



Student career prospect and industry commitment: The roles of industry attitude, perceived social status, and salary expectations



Yim King Penny Wan*, IpKin Anthony Wong¹, Weng Hang Kong²

Institute for Tourism Studies, Colina de Mong-Ha, Macao

HIGHLIGHTS

- Perceived work nature has no significant relationship with career prospects.
- Work nature is a significant factor contributing to the perceived social status.
- Social status has an effect on the students' perceptions of the career prospects.
- Perceived career prospects determines students' commitment to the industry.
- Moderating effects of salary on industry commitment is not significant.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of students' perceptions of the nature and social status of work in the tourism and hospitality industries, and of their salary expectations, on their attitudes toward career prospects and employment intention. Results based on a sample of tourism and hospitality students in a major Asia Pacific travel destination indicated that the perceived nature of the work had no significant relationship with career prospects; however, nature of the work was a significant factor contributing to the perceived social status of the industry. In addition, social status had an effect on the students' perceptions of the career prospects, and perceived career prospects was a significant determinant to students' commitment to the industry. The author further explores the moderating effect of salary expectation and discusses theoretical and practical implications of the results. Findings of this study provide a fuller understanding of industry commitment and its antecedents.

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1. Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industries worldwide have been confronted with the problem of attracting and retaining quality employees, which has led to a shortage of skilled employees to staff the ever-growing number of hospitality businesses (Baum, 2006; Richardson, 2010). There are many factors contributing to the problem, and negative disposition toward the industries is one of them. The industries have a poor reputation due mainly to the low financial compensation, unsociable working hours, menial work, and limited opportunities for career progression. Low job satisfaction and high turnover rate are often the result (Roney &

Öztin, 2007). To attract and retain employees, it is essential to understand their attitudes toward and perceptions of the industries (Richardson, 2009, 2008).

Having understood students' attitudes toward the industries also provides hospitality and tourism firms with better insights into how to cultivate an enthusiastic workforce, which is considered vital to any firms to gain in competitiveness (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Richardson, 2010). The tourism and hospitality industries require frequent and intense face-to-face interactions or encounters between the service providers and customers. Customers often judge the quality of service of a hospitality firm based on the service encounter. Employees who have positive attitudes toward the industries and their jobs are more likely to deliver better service and performance, resulting in greater customer satisfaction and loyalty (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2006). Furthermore, students need to have more reasonable expectations of the industries and their future jobs and careers because this helps enhance their job satisfaction and lower the turnover rate in hospitality and tourism firms (Aycan & Fikret-Pasa, 2003; Wan & Kong, 2012). Knowing the

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +853 85982175; fax: +853 28838320.

E-mail addresses: pennywan@ift.edu.mo (Y.K. Penny Wan), anthonywong@ift.edu.mo (I.A. Wong), frances@ift.edu.mo (W.H. Kong).

¹ Tel.: +853 8506 1360 (office); fax: +853 8506 1283.

² Tel.: +853 85983082; fax: +853 85061283.

values and expectations of students allows hospitality and tourism programs and faculty “to guide them into right employment settings and this will ensure person–organizational fit” (Aycan & Fikret-Pasa, 2003, p. 142). In sum, having a good understanding of students’ perceptions of the industries and the factors that shape their perceptions is crucial for the industries, individual firms, students and hospitality programs and faculty members.

A majority of the career literature in hospitality focuses on exploring students’ general attitudes toward the industries, their career prospects, and their intention to enter the industries upon graduation (Aksu & Köksal, 2005; Barron & Maxwell, 1993; Jenkins, 2001; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Richardson, 2008; Roney & Öztin, 2007). Others focus on how different variables such as gender, work experience, year of study, and influences of friends and family members could affect students’ perceptions of and attitudes toward the industries and their career intention and commitment (Barron & Maxwell, 1993; Chuang & Jenkins, 2010; Jenkins, 2001; O’Leary & Deegan, 2005; Roney & Öztin, 2007; Wan & Kong, 2012, 2011; Wong & Liu, 2010). There are studies that investigate the effects of work value on students’ career expectations, goals and choices (Chen & Choi, 2008; Chen, Chu, & Wu, 2000; Pizam & Lewis, 1979; Wong & Liu, 2010). Yet, little research has been conducted to understand the effect and consequence of students’ industry intention and commitment (Jenkins, 2001). A nomological network that explores the direct, indirect, and moderating effects of different variables on students’ industry intention and commitment is lacking. Previous studies in other fields have separately discussed the relationships between the perceived nature of work and social status (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000), between perceived social status and career prospects (Sandiford & Seymour, 2010), between perceived career prospects and employment intention (Sennett, 1998), and finally between salary expectation and students’ career aspirations and choice (Richardson, 2009; Richardson & Butler, 2012). It is imperative to understand how different factors come into play to shape students’ career prospects and commitment to these industries.

The objective of this study therefore is to explore the direct, indirect, and moderating effects of different variables on students’ industry intention and commitment. More specifically, it investigates the factors shaping students’ perceptions toward the hospitality and tourism industries and their career intention (i.e., industry commitment) by comprehensively examining the roles played by students’ perceptions of the nature of work in the industries, perceived social status, and salary expectations. We believe that the findings will be able to contribute to the literature by providing a more thorough understanding of how different factors come into play to shape students’ career prospects and commitment to the tourism and hospitality industries. Tourism and hospitality educators could acquire more information to guide students into appropriate employment settings and ensure a good person–organization fit (Aycan & Fikret-Pasa, 2003).

2. Literature review

2.1. Job nature and social status

Social status is a unit of the social system. An individual obtains it within a group (Vecchio, 1992). Social status is also related to the kind of relation that a society makes with an employee, an employee’s personality and occupation, job complexity and responsibility, and the attitude of people in society regarding the employee’s status (Parcel & Mueller, 1983; Spaeth, 1977; Vecchio, 1992; Walsh, 1982). Social status could be acquired through the characteristics that an employee is born with (such as family name, race and wealth) and by what he/she can obtain and achieve (in

terms of education, occupation, job title and nature of work) (Rostamy, Hosseini, Azar, Khaef-Elahi, & Hassanzadeh, 2008). Based on Kusluvan and Kusluvan’s (2000) definition, social status can be evaluated by whether an individual has pride in his/her career, if family members are proud of the job that he/she is taking, and if the job is perceived as a respected and an important occupation in the society.

Several reports have recorded the relationship between the nature of a job and social status. There are studies that show the importance of job status congruence; a match between what workers prefer (e.g., autonomy or work interest) and what organizations offer (e.g., status) to employees’ job satisfaction, organizational commitment and retention (Creed & Saporta, 2004; Holtom, Lee, & Tidd, 2002; Rostamy et al., 2008). Weaver (2009) conducted face-to-face interviews with the recent graduates of a university’s tourism management program in New Zealand and found that graduates regard the nature and content of the work as key attributes of a good hospitality job; interesting and challenging jobs can even overshadow the perceived weaknesses of the industry image and status. A similar finding is reported in the study by Lai, Chan, and Lam (2012: p. 6). It concluded that “casino dealers who perceive their occupations to have high status might shift their attention toward the positive aspects of their jobs”. The study of Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) reported the perceptions of undergraduate tourism students toward working in the tourism industry in Turkey. Their findings indicated a significant correlation between students’ perceptions of the nature of work in the tourism industry and of its perceived social status. Singh and Kaur (2009) examined the factors affecting job satisfaction and their impact on the overall job satisfaction level of Universal bank employees in India. They found that having a good supervisor contributed significantly to employees’ overall satisfaction. In particularly, employees expressed that good projects that were assigned by their supervisors enhanced their image, prestige and status in the organization. Other studies show that if the nature of a job is interesting, employees are likely to enjoy their jobs better and have a sense of pride about what they do, hence enhancing their perceptions of social status (Chuang, Yin, & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2009; Hancer & George, 2003). Based on the above discussion, it can be reasonably assumed that the perceived nature of the work can be a good determinant of students’ perceived social status of the tourism and hospitality industries.

2.2. Job nature and career prospects

The perceived nature of the work is also related to career prospects. Career prospects often depend on one’s perceptions of the job and the industry (Richardson, 2008), which is often evaluated based on several factors such as rewards, advancement, promotion and chance of good careers (Duignan & Iaquinto, 2005). In the tourism and hospitality contexts, Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) defines career prospects as consisting of the attributes related to one’s perceptions of the promotion opportunities given in the industry, the money that one could earn when comparing other jobs within the same sector (i.e., hospitality) and other sectors, whether the advantages of working in the industry outweigh the disadvantages, and whether studying at university is a correct investment in career development.

A number of studies have reported a correlation between the nature of the work and perceived career prospects (Connell & Burgess, 2006; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Richardson, 2008; Stahl, Miller, & Tung, 2002; Wan & Kong, 2012). O’Leary and Deegan (2005) examine the tourism graduates’ perceptions of their career progress in Ireland and find that several attributes of work in the tourism industry, such as long hours and unsociable work, lack of

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