



Gender diversity in the hospitality industry: An empirical study in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This paper, an investigation of gender diversity in the Turkish hospitality industry, focuses on two primary objectives: (a) exploring the potential relationships between gender and several demographic factors, and (b) examining the possible existence of a gender effect regarding employees' perceptions of recruitment and earning potential decisions. Results, based on 682 surveys, show that, in the male-dominated Turkish hospitality industry, there is a significant gender effect for two of four demographic variables and with respect to recruiting efforts and earning potential. These findings could have some important managerial implications for addressing gender diversity in the (Turkish) hospitality industry.

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1. Introduction

Gender diversity and the status of women in the hospitality industry has been a concern among both management practitioners and academicians. In recent years, there has been remarkable progress with respect to women closing the gender gap in managerial positions in the hospitality industry. Yet there still seems to be what might be called “patterns of employment ghettos,” wherein certain departments are predominantly filled by men and others are predominantly staffed by women. This suggests that gender diversity may be lacking in the hospitality industry.

This study aims to investigate gender diversity in the hospitality industry in Turkey by pursuing two major research objectives, both of which address the extent to which a *gender effect* exists within the hospitality industry. First, the study explores the potential relationships between employees' gender and four other demographic variables, including employees' job position in the hospitality industry, the department in which they are employed, and their education level and age. In pursuing this research objective, the study will ascertain whether any gender disparities occur in the context of these other demographic characteristics. Second, the study examines employees' beliefs regarding both the recruitment of men and women and the earning potential of men and women within the hospitality industry. The second aspect of this study

will reveal whether recruitment efforts and the salary offered are influenced by gender, as well as by the demographic characteristics identified above. We believe that the results of this study will provide meaningful insights into gender diversity in the Turkish hospitality industry.

2. Gender in the hospitality industry

A considerable body of research exists concerning gender diversity in businesses, including the hospitality industry. For example, several studies demonstrate a disparate distribution of income between male and female employees in the hospitality industry, with females earning less than their male counterparts (Biswas and Cassell, 1996; Purcell, 1996; Sparrowe and Iverson, 1999). Gender-based income disparity has been confirmed as a form of sex discrimination within the hospitality industry (e.g., Sparrowe and Iverson, 1999; Thrane, 2007). There also have been several examples of research highlighting differences between men and women managers in effective strategy implementation (Schaap et al., 2008). Still other research has documented gender differences in promotions to managerial positions (Manwa and Black, 2002; Thrane, 2007), wherein men are over-represented in preferred positions that pay better. Part of the reason for this disparity may be that female employees may interrupt their working lives due to preferences for marriage and caring for children.

Of course, gender might not be the sole cause of disparities in the distribution of income and managerial employment in the hospitality industry. Other variables might interact with gender to produce these disparities. For example, Adib and Guerrier (2003) explored the ways in which gender interacts with such variables as race, ethnicity, and the class background of chefs and their employees in the context of how they position themselves within organizational

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power arrangements. Adib and Guerrier (2003) reported that the lack of power resulting from employees' immigrant status was the most significant reason behind male chefs' harassment of female employees working in the same department. In addition to discrimination, Kattara (2005) identified other characteristics – such as age, work experience, and work–family conflict – as influential factors that prevented female employees from reaching the top managerial positions within the Egyptian hotel industry. In addition to the work–family conflict as an internal factor in Turkey, Cave and Kilic (2010) emphasized the impact of work–stereotype conflict, which refers to the societal disrespect of women's high involvement in the hospitality industry, as an external factor.

In developing countries, including Turkey, females usually are quite powerless to compete with their male counterparts due to several visible or invisible barriers and challenges (e.g., forgoing marriage, motherhood, discrimination, stereotyping, etc.). This problem becomes magnified when the operational aspects of hospitality management require long working hours and high degrees of mobility. As noted above and as a matter of respect (or cultural tradition) the society would not like to see females working in an environment that requires working long hours, drinking alcohol, etc. As a result, women, lacking the experience that is essential for a higher position, often are denied opportunities; in contrast, the business environment of the hospitality industry is more conducive for males' advancement in their professional careers. Cave and Kilic (2010) note that the industry requires commitment, teamwork, achievement, desire, and risk taking – regardless of gender discrimination.

The Turkish hospitality industry has also been dominated by the problem of seasonality, which particularly deters women from continuing their professional careers in this field. Perhaps most importantly, some women believe that the hospitality industry can interfere with their private lives and their social lives. Thus, hospitality businesses provide fewer opportunities for promotions that are sufficient to meet the expectations of women. The widely shared perspective within Turkey is that women often view the public sector as an alternative employment solution given its flexibility with regard to managing domestic household duties. Contrary to the situation in some Western countries such as the United Kingdom (Purcell, 1996), these factors have led the Turkish hospitality industry to become male-dominated. Despite this, and from an optimistic point of view, over the last few years there have been a growing number of women who are undertaking tourism programs at the university level and seeking positions in the Turkish hospitality industry. Based on the personal observations of two of the co-authors who teach in tourism programs in Turkey, there were only one or two female students in classes about 20–25 years ago but now almost 30–35% of the students are female; moreover, some schools might be more female-dominant. Still, gender disparity seems to remain in the Turkish hospitality industry, which in turn brings to the forefront important questions regarding recruitment and compensation decisions, and the factors that could influence those decisions.

2.1. Gender effect on recruitment

Studies have investigated the impact of gender in employment interviews, with the aim of separating the effects of applicant sex and recruiter sex on recruiters' evaluations of the applicants. In a laboratory setting, Gallois et al. (1992) found that personnel managers regarded same-sex applicants as more similar to themselves than opposite-sex applicants; however, sex similarity was not a factor in ratings of likeability or suitability for the job. Graves and Powell (1988) found no significant effects of applicant sex on interview outcomes; but they did find that perceived similarity and interpersonal attraction were important factors in the recruiters'

decision-making processes. In a different study, Graves and Powell (1995) showed that perceived gender similarity and interpersonal attraction mediated the effect of sex similarity on female recruiters' assessments of applicants' qualifications. However, an unexpected finding of their study was that female recruiters saw male applicants as more similar to themselves and more qualified than female applicants. In a more recent study, Hardin et al. (2002) found that similarity of recruiter and applicant gender did not have any significant effect on the recruiting outcomes.

As more women have entered the sales arena, several studies began exploring the effect of buyer–seller gender similarity on sales performance. Conventional wisdom concerning buyer–seller similarity is that exchange relationships are easier to develop with similar others (Churchill et al., 1997). Crosby et al. (1990) point out that similarity between salespersons and customers – as measured by such characteristics as sex, appearance, lifestyle, and status – is positively related to quality of the sales relationship and sales performance. Similarly, Smith (1998) reports that same-gender and same-life-stage buyer–seller relationships are associated with greater relationship investment, more open communication, and greater trust and satisfaction within relationships. While an earlier study by Churchill et al. (1975) found a statistically significant relationship between visible similarity (i.e., gender, age, race, education, and nationality) and salesperson performance, more recent similarity research (Crosby et al., 1990; Weitz, 1981) suggests that this relationship is weak at best. On the other hand, Dwyer et al. (1998) show that female salespeople are just as effective as male salespeople and that gender similarity is not a significant factor in sales performance.

2.2. Gender effect on earning potential

Despite continued efforts during the last few decades, wage disparities on the basis of gender still persist in the United States (Gibelman, 2002). Since 1975, when the Equal Pay Act came into effect, the full-time pay gap has closed considerably for women, from 29.5% of men's hourly pay to 20.2% in 1996 and from 20.7% in 1997 to 17.2% in 2006 (Anon., 2006). A study by Gibelman (2002) revealed substantial salary discrepancies on the basis of gender throughout the service professions. She states that in the year 2000 women earned 24% less than men, which was a reduction from a 37% earnings gap that existed in 1979. While the reasons for this pay gap are complex and interconnected, the keys factors include: (a) human capital differences, (b) part-time work by many women, (c) travel patterns, (d) occupational segregation, and (e) workplace segregation (Anon., 2006).

As implied by the findings of Hardin et al. (2002), men might be earning more than women in their jobs because they are offered higher starting salaries. These findings are consistent with a study by Joy (2000) who found that men earned more than women in their first jobs within the majority of majors and occupations (including the sales field). In specific reference to the tourism and hospitality industry, there is also evidence that men are paid more than women in such countries as the Czech Republic and Norway (Jurajda, 2003; Thrane, 2007). In the case of Turkish hospitality industry, several researchers argue that women earn less because they usually find jobs in low-skilled and low-status positions such as housekeeping (Aykaç, 2006; Cave and Kilic, 2010). Since many women start with a lower salary, it would be difficult for them to catch up with men's earnings later in their careers. This could provide one possible explanation of the gender pay gap. Moreover, applicants' perceptions of gender effects on expected earning potential could influence their decisions when making career choices. For example, if a male or female applicant perceives that he/she will be earning less than the other gender in a given field, he/she may not pursue a career in that field. Therefore, it is important to examine applicants'

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