

## **UNDERGRADUATE TOURISM STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS TOURISM INDUSTRY: THE CASE OF DAEJEON, SOUTH KOREA**

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**Abstract:** Examining the perceptions and attitudes of current undergraduate tourism students toward tourism industry is the main purpose of this study. In this research, undergraduate Korean tourism students were selected to learn their perceptions and attitudes towards tourism industry. A total of 150 questionnaire were made equally in Daejeon, South Korea, during May 2016-June 2016. When the process completed, datas were imported in to the Statistical Package Social Science 17.0 (SPSS 17.0), where descriptive analyses, factor analysis, Mann Whitney U Test and Kruskal Wallis Test were undertaken. Study results showed that tourism job is interesting, worth of doing, need less skills, people can use their ability and skills and get pleasure while working, on the other hand some negative perceptions and prejudices about tourism industry were derived from to the responses of students.

**Key Words:** Tourism, Education, Korea, Workforce, Perceptions, Students

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism industry is the largest service industry and largest employment generator in the world. With increasing globalization and disposable income, tourism has over the last few decades, became one of the largest and fastest growing industries all over the world (Amalu et al., 2012; UNCTAD, 2013). For example while, the number of tourists travelling around the world in 2013 was 1.087 millions of people, this number has increased up to 1.135 millions of people in 2014 (TUROFED, 2015) and it continues to increase. As for the entire world, tourism maintains its characteristic by being a continuously developing industry in South Korea. According to UNWTO, South Korea is the 20<sup>th</sup> most visited country in the world, and the 6<sup>th</sup> most visited in Asia, where 12, 1 million foreign tourists visited in 2013 (UNWTO, 2015). In addition to these informations, according to Euromonitor Internationals' 2013 declaration about annual Top City Destinations Ranking, covering 100 of the world's leading cities in terms of international tourist arrivals, Seoul is at the 13 place (Bremner, 2015). Because of rapidly growing of international tourism industry every year in worldwide, customer satisfaction has become most important issue for countries. Although there are many factors that affect tourist satisfaction, such as service quality, attractiveness, activities, destination image, price and so on, labour-force is the most important factor. Factors such as quality of services, business performance, business

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itself, destination and/or country image and etc. depend on a well-educated, well-trained, skilled, enthusiastic and committed work-force. Bettencourt and Brown (1997) claims that employee attitudes, performance and behavior are key determinants of service quality, which has a direct linkage to customer satisfaction and loyalty. High quality services and work-forces attitudes affect tourists' intention of coming back to business or destination. However, some researchers (Rosentbluth, 1991; Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996) suggested that without employees positive attitude toward their work, there is minimal chance for the organization to achieve customer satisfaction and loyalty. Well educated and well trained work-force gives not only high quality service but also provides healthy and qualified relationship among tourists and workers. Tourism industry entails plenty of "face to face" interaction with its customers and that makes the tourism industry highly dependent on an adequate balance between the hard and the soft skills of its employees (Hinch & Butler, 2007). Olcay (2008) suggests that the high qualified education in the tourism industry which is based on service element, contributes significantly to the regional economic development as well as the employee himself. Up to now, it's point out by researches (Gökdeniz et al., 2002; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Baum, 2006; Deery & Shaw, 1999; Freeland, 2000) that well educated work-force and workers' attitudes and behaviors affect customer satisfaction but these workers stay away from the industry due to some problems. Tourism industry confranted with problem of attaracting and retaining qualified work-force. It's claimed that there are plenty of factors which cause challenges among tourism industry employees. These problems were summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Challenges in Tourism Industry Workforce

<b>Work-force Problems</b>	<b>Researchers</b>
Low wage	Roney and Öztin (2007), Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000), Pavesic and Brymer (1990), Kokko and Guerrier (1994), Iverson and Deery (1997), Goodall (1987), Lucas and Jefferies (1991), Riley at al., (2002)
Poor working conditions	Roney and Öztin (2007), Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000), Pavesic and Brymer (1990), Kokko and Guerrier (1994), Iverson and Deery (1997), Doherty et al., (2001), Jenkins (2001), Goodall (1987), Haywood and Maki (1991), Brien (2004)
Irregular and long working hours	Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000), Birdir (2002)
Seasonal working	Kozak (2009), Pelit and Güçer (2006), Roney and Öztin (2007)
High turnover	Pavesic and Brymer (1990), Kokko and Guerrier (1994), Iverson and Deery (1997), Doherty et al., (2001), Jenkins (2001), Goodall (1987), Haywood and Maki (1991), Doherty et al., (2001)
Low job satisfaction	Doherty et al., (2001), Jenkins (2001), Pavesic and Brymer (1990)
Absence of motivating factors	Doherty et al., (2001), Jenkins (2001), Pavesic and Brymer (1990)
Lack of security	Goodall (1987)
Limited training	Goodall (1987)
Poor image	Lucas and Jefferies (1991), Riley at al., (2002)
Low career potential	Lucas and Jefferies (1991)
Low statue	Riley at al., (2002)

As seen in Table 1, wages are low in tourism industry. Besides, employees work in poor conditions in irregular and long working hours. Turnover rate is high and job satisfaction is low. Security is not efficient and motivating factors don't exist. These problems may cause challenges and obligations in workforce of tourism industry. Tourism industries' development depends on many factors, but one of the most important is the qualification of human resources. Human resources is an important and vulnerable

segment of tourism industry regarding to its role in making a connection with the tourists as the users of services given in tourism industry. Gruescu et al., (2008) argue that the story of successful tourism enterprises is largely about people – how they are trained and educated, how they are valued and rewarded, and how they are supported through a process of continuous learning and career development. The increasing of the tourism industry competitiveness largely depends on the human resources quality improvement (Milic et al., 2011:435). Many studies have recently conducted about focusing on how tourism education must be. For instance, Morgan (2004) found that in order to prepare the students for the future, the industry should be a part of the tourism education. Aksu & Köksal (2005) mentioned that tourism students have negative perceptions and attitudes toward the tourism industry. Lam and Xiao (2000) suggested that there is a big gap between the supply and the demand of qualified personnel and curriculums are generally have poor designs. They found that the tourism graduates from institutes and vocational schools in China often fail to meet industry needs due to the number of unstable curriculums. Several researchers have also studied the perceptions of undergraduate tourism and hospitality management students. In these studies it is found that students tend to be fairly realistic before graduation but turnover number of these students were high (Casado, 1992); the beginner students had positive images of the industry, whereas the students with work experience were less positive. It was obvious that work experience as a trainee in the industry affected their perceptions in a negative way (Pavesicve Brymer, 1990; Kozak & Kızılırmak, 2001; Barron & Maxwell, 1993). Students have negative perceptions towards different dimensions of working in tourism (Unluonen, 2004; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000); unqualified education in tourism effects students' success negatively in the industry (Birdir, 2002).

According to these researches, it is obvious that sustainable tourism development needs high qualified and educated workforce. So, undergraduate tourism students' perceptions and attitudes towards tourism industry is emphasized in this study. Therefore, tourism businesses and governmental cooperations can see the view of tourism students' and take the precautions in case it needs. Because these students will be the high educated workforce of South Korea tourism industry in the near future.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research is aimed investigating the perceptions and attitudes of undergraduate tourism students and examine the differences in South Korean students views. A sample was selected from students studying tourism in South Korea. That's why from nonprobability, purposive sampling was chosen. Purposive sampling is a type of sampling that is characterized by the use of judgement and a deliberate effort to obtain representative samples by including typical groups in the sample (Kerlinger, 1986). Undergraduate South Korean tourism students were selected to learn their perceptions and attitudes. A survey was used for data collection. It was composed of two sections: First section was contained as a set of 60 statements about students' perceptions and attitudes towards tourism industry. 5-point likert scale was used to measure the students' agreement to statements. Second section was composed of 7 demographic questions about characteristics of students. In order to measure perception and attitudes of tourism students in South Korea, a multi-dimensional and multi-item attitudes scale was used which Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) improved. Scale format is the Likert type scale with five categories (1=strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3= No opinion, 4= Disagree, 5=strongly disagree) that selected to measure attitudes. For the sake of the clarity of the statement, the initial scale was pre-tested on a sample of

25 South Korean students. After the pre-test students told that some statements have same meaning for them. That's why these statements were removed from original scale. On the other hand, some statements were not used from original scale because almost half of the students have not any work experience in tourism industry in both countries. A total of 150 questionnaire were made equally in South Korea, during May 2016-June 2016. When the process completed, data were imported in to the Statistical Package Social Science 17.0 (SPSS 17.0), where descriptive analyses, factor analysis, Mann Whitney U Test and Kruskal Wallis Test were undertaken.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, 150 tourism undergraduate students took place in Daejeon city in South Korea. As seen at Table 2, majority of respondents were female (56%) and more than half of them (52.7%) are at 18-20 age. 74 students had a background in other schools rather than vocational high school and most part respondents (30.7%) were freshman in their education.

**Table 2.** Some Characteristics of Survey Sample in Frequency Distributions and Percentages

	N	%
<b>Age</b>		
18-20	79	52.7
21-23	66	44.0
24-26	5	3.0
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	66	44.0
Female	84	56.0
<b>Type of high school</b>		
Vocational high school (tourism)	39	26.0
Other	111	74.0
<b>Class</b>		
Freshmen	46	30.7
2. Class (Sophomore)	41	27.3
3. Class (Junior)	38	25.3
4. Class (Senior)	25	16.7
<b>Did you choose tourism education voluntarily?</b>		
Yes	143	95.3
No	7	4.7
<b>Did you have any information about the tourism industry while choosing this department?</b>		
Yes	122	81.3
No	28	18.7
<b>If you knew the working conditions in the tourism industry, have you ever chosen this department for education?</b>		
Yes	138	92.0
No	12	8.0
<b>Have you ever worked in tourism industry?</b>		
Yes	75	50.0
No	75	50.0

Almost all students (95.3%) have chosen tourism school willingly and most part of respondents (81.3%) indicated that they had information about the tourism industry while choosing this department. The question - 'if you knew the working conditions in tourism industry, have you ever choose this department?' – was replied with “yes” with

the rate of 92%. This means that almost all of the tourism students have information about tourism industry before they choose this department. In Table 3, a summarized result of perceptions and attitudes of undergraduate tourism can be seen. Attitudes towards each dimension are discussed below:

**Table 3.** Result of Mann Whitney U Test

VARIABLES		1. Commitment to the Industry	2. Coworkers	3. Managers	4. Promotion Opportunities	5. Nature of Work	6. Social Status	7. Industry-Person Congeniality	8. Family Life	9. Physical Working Conditions	10. Pay/Benefits	11. Future
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Z</b>	-1.324	-.362	-1.170	-2.378	-1.554	-2.833	-1.871	-.932	-.212	-2.877	-1.883
	<b>p</b>	.185	.717	.242	.017	.120	.005	.061	.251	.832	.004	.060
<b>Type of High School</b>	<b>Z</b>	-1.400	-1.542	-1.803	-.847	-1.922	-.688	-2.108	-.560	-1.373	-2.493	-.383
	<b>p</b>	.162	.123	.071	.397	.055	.492	.035	.576	.170	.013	.702
<b>Choosing tourism Education voluntarily</b>	<b>Z</b>	-.041	-.005	-1.452	-3.018	-.829	-2.707	-.701	-.719	-1.214	-.829	-1.040
	<b>p</b>	.967	.996	.147	.003	.407	.007	.483	.472	.225	.407	.298
<b>Worked in tourism industry before</b>	<b>Z</b>	-.813	-2.857	-1.306	-.366	-2.485	-1.33	-3.601	-1.208	-.488	-2.301	-2.277
	<b>p</b>	.416	.004	.192	.714	.013	.182	.000	.227	.626	.021	.023
p < .05												

It can be understood from table 3 that there have been significant differences seen for factors 4, 6 and 10 for the gender variable. For the type of School Variable, there have been significant differences seen for industry-person congeniality and pay/benefit factors. On the other hand, there have been significant differences seen for factors 4 and 6 for choosing tourism education voluntarily variable. For the having worked in Tourism Industry before variable, there have been significant differences seen for co-workers, nature of work, industry-person congeniality, pay/benefits and future factors. Table 4 shows the Kruskal Wallis Test results of dimensions changes according to age and class.

**Table 4.** Result of Kruskal Wallis Test

VARIABLES		1. Commitment to the Industry	2. Coworkers	3. Managers	4. Promotion Opportunities	5. Nature of Work	6. Social Status	7. Industry-Person Congeniality	8. Family Life	9. Physical Working Conditions	10. Pay/Benefits	11. Future
<b>Age</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>	1.712	3.360	10.753	12.475	12.409	1.913	5.057	2.698	4.396	5.073	.452
	<b>Pearson</b>	.425	.186	.005	.002	.002	.384	.080	.259	.111	.079	.798
<b>Class</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>	5.581	4.539	11.778	5.662	10.066	1.102	22.795	2.090	11.647	9.911	1.310
	<b>Pearson</b>	.134	.209	.008	.129	.018	.776	.000	.554	.009	.009	.727
p < .05												

For the age variable, there have been significant differences seen for managers, promotion opportunities and nature of work factors. This is to say, different age group

student has a different idea about managers, promotion opportunities and nature of work. For the class variable, there have been significant differences seen for factors 3, 5, 7, 9 and 10. These results show that when students' education level improves their perception change about managers, nature of work, industry-person congeniality, physical working conditions and pay/benefits.

According to factor analysis, there have been eleven factors which eigenvalues over 1 and factor loadings more than 5. Names have been given to the factors, each reflecting what is believed to be the essence of the factor. The most important factor is factor one and it has been called the '*Commitment to the Tourism Industry*'. Twelve items with factor loadings above 5 constitute this factor: Work in the Tourism Industry allows me to meet new and different people (mean=1.66); I can use the knowledge and experience I have gained while working in the Tourism Industry (mean=1.78); I am happy about working in the Tourism Industry (mean=2.11); It makes me happy that I serve people to make them happy (mean=2.13); Employees' working wish and motivation is high in the Tourism Industry (mean=2.13); My personality is suitable to work in the Tourism Industry (mean=2.15); After graduation, I will come to a good position soon (mean=2.08); Working in the Tourism Industry is enjoyable (mean=2.16); I'm glad that I chose the Tourism Department for Education (mean=2.16); Working in the Tourism Industry provides me learning something new every day (mean=2.19); I love dynamic business environment (mean=2.22) and Managers are respectful to their employees (mean=2.24). These results show that Korean students glad to educate and work in the Tourism Industry. On the other hand, they think that working in Tourism Industry not only teach new things to them but also enables them to use their knowledge and experience.

Factor 2 has been termed '*Co-workers*'. Factor 2 includes these factors: I support those who want to study tourism around me (mean=2.40); In General education level of employees is low in the Tourism industry; (mean=3.58); Many managers in the Tourism Industry are uneducated (mean=3.76), I am ashamed to say to my family and friends that I will work in the Tourism Industry (mean=3.95). Co-worker factor is the second important factor for Korean students. In general, they feel not good of working in the Tourism Industry and they find co-workers' education level not sufficient enough. Factor 3 has been called '*Managers*'. Four items with factor loadings above .5 constitute these factors: There is cooperation between the people working in the Tourism Industry (mean=1.95); Managers support their employees to receive training as professionals (mean= 2.03); The experience of working in the Tourism Industry is considered while promotion (mean=2.00); Managers take into account the recommendations of the employees (mean=2.36). One can understand from these results Korean students believe that there has been coordination between workers and managers in the tourism industry. Factor 4 '*Promotion Opportunities*' includes three features: Encouragements in Tourism are clear and obvious (with a low mean of 2.06), Promotions in Tourism Industry (holiday bonus, insurance, etc.) are sufficient (mean=2.18) and If you want to work in the Tourism Industry, you must have friends in the industry (with a moderately high mean of 2.44). These results state that even promotions are clear and sufficient in the Tourism Industry; they need relatives for working Tourism Industry.

Only two features load into factor 5, 6 and 7. Factor 5 named '*Nature of Work*' which includes: Jobs are very stressful in the Tourism Industry (low mean=2.65) and Works are very tiring in the Tourism Industry (high mean=2.71). Factor 6 has been termed '*Social Status*': Tourism is a profession that is accepted by society (low mean=2.21) and Working in the Tourism industry is a respected business (high

mean=2.62). Factor 7 (named '*Industry-Person Congeniality*'): Working in the Tourism Industry allows me to give an important contribute to the services industry (low mean=2.16) and It requires compromising moral values to work in the Tourism industry (high mean=2.32). Factor 8 named '*Family Life*' and includes three features: Due to the seasonality of the Tourism Industry it is difficult to find regular work (mean=2.95); I wish my children choose Tourism department for education like me (mean=3.01) and Working in the Tourism Industry affects my family life negatively (mean=3.55). Interestingly even Korean students believe that working in the Tourism Industry affects family life negatively and difficult to find regular work they wish their children work Tourism Industry. Only two features load into factor 9, 10 and 11. Factor 9 named '*Physical Working Conditions*': Managers help employees to do their jobs better (with a low mean of=1.96) and It is physically hard working in the Tourism Industry (with a moderately high mean of=2.31). Factor 10 is '*Pay/Benefits*': Working hours are irregular in the Tourism Industry (low mean of=2.90) and Previous graduates are not working in good positions in the Tourism Industry (high mean=3.23). Factor 11 called '*Future*': After graduation, I will not work in places that do not support my advancement (low mean=2.54) and Wages are low in the Tourism Industry (high mean=2.62). Even Korean students perceive working Tourism Industry hard, they think that managers help workers. Unfortunately, wages are low, previous graduates aren't working at good positions and working hours are irregular according to Korean students. So they do not want to work in the Tourism Industry in the future.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study investigated undergraduate South Korean undergraduate tourism students' perceptions and attitudes towards different aspects of working in the tourism industry with relatively reliable and valid attitude scale. A number of findings emerged from the study. According to the demographic questions, it can be seen that students were mostly female, 18-20 years old and in freshman level in their education. Almost all students have information about tourism industry while choosing and they choose tourism department willingly. For the students, tourism job is interesting, low skilled and worth doing it. They choose willingly tourism industry and they have information before choosing they can think like that. On the other hand, interestingly they think that working in tourism industry affect their family life negatively because of the nature of work and working hours are too long. They feel as a slave while working, they don't like to serve people when they're on holiday. They think that employers are uneducated and uneducated employers jealous of educated employers. Students have some positive perception and attitudes towards tourism industry. Study results showed that tourism job is interesting, worth of doing, need less skills, people can use their ability and skills and get pleasure while working, on the other hand, they think that tourism jobs are not accepted in society because they specified that they ashamed to say their relatives that they are working in this industry. According to the respondents, in tourism working hours are too long and family life affect negatively due to the nature of work.

Respondents think that payments are low in tourism industry while considering long and irregular working hours. One important result is about the perceptions towards managers. The perceptions are changing while the students comes closer to graduation. They give high respect to the managers and they believe that managers are supporters. Overall, there are negative tendencies can be seen from the responses but one should take into consideration that they are still undergraduate students. Their opinions derive from observations and gossips. According to their ages, they don't have

any serious working history in tourism industry. They worked as an intern and part-time employee in the industry. It is clear that educators and professors in universities should include some effective practical programmes in to lectures.

The hotel managers should be invited to the lectures to meet with the students. These meetings may give start since freshmen classes. Also, governmental precautions should be taken about payments and working hours. Educated and high-skilled employees are important and valid in tourism industry for both countries. Employers' and governments' cooperation would help to solve some unclear and negative opinions against finding regular jobs in industry. Specially, the students should not be ashamed working in tourism industry. Academy, government and employers must work coordinally and find permanent solutions for these perceptions. Thus, in the future more conscious and merrier tourism industry employees can be seen in South Korea where tourism has an important economic role in.

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