HOSPITALITY STUDENTS PERCEPTION OF PREFERRED HOTELS AS WORKPLACES

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Abstract

Hospitality students and graduates are a promising segment of the workforce for the hospitality industry. However, the industry was known for several recruitment problems due to its business nature which made it harder for hospitality students to choose to work there, especially in hotels. Hotels started to apply the concept of themselves as an employer of choice to win talented workers. To be an employer of choice, hotels must first identify the attributes that are mostly appealing to hospitality students. This research identified the most significant hotel attributes in attracting hospitality students to find their preferred hotel to work for. A total of 158 hospitality students were asked to fill out a questionnaire to rate the hotel attributes that most appealed to them, and then the mean score is calculated from each of the items. As the result, quality management, a happy environment, and good relationship with colleagues were the most appealed hotel attributes to hospitality students.

Keywords: employer of choice, hospitality students, hotels

Introduction

Talent is a key source of competitive advantage in today's corporate world. The hospitality industry has its own challenges in acquiring talent. The best workers are highly sought after, which makes them have easier time to find places that offer appealing values to them (Ng, 2013). Despite this, the hospitality industry has a number of problems when it comes to their reputation as a place to work. A high turnover culture and other recruitment issues are identified as problems that employers in the hospitality industry must address (Baum, 2019).

The highly seasonal nature of the hospitality industry results in majority of companies decide to operate with very little permanent labour in their composition, while additional part-time workers are hired during high season (Zopiatis et al., 2014). This makes it difficult for workers in the hospitality industry to have job security (Chalkiti & Sigala, 2010). Meanwhile, employee mobility remains a major challenge across companies in the hospitality industry (George et al., 2020). This sector is also associated with long working hours that make it difficult for workers to adjust to social life, the use of casual workers to support uncertain career development, and low pay and frequent delays (George et al., 2020). It was also found that a worrying new trend is forming, where hospitality workers usually end up leaving the industry entirely (Zopiatis et al., 2018).

Despite the issue of high employee turnover rates in the hospitality industry, some researchers reported that many hotel managers have not shown enough effort to keep hospitality graduates motivated to stay in the industry (Richardson, 2009) This is indicated with providing them lack of career planning and advancement opportunities, and often valuing them as a cheap labour where the hospitality sector is one of the lowest paid industries (Casado-Díaz & Simón, 2016). Such poor practices are known to negatively impact the process of attracting and retaining hospitality graduates and employees (Brown et al., 2016).

In the present, the hospitality industry is considering the importance of attracting the right people to join the organization. The strategy to become an employer of choice is helpful to manage both current and prospective employees more effectively, as a hotel that becomes an employer of choice, is more likely to win in the war for talent (Baker, 2014). By being an EOC, hotels can acquire advantages such as greater employee and customer satisfaction, greater referral rate, a higher rate of acceptance of job offers and a better new hire retention rate, a higher proportion of jobs filled internally and a greater level of engagement, organizational competitiveness, lower absenteeism and low turnover rate (Baker, 2014; Branham, 2005; Rampl, 2014; Rondeau & Wagar, 2006).

Organizations need to recognize the image they present to potential employees to clearly present themselves to the labour market in order to attract the most suitable applicants (Arachchige & Robertson, 2011). Job applicants need early signals from companies of their characteristics as employers to reduce information asymmetry in the employee search process (Wang, 2013), so that they have realistic perceptions. Prospective employees' perceptions of the characteristics of a job and organization have a significant role in attracting employees (Ahmad et al., 2020).

Hospitality students and graduates are a promising segment of the workforce for the hospitality industry. Much of hospitality student education is focused on producing graduates who are ready to enter the industry as entry-level managers (Hertzman et al., 2015). In addition to gaining specific knowledge, hospitality education generally requires students to complete an on-the-job training program in the hospitality industry, especially in hotels. It is not surprising that hospitality graduates who are equipped with work experience and academic knowledge are considered a step ahead for the industry in terms of competence compared to graduates of other majors.

Currently, hospitality students belong to Generation Z (born in 1995-2009), where the newer generation of workers is expected to have different preferences than workers in the older generation (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). The cultural environment is also an important element that influences the perceptions of potential employees regarding good and bad places to work (Ognjanović, 2021). There are still few studies that examine Generation Z's career perceptions in the hospitality industry (Goh & Lee, 2018), especially hospitality students with cultural backgrounds in Bali, Indonesia. The prominence of hospitality students as potential employees for the hospitality industry with appropriate work experience and academic knowledge, as well as the existing gaps in the literature,

indicate the importance of conducting a study on hospitality students to understand their interest in the choice of hotels as places to work.

Literature Review

1. Definition of Perception

Perception is the process of organizing, identifying, and interpreting sensory information to represent and understand the information presented or the environment (Schacter et al., 2011). Perception is not only a passive reception of existing signals, but is also influenced by learning, memory, expectations, and attention from the recipient (Bernstein, 2010).

2. Signalling Theory

Signalling Theory was first proposed by Spence (1978). This theory indicates that job applicants are influenced by any information related to the attributes of the organization, and perceive it as a signal (Younis & Hammad, 2021). This information can be obtained in a number of ways, both at the individual and organizational levels (Celani & Singh, 2011). Without the necessary information, a job seeker may create an inaccurate picture based on the signals he or she processes and derives from his or her own interpretations (Celani & Singh, 2011). Companies must consider the context of the information they disseminate, the source of the information and its credibility to be an attractive employer and to build a good image as an employer (Kashive & Khanna, 2017).

3. Employer of Choice (EOC)

The construct of the employer of choice (EOC) describes an organization which inspires individuals to join and stay (Bellou et al., 2015). The employees consciously choose to work for the EOC, in preference to other employers (Herman & Gioia, 2000). The construct of an EOC offers a holistic approach to the examination of the desired employment experience (Edwards, 2010).

The first step to become an EOC is to develop the value proposition (Bellou et al., 2015). Individuals prefer organizations that offer them what they consider important, so that they feel they do or can fit in (Bellou et al., 2015). To become an EOC it is necessary for an organization to build a value proposition that is important to them in particular (Bellou et al., 2015). This step includes understanding the possessed attractive attributes, which magnetize current and prospective employees (Herman & Gioia, 2000). When the organization is well known, the prospective employees will have a strong sense of what is central and distinctive about its attributes, especially relative to other firms (Whetten & Mackey, 2002).

Next, the company goes on by promoting specific promises to external audience of interest and is completed when it is marketed internally (Lievens, 2007).

Hotels, therefore, must also assess the attributes that are important to their targeted segment prospective employee to become their employer of choice. The understanding of these attributes will help them promoting the right promises when targeting the hospitality student and graduate segment.

4. Generation Z as The Present Hospitality Labour

Hospitality students in present have entered generation Z (Gen Z). Generation Z is the generation born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, generally defined as between 1995-2010 (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). Some of Gen Z are already actively in the workforce, and others are still in the process of transitioning into the workforce, such as hospitality students. Their introduction to the world of work comes with many challenges, with the Covid-19 pandemic and its attendant economic, social and labour implications.

Gen Z is characterized as highly ambitious and confident (Pataki-Bittó & Kapusy, 2021). This generation is motivated to find their dream jobs and opportunities to expand their skill sets (Magano et al., 2020). This has led to the belief that they are more likely to change jobs, or anything they dislike, than previous generations (Csiszárik-Kocsír & Garia-Fodor, 2018). In addition to the above, the driving motivators for Gen Z relate to advancement opportunities, increased salary, work that is meaningful to them, and good coworkers or teams (Csiszárik-Kocsír & Garia-Fodor, 2018). It was also found that Gen Z is attracted with flexibility in work and a balance between their lives inside and outside of work (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022).

Research Methodology

1. Research Sample and Characteristics

The data for this research was gathered from a total sample of 158 of eighth semester hospitality students of the Hospitality Department with a Diploma 4 study program at Bali Tourism Polytechnic. Within this total sample, there are two study programs, namely the Hotel Management (HM) which are represented by 106 students and Hospitality Accounting Management (HAM) which are represented by 52 students.

The Hospitality Department students at Bali Tourism Polytechnic were specifically chosen because of their relevant characteristics to the hospitality industry. These characteristics include having academic knowledge specific to the hospitality industry and having a total of two times six months on-the-job internship experience in hotels as work experience. In addition, these hospitality students are in the eighth semester of their study program and expected to graduate in less than six months, where they were actively considering their future career prospects. These characteristics are believed to form an ideal group to add to the understanding of the attributes that attract hospitality graduate students to seek employment in hotels.

2. Data Collection

Data was gathered from hospitality students by questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section contained questions requesting for the respondent personal data, which included their gender and study program which will be the base for the hospitality student segmentations.

The second section consisted of 32 items representing the hotel attributes as a place to work for the hospitality students. These items were drawn from the research done by Arachchige & Robertson (2011).

The respondents were asked to rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale. The higher the score, the more that item is considered important for hospitality students in evaluating their preferred hotel for a workplace.

3. Data Analysis

The objective of this study is to find out the most significant hotel attributes in attracting hospitality students in to find their preferred hotel to work for. The data analysis for this objective was done by computing the mean score of each of the items from all of the respondents. The findings will then be discussed by dividing the most-preferred and least-preferred attributes.

Results and Discussion

1. Questionnaire Validity and Reliability

The validity test of the questionnaire conducted in this study correlates the scores of 32 items with the total score of the construct. The significance level used is 0.05 and the item is considered valid if it has Pearson Correlation value greater than 0.30 (Sugiyono, 2016). The validity of each question item in the questionnaire is described in Table 1 as follows.

Table 1: Validity Test Result

Item Code	Pearson Correlation	Validity Requirement	Description
EC1	.386	0.300	Valid
EC2	.498	0.300	Valid
EC3	.512	0.300	Valid
EC4	.702	0.300	Valid
EC5	.737	0.300	Valid
EC6	.629	0.300	Valid
EC7	.701	0.300	Valid
EC8	.401	0.300	Valid
EC9	.784	0.300	Valid
EC10	.520	0.300	Valid
EC11	.687	0.300	Valid
EC12	.476	0.300	Valid
EC13	.617	0.300	Valid
EC14	.587	0.300	Valid
EC15	.530	0.300	Valid
EC16	.429	0.300	Valid
EC17	.398	0.300	Valid
EC18	.739	0.300	Valid
EC19	.669	0.300	Valid
EC20	.520	0.300	Valid
EC21	.811	0.300	Valid
EC22	.413	0.300	Valid
EC23	.673	0.300	Valid
EC24	.595	0.300	Valid
EC25	.692	0.300	Valid

Item Code	Pearson Correlation	Validity Requirement	Description
EC26	.780	0.300	Valid
EC27	.842	0.300	Valid
EC28	.467	0.300	Valid
EC29	.617	0.300	Valid
EC30	.766	0.300	Valid
EC31	.801	0.300	Valid
EC32	.481	0.300	Valid

[Source: Research Data, 2023]

The reliability test was carried out using the Cronbach's Alpha method, where the magnitude of the alpha coefficient represented the level of reliability of the questionnaire. The instrument is said to be reliable if it has an α score> 0.70 (Azwar, 2016). The reliability test results are described in Table 2 as follows.

Table 2: Reliability Test Result

No. of Item	Cronbach Alpha	Reliability Requirement	Description
32	0.927	0.700	Reliable

[Source: Research Data, 2023]

The result described in Table 1 and Table 2 shows that the questionnaire is considered valid and reliable to be used in this research.

2. Result Findings: Hotel Attributes Overall Preferences

Hospitality students' overall preferences for hotel attributes in general are measured by computing the mean score of each questionnaire item. The mean score of the items for hotel choice as a place to work is described in Table 3.

Table 3: Mean Scores of Hotel Attributes Items

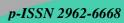| Item Code	Item Statement	Mean
EOC1	I choose to work in a hotel with a large property.	6.09
EOC2	I choose to work at a hotel that I recognized through advertisements and other media.	5.59
EOC3	I choose to work in a hotel by first learning about the types of products and/or services offered.	6.06
EOC4	I choose to work in a high-profit hotel.	6.59
EOC5	I choose to work in a hotel that has high quality products and services	6.49
EOC6	I choose to work in a hotel with quality management.	6.87
EOC7	I choose to work in a hotel with an above-average base salary.	6.39
EOC8	I choose to work in a hotel with attractive compensation.	6.43
EOC9	I choose to work in a hotel that has job security.	6.75
EOC10	I choose to work in a hotel that could serve as a stepping stone for future employment.	6.30

Item Code	Item Statement	Mean
EOC11	I choose to work in a hotel that has good promotion opportunities.	6.53
EOC12	I choose to work in a hotel that gives me the opportunity to apply what I learned in college.	5.94
EOC13	I choose to work in a hotel that gives me the opportunity to teach others what I have learned.	6.08
EOC14	I choose to work in a hotel that gives back to the community and its environment.	6.08
EOC15	I choose to work in a hotel where I could have a sense of acceptance and belonging.	6.69
EOC16	I choose to work in a hotel with a happy working environment.	6.84
EOC17	I choose to work in a hotel that gives me recognition/appreciation from management.	6.59
EOC18	I choose to work in a hotel that is known for being fair and honest.	6.77
EOC19	I choose to work in a customer-oriented hotel.	6.27
EOC20	I choose to work in a hotel where I maintain good relationships with my coworkers.	6.80
EOC21	I choose to work in a hotel by maintaining a good relationship with my superiors.	6.68
EOC22	I choose to work in a hotel with supportive and encouraging coworkers.	6.78
EOC23	I choose to work in a hotel that gave me confidence.	6.79
EOC24	I choose to work in a hotel that promotes my self-esteem.	6.79
EOC25	I choose to work in hotels that provide career-enhancing experiences.	6.76
EOC26	I choose to work in an innovative hotel with forward-thinking working practices.	6.56
EOC27	I choose to work in a hotel that values and utilizes the creativity of its workers.	6.61
EOC28	I choose to work in hotels that provide innovative products and services.	6.38
EOC29	I choose to work in a hotel that provides a broad/inter-departmental experience.	6.45
EOC30	I choose to work in a hotel with an exciting work environment.	6.68
EOC31	I choose to work in a hotel with a fun work environment.	6.75
EOC32	I choose to work in a hotel that gives me respect from my family and friends.	6.03

[Source: Research Data, 2023]

Table 4: Most-Preferred and Least-Preferred Hotel Attributes

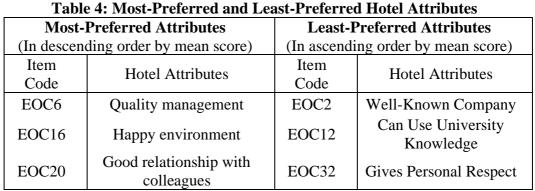| Most-Preferred Attributes (In descending order by mean score)		Least-Preferred Attributes (In ascending order by mean score)	
Item Code	Hotel Attributes	Item Code	Hotel Attributes
EOC6	Quality management	EOC2	Well-Known Company
EOC16	Happy environment	EOC12	Can Use University Knowledge
EOC20	Good relationship with colleagues	EOC32	Gives Personal Respect

[Source: Research Data, 2023]

Hospitality students' preferences for the choice of hotel as a place to work are further explained by picking two groups consisted of 3 item each with the highest mean score and the lowest mean score. The group that consists of items with highest mean score is labelled the Most-Preferred Attributes. Conversely, the group with lowest mean score is labelled the Least-Preferred Attributes. These two groups are described in Table 4.
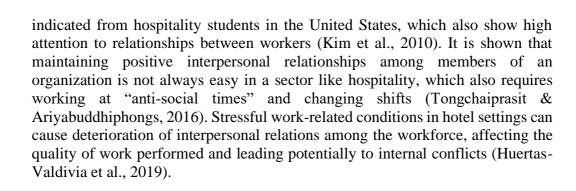
3. Discussion of Findings
A.   Most-Preferred Hotel Attributes

Hospitality students in Bali show great interest in the non-material attributes of hotels. Highest interest is shown towards hotels that have a management of good quality. This is an important finding for hotels, because an effective management is a major contributor to the success of a hospitality firm (Liang et al., 2017; Shum et al., 2018). For the majority of hospitality students that will join the industry as entry-level staff, this is even more important. Supervisory managers who oversee line-level employees, as these managers interact daily with their subordinates (Mistry et al., 2022). It is indicated that employee engagement relies heavily on the manager in charge (Fuller & Shikaloff, 2016). In addition to the direct interaction of employees with the individual of managers, it is reasonable for hotel to also take a look at the dynamism of the hotel management. This may be associated with the work system, including work facilities, job delegation, and the established work process, etc. as the management are seen responsible to establish a good system for the employee to work.

The work environment is also a big concern for hospitality students in Bali for choosing a hotel as a place to work. They prioritize hotels with a happy workplace. In this case, there are similarities between hospitality students in Bali and Polish and Spanish hospitality students who want good working conditions (Grobelna, 2017). Some studies done in hotels in Bali have also investigated the impact of work environment to employees (Anggreni et al., 2018; Dewi, 2021; Wiadnyana et al., 2020). It is shown that the work environments positively and significantly to employee work spirit and performance.

Along with work environment, it is also important for hospitality students in Bali to maintain good relationships with their co-workers in the hotel. The same

indicated from hospitality students in the United States, which also show high attention to relationships between workers (Kim et al., 2010). It is shown that maintaining positive interpersonal relationships among members of an organization is not always easy in a sector like hospitality, which also requires working at "anti-social times" and changing shifts (Tongchaiprasit & Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016). Stressful work-related conditions in hotel settings can cause deterioration of interpersonal relations among the workforce, affecting the quality of work performed and leading potentially to internal conflicts (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2019).

B. Least-Preferred Hotel Attributes

Hotel attributes that show the superiority of the company such as being well-known hotel is not prioritized by hospitality students in Bali. This is attributes are often possessed by big hotel with well-known brands which has the resource to market their properties intensively. This finding clarifies what has been believed all along that such attribute was very important to hospitality students. When they are faced with the choice of working for a hotel, and the hotel is judged solely on its size and stars as in the baseline survey of this study and other employer assessment surveys (Hsu & Hiltebrand, 2019), hospitality students strongly prioritize working at the highest star hotel. However, when confronted with various other hotel attributes, hotel size and popularity were found to be among the least prioritized attributes.

Despite having industry-specific knowledge from their educational background, hospitality students do not prioritize whether their work in hotels is in line with the education they have undertaken. This may indicate that they are completely fine with the adaptation needed to the standard of the hotel they are working for. In addition, this may also indicate that hospitality students are open to learning new knowledge and skills of a job position upon working in a hotel, and do not rigidly stick to the past knowledge they acquire in their respective university

While hotel jobs that boost self-confidence are prioritized by hospitality students in Bali, they are less concerned with whether these jobs bring respect from people around them, such as family and friends. This indicates that the self-confidence desired by the students comes from within themselves. Working in a the right hotel for them directly increases the self-confidence of hospitality students.

Conclusions

This study successfully identified the most significant hotel attributes in the hospitality industry in attracting hospitality students in seeking employment. Hospitality students show the greatest interest to the quality of management, appealed to a happy work environment, and a good relationship with colleagues. These attributes may be used by hotels to understand better on how become the employer of choice of the hospitality students.

Hospitality students choose to work with a good hotel with a good management. This makes establishing a hotel management of quality the most

important agenda for hotels. This is because an effective management is a major contributor to the success of a hospitality firm (Liang et al., 2017; Shum et al., 2018), and this research shows its also important in making the hotel a desirable place to work.

Making the work environment a happy environment must also be the focus of hotel in becoming employer of choice for hospitality students. This is also followed by the presence of good relationships with colleagues. This is not surprising, since today's hospitality students are part of Generation Z, which good co-workers or teams are known to be the driving motivator for them (Csiszárik-Kocsír & Garia-Fodor, 2018).

Hotels must increase their attention in developing these attributes to become the employer of choice for hospitality students. This may mean for them to focus their resources in these attributes among other attributes. Once the attributes are well developed, hotels can communicate their possession of these attributes to come on top among other hotels in terms of being the most desirable place to work.
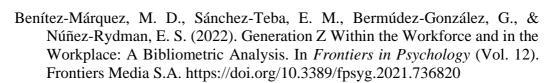
Acknowledgement

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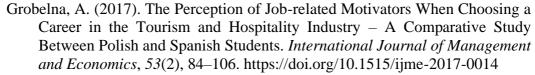
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