IMPACT OF PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDES OF TOURISM UNDERGRADUATES TOWARDS THEIR INTENTION TO WORK IN TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract

Travel, tourism and hospitality industry is one of the important industries in both developed and developing countries, which contributes to the county's economy by generating income for the GDP and supporting for the job creation. Tourism and hospitality Industry is one of the labor intensive industry. Many universities and educational institutes in Sri Lanka focus on developing human resources for the industry. This study examines the impact of attitudes and the perceptions of current undergraduates' towards their intention work in the tourism industry. To assess the attitudes and perception of the tourism undergraduates towards a career in tourism & hospitality industry, a questionnaire was developed based on the Kusluvan and Kusluvan's (2000) perceptual model and data were collected from 38 tourism undergraduates from the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, who already have minimum 2 years working experience in the tourism and hospitality industry. The data were analyzed using the SPSS 20.0 analytical tool by running descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The explanatory power of overall model is 58%. The concerned areas to assess the attitude and perception of the undergraduates are nature of work, social status, industry person compliance, physical working condition, pay/ benefits, promotion opportunities, co-workers characteristics, support of managers and the undergraduates' intention to work in the industry. The average means of the dimensions range from 2.81 to 3.75, indicating that the undergraduate tourism students hold moderate favorable perceptions and attitudes towards the working in the industry. The pay and benefits of the tourism careers are negatively perceived by the majority of the tourism undergraduates. The factors influencing tourism undergraduates to pursue a career in the industry are coworker characteristics, physical working conditions and promotion opportunities available in the tourism industry and the coworker characteristics is the most important influencing factor for the undergraduates to choose career in the industry

Keywords: Perception, attitudes, career intention

1. Introduction

Tourism industry is showing an impressive growth globally by increasing international tourist arrivals. Taken as a whole, the tourism activities are contributing as important economic activities in most of the countries. According to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer (2018) (Volume 16, January to April) international tourist arrivals grew by 6% in the first four months of the year comparing to the same period last year. This upward trend of the tourism

sector looks likely to continue into the future. Along with the global growth of the tourism industry, Sri Lankan tourism industry is experiencing a remarkable growth of tourist arrivals by receiving over 2 million (2,116,407) arrivals in the year of 2017. (SLTDA, 2017).

Tourism sector continues to support the economic growth in Sri Lanka by generating income to the GDP and notably supporting for job creation. SLTDA (2016) estimated both direct and indirect employment created by the tourism sector has increased in 2016 with a growth rate of 5.1% creating one job for every five arrivals. Tourism sector involves an array of different activities including accommodation services, food and beverage services, passenger transport services, vehicle hire, travel agencies and sports, recreational and conference services. Being a service industry, the tourism sector is labour intensive industry and people are clearly central to the effective operation. Therefore skilled workforce is essential to cater to the industry.

Considering the growth of the tourism sector and growing need of skilled human resources for the tourism industry, many state universities and other educational institutes started to focus on developing human resources for the tourism industry. Currently there are five state universities in Sri Lanka namely, University of Colombo, University of Kelaniya, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, University of Uwa Wellassa and University of Sabaragamuwa are offering bachelor degrees for the students specializing travel, tourism or hospitality management education. Approximately 200 fresh graduates join the tourism industry annually. (Wijesundara, 2015). The main purpose of this study is to assess the impact of perception and attitudes of the tourism undergraduates towards their intention to work in the industry.

2. Literature Review

The attitudes and perception of an individual's towards the career is a crucial factor in any context, as it is important to describe the predicting behavior. Tourism and hospitality sector being a labor intensive industry, it is important to understand the attitudes and the perception of the tourism undergraduates towards the career in the industry. Many scholars and researchers defined the term attitude and developed theories models of attitudes. Based on the range of definitions, theories and models it is generally agreed that attitude represents the positive or negative mental and neutral readiness towards a person, place, thing or event. It consists of three components: Affective Component (Neural) (Feeling/ Emotion), Behavioral Component (Readiness) (Response/ Action) and the Cognitive Component (Mental) (Belief/ Evaluation) (Jain, 2014).

Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) developed a multi-dimensional and multi-item attitude scale to measure the attitudes of tourism and hotel management school students and to use the measure to outline the general perceptions and attitudes of tourism students towards different aspects or dimensions of working in, and commitment to the tourism industry in Turkey. This scale of attitudes developed with nine dimensions including nature of work, social status, industry-person congeniality, physical working conditions, pay benefits, promotion, co-workers, managers and commitment to the industry. The multi-dimensional scale developed by Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) has been adopted by many researchers. There are many recent studies on the perception and attitudes of the tourism undergraduates. Aksu and Koksal (2005) tested the scale in a study of tourism students' attitudes of tourism and hotel management school in in Antalya, Turkey and the results generally show negative perceptions and attitudes of students toward the tourism industry. Another study was carried out by Roney & Östin (2007) in Turkey to investigate the career perception of undergraduate tourism students by using a questionnaire, which was developed by integrating questions and statements used in

some of the previous studies including the Kusluvan and Kusluvans' (2000) multi-dimensional scale. Their findings confirm that, overall the respondents' perceptions are neither favorable nor unfavorable.

Richardson (2008) applied Kusluvan and Kusluvan's multi-dimensional attitude scale in an Australian context and found out that working in the industry does have a major negative impact on respondents' intentions to pursue careers in the industry. The multi-dimensional attitude scale was tested and applied to the China by Wang (2014) to assess the tourism career perceptions among Chinese undergraduate students. The study reveals that Chinese undergraduate students hold moderate or even negative perceptions of tourism careers. Bahcelerli and Sucuoglu (2015) selected the undergraduate of the Near East University to examine tourism students' opinions regarding the work conditions in the tourism industry based on this multi-dimensional scale developed by Kusluvan and Kusluvan. The results shows that the students have chosen to study tourism education willingly and they have an idea of the working conditions and female students find tourism as profession more interesting, worth to work and enjoyable.

3. Methodology

3.1 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this survey is developed based on the literature review. The variables for this survey were employed from the Kusluvan and Kusluvan's (2000) perceptual model.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework
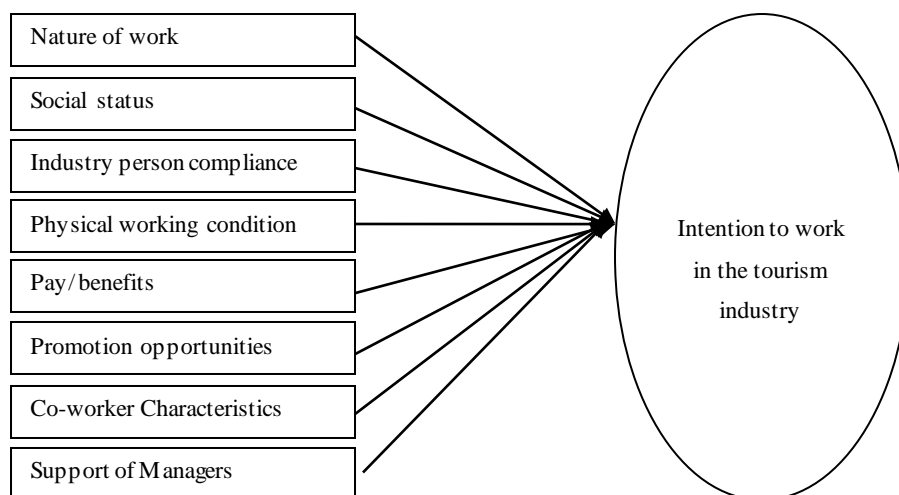
3.2 Sample and population

For this study multi stage sampling method is adopted. The population of this study is all the undergraduates, who are studying tourism at state universities in Sri Lanka. The university was selected according to the cluster sampling technique. 38 out of 179 undergraduates were selected for this study according to the stratified sampling technique, who are following tourism and hospitality management degree at Rajarata University of Sri Lanka with minimum 2 months working experience in the industry.

3.3 Method of data collection

Both primary and secondary techniques of collection of data have been drawn in this study. Primary data was gathered by employing a questionnaire based on the Kusluvan and Kusluvan's (2000) multi-dimensional and multi-item attitude scale. This scale was developed based on the procedures suggested by Churchill (1979), Tull and Hawkins (1987), and Echtner and Ritchie (1993) .The items in the perceptions scale was Likert-type with five categories (5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3= Neutral, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree).

The questionnaire is consisted of two parts. Part I consist with demographic characteristics of the respondents and part II is devoted to assess the perception and attitudes of the tourism Undergraduates towards the career choice in the tourism industry. The concerned areas to assess the attitude and perception of the undergraduates are nature of work, social status, industry person compliance, physical working condition, pay/ benefits, promotion opportunities, co-workers characteristics, support of managers and intention to work in the industry.

3.4 Data Analysis method

The collected data of the survey was analyzed using frequencies, cross tabulation, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. To confirm the accuracy of the result, SPSS 20.0 analytical tool is used for the data analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

The key objective of this survey is to assess the impact of perception and attitudes of the tourism undergraduate towards their intention to work in the industry. Follows is a brief summary of the characteristic of the respondents.

Table 1: Gender and ethnic background of the respondents

Gender		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Male	12	31.6
	Female	26	68.4
	Total	38	100.0
Ethnic background		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Sinhalese	32	84.2
	Tamil	2	5.3
	Muslim	4	10.5
	Total	38	100.0

The majority of the respondents of this survey are female (68.4 Percent) undergraduates and the respondents are coming from different ethnic backgrounds such as Sinhalese (84.2 Percent) Tamil (5.3 Percent) and Muslim (10.5 Percent). There are two major specializing areas for the students who are following tourism and hospitality management degree. The students can select tourism management or hospitality management as the specializing area. The figure 2 shows the distribution of the specializing areas of the undergraduates with the gender. 28 undergraduates are following tourism management and 10 undergraduates are specializing

hospitality management. 21 Out of 28 undergraduates following tourism management are female. There are 10 undergraduates are following hospitality management and there is a similar distribution of the gender.

Figure 2: Undergraduates' Specializing area of tourism education
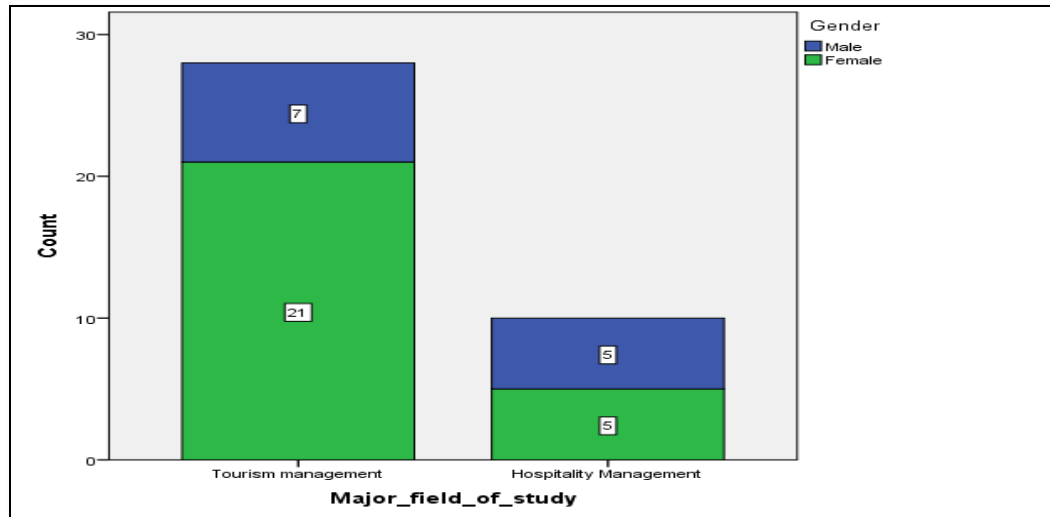
4.1 Reliability

Reliability analysis allows testing the extent, to which an assessment tool produces the stable and consistence results. Reliability evaluates the quality of the measurement procedure used in the survey. According to table 2 it can be concluded that the entire variable used for this survey are reliable at the level of 0.7.

Table 1: Reliability

Variable	No of Item	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Nature of work	6	.874
Social statues	3	.880
Industry person compliance	5	.867
Physical working conditions	4	.882
Pay/ Benefit	4	.900
Promotion opportunities	5	.877
Coworkers	4	.880
Managers	4	.881
Intention to work in the tourism industry	6	.884

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of the perception and attitudes of tourism undergraduates towards the different dimensions of working in the tourism and hospitality industry are sum up in the table 3.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Nature of work	3.5877	.92815	-1.402	.383
Social statues	3.3333	.81650	-.361	.383
Industry person compliance	3.7526	.95570	-1.133	.383
Physical working condition	3.2434	.44070	-.177	.383
Pay/ Benefit	2.8158	.77913	-.095	.383
Promotion opportunities	3.1211	.53330	-.336	.383
Coworker characteristics	3.3618	.60039	-.080	.383
Support of Managers	3.3947	.57137	-.495	.383
Intention to work in the industry	3.7105	.85132	-1.074	.383
Valid N (list wise)				

As seen the table 3 overall the mean value of the dimensions are ranging from 2.81 to 3.7. The dimension with the largest mean value is "industry person compliance" (3.75). The "pay/benefits" of the tourism related careers are negatively perceived by the undergraduates as the mean value of the "pay/benefit" is 2.81. Overall the mean value of 8 dimensions out of the 9 dimensions is above the 3.0 and the skewness of all the Dimensions is negative. The standard deviations of all the dimensions are less than 1.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

To assess the relationship between the perception and attitudes of tourism undergraduates and their decision to work in the tourism industry, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis has performed, which measure the strength and direction of association that exists between two variables. The correlation analysis of the study is presented in table 4.

Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**: correlation analysis

		Natureof work	Social statues	Industry_Person	Physical_working conditi	Pay_Benefit	Promotion_Oppertunities	Cowrkers	Managers	Intention to work in the industry
Nature of Work	Pearson Correlation	1								
	Sig. (2-tailed)									
Social statues	Pearson Correlation	.596**	1							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000								
Industry Person	Pearson Correlation	.803**	.776**	1						

complian ce	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000						
Physical working condition	Pearson Correlation	.607**	.501**	.631**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.000					
Pay/ benefit	Pearson Correlation	.386*	.269	.280	.405*	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	.102	.088	.012				
Promotio n Opportun ities	Pearson Correlation	.580**	.596**	.616**	.538**	.471**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.003			
Coworke r characteri stics	Pearson Correlation	.410*	.432**	.521**	.514**	.255	.758**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	.007	.001	.001	.123	.000		
Support of Managers	Pearson Correlation	.445**	.362*	.518**	.561**	.551**	.606**	.700**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.025	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	
Intention to work in the industry	Pearson Correlation	.524**	.408*	.602**	.637**	.175	.409*	.653**	.508**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.011	.000	.000	.292	.011	.000	.001	

According to the table 4 it can be summarized that the perception and attitudes of tourism undergraduate on the nature of work, industry person compliance, physical working conditions and co-worker relationship are significantly correlated with their intention to work in the industry at the 99% confidence level and the perception and attitudes on social status, promotion opportunities has a significant relationship with their intention to work in the industry at the 95% confidence level.

4.4 Regression analysis

The concerned areas to examine the perception and attitude of tourism undergraduates are nature of work, the social status of tourism careers, personal fitness to join in the industry, physical working conditions, pay/ benefits, promotion opportunities, co-workers and managers. In this study it is analyzed which of the above mentioned factors are impacting on undergraduates' intention to work in the industry. For the purpose of finding the influencing factors, regression analysis was performed. Adjusted R square of the model is .587, which implies 58% of the variation of the undergraduates' decision to work in the industry is explains by the dimensions selected. This is also confirmed by the ANOVA significance of the f value.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.822a	.676	.587	.54716

Table 4: ANOVA Table

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	18.134	8	2.267	7.571	.000[b]
	Residual	8.682	29	.299		
	Total	26.816	37			

The table 7 presented the results of the regression analysis. According to that the coworker characteristics, promotion opportunities and physical working condition of the careers in the tourism industry are significantly impacted for undergraduates' intention to work in the industry. Among the significant dimensions "coworker characteristics" is the most significant factor impacting on undergraduates' intention to work in the industry.

Table 5: Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.185	.748		-.248	.806
	Nature of work	.146	.177	.159	.825	.416
	Social statues	-.057	.186	-.055	-.305	.762
	Industry Person Compliance	.254	.221	.285	1.151	.259
	Physical working condition	.635	.293	.329	2.169	.038
	Pay/ benefit	.033	.164	.030	.204	.840
	Promotion Opportunities	-.856	.329	-.536	-2.603	.014
	Coworker characteristic	1.085	.292	.765	3.716	.001
	Support of Managers	-.153	.278	-.103	-.552	.585

5. Conclusion

It must be underlined that this study is focusing on the impact of perception attitudes of the tourism undergraduates towards their career choice in the industry. The tourism undergraduate may have different perception and attitudes towards the different sub categories of career in the industry. However, it is also needed to emphasize that the respondents of this survey have general understanding and the nature of the career in the tourism industry as the undergraduates have minimum two months working experience in the industry. The undergraduates specializing areas for the degree are tourism management and hospitality management. As shown in the figure 2. Majority of the respondents are studying tourism management. The result of this survey reveals that more female undergraduates tend to select tourism management than hospitality management as their specializing area of tourism education.

The results of the survey reveals that there is a favorable perception and attitudes of the tourism undergraduates to select a career in the tourism industry after the graduation as 8 out of 9 dimensions of the perceptions and attitudes are above the mean value and the skewness of all

the dimensions are negative (See table 3). The nature of work, the social status of tourism careers, industry person compliance, physical working conditions, promotion opportunities, co-workers and managers are moderate and favorably rated by the tourism undergraduates. Industry person compliance has the highest mean, indicating that the undergraduates believe their personality and character fits well with the jobs available in the tourism industry.

The only dimension, which rated below the mean value, is the "pay/benefit" of the tourism careers, implying that students may have negative perception regarding the pay and benefits of the industry. Kusluvan and Kusluvan's (2000), Richardson (2008) and Wang (2014) have also found that majority of the respondents of their research have perceived that tourism jobs are low paid. These researches have been conducted in Turkey, China and Australia. From that it can come to a conclusion that the tourism undergraduates in the different countries hold the same opinion that the tourism industry jobs are low paid. According to the value of the standard deviation it can come up with the finding that are no huge deviations among the respondents, which indicates that the tourism undergraduates participated in this survey hold similar perception and attitudes towards the working in the tourism industry. Taken as whole, it can come to the conclusion that the tourism undergraduate hold moderate favorable perception and attitudes towards career choice in the industry.

The results of the regression analysis reveal that the factors influencing tourism undergraduates to pursue a career in the industry are coworker characteristics, physical working conditions and promotion opportunities available in the tourism industry. The "coworker characteristics" is the most important influencing factor for the undergraduates to choose career in the industry. This confirms by the table 4 that the "coworker characteristics" is the most correlated factor with the career choice of the tourism undergraduates. The most undergraduate perceived that tourism industry provides low paid jobs. Yet, the undergraduates see their future career in the tourism industry. This finding of the research shows that tourism undergraduates do not consider much on financial and other fringe benefits available in the tourism industry in selecting their career in the industry. This is may be due to the reason that they perceive the coworkers in the industry are friendly, enthusiastic and work as a team. On the other hand the undergraduate perceived that the promotion opportunities are not limited in the industry and the physical working condition and environment is good in the tourism industry. These factors are the most influencing factors, which cause undergraduates to select their career in the tourism industry.

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