Perceptual Analysis of Internship Satisfaction and Employment Tendency in Hotel Industry

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Abstract

In China, there has always been a contradiction between the education of hotel management professionals and the low rate of employment in the industry. To find the root cause of the situation, this paper carries out a semi-structured questionnaire survey and in-depth interview on hotel management students interning in five-star hotels. The questionnaire was prepared based on the index system proposed in relevant literature. Based on the survey data, the author probed deep into the students' satisfaction with internship, their employment tendency in hotel industry with a structural equation model. The results show that the interns' perception of university management, hotel work support and hotel environment support have positive effects on their satisfaction the internship, while their expectation has a negative impact on their satisfaction with the internship; the students' employment tendency in hotel industry is promoted by their perception of hotel work support and hotel environment support, as well as their satisfaction with internship. The research findings provide new insights on the relationship between school learning, internship and employment in hotel industry.

Key words: *Hotel Industry, Internship Satisfaction, Employment Intention, Structural Equation Model.*

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INTRODUCTION

The hotel industry is one of the pillar industries in tourism, and plays a key role in the quality and level of the tourism reception industry in tourist destinations. However, many hotels have been struggling with high employee turnover, lack of high-quality personnel and other problems. To attract talents, hotels have been providing internships for university students. Hotel internship is an important part of professional practical teaching in tourism management and also a necessary means to test the results of both theoretic and practical teaching. It not only provides an important practical platform for students, but also alleviates hotels' pressure in human resources management. Students' perception of the industry during their internship will greatly affect their future career path; in other words, it will determine whether they will stay in the hotel industry. If we can measure how satisfied the students majoring in hotel management are with their internships and investigate the effects of relevant latent variables on their satisfaction with the internships and their career orientations, maybe we will be able to solve the above problems that the hotels have been struggling with.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of "job satisfaction" was explicitly put forward by Robert Hoppock, who defined it as "any combination of psychological,

physiological and environmental circumstances that cause a person truthfully to say I am satisfied with my job". The factors influencing the satisfaction of students majoring in tourism during their internships consists of external factors such as enterprises, universities and social environment as well as internal factors such as students' cognitive abilities, personal accomplishments and personalities. The existing research on satisfaction mainly focuses on the following aspects: the measurement index system of satisfaction (Audrey & Sam, 2017), related factors affecting satisfaction (Aarts & Thomassen, 2008), satisfaction characteristics of special groups (Schoenfeld, Loving, Pope et al., 2017) and shopping behaviors, etc. Since the 1980s, Western scholars have constructed many theoretical models to explain how customer satisfaction is formed (Pascoal, Narisco, & Pereira, 2014). Among them, the American Customer Satisfaction Model (ACSI) in 1994 and the European Customer Satisfaction Model (ECSI) in 1999 have been widely used. The Chinese Customer Satisfaction Model (CCSI) was established in 2001. Regarding satisfaction with hotel internship, there have been some but not much academic research, and most of it mainly focuses on the value perception of internship satisfaction (Christou, 1999), the factors affecting satisfaction, and the implications of internship satisfaction to staff training (Walo, 2001). There are also studies that work on the serious mismatch between the number of interns and the number of employees staying in the industry, but there is no corresponding quantitative investigation. Based on the theories of customer satisfaction and behavior choice, this paper constructs a measurement index system for such concepts as student internship value, environmental perception, satisfaction and employment tendency, so as to investigate the factors influencing the satisfaction of hotel interns and their influences on the intern's employment tendency.

The internship of university students is a very important teaching process and also an important bridge between classroom study and work. Most of the existing literatures on internship are about medical students, especially those majoring in nursing. This is determined by the nature of this major, as medicine is all about saving lives and it cannot afford trial and error (Brinkman, Tichelaar, van Agtmael et al., 2015; Maxwell, Coleman, Bollington et al., 2017; Silva,

Lopes, Costa et al., 2018). There are also many researchers who have discussed the internships of university students majoring in business and economics and concluded that these internships have a significant role in promoting the general abilities of graduates (Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Schworm, Cadin, Carbone et al., 2017). Of course, the internships of students majoring in tourism has also attracted the attention of some researchers (Beggs, Ross & Knapp, 2006; Ruhanen, Robinson & Breakey, 2013). Scholars have analyzed the effects of short-term internships, the combination of practice and theory and the content design of internships (Lam & Xiao, 2000; Gault, Leach & Duey., 2010). Most of the studies have covered the relationships between internship and employability, and it is generally believed that internship experience is an important factor affecting employability (Hills, Robertson, Walker et al., 2003; Crossman & Clarke, 2010; Imose & Barber, 2015). Some researchers have also summarized the factors affecting the internship effects, and believed that the arrangement of internships, the satisfaction of interns, the salaries and benefits given by enterprises, and opportunities for career planning are all possible factors (Lam & Ching, 2007; Beggs, Ross, & Goodwin, 2008; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Alagaraja & Arthur-Mensah, 2013). Some papers have investigated interns' attitudes towards internships and their interpersonal relationships (Gates, 2014; Silva, Costa, Seabra et al.,2016). In terms of research methods, many researchers have used quantitative analysis and verified relevant hypotheses based on large sample survey data (Maertz, Stoeberl & Marks, 2014; Eriksson & Wallerstedt, 2018).

CONCEPTUAL PROPOSITION AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

According to the individual behavior theory, an individual behavior takes place under the control of a behavior intention, while a behavior intention is a result of the interaction between evaluation criteria and behavioral attitudes (Bernauer & Vatter, 2012). Based on the American Customer Satisfaction Model (ACSI) and the Chinese Customer Satisfaction Model (CCSI), this study constructs a conceptual model for the internship satisfaction of students majoring in hotel management, in which, the

students' internship expectation, university management perception, hotel work support perception and hotel environment support perception are endogenous latent variables, and the students' satisfaction and employment tendency are exogenous latent variables.

The students' internship expectation is borrowed from the concept of "customer expectation", which refers to the future expectation of a customer for the ability of the product (service) provider to provide quality products (services) based on his/her previous consumption experience. The internship expectation in this study refers to the general expectation of a student before he/she takes the internship in the hotel, which includes the overall expectation that the internship can improve his/her own practical skills and help him/her gain more leverage in employment. Previous studies have shown that students' expectation has a positive effect on the internship value perception, but a negative effect on the internship satisfaction. This study hypothesizes that it has a negative effect on satisfaction and a positive effect on employment tendency.
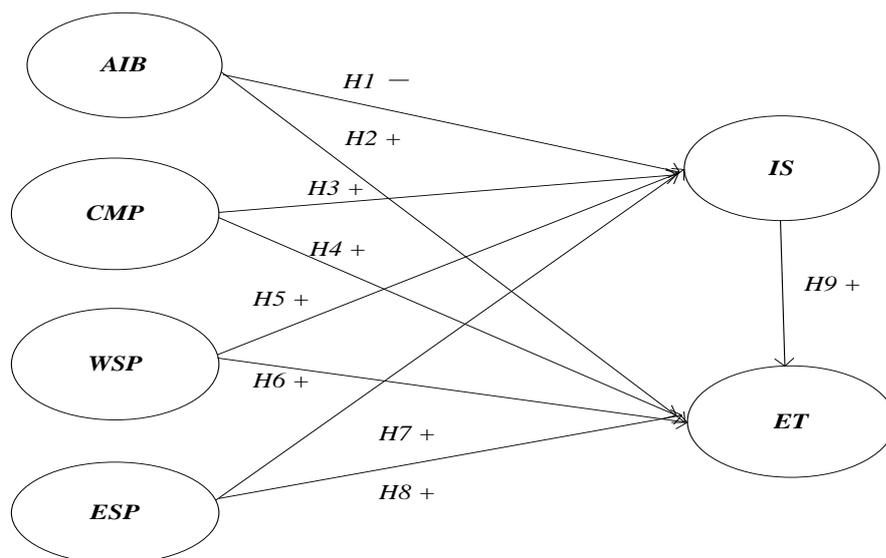
Students' university management perception comes from the variable of "quality perception" in customer satisfaction evaluation, which refers

to the actual feeling of a customer when he or she is receiving or using a certain product or service. Accordingly, the university management perception of students in this study refers to the general feeling of a student when he or she is experiencing various "university services" in the whole process of internship, including the academic requirements of the university, the guidance of teachers and the efforts made by the university in safeguarding their own rights. This study hypothesizes that this factor has a positive effect on the satisfaction and employment tendency.

Hotel work support perception and hotel environment support perception are also derived from the concept of "quality perception". Hotel work support perception includes both material and spiritual aspects, such as accommodation conditions, degree of respect and convenience of work arrangements. Hotel environment support perception mainly involves the location of the hotel, corporate culture, development space and other aspects. It is assumed that both of these factors have a positive effect on internship satisfaction and employment tendency.

Based on the above research hypotheses, the following paths are proposed (Figure 1):

Figure 1. **Path diagram for hypotheses**

Note: AIB, CMP, WSP, ESP, IS and ET are short for anticipated internship benefit, university management perception, hotel work support perception, hotel environment support perception, internship satisfaction and employment tendency, respectively.

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VARIABLE DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the measurement index system proposed in relevant literature and with the information obtained from the early semi-structured questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews, this study completed a questionnaire survey consisting of 32 measurement variables, and pre-investigated the hotels with 80 questionnaires. According to the reliability and validity test of the obtained

data, as well as the validity of the communication between the investigator and the respondents in the course of investigation, and considering the suggestions by some experts, the variables were added or reduced accordingly, and the semantic expression of each variable is carefully considered so as to facilitate the understanding of interns, and improve the quality and efficiency of data collection. The final revised questionnaire on the effect of interns' perception on their satisfaction and employment tendency includes 28 measurement variables and 6 latent variables. Each latent variable is characterized by 3-6 measurement variables. In addition to the attribute variables of the respondents themselves, the 5-Likert scale is also used to quantitatively set the 28 measurement indices, and 1-5 points are assigned according to the degree of approval expressed by the respondents.

The structural equation model has a unique advantage in measuring the complex relationship between the multi-dimensional measurement variables and latent variables, and further exploring whether there are correlations among latent variables. First of all, model setting, confirmatory factor analysis and goodness-of-fit judgment should be carried out, followed by the final modification, evaluation and optimization of the model. Therefore, it has significant advantages in measuring the correlation of multidimensional variables, especially in the field of latent variables which are difficult to directly observe and measure (Lee & Park, 2015). According to the theoretical analysis above, the comprehensive value perception of students about internship is a comprehensive subjective impression influenced by multi-dimensional variables, and its effects on the internship satisfaction and the employability is explored in this study. It is feasible to find the latent variables on the basis of a large number of basic observational variables and investigate the

interactions among them, so the structural equation model is adopted in this study to measure and analyze them. The specific theoretical model and formula are as follows (Figure 2):

Figure 2. **Theoretical structural equation model**
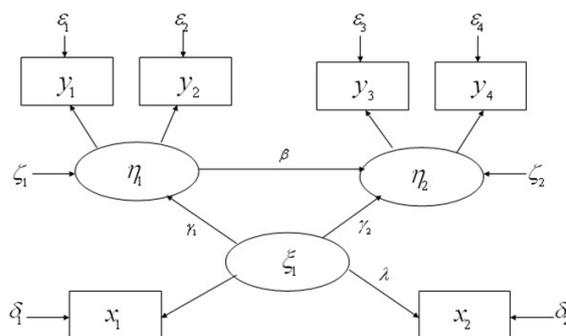
The relationship between observational variables and latent variables is expressed by the following measurement equations:

$$\underset{(q\times1)}{X} = \underset{(q\times n)}{\Lambda_x} \underset{(n\times1)}{\xi} + \underset{(q\times1)}{\delta}$$

$$\underset{p\times1}{y} = \underset{(p\times m)}{\Lambda_y} \underset{(m\times1)}{\eta} + \underset{(p\times1)}{\varepsilon} \tag{1}$$

where, x is the q*1 vector constituted of q exogenous measurement variables; y is the p*1 vector constituted of p endogenous measurement variables; ξ is the n*1 vector constituted of n exogenous latent variables; η is the m*1 vector constituted of m endogenous latent variables; Λ_x is the p*m factor load matrix of X on ξ; and ε is measurement error.

The relationship among latent variables is expressed with the following structural equation:

$$\underset{(m\times1)}{\eta} = \underset{(m\times m)}{B} \underset{(m\times1)}{\eta} + \underset{(m\times n)}{\Gamma} \underset{(n\times1)}{\xi} + \underset{(m\times1)}{\zeta} \tag{2}$$

where, B is the coefficient of interaction among endogenous latent variables; Γ is the path coefficient of the exogenous latent variables to the endogenous latent variables; and ζ is the residual vector of η, which reflects the unexplained part.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The data used in this study were collected from the questionnaire survey on 5 five-star hotels in a coastal city in April 2017. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed and 268 were collected, with an effective rate of 89.33%. The respondents included 53 boys, and 215 girls, the latter of whom accounted for 80.22%.

Overview of research variables

According to the statistics of the questionnaire survey, the students' internship expectation, university management perception and hotel environment support perception obtained high scores, i.e. 3.92, 3.78 and 3.69, respectively. This indicates that the interns have relatively high expectations for hotel internship before starting the internship. According to the scores of the corresponding measurement variables, students have a high expectation that internship can improve their frontline work experience and skills, and some also have a high expectation that they can get better job opportunities through internships. The scores of hotel work support perception, satisfaction and tendency to stay in the industry are relatively low, i.e. 3.21, 3.09 and 2.97, respectively, indicating that the students felt that the hotel did not give enough support for their own career development during the course of internship, which thus led to a lower score of satisfaction and employment intention.

Analysis of reliability and validity

By reference to the related indices of consumer perception and behaviors, this paper proposed relevant variables according to the personality characteristics of university students and the current situation of hotel internship, and verified their reliability and effectiveness. The reliability and validity of the sample data are tested by SPSS 21, which shows that the α coefficient of the whole questionnaire is 0.861, and that the α coefficient of each latent variable is also above 0.7. The results indicate that the internal structure of the questionnaire is logic and stable, so the data are highly reliable. The KMO coefficient is 0.819, the chi-square value of the Bartlett spherical test is 11952.3, and the degree of freedom is 249, which indicate that the questionnaire is highly effective.

Confirmatory factor analysis

In order to investigate the effective interpretation of measurement variables to latent variables, Lisrel 8.7 is used for confirmatory factor analysis. According to the criterion that the effective factor load should be greater than 0.5, two measurement factors such as the "professional qualification certification can be obtained through internship" and "teachers need to provide timely guidance in hotel" are deleted from the expected latent variables of internship, and in the perceived latent variables of university management, with the factor loads being 0.369 and 0.421 respectively, the α coefficient of the new scale is changed to 0.893, the α coefficients of the two optimized latent variables are also improved accordingly, and the index of the adjusted scale is reduced from 28 to 26.

Estimation, evaluation and modification of the model

Lisrel 8.7 is used to set and verify the path of the structural equation model, and the results show that the factor loads of the 26 measurement variables on their corresponding latent variables all reach the critical standard of more than 0.5, and only 3 variables have factor loads of below 0.6. This is to ensure that each latent variable has a certain number of measurement variables, with these three variables retained. From the path coefficient of each latent variable in the structural model, the absolute values of 7 coefficients are above 0.5, and the absolute value of the T value also exceeds 1.96, that is to say, 7 out of 9 paths have passed the hypothesis test. According to the three kinds of fitting indices for evaluating structural equation model, the χ^2/df index, which is greatly influenced by sample size, is scored as 2.526, which is less than upper limit 3, indicating that it has reached a good level. GFI is an index indicating the fitting degree, and 0.886 indicates that there is a good match between the survey data and the designed path map. The RMSEA index is also within the ideal range of 0.05-0.08. The indices of simple fitting degree and value-added fitting degree also basically reach or are close to the tolerance limit, and the initial model as a whole meets the requirements of relevant parameters.

Table 1. **Relative indices to measure the goodness-of-fit of the model**

Index name	Absolute fit			Simple fit		Value-added fit		
	χ^2/df	GFI	RMSEA	PNEI	PGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI
Fit value	2.526	0.886	0.069	0.72	0.679	0.847	0.876	0.903
Result	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Available	Available	Good

Table 2. **Effects of variables and test conclusions**

Hypothesis	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	Result
H1	-0.65	—	-0.65	Supportive
H2	—	—	—	Non-supportive
H3	0.62	—	0.62	Supportive
H4	—	—	-0.68	Non-supportive
H5	0.75	—	0.75	Supportive
H6	0.67	0.58	1.25	Supportive
H7	0.72	—	0.72	Supportive
H8	0.61	0.52	1.13	Supportive
H9	0.86	—	0.86	Supportive

Analysis of model results and total effect

The path coefficient of each latent variable is summarized, with the direct effect, indirect effect, total effect and final test conclusions shown in Table 2.

From the above table, it can be seen that, among the nine paths proposed in the research hypotheses, the paths H1, H3, H5, H6, H7, H8 and H9 have passed the significance test, that is, the following hypotheses are supported: (1) Interns' expected income has a negative effect on the internship satisfaction. The gap between the high internship expectation and the actual internship environment is an important reason for the students' low satisfaction. (2) The university management perception has a positive effect on the students' internship satisfaction. A good university-enterprise cooperation relationship and effective university management for interns have significant effects on the psychological and practical support of interns. However, its impact on the employment tendency of interns has not passed the test. (3) The hotel work support perception has a significant effect on the satisfaction and employment tendency of interns. The attitude of relevant departments and personnel of the hotel in supporting their work during the internship will greatly affect how the interns value their jobs. (4) The hotel environment support perception has a positive effect on the internship satisfaction and the employment tendency. The corporate culture of the hotel and the development space that the hotel can provide play vital roles in the satisfaction of interns and whether they will choose to stay in the industry.

(5) The positive effect of internship satisfaction on employment tendency is the most significant, and comprehensive value satisfaction will obviously play a fundamental role in whether interns choose to stay in the hotel industry.

CONCLUSION AND COUNTERMEASURES

From the above analysis, it is easy to know that various dimensions of the value perception of hotel interns have important effects on their internship satisfaction and whether they will ultimately choose to stay in the hotel industry for employment. According to the research, well-targeted work will help improve the satisfaction of hotel interns, create an effective bridge between hotel talents demand and university talents training, attract more excellent talents to enter the hotel industry, and promote both quantity and quality of hotel human resources. The following work is particularly necessary: (1) A good pre-internship mobilization can help interns establish correct expectations about internship and industry. It is found that the high expectation on internship is an important factor that leads to students' low satisfaction. Therefore, students should be trained in various aspects before internship, such as career planning, psychological guidance for internship, hotel employment characteristics and development space. Moderate and reasonable internship expectations will have a positive effect in improving students' satisfaction and even their intention to stay in the hotel industry. (2) A quality hotel base with an excellent location, a sound corporate culture and large

space for career training and development should be chosen for the students. The internship is the window and test site for the students majoring in hotel management to be exposed to the industry. Their perception about environment will have a significant effect on their career choices. Therefore, we must choose cooperative hotels for internship considering the aspects of location, brand and corporate culture, etc. (3) We should build a close university-enterprise cooperation mode and mechanism. According to the research, the high perception of university management and hotel work support has a positive effect on the internship satisfaction and the employment of the industry. A good university-enterprise cooperation relationship is conducive to strengthening collaborative management and guidance of students during the internship. The absence of management in the period of internship in colleges and universities often leads to the psychological helplessness and insecurity of interns, affecting their internship performance and satisfaction (Waryszak, 2000). At the same time, a higher perception of support for the hotel internship will also make the interns feel more cared for and have a sense of belonging to the organization, and this will enhance their internship satisfaction and willingness to stay in the industry.

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