Study motivations of Bhutanese students in hospitality and tourism courses

Paul Christopher Strickland
Department of Management and Marketing, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia, and
Vanessa Ratten
La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

Purpose – The main purpose of this article is to understand the motivations for Bhutanese students to study hospitality and tourism courses. The second objective is to analyse what countries are the preferred destinations for study abroad and visitation for students. This includes focussing on new course topic areas such as sustainability for business in hospitality and tourism courses.

Design/methodology/approach – A quantitative methodology approach was undertaken with two surveys administered to the first and second student intakes into the Bhutan Middle Management Hotel Program. Motivational and reasoned action theory form the basis of the theoretical framework to understand behavioural intentions regarding educational choices in hospitality and tourism courses.

Findings – The results of the surveys indicate that the main motivations to study hospitality and tourism are for attraction, career opportunities, status, broader benefits and aptitude. In addition, it was found that students studying hospitality and tourism in Bhutan are likely to stay in the sector for a long period of time thereby contributing to the economic and social development of Bhutan. Moreover, it was found that the United Nations Sustainable Development goals are increasingly being integrated into the tourism and hospitality sector, which is influencing students to study these topic areas.

Research limitations/implications – The results of this study will help government and hospitality providers support educational training programs by focussing on new education topic areas. This study is limited to Bhutan.

Practical implications – The results of this study will help government and hospitality providers support educational training programs by focussing on new education topic areas such as sustainability for business management. This will enable hospitality and tourism providers in Bhutan to update their curriculum and to focus on emerging industry needs.

Originality/value – This is amongst the first studies on Bhutanese students motivations for studying hospitality and tourism. It will provide practical and policy advise about how to train workers in order to become less reliant on foreign training providers and the importance of integrating sustainability topics in course design.

Keywords Bhutan, Education, Hospitality, Student satisfaction, Tourism, Sustainable development

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The importance of the hospitality and tourism industry cannot be underestimated as it significantly contributes to the global economy and sustainable development of developing countries such as Bhutan (Strickland, 2019). From this, there is a need to understand student motivations to study hospitality and tourism courses and future employment opportunities.

Based on research conducted by Kim *et al.* (2005) into study motivations and study preferences of hospitality and tourism management students (hereafter, HTM) in Asian countries, namely China, Taiwan and Korea, this study will be applied to Bhutanese students. Kim *et al.*'s (2005) research has been used in other studies (Strickland, 2011). This type of research is important as Bhutan has only recently (compared to other nations), opened their borders to other cultures and influences (Dam *et al.*, 2021) and started a recognised tourism and hospitality program. Bhutan was culturally isolated until the 1960s but change was instigated after a change in government policy (Bauer *et al.*, 1999; Dasgupta and Vogelaar, 2022). For example, in 1974 Bhutan joined the United Nations satisfying the desire to join the international community. This strategic move allowed foreign aid into the country which is paramount for Bhutan to modernise and make greater steps to increase the standard of living of the people (Das, 1995; Bauer *et al.*, 1999; Odier, 2004). It also allowed for increased tourism development and further education (Abu Bakar *et al.*, 2023).

The country of Bhutan is known as the Kingdom of Bhutan and is located in the Eastern Himalayas (Rahul, 1997). It is a landlocked country and shares its borders with China and India (Odier, 2004; Ritchie, 2008). The Bhutanese people have a unique cultural and religion heritage that has not much changed since King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck started to modernise the country (Worden, 1993; Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007). This process has continued and under the guidance of the fourth and fifth king, the country is rapidly changing allowing modern facilities such as television, the Internet and mobile phones to be introduced in the last decade (Planning Commission, 1999; Bauer *et al.*, 1999; Ritchie, 2008).

Dubbed the only remaining Lamaist Kingdom, Bhutan also has a philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH) implemented by the fourth ruler in the year 2000 to increase happiness and satisfaction of the people, rather than just focus on monetary value or gain (Sinha, 1991; Bauer *et al.*, 1999; Ritchie, 2008). Happiness is a key cultural factor that has flow on effects in terms of helping meet the emotional and spiritual needs of the population (Ministry of Finance, 2000). The current population of Bhutan is 789,171 making it one of the smallest countries in the world (Worldometers, 2023). This has required the introduction of educational programs such as the Bhutan Middle Management Hotel Program (BMMHP) to train current middle to senior managers in effectively operating hotels at an internationally recognised service standard, minimising potential environmental impacts and waste management whilst maintaining cultural integrity. This will create employment for the Bhutanese people and minority communities and Bhutan will gradually become less reliant on foreign managers and teachers (Du, 2003).

These educational initiatives and development strategies are aimed at creating a skilled labour force (Karan, 1990; Andaya, 2007, Bauer *et al.*, 1999). The overall objective is to eventually remove the title of a "developing country" and for Bhutan to be self-sufficient (Bauer *et al.*, 1999). Education is seen as a high priority and paramount to increasing the standard of living of the people. Research by Salamzadeh *et al.* (2022) has highlighted the need to develop new teaching practices for students based on emerging technology. Education starts in primary school and continues for the next eleven years all subsidised by the Bhutanese government (Worden, 1993). To move forward and also protect the Bhutanese culture, the schools teach in the national language Dzongkha and English. However, there are at least another twenty-four Bhutanese dialects spoken depending on the province and Nepali in the north (van Driem, 1994; SAARC Tourism, 2010).

Having a quest for professional education, tertiary education is available in some disciplines, but the Bhutanese usually travel and study in other countries through foreign aid, sponsorship and friendship alliances with mainly India and western countries (Basu, 1996). This is because they do not have the necessary qualified educators (Ford, 1989, Bauer *et al.*, 1999). Teaching institutions such as the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) were formed to offer professional programs in the capital Thimphu (Bauer *et al.*, 1999) and more recently the

Royal Institute of Tourism and Hospitality (RITH). Increasingly educational institutions are prioritising the inclusion of technology related learning methods as a way of enhancing the competitiveness of a region (Dana *et al.*, 2021).

Bhutan is keen to expand its tourism sector as it contributes to the country's gross domestic product. This has led to tourism bring in social change and greater wealth for the country (Worden, 1993; Bauer *et al.*, 1999). Careful planning is involved to control the growth of tourism, including limiting tourists numbers and controlling the construction of hotels and tourist attractions (Karan, 1990). The government will only allow tourists to stay in government sanctioned hotels (Bauer *et al.*, 1999) but in the last decade, an increase in tourist visas issued and consequently more hotels have been built. This is similar to China's tourism policy initiated in 1978 (Zhao, 1991). It is expected that the Royal Government of Bhutan will issue up to 100,000 tourists visa in 2014 and achieved this at the fifth king's coronation.

It is assumed that exposure to other cultures, countries and hotel management practices' will have an impact on the students enrolled in the program. In developing countries governments are focussing on education as a way to alleviate poverty and to enhance employment prospects (Rahman *et al.*, 2022). As the government is striving to increase professional development of the workers in the tourism and hospitality industry, the program assumes that the Bhutanese will stay in Bhutan after graduation however no studies regarding student expectations has ever been undertaken. This study therefore aims to identify Bhutanese student expectations and any similarities and/or differences in perceptions between these students and those in other Asian nations studying tourism and hospitality.

By undertaking a study based on motivations and study preferences of HTM students in Bhutan, the results can be compared to the findings of Kim *et al.* (2005) based on geographic location, culture, beliefs or ethnic groups (Airey and Frontistis, 1997; Cothran and Combrink, 1999). There have been a number of studies investigating similar motivations in western countries (Rudall *et al.*, 1996; Davidson, 1997; Barron, 1998; O'Mahony *et al.*, 2001; Jenkins, 2001), which have been well documented in identifying potential HTM students and their motivations for study and their expectations following graduation. Such studies have interested stakeholders such as the hospitality industry, government and educational institutions (Barron, 2002b). Similar organisations may be interested in Bhutan especially for future enrolments in the program.

Literature review

As previously mentioned, there have been many studies that have focused on HTM courses, motivations for studying HTM, studying abroad and their experiences (Ross, 1994; Purcell and Quinn, 1996; Formica, 1996; Barron, 2002a, b). Many of these have focused on Asian countries, namely China, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore and Thailand (Adams and Chapman, 1998). Other Asian studies have extended to include countries such as Kygyz, Nepal, Pakistan and Philippines (Adams and Chapman, 1998). Similar motivational studies have been researched in western countries (Formica, 1996; Airey and Frontistis, 1997; Christou, 1998; Barron, 2002a). However, these studies are beyond the scope of this paper.

This paper is interested in investigating HTM courses, motivations to study and graduate expectations of students currently studying in Bhutan. There has been no earlier study undertaken in this field. This is because the first ever HTM course was only introduced to the Kingdom of Bhutan in 2009. The two student intakes will graduate with a Diploma in Hospitality Management recognised by the Bhutanese government. At present, the course relies on foreign aid to operate, however the RITH having been opened in 2012, the aim is to eventually be self-sufficient. Technology has also advanced at a rapid rate adding to

educational tools (Cho *et al.*, 2002). This will assist in the continuance of HTM programs in Bhutan for Bhutanese nationals.

Although hotels are currently operating in Bhutan with at least five more in the construction phase, it was identified that formal HTM qualifications are necessary to address industry concerns such as the expectations of guests (in particular international tourists), sustainability, waste management and the hygiene practices of hoteliers (Keller, 2008; Ritchie, 2008). The course is designed in the context of co-operative education meaning experiential learning in a classroom setting and coupled with planned, paid and supervised industry work. This teaching method should produce graduates who have realistic expectations of the workforce and longevity in the industry (Garavan and Murphy, 2001) although this has not been researched.

Woodley *et al.* (1987) suggests that motivational theories are of great interest in education as they can effectively uncover reasons for undertaking formal studies. In HTM education, it is often assumed that students are attracted to programs primarily for vocational outcomes including skilled roles and/or management outcomes (Raybould and Wilkins, 2006). However, other studies have taken different approaches to understanding the effect of attitudes on behaviour. The reasoned action approach (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2007) is the process whereby behavioural intentions are assumed to stem from beliefs and be reasonably consistent. The focus on reasoning means that students consider different alternatives in their decision to study certain topics. These reasons then influence their behavioural intentions in terms of how, when and why they study HTM. This is also evidenced in Kim *et al.*'s (2005) paper based on student motivations to study HTM in China, Taiwan and Korea. As Bhutan is a country situated in Asia, this paper compares the outcomes to Kim *et al.*'s (2005) findings.

Further details pertaining to Table 1 are in the results section. Using the methods undertaken by a number of other studies asserts the effectiveness therefore no need to create a new method of data collection (Posavac, 2002; Newman *et al.*, 2004; Walker, 2008). In a business context, using similar methods can be seen as the transfer of knowledge and is also well received as a legitimate business practise in HTM (Winter and Szulanski, 2001; Brock and Yaniv, 2007). Using similar methods to compare results under the same conditions as Kim *et al.* (2005) research will allow the data to be comparable and add to the reliability and validity of the data (Scott and Morrison, 2007).

Methods
Highlighted in the literature review methods used in other studies is deemed an effective solution to compare the Bhutanese responses with other studies. After securing permission to administer the questionnaire all enrolled students were able to complete the survey in English. The author was working in the institution therefore access to the students was easily obtained. Two surveys were administered to the first and second student intakes into the BMMHP.

Measurement
Following Kim *et al.* (2005) students undertaking undergraduate studies in tourism and hospitality at the RIM and then RITH in Bhutan were administered a questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised items to measure basic demographics and also a 21-item scale designed to measure motivations related to pursuing a qualification in tourism and hospitality. These items have also been applied in other surveys (Bushell *et al.*, 2001; Schmidt, 2002; Kusluvan and Kusluvan, 2003). The items spanned the domains of job opportunities, interest in the practical aspects of tourism and hospitality, scholastic ambition, the attraction of working in tourism and hospitality, interest in foreign cultures and aptitude for pursuing

Motivational items	Factor loadings	Communalities	Means	SD
Domain 1: Job opportunity (eigen value = 5.90; variance = 28.1; reliability alpha = 0.73)				
I believe that the percentage of employment is higher after graduation	0.78	0.65	4.43	1.38
I believe that there are a variety of job opportunities	0.72	0.6	4.63	1.45
I believe that the level of salary is high in this field	0.7	0.57	3.97	1.38
Compared to other fields, this field provides me with an opportunity to be promoted	0.48	0.57	3.75	1.41
I believe that this field has a growing potential	0.41	0.5	5.81	1.26
Domain 2: Interest in the practical aspects (eigenvalue = 1.82; variance = 8.7; reliability alpha = 0.70)				
I believe that this field is practical rather than theoretical	0.86	0.52	5.36	1.5
I have more interest in this field, compared to others	0.81	0.69	5.25	1.57
This field suits my aptitude	0.8	0.68	4.91	1.57
I like to serve others	0.47	0.48	5.06	1.55
Domain 3: Scholastic achievement (eigenvalue = 1.55; variance = 7.4; reliability alpha = 0.73				
I would like to a theoretical expert in this field	0.86	0.76	3.62	1.55
I would like to be an excellent scholar in this field	0.81	0.77	4	1.65
I would like to study more in this field	0.6	0.68	5.25	1.64
Compared to other fields, it is easier to get a professorship in this field	0.47	0.6	3.11	1.38
Domain 4: Apparent attraction (eigenvalue = 1.39; variance = 6.6; reliability alpha = 0.70)				
Scenes or pictures of the hospitality industry appearing in movie or TV look attractive	0.7	0.65	4.85	1.91
Working in this field apparently looks good	0.69	0.61	4.65	1.49
Jobs in this field look attractive	0.65	0.57	4.66	1.46
Domain 5: Interest in a foreign country (eigenvalue = 1.30; variance 6.2; reliability alpha = 0.71)				
Compared to other fields of study, I believe there is a higher opportunity to interact with more foreigners and foreign cultures	0.83	0.78	5.45	1.43
I believe that I can have the opportunity to take more overseas business trips or meetings in foreign countries	0.8	0.74	5.16	1.48
I like foreign languages	0.49	0.46	4.59	1.74
Domain 6: Ease in studying (eigenvalue = 1.10; variance 5.2; reliability alpha 0.69)				
Compared to other fields, it is easier to study in this field	0.78	0.68	4	1.65
My score for university entrance exam qualified me for this major	0.56	0.51	3.8	1.85

Table 1.
Factor analysis with varimax rotation on undergraduate students' motivations of choosing an HTM program in either China, Korea or Taiwan (N = 1592)

studies in tourism and hospitality. Responses to the items in the scale were measured on a 7-point Likert scale where "1 = *strongly disagree*," "4 = *neutral*," and "7 = *strongly agree*."

Data collection
The questionnaire was administered by the first named author after obtaining ethical clearance from the institution at which the author worked and also obtaining permission from the administrator of the BMMHP. The number of completed questionnaires was fifty-five. The responses were loaded into an SPSS data file for analysis. The questionnaire was developed and tested using five random Bhutanese students studying general management subjects in the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) in the capital Thimphu in a pilot study. Although Kim *et al.*'s (2005) survey required translation into Korean, Chinese and Taiwanese languages, it was deemed not necessary for this study as English is one of the two national languages; the other being Dzongkha. Although the sample size is relatively small, one hundred percent of students completed the questionnaire in which the author argues is the best result obtainable.

Analysis

A standard procedure was used to factor analyse the items in the interests and motivations scale based on the survey instrument. The method of Principal Components was used to extract the factors and an obliminal rotation was used to resolve the final factor structure. Following guidelines from Kaiser's (1974), criterion only factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0 and communalities greater than 0.4 were included in the final factor structure.

Results and discussion

Respondent profile

The study contained 24 females and 31 males with a mean age being 28. The females were slightly older than the males. Each participant was a Bhutanese national and was accepted into the BMMHP. All participants were in full time employment in the tourism and hospitality industry and able to attend the BMMHP during and outside work hours with their employers permission (see Table 2).

Motivational items	Factor loadings	Communalities	Mean	SD
Domain 1: Attraction (eigenvalue = 4.27; variance = 20.31%; reliability alpha = 0.92)				
Compared to other fields of study, I believe there is a higher opportunity to interact with more foreigners and foreign cultures	0.93	0.87	6.74	0.81
I like to serve others	0.86	0.82	6.52	0.75
This field suits my aptitude	0.75	0.77	6.33	0.83
I would like to study more in this field	0.61	0.89	6.63	0.79
Scenes or pictures of the hospitality industry appearing in movie or TV look attractive	0.60	0.87	6.26	1.10
I like foreign languages	0.59	0.82	6.56	0.64
Jobs in this field look attractive	0.54	0.81	6.03	1.29
Domain 2: Career opportunities (eigenvalue = 3.89; variance = 18.52%; reliability alpha = 0.87)				
I believe that the percentage of employment is higher after graduation	0.87	0.86	5.74	1.20
I believe that there are a variety of job opportunities	0.81	0.72	5.96	1.19
I believe that the level of salary is high in this field	0.81	0.84	5.19	1.62
Compared to other fields, this field provides me with an opportunity to be promoted	0.74	0.86	6.00	1.14
I believe that this field is practical rather than theoretical	0.65	0.66	6.04	0.90
I believe that this field has a growing potential	0.62	0.85	6.33	0.96
Domain 3: Status (eigenvalue = 3.19; variance = 15.17%; reliability alpha = 0.76)				
I would like to be an excellent scholar in this field	0.83	0.83	6.37	0.74
I would like to be a theoretical expert in this field	0.81	0.77	5.89	0.93
Working in this field apparently looks good	0.67	0.72	6.03	0.94
Domain 4: Broader Benefits (eigenvalue = 2.18; variance = 10.40%; reliability alpha = 0.78)				
Compared to other fields, it is easier to get a professorship in this field	0.91	0.87	6.00	1.27
I believe that I can have the opportunity to take more overseas business trips or meetings in foreign countries	0.89	0.86	6.44	0.75
Domain 5: Aptitude and Interest (eigenvalue = 2.13; variance = 10.13%; reliability alpha = 0.79)				
My score for university entrance exam qualified me for this major	0.91	0.90	6.22	0.70
I have more interest in this field, compared to others	0.66	0.84	6.30	0.78
Domain 6: Ease of study (eigen value = 1.55; variance = 7.37%; reliability alpha = na only one item)				
Compared to other fields, it is easier to study in this field	0.73	0.78	5.59	1.28

Table 2.
Factor analysis with varimax rotation on undergraduate students' motivations of choosing an HTM program in Bhutan (N = 55)

Factor analysis

Six factors were extracted which is the aggregate explained 81.89% of the variance. The factor loadings, communalities means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1.

Of the six factors extracted the first three are dominant explaining 54% of the variance. Since only one item loaded on the last factor it is difficult to draw any meaningful interpretation from it. It does appear that for this cohort the key drivers of their vocational preferences are the perception of the field of hospitality and tourism as attractive, very good career opportunities and the status which can accrue by becoming an expert in the field. Broader benefits such as becoming a professor in the field and travel opportunities are also relevant as is an aptitude and interest in the field.

Table 1 shows the results of the factor analysis conducted on the same scale by Kim *et al.* (2005). The authors found that the main dominant factors for studying HTM was job opportunities. This includes obtaining a job, the variety or jobs, perceived high salary, growth and promotion potential in the hospitality and tourism industry. The HTM programs may assist the participants in achieving these outcomes by having the opportunity to study abroad. The results for the Bhutanese study indicate three dominant factors for study motivation in HTM being attraction, career opportunities and status that have similar eigen values (attraction being the most dominant). This may be explained by the increase in tourism products and hotels in the country that have only recently been established relative to other nations. Traditional occupations are declining such as farming and new opportunities in the larger cities including tourism and hospitality are increasing. With the establishment of new hotels, traditional hierarchy management positions have been introduced which offer a clear career path and that may lead to higher salaries and career growth potential.

Kim *et al.*'s (2005) findings suggest that scholastic achievement is the third most dominant factor and this is similar to the Bhutanese study however, there is a cultural difference between the studies. The Bhutanese respect education however it is ultimately a means to achieve status hence the relabelling of the Bhutanese study to "status". Additionally, the eigen value indicates a much stronger dominance for status and education than of scholastic achievement presented in the previous study. This may further be explained by Bhutan offering the inaugural HTM program as opposed to already established HTM programs in Kim *et al.*'s (2005) study.

Comparison on means on factors by gender

The sample was split on gender and the means compared on each of the factors. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics and the associated *p* values associated with the comparison of the means.

The table shows that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female respondents on any of the identified motivating factors in respect of careers in

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	P
Attraction	female	24	6.5195	0.29466	
	male	31	6.1964	0.91231	0.20
Job opportunities	female	24	5.9394	1.15536	
	male	31	5.8333	0.78174	0.78
Status	female	24	6.2424	0.49645	
	male	31	6.0000	0.84327	0.40
Broader benefits	female	24	6.3636	0.50452	
	male	31	6.1250	1.16190	0.52
Aptitude interest	female	24	6.4545	0.52223	
	male	31	6.1250	0.74162	0.22

Table 3.
Group and gender
statistics

Tourism and Hospitality. Bhutan can be viewed as an androgynous culture and that could explain why males and females are similarly motivated. The culture also reflects an ideal of collectivism as opposed to individualism which is indicative of the main religion being Buddhism and the concept of Gross National Happiness (Ritchie, 2008).

Preferred destinations students would like to visit/work/study abroad
The results also indicated that there is a strong desire to study abroad and/or visit other countries with Switzerland, Netherlands, United States of America (USA) and Australia being the most preferred options. This may be explained due to the funding of the BMMHP from international countries with these four countries being largest contributors. Other countries included England, Austria, Maldives, South Africa, China, Japan, Dubai, Singapore, Tibet and others regions of Bhutan by individuals based on personal knowledge or preferences. It is likely that the participants have met visitors from these countries whilst working in the industry or by images from media such as television. When asked which country the participants would prefer to work in, the USA was clearly dominant with almost 40% of responses, secondly Bhutan (20%), then Australia and Switzerland equally with 15%. Other countries mentioned were any country (not Bhutan) (8%), Austria (5%) and China (5%). The majority of television programs shown in Bhutan are relayed from India however include movies and programs from the USA and Britain. The participants acknowledged that the majority of their western exposure is from the television, Internet and tourists that may explain the results. The results suggest that the majority of current students would like to work abroad mainly in western countries and perhaps experience a different standard of living. The participants that mentioned Bhutan as the preferred option to work felt a duty to stay in Bhutan for family reasons.

Interestingly Kim *et al.*'s (2005) also highlighted the USA and Switzerland as the two main countries that their participants would prefer to study abroad in which is a similar result for this study except Australia rated a close third to Switzerland. It is noted that if the students would like to visit a particular country, if the opportunity presented itself, they would also like to study there however no further evidence as to why they want to work abroad is given.

Discussion
This study was designed compare Kim *et al.*'s (2005) Chinese, Taiwanese and Korean student's motivation to study HTM by exploring the same study motivations of Bhutanese students and included preferred countries to visit and study abroad. The results of factor analysis produced six domains: "attraction", "career opportunities", "status", "broader benefits" and "aptitude". These findings are significant as the results have indicated a shift in the main dominant domain from "job opportunity" "to attraction" indicating different study motivations of the Bhutanese compared with Chinese, Taiwanese and Korean students.
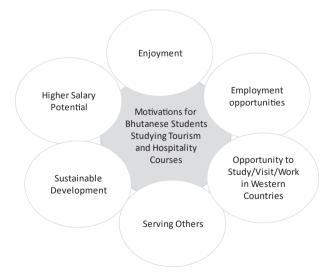
This study suggests that the main motivation for studying HTM is the attraction to the industry. It also suggests that even though the scores of both studies are similar in one grouping and strongly related, they are still individually independent. For example, the factor loadings suggest that there is a strong motivation to interact with foreigners. This may be due to Bhutan being exposed to the western world for a relatively short period of time (Ritchie, 2008). Moreover, the gross national happiness being high in Bhutan may mean that students are more motivated to focus on education than other geographic locations. The findings also suggest that the participants like to serve others and the field of tourism and hospitality suits their aptitude. Obviously there is strong correlation between the two factors however it may be more involved. As mentioned earlier, Bhutan has introduced the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) which is striving to achieve, spiritual, cultural and
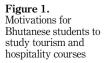
individual wellbeing. The Bhutanese are known as a giving society and it may be uniquely asserted that serving others is a way of achieving GNH (Sinha, 1991; Bauer *et al.*, 1999; Ritchie, 2008) or a strong motivation for studying HTM. These concepts are unique to Bhutan therefore do not appear in other studies. Similarly, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are being added to the curriculum which supports the concept of GNH. This is to enshrine in sustainable tourism and hospitality policies will eventually meet the SDG that pertain to Bhutan.

The results also suggest that students studying HTM in Bhutan are electing to stay in the industry for a long period of time which supports Cothran and Combrink's (1999) findings based on minority American student groups studying HTM. This may also be due to perceived job security through sustainable sector growth as hospitality and tourism is the second largest contributor to Bhutan's GDP. Ross (1994) concluded that Australian students working in a resort or tourist town were more likely to have an interest in working in the hospitality or tourism field because of their familiarity with the industry and this may also be the case for students in Bhutan as tourism is increasing every year and creating more jobs.

Participants from both studies have indicated that the USA and Switzerland and the two dominant countries that study would prefer to study abroad in or to visit. Although it was explicitly stated, both countries represent western populations and ideals which may be the main attraction. Students would like to have a different cultural experience and these countries satisfy these requirements. The Bhutanese respondents also suggested Australia closely behind Switzerland as a preferred country to visit or study broad in. This may be influenced by the BMMHP being externally funded with the USA, Switzerland and Australia being the main contributors (along with the Netherlands).

The results did not offer any difference between males and females motivations for studying HTM in Bhutan which can be due to the culture being fairly androgynous compared to other cultures. This corresponds with motivational theory that suggests that students study for a variety of reasons some of which can include their reasoned action regarding behavioural intentions. It may also be linked with their values, traditions, customs and religion (Ritchie, 2008). Lastly, both studies suggested that it is the attraction or career opportunity being the dominant factors whereas perceived ease of study was not a major consideration (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.
Motivations for Bhutanese students to study tourism and hospitality courses

These results are expected to be helpful in understanding Bhutanese students motivations for studying HTM in the BMMHP compared with other Asian nations. The study provides an insight into the main study motivations of Bhutanese students, countries they would like to visit and countries they would like to study abroad in. The results also suggest the main motivations for HTM study through six identifiable domains. These can be used to help assist in program content including practical work integrated learning opportunities. The study also highlights that the majority of Bhutanese students would like to take their HTM education and work abroad in mainly western societies therefore Bhutan may not be getting the long-term benefits of the students HTM education.

Limitations and future research suggestions

There is a major limitation of this study and that is of the sample size. Although it appears very small, it is the maximum number of students studying HTM in Bhutan. There is only one institution offering an HTM program and that is the BMMHP. These two factors may strongly influence the results however there are no other alternatives. Future research may include the same study be administered to the future intake of students into the BMMHP which will increase the sample size over time. This exploratory study can also be expanded to other countries for comparison. It would be useful to compare and contrast Bhutan student's perceptions of education with similar size countries in Asia and internationally. Moreover, the level of economic development in Bhutan might influence the course students study. Thus, further studies could obtain information from economic tracking websites to understand educational motivations.

The gross national happiness of Bhutan is high compared to other countries, which means an interesting future research direction would be to investigate more how this influences education. Happiness as a concept could be measured in terms of willingness to progress despite hardship. This enthusiasm for study might mean that students in Bhutan are more willing to focus on emerging topics such as sustainability for business. New research that integrates economic indicators such as gross national happiness with sustainability topics could be studied through in-depth interviews and surveys. This would help to understand the relationships between concepts and the way hospitality and tourism courses in Bhutan can differentiate themselves from competitors.

Practical implications

Tourism and hospitality education is an important component of overall management education due to societal pressures requiring more people to receive education in this area (Ivanov and Soliman, 2023). Thus, this study has provided a way to understand what tourism educators need to do in order to attract more students. In the competitive global marketplace where students from Bhutan can travel to other countries for educational experiences it is important to understand their motivations (Lhendup, 2021). The results of this study suggest that the main motivations are for strategic job placement and to obtain a better position in the marketplace. Thus, hospitality and tourism educators need to consider new topic areas such as artificial intelligence and ChatGPT in new curriculum design (Williams and McKercher, 2023). This might motivate more students to enrol in hospitality and tourism courses (Llendup and Panda, 2020).

Policy implications

Hospitality and tourism are a topic of strategic importance to Bhutan as the country relies on it as part of their economic growth (Montes and Kafley, 2022). This means it is important to

know why students study the topic and what can be done to grow student numbers. As the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided there is now more need to obtain highly skilled students who can work in the tourism industry (Skavronskaya *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, as a large percentage of people travelling to Bhutan do so for tourism reasons it is important to know what kind of services they require (Norbu and Wetprasit, 2021). Thus, the results of this study can help to inform regional and country level governments about educational training needs (Şimşek and Kalıpçı, 2023).

Conclusion

This study has focused on understanding the motivations and experiences of hospitality and tourism students in Bhutan. As there are few studies from a Bhutanese perspective in the business literature, the findings of this study will help to understand the role of culture and economic climate in educational experiences. The results suggest that different countries can be more attractive to Bhutanese students due to the perception of enjoyment and also career opportunities. Limitations and future research suggestions stated how this study contributes to the broader global discussion about the importance of building educational capabilities particularly in emerging economies.

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About the authors

Dr Paul Christopher Strickland is senior lecturer in Tourism, Hospitality and Events at La Trobe University. Paul has a vast background of job titles in industry from around the globe. His research interests include wine marketing, ethnic restaurants, fashion trends, Bhutan studies and space tourism. Paul completed his PhD specialising in wine marketing and events. Paul Christopher Strickland is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: p.strickland@latrobe.edu.au

Dr Vanessa Ratten is Associate Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation in the Department of Management and Marketing, La Trobe Business School at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia. She teaches entrepreneurial business planning, managing innovation in organisations and entrepreneurship and publishes in books and high-ranking journals.