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ACCOUNTING FOR HONG KONG HOSPITALITY STUDENTS' INTENTION TO
JOIN THE INDUSTRY: THE ROLE OF SERVICE ORIENTATION, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, AND
SATISFACTION WITH THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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Abstract

In this study we investigated the roles of service orientation, emotional intelligence and satisfaction with the hospitality industry in affecting Hong Kong post-internship hospitality students' career aspirations to join the hospitality industry. We found that service orientation but not emotional intelligence enhanced hospitality students' intention to join the industry. We further found that satisfaction with the hospitality industry partially mediated the relationship between service orientation and intention to join the industry. Implications for retention research and practices are discussed.

Key Words: Service orientation, emotional intelligence, hospitality industry, Hong Kong hospitality students, internship, intention to join

Introduction

Hospitality educators and practitioners are increasingly interested in understanding hospitality students' career decisions or intentions to join the hospitality industry (e.g., Chuang & Dellmann-Jenkis, 2010; Lee, Olds, & Lee, 2010; Teng, 2008). For instance, Teng (2008) surveyed 483 post-internship undergraduate hospitality students in Taiwan and found that students' personality, especially extroversion, predicted students' attitudes toward and aspirations for hospitality jobs. Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkis (2010) studied 360 hospitality students in the US context. They found that hospitality students' career intentions to join the industry was affected by students' gender such that female students had stronger intentions than male students, transfer status such that transfer students had stronger intentions than nontransfer students, and career outcome expectations such that students who reported higher career outcome expectations had stronger intentions to join the industry after they graduate. King, McKercher, and Waryszak (2003: 145) also found that only about half of the hotel program graduates had their first jobs in the industry and noted that "Future research is required to investigate why so few students end up in the industry".

Inspired by these studies, in this study we aim to further advance this line of research by investigating the roles of service orientation, emotional intelligence and satisfaction with the hospitality industry in affecting Hong Kong post-internship hospitality students' career aspirations to join the hospitality industry.

Literature review and hypotheses

Service Orientation. Extraversion represents one of the big-five personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and has been suggested an important antecedent of hospitality students' career intentions to join the industry (Teng, 2008). However, there are other narrow personality traits such as service orientation that may play a role in affecting hospitality students' career aspirations. Hogan, Hogan, and Busch (1984: 167) defined service orientation as an individual dispositional trait that characterizes being "helpful, thoughtful, considerate, and cooperative". Individuals who have stronger service orientations tend to have better job performance as well as other desirable social and psychological functioning, e.g., self-acceptance, sense of well-being, responsibility, self-control, tolerance and intellectual efficiency (Hogan et al., 1984)¹. In the service context, Gwinner, Bitner, Brown, and Kumar (2005)

¹ There is another line of research that treats service orientation as a firm-level program, including factors such as service training, service rewards, service technology (e.g., Lytle, Hom, & Mokwa, 1998), or factors such as customer focus, organizational support, and service under pressure (e.g., Kim, Leong, & Lee, 2005; Kim, McCahon, Miller, 2003). The argument

found that individual employees' trait of service orientation led to more adaptive behavior when these employees were offering services to customers.

We posit that service orientation may affect hospitality students' intention to join the industry, other than its impact on general job performance (Hogan et al., 1984) or adaptive service performance (Gwinner et al., 2005). Service orientation, characterized by one's predisposition toward offering help to other people, is more likely to lead the focal person to find service jobs interesting and meaningful. For instance, Gwinner et al. (2005) found that one's service orientation correlated significantly with intrinsic motivation in service jobs ($r = .50, p < .01$). Intrinsic motivation leads to higher tolerance for challenging jobs (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which may be an important antecedent of one's aspiration for hospitality jobs. Besides, people who have a stronger service orientation may be more likely to perceive a person-job match between themselves and hospitality jobs, and such a match is more likely to motivate these persons to choose hospitality jobs (Teng, 2008). Finally, persons with higher service orientations may also find that hospitality jobs help them achieve a higher level of self-actualization. Lee et al. (2010) found that one of the main factors contributing to undergraduate students' decision to choose a hospitality and tourism program was because these students "feel that the career in the hospitality and tourism industry will enable me to meet my personal goals" and "like to serve others" (p. 21). Thus we have the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Service orientation will be positively related to hospitality students' intention to join the hospitality industry.

Emotional Intelligence. Hospitality jobs require a high level of emotional labor and are emotionally challenging (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Hospitality employees often need to balance between their true emotions and the displayed emotions and are more likely to encounter emotional dissonance (e.g., Grandey, 2003). For these types of jobs, people who have higher levels of emotional intelligence, defined as one's ability to perceive and manage one's own emotions, understand and recognize other persons' emotions as well as manage them (Goleman, 1995), may have more emotion-specific self-efficacy to handle. Besides, these emotionally-wise people may be more likely to adopt the deep acting strategy, e.g., reappraising the meaning of stressful events, rather than using the surface acting strategy, e.g., hiding one's true emotions, when they deal with difficult customers. Deep acting strategy is typically associated with a higher level of affective service delivery (Grandey, 2003). Lastly, Lee et al. (2010: 21) found that

of this line of research is that service orientation is an internal and firm-level design that promotes employee service performance. In this study, consistent with Hogan et al. (1984), we treat service orientation as an individual-level personality trait rather than a firm-level design.

one reason that affected one's choice of hospitality and tourism program was "I feel that my skills match the demands & requirements of the hospitality and tourism industry". Overall, we expect that for hospitality students who are higher at their emotional intelligence, they may be more likely to have higher self-efficacy in handling hospitality jobs and emotional labor (Bandura, 1997), perceive a better fit between themselves and hospitality jobs (Lee et al., 2010; Teng, 2008), and thus have a stronger tendency to join the industry after graduation.

Hypothesis 2: Emotional intelligence will be positively related to hospitality students' intention to join the hospitality industry.

Satisfaction with the hospitality industry. We further posit that one's satisfaction with the hospitality industry partially mediates the relationship between one's personality trait (i.e., service orientation) and emotional ability (i.e., emotional intelligence) and the person's intention to join the hospitality industry. According to turnover research, employees' overall job satisfaction is negatively and significantly related to employees' turnover (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). Following the conceptual and empirical evidence (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Griffeth et al., 2000), we suggest that one's satisfaction with the hospitality industry represent one important predictor of one's aspiration for hospitality jobs. When individuals have higher service orientations, they are more likely to find hospitality jobs interesting and perceive a person-environment match. Besides, when individuals have higher service orientations, they are more likely to believe that service- or hospitality-related jobs can allow them to achieve a higher level of self-actualization (e.g., Lee et al., 2010). As a result, these individuals are more likely to be satisfied with the hospitality industry or hospitality jobs, and the satisfaction further motivates these individuals to choose the hospitality industry as their career after graduation. Likewise, when individual employees have a higher level of emotional intelligence, they are more likely to develop hospitality-job-specific self-efficacy and perceive a better match between their capability and the hospitality industry. Put differently, they are also more likely to be satisfied with hospitality jobs or the hospitality industry.

We only argue for the partial mediating role of satisfaction with the hospitality industry because some other factors, such as perceived person-environment match (Teng, 2008), hospitality-job-specific self-efficacy, or even career outcome expectations (e.g., Chuang & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2010), may also play important roles in mediating the relationship between service orientation and emotional intelligence and one's intention to join the hospitality industry. We thus have the following predictions:

Hypothesis 3A: Satisfaction with the hospitality industry will partially mediate the relationship between

service orientation and hospitality students' intention to join the hospitality industry.

Hypothesis 3B: Satisfaction with the hospitality industry will partially mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and hospitality students' intention to join hospitality the industry.

Methodology

Sample. We surveyed all second-year (Junior) post-internship hospitality undergraduate students ($N = 77$) from a major university in Hong Kong. These students were taking a required course on hospitality management. To alleviate the common method bias concern, we adopted a longitudinal design to collect the data. The longitudinal design allowed us to minimize the superficial relationships among variables due to same raters (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Specifically, at the beginning of the semester, the instructor of the course asked students to fill in a survey regarding their service orientation, emotional intelligence, and demographic information such as gender and age. At the end of the semester, around 4 months' later, the instructor distributed a follow up survey asking these students to report their satisfaction with the hospitality industry and the intention to join the hospitality industry after graduation. All surveys were completed during the class time and five extra course marks were assigned to the research participation in order to increase the participation rate. Surveys were not anonymous because we needed to match the two-wave surveys. However, we ensured to all participants that their responses would be used for academic purposes only and would not affect their course grade (other than the extra five points) in the survey instructions. The final sample was 72 after we excluded cases with missing values.

Measures. Service orientation. We measured service orientation with five items from Gwinner et al. (2005). Two sample items include: "I enjoy helping others" and "The best job I can imagine would involve assisting others in solving their problems". The reliability for this scale was .77. *For Emotional intelligence,* we measured self-reported emotional intelligence with a 19-item scale developed by Brackett and colleagues (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006). Two sample items read: "By looking at people's facial expressions, I recognize the emotions they are experiencing" and "When someone I know is in a bad mood, I can help the person calm down and feel better quickly". The reliability for this scale was .84. *Satisfaction with the hospitality industry,* we measured satisfaction with the hospitality industry with one overall item of satisfaction scale, which asked respondents to assess the extent to which they agree with the following statement, "Overall, I am very satisfied with the hospitality industry." The single-item, overall satisfaction measure has found to correlate highly with composite satisfaction measures (Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997). *Regarding Intention to join the*

hospitality industry, we measured students’ intention to join the industry with two items. The two items are: “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with the hospitality industry” and “I will surely join the industry upon graduation”. The reliability for this measure was .83.

Control variables. We also assessed respondents’ gender and exam scores (as an indicator of their general intelligence) as control variables. We relied on self-report data so we also included negative affectivity as another control variable (Spector, 1994). We did not control for age because the variance on this variable was very small. All the items, except exam scores and gender, were measured with a 5-point Likert-type Scale, with 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

Results

Descriptive statistics. Table 1 presented descriptive analysis results. In Table 1, hospitality students’ intention to join the industry after graduation was significantly related to their satisfaction with the industry ($r = .62, p < .01$) and service orientation ($r = .36, p < .01$). Emotional intelligence, however, had no relationships with intention to join the industry ($r = .09, n.s.$) and satisfaction with the industry ($r = .16, n.s.$). Finally, emotional intelligence was significantly correlated with service orientation, suggesting that emotionally smart persons also tend to have higher service orientations ($r = .39, p < .01$). None of the control variables had significant correlations with intentions to join the industry after graduation.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations ^a

	Means	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Study Variables								
1. Intention to join the industry	2.85	.87						
2. Satisfaction with the industry	3.17	.82	.62**					
3. Service orientation	3.72	.61	.36**	.24*				
4. Emotional intelligence	3.30	.36	.09	.16	.39**			
Controls								
5. Gender ^b	.21	.41	-.07	.02	.05	.02		
6. Exam score	172.90	12.95	-.11	-.18	.01	-.02	-.06	
7. Negative affectivity	2.54	.80	-.05	.06	-.19	-.05	-.09	.05

^a. N = 72 (Listwise). ^b. 0=Male, 1=Female.

Multiple regression analysis results. Table 2 presented multiple regression analysis results. In Table 2, Model 1 examined the relationships between our individual-trait variables (i.e., service orientation and emotional intelligence) and our mediator (i.e., satisfaction with the hospitality industry). Results suggested that service orientation was a significant predictor of satisfaction with the industry ($\beta = .24, p < .05$) while emotional intelligence was not ($\beta = .07, n.s.$). Results of Model 1 established the link between our independent variables and mediators, thus the first step toward a mediation model (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Model 2 was the baseline models for intention to join the hospitality industry where the three control variables were in the equation. In Model 3, we entered service orientation and emotional intelligence into the equation. Results suggested that service orientation predicted intention to join the industry significantly ($\beta = .39, p < .01$) while emotional intelligence did not ($\beta = -.06, n.s.$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported whereas Hypothesis 2 was not. This model explained 13% additional variance ($p < .01$) on intention to join the industry after graduation. In Model 4, we entered the mediator, i.e., satisfaction with the hospitality industry, into the equation. Results suggested that satisfaction with the hospitality industry was a significant predictor of intention to join the industry ($\beta = .58, p < .01$). In the meantime, the impact of service orientation on intention to join the industry remained significant, but the level of significance dropped from .01 to .05 level, which supported the partial mediation role of satisfaction with the hospitality industry (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Thus, Hypothesis 3A was supported but Hypothesis 3B was not. Overall, Model 4 explained 45% of variance in hospitality students' intention to join the industry.

Table 2
Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Students' Intention to Join the Hospitality Industry^a

	Dependent Variables			
	Satisfaction with the hospitality industry	Intention to Join the Hospitality Industry		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Controls				
Gender	.01	-.08	-.10	-.10
Exam score	-.19	-.11	-.12	-.01
Negative affectivity	.12	-.05	.02	-.05
Study Variables				
Service orientation	.24*		.39**	.25*
Emotional	.07		-.06	-.10

intelligence				
Satisfaction with the hospitality industry				.58**
R^2	.11	.02	.15*	.45**
ΔR^2			.13**	.30**
N	5, 66	3, 68	5, 66	7, 65

a. $N = 72$.

Discussion

Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkis (2010: 513) noted that, “Further understanding of hospitality students’ career decision-making process and career intentions has important implications for educators”. In this study we investigated the roles of service orientation, emotional intelligence, and satisfaction with the hospitality industry in accounting for hospitality students’ intention to join the industry after graduation. Our results revealed that service orientation, one’s predisposition toward helping others, could significantly enhance one’s intention to join the industry. Furthermore, we found that such a link may happen because one’s service orientation positively increases one’s satisfaction with hospitality jobs. Put it differently, people with higher service orientation may find hospitality jobs more interesting, challenging, a better person-job match, and thus have a higher tendency to join the industry after graduation. Overall, our results suggested that for hospitality educators and practitioners, recruiting students or hiring employees with higher service orientations might be a good strategy to promote the industry.

In contrast, although evidence regarding the role of emotional intelligence in affecting hospitality employees’ job performance abounds (e.g., Gwinner et al., 2005; Kidwell, Hardesty, Murtha, Sheng, 2011), our study revealed that emotional intelligence could neither contribute to one’s satisfaction with hospitality jobs nor one’s intention to join the industry. Thus, although hospitality educators and managers may consider hiring students or employees with higher emotional intelligence to enhance job performance, it is advised that emotional intelligence should not be used as an important facet to understand hospitality students’ or employees’ job satisfaction or retention decisions.

Our study is not without limitations. First, we used hotel students’ sample. Although these were post-internship students and they should have developed a good understanding regarding hospitality jobs already, it remained interesting to investigate whether the present findings could also be found based on samples from existing

hospitality employees. Second, we investigated the impact of service orientation on hospitality students' intention to join the industry. It should also be interesting that researchers investigate hospitality student's actual decisions to join the industry upon graduation. Third, we found that satisfaction with the hospitality industry only partially mediated the relationship between the service orientation and intention to join the industry. Therefore, the service orientation-intention to join the industry link is still partly a black-box and it remains imperative for researchers to further understand why service orientation could lead to career aspirations for hospitality jobs. Finally, we conducted the study in Hong Kong. It is worthwhile for researchers to assess whether the present findings can be applied to other contexts or not.

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