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Bhupender Dighliya

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Exploring motivational factors for enrolling in hospitality programs: insights from India

Bhupender Dighliya

School of Hotel Management,
Starex University,
Gurugram, 122413, India
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4562-5413>
Email: bhupendrhm.ihtm08@gmail.com

Abstract: This research examined motivational factors influencing students' enrollment in hospitality programs, investigating potential gender differences. Using a structured questionnaire and a quantitative approach, data from 650 students in India's National Capital Region were analysed via descriptive analysis, factor analysis, and *t*-tests. The sample, predominantly male (77.2%) and young (ages 18–20), highlighted motivations such as career opportunities and study convenience, academic aspiration, external influences, interest in foreign exposure, and the perceived attractiveness of the field. There were no significant gender differences found in the motivational factors. The study's limited sample size and cross-sectional design may limit the generalisability and temporal insights of its findings. The educational institutions and industry stakeholders can better align their programs with students' aspirations and expectations, thereby enhancing the quality and relevance of hospitality education in India.

Keywords: hospitality education; motivational factors; career; hospitality program; hospitality industry.

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Biographical notes: Bhupender Dighliya holds a doctoral degree in Hotel and Tourism Management from Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak, India. His current research interest includes hospitality and tourism education, sustainable development and innovations in hospitality and tourism, and farm tourism. He has contributed to several book chapters, conference papers and journal papers.

1 Introduction

The hospitality industry plays a pivotal role in today's global economy, offering a wide range of career opportunities in various sectors such as hotels, restaurants, tourism, event management, and more. In India, the hospitality industry has witnessed remarkable expansion in recent years, making it a vital sector for job creation and revenue

generation. The tourism and travel sector made a contribution of \$178 billion to the GDP in 2021, and this number is foreseen to rise to \$512 billion by 2028. Amid 2019 and 2030, India's direct contribution to GDP is estimated to increase at a pace of 7–9% each year (WTTC, 2022). As the industry remains to evolve and develop, the demand for competent personnel in the hospitality sector is on the rise. As per the report of WTTC (2022), India's tourism and hospitality sector employed 32.10 million people, representing 6.9% of the total employment in the country. It is predicted that by 2029, the sector will employ 53 million people (IBEF, 2022). In the Indian context, where tourism and hospitality are as the key contributors to the national economy, there is a growing interest among individuals to pursue hospitality education programs.

Motivation plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's career choices and commitment to their chosen field of study. Understanding the aspects that persuade students to pursue a hospitality program is of great importance to educational institutions, industry practitioners, and policymakers. By gaining insights into students' motivations, educational institutions can design effective curricula, career counselling services, and industry collaborations that align with students' aspirations and ensure the development of a skilled workforce for the hospitality industry.

Students' motivations for pursuing a program in hospitality and tourism management have been extensively explored through various research studies. Investigating student motivations in this field has been ongoing since the 1990s, with scholars such as Airey and Frontistis (1997), Cothran and Combrink (1999), Huyton (1997), Purcell and Quinn (1996), and Zhou (1991) contributing to the literature. While similar research has been conducted in different countries to comprehend students' motivations, many scholars have encountered a lack of available literature on this subject (Akıncı et al., 2017; Bhupender, 2023; Dilbag and Amandeep, 2017; Shyju and Tanwar, 2020). A more in-depth examination of the existing literature reveals a scarcity of research on the drives that lead students to select tourism and hospitality programs.

While studies have explored various aspects of motivation in different educational contexts, research specifically focusing on the inspiration of students to pursue hospitality programs in India is limited. Such examination has been done by Dilbag and Amandeep (2017), Shyju and Tanwar (2020) and Bhupender (2023). The current study is motivated by the notable gap in research concerning the drives of students pursuing tourism and hospitality degrees in India. Additionally, examining student behaviour aids in gaining a deeper understanding of their requirements. As highlighted by Schunk et al. (2014), motivation plays a crucial role in shaping behaviour. Understanding why students choose to study tourism and hospitality program holds significant importance within the field of education, as emphasised by prior research (Bhupender, 2023; Schmidt, 2002; Shyju and Tanwar, 2020; Santucci de Oliveira et al., 2023, Strickland and Ratten, 2024). The main objective of this study is therefore to fill this gap and gain a deeper understanding of the motivation factors driving Indian students to pursue hospitality program. The second aim of this study is to analyse gender-specific differences in motivational factors. By examining these motivations, educational institutions and industry stakeholders can better align their programs with students' aspirations and expectations, thereby enhancing the quality and relevance of hospitality education in India.

2 Hospitality education in India

The hospitality education journey began in 1954 when the “All India Women Council, Bombay” took the initiative to establish hotel management education under the leadership of Ms. Lilavati Munshi. Government of India initiated its efforts in hotel management education by establishing the first “Institute of Hotel Management,” Pusa, New Delhi, in 1962. Subsequently, institutes were set up in Kolkata and Madras in 1963 and 1964. In 1982, the “National Council of Hotel Management and Catering Technology (NCHMCT)” was established by the “Department of Food”, “Ministry of Agriculture”, and the “Government of India”. In the university system, MJP Rohelkhand University Bareilly introduced a four-year “Bachelor of Hotel Management and Catering Technology” program in 1996. Following this, Bundelkhand University, Jhansi (2001), BIT, Mesra (2003), HNB Garhwal University, Srinagar, Garhwal (2004), and other universities also introduced hotel management programs on their campuses (Dighliya and Dahiya, 2024). Many private institutions and hotels also emerged in hospitality education. As of the 2023–2024 academic year, there are 121 institutes offering hotel management programs in India (AICTE).

3 Literature review

The hospitality sector is a thriving sector that offers numerous career opportunities (Dighliya, 2023) and attracts students from diverse backgrounds. Several studies have highlighted the significance of career opportunities as a primary motivation for students (Anthony et al., 2023; Bhupender, 2023; Santucci de Oliveira et al., 2023, Strickland and Ratten, 2024). Chinese students, as identified by Zhou (1991) and Huyton (1997), believe that the hospitality and tourism sector provide a wide range of job opportunities, making it an attractive field of study. Similarly, Lee et al. (2010) found Job opportunity and self-actualisation in US and Mohammad and Alsaleh (2013) found social status, job opportunities in Jordan were to be the most influential factors. Ross (1994) found that students with extensive knowledge about the industry are more inclined to enrol in hospitality and tourism programs, as they recognise the potential for career advancement within the sector. In addition to career prospects, other motivating factors include the benefits offered by the industry. Bushell et al. (2001) emphasised the industry’s involvement to cultural enrichment and economic progress, as well as its ability to provide interesting and exciting job opportunities for individuals with diverse abilities and interests. The most influential factors were intrinsic sources such as job experiences and personal experiences, as well as extrinsic factors like opportunities for progression and work security (Kim et al., 2010).

The perception of hospitality and tourism programs and institutes also influences students’ motivations. Students consider factors such as the reputation of the program, the accessibility of specific courses, and the quality of faculty when selecting a hospitality and tourism program (O’Mahony et al., 2001). Tukamushaba and Xiao (2012) investigated 136 students and identified six influences that accounted for around 60% of the variance in students’ decisions. Factors such as long working hours and low pay

created a negative perception of the industry (Tukamushaba and Xiao, 2012; Bhupender, 2023; Mqwebedu et al., 2022).

Social aspects such as family support (Schmidt, 2002), socio-economic background and parental influence play an important role in the students' decision-making process (Theresa and Agbotse, 2013; Kim et al., 2016; Shyju and Tanwar, 2020; Strickland and Ratten, 2024). Household income and parental professions are related to students' decisions to enrol in hospitality and tourism programs (Salehuddin et al., 2005). Furthermore, factors such as career outcome expectations, career decision self-efficacy, and relevant work experiences have been found to influence students' commitment and engagement in the industry (Chuang et al., 2007).

Different cultural contexts can also affect students' motivations. Kim et al. (2007) observed variations in study preferences among Korean, Taiwanese, and Chinese students. Kim et al. (2016) highlighted that students were primarily motivated by factors like the working environment and interest in different cultures. Qiu et al. (2017) investigated students' perceptions and influencing factors in hospitality career options in China, finding that traditional principles and family members had less influence. Self-efficacy, occupational aspirations, cultural values, career guidance, and parental support were more influential.

Jamnia and Pan (2017) found that Taiwanese' students often chose hospitality programs due to lower scores on the university entrance exam for other majors. Factors like the environment, curriculum, and study opportunities were influential, and while parents had some influence, students ultimately made their own major choices. Lee et al. (2018) examined the impact of advice-givers, teachers, industry mentors, parents, and social media in career decision-making inspirations of students majoring in hospitality. Traditional factors were found to partake a more influence than social media, emphasising the need for comprehensive support mechanisms. Students were influenced by parents, friends, and teachers, and the perceived employment prospects and international exposure played a significant role in their decision-making (Shyju and Tanwar, 2020). They also found that "foreign exposure", "affordability", "job opportunities", "knowledge improvement", and "recommendations" were important drives. "Self-actualisation", "field attractiveness", "ease of study", and "scholastic achievement" were some others factors that were also highlighted by the researchers (Lee et al., 2006, 2010; Theresa and Agbotse, 2013; Mohammad and Alsaleh, 2013; Juaneda et al., 2017; Bhupender, 2023; Santucci de Oliveira et al., 2023; Strickland and Ratten, 2024).

Gender differences have been observed in students' drives for selecting a hospitality and tourism programs. Male students were more influenced by the potential for career progression, employment prospects, and salary levels, while female students prioritise their skills and interests in the subject (Malgwi et al., 2005). Furthermore, studies by Aitchison (2003) and Hjalager (2003) indicated that male students were more inspired by past industrial experiences and international career prospects, whereas female students place greater emphasis on salary considerations. Mohammad and Alsaleh (2013) found that male and female students differed in three significant motivators: job opportunities, attractive majors, and ease of studying.

4 Research methodology

The population for this study comprised undergraduate and postgraduate hospitality students studying in the “National Capital Region” (NCR) of India. In the current study, Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size was used. As per the table, for the population of 15,000, the appropriate sample size would be 375. In the current study, the population size was 11,798 (as per intake given on the institution’s website), which is between 10,000 and 15,000 on the Krejcie and Morgan table, so the appropriate sample size would be 372. To increase the validity of the research a sample of 650 students was collected using the convenience sampling method from various hospitality institutions, including private universities, state universities, central universities, private IHMs, state IHMs, and central IHMs under NCHMCT and AICTE-approved institutes.

The survey instrument used in this study was a self-administered questionnaire consisting of 23 variables related to motivations to pursue hospitality program and other questions to gathered the demographic information. The variables were adapted from instruments used in previous studies conducted by Bushell et al. (2001), Huyton (1997), Juaneda et al. (2017), Lee et al. (2006), O’Mahony et al. (2001), Purcell and Quinn (1996), Schmidt (2002), and Kim et al. (2007). The motivation items in the questionnaire assessed participants’ interest in a hospitality program and the job-related or other benefits they expected to gain from studying in a Hotel Management program. Participants were requested to rate their answers on a “5-point Likert-type scale”, ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. Additionally, the questionnaire included items to collect demographic information about the respondents.

To maximise participation and ensure a wide reach, an online questionnaire was distributed through various channels, including the internet, social media platforms, and with the assistance of faculty members. Online distribution was chosen considering the familiarity of students with internet usage and the advantages it offers in terms of cost, convenience, speed, ease of data cleaning, and analysis (Beebe et al., 1997; Schaefer and Dillman, 1998; Sills and Song, 2002). The survey was conducted in the April – December 2022.

The survey responses were collected and exported as an Excel spreadsheet for further analysis. Data analysis was conducted using “SPSS Version 26”. Descriptive analysis was performed to generate results related to the demographic profile of the respondents. Exploratory factor analysis, a statistical technique, was employed to identify underlying factors or dimensions that explained the variance in students’ motivations for choosing a hospitality program. This analysis helped uncover common themes and group related items together, providing insights into the key motivational factors driving students’ decisions to pursue a hospitality program. Independent samples t-test was performed to find the significant gender variance in motivational factors.

5 Results and findings

5.1 *Demographic characteristics*

The demographic profile (Table 1) of the 650 surveyed students showed a predominance of males (77.2%) and females (22.8%). This corresponds to the underrepresentation of women. Majority of respondents falling in the 18–20 age bracket (80.6%). The majority

were unmarried (94.9%) and hailed from rural backgrounds (57.2%). Regarding family income, 56.3% reported earnings up to 3 Lakhs annually. Educational backgrounds varied, with Arts (40.3%), Commerce (31.8%), and Science (27.8%) being primary streams. Marks distribution indicated 39.8% scoring 75% and above. Most were pursuing BHM/BHMCT (48.0%), followed by B.Sc. H&HA (28.6%). Respondents were dispersed across study years, with the highest in the third year (31.2%). Private universities (31.4%) and state universities (25.1%) were common study institutes. While 88.0% expressed satisfaction with their study program choice, 24.2% had familial ties to the hospitality sector. These inferences provide insights into the demographic characteristics and educational background of the respondents, which are essential for understanding the motivations and preferences of students in the hospitality program.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender	Male	502	77.2
	Female	148	22.8
Age	Below 18	27	4.2
	18–22	524	80.6
	22 and above	99	15.2
Marital status	Married	33	5.1
	Unmarried	617	94.9
Your background	Rural	372	57.2
	Urban	278	42.8
Family annual income	Up to 3 Lakhs	366	56.3
	3–6 Lakhs	123	18.9
	6–10 Lakhs	89	13.7
	Above 10 Lakhs	72	11.1
What was your Stream in the last qualifying exam, 10+2 or Graduation?	Arts	262	40.3
	Commerce	207	31.8
	Science	181	27.8
What was your percentage of marks in the last qualifying exam, 10+2 or Graduation?	40–50%	16	2.5
	50–60%	109	16.8
	60–75%	266	40.9
	75% and above	259	39.8
Program pursuing	BSc H&HA	186	28.6
	BHM/BHMCT	312	48.0
	MSc H&HA	24	3.7
	MHM/MHMCT	99	15.2
	B. Voc.	29	4.5

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents (continued)

	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Year of study	First-year	182	28.0
	Second year	201	30.9
	Third year	203	31.2
	Fourth-year	64	9.8
Institute you are studying	Central University	58	8.9
	State University	163	25.1
	Private University	204	31.4
	Central IHM	56	8.6
	State IHM	86	13.2
	Private IHM	83	12.8
The preferred choice of the study	Yes	572	88.0
	No	78	12.0
Relatives/parents associated with the Hospitality sector	Yes	157	24.2
	No	493	75.8

5.2 *Motivational factors to choose hospitality program*

The KMO (Table 2) measure evaluates the sampling adequacy by inspecting the proportion of variance among variables that might be instigated by underlying factors. In this study, the KMO measure is calculated to be 0.893. This value falls within the acceptable range (usually above 0.7), indicating that the data is appropriate for factor analysis (Nunnally, 1978). A higher value suggests a better suitability for factor analysis. Bartlett's test evaluates the correlation matrix, meaning that there is no underlying structure or relationship among the variables. The test assesses the significance of the relationship between variables. In this study, the approximate chi-square value is 5411.3, with degrees of freedom (df) equal to 253. The significance level (Sig.) is reported as .0, representing that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and there is a significant relationship amongst the variables. Therefore, the data is appropriate for factor analysis.

Table 2 KMO & Bartlett's test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.893
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	5411.3
	Df	253
	Sig.	0.0

To examine the factors influencing students' choice to pursue a hospitality program, "Principal Component Factor Analysis" and "Varimax Rotation" was employed to identify the factors after collecting data from respondents. The measurement scale consisted of 23 items for factors influencing students' choice to pursue a hospitality program. Factor analysis implying with latent root criterion, it is essential to consider Eigen values greater than 1.0, as suggested by Pett et al. (2003).

Additionally, a factor loading of at least 0.50 is used as a threshold to determine which items should be included in a factor. Two items were extracted as their value loaded under 0.5. Twenty-one items were extracted under the five factors as mentioned in Table 3.

Table 3 Exploratory factor analysis

S. No.	Variables	Factor loading				
		F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Factor 1: Career opportunities and study convenience						
1	Hospitality sector is more practical than theoretical	0.648				
2	I believe there is a diverse range of work opportunities	0.645				
3	Movies/TV/Media/social media reflect appealing images of hospitality sector	0.608				
4	Hospitality industry provides decent work and contributes to the economic growth	0.583				
5	I believe that there is a high rate of employment after successful completion the program	0.579				
6	Jobs in hospitality appear to be appealing	0.577				
7	Hospitality as discipline, easy to study and achieve good grades in, as compared to other areas/domains	0.572				
8	The quality of education provides by institute is good in the hospitality sector	0.559				
9	In comparison to other industries, hospitality sector offers better opportunities for promotion	0.545				
Factor 2: Academic aspiration						
1	I aspire to be a good scholar in hospitality		0.784			
2	I aspire to be an academic specialist in hospitality		0.760			
Factor 3: External influence						
1	Others (such as parents, friends, or teachers) have suggested to pursue this field			0.691		
2	I am interested in pursuing further studies in hospitality			0.545		
3	I believe that the remunerations in hospitality sector are high			0.519		
4	Institute provides industry linkages, innovation and good infrastructure			0.511		

Table 3 Exploratory factor analysis (continued)

S. No.	Variables	Factor loading				
		F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Factor 4: Interest in foreign exposure						
1	In comparison to other disciplines, it provides more opportunities to meet with foreigners and know different cultures				0.774	
2	I believe that hospitality sector shall provide me numerous possibilities to take more overseas trips				0.666	
3	I aspire to learn overseas languages; hospitality discipline provides such opportunity				0.641	
Factor 5: Field attractiveness						
1	The hospitality study is attractive and easily accessible					0.736
2	I believe that hospitality sector has a bright future					0.579
3	This field provides more subject choices					0.521
Eigen Value		7.472	1.528	1.490	1.234	1.106
Total Variance Explained (%) = 55.785		32.487	6.642	6.480	5.365	4.810
No. of total items (Total= 21)		9	2	4	3	3

6 Discussions

The five factors, derived through factor analysis, collectively explain 55.8% of the variance in students' motivations for choosing a hospitality program. Each factor represents distinct aspects influencing students' decisions, including perceived "career opportunities and study convenience", "academic aspirations", "external influences", "interest in foreign exposure", and "field attractiveness" of the hospitality sector as a study choice.

The first factor includes items related to students' perceptions of career opportunities and the convenience of studying in the hospitality sector. It comprises sector is more practical than theoretical, a diverse range of work opportunities, appealing images, decent work, industry linkages and ease of study. The factor reflects students' positive attitudes towards the hospitality industry, considering it to offer appealing job prospects, practical learning experiences, and a higher chance of employment after completing the program. Students also perceive the hospitality field as convenient to study, with good quality education provided by the institutes. This factor is quoted by many researchers (Alcantara et al., 2014; Alrawadieh and Alrawadieh, 2015; Bhupender, 2023; Guo et al., 2005; Kim et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2008; Mohammad and Alsaleh, 2013; Theresa and Agbotse, 2013; Tukamushaba and Xiao, 2012; Shyju and Tanwar, 2020; Santucci de Oliveira et al., 2023; Strickland and Ratten, 2024). The second factor (Academic Aspiration) indicates that students express a strong academic ambition and desire to excel in the field of hospitality. They aspire to become proficient scholars and specialists, reflecting their commitment to academic growth and excellence in the domain of hospitality studies.

This factor supports the findings of Jamnia and Pan (2017). The third factor highlights the impact of external influences, particularly from parents, friends, or teachers, on students' decision to pursue a career in the hospitality sector. This factor supports the finding of Lee et al. (2018) and Shyju and Tanwar (2020). Additionally, students' interest in further studies within the field and their belief in the sector's high remuneration contribute to this factor. The third factor is "Interest in Foreign Exposure". This factor reveals that students are drawn to the hospitality sector due to the prospects of international exposure and opportunities to interact with individuals from diverse cultures. They also express a keen interest in learning foreign languages, which the hospitality discipline can provide. This finding is supported the previous researchers (Bhupender, 2023; Guo et al., 2005; Kim et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2008; Mohammad and Alsaleh, 2013; Theresa and Agbotse, 2013; Tukamushaba and Xiao, 2012; Shyju and Tanwar, 2020; Santucci de Oliveira et al., 2023; Strickland and Ratten, 2024). The fifth factor (Field Attractiveness) comprises three items, such as "The hospitality study is attractive and easily accessible" and "I believe that the hospitality sector has a bright future". This factor underscores the students' perception of the hospitality sector as an attractive and promising field of study. They view the hospitality program as appealing and accessible, with a promising future in terms of career prospects and opportunities. This factor supports the findings of O'Mahony et al. (2001).

Table 4 illustrates a significant variance among male and female participants in the motivational factors by implying independent sample t-test. Considering "Career Opportunities and Study Convenience", male respondents had a slightly higher mean score ($M = 4.00$) compared to female respondents ($M = 3.96$), with a negligible mean difference of 0.34. However, the t-value ($t = 0.537$) suggests no statistically significant gender difference ($p = 0.592$). Similarly, for 'Academic Aspiration', male and female respondents displayed similar mean scores ($M = 3.85$ and $M = 3.80$, respectively) and no significant gender-based difference ($p = 0.623$). Additionally, 'External Influence', 'Interest in Foreign Exposure', and 'Field Attractiveness' did not reveal statistically significant gender disparities, with t-values indicating minimal differences and p-values above the significance threshold. In conclusion, the data indicate that there are no substantial gender-related variations in motivational factors. Both male and female respondents generally share similar motivations across these factors. This suggests that, in the context of Indian higher education, the choice to pursue hospitality programs is not significantly influenced by gender-related factors. These findings are not supported the other researcher's findings (Malgwi et al., 2005; Mohammad and Alsaleh, 2013).

Table 4 Gender difference in motivational factors

Motivational factors	Male		Female		Mean diff.	t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Career opportunities and study convenience	4.00	0.68	3.96	0.65	0.34	0.537	0.592
Academic aspiration	3.85	0.97	3.80	1.00	0.45	0.491	0.623
External influence	3.81	0.81	3.74	0.74	0.07	0.938	0.349
Interest in foreign exposure	4.15	0.81	4.21	0.73	-0.57	-0.776	0.438
Field attractiveness	4.25	0.54	4.21	0.56	0.04	0.823	0.411

7 Conclusion

This study sought to shed light on the motivations of Indian students when choosing hospitality education programs and to investigate potential gender differences in these motivational factors. It provides valuable insights for educational institutions and policymakers to better understand the factors that attract students to this field. Additionally, the study's findings highlight that, regardless of gender, students are primarily driven by factors such as career opportunities, academic aspirations, external influences, interest in foreign exposure, and the perceived attractiveness of the hospitality sector. This knowledge can aid in tailoring educational programs and support systems to meet the specific needs and aspirations of students pursuing careers in hospitality.

8 Limitations and future directions

This study has limitations worth considering. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of 650 respondents from a specific region in India and underrepresentation of female students, which may restrict the generalisability of findings to a broader population. Secondly, the research employed a cross-sectional design, capturing a single point in timeframe, and future studies could benefit from longitudinal approaches to track evolving motivations. Lastly, while gender differences were explored, other demographic factors remained relatively unexamined.

To address these limitations, future research avenues are proposed. Investigating how motivations differ across various types of educational institutions can provide valuable insights. Longitudinal studies could offer a deeper understanding of changing motivations over time. Examining how initial motivations align with post-graduation career outcomes is vital. Qualitative research can capture nuanced motivations. Regional and cultural variations should also be explored. Comparative studies with other countries can highlight unique aspects of student motivations, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of hospitality education choices. Incorporating these suggestions and considering the study's implications, stakeholders can improve the attractiveness and effectiveness of hospitality education in India, ultimately benefiting both students and the industry.

9 Implications of the study

9.1 Practical implications

The identified factors guide institutions in tailoring hospitality programs to student needs, emphasising practical learning experiences, academic excellence, parental involvement, international perspectives, and career promotion. This facilitates curriculum design, career counselling, and recruitment strategies. Recognising these motivations enhances program attractiveness and student retention, fostering a supportive learning environment. Ultimately, aligning educational offerings with student aspirations strengthens the hospitality sector's appeal and ensures its continued relevance in meeting industry demands.

9.2 Theoretical advancements

The identified factors contribute to theoretical advancements in understanding students' decision-making processes regarding hospitality education. By delineating distinct motivational factors, the study enriches existing theoretical frameworks and provides a nuanced understanding of students' motivations. The factors align with previous research findings, consolidating and validating the conceptual understanding of motivation in hospitality education.

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