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CAREER PERCEPTIONS OF UNDERGRADUATE TOURISM STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY IN UZBEKISTAN

Abstract

The aspects of tourism employment and careers have been broadly documented. Although the tourism industry's improvement can generate new job opportunities, it is often scrutinized for providing essentially low-skilled and low-paying jobs. If today's students are to become influential practitioners of tomorrow, it is fundamental to realize their employment attitudes. This paper concentrates on an example of 48 Uzbek students studying tourism at the university level to analyze their careers perceptions. The outcomes pointed out that, overall, the respondents' perceptions are positive. The verdicts also symbolized that: eagerness to study tourism, willingness to work in tourism after graduation, and professional experience; are required factors forming their vision of tourism careers.

Keywords: *Uzbekistan, Students' Perceptions, Tourism Careers,*

Introduction

Tourism is a fast-growing industry and a significant source of employment. A primary argument made for promoting tourism development is that it produces many jobs, both directly in the areas in which tourist expense happens and more globally through inter-industry linkages. The growth of tourism and associated employment is seen as a component of the widespread shift from a manufacturing to a service marketplace in several developed and developing countries throughout the world. However, even though the tourism industry's development creates new employment possibilities, it is often criticized as generating low-skilled and low-paying jobs that offer limited job satisfaction. Consequently, the tourism industry has a distinction for high personnel turnover and misuse of trained personnel.

In 2018, to overcome liberalization come skillful staff deficiency, the Uzbek Government launched a strategy to strengthen tourism education and encouraged four-year bachelor programs through the Ministry of Higher Education. Currently, there are three universities in Uzbekistan that offer a four-year program of tourism and hotel administration. Two of them are located in Tashkent, which is the gateway for the majority of tourists.

Since the continued accomplishment of tourism depends, to a considerable degree, on well-trained, motivated and devoted people, who are satisfied with their careers, it is indispensable to accommodate qualified tourism students with a positive mindset towards work in the tourism industry. This paper converges on a sample of 48 Uzbek undergraduate students studying tourism and analysis their attitudes towards tourism careers.

Literature Review

Although there is substantial literature concerning tourism employment, only a limited number of researches were conducted to highlight students' perceptions towards careers in the tourism industry. This means that more observational studies concentrating on tourism students' perceptions of the

industry are required in order to estimate the status of tourism jobs in the human resources (HR) planning process for the tourism sector. Commonly, HR policies focus on the employment requirements of sizeable worldwide tourism businesses, particularly in hospitality, and neglect students' perceptions. Contradictory opinions towards working in tourism may result in the industry's collapse to capture and maintain the most qualified tourism undergraduates. Since the tourism industry relies so massively on people to deliver a service, this would negatively impact service quality and consumer well-being, which might hinder its competitiveness.

Casado (1992) noticed that although students tend to be reasonably pragmatic before graduation, their turnover appears to be high, while Barron and Maxwell (1993) noticed that, overall, recently admitted undergraduates have positive opinions toward the tourism industry. In contrast, the students who are from internship were much less optimistic about tourism jobs. Furthermore, data points out that tourism and hospitality students have little or no plan of joining the industry upon graduation (King, McKerracher, & Waryszak, 2003). Investigations on perceptions of tourism as a career have broadly reported that students recognize the industry as having inadequate salaries, extended working hours, which are not at a level with pay (Chellen & Nunkoo, 2010; Aksu & Koksal, 2005). Even those few who entered the industry left within a year, tourism and hospitality undergraduates never entered the tourism sector upon graduation in Hong Kong. The cause may be that students pursuing tourism enter the industry without detailed knowledge about it (Teerti & Chaipat, 2016).

Reports also show that many hospitality and tourism management bachelors fail to enter the industry upon graduation because of low job satisfaction, lower employment conditions, and insufficiency of motivating factors. This results in high staff turnover and the misuse of skilled and experienced employees (Doherty, Guerrier, Jamieson, Lashley, & Lockwood, 2001). Lam and Xiao (2000) found that students who entered the tourism

industry encountered stress, poor working conditions, and a different work experience than what the institution has taught them in China. Jenkins (2001) recognized that over 70% of students in their freshman period look for work in the industry, but as students' progress into finalizing their degrees, only 13% look for the industry's job. This indicates that most students' positive perception of tourism career declines (Richardson, 2010b), whereas Sibson (2011) argued that tourism is engaging, fun, and satisfying. This is logical with Kusluvan, S. and Kusluvan, Z. (2000), who noted that most undergraduate tourism students found jobs in the tourism industry exciting and not dull and worth doing. However, female undergraduates in tourism do not want to work in the tourism industry due to complex work, too long working hours and no time for family responsibilities (Wijesundrara, 2014; Scott, 2011). Also, Sibson (2011) argued that jobs in the tourism and hospitality industry allow people to practice personal power and learn new information every day.

On the other hand, Baum (2006) found that most students would prefer to pursue a career in the tourism sector; however, the sector's working conditions are unfavorable. Some of the determinants, which seemed to account for negative perceptions towards careers in tourism, are stressful jobs, shortage of family time due to the character of work, long working hours, exhausting and periodically unsteady jobs, low social rank of tourism jobs, inefficiently and unfair promotions, low pay and inadequate benefits. The direct and most visible outcomes of this situation are the difficulty of hiring equipped staff and high staff turnover. These are costly to the industry's success. In some nations, such as Mauritius, Australia and Turkey, students are interested in entering the industry (Petrova & Mason, 2004). Moreover, their attitudes of the career in tourism and hospitality are positive.

Objective and Methodology of the Study

To study undergraduate tourism students' career perceptions in Uzbekistan, two universities that offer a four-year tourism and hotel

management program were surveyed: The Department of Tourism of the Tashkent State University of Economics and the Tourism Department the Yeosu Technical Institute in Tashkent.

The data collection was conducted during the spring semester of 2021 in Uzbekistan. With Internet platforms' assistance (Facebook, Google Form), the survey resulted from 48 responses. Since there are no senior tourism students here, they were included from freshman to junior.

The questionnaire (included in the Appendix) was developed primarily by integrating questions and statements in the previous study (Sevgin Akış Roney and Perin Öztin, 2009). It was composed of two parts. The first part was comprised of 7 questions intended to elicit the attributes of the respondents. The second part included a set of 12 statements about career perceptions.

A 5-point Likert Scale (strongly agree = 5; agree = 4; neither agree nor disagree = 3; disagree = 2; strongly disagree = 1) was applied to measure the respondents' degree of agreement or disagreement with various statements given, to estimate associated perceptions. Five statements that showed negative perceptions were reverse coded (during the coding step of the analysis) to prevent the response set bias.

For the group of 12 statements about career perceptions, the coefficient of internal consistency of the total scale reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was determined as 0.63. A generally affirmed rule is that an alpha of 0.60 - 0.70 shows an acceptable level of reliability and 0.80 or greater an excellent level. Thus, the internal consistency of the statements applied in this study can be supposed to be acceptable.

Findings of the Survey

Profile of the Survey Sample

As can be seen in Table 1, there were various respondents from different institutions. The gender split was also different: 31.3 % females and 68.8 % males. However, according to level, the respondents' distribution showed that

the number of juniors was higher than first-year students and sophomores. This reflects the present distribution of students at these universities – the number of junior students is always higher.

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Name of the university</i>		
Yeoju Technical Institute in Tashkent	38	79,2
Tashkent State University of Economics	10	20,8
<i>Gender of the students</i>		
Male	33	68,8
Female	15	31,3
<i>Class of the students</i>		
Freshman	13	27,1
Sophomore	10	20,8
Junior	25	52,1
<i>Willingness to study tourism at the university</i>		
Yes, I was willing	40	83,3
I was not very willing	6	12,5
No, I was not willing at all	2	4,2
<i>Practical work experience in the tourism industry</i>		
Yes	25	52,1
No	23	47,9
<i>Intention to work in the tourism industry after graduation</i>		
Yes	41	85,4
No	7	14,6
<i>Friends / relatives who work in the tourism industry</i>		
There are	22	45,8
There are not	26	54,2

Table 1: Respondents' Profiles (n=48)

Table 1 also explains that the proportion of respondents who were willing to study tourism at the university (83.3%) was nearly identical to those who wanted to work in the tourism industry after graduation (85.4 %). The same table shows that 52.1 % of the respondents had practical work experience in the

tourism sector. Finally, 45.8 % of the respondents responded that they have friends/relatives who work in tourism.

Perceptions of tourism careers

Table 2 shows the degrees of agreement's features with each of the 12 statements implemented in the second part of the questionnaire. For clearness, perceptions are summarized in group percentages as "strongly agree and agree" and "strongly disagree and disagree". The overall mean value was 3.40 out of 5, which suggests the perception of the respondents towards tourism careers, in general, was positive. This can also be seen from the responses given to the final statement, "in general, the advantages of working in the tourism industry outweigh the disadvantages". Approximately half of the respondents (54.2%) agreed with this statement, and the other half was either doubtful (37.5%) or disagreed (8.3%).

How much do you agree or disagree with each statement?	Strongly agree / agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Mean — (x)	St. dev. (s)
Meeting new people by working in tourism is a pleasant experience.	83,3%	8,3%	8,3%	4,33	1,08
To study tourism management at the university level is a correct investment in career development.	62,5%	29,2%	8,3%	3,81	1,00
Promotion opportunities are satisfactory in the tourism industry.	60,4%	33,3%	6,3%	3,81	0,98
One can make good money by working intourism.	58,3%	33,3%	8,3%	3,75	1,06
There is no sexual discrimination in tourism.	60,4%	22,9%	16,7%	3,75	1,25
In general, the advantages of working in the tourism industry outweigh the disadvantages.	54,2%	37,5%	8,3%	3,65	0,96

Tourism related jobs are more respected than the other jobs.	52,1%	31,3%	16,7%	3,54	1,22
It is hard to find job security in tourism. R*	27,1%	37,5%	35,4%	3,19	1,20
Since many of the managers in tourism do not have a university degree, they are jealous of university graduates working in the industry. R*	29,2%	56,3%	14,6%	2,85	1,03
Working in tourism does not provide a secure future. R *	43,8%	29,2%	27,1%	2,79	1,40
It is not necessary to have a university degree to work in the tourism industry. R*	43,8%	31,3%	25,0%	2,67	1,24
Irregular working hours in tourism affect family life negatively. R*	45,8%	37,5%	16,7%	2,60	1,20

Table 2: Perceptions of tourism students concerning careers in the tourism industry

*R *: these items are reverse coded*

As can be seen in Table 2, 83.3% of the respondents agreed with the statement "meeting with new people by working in tourism is a pleasant experience" ($x = 4.33$). In comparison, 62.5% of the respondents agreed with the statement "to study tourism management at the university level is a correct investment in career development" ($x = 3.81$). "Promotion opportunities are satisfactory in the tourism industry" was another statement that 60.4% of the respondents agreed with, providing a relatively high average value ($x = 3.81$). On the other hand, more than half of the respondents (58.3%) considered that "one can make good money by working in tourism". In comparison, 43.8% of them agreed with the contradictory statement, "it is not necessary to have a university degree to work in the tourism industry".

It seems that the majority of the respondents believe that tourism is a prestigious occupation in society, as explained by the high portion (52.1%) of those who agreed with the statement "tourism-related jobs are more respected

than the other jobs". "Irregular working hours in tourism affect family life negatively" was answered positively by 45.8% of the respondents. Numerous tourism workers indeed work long and unsociable hours when the rest of the population does not.

Job safety was another obstacle. It is well known that according to Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs theory, safety and security (together with physiological needs) are the fundamental needs that must be completed before the secondary needs (belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization) become powerful sources of motivation. Employment in the tourism industry is notoriously insecure because of seasonality, changes in demand, and the high amount of part-time and temporary jobs (Bull, 1995). Hence, it was not surprising that 43.8% of the respondents agreed that "working in tourism does not provide a secure future".

Finally, the proportion of the respondents who agreed with the statement "there is no sexual discrimination in tourism" was relatively high (60.4 %). Interestingly, there was a notable distinction among female ($\bar{x} = 4.20$) and male ($\bar{x} = 3.54$) students in their perceptions.

Comparisons of career perceptions

As can be seen in Table 3, there was no significant difference between the career perceptions of the respondents who have friends/relatives working in the tourism industry and those who do not.

Yes (n = 22)	No (n = 26)	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)
$\bar{x} = 3.38$ s = 0.46	$\bar{x} = 3.41$ s = 0.53	-0.266	0.791

Table 4: Comparison of the mean scores of career perceptions for students with and without any friends/relatives who work in the tourism industry (n = 48)

Similarly, the results given in Table 4 show that there was no significant variation amid the perception of tourism careers and work experience. Although,

it seems that students with work practice tend to have negative opinions towards tourism jobs. It can be alleged that as students' progress in their degree and obtain more experience as trainees in the area, their conception of the industry changes for the worse.

Work experience (<i>n</i> = 25)	No work experience (<i>n</i> = 23)	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)
\bar{x} = 3.35 <i>s</i> = 0.44	\bar{x} = 3.44 <i>s</i> = 0.55	-0.617	0.540

Table 4: Comparison of the mean scores of career perceptions for students with and without work experience (n = 48)

However, as shown in Table 5, there was a gender-based difference in tourism careers' perception.

Female (<i>n</i> = 15)	Male (<i>n</i> = 33)	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)
\bar{x} = 3.54 <i>s</i> = 0.54	\bar{x} = 3.33 <i>s</i> = 0.47	-1.365	0.179

Table 5: Comparison of the mean scores of career perceptions between female and male students (n = 48)

Furthermore, as indicated in Table 6, there was a notable difference between students' perceptions of various universities. Students of Yeosu Technical Institute in Tashkent appeared to have a more positive image of the industry than the rest.

YTIT (<i>n</i> = 38)	TSUE (<i>n</i> = 10)	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)
\bar{x} = 3.44 <i>s</i> = 0.52	\bar{x} = 3.23 <i>s</i> = 0.37	1.174	0.246

Table 6: Comparison of the mean scores of career perceptions for YTIT and TSUE

Tables 7 and 8 reveal that willingness to study tourism and intention to work in the tourism industry after graduation were crucial determinants positively impacting the respondents' viewpoints. The Post-hoc Tukey HSD test

indicated the mean value of the respondents' perceptions of who was amenable to study tourism was significantly distinct from the rest. Their concept of the industry was more favorable than the others. Likewise, comparisons indicated that the mean value for those interested in working in tourism was significantly higher than the mean scores of the respondents who were not interested.

Yes, I was willing (<i>n</i> = 40)	I was not very willing (<i>n</i> = 6)	No, I was not willing at all (<i>n</i> = 2)	F value	Sig.
$\bar{x} = 3.45$ <i>s</i> = 0.51	$\bar{x} = 3.21$ <i>s</i> = 0.28	$\bar{x} = 2.96$ <i>s</i> = 0.53	1.449	0.246

Table 7: Comparison of the mean scores of career perceptions for students with different levels of willingness to study tourism (*n* = 48)

Yes (<i>n</i> = 41)	No (<i>n</i> = 7)	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)
$\bar{x} = 3.42$ <i>s</i> = 0.48	$\bar{x} = 3.26$ <i>s</i> = 0.59	0.773	0.444

Table 8: Comparison of the mean scores of career perceptions according to the students' intention to work in tourism after graduation (*n* = 48)

On the other hand, Table 9 indicates that the respondents' career perceptions vary according to their study year. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test showed that first-year students' mean value was significantly higher than the mean scores of sophomores and juniors. In other words, as the respondents grow in their degree, their perceptions of the industry degenerate.

Freshman (<i>n</i> = 13)	Sophomore (<i>n</i> = 10)	Junior (<i>n</i> = 25)	F value	Sig.
$\bar{x} = 3.51$ <i>s</i> = 0.43	$\bar{x} = 3.21$ <i>s</i> = 0.62	$\bar{x} = 2.41$ <i>s</i> = 0.47	1.100	0.342

Table 9: Comparison of the mean scores of career perceptions according to the class

Interpretation of the findings

The tourism industry's conventional image of low salary is not confirmed by this survey's verdicts, as 58.3% of the respondents agreed with the statement "one

can make good money by working in tourism". The variety of tourism-related jobs can explain this. There is considerable inequality in tourism occupations, and consequently, there are many examples of well-paid occupations in the industry (Riley et al., 2002). Managers or specialists who are full-time workers experience high profits. In contrast, part-time and temporary workers, who are often semi-skilled or uneducated, tend to earn little money. It appears that, in common, the respondents believed that those who invest in tourism training should earn more than those who do not. Almost two-thirds of them agreed that "to study tourism is a good career investment".

However, as students' progress in their studies and have more work experience as trainees in the industry, their attitude toward tourism-related jobs is changed negatively. This finding is in agreement with those of earlier researches (Barron and Maxwell, 1993; Getz, 1994; Kuşluvan and Kuşluvan, 2000; Kozak and Kızılırmak, 2001; Jenkins 2001; Aksu and Köksal, 2005), which shows that the role of practice in shaping perceptions is crucial.

The individual engagement of the students is another factor that shapes the picture of the tourism industry positively. A willingness to work in tourism after graduation contributes positively to the overall image of the industry. This finding is in agreement with those of Aksu and Köksal (2005).

After "irregular working hours", which is one of the recognized negative attributes of tourism employment, "job security" seems to be a significant matter for the students. Of course, feeling secure and confident about the future of one's job is a primary character of employment condition. However, in today's global environment, as a result of the fast movement of technological transformation and outsourcing, Labor flexibility has expanded. Consequently, job safety became a problem in nearly every area. Labor flexibility has always been a vital problem in the tourism industry. Nowadays, there is an even more prominent inclination towards irregular working times and a shortage of job defense.

Conclusion

This research concentrated on representing the undergraduate tourism students' perceptions of tourism as a profession based on the survey at two different universities in Uzbekistan. In contrast to the previous research conclusions, this survey results indicated that tourism employment's general idea seems optimistic. Students' willingness to study tourism and commitment to work in the industry after graduation outweigh the unfavorable view of tourism careers. When students are interested in studying tourism and pursuing a career in the industry, they tend to have a more realistic view of the nature of tourism-related jobs, which means more reasonable expectations.

It is recognized that great career expectations can generate disappointment and, consequently, less job satisfaction and high staff turnover when they are not met. Therefore, if students who are strong-minded about attending a four-year tourism program are given a chance to do so, there will probably be less frustration in their career prospects.

However, even if it is true that most of the career difficulties happen because of the individual characteristics of employment in the tourism industry (such as seasonality and the high quantity of part-time and temporary jobs), developing working conditions in the tourism industries is easier to achieve. As indicated above, one of the causes of the industry's negative image is the use of out-of-date human resource management techniques. High class professional human resources would help increase the quality of work practice and, consequently, potentially improve the industry's image. In the long term, the industry's overall employment conditions could be improved to enable today's students, with approved qualifications, to become tomorrow's productive managers. Therefore, it can be claimed that one of the ways of enhancing the share of direct employment in tourism is to boost the supply of well-educated human resources.

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