
Students' Perceptions towards Working in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry in United Arab Emirates**Dr. Maryam Taha Mannaa****Assistant professor, Department of History and Islamic Civilization, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE;****Lecturer, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Alexandria University, Alexandria, Egypt**m.taha@sharjah.ac.aemaryoum1000@yahoo.com**Mohamed Abou-Shouk****Associate professor, Department of History and Islamic Civilization, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE;****Assistant professor, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Fayoum University, Fayoum, Egypt**maboushouk@sharjah.ac.ae**Abstract**

There are few studies on student perceptions of working in the tourism sector in Arab and Islamic countries. Taking into account the factors related to the cultural dimensions and to the society, the current study aims to examine the factors that influence the perception of tourism students in United Arab Emirates (UAE) to work in the tourism sector after graduation. Based on a random sample of students enrolled in the tourism program at the university level and using the structural equation modelling technique of analysis, the findings revealed that the commitment of students to work in the tourism sector is negatively influenced by the social aspects, the nature of work and the pay and promotion benefits. The current study is useful for all policy makers in education and tourism businesses to improve the image of tourism jobs in the minds of tourism students in the UAE, as well as to attract and retain skilled national employment and reduce the leakage of tourism income resulting from a high percentage of non-national employment.

Keywords: Commitment to work, Students' perceptions, Tourism career, Tourism study, UAE

Introduction

Tourism is a rapidly growing industry and a major source of employment. One of the main arguments for endorsing tourism development is that it creates a large number of jobs, both directly in sectors where tourism spending occurs and indirectly across the links between industries (Gebbers, Pantelidis, & Turner, 2020). However, while tourism industry growth generates new jobs, these jobs are also

identified by certain unfavourable characteristics. These characteristics include young foreign workers, low pay rates, a high proportion of low-skilled jobs, a large proportion of hours worked beyond regular business hours and a large number of seasonal workers (Gebbels et al., 2020; Guzeller & Celiker, 2020; Frye, et al., 2019; Goh and Lee, 2018; Hawkins, 2018; Baum, 2015; Brown, Thomas & Bosselman, 2015). As a result, the tourism sector is notorious for its heavy turnover of workers and the shortage of professional labour (Frye, et al., 2019; Gebbels et al., 2020; Guzeller & Celiker, 2020; Lusby, 2017; Roney & Oztin, 2007; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000)

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), tourism plays a crucial role in the development of the economy, and its impact seems likely to continue in the years ahead (John, 2018). Over the last four decades, the UAE and other GCC (Gulf Co-operation Council) countries have relied on oil revenues as their primary source of income. The UAE has used oil sales to develop modern infrastructure and fund business ventures. However, in order to ensure its socio-economic development and its long-term progress and prosperity, the country has decided to diversify its sources of income and to develop service industries, including tourism (UAE Business, 2016). Over the last two decades, the UAE has been able to become one of the biggest tourist destinations drawing millions of visitors from all over the world every year (Gulf News Business, 2018; Sutton, 2016). For example, the total number of overnight visitors in 2018 reached 21,286 million (World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2019) which reflects a rise of 5 million relative to 2014 (WTO, 2019).

Tourism is currently the most important non-oil economic sector in the UAE. In 2018, the travel and tourism sector made a significant contribution of AED164.7 billion to the country's GDP, accounting for 11.1% of total GDP (Emirates News Agency, 2019). Tourism spending is projected to grow by more than 4% each year from 2018 to 2027 (WTTC, 2017).

As for employment, the tourism sector generated 10.4% of overall employment in the UAE in 2016, or 617,500 jobs, including indirectly endorsed jobs. That is projected to rise by 2.0 % to 770,000 jobs in 2027 (11.1% of total employment). With regard to directly generated jobs in the tourism industry, 317,500 jobs have been created, which constitutes 5.4% of the total employment in the country. This was also projected to rise by 2.4 % to 410,000 jobs (5.9 per cent of total employment) in 2027 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2017). These expectations, of course, became irrational and doubtful after the outbreak of Covid-19 at the beginning of 2020.

Investments in the travel and tourism sector in UAE in 2016 totalled AED 26.2 billion (US\$ 7.1 billion), 7% of total investment. It

is anticipated to rise by 11.0% over the next ten years to AED 74.5 billion (US\$ 20.3 billion) in 2027, representing 11.2% of total investments (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2017).

The UAE is currently the most competitive tourism country in the Middle East and North Africa region (Travel and Tourism Competitive Report, 2017). Yet the alarming fact of the tourism industry in the UAE is the low number of Emirati people working in tourism and hospitality sectors. The Emiratis account for just 1% of the tourism workers in the UAE (Insight Magazine, 2016), which leads to a high rate of tourism income leakage from the local economy. While more citizens join UAE-based airlines and hold leading positions in different tourism businesses, it does not seem that many UAE nationals are opting for hotel and other hospitality-related jobs (Sahoo, 2014). These facts are the rationale behind conducting this study. The aim of the study is to investigate the factors that motivate Emirati students to join the tourism and hospitality sector after graduation. One main issue in the UAE is the social factors (i.e. society look and cultural aspects) and how it affects students' perceptions towards tourism and hospitality jobs.

To maintain the UAE's boom in the tourism sector, the industry should rely on the employment of trained, motivated and dedicated citizens who are satisfied with their work. In the light of the above, if the UAE wants to boost its competitive position in the international tourism industry, tourism enterprises and entrepreneurs need to enhance the quality of tourism-related jobs in order to raise their appeal to young Emirati. Therefore, this study focuses on examining the perceptions of students studying tourism in the UAE towards tourism careers. The current study will be useful to policy-makers in education and in tourism sector in the Arab countries with similar culture and social traditions. It will help forming an understanding of the perceptions toward tourism jobs and studying tourism major. In addition, studies of student attitudes towards working in the tourism industry in Arab-Islamic countries are scarce (Alanzeh, 2014; Goma & Sobieh, 2014; Al Mazro'ei, 2010). This study will add to knowledge an additional evidence of students' perceptions toward tourism work in Arab-Islamic countries.

Literature review

A qualified, inspired and dedicated workforce is essential to the growth of business in the tourism and hospitality market. Staff attitudes, performance and behaviour are crucial for customer satisfaction and loyalty (Richardson, 2009). Pfeffer (2005) stated that fierce competition between international companies has led businesses to use staff as a strategic advantage over rivals. However, several studies show that the tourism industry has an underprivileged

reputation in the eyes of tourism students, which means that the industry may face the challenge of attracting and retaining skilled staff (Gebbels et al., 2020; Guzeller & Celiker, 2020; Goh and Lee, 2018; Hawkins, 2018; Baum, 2015; Richardson, 2009; Barron et al., 2007). There is also evidence of many graduates in tourism and hospitality management leaving the industry or not joining a tourism career after graduation. Studies have shown that this issue relates to low work satisfaction, poor working conditions and lack of motivating factors resulting in a high turnover of staff and a shortage of skilled and experienced workers (Gebbels et al., 2020; Guzeller & Celiker, 2020; Frye, et al., 2019; Richardson, 2009; Doherty et al., 2001; Jenkins, 2001). Baum (2015) also pointed out that, after assessing the different dimensions of work, such as nature of work, social status, industry-personal congeniality, physical working conditions, pay and benefits, promotion opportunities as well as the relationship between employees and managers, they concluded that tourism-speciality students have a weak commitment to work in the tourism industry.

Attraction and retention of trained employees have become a big challenge facing the tourism and hospitality industry worldwide these days (Gebbels et al., 2020; Guzeller & Celiker, 2020; Hawkins, 2018; Lusby, 2017; Baum, 2015; Ferris, Berkson & Harris, 2002; Hinkin and Tracey, 2000). A range of factors related to the tourism and hospitality industry have been attributed for creating this problem. These include young foreign workers, low rates of pay, a high proportion of low skilled jobs, a large proportion of hours working beyond regular business hours, a negative image of the industry in the eyes of prospective employees, a large number of seasonal workers and high levels of staff turnover (Gebbels et al., 2020; Guzeller & Celiker, 2020; Frye et al., 2019; Goh and Lee, 2018; Hawkins, 2018; Baum, 2015; Brown et al., 2015; Richardson, 2009; Barron et al., 2007; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000).

This has led to several recent studies addressing issues related to the willingness of students to enter the tourism and hospitality industry thereafter (Wena, Leunga, Lic & Kwonb, 2018; Lusby, 2017; Menemenci & Sucuoglu, 2015; Huang & Lo, 2014; Wan, Wong & Kong, 2014; Richardson, 2009; Roney & Oztin, 2007; Aksu & Koksall, 2005; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000).

Nevertheless, studies dealing with student attitudes towards working in the tourism industry in Arab-Islamic countries are scarce. It is important to investigate the effect of the Arab-Islamic culture on young people's desire to work in the tourism sector (Al Mazro'ei, 2010). These cultural issues in Islamic countries have received little attention from researchers (Dumbrăveanu et al., 2016; Young, and Chapman, 2016; Afifi and Al-Sherif, 2014; Al Mazro'ei, 2010). As

the UAE struggles to attract locals to work in the tourism sector, it is vital to explore the perceptions of tourism students regarding working in the tourism sector. Accordingly, this research focused on studying the main aspects that affect the perspective of Emirati students to pursue their careers in the tourism industry.

The perceptions of tourism students are essential for tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs to understand the elements that graduates are looking for in their careers. Through offering these features, the tourism and hospitality industry in the UAE would be able to improve the appeal of tourism employment in the eyes of prospective skilled workers.

Research framework and hypotheses

Based on the literature review (i.e. Lusby, 2017; Wan, et al., 2014; Richardson, 2009; Aksu & Koksal, 2005; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000;), the researchers have end up with six main variables that affect students' commitment to work in tourism after graduation (Figure 1). These factors are the positive and negative aspects of work nature in tourism, social factors, industry-person congeniality, pay benefits and opportunities of promotion to managerial positions, and students' choice to study tourism willingly.

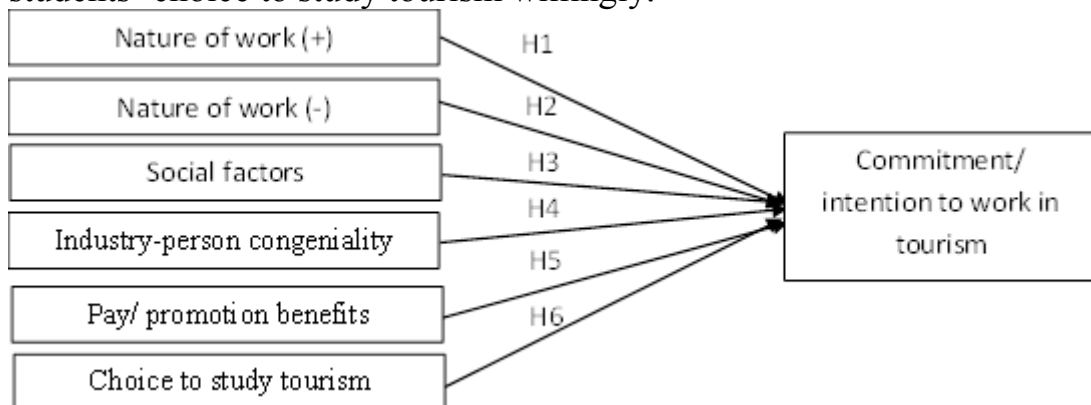


Figure 1. Research framework and hypotheses

Based on the research framework (Figure 1), six research hypotheses were developed as follows:

Students' commitment/ intention to work in tourism after graduation is affected by:

H1. Positive aspects of tourism work nature

H2. Negative aspects of tourism work nature

H3. Social factors

H4. Industry-person congeniality

H5. Pay/ promotion benefits

H6. Choice to study tourism major.

Research Methods

The current study employs the deductive approach based on the quantitative method. Data were collected through an online survey

over 12 weeks from January till March, 2020. A simple random sampling technique was employed to collect data from the target population. The target population for this study was the students of the University of Sharjah (UOS) who study tourism as their major specialty to investigate their commitment/intention to work in tourism career after their graduation. The sample was collected from four branches of the university in four different cities; Sharjah, Kalba, Al-Dhaid and Khorfakan. The questionnaire was designed based on literature studies for validity concerns (i.e. Lusby, 2017; Richardson, 2009; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000).

The questionnaire form was prepared in English then translated into Arabic language, as it is the mother language of respondents. The form includes seven constructs: nature of work in tourism (positive aspects), nature of work in tourism (negative aspects), social factors (society perception), industry-person congeniality, pay benefits and promotion opportunities, choice of tourism major to study, and commitment to work in tourism after graduation. The questions of the form used 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) to collect the level of agreement from respondents. 30 items were used to measure the 7 constructs included in the study (presented in details in Table 9).

The survey was pre-tested amongst colleagues with master's or PhD degrees. The final version of the survey was created after minor changes based on comments received. The survey was available in an online version only as it is much easier and more appealing to the target audience. Email and WhatsApp were used to contact the students requesting participation in the survey and forwarding it to their colleagues in the same major. In total, 227 usable questionnaires were used for analysis after discarding invalid participation. The initial results of the questionnaire (first 50 forms) were checked for validity and reliability and results showed good Cronbach's alpha values for each construct (exceeding the threshold of 0.7), and corrected-item total correlation statistics were also calculated and provided an evidence of construct validity.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used for data analysis and hypotheses testing. SEM used the WarpPLS Software Program (version 7) for data analysis. SEM is an advanced multivariate technique that is used to analyse models with latent variables and reveals valid and reliable measurement models. Internal consistency is measured through Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability is also checked. Construct validity, including convergent and discriminant validities, are also revealed using the values of average-variance extracted (AVEs).

Results and discussion

Descriptive statistics/ Respondents' profile

The majority of respondents are female (86.8%) referring that the majority of students enrolled in tourism specialty are females, 33% are fresh students, 30.4% are junior students, and 36.6% are senior students. When students were asked about the preferable fields of work they would like to join if they were to work in the tourism sector after graduation, the majority (54.6 %) chose governmental tourism authorities and working as local guides at a particular location (i.e. - museum, park, etc.) as shown in the table 1. The preference of jobs reflects the tendency of students to work in governmental authorities with specific and regular work hours. It is obvious that the preference of students to work in accommodation institutions comes last as shown in Table1.

	Preference to work after graduation	%
1	Governmental tourism authorities	54.6 %
2	Local guides at a specific location (i.e.museum, reserve, etc.).	48.9 %
3	Travel agencies or with tour operators	30.4 %
4	Airlines	29.5 %
5	Accommodation facilities	16.7 %

Table 1. Preference of respondents for work after graduation
Respondents' level of agreement (mean and std. deviation for research model constructs)

This part looks at the perception of respondents on the research model constructs. It depicts mean and standard deviation statistics for each dimension. From Table 2, it is clear that respondents have positive perceptions towards the factors relating to the nature of tourism work. The respondents' agreement ranges from 'jobs in tourism are enjoyable' (mean value of 4.33), 'pleasant work environment (4.32), opportunity to communicate with foreigners (4.07), 'it is easy to find colleagues to get along with in tourism work' (mean value of 4.07), to the ability to combine work in tourism and parenthood (3.82).

Nature of work (+)	Mean	Std. Deviation
I find jobs in the tourism industry enjoyable.	4.33	.734
I think the working environment in tourism is pleasant	4.32	.786
A job in tourism can be combined with parenthood	3.82	.885
It is nice to have the opportunity to communicate with foreigners while working in the tourism industry	4.07	.887
I can find colleagues that I can get along with in tourism career	4.07	.902
Grand mean	4.122	

Table 2. Respondents' perceptions on positive factors relating to nature of work in tourism.

Table 3 shows that respondents have neutral opinions towards the negative aspects of tourism industry work. This includes the long hours of work (mean value 3.19) and job stability (3.39). These results reflect the perceptions of Emirati students towards the nature of work in tourism in terms of long hours of work and instability comparing to their peers who may join regular public jobs with stable income and reasonable work hours, particularly for women who have to balance between work and family concerns.

Nature of work (-)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Working hours are too long in the tourism industry	3.19	.985
It is very difficult to find a stable job in tourism due to seasonality	3.39	.995
Grand mean	3.29	

Table 3. Respondents' perceptions on negative factors relating to nature of work in tourism.

The results showed that students see that society does not find working in tourism to be a respectable (valuable) career, particularly for women (mean value of 3.40). Table 4 indicates that respondents' perceptions regarding the community's view of working in tourism and the preference of male tourism providers over female workers

Social Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
I think that those working in the tourism industry are not valued in the society specially women	3.40	.970
Working in tourism is a not respected (prestigious) vocation in society specially for women	3.09	.922
Tourism entrepreneurs prefer male employees to females	3.28	.948
Working in tourism is more suitable for men than women in my society	3.15	.936
Grand mean	3.23	

were "neutral"(3.28).

Table 4. Respondents' perceptions on social factors

Table 5 indicates that respondents believe they have the capacity to work in the tourism industry (mean value of 4.24). Potential ability, skills (4.17) and willingness to serve and enhance customer satisfaction (4.41) are aspects that all respondents agree with.

Industry-person congeniality	Mean	Std. Deviation
My character fits great for working in the tourism industry	4.07	.803
I can use my abilities and skills in tourism jobs	4.17	.740
I get pleasure while working in the tourism industry	4.29	.806
I like to see satisfied customers when serve them	4.41	.783
Grand mean	4.24	

Table 5. Respondents' perceptions on industry-person congeniality

Table 6 shows that respondents have "neutral" views, but are close to "agree" on low wage benefits (mean value of 3.41) and incentives for promotion in the tourism sector (3.52). They find that the tourism career is a low-paid job that is not enough for a satisfying life (3.29). They also see limited prospects for progress in the

Pay/ Benefits and promotion opportunities	Mean	Std. Deviation
I think the pay is low for most jobs in the tourism industry	3.41	.976
I think that the pay for most tourism jobs is not sufficient to lead a satisfactory life	3.29	.982
Considering the long hours and work load I find the pay low in the tourism industry	3.38	.959
The opportunity of getting promoted to managerial positions is limited in the tourism industry	3.52	.986
Grand mean	3.40	

management roles of the tourism sector.

Table 6. Respondents' perceptions on pay/ benefits and promotion opportunities in tourism.

Table 7 shows that the respondents "agreed" on the factors relating to their choice of tourism as the main subject of the study. They confirmed that they had voluntarily chosen tourism as their field of study (mean value of 3.99), that it was their first preference in the college (3.78), that it was easy to join (3.97), and that it was a right decision to make (4.20).

Choice to study tourism	Mean	Std. Deviation
Choose to study tourism willingly	3.72	.979
Studying tourism was my first choice in college	3.78	.953
I have chosen this program because it is easy to	3.97	.928

enter		
Compared to other fields, it is easy to study this field	4.29	.832
Studying tourism major in university was a correct decision	4.20	.883
Grand mean	3.99	

Table 7. Respondents' perceptions on choosing to study tourism major

Table 8 demonstrates the positive perceptions of the respondents to work in the tourism industry in the future (mean vale of 4.20). They are happy to choose tourism as a career path (4.23), plan to work in the industry after graduation (4.24), and will do their

Career intention/ commitment to work in tourism	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am very happy to have chosen tourism as a career path	4.23	.852
I intend to work in the tourism industry after graduation.	4.24	.839
I would like to work in the tourism industry after graduation	4.22	.849
I see my vocational (professional) future in the tourism industry	4.17	.810
I will do my best to acquire a job in the tourism industry	4.16	.893
Grand mean	4.20	

utmost to get a profession in the tourism sector (4.16).

Table 8. Respondents' perceptions on career intention/ commitment to work in tourism

Measurement Model

The measurement model looks at the validity and reliability of the measurement scale. It examines the relationships between indicators and their relevant constructs. Conducting the SEM analysis using the WarpPLS Software program (Ver. 7), the measurement model showed good model fit indices according to (Kock, 2020): Average path coefficient (APC)=0.233, $P < 0.001$, average R-squared (ARS)=0.727, $P < 0.001$, average adjusted R-squared (AARS)=0.720, $P < 0.001$, average block VIF (AVIF)=2.497 (ideal), average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)=2.521 (ideal), Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)=0.707 (large), Sympon's paradox ratio (SPR)=0.833 (acceptable), R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR)=0.937 (acceptable), statistical suppression ratio (SSR)=1 (acceptable), and Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR)=1 (acceptable).

Construct	Indicators	Loading	α	CR	AVE	\sqrt{AVE}
Nature of work (+)	I find jobs in the tourism industry enjoyable.	0.889	0.882	0.915	0.685	0.828
	I think the working environment in tourism is pleasant	0.899				
	A job in tourism can be combined with parenthood	0.886				
	Opportunity to communicate with foreigners	0.835				
	I think I can find colleagues that I can get along with easily	0.811				
Nature of work (-)	Working hours are too long in the tourism industry	0.895	0.750	0.889	0.800	0.895
	It is difficult to find a stable job in tourism due to seasonality	0.875				
Social Status	People working in tourism are not valued in the society	0.793	0.867	0.910	0.717	0.847
	Working in tourism is a not respected job in society	0.891				
	Tourism entrepreneurs prefer male employees to females.	0.893				
	Working in tourism is more suitable for men than women	0.806				
Industry-person Congeniality	My character fits great for working in the tourism industry	0.675	0.787	0.798	0.550	0.742
	I can use my abilities and skills in tourism jobs	0.730				
	I get pleasure while working in the tourism industry	0.772				
	I like to see satisfied customers when serve them	0.805				
Pay/ Benefits and promotion opportunities	I think the pay is low for most jobs in the tourism industry	0.845	0.873	0.914	0.726	0.852
	The pay for tourism jobs is not sufficient for satisfactory life	0.898				
	Long hours and work load versus low-pay in tourism jobs	0.854				
	Getting promoted to managerial positions is limited	0.809				
Choice to study tourism	I chose to study tourism willingly	0.710	0.828	0.881	0.605	0.778
	Studying tourism was my first choice in college	0.538				
	I have chosen this program because it is easy to enter	0.861				
	Compared to other fields, it is easy to study this field	0.863				
	Studying tourism major in university was a correct decision	0.862				
	Joining tourism major was a rationale decision	0.710				
Career intention/ Commitment	I am very happy to have chosen tourism as a career path	0.893	0.951	0.962	0.836	0.914
	I intend to work in the tourism industry after graduation.	0.942				
	I would like to work in the tourism industry after graduation	0.939				
	I see my professional future in the tourism industry	0.902				
	I will do my best to acquire a job in the tourism industry	0.893				

Table 9. Measurement model

Note: α : Cronbach's alpha, CR: composite reliability, AVE: average-variance extracted

As for reliability concerns (Table 8), the measurement model showed good internal consistency and construct reliability where all constructs in the model exceed the threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2016; Hair et al., 2010; Field, 2009). In terms of validity, it is found that convergent validity is evident where average-variance extracted (AVEs) values for all constructs exceed the threshold of 0.5 ([Fornell & Larcker, 1981](#)). Discriminant validity is also existed where the square root of AVEs is greater than the inter-correlation values among constructs ([Kock, 2020](#)).

Structural Model

The structural model examines the causal relationship among the constructs (i.e. the hypotheses). The structural model has shown that some factors related to the nature of tourism work have a positive impact on the commitment and intentions of Emirati students to work in the tourism sector ($\beta = 0.21$, $P < 01$, and the first hypothesis is supported). This means that the respondents see tourism career as an enjoyable and pleasant career. Meanwhile, some other factors related to the nature of work in tourism are negatively affecting students' commitment to work in the career ($\beta = -0.15$, $P < 01$, and H2 is supported). This result indicates that participants considered tourism jobs unstable due to seasonality in addition to long working hours compared to jobs in the government.

In addition, results show that social factors, particularly related to the view of society, are negatively affecting the commitment of students to work in the tourism sector ($\beta = -0.11$, $P < 05$ and H3 is supported). This result is also crucial as it explains that tourism jobs are not valued by the society and there is a preference to employ males over females in the sector. Regarding, pay and promotion prospects in the tourism industry, it has been found that they have a negative effect on the willingness of Emirati students to work in the tourism field ($\beta = -0.17$, $P < 01$ and H5 is supported). Furthermore, the finding shows that students believe that salary for jobs in the tourism sector is low compared to other jobs given the long daily working hours. Besides, the results show that students think that female employees have limited access to managerial positions in tourism related jobs.

Moreover, the commitment of students to work in the tourism sector has been positively impacted by both industry- person congeniality ($\beta = 0.27$, $P < 01$, and H4 is supported) and their choice to study tourism ($\beta = 0.48$, $P < 01$, and H6 is supported). This means that students have the skills required to work in tourism and they selected tourism major willingly. These six aforementioned factors explain 73 per cent of the variance of students' commitment to work in the tourism sector in the UAE (Figure 2).

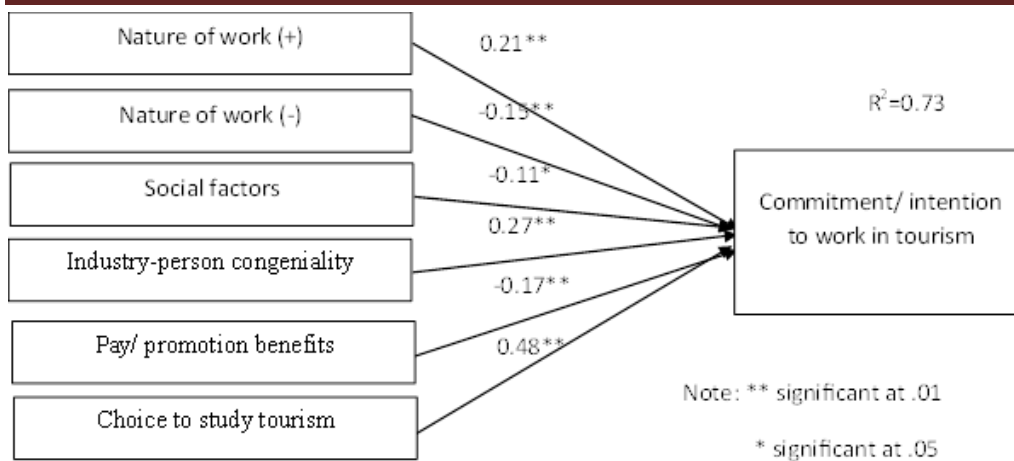


Figure 2. The structural model

Conclusion and implications

The current study looked at the attitude of undergraduate tourism students towards different aspects of working in the tourism industry. First interesting finding of the study was that certain factors relating to the nature of tourism work have a positive effect on the interest and intentions of Emirati students to work in the tourism industry. Respondents perceive some advantages of working in tourism sector, as tourism job is enjoyable, the work environment is pleasant, the interaction with foreigners while working is exciting and it is very possible to get along with colleagues in the tourism profession. All this is in line with previous studies, except that the respondents found that tourism work can easily be combined with parenthood (Goh and Lee, 2018; Richardson, 2009; Barron et al., 2007; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). The study also found that the commitment of students to work in the tourism sector was positively affected by the industry/ person congeniality and the students' free choice to study tourism.

Another key finding of the study was that three work-related elements were generally unfavourably evaluated by the respondents. These elements contribute to adverse working conditions in the tourism sector, negative views of society for employees in the tourism sector, poor salaries and limited promotion opportunities to managerial positions.

Factors related to long working hours and the instability of many jobs in tourism sectors due to seasonality have negatively affected the students' commitment and intention to pursue a job in tourism industry after graduation. This result agrees with the finding of some existing studies such as Goh and Lee (2018), Brown et al. (2015), Richardson (2009), Barron et al. (2007) and Kusluvan & Kusluvan, (2000).

Social status has been identified as a major barrier that could hinder students from joining the industry. This aspect may be affected by the common belief in the local community that those who study tourism and hospitality should work in service jobs. In addition, there is a common misconception in the Arab and Muslim world that working in the tourism industry is incompatible with religious values and causes individual moral failure. This misconception also hinders students to enter the industry after graduation particularly females. This is due to the workplace atmosphere that is subjected to promiscuity, excessive entertainment and the consumption of alcoholic drinks. This concept relates to the hospitality sector more than other tourism sectors such as airlines, governmental authorities or travel agents (Al-Ismail, Carmichael & Duberley, 2019). This finding is fully in agreement with Tan et al. (2016) and Alsawafi (2016) who also found that the commitment of students to work in the tourism and hospitality industry in Malaysia and Oman respectively was adversely affected by Muslim community's misconception of tourism jobs in both countries.

With regard to pay and promotion prospects, respondents find that the income of workers in the tourism industry is low and not commensurate with working hours compared to other regularly working hours in the public sector. They also believe that the opportunities for promotion in this field are low particularly for women. This result agrees with the studies done by Hawkins (2018), Tan et al. (2016), Baum (2015) and Kusluvan & Kusluvan (2000).

The study of Losby (2017) has similar findings for the three unfavourable factors. Losby found that both American and Chinese tourism students lacked the commitment to work in the tourism and hospitality sector after graduation due to the instability of jobs, low social status and low pays.

The factors listed above justify the preference of the majority of respondents to work in the public tourism authorities or as permanent tour guides in museums after graduation in order to overcome most of the unfavorable conditions related to tourism industry. Working in a public tourism authority or as a tour guide in a museum ensures an acceptable level of income, an appropriate number of working hours, a prestigious social image of work, as well as addressing seasonality problems and job instability. The same factors also explain the reasons behind the reluctance of young people specially females to work in the hotel industry, where the image of work is related to long working hours, unsociable working hours and night shifts.

The findings of the research are crucial to understand why Emirati male citizens are reluctant to work in the tourism sector. The findings also explain the factors that led to male students' reluctance to

choose tourism as a university study field. Male students at the University of Sharjah and its branches (the subject of the study survey) constitute just 19 per cent of total students enrolled in the tourism program, which explains the small contribution of male students in the test sample (13.2 per cent). In the Arab Islamic culture, the husband or father is the household 's key breadwinner, even though the wife is working. The Emirati males therefore do not consider jobs in the tourism sector because they do not believe that the income from these jobs is sufficient for them and their household to maintain a decent life (Al Zubaibi, 2012).

Another point worth noting is that the regulations for university entrance to various disciplines in the United Arab Emirates depend on the degree earned by the student in the General Secondary Certificate (High School Diploma). This might compel a student to enroll in a discipline that is not one of his best preferences. In the case of the tourism program at the University of Sharjah, the low entry standards of the program can induce a significant number of students to enroll in this specialty without real knowledge of the field of tourism or a real desire to work in the field.

Recommendations

In order to attract and maintain skilled national labor and reduce the leakage of tourist income resulting from a high proportion of non-national employment, it is necessary to change the attitudes of students towards the tourism industry from negative to positive. Here, two major issues need to be addressed.

The first issue concerns tourism and hospitality educators. It is said that many students enter tourism and hospitality programs without a real understanding of the working conditions in the sector and with a simple idea of the workplace practices in the industry. Tourism and hospitality educators can help to solve this issue by providing all prospective students in the tourism and hospitality field a comprehensive overview of the types of positions available in the industry and the current working conditions, including pay rates, employment incentives and career pathways offered. By providing prospective students with realistic knowledge about their jobs in the industry, their decision to study tourism at the university level can rely on a genuine desire and determination to undertake postgraduate tourism work. This is likely to help decrease the number of qualified employees who leave after graduation, or fail to join the industry.

High school career guidance and counseling can play an important role in developing students' perceptions of tourism and making their expectations more realistic. This would minimize the likelihood of disappointment at graduation or while carrying out an internship program with a tourist service provider that would

eventually contribute to their unwillingness to work in the tourism industry.

In addition, the policy of university enrolment in UAE, which admits students in tourist schools based on the General Secondary Certificate, should be revised. The admission policy for students wishing to join tourist and hospitality schools should be more selective. For example, the current policy should be complemented by personal interviews and/or psychological tests, and priority should be given to students with practical experience in the field of tourism.

The second, and perhaps most important, issue is the need to improve working conditions for all workers in the sector. Conditions relating to the nature of employment, wages/ benefits, hours of service and incentives for promotion must be strengthened. Most of the time, the private sector will be unwilling to play a significant role in this regard and, as a result, public sector legislators are recommended to enforce effective human resource corrective policies and practices in the industry. Regulations may, for example, define minimum wages, maximum working hours and final benefits such as medical insurance, a pension scheme, disability insurance and maximum weekly or daily working hours.

In conclusion, it can be said that it is in the interest of the tourism industry to improve students' negative perceptions of working in the industry. As a result, this would further increase the number of university students joining and pursuing their careers in the industry. Otherwise, the industry will continue to lose such highly qualified and educated citizens, contributing to the consequent leakage of a significant proportion of income of tourism outside the region.

Further recommended research

Future work can be conducted on the experiences of undergraduate tourism students. First, the relationship between the social, economic and demographic variables of students and their attitudes towards tourism employment can be examined. Second, given that the Gulf Cooperation Council countries have a common ethos; future research on tourism students can be conducted in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries to explore differences and similarities in their attitudes towards the tourism professions.

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تصورات الطلاب تجاه العمل في صناعة السياحة والضيافة
في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة

د. مريم طه مناع

أستاذ مساعد/ قسم التاريخ والحضارة الإسلامية / كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية/ جامعة
الشارقة/ الإمارات العربية المتحدة.

مدرس بكلية السياحة والفنادق/ جامعة الأسكندرية/ جمهورية مصر العربية

maboushouk@sharjah.ac.ae

د. محمد أبوشوق

أستاذ مشارك/ قسم التاريخ والحضارة الإسلامية/ كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية/ جامعة
الشارقة/ الإمارات العربية المتحدة.

أستاذ مساعد بكلية السياحة والفنادق جامعة الفيوم/ جمهورية مصر العربية.

m.taha@sharjah.ac.ae

الملخص

هناك القليل من الدراسات تتناول تصورات الطلاب للعمل في قطاع السياحة في الدول العربية والإسلامية، من هنا تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة العوامل التي تؤثر على تصور طلاب السياحة في الإمارات العربية المتحدة للعمل في قطاع السياحة بعد التخرج، مع الأخذ في الاعتبار العوامل الثقافية والدينية المميزة للمجتمع العربي. بناءً على عينة عشوائية من الطلاب الملتحقين ببرنامج السياحة على المستوى الجامعي وباستخدام تقنية نمذجة المعادلة الهيكلية في التحليل، كشفت النتائج أن التزام الطلاب بالعمل في قطاع السياحة يتأثر سلباً بطبيعة العمل في مجال السياحة وكذلك برؤية المجتمع للعاملين في القطاع وبمستوى الأجور وطبيعة الترقى في الوظائف السياحية. تعد الدراسة الحالية مفيدة وهامة لوضع السياسات في قطاعي التعليم والسياحة من أجل العمل على تحسين صورة الوظائف السياحية في أذهان طلاب الدراسات السياحية في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، وكذلك لجذب واستبقاء العمالة الوطنية الماهرة والحد من تسرب الدخل السياحي الناتج عن ارتفاع نسبة العمالة غير الوطنية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الالتزام بالعمل، الإمارات العربية المتحدة، العمل بمجال السياحة، تصورات الطلاب، دراسة السياحة.