

An In-Depth Exploration of the Impact of COVID-19 on Hospitality Interns' Career Choices and Experiences: Insights for Educators, Industry Professionals, and Policymakers

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The study explores how COVID-19 impacts hospitality interns' career choices and experience. Through a comprehensive literature review, key findings emerge regarding the effects of the pandemic on internship programs, the challenges interns face, and the factors influencing their post-pandemic career decisions.

Methodology: The first step of the study is a comprehensive literature review, which establishes a qualitative approach to gathering information from existing research, articles, and publications.

Principal Findings: COVID-19 has heavily affected hospitality internships, resulting in cancellations and remote work. However, interns have shown resilience by adapting to new learning methods and career exploration. Employers in the hospitality industry are hopeful about interns' job prospects after the pandemic, emphasizing the need to support students and address their career concerns for industry recovery.

Applications of the study: This study offers valuable insights that empower educators, industry professionals, and policymakers to adapt internship programs, support intern resilience, and understand evolving career preferences in hospitality. By understanding COVID-19's impact on interns, stakeholders can make informed decisions to aid industry recovery.

Novelty/Originality of the study: This study examines the impact of COVID-19 on hospitality internships, emphasizing both challenges and intern resilience. It offers insights for interns, industry recovery, and guidance to educators, professionals, and policymakers.

INTRODUCTION

A pandemic is generally defined as an infectious disease outbreak that has spread across a large geographical area, such as a continent or the world, affecting many people simultaneously. Several pandemics, such as the Plague, the Spanish Flu, and the Black Death, have occurred throughout history. People and the economy have suffered significant losses every pandemic (Janjal et al., 2022). Recently, the world has faced a new pandemic, which is COVID-19. The Coronavirus pandemic has affected people's lives, economies, industries, and nations. Global economic and social crises have been triggered by the pandemic, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) (Piramanayagam et al., 2023). Hospitality and tourism were almost halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic that affected China at the end of 2019 and India in March 2020 (Kanitkar et al., 2023). In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries worldwide have been affected. As a result, many countries have declared a complete lockdown in their countries to fight this pandemic virus.

Due to COVID-19, schools/ colleges cannot develop students' social skills and awareness during the lockdown. Studying is not the only aspect of students' training affected, but also industrial training for students (Dani et al., 2020). Graduates are offered internships in educational institutions to increase their employability in the industry by providing them with work experience. Employability has historically been the focus of internship programs. This program allows participants to acquire skills relevant to the workplace, engage in networking, and receive a job offer from the host organization. It also has the benefit of synchronizing the educational program with the needs of industry partners (Srivastava et al., 2020).

As the business world changes, internships prepare students to meet those changes. Students can develop negative and positive attitudes and behaviors because of their internship experience if they do not experience satisfactory satisfaction. In contrast, with a negative attitude, a student regrets his or her choice of a future career and speaks negatively about the school and program in the future (Windawaty, 2022). The internship work plan has been modified due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite policies in the hospitality and tourism industries mainly in survival mode, students have difficulty finding places to conduct industrial work practices (Suastini et al., 2022). Students finishing their internships in the last semester suffered a lot from COVID-19.

COVID-19 forced most institutions to close. Due to safety concerns, most institutions did not offer internships after reopening, so the internship is no longer offered. These obstacles were, however, overcome by students (Zaman et al., 2021). COVID-19 significantly impacted internship courses during the summer of 2020, and hospitality and tourism management programs must continue adapting to the changing environment. As little was known about the virus' impacts

in March of 2020, university faculty had to make decisions. Several faculty members believed the virus's impacts could be mitigated by the summer of 2020 or at least temporarily (College et al., 2021). In the United States, internship opportunities were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a Glassdoor study. As a result of the pandemic, approximately half of the internships advertised on the website were canceled. Additionally, internship openings on the website have decreased by 52% since March 9, with 30,806 placements fewer than on March 9. Over the past three months, internship opportunities have decreased by 92% in the travel and tourism industry (Stansell, 2020).

In light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the present study aims to examine its impacts on hospitality interns' experiences and career choices. Through a comprehensive literature review, key findings emerge regarding the effects of the pandemic on internship programs, the challenges interns face, and the factors influencing their post-pandemic career decisions.

Understanding the Hospitality Intern's COVID-19 Experiences

The main reason for joining an internship, according to 71% of students, was to gain experience. During the COVID-19 pandemic of March 2020, students have been forced to study online at home, which makes them bored. They jumped at it when the 2019 class was allowed to complete their internships. Student hopes to gain new insights and experiences by going directly into the workplace. Additionally, they can better understand the department they have chosen through this internship program so that they will know where their career should take them when they graduate. (Windawaty, 2022). As a result of the online classes, students experienced several problems; their internship programs were affected, adversely affecting their learning and skill development activities. However, most of the students got full support from their teachers, colleges, and universities throughout this pandemic, and they found online education to be a better and more effective means of completing their studies online. While most students prefer traditional (face-to-face) education over online education, there is still a significant minority that prefers online education (Dani et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the coronavirus pandemic did not affect the student's ability to acquire additional skills, including dealing with work pressures, developing communication skills, transferring his experience to new trainees, and dealing with work pressures. Students and trainees are exposed to direct contact with customers, and they accomplish the tasks assigned to them due to doing so. This confirms that these skills above are acquired through direct customer interaction (Al-Share & Alananzeh, 2022). Rather than doing an internship, some students work on projects. This application uses IoT, artificial intelligence, machine learning, the web, and Android. A project must be completed within at least three months, an extended period. The group divides the project into sections, and each member is responsible for completing it as soon as possible. In addition to being fair, this is a better choice than an internship. In this environment, students can access online resources and courses, read many articles on the subject, gather information for the upcoming project, modify the code as the instructor dictates, and generate and maintain the function themselves (Zaman et al., 2021).

Kelson 2023, an instructor in Illinois State University's Accounting Department and a CPA with an M.S.A., highlighted that as COVID-19 ended, we noticed a few internships were canceled or deferred. Even when seeking internships, some students experienced difficulty getting employers' attention. Although the pandemic was devastating, it opened up new doors and taught us how to adapt. Many internships signed right before the pandemic included the possibility of students performing their duties remotely via Zoom or other platforms. Students could still meet with their mentors and learn about the company and their jobs using these platforms. Amid the pandemic, we are incredibly grateful to employers who took the time to work with interns.

Impact of COVID-19 on Hospitality Interns

The pandemic affected the postgraduate internship program greatly, with nearly one-third of students failing to complete their internships. In comparison with other postgraduate students, students whose internships were canceled experienced significantly higher anxiety and depression. (Zhang et al., 2022) Hotels have been most affected by the pandemic. As lockdown norms were implemented very strictly, students who were doing industrial training were most affected. Even though the pandemic was there, students had a good training experience overall. However, 95% of students are still committed to staying in this industry after graduation, so they have not changed their perception about changing the industry or choosing it as a career option. (Joshi and Sathe, 2021) Approximately 71% of respondents stated that the pandemic limited their options in their field of study. Students delaying graduation or changing their major are a small percentage, 4%, of the student population. The study's findings show that 25% of participants had no academic implications, while 75% said losing their internship would significantly affect their future (Michael et al., 2020). Several companies stopped offering traditional internships following the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in remote internships being offered. Even though this enabled students to work from home, they encountered many challenges, including a lack of experience in an office environment and a disconnect from the corporate environment. As a result of this change, students' ability to find employment in the future has been questioned. (Zaman et al., 2021)

Perception of Hospitality Interns about a career in the industry: Post-COVID Scenario

Across various colleges and universities in Karnataka, India, 112 hotel management graduates were surveyed. Most respondents disagreed with the salary packages offered to freshers after the COVID-19 pandemic, but hotel management graduates still gave their positive opinion of jobs in the hotel industry post-pandemic. Most respondents (41.96%) already work in the hotel industry because they feel safe working there post-pandemic, and most (76.79%) feel safe working there. Furthermore, 56.25 percent of respondents indicated that the pandemic has not adversely affected their career decisions in

the hotel industry. In addition, most graduates believe there are job opportunities in the hotel industry for freshers, and they anticipate career growth. Further, many graduates believe that businesses in the hotel sector have survived better than others and are still providing placements for fresh graduates (Gamlath & SaiKrishna, 2022).

A comparatively high percentage of students expressed plans to pursue a master's degree during the pandemic. This may be because more students have demonstrated a commitment to further learning due to the pandemic, and the tourism industry has become increasingly competitive and multitasking due to the pandemic (Lopes & Gomes, 2023). Following the (online) survey, the researcher compiled much information concerning the central objectives. Based on this, he concluded that the participants were quite concerned about their careers after observing the hotel industry's current state during COVID-19; many were uncertain about their career prospects and considered changing careers. There were many plans among them.

Numerous business ideas had appeared in students' heads during the pandemic, and entrepreneurship was one of the options that attracted many students. Students should be exposed to various subjects related to the hospitality industry, including regular and vocational subjects, to allow them to develop a wide range of business ideas (Janjal et al., 2022). Students still regarded the travel and tourism industry as a potential place for employment even though the pandemic severely affected the sector. Moreover, their preferred careers were in the core hotel operations departments. In addition to being aware of possible repercussions on wages and work environments, students knew that the pandemic could affect employment. Entry-level jobs were, however, unappealing to them (Shah et al., 2021).

NEED OF THE STUDY

The study is based on a literature review and addresses how COVID-19 affects hospitality internships in the post-pandemic era. It also provides valuable insights into factors influencing hospitality intern career choices. Stakeholders in workforce planning, talent development, and industry recovery can use the data to inform their decision-making processes. This study emphasizes the importance of navigating career paths in the post-pandemic era while understanding the changing landscape of hospitality internships.

OBJECTIVES

1. We are identifying the impacts of COVID-19 on hospitality internship programs.
2. We are examining the challenges faced and coping strategies employed by hospitality interns during the pandemic.
3. Examining factors affecting post-pandemic career choices for hospitality interns.

METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive literature review is the first step of the study, which establishes a qualitative approach to gathering information from existing research, articles, and publications. In reviewing the literature on hospitality interns' attitudes toward a career in the industry in the post-COVID scenario, the keywords used for identifying the relevant articles were the *impact of COVID-19 on hospitality interns, internship in the times of COVID-19, hospitality students' expectations from internship, hospitality career post-COVID-19 and perception of hospitality students about hospitality industry post COVID scenario* using Google Scholar. Using a random approach, 18 articles published in hospitality and tourism journals, blogs, and magazines and in non-hospitality and tourism journals (management, business, finance, psychology, and engineering journals) were reviewed.

FINDINGS

We are identifying the impacts of COVID-19 on hospitality internship programs.

Based on the literature on students' internship experiences, COVID-19 has had a multifaceted impact on hospitality internship programs. The pandemic disrupted students' career advancement plans by canceling or deferring several internship opportunities (Kelson, 2023). Some internship programs have responded to these challenges by leveraging technology to facilitate remote internships, such as Zoom and online platforms (Kelson, 2023; Zaman et al., 2021). Although remote internships were attempted, most students could not complete their internships due to logistical challenges and ongoing uncertainties (Zhang et al., 2022). Several students considered switching career paths or further education after experiencing this disruption to their learning and skill development activities (Joshi & Sathe, 2021; Janjal et al., 2022; Lopes & Gomes, 2023). Although they faced challenges in this career choice, most students remained determined to pursue careers in hospitality (Joshi & Sathe, 2021; Janjal et al., 2022; Lopes & Gomes, 2023). Additionally, students participated in projects and online courses during this period, aside from traditional internship experiences (Zaman et al., 2021; Dani et al., 2020). Student attitudes toward the hospitality industry remained positive despite concerns about salary packages and job availability at entry levels (Gamlath & SaiKrishna, 2022; Shah et al., 2021).

We are examining the challenges faced and coping strategies employed by hospitality interns during the pandemic.

Based on the literature provided, challenges faced and coping strategies employed by hospitality interns during the pandemic can be accessed as:

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, hospitality interns faced numerous challenges, such as interruptions to internship programs, increased levels of anxiety and depression, and difficulties adjusting to remote work environments (Zhang et al., 2022; Joshi & Sathe, 2021). Even so, interns demonstrated resilience by participating in projects and taking online courses

during the pandemic, which enabled them to further their knowledge and skills (Zaman et al., 2021; Kelson, 2023). In addition to dealing with immediate challenges, interns also considered alternative career paths, such as entrepreneurship, to plan for their future careers (Zaman et al., 2021; Kelson, 2023). In challenging times, interns' adaptive reactions demonstrate their resilience and resourcefulness in navigating uncertainty and proactively addressing challenges. (Janjal et al., 2022; Lopes & Gomes, 2023)

Examining factors affecting post-pandemic career choices for hospitality interns

Based on the literature provided, factors affecting post-pandemic career choices for hospitality interns can be identified:

As the hospitality industry evolved and interns' aspirations and concerns changed post-pandemic, their career choices reflected that changing landscape. Interns reflected on their career choices explored alternative career paths and re-evaluated them because of uncertainty and transformation (Zaman et al., 2021; Kelson, 2023). It is encouraging to see that interns were optimistic about their employment prospects even after the pandemic, highlighting their commitment to the hospitality industry (Shah et al., 2021). Some interns, however, considered changing careers or going on further education in order to enhance their skills and qualifications because of concerns about job security, salary packages, and career advancement opportunities (Gamlath & SaiKrishna, 2022; Janjal et al., 2022). Despite the uncertainty surrounding the post-pandemic workforce, interns' career choices were influenced by industry dynamics, personal interests, and external factors (Shah et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many hospitality internship programs have been canceled, necessitating students to complete their internships remotely. The hospitality internship program has demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of unprecedented challenges. Despite disruptions to internship programs, these students have actively pursued alternative learning opportunities. As the industry recovers post-pandemic, it is essential to understand these impacts and provide students with alternative learning options that address concerns about future career prospects.

LIMITATIONS

The study acknowledges some limitations regarding COVID-19's impact on hospitality internships. First, it is primarily based on existing literature, which may miss actual intern experiences during the pandemic. Regional differences in internship experiences may also be overlooked due to their geographic focus. Furthermore, the study may not capture all the factors influencing interns' career paths and experiences.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICAL STANDARDS

As far as the conduct of this study is concerned, the authors declare no conflict of interest. In addition, they have no financial or personal relationships with individuals or organizations that may have influenced this study's results or findings. They explicitly state in their paper that they conducted the literature review by ethical guidelines and credited all sources appropriately.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

- Shikha conducted a literature review, synthesized the findings, and contributed to the study's objective and conclusions.
- Dr. (Prof.) Sanjeeb Pal, the study's director and professor, provided guidance and oversight for the study's execution throughout the research process.
- In addition to offering expertise in hospitality management, Dr. Yashwant Singh Rawal offered insight into the implications of the study's findings.

The authors collaborated to map out the research's purpose, methodology, and outcomes, offering stakeholders in academia, industry, and policymaking valuable insights into the impacts of COVID-19 on hospitality internships.

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