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**Hotel Career Perceptions of Final Year Hospitality Degree Students**

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The Indian Hospitality Management Institutions has seen a tremendous growth in the recent years, due to the growth of the tourism and hospitality sector a large number of hotel chains has increased their expansion plans to accommodate this growth. Although the development of the tourism and hospitality industry can create greater employment opportunities, it is the role of the education institutions to produce more hospitality graduates. If today’s students are to become effective practitioners of tomorrow, it is important to understand the final year hospitality degree students’ perception towards their future careers in the hotel industry. The purpose of this study was to investigate the career perception of final year hospitality students towards the hotel industry. This paper focuses on a sample of 60 final year students pursuing a hospitality degree at a private university in Bangalore City, India to analyze their perceptions towards hotel careers the researchers used the survey questionnaire. The findings indicated that the students willingness to work in the hotel industry after graduation was high; 41per cent of the students preferred to start their future career in the food and beverage department; awareness of the working environment; perception on internship and also negative views about the hotel careers were highlighted in the study.

**Keywords:** Hospitality, Students perceptions, Hotel careers,

**1. INTRODUCTION**

India is a fast growing market and sees a positive growth with respect to occupancy in hotels. The Indian hoteliers are very optimistic and tourist inflow is expected to increase in the future. According to 2014 statistics shared by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India], the Indian hospitality sector has been growing at a cumulative annual growth rate of [14 per cent] every year, adding significant amounts of foreign exchange to the economy of India. According to a report from Global Hospitality Services -HVS, the overall occupancy rates showed a marginal increase in the 2013 to 2014 fiscal year with 58.9 percent occupancy, an increase of 1.9 per cent from the previous year. The tourism and hospitality sector is among the top 10 sectors in India to attract the highest foreign direct investment (FDI). In the period April 2000 – November 2014, this sector attracted around US$ 7,661.6 million of FDI, according to the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP). With the rise in the number of global tourists and realising India’s potential, many companies have invested in the tourism and hospitality sector which has also paved way to the growth of hotel management schools in the country with the aim of providing trained professionals. The students’ perceptions of skills needed in hotel management appear realistic, as many of the undergraduate students of management expectations have also identified interpersonal skills as a key area of importance. Studies of management expectations have generally shown that industry believes management skills are more important in the academic curriculum than technical skills (Robinson, Ruhanen, & Breakey, 2015). The hotel management schools have been offering programmes with the aim of preparing the students to take up jobs in hospitality sector at entry level, middle management level or management level in various core departments of the hotel. The recent trend, which has been observed amongst the hospitality students, is that they have started planning about their career in the hospitality industry only after their graduation.

**2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

**Positive aspects of expectations and assumptions of students:** The undergraduate students tend to believe that they will find a good job in a big hotel chain after completing their degree course (Brien, 2004; Jenkins, 2001). In an Anglo-Dutch study (Jenkins, 2001) on students’ future perceptions, 77.5 percent of the respondents, who were studying in a hospitality degree course in the UK and the Netherlands, believed that after graduating from their degree course they would find a job in international hotel chains, such as Starwood, Hilton, Hyatt, Marriott, Intercontinental, and Accor. The large corporations tend to want to employ graduates because employers want employees who are bright in personality as well as intelligent. Big corporate hospitality companies have also developed broad management training programmes to foster the best employees (Accor hotels, 2007; Brien, 2004; Kim & Park, 2013). For example, Langham Hotels, Hilton Hotels, and Accor Hotels provide customised programmes for graduate students. Langham Hotel Hong Kong has a partnership programme with local universities (Tang, 2006; Robinson, Ruhanen, & Breakey, 2015). The Hilton Hotel offers an ‘Elevator Programme’ and Accor hotels provide a ‘Graduate Management Traineeship Programme’. These programmes offer different experiences that include training in all the departments of the hotel. Trainees work as full time employees during their training (Accor hotels, 2007). After finishing the programme, a trainee will progress towards a General Manager position at a faster pace. Brien (2004) stated, “Graduates are expected to undertake ongoing professional development related to their careers, which may well include some technical training”. This programe creates opportunities that benefits both students and organizations. Most undergraduate students might have career expectations of their future. Jenkins (2001) also found that 70 percent of students expected to be employed as a General Manager or Corporate Manager 10 years after graduating, and 65 percent of students expected to be a department manager five years after graduating (Jenkins, 2001). The results of Jenkins’ study (2001) were very close to the results of studies by Ladkin and Juwaheer (2000), Kim and Park (2013) and Harper et al. (2005). Ladkin and Juwaheer (2002) found that the period of time to reach General Manager’s position ranges from 9 to 15 years. Harkison (2004b) noted that students were realistic in terms of the management goals they could achieve following their graduation. Students tend to have a plan to apply for middle management positions, such as in the supervisory and trainee areas, after graduation (Chang & Tse, 2015; Harkison, 2004b). In order to achieve their goals, they have to have a precise career plan, which is very important for success in their career development (Harkison, 2004b; Robinson, Ruhanen, & Breakey, 2015). However, Jenkins (2001) also found that no students wanted to start their own business 5 years after graduating. Only seven percent of students expected to own a business 10 years after graduating, which means not many students considered starting their own business after completing their course. Andrew Kevin Jenkins, 2001 mentions that students have a distinct preference for certain hotel departments, hotel chains and sectors of the industry. Most expect to be a General Manager or Corporate Manager 10 years after graduating.

**Negative perception of students towards their career in the hotel industry:** Some early studies identified that many students recognised the negative characteristics (poorly paid, working on unsociable days and times, long hours and multi-skill with shift work) of the industry after starting work in the hospitality industry (Barron & Maxwell, 1993; Johns & McKechnie, 1995). Barron and Maxwell (1993) found that most students in Scottish higher education institutions believed that the hospitality industry offered career opportunities, but students in the final year had an overall negative perception of the industry. These meant that they recognised negative working environments and were disappointed with the hospitality industry when they had work experience (Barron & Maxwell, 1993; Kim & Park, 2013). Students of hospitality management tended to have high ambitions for their future working career when they commenced their studies, but their ambitions changed after recognizing the actual circumstances of the industry. As a result, some students tended to change their goal, which has serious implications for Students, Education Providers, and the Hospitality Industry.

**3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology refers to the nature of research design and methods. Methodology guides the way researchers gain knowledge about the world and instructs the researchers in the way the research is constructed and conducted28. In order to serve the aims and objectives of the study, the current study mainly relies on quantitative research approach. According to Veal, A.J. (2005), the quantitative research involves the gathering and analysis of numerical data. The sample population of the study comprises of final year degree students of private university at Bangalore, India enrolled in hospitality courses during 2012 academic year. All participates were targeted with a non-probability convenience sampling technique35, the most practical method in order to gather primary data. There were 78 respondents done the survey and collected. However, only n=60 (sample size) surveys were found to be useful, representing 70.1% response rate from the original sample (n=85) as per the below table 1.

**Table 1:** Students’ sample (Number of final year students as at March 2014).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Study Year** | **Final Year** |
|  | Frequency | Percentage |
| Sample size | 85 | 100% |
| Total number of responses | 78 | 91.7% |
| Total number of useful response | 60 | 70.1% |

**4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

It is a quantitative analysis that is calculated in SPSS, measuring frequency, mean and standard deviation. The hotel career perceptions of final year students were analyzed by using a survey.

**Table 2: S**tudents’ willingness to work in the hotel industry after graduation

|  |
| --- |
| **S**tudents’ preferences to work in the hotel industry after graduation |
| **Study Year** | **Final Year** | **Total in percentage** |
| Most preferred  | 55 | 91.6% |
| Preferred | 5 | 8.3% |
| Total | 60 | 100% |

Table 2 indicates that 91.6% of the final year student respondents wanted to work in the hotel industry after graduation. Only 8.3% of the final year students indicated they are uncertain about working in the hotel industry after graduation.

**Table 3**: Students’ career hierarchy expectations

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Dept**. | **F&B** | **HK** | **FO** | **A&G** | **Total** |
|  | 25 | 3 | 14 | 18 | 60 |
| Entry Level Job Position |
| **Dept.** | **FR.E** | **MT** | **DT** | **DM** | **Total** |
|  | 25 | 18 | 7 | 10 | 60 |
| 5 years after Graduation |
|  | 9 | 25 | 18 | 8 | 60 |
| 10 years after Graduation |
|  | 0 | 13 | 34 | 13 | 60 |
| Note: F&B: Food & Beverages, HK: Housekeeping, FO: Front Office, A&G: Admin & General, FR.E: Frontline Employee, MT: Management Trainee & DT: Department Trainee. |

The above table 3 results shows that student respondents preferred working in Food & Beverage (F&B) departments as their first job field/department and then Administration or General, including Human Resources, Finance and Sales or Marketing Departments. Furthermore, Management Trainee level was the position students thought most likely to be their job entry level. Working at a hotel as a front line employee ranked second. Undergraduate students seemed to believe that when holding a qualification, such as a bachelor of hotel degree, they did not need to work in the Housekeeping Department and they expected to enter a high-level position. A minority of the students expected that they would start working in a Housekeeping Department as a front line employee or a Management Trainee. Many student respondents expected their job positions to be at the Mid Management or Top Management level within five years of graduation. A total of 25 (41.6%) student respondents expected that they would work in the hotel industry as Mid Management manager (e.g. department manager) five years after graduation. A total of 34 (56.6%) student respondents expected that they would work as a top manager in the hotel industry whereas 13 (21.7%) student respondents thought that they would be self-employed ten years after graduation. No respondents expected to work as a low management level employee in the hotel industry ten years after graduation.

The findings of students’ career expectation for the future suggest that most student respondents want to work as a Management Trainee in a Food and Beverage department in the hotel industry after completing their course. More than half (n=34 or 56.6%) of student respondents suggested that they will work as a top manager in the hotel industry, and a large number of student respondents (n=13 or 21.7%) expected they will be self-employed ten years after graduation.

**Table 4**: Cross-tabulation analysis of students perception on the working environment in the industry

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Poor payment in hotel industry** | **Agree** | **No opinion** | **Disagree** | **Total in Percentage** |
| The industry demand working unsocial hours |
| Agree | Observed | 36 | 6 | 4 | 76.7% |
| Expected  | 33 | 8 | 5 |
| No opinion | Observed | 4 | 5 | 1 | 16.7% |
| Expected  | 6 | 3 | 1 |
| Disagree | Observed | 1 | 1 | 2 | 6.6% |
| Expected  | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Total |  | 41 | 12 | 7 | 60 |

The table 4 shows that many student respondents (n=39 or 76.69%) have negative views of the working environments within the hotel industry; for example the industry demands working unsociable hours with poor remuneration. The table also shows that the ‘observed’ frequencies are significantly different from the ‘expected’ frequencies. Consequently, the two variables are related. Therefore, Chi-square analysis shows that there is a strong relationship between the perceptions that jobs in the hotel

industry are poorly paid and that jobs in the hotel industry involve working unsociable hours (sig. to the .000 level). In other words, those who think the pay is poor also think the hours are unsociable. This result may highlight one of the causes of increasing employee turnover or disillusionment with work in the hotel industry. This is important when hoteliers expect students to be more competent, but they themselves are not

structured in human resource procedures.

**Table 5:** Importance of internship for Final year student’s career

|  |
| --- |
| Internship will help students in hotel industry |
| Student opinion | Final year | Total in percentage |
| Agree | 51 | 85% |
| No opinion | 8 | 13.3% |
| Disagree | 1 | 1.7% |
| Total | 60 | 100% |

Responses showed that a large majority of the student respondents (n=38 or 63.3%) believed a different understanding of career expectations exists between educators and managers in the hotel industry. The fact is that positive answers by final year about the role of internship towards the students career in the hospitality industry for their success.

This study identified that undergraduate students had high expectations of entry-level positions, which were discordant with the reality of management pathways in the industry. The students’ high expectations may have dangerous implications for students and the hotel industry. If jobs do not meet student expectations, students may lose their motivation and may abandon or change their job. Therefore, the hotel industry must be encouraged to communicate entry requirements to prospective students in an effort to promote realistic career expectations. Student respondents expected to be in Middle Management of a hotel within five years of completing their course. Furthermore, student respondents suggested that they would work as a Manager of a hotel within ten years of completing their course. The results associated with student expectations for long-term careers in this study were slightly lower than student expectations in a previous Anglo-Dutch study by (Jenkins, 2001). However, the student results of this study relating to long-term career expectations and employee career paths are realistic. The low management and mid management level jobs were occupied predominantly by respondents who had been working between five and ten years. Some earlier studies also explored the length of time taken to reach employment as a GM from when an employee was first employed (Chang & Tse, 2015; Harper, Brown, & Irvine, 2005; Jenkins, 2001; Ladkin, 2000, 2002; Nebel, Lee, & Vidakovic, 1995; Steele, 2003). They found that reaching a General Manager position (Top Management) took between 9 and 15 years.

**5. CONCLUSION**

­­­­The study concludes that the 55 (40.2%) student respondents believed that knowledge of the industry and experience are the most important factors for a new employee entering the hotel industry. Harkison (2004a) found that the hotel industry, particularly in India, considers work experience more important than a degree in hotel management. This study suggests that a bachelor’s qualification is not the most important factor for employment in the hotel industry. A minority of student respondents (n=4 or 6.6%) indicated that qualifications are the most important criterion for a new employee. Furthermore, students also indicated that knowledge of the industry and experience are more important than qualifications in the hotel industry and also highlighted that communication skills were the most important skills for a career development.

This result will help the industry to restructure the recruitment process, new employee analysis in relation to hiring and also consider the degree qualification in terms of job promotions. The industry should consider benchmarking their salaries and career advancement based on their performance, skills and qualification. Since the study revealed that students were highly benefited through internship, the Education analysts should incorporate more than one internship in the degree program.

**6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH:**

The study is done on final year students in a particular college. For future study, it is recommended to incorporate more samples and different level of respondents based on their level of studies. A collaborative study can also emerge between the hospitality industry and the educators.

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