

## **TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY UNDERGRADUATES' PERCEPTION OF CAREER CHOICE IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN SRI LANKA**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The tourism industry, which contributes well to the economies of many countries worldwide, has not been able to reap its full benefits due to the shortage of a knowledgeable and skillful workforce (Richardson, 2008). The tourism industry is becoming more popular among students recently. Also, university graduates and students focus more on tourism careers. However, the question is, even though the number of tourism students is rapidly increasing worldwide, there is still a labour shortage in the industry. Lee Bamford (2012) explained two possible reasons for this matter; one is industry does not value a degree, and the second is those negative perceptions of students about the industry. Many researchers have paid attention to the second reason for decades. Therefore, many studies concluded that the perception/attitude or intention of tourism as students perceive a career as having poor wages, long working hours, low stability, and poor working conditions (Kim et al., 2010).

The tourism industry is key to Sri Lanka's employment generation, contributing 11% to the country's total labour force. However, the annual output of 1500 graduates from the tourism industry is not sufficient to meet the industry standards. Tourism and hospitality students are more critical in this scenario which will be entering the tourism industry workforce in the future. Several studies found that tourism students negatively perceive jobs in the industry (Richardson & Butler, 2012). Here, the question arises about the perception of tourism students of Sri Lanka in this regard. Therefore, this research aims to examine the perceptions of tourism and hospitality undergraduates regarding career choices in the tourism industry in Sri Lanka. The current study examined and seeks to answer research questions through state university tourism and hospitality undergraduate students in Sri Lanka.

Undergraduates' perception of career choice concerning the critical aspects of the nature of the jobs, social status, industry person- congeniality, physical working conditions, and the promotion opportunities in the tourism industry. Accordingly, the specific objectives are;

1. To investigate the effect of undergraduate perceived career choice on the nature of jobs, social status, industry person- congeniality, physical working conditions, and the promotion opportunities in the tourism industry.
2. To determine the most influencing factor for undergraduates to perceive career choice.
3. To investigate whether undergraduates' demographic characteristics affect undergraduate career choices.

The findings of this study will be helpful to tourism and hospitality undergraduate students, tourism planners, scholars, government, and tourism businesses.

## METHODOLOGY

The study took the quantitative research approach with a survey design. The study population is all tourism and hospitality undergraduates in Sri Lanka who are currently following tourism and tourism-related degrees in-state universities. A total of 120 undergraduate students were selected as the sample. The sample represents four state universities: the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, the University of Kelaniya, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, and the Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka. A structured questionnaire was distributed online to the sample, also known as an online survey. The questionnaire was made up of two sections; one and two. The first section was to obtain personal information about the respondents. The second part was for factors (variables) that affect undergraduates' career selection in the tourism industry with COVID- the 19 pandemics.

Collected data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software which is used for the statistical treatment of data and to test the proposed hypothesis. This study's data analysis was carried out using primary data and evaluating the responses to the questionnaire.

In the descriptive analysis, numerical and graphical methods are used to organize, demonstrate, and analyze data. Correlation analysis, Regression analysis, Hypothesis testing, and Probability distributions came under inferential statistics.

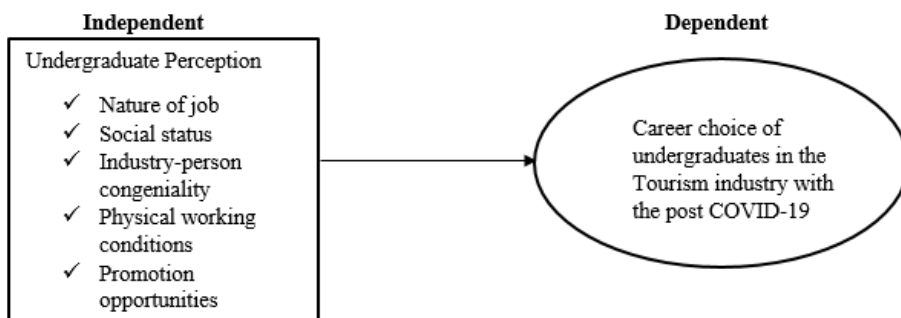


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

The following hypotheses are formulated based on the literature review and conceptual framework of the study.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The nature of the job of employment in the tourism industry affect career choice of undergraduates.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Social status of employment in the tourism industry affect career choice of undergraduates.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Industry- person congeniality of employment in the tourism industry affect career choice of undergraduates.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Physical working conditions of employment in the tourism industry affect career choice of undergraduates.

**H<sub>5</sub>:** Promotion opportunities for employment in the tourism industry affect career choice of undergraduates.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Reliability Analysis:** Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the internal reliability of the current study. According to the results, Cronbach's alpha value was 0.811, which indicates a high level of internal reliability or highly acceptable of the questionnaire.

Table 1 Correlation Analysis

|                              | Nature of Jobs | Social Status | Industry Person-Congeniality | Physical Working Conditions | Promotion Opportunities | Career Choice |
|------------------------------|----------------|---------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Nature of Jobs               | 1              |               |                              |                             |                         |               |
| Social Status                | .433*          | 1             |                              |                             |                         |               |
| Industry Person-Congeniality | .377*          | .676*         | 1                            |                             |                         |               |
| Physical Working Conditions  | .514*          | .482*         | .351**                       | 1                           |                         |               |
| Promotion Opportunities      | .374*          | .648*         | .693**                       | .395**                      | 1                       |               |
| Career Choice                | .144*          | .542*         | .545**                       | .278**                      | .556**                  | 1             |

Accordingly, results of the correlation analysis (Table 1), social status, industry person-congeniality, and promotion opportunities variables had a moderately significant positive relationship with career choice. Physical working conditions have a weak positive association with career choice, while the nature of the job variable has no significant relationship. According to the multiple linear regression analysis, the researcher recognized impact of the nature of the job variable on career choice was a significant negative relationship. Social status, industry person-congeniality, and promotion opportunities are significantly positively associated with the career choice of undergraduates in the tourism industry. However, there was a significant negative relationship between the nature of jobs and career choices. Also, the physical working conditions variable has a positive but insignificant relationship with career choice. Therefore, the physical working conditions of employment in the tourism industry do not affect the career choice of undergraduates. Except for that hypothesis, all other hypotheses of the study were accepted.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study revealed an adverse effect of the nature of jobs in the tourism industry on the career choice of tourism and hospitality undergraduates. In contrast, the social status, industry person-congeniality, and promotion opportunities had a positive effect on the career choice. However, the study indicated no statistically significant impact of physical working conditions dimensions on undergraduates' career choices in the tourism industry.

Table 2 Multiple Regression Analysis

| Variables                    | B Coefficients | Standard Error | P value |
|------------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------|
| (Constant)                   | 9.041          | 2.527          |         |
| Nature of jobs               | -.115          | .051           | .026    |
| Social status                | .234           | .104           | .027    |
| Industry person congeniality | .168           | .062           | .008    |
| Physical working conditions  | .064           | .091           | .482    |
| Promotion opportunities      | .280           | .121           | .023    |

According to the above analysis, among five variables career choice of undergraduates in the tourism industry was highly influenced by the industry person- congeniality factor. Regarding gender, it was found that there was a significant difference between male and female undergraduate students ( $p= 0.049$ ) in their career perceptions. According to the ANOVA test and t-test results, there was a significant difference between academic years ( $p= 0.014$ ) and university ( $p= 0.000$ ) in undergraduate career choice. However, it was examined that there was no statistically significant difference among students' specializing areas ( $p= 0.861$ ) in terms of the career choice of undergraduates. Furthermore, the survey data were only collected from four state universities in Sri Lanka. Therefore the outcomes may not be generalizable to other countries and other universities and institutions of Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** Career choice, perception, tourism, tourism undergraduates

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