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Research notes

A study of internship attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and career planning of hospitality vocational college students

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ABSTRACT

This research used the revised theory of planned behavior as a conceptual framework to explore its relationship to career planning for hospitality vocational college students in Taiwan. The analysis conducted by structural equation modeling revealed that attitude has a positive influence on intention; the subjective norm has a negative influence on intention; perceived behavioral control has a positive influence on intention; intention has a positive influence on behavior; and perceived behavioral control has a positive influence on behavior. Based on the evidence results, the current study proposes a few suggestions for educational institutions and future research.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the tourism, hospitality, and leisure department in higher education has increased quickly due to the evolution of the global tourism industry. To cope with this change, the department of tourism and hospitality requires substantial growth to meet industry needs. Hospitality education in Taiwan also needs to grow substantially to overcome the human capital gap in this industry.

Currently, tourism and hospitality courses in academia emphasize the importance of practical training, and endeavor to develop internship programs for students. Schools consider internship as one of the positive strategies for recruiting students, thereby promoting a comprehensive curriculum with an attractive internship project. Students and the tourism industry are also well aware of the advantage of incorporating practical experiences into tourism and hospitality school curricula (Lam & Ching, 2007).

For hospitality educators or practitioners, a good understanding of student perception regarding hospitality internship is of critical importance. Most schools provide internships to provide hospitality management students an opportunity to experience real working conditions while completing full time academic courses, to help ensure that they will become future successful professionals. A hospitality internship serves to bridge university education and industry expectations for the hospitality graduate.

Busby (2002) identified the following aims for students undertaking an internship:

- to experience employment and, where appropriate, accept responsibility for completing tasks and supervising others,
- to obtain insight into management and management methods,
- to gain greater maturity and self-confidence,

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- to be involved in the diagnosis and solution of problems,
- to develop attitudes and standards appropriate to career and aspirations (Busby & Gibson, 2010).

A considerable amount of literature exists on hospitality management students. Taking hospitality management students as an example, this study applied the theory of planned behavior (TPB) model as a research framework to predict the behavioral intention of internship and career planning.

The TPB (Ajzen, 1985) is a cognitive model of human behavior, focused on predicting and understanding of clearly defined behaviors. Ajzen asserted intention to be the principal predictor of behavior. The TPB model is based on three constructs first introduced by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and extends the theory of reasoned action (TRA) by taking the issues of volition and following related control elements to predict human behavioral intention and actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991, 2001; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The TPB is an extension of TRA, which provides a useful tool to predict a wide range of behaviors in many different studies in the hospitality literature (Cheng, Lam, & Hsu, 2005; Han, Hsu, & Sheu, 2010; Han & Kim, 2010; Quintal, Lee, & Soutar, 2010; March & Woodside, 2005). The TPB includes three conceptually independent determinants of intention postulates. The first antecedent of intention is attitude toward the behavior: it refers to the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question. The second predictor is subjective norm, a social factor referring to perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior. The final predictor factor is the degree of perceived behavioral control, which refers to the perception regarding whether the performance of the behavior is easy or difficult. Perceived behavioral control reflects previous experience as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles. To sum, the more advantageous the attitude and subjective norm related to a behavior and the greater the perceived behavioral control, the stronger the individual intention to perform the behavior. The important prediction factors of intention, attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control, are expected to vary across behaviors and situations. Although TPB is an old theory, it is a mature and complete theory that is still applicable to various social behaviors. Yang (2008) summarized the trend of the theory of planned behavior extensively, which not only discusses applications in psychology and sociology, but also in education, health, medicine, computers, management, and so on. Since the original conceptualization of TPB by Ajzen (1991), more than 2400 articles have cited and discussed this theory. Some studies have used the revised theory of planned behavior as a research framework (Smith & McSweeney, 2007; Warburton & Terry, 2000). The difference between the original TPB and the revised TPB is that the individual subjective norm has an attitude affect on behavior.

An internship system is not only an important shortcut for students to adapt to the actual workplace, but also a way for students to test the suitability of the hospitality industry, deeming it integral to curriculum planning. The current study explores the career planning of hospitality management students in relation to their internship perception. The specific aims of this report include (a) to examine the internship and career planning perception of students and (b) to compare the differences between TPB and the revised TPB.

2. Research method

2.1. Sample

The study population consisted of hospitality management students in a Taiwanese university. The survey questionnaire was sent to 300 hospitality management students from two Taiwanese universities. 231 usable questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of 77%. The respondents comprised a diverse population. Females accounted for 54% of the respondents; more than 40% of the sample consisted of second-year students and final-year students, 40.3% and 41.6%, respectively. Finally, 73.6% of the respondents had experience in related hospitality part-time work.

2.2. Questionnaire design

The questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first was intended to elicit demographic information on the respondents. The second section asked respondents to rate their internship and career planning according to a set scale. This study developed an internship and career planning scale, and the data were collected via a questionnaire survey.

The internship and career planning scale was assessed according to the measure instrument of Chuang and Kuo (2008). The measure assesses internship, and career planning adopts the TPB theory in five subscales: (1) attitude; (2) subjective norm; (3) perceptive behavior control; (4) intention; and (5) behavior. Each item was evaluated using a five-point Likert scale. The scales anchor ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree; a higher number indicates increasing use of related measuring. The research sample of Chuang and Kuo consisted of practitioners among undergraduate students majoring in hospitality management. The practitioner sample consisted of 246 practitioners. Cronbach's α subscale was 0.91, indicating strong test reliability for the instrument as a whole. Cronbach's α was 0.75–0.86. These measures indicated strong test reliability for each section of the instrument.

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