for the author's excursions, which, in turn, stimulates the need to create personal brands of guides. V. Yu. Stepanov, N. V. Yakymenko-Tereshchenko and T. Yu. Chaika [7] substantiates the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to excursion activities, which ensures the comprehensive formation of the guide's image. H. Mashika [8] investigates the role of mobile applications in conducting excursions, emphasizing the importance of digital tools for supporting the guide's brand. S. S. Rostovtsev [9] highlights the theoretical foundations of quest excursions, which involve the active participation of the guide and form an emotional connection with the client. A. M. Prylutskyi [10] analyzes the specifics of excursion activities in modern conditions, paying attention to the challenges faced by the guide as a trusted leader.



In the study by R. V. Logosha, A. M. Prylutskyi and V. F. Podlubnyi [11], the importance of rural tourism for entrepreneurship development is emphasized, where the personal brand of the guide plays a key role in forming a unique offer. N. Yakymenko-Tereshchenko and M. Yariko [12] investigate quest excursions with a virtual guide as an innovative tourist product based on trust in the virtual avatar of the guide. M. Vasylieva [13] considers a quest excursion as an educational form, while emphasizing the importance of a guide in forming interest and trust among a youth audience. In the study by I. Tuchkovska [14], the importance of integrating knowledge from different fields in forming a comprehensive approach to conducting excursions for people with disabilities is emphasized. I. S. Honcharova and O. V. Kovalenko [15] focus on the training of ecological tourism guides, emphasizing the importance of not only the professional but also the image component in the work of a guide.

Identification of previously unresolved parts of the general problem.

Despite the growing interest in the topic of personal branding in the tourism sector, the relationship between a guide's brand and the formation of trust in authorial excursions remains insufficiently researched. In particular, there is a lack of a comprehensive analysis of how individual elements of a personal brand affect the behavioral and emotional aspects of choosing tourist services in a highly competitive environment. The role of the guide's digital presence in the process of building trust in individualized excursions has also been insufficiently highlighted. This article is devoted to these aspects.

Formulation of the objectives of the article (task statement). This article aims to analyze the influence of a tour guide's brand on consumer trust in the field of authorial excursions and to identify practical approaches to branding that ensure increased competitiveness.

By the aim, we were set the following tasks: to analyze theoretical approaches to the concept of a personal brand in the tourism sector; to identify key factors in the formation of trust in a tour guide among consumers of authorial excursions; to



investigate the mechanisms of influence of personal brand on behavior of tourists in a competitive environment; to generalize modern practices of branding of tour guides and to define effective strategies of increasing their attractiveness in the market.

Presentation of the primary material of the research. The formation of a personal brand in the tourism sector has become an essential element of professional identity, building reputation and market differentiation. In conditions where the industry is becoming increasingly saturated with offers, especially in the fields of author's and experimental tourism, the personal brand of the guide appears not simply as a professional brand, but as a multidimensional construct that forms tourist expectations, trust, and influences decision-making behavior. Theoretical consideration of this phenomenon begins with defining the concept of personal brand. In the academic environment, a personal brand is understood as a strategically constructed and consciously managed image of a person, which conveys a clear value proposition and arouses trust and emotional response in the target audience. It encompasses both tangible and intangible components, including visual style, tone of communication, experience, values, reputation, and stability of performance over time [16, p. 99-100].

In the context of tourism, and particularly for guides, personal branding plays a crucial role. A guide is not only a service provider, but also a communicator, cultural interpreter and facilitator of experience. It positions the guide brand as internally relevant and performative. Unlike products or companies, the guide brand exists in direct, often emotionally charged interactions with tourists. It is created in real-time through verbal and non-verbal communication, storytelling, responding to group interactions, and the ability to create captivating and memorable experiences. Therefore, the guide brand is closely linked to authenticity, empathy, charisma and the perception of professionalism. In addition, the guide acts as an intermediary between the destination and the tourist, shaping how the place is understood,



experienced, and remembered, which significantly strengthens the symbolic capital of their brand [17].

The evolution of digital communications and the proliferation of social media platforms have further transformed the theoretical and practical aspects of personal branding in tourism. The digital age has created new realms of visibility and self-presentation, where guides are no longer solely dependent on word of mouth or institutional affiliation; instead, they can actively construct and manage their online narratives. Social media functions as an extension of personal branding, creating spaces for storytelling, content creation, and engagement with potential clients beyond physical tours. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube allow guides to showcase their expertise, personality, values, and perspectives from behind the screen, thereby building trust and emotional connection even before the tour begins. Digital self-presentation becomes a performance, where the congruence between online image and offline behavior is essential for trust and long-term brand sustainability [18].

Overall, personal branding in the tourism sector is a complex and evolving construct based on theoretical concepts of identity, communication, and co-creation of value. For guides, it is not only a marketing tool, but also a dynamic expression of professionalism, personality and cultural environment. Its development in the digital context opens up new opportunities and challenges, requiring both strategic thinking and authenticity in the age of hyper-connectivity.

Trust is a key factor in consumer decision-making, especially in the context of authorial excursions, where the service experience is highly personalized and intangible. Unlike standardized tourism products, authorial excursions are primarily shaped by the personality, knowledge and values of the guide. In this environment, trust operates at the interface of psychological predispositions and marketing incentives, influencing both the initial choice and the long-term loyalty of the tourist. From a psychological perspective, trust reflects a cognitive-emotional state in which a consumer is willing to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations about



the intentions or behavior of another. In tourism, this refers to a traveler's belief that a guide will provide a safe, engaging, and enriching experience. The decision to engage with an unfamiliar guide - often through online platforms or peer recommendations - requires overcoming uncertainty, which can be achieved by developing trust.

From a marketing perspective, trust functions as a strategic resource that reduces risk and increases perceived value. In a saturated market and information overload, consumers increasingly rely on trust signals rather than detailed comparisons. This is especially evident in the digital context, where tourists evaluate tours by combining narrative elements, visual cues, and social evidence. Reputation, online reviews, and demonstrated expertise play a crucial role in establishing trust before any direct interaction takes place. Reputation is typically built over time through consistent service delivery and the accumulation of positive user-generated content. Reviews, especially those perceived as authentic and detailed, function as digital «word of mouth» and significantly influence consumer attitudes. Expertise, often conveyed through a guide's experience, storytelling ability, or subject matter expertise, contributes to perceptions of professionalism and reliability. The combination of these elements creates an environment in which trust can develop even in the absence of personal experience [19, p. 45-50].

An equally important component of building trust is the emotional connection that arises between the guide and the tourist. This relationship is not only transactional, but also deeply interpersonal. Empathy, authenticity and charisma play a key role in this interaction, shaping what tourists feel during the trip and how they remember it. Empathy enables the guide to tune in to the group's expectations and emotional state, adjusting the content or tone in real-time. Authenticity, understood not as overt sincerity but as a consistent self-presentation aligned with personal values, strengthens trust in the guide and makes the experience more meaningful. Charisma, which is often a combination of confidence, enthusiasm, and communication style, creates a sense of excitement and involvement that deepens



emotional attachment. These human factors are crucial in authorial tours, where the guide is not just a conduit of information, but the central figure around whom the entire narrative and emotional trajectory of the experience unfolds.

Table 1 summarizes the interrelated components that contribute to the formation of trust in the conditions of conducting authorial tours.

Table 1

Formation of trust in authorial tours

Component	Characteristics	Trust impact
Psychological trust	Consumer's willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations	Reduces emotional resistance, increases openness to new experiences
Reputation	Accumulated public perception of the tour guide's trustworthiness and professionalism	Indicates long-term reliability and consistency
Online reviews	User reviews available on digital platforms	Provides social proof and reduces perceived risk
Expertise	Demonstrated knowledge and subject matter expertise	Establishes authority and credibility
Empathy	Sensitivity to group dynamics and individual needs	Creates emotional comfort and satisfaction
Authenticity	Congruence between the guide's image, behavior, and values	Enhances trust and personal connection
Charisma	Attractive and magnetic personal style	Creates emotional resonance and memorability

Source: formed by the author based on [18-20]

In general, trust in authorial tours is not a static characteristic, but a multidimensional and dynamic process, influenced by cognitive evaluation, emotional resonance and social approval. It is simultaneously constructed and experienced, which requires targeted efforts from tour guides and conscious perception from consumers. The stronger the foundation of trust, the greater the likelihood that the tour will not only meet but also exceed expectations, generating loyalty, commitment and long-term brand equity. In the modern market of excursion services, particularly in the niche of authorial tours, the relationship between the tour



guide's personal brand and consumer trust is becoming one of the decisive factors for gaining competitive advantages. Unlike mass tourism, authorial tours are characterized by personalized stories, unique thematic content and direct interaction between the guide and the tourist. In this context, competition intensifies not only at the level of destinations or price offers, but also at the level of personality and perception of the uniqueness of the tour guide. The tour market exhibits signs of monopolistic competition, where numerous service providers offer differentiated products that are not perfect substitutes [21, p. 169-170]. Such differentiation is based on style, storytelling methods, cultural capital, emotional involvement and - most importantly - the personal brand of the guide. Consumers do not simply choose a tour, they choose an experience mediated by a specific person whose reputation, values and charisma match their expectations and emotional needs.

The influence of a personal brand on consumer behavior occurs through several interconnected psychological and communicative mechanisms. First, a formulated personal brand reduces informational uncertainty, creating a holistic image of what to expect. This clarity builds trust in prior experiences and influences decision-making. Second, a strong personal brand activates the process of emotional identification, through which tourists feel a connection with the guide's personality, worldview, or lifestyle. This identification turns the excursion into a socially and emotionally meaningful interaction. Third, the brand functions as a heuristic cue in an environment filled with a variety of options - consumers often rely on easily recognizable signs, such as tone of voice, visual aesthetics, or public presence, to make their choice. In this sense, the personal brand becomes a behavioral trigger that forms preferences, loyalty, and evaluations after gaining experience [22, p. 1731-1734].

In recent years, successful branding practices for guides have emerged, particularly among professionals who actively utilize digital platforms to establish and maintain their recognition. These practices typically involve the strategic integration of personal storytelling, visual identity, niche specialization, and



multichannel communication. For example, guides in cultural heritage tourism often build their brands on historical knowledge, academic expertise, and connections to local institutions. In contrast, guides in alternative or experiential tourism emphasize lifestyle, informality, or subcultural affiliation.

Social media platforms play a crucial role in brand communication, enabling guides to showcase their values, aesthetics, and storytelling styles in formats that align with consumers' media habits. Influencer-like approaches, behind-the-scenes content, and customer-generated content (e.g., tagged photos or testimonials) help reinforce brand identity. Case studies show that guides with strong personal brands often demonstrate consistency between online and offline touchpoints, authenticity in their messaging, and responsiveness to audience feedback. For example, a guide specializing in urban street art can build a brand based on subcultural knowledge, local activism, and an informal style of interaction that appeals to a specific segment of the audience seeking out-of-the-box experiences. Another guide focused on literary tourism may utilize academic authority and poetic sensibility as brand elements that shape consumer expectations and post-trip satisfaction [23, p. 7-10]. These examples demonstrate that effective branding encompasses not only visibility but also narrative coherence and audience orientation.

Table 2 presents the key branding strategies used by successful literary travel guides and their corresponding impact on consumer trust.

Table 2

Branding strategies used in the tourism industry

Branding strategy	Characteristics	Impact on consumer trust
Niche specialization	Focus on a specific topic or audience segment (e.g., gastronomy, architecture)	Positions the guide as an expert; increases trust in it
Consistency of the story	Using personal narrative and emotional resonance across platforms	Creates emotional connection and perceived authenticity



Branding strategy	Characteristics	Impact on consumer trust
Visual identity and aesthetic consistency	Using specific colors, styles, and images in branding materials	Increases recognition and professional image
Multi-channel communication	Active presence on social media, blogs, booking platforms, and review sites	Increases visibility and offers multiple trust signals
User engagement and feedback integration	Interact with the audience promptly and adapt to reviews	Demonstrates openness and builds trust in relationships
Cross-promotion and collaboration	Partnering with local businesses, influencers, or institutions	Extending trust through association with trusted organizations

Source: formed by the author based on [21-23]

A tour guide's brand is not an additional marketing tool, but a key component of value creation in the author's tour market. It mediates consumer perception, reduces decision-making uncertainty, and promotes emotional investment. In a competitive environment where the quality of the experience is tied to the person providing it, trust is both the result and condition of an effective personal brand. As the industry evolves, the ability of guides to create, communicate, and maintain authentic personal brands will remain a crucial factor in building consumer loyalty and market differentiation.

Conclusions. The study found that a tour guide's brand is not only a tool for self-presentation but also a significant factor in building trust in an author's tours in today's competitive environment. Trust is formed based on a combination of rational assessments (expertise, experience, reputation) and emotional components (authenticity, empathy, charisma), which provides a deeper level of interaction between the guide and the tourist. In the process of choosing an excursion service, it is the personal brand that largely determines the consumer's behavioral patterns, reducing uncertainty and increasing the sense of security and expected satisfaction from the future experience.

An analysis of modern branding practices for tour guides has revealed several effective strategies, including targeted specialization, an active digital presence, consistency in visual and communicative image, as well as interaction with tourists



through storytelling elements and feedback. Successful cases demonstrate that creating a holistic and consistent personal brand significantly enhances the guide's competitiveness in the market, contributes to the formation of a loyal audience, and ensures the sustainable development of professional activities. Prospects for further scientific research include a more in-depth empirical study of the influence of individual brand elements on the level of trust and behavioral reactions of consumers across different segments of the tourism market.

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