

Attitudes towards tourism and hospitality career psychology essay



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To explain human behavior is a very difficult and complex task. But approaching it from different levels such as the person's attitude and perception factors and so on, sheds light to this complexity. Concepts referring to behavioral dispositions, such as social attitude, and personality trait, have played an important role in these attempts to predict and explain human behavior (Ajzen, 1998; Campbell, 1963; Sherman & Fazio, 1983). This study uses the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB model) to test the influences governing undergraduates' intention towards pursuing a career in the tourism industry. This study will thus explore the variables that influence a student's intention to pursue a career in the hospitality industry and the factors that are implicated in or modify a student's career commitment over time. The sample includes first year to fourth year undergraduates studying Tourism management courses offered by The University of Mauritius.

2. 1 Perceptions and attitudes towards pursuing a Tourism and Hospitality Career

2. 1. 0 Tourism management as a course

Author (s)

s Study S

Variables used les used

Davidson and Tideswell (1998)

Considering level of student interest in the hospitality programme (Australia)

Industry factors:

Career prospects,

Interests,

See degree as a rite of passage to job and career,

Entrance criteria used by institutions as a mechanism to attract students

Barron and Maxwell (1993)

New entrants' illusory image of the industry- glamorous and unrealistic perceptions

Jarvis (1994)

Limited resources applied early in the education process

Barron (1997)

Offer for the course

Good reputation of university

O'Mahony, McWilliam and Whitelaw (2001)

Reputation and availability of a particular course

Hospitality course as second or third preference

Accepted based on entry requirement rather than career interest

Hing and Lomo (1997)

Students enroll with a vague idea of their goal, their future aspirations and career opportunities (minimal commitment)

Place coveted at the university, irrespective of discipline

If scores were too low. There's a chance to pursue interest and career in private hospitality colleges

Purcell (1993)

Career choice in high school were influenced by parents or guardians, peers or friends

Cothram and Combrink, 1999; Sciarini and Wood, 1997

Parents and families were the most influential in determining students' attitudes and career choice

Young (1994)

Parents as primary providers of encouragement

Machatton (1997)

Negative perceptions of parents- hospitality jobs confined to hamburger-flipping and bed making

O'Mahony, McWilliam and Whitelaw (2001)

Not rated as an important influence:

Parents

Teachers

School counselors

Peers

Rated the highest:

Mass media

Helmes and Adcock (1992)

Lack of information

Lack of career knowledge

Lead to creation of misconception and unwarranted negative attitudes and often associated with lack of opportunities

Barron and Maxwell (1993)

Information about the industry

Career based on choice rather than by chance

Fraser, 2000

Varying interest to work in different sectors of the hospitality industry

views changed through various exposures:

study programme

exposure to industry

2. 1. 1 Tourism as a career choice

Author (s)

Study

Variables used

Ross (1991; 1993)

positive attitudes towards potential careers

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high level of interest in management positions

industry regarded as holding considerable promise for future employment and career prospects

Gets (1994)

unattractive option for high school students:

downturn in regional economies

potential for attracting youth through:

internships or co-operative education between schools and industry

Airey and Frontisis (1997)

career support

improvement in basic hospitality education

Greek students' positive attitudes but:

Unrealistic views about careers in the industry

Limited experience as hospitality consumers

Employment structure in Greece

Charles (1992a)

Positive attitudes towards:

Career in tourism industry- seen as exciting, stimulating and developing creativity

Negative attitude because of potential disruptive effect on:

Personal

Family

And social life

Interest seen to be decreasing:

After internship experience

Barron and Maxwell (1993)

Difference between perception and experience of the industry:

New students hold positive views

Post internship students hold negative views

Expectations:

Good career opportunities

Good training

Treatment of staff by employers

Job does not demand a capacity effort

Perception:

Industry not lucrative

Poor treatment of manual staff

Warsyzak (1997)

Assessment of industry becomes less positive after post work experiences

Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000)

Positive attitudes changed to negative attitudes after practical work experience:

Job stress

Lack of family life owing to nature of the work

Long working hours

Exhausting and seasonal (unstable) jobs

Low social status of a hospitality job

Unfavorable evaluations were due to:

Insufficient information about careers

Limited information on working conditions

West and Jamieson (1990)

Reduction in commitment after various exposures to the industry

Purcell and Quinn (1996)

Supervised work experience a key contributor to reduced commitment

Fraser (2000)

Perceptions, aspirations, expectations and career commitment steadily declined over time.

Levels of commitment not based on:

Sex

Qualifications

Levels of industry knowledge

Nor prior experience

But based on:

Employment practices

Pavesic and Byrmer (1990)

Hospitality Graduates switch to another industry less than one year after graduating. Reasons:

Poor pay for the hours of work

Little recognition for efforts made

Lack of opportunity for progress

Long hours

Stress at work

Not receiving acknowledgement of qualifications gained.

Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000)

Negative attitudes formed after internship:

Stressful jobs

Lack of family life owing to the nature of tourism jobs

Unsatisfactory and unfair promotions

Low pay

Insufficient benefits

Unqualified managers

Poor attitudes and behavior of managers towards employees

Unqualified coworkers

Poor attitudes and behavior of coworkers

Poor physical working conditions for employees

2. 2 The Theory of Planned Behavior

Ajzen developed the Theory of Planned Behavior in 1991 as an extension of Ajzen and Fishbein's 1975 Theory of Reasoned Action. The TPB has four components: attitudes (i. e. the individual's positive or negative feelings about performing a behavior), subjective norm (i. e. the individual's perception of whether people important to the individual think the behavior

should be performed), perceived behavioral control (i. e. The individual's perception on the self skills and ability of performing a behavior) and behavioral intention (i. e. an individual's readiness to perform a given behavior)

Ajzen stated that for nonhabitual behaviors that are easily executed by almost everyone without special circumstances, the theory of reasoned action was adequate. When behaviors are more difficult to execute, and when a person needs to take control over needed resources in order to act, the theory of planned behavior is a better predictor of behavior than the theory of reasoned action. In the theory of planned behavior, control is taken into account as a variable labeled "perceived behavioral control," which is defined as a person's perception of how easy or difficult it would be to perform the action. The theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has been since its development some 20 years proved to be a powerful approach to explain human behavior.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) predicts that planned behaviors are determined by behavioral intentions which are largely influenced by an individual's attitude toward a behavior, the subjective norms encasing the execution of the behavior, and the individual's perception of their control over the behavior (Ajzen, 1975). In simpler terms, behavioural decisions are the result of a reasoned process in which the behavior is influenced by attitudes, norms and perceived behavioral control.

2.3 The Theory of Planned Behavior: Model

Ajzen's revised model (1991) is expressed in the diagram (figure 2) below:

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Figure 2: Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior postulates three conceptually determinants of intention.

2. 4 Determinants of Behavioral Intention

Attitude towards behavior

Attitudes represent an individual's likes, dislikes, beliefs and opinions regarding a particular behavior. It represents a summary of evaluation of psychological object captures in attribute dimensions of good- bad, harmful- beneficial, pleasant- unpleasant, and likable- dislikable (Ajzen; 2001)

Rosenberg and Hovland (1996) viewed attitude as a ' multi-component' construct and made the following statement " all responses to a stimulus object are mediated by the person's attitude towards the object."

Ayres (2008) claims that traditionally there has been a career-for-life philosophy adopted by workers, whereby workers will spend their entire working life working in one industry, and, in many cases, one organization.

This philosophy has in recent times, coinciding with Generation Y entering the workforce, been replaced by a more uncertain career structure, with employees frequently changing employers within their industry and many also pursuing work in different industries (Inkson, Anhur, and Pringle, 1999).

Morton (2002) stated that Generation Y employees show a tendency towards valuing equality in the workplace and they seek positions that offer

reasonable wages and good opportunities for training. Morton (2002) also claimed that they respect managers who empower workers and who are

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open and honest with employees. Martin (2005), who calls this generation “Yers”, describes eight main characteristics shown by Generation Y towards their careers. These eight characteristics include the Generation Y employee being self-reliant and independent, technosavvy, entrepreneurial, seeking flexibility, having an urgent sense of immediacy, wanting increasing responsibility, having a “get off my back” attitude and adopting a free agency attitude.

Oliver (2006) claims that recent interest in the Generation Y worker has intensified in recent years, and while generalizations are plentiful, he claims that the Generation Y worker is uninterested in a job for life, instead seeking flexibility and work-life balance. Oliver (2006) states that, overall, Generation Y workers are seen to have much higher expectations of a job than previous generations, including high expectations of pay, conditions, promotion and advancement.

A study conducted by Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) found that some of the factors that seemed to account for the negative attitudes towards careers in tourism, formed after students had undertaken a practical work assignment, are stressful jobs, lack of family life owing to the nature of the work, long working hours, exhausting and seasonal (unstable) jobs, low social status of tourism jobs, unsatisfactory and unfair promotions, low pay and insufficient benefits, unqualified managers, poor attitudes and behavior of managers towards employees, unqualified coworkers and poor attitudes and behavior of coworkers and poor physical working conditions for employees.

Subjective Norms

Subjective Norms is the degree to which someone wants to conform to other's behavior or expectations. Usually, 'others' are individuals (family and friends) whose preferences on a subject matter are important to him or her. This concept was introduced into theory of planned behavior to accommodate the non volitional elements inherent, at least potentially, in all behaviors (Ajzen, 2002).

Although schools, peers and the student's community all have an impact on the young adult's self-identity and career choice, the parents' expectations and perceptions of vocational fit for their children have been found to be the key roles in shaping their career choices (Ferry, 2006).

In one study (Creamer and Laughlin, 2005), this influence has been so strong as to override the influence of teachers, faculty, and career field in question but were not as well-known and or trusted as to students' parents for this type of decision.

In an era where 49% of UK workers report that balancing work and family responsibilities is an issue of significant concern to them (IP Morgan Fleming, 2003), the influence of family and personal life and career decisions is receiving increasing amounts of media attention. Today's business school graduates are "looking for a work style to go with their lifestyle", claims the HR consultancy Hay Group (The Economist, 2006). "Generation X and Generation Y workers who are younger than 40, are more likely than boomers to say they put family before jobs," says an article in USA Today (Elias, 2004). "Today's younger employees are working to live rather than

living to work,” states a newspaper manager in the journalism newsletter Fusion (Williamson, 2006).

Perceived Behavioral Control

Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) refers to a person’s perception of the ease or difficulty of performing a particular behavior. According to Ajzen (2002), PBC is used to deal with situations where people do not have complete volitional control (i. e. external influences) over the particular behavior in question.

An employee’s perception to any industry will, no doubt, be determined by their commitment, perceptions, attitudes towards working in the industry as well as the types of jobs available in the industry. It is argued that this is particularly pertinent to tourism and hospitality as it has been reported that potential recruits have a negative image of working in the industry (Aksu and Koksal, 2005; Brien, 2004; Getz, 1994, Kuslavan and Kuslavan, 2000).

Several researchers have also studied the perceptions of undergraduate tourism and hospitality management students. Barron and Maxwell (1993) examined the perceptions of new and continuing students at Scottish higher education institutions. They found that in general the new students had positive images of the industry, whereas the students with supervised work experience were much less positive in their views.

Baron and Maxwell (1993) found significant differences between the new students’ perceptions of the industry compared with the students who had undertaken their industry placement. The marked differences in the perceptions of new students compared with those post placement students

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and graduates lie in the difference between perception and experience in the industry. West and Jameson (1990) agree and claim that the more exposure hospitality students have to the industry, the less commitment they show.

2.5 Behavioral Intention

Intention is an anticipated outcome that is intended or that guides your planned actions; in the words of Ajzen, " an indication of how hard people are willing to try, of how much effort they are willing to exert in order to perform the behavior. Therefore, the stronger the intention to engage in a behavior, the more likely should be its performance." (p. 181) TPB states that people act in accordance with their intentions and perceptions of control over their behavior, while intentions are influenced by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms and perceptions of behavioral control (Ajzen, 1985).

Behavior

Hsing (2002) defined behavior as the performance of an action at a certain time, in a certain context and with a certain purpose.

Generally, the more favorable the attitude and subjective norm with respect to a behavior and the greater the perceived behavioral control; the stronger an individual's intention should be to perform the behavior under consideration (Ajzen, 1991). However based on varying behaviors and situation, the relative importance of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control is expected to be different.

2. 6 Indicators of Behavioral Intention

For the TPB to predict behaviour successfully or for maximum prediction, intention must be measured as closely as possible in time to the observation of the behaviour. The longer the interval between measurement of intention and behaviour, the greater the likelihood that an unforeseen event will occur that will lead to changes in intention and be less predictive of actual behaviour. Nevertheless, this study is not working on actual behaviour, but rather on attitudes and beliefs about the behaviour of choosing a particular career.

2. 6. 0 Indicators of Attitude towards behavior

Thus, to measure student attitudes toward behaviour, which in this context meant choosing the programme and direction, or intention to seek a career in hospitality, questions were constructed in such a way so as to shed light on the attitude and beliefs of the undergraduates:

” I expect this course will only qualify me to do a specialised job in the hospitality

industry”

” I am still keen to work in the industry as when I first chose this training programme”

” I am very satisfied with my choice of a career in hospitality”

” I am committed to a career in hospitality”

2. 6. 1 Indicators of Subjective Norms

A second major predictor of intention in this study is the influence of important people in an individual student's life as encouragement and support to perform the behaviour intention. Subjective Norm refers to a favourable or unfavourable student perception of social pressure and the relative importance of different sources of social influence on their intention (decision) to choose a programme and hospitality career. Such social influence might come from immediate family members, peers and friends, teachers and other individual and groups. As stated by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) an individual will perform or operationalise their behaviours that they perceive as favoured by other people who are important to them. In the present study, there were items used to obtain a direct measure of students' perception of significant others and the degree to which they influenced the decision to take a tourism management course. Questions which relate to parents, friends, brothers and sisters and school teachers were constructed to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with such statements. Such questions were:

" My parents encouraged me to study hospitality"

" My school teachers and counsellors encouraged me to study hospitality"

" My brothers / sisters encouraged me to study hospitality"

However, according to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) any relationship between the respondents and the referent (s) will be more or less stable over time. To assess the actual career influencer parallel to those of the students'

intention, an open ended question was asked:

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Who was the most influential individual who influenced your choice of a hospitality

career?

2. 7 Empirical Evidence

2. 8 Conclusion