



## **WHY STUDENTS CHOOSE TO STUDY TOURISM AND HOTEL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM IN NORTH CYPRUS**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to investigate why students choose to study Tourism and Hotel Management Programs in North Cyprus. The study employed the quantitative research approach, through the use of a structured questionnaire. The data was carried out using convenience sampling technique as guided by Singh and Masuku (2014). The 206 questionaries were collected during the period of October-November 2023. Descriptive statistics, reliability test, correlation analysis, regression analysis and Explanatory Factor Analysis (EFA) were employed for testing the conceptual model of the research by using SPSS version 26. The regression results revealed statistically significant relationships among self-actualisation (SA), job opportunity (JO), field attractiveness (FA), easy to study (ES), scholastic achievement (SA) and interest in practical accept (IPA). The strongest relationship was between JO and SA and the lowest was between FA and ES. The major findings and implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** student, motivation, tourism and hospitality, job opportunities, decision-making

### **Introduction**

According to Mohamed (2016) tourism and hospitality industry has one of the fastest and largest growing industry in the world, and more expansion is expected in the future. This expansion is being fuelled by a multitude of factors, such as greater leisure time, increasing disposable money, and rising interest in international travel (Prayag & Hosany 2014). The tourism and hospitality industries are in dire need of trained personnel as a result of this boom. More university students are choosing to enrol in tourism and hospitality management programs as a result (Canage & Sempele, 2019).

In North Cyprus there are 23 universities which have significant contribution within the services sector on the economy of country. Katircioglu (2010) asserts that universities in North Cyprus play a crucial role in fostering genuine economic expansion. In 2022, 950 million dollars generated from higher education. According to Cyprus Turkish Chamber of Commerce's report (2023) 108,588 students studying in North Cyprus and 51,280 were from third-world countries in 2022.

In the current global context, in order to be succeed and maintain their competitive advantage, universities need to create tactics/strategies to attract new students and to comprehend the decision-making process of international students who are looking to enrol in tourism and hospitality programs.

The sixteen universities in North Cyprus offer higher education in tourism and hospitality management. These universities, which have been offering two-year (A.A.S.) and

four-year (B.S.) degree programs to both local and foreign students for more than thirty years, offer instruction in both English and Turkish. Faculty of Tourism in Near East University (NEU) is one of them which offers a range of courses in tourism and hospitality management program.

The large and growing tourism and hospitality industries have a high demand for qualified professionals (Guttentag et al., 2018). However, little research has been done on the factors that affect university students' choices of majors in tourism and hospitality management.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to identify which factors influence students' decisions to study the tourism and hotel management bachelor program at NEU in Nicosia, North Cyprus. In the study, we attempted to understand student's perceptions according to SA, JO, FA, ES, SHA, and IPA.

### **Conceptual Model**

According to Ferguson at their friends (2021), alluded that information on student enrolments of Tourism and Hospitality programs are becoming more and more popular in the world with specific Asian countries like China, Taiwan, and South Korea similar scenario happening in Europe with North Cyprus not spared. This is also backed up by Mohammad and Alsaleh (2013) assert that the government's actions are a result of the tourism industry's growth. The demand for skilled Tourism and Hospitality programs labour has risen as the tourism industry grows.

The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates that by 2030, the tourism sector will have added 100 million new employments. According to Theresa and Agbotse (2013), stated that the third-largest source of income in the world at the moment is tourism. As a result, the importance of education in Tourism and Hospitality programs has increased, and more institutions have begun distributing Tourism and Hospitality programs. There is also a rising number of international students studying Tourism and Hospitality programs. Despite its importance, there is not much research on the factors that influence students' decision about choosing schools associated to the hospitality industry. Students' motivation to study hospitality and tourism management has not received enough attention, despite its importance in tourism education and its impact on both educators and managers (Hjalager, 2003).

The paper by Alrawadieh and Alrawadieh (2015) sought to determine the factors influencing the choice of Hospitality and Tourism Management as a major among students in Jordan, as well as their aspirations to pursue a graduate degree in this field overseas. The results indicated that the factors influencing Jordanian students' choice of major include job opportunities, academic achievement, perceived ease of study, and the attractiveness and characteristics of the field.

Mohammad and Alsaleh (2013) conducted a study in Jordan to investigate the factors that influence students' decision to major in hospitality and tourism. The differences between males and females were statistically examined. "Social status," "job opportunities," "modern major," "special interest," "attractive major," "ease in studying," and "fulfilment of dreams" are the seven motivational variables which are included in this study. Students considered "social status" to be the main factor influencing their decision about enrolling in a tourism program out of the seven motivational factors. According to the findings, students expressed a preference for the opportunity to secure employment in various tourism establishments, such as upscale hotels, artisanal stores, or as tourist guides.

At Akdeniz University in Turkey, Erdinc and Kahraman (2012) concluded that four separate variables motivated students pursuing degrees in tourism-related programs: "status

and personal relationships," "industrial commitment and personal suitability," "compensation and benefits," and "career advancement."

The study conducted by Lee, Olds, and Lee (2010) aimed to ascertain the motivations behind college students in the U.S.A. choosing to pursue a degree in Hospitality and Tourism Management. Additionally, the study sought to determine the specific topic areas within this field that student wished to specialize in, as well as their favourite overseas places for learning.

Six different motivational elements were identified from an empirical research of 479 undergraduate IT majors: "job opportunity," "field attractiveness," "foreign experience," "external influence," and "ease of study. In 2008, Lee and his colleagues conducted a study on the motivation of students studying Hospitality and Tourism Management in Hong Kong. Their empirical study elucidated the motivations behind college students' desire to study in the subject of Hospitality and Tourism Management, as well as their inclination to seek degrees in this field abroad. Principal component factor analysis was conducted on 23 motivation items, resulting in the extraction of five motivating components namely "self-actualization," "job opportunity," "field attractiveness," "ease of study," and "scholastic achievement." Among the five motivational elements, students ranked career opportunities as the primary reason for studying Hospitality and Tourism Management, with self-actualization being the second most important aspect.

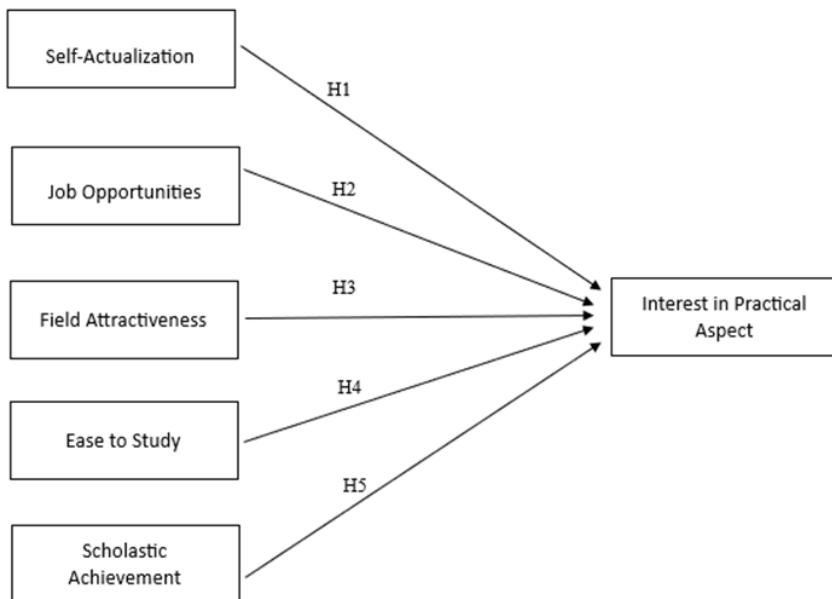
Separate research conducted by Kim et al. (2007), examined the motivations of undergraduate and master's level students in China, Taiwan, and Korea to pursue a degree in Hospitality and Tourism Management. The study also explored their preference for studying overseas and their desired area of specialization within this field. Kim et al. identified 33 key factors that drive students' decisions to pursue their studies.

## **Research Questions**

The purpose of the study is to identify which factors influence students' decisions to study the tourism and hotel management bachelor program at NEU in Nicosia, North Cyprus. In the study, we attempted to understand student's perceptions according to SA, JO, FA, ES, SHA, and IPA. In this context, the aforementioned discussion and aim allow us to develop the below hypotheses:

- H1. Self-actualization has a positive impact on interest in practical aspect of student choosing Tourism and Hospitality program at Faculty of Tourism at the NEU.
- H2. Job opportunities have a positive impact on interest in practical aspect of student choosing Tourism and Hospitality program at Faculty of Tourism at the NEU.
- H3. Field attractiveness has a positive impact on interest in practical aspect of student choosing Tourism and Hospitality program at Faculty of Tourism at the NEU.
- H4. Easy to study has a positive impact on interest in practical aspect of student choosing Tourism and Hospitality program at Faculty of Tourism at the NEU.
- H5. Scholastic achievements have a positive impact on interest in practical aspect of student choosing Tourism and Hospitality program at Faculty of Tourism at the NEU.

SA, JO, FA, ES, SHA are considered as an independent variable, whilst IPA has been tested as a dependent variable. Figure 1 depict the conceptual model of the study.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual model by author

## Methodology

### Research Design

The current study employed quantitative approach for achieving the study purpose. In this study, the scanning method, one of the quantitative research methods, was used. In studies where the descriptive-relational scanning model was used, a situation or event is defined as it is, and the relationships, effects, and degrees of the variables that cause this situation are determined (Lewin, 2005). Based on this method, the extent to which the determined independent variables affect/predict the dependent variable was statistically analysed during the process of questioning the developed hypotheses.

### Study Group

The target sample of the study comprises students enrolled in the tourism and hotel management program at NEU. A convenience sampling technique was used to collect data as guided by Singh and Masuku (2014). The sample size of 206.

### Data Collection Tools and Analysis Process

Data collection started after getting permission from Scientific Research Ethics Committee of NEU. The questionnaires were distributed out to participants who match the requirements for inclusion during the period of October-November 2023. The sample size of 206 was determined based on considerations of statistical power, precision, and feasibility and from the online sample size calculator.

A questionnaire survey was used as a collection data tool. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A comprised the demographic information. Section B has 25 structured questions adapted from Ahmad Edwin Mohamed, Nur Balqish Hassan, and Wong Yean Meng (2016). A 5-point Likert scale measurement was used in the questionnaire, ranging from strongly disagree as 1 to strongly agree as 5. SA has 2 items, JO has 6 items, FA has 4 items, ES has 5 items, SHA has 3 items, and IPA has 5 items.

The acquired data subsequently be evaluated using SPSS version 26. Descriptive, reliability, correlation, Explanatory Factor Analysis (EFA) and regression analysis used to test the study variables

## Findings

### Demographic profile

Frequency was used to analyses a demographic data. As can be seen in Table 1, 50.0% (n=103) was the highest age group between 21 – 25 years and 3.4% (n=7) was the lowest age group between 35 years and above. The nationality of the respondents distributed as, 42.3% (n=87) was highest group with Nigeria. The family working history in hospitality industry of the participants distributed as 54.4% (n=112) the (Yes) group was the highest and 45.6% (n=94) the (No) group was the lowest. Specify if yes from respondents, 44.4% (n=92), (mothers) was the highest group of family members and 1.0% (n=2), (Others) was the lowest group of family members. Family educational history in hospitality from respondents, 64.5% (n=133), (No) group was the highest and 35.5% (n=73) was the lowest.

**Table 1. Demographic Profile**

Demographic Characteristics	Categories	Frequency (f)	Percentage %
Age	Less than 20 years	30	14.6
	21-25 years	103	50.0
	26-30 years	50	24.3
	31-35 years	6	7.7
	More than 35 years	7	3.4
Nationality	Zimbabwe	67	32.7
	Nigeria	87	42.3
	Turkish Cypriot	22	10.5
	Turkish	20	9.8
	Other	10	4.7
Family working history in hospitality industry	112	54.4	54.4
	94	45.6	45.6
Specify if yes	Father	72	35.0
	Mother	92	44.7
	Sibling	40	19.4
	Other	2	1.0
	Yes	73	35.5
Family Educational history in hospitality industry	No	133	64.5

### Exploratory Factor Analysis

EFA was used to explore the underlying relationships between measured variables. Factor analysis reduces big volumes of data to smaller amounts, it works with large volumes of data (Saunders et, al, 2019). No item was removed all items were significant within the variables and components they fell under. Also, item loadings of the statement related to the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .854, excellent level to explain the factor (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), and Bartlett's (1954) test of sphericity reached statistical significance ( $\chi^2 = 3398.483$ ,  $df = 45$ ) at  $p = .000$ , which was acceptable. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's .832 which is above 0.7 as suggested by Kaiser in 1974. It also indicates that the p-values are significant at .000 below 0.05 which is acceptable. It is regarded significant according to (Pallant, 2020).

### Reliability analysis

The study used the internal consistency to verify Cronbach's Alpha as demonstrated in the Table 2. The findings indicate that the Cronbach alphas values exceeded the 0.70 criterion (Hair et al., 2010). The values which are given are of SA, JO, FA, ES, SHA, and IPA and their values are .820, .952, .927, .935, and .917 respectively. These findings show that the scales were solid and significant (Bagozzi et al., 2017). The fundamental design of the study appropriates the data pretty well. The proposed model now demonstrates discriminative validity as a result of these findings.

**Table 2. Reliability Statistics for study variables**

Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Statistics for Self-Actualization	.820	2
Job Opportunities	.952	6
Field Attractiveness	.886	4
Easy to Study	.927	5
Scholastic Achievements	.935	3
Interest in Practical Aspect	.917	5

### Correlation, mean, standard deviation analysis

Pearson correlations, means and standard deviations of constructs were calculated and the inter-correlations between the constructs were found and are presented. Results show that SA, JO, FA, ES, SHA, and IPA have positive relationship. A correlation analysis of .0 – .29 shows a weak correlation relationship between variables, then .30 – .49 shows medium correlation whilst .50 – 1.0 shows the strongest correlation relationship between the variables (Cohn, 1988).

The mean value of SA is 4.10 (S.D.= .403), the JO value being 4.09 (S. D. = .477), FA had a mean value of 4.08 (S. D. = .395), the ES value being 4.05 (S. D. = .474), the SHA value being 4.09 (S. D. = .412) and lastly, the IPA value being 4.02 (S. D. = .438). These results show students choice for selecting tourism and hospitality of all variables and the relationships were all strong. The table 3 shows that among variables the strongest correlation is between JO and SHA .968, followed by SA and ES with .964 and the lowest was between FA and ES which had 752.

**Table 3. Pearson Correlation**

Details	Mean	Std. Deviation	SA	JO	FA	ES	SHA	IPA
SA	4.10	.403	-					

JO	4.09	.477	.891**	-				
FA	4.08	.395	.782**	.813**	-			
ES	4.05	.474	.964**	.957**	.752**	-		
SHA	4.09	.412	.826**	.968**	.799**	.870**	-	
IPA	4.02	.438	.758**	.830**	.943**	.803**	.801**	-

n=206; p<.05\*\*

### Normality Test

The univariate normality test was evaluated by help of SPSS version 26. The absolute skewness and kurtosis values were matched with the responses to the observed variable to check the univariate distribution. As a result, the skewness values ranged from .724 to .915 while the kurtosis values were between .572 to .821 as shown in Table 4, results met the Kline's (2011) skewness criteria <8; these findings demonstrated that there was no evidence of univariate normality.

**Table 4.** Skewness and kurtosis of variables

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
SA	.915	.671
JO	.751	.572
FA	.853	.761
ES	.724	.584
SA	.903	.821
IPA	.857	.701

### Regression Analysis

**Findings for Hypothesis 1.** SA positively related with IPA in choosing to study tourism and hotel management program, at NEU.

The linear regression from SA to IPA is positive in line with H1 ( $\beta = .758$ ,  $t = 16.579$ ). The IPA has a positive relationship with SA increases by 75.8 % due to the increase of one unit IPA. The model was found to be fit ( $R^2 = .574$ ,  $p = .000$ ), with SA explaining 57.4% by the IPA in choosing to study tourism and hotel program, at NEU. As a result, H1 was supported. Table 5 summarizes the results of direct effect.

**Table 5.** Summary of results hypothesis H1

Hypotheses	$\beta$	S.E.	t	p
H1. SA on IPA	.758	.040	16.579	.000

F=274,872; p<0.05; R<sup>2</sup>=0.574

**Findings for Hypothesis 2.** JO positively related with IPA in choosing to study tourism and hotel management program, at NEU.

H2 is supported by the positive linear regression from JO to IPA ( $\beta = .830$ ,  $t = 21.233$ ), as can be seen in Table 6. The IPA and JO have a positive association; an increase of one unit of IPA results in an 83.0% rise in JO. The IPA determined that JO accounted for 68.8% of the reasons for choosing to pursue tourism and hospitality programs at NEU, and the model was found to be fit ( $R^2 = .688$ ,  $p = .000$ ). H2 was therefore supported. The direct effect results are summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6. Summary of results hypothesis H2**

Hypotheses	$\beta$	S.E.	t	$\rho$
H2. JO on IPA	.830	.036	21.233	.000

F=450.825;  $\rho$ <0.05;  $R^2$ =0.688

**Findings for Hypothesis 3.** FA positively related with IPA in choosing to study tourism and hotel management program, at NEU.

The linear regression from FA to IPA is positive ( $\beta = .943$ ,  $t = 40.597$ ). One unit rise in IPA results in a 94.3% increase in FA, which is positively correlated with IPA. The model was determined to be fit ( $R^2 = .890$ ,  $\rho = .000$ ), with FA accounting for 89.0% of the IPA's decision to enrol in NEU's tourism and hospitality program. Consequently, H3 received backing. The direct effect results are summarized in Table 7.

**Table 7. Summary of results hypothesis H3**

Hypotheses	$\beta$	S.E.	t	$\rho$
H3. FA on IPA	.943	.026	40.597	.000

F=1648.128;  $\rho$ <0.05;  $R^2$ =0.890

**Findings for Hypothesis 4.** ES positively related with IPA in choosing to study tourism and hotel management program, at NEU.

The linear regression from ES to IPA is positive ( $\beta = .803$ ,  $t = 19.266$ ). A rise of one unit in IPA results in an 80.3% increase in ES, indicating a positive link between the two variables. It was determined that the model fit ( $R^2 = .645$ ,  $\rho = .000$ ), and that ES accounted for 64.5% of the IPA's decision to enrol in NEU's tourism and hospitality program. Consequently, H4 received backing. The direct effect results are summarized in Table 8.

**Table 8. Summary of results hypothesis H4**

Hypotheses	$\beta$	S.E.	t	$\rho$
H4. ES on IPA	.803	.039	19.266	.000

F=371.187;  $\rho$ <0.05;  $R^2$ =0.645

**Findings for Hypothesis 5.** SHA positively related with IPA in choosing to study tourism and hotel management program, at NEU.

The linear regression from SHA to IPA is positive ( $\beta = .801$ ,  $t = 19.129$ ). When one unit of IPA is increased, the IPA has a positive relationship to SHA increases of 80.1%. SHA was found to account for 64.2% of the IPA's decision to pursue tourism and hospitality programs at NEU, according to the model's fit ( $R^2 = .642$ ,  $\rho = .000$ ). Consequently, H5 received support. The direct effect results are summarized in Table 9.

**Table 9. Summary of results hypothesis H5**

Hypotheses	$\beta$	S.E.	t	$\rho$
H5. SHA on IPA	.801	.036	19.129	.000

F=365.900;  $\rho$ <0.05;  $R^2$ =0.642

## Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

### Discussion, Conclusion

Findings from Hypothesis 1 which was accepted revealed that SA is positively related with IPA in choosing to study tourism and hotel management program at NEU. This aligns with findings from research on tourism education, such as Daniel et al. (2017), which emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurial skills in tourism education. Self-actualization emerges as a powerful motivator, echoing findings by Mohammed et al. (2016). The booming tourism industry, particularly countries like North Cyprus, coupled with the program's focus on practical skills and employability and the importance of career preparedness for students who are driven by self-actualization may see practical experiences as opportunities for personal growth and development. This resonates with universities potential to equip graduates with industry-relevant skills, thus bolstering their confidence and attractiveness to potential employers.

Findings for Hypothesis 2 which was accepted shows that JO is positively related with IPA in choosing to study tourism and hotel management program at NEU. Job opportunities align with numerous studies, a study by Kim et al. (2020) highlights the allure of high salaries and social status associated with hospitality careers, particularly in emerging economies like North Cyprus. Students who are motivated by the perceived job opportunities are more likely interested in the practical aspect of tourism and hotel management program. Chen and Shen (2012) suggest that internship programs can influence students' career development in the hospitality industry. Positive perceptions of job prospects may drive students to engage more in practical aspects of their education, as they see it as a pathway to future employment.

Findings for Hypothesis 3 which was accepted, revealed that FA is positively related with IPA in choosing to study tourism and hotel management program, at NEU. According to Boldureanu et al. (2020), fields that are linked to lucrative employment, prospects for innovation, or societal influence tend to garner greater interest among potential students. Kim et al. (2020) back this up, highlighting the magnetism of hospitality careers in emerging economies like Turkey, where NEU proudly stands. The program's offer of international opportunities, provides an extra draw for young individuals eager to explore the world and gain global experiences.

Findings for Hypothesis 4 was accepted shows that ES is positively related with IPA in choosing to study tourism and hotel management program at NEU. A strong faculty, and a well-structured curriculum likely contribute to student satisfaction at NEU, as supported by research by Wu et al. (2021) emphasizing the significance of faculty competence and course relevance. According to Baker et al. (2020) modern facilities, a vibrant campus culture, and a strong university brand image hold significant sway in attracting students. NEU, by actively showcasing its infrastructure, campus life, and reputation, can further amplify its appeal to potential applicants. The ease of studying Tourism and Hotel Management at NEU has a profoundly positive impact on students' interest in the practical aspects of the program. When students find the coursework manageable and accessible, they are more likely to develop a genuine passion for the field, leading to increased motivation and engagement in hands-on learning experiences.

Moreover, the acceptance of Hypothesis 5, revealed that SHA is positively related with IPA in choosing to study tourism and hotel management program, at NEU. This finding resonates with research by Mohammed et al. (2016), underscoring the motivational impact of academic success on students' eagerness to engage in practical learning experiences. Higher-achieving students, in particular, may view such opportunities as avenues to apply theoretical knowledge and hone their skills, further fuelling their interest in hands-on educational components.

All hypotheses had p-value is 0.000 that is ( $p<0.05$ ) which was significantly accepted. Based on the results provided, the hypothesis with the highest beta coefficient is (H3) “FA on IPA,” with a beta coefficient of .943. This indicates that the relationship between the independent variable (FA) and the dependent variable (IPA) is stronger in comparison to the other hypotheses. Conversely, the hypothesis with the lowest beta coefficient is (H1) “SA on IPA,” with a beta coefficient of .758. This suggests that the relationship between the independent variable (SA) and the dependent variable (IPA) is relatively weaker compared to the other hypotheses. The outcome of the research provides strong evidence to support from the five hypotheses were significantly accepted and supported to the research purpose and objective which entails that tourism and hotel management is preferred by many students at NEU.

The significant influence of Family Influences ‘correlation, mirrors research by Mohammed et al. (2016) who emphasize the role of positive family experiences and role models in shaping career aspirations. This suggests that NEU may benefit from building stronger alumni networks and parent outreach programs to further amplify the program’s positive familial connections.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations both practical and theoretical are proposed. University career centres can partner with the Tourism Hospitality program to provide students with career counselling, workshops, and industry exposure opportunities. Academic advisors and career counsellors should provide comprehensive information and guidance to prospective students, highlighting the diverse career paths and opportunities available within the tourism and hospitality sector (Ahmad, 2015). The program can further expand its internship network and partnerships with hotels and tourism organizations to enhance students' practical skills and employability. Collaboration with industry partners can provide students with valuable insights, practical experience, and networking opportunities. Universities should actively seek to establish and maintain strong ties with the tourism and hospitality industry (Chen & Shen, 2012).

Universities can effectively communicate the program's unique features, such as international accreditation, faculty expertise, and industry connections, to attract potential students. Exploring alternative recruitment channels like social media campaigns, targeted advertising, and international educational fairs can reach a wider student audience. Engaging alumni as mentors, guest speakers, and internship supervisors can create a valuable network for current students and enhance program credibility. Given the financial considerations that influence students' decisions, universities should explore the possibility of offering scholarships and financial aid to attract talented and motivated students to the program.

Future research could explore the long-term career outcomes of universities Tourism Hospitality graduates to assess the program's effectiveness in preparing students for the job market. Longitudinal studies tracking students' career trajectories and satisfaction would provide valuable insights. Additionally, comparative studies investigating student motivations across different universities and countries could offer valuable cross-cultural perspectives. Furthermore, research into the role of emerging technologies and trends in shaping future career aspirations within the tourism and hospitality industry is crucial to informing program development and student guidance.

This study opens up several avenues for future research on the topic of university students' decision-making in relation to the Tourism Hospitality Program. Some potential areas for further investigation include, comparative research across different cultural and national contexts could provide valuable insights into how cultural factors influence students'

decisions to study tourism and hospitality. Longitudinal Studies, for tracking the career trajectories and professional outcomes of graduates from tourism and hospitality programs could provide a deeper. Addressing these limitations and pursuing further research, this study hopes to contribute to a deeper understanding of student motivations in choosing a Tourism Hospitality program and inform efforts to enhance program effectiveness and graduate employability in a dynamic and evolving industry.

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## Ethical procedure

The data collection process was started after getting permission Scientific Research Ethics Committee of the NEU.

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