6th International Research Symposium in Service Management, IRSSM-6 2015, 11-15 August 2015, UiTM Sarawak, Kuching, Malaysia

Graduates' Perception on the Factors Affecting Commitment to Pursue Career in the Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the barriers influencing hospitality undergraduates pursuing a career in the hospitality industry. A total of 70 final year diploma students majoring in hotel and tourism management, UiTM (Pulau Pinang) participated in this study to complete the survey. Based on the results of the regression among nature of work, social status, pay/benefits and commitment to the hospitality industry, it was found that the model was significant with predictors explaining 45% of the variation in commitment to the hospitality industry. The findings showed that only two predictors statistically had significant contribution to the commitment hospitality industry and those predictors were social status and pay benefits. In term of importance, social status was the largest unique contribution to the commitment to the hospitality industry. The negative characteristics of the hospitality industry have reduced the graduates' interest to seek a career in the industry upon graduating even the need to attract and recruit hospitality graduates to work in the hotel industry is very crucial towards the future success of the industry since the industry is facing the problem of employee shortage.

Keywords: social status; pay/benefits; career commitment; hospitality industry

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1. Introduction

In Malaysia, tourism industry is one of the major contributors to the economy. In 2013, tourism sector was the sixth largest contributor to the economy and has contributed RM51.5 billion to Gross National Income (GNI) (Tourism Malaysia, 2014). Parallel to the development of the tourism industry, there is higher demand for qualified and skilled employees to ensure the success and competitiveness of the industry. True to this factor; the tourism and hospitality industry require employees; and the more consumers they serve; the greater level of revenue they can gain hence, more staff members in the operation must be required (Hayes and Ninemeier, 2009).

Having said that, it was revealed that most hospitality students do not join the hospitality industry right after completing their study (Pavesic & Brymer, 1990). This is supported by several recent studies which discuss on the issues pertaining to commitment of students in joining the hospitality industry afterwards (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Chellen & Nunkoo, 2010; Aksu & Koksal, 2005; Roney & Oztin, 2007; Barron & Maxwell, 1993; Richardson, 2012). Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) also stated that from previous appraisal of different dimensions of attitudes such as nature of work, social status, industry-person congeniality, physical working conditions, pay and benefits, promotion opportunities as well as relationship between co-workers and managers; it is very challenging to conclude that respondents have a strong commitment in working in the hospitality industry. Moreover, it is widely accepted that the characteristics of the industry such as long working hour, poor working environment, salary and lack of pay and benefits had created poor image of the industry thus reduced the commitment level of the students (Roney & Oztin, 2007). In conjunction to that, this research focused on examining the key barriers that influenced the Malaysian hospitality students' perspective to pursue their career in the hospitality industry.
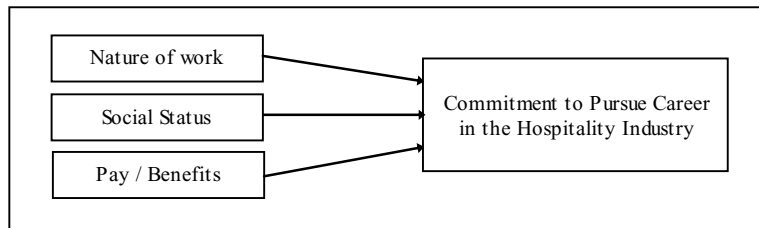

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework (Kusluvan and Kusluvan, 2000).

2. Methodology

In this study, all measurements pertaining to the four variables identified are nature of work, social status, pay benefits and commitment to work in the hospitality industry. These were derived from Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) (refer to Table 1). Multi-measurement items for each variable were adopted to overcome the limitations of a single item due to its higher rate of measurement error. Each item was measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). A mid-point of 3 = neither was not used as it encourages respondents to choose neither agree nor disagree to the statement.

Table 1. Measure of the study variables

Variable	Number of items	Sources	Type of scales
Nature of Work	15 items	Kusluvan & Kusluvan	5- point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)
Social Status	8 items	Kusluvan & Kusluvan	5- point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)
Pay/benefits	4 items	Kusluvan & Kusluvan	5- point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)
Commitment to the Hospitality Industry	15 items	Kusluvan & Kusluvan	5- point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)
Demographic Profile	11 items	Kusluvan & Kusluvan	5- point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

The reliability and validity of the measurement instruments were assessed via Cronbach's alpha and pre test respectively. Internal consistency test was conducted to assess the summated scale where several items were summed to form a total score for the construct. Using SPSS version 22, the reliability test is performed where the acceptable Cronbach's alpha should be above 0.70 to indicate a good internal consistency (Hair, Money, Samoul & Page, 2007). Results from the reliability test showed that the Cronbach's alpha values for all variables were above 0.70 (refer to Table 2). Thus, all variables were considered as reliable and suitable for the study. As for the instruments validity, a pre test was conducted that involved 30 respondents. The purpose of the pre test is to ascertain that the questionnaire is free from any ambiguous or biased questions (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin, 2010). The respondents were asked to highlight any questions that are difficult to understand or confusing. Also, two hospitality senior lecturers were asked to check on the questionnaire.

Table 2. Result of reliability test for pilot study.

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Nature of Work	12	.634
Social Status	8	.698
Pay/benefits	4	.912

The target population for this study was the students of Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, University Technology Mara, Pulau Pinang. A total of 371 final year diploma students of hotel and tourism management who had recently completed their industrial training were identified as target population. Based on GPower analysis (Buchner, Erdfelder & Faul, 1997), 52, 76 and 48 are adequate sample size for independent sample t-test, ANOVA and Chi-square with 0.05 probability of alpha errors and powers of 0.8. The study distributed a total of 100 questionnaires based on convenience sampling technique because the sampling frame is unavailable due to academic privacy matters. The survey was conducted for 2 days from 19th to 20th March 2015 for the duration of 7 hours (9.00 a.m. until 5.00 p.m). Out of the 100 questionnaires, 70 were returned and completed representing a response rate of 70 per cent. After checking for outliers, all 70 questionnaires were coded for multiple regression analysis using IBM SPPS version 22.

3. Results

3.1. Respondents profiles

The profile of the respondent is shown in Table 3. Of the 70 respondents, approximately 70.0% were female and 30.0% were male. Majority (78.5%) of the respondents were between 19 and 21 years old. More than half (52.9%) of the respondents reported that they had ranked the hospitality management program between 4 to 6 as their preferred course when they filled up the online application form for public universities' admissions. More than half (62.9%) of the total respondents had no plan to work in the hospitality industry within the first year after they had completed their study.

Table 3. The profile of respondents in frequency distributions and percentages.

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	21	30.0
Female	49	70.0
Age		
19 – 21	55	78.5
22 – 24	13	18.5
25 – 28	2	3.0
Preference rank to enroll in hospitality management program		
Between 1 and 3	19	27.1
Between 4 and 7	37	52.9
Between 8 and 10	14	20.0
Intention to work in the hospitality industry		
Yes	14	20.0
No	44	62.9
Undecided	12	17.1

Note: N = 70

3.2. Relationship between nature of work, social status, pay/benefits and commitment to the hospitality industry

Table 4 shows the results of the regression between nature of work, social status, pay/benefits and commitment to the hospitality industry. It was found that the model was significant [F (3, 66) = 17, p < .001] with predictors explaining 45% of the variation in commitment to the hospitality industry. The remaining 55.4% is explained by other predictors. Among the three predictors entered into the model, only two predictors significantly contribute d as the barriers towards students' commitment to pursue their career in the hospitality industry, and the predictors were social status and pay/benefits. In term of importance, social status was the largest unique contributor to the commitment to the hospitality industry.

Table 4. Results on multiple regression of nature of work, social status, and pay/benefits to predict commitment to the hospitality industry.

	B	SE B	β
Constant	.963	.371	
Nature of work	.100	.107	.096
Social Status	.471	.095	.513***
Pay/benefits	.109	.048	.222*

*R² = .446, *p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001*

4. Discussion

It was found that nature of work did not influence the students' commitment in the hospitality industry. According to Hayes and Ninemeier (2009), students from Generation Y have high desire in learning new things and are open for challenges. Thus, the nature of work did not influence the student's commitment to pursue a career in the hospitality industry.

Social status was found to have strong significant relationship which indicates it is the main barrier that could influence students to venture out themselves in the industry. This factor may be influenced by the extensive trust in the local community that those who study hospitality will work as service staff. It has been revealed by Mohd Yusof and Radha (2010) that from the students' perspectives, the community viewed the job as waiters or waitresses do not require high academic qualification. The existence of negative perception that working in this industry is contradicting with religious values and causing individual moral collapse is also hindering them to involve in the industry. This is due to the work environment that is exposed to promiscuity, extreme entertainment and offers alcoholic beverages.

Besides that, pay/benefits are also found as the barrier that influences student's commitment for the industry. This result is constant with previous studies (Aksu & Koksal, 2005; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000) who found that pay and benefit have an undesirable perception from the students towards the hospitality industry. Typically, people leave the hospitality industry because of displeasure with income (Tanke, 1990). Thus, hospitality managers should take serious consideration on the current pay structure. The organization should be able to attract hospitality students with an effective pay and benefits as employees want to be paid what they are worth like their older generations (Withiam, 2005).

5. Recommendations

The above findings highlight several important points worth to be noted by the public hospitality institutions, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Tourism, and industry practitioners. To address this issue, early career advice to the students would assist them in making decision for the future as well as review real pictures of the hospitality industry. An extensive overview of the career may include information on pay levels and career pathway can be offered from the secondary school level by the school counselors. A well-informed candidate would help in eliminating negative social status perception and expecting unrealistic pay and benefits. Besides that, professional career guidance from the industry players could help to attract potential hospitality students to continue working with their organizations once the students had undergone industrial training program.

To overcome pay structure as the barrier for the students to committing to the industry, the industry players are recommended to implement the strategic income management as well as remain competitive. Besides, the midterm salary revisions and extraordinary pay-raises are among ways the industry should attempt to retain efficient employees and can increase the amount of employees' salary. As benefits is also the factor influencing negative perception among hospitality graduates, ample information on the fringe and benefits received could help in encouraging them to work in the field. Industry players also need to prepare sufficient and relevant benefits for their employees in order to retain the employment.

6. Conclusion

In a nutshell, the current situation shows that the industry is facing a shortage of employees even though the number of students graduating from the hospitality schools is increasing. Hence, academicians and industry players need to play their role in attracting these potential hospitality graduates in order to get them involved in the industry. The three factors which contributed as barriers that influenced the students' commitment to pursue career in the hospitality industry should be addressed professionally. In completing this study, few limitations had been encountered such as restricted time allocation in data collection which had been done during the final presentation of students' internship. Within the two-day time, the students were rushed to complete the questionnaires and the quality of the answers might be jeopardized. Moreover, from the sample size of this study, it is too small to generalize for all students to have the same opinions. Thus, it is recommended to have sufficient time frame in collecting data and extend larger sample size for future study. Additionally, the sample size could be divided into demographics such as gender and education level as it may perhaps give an interesting result.

Acknowledgements

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