

The Relationship between Professional Identity and Retention Intention of Hotel Interns in China

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Abstract

In recent years, with the rapid development of Chinese tourism and hospitality industry, more and more attention has been paid to the outflow of hotel professionals. However, the current research focuses on improving hotel's incentive mechanisms for interns, lacking exploration of individual differences among interns and targeted suggestions in the process of talent development. Therefore, understanding the deep psychological factors that affect the interns' retention intention is the future trend of training talents in universities and selecting talents for hotels. From the perspective of professional identity, this paper studies the relationship between professional identity of Chinese hotel interns majoring in hotel management, its four dimensions (professional values, professional belonging, professional behavioral inclination, professional will and expectation) and the retention intention. Through the survey in two universities in Guangdong province, five hypothesis were verified and three of them were supported. Meanwhile, some corresponding suggestions were put forward due to the analysis results.

Keywords: Hotel Management, Chinese College Interns, Professional Identity, Retention Intention

1. Introduction

At present, the hospitality industry, one of the pillar industries of Chinese tourism, is facing enormous opportunities and challenges. The cumulative number of tourists in China has reached 5001 million in 2017, and the compound annual growth rate of domestic tourists in the decade from 2008 to 2017 is 12.6% (CEIC, 2019). However, while the upgrade of tourism consumption has driven an increase in the demand for hotel rooms, the growth rate of hotel room supply in China has been less than that of demand since 2014, and there is a growing gap in professional talents (NBS of China, 2019).

Contrary to the tense atmosphere of the hospitality industry's urgent need for professionals, a survey report based on the data of 2018 shows that nearly 60% of hotel interns have indicated that they will not continue working in the hotel industry (Meadin Data, 2019). Therefore, in the case of the low entry rate and high turnover rate of professional talents, exploring the factors affecting the hotel management students' intention to stay has become a pressing problem.

When the problem of low retention intention in the hotel industry gradually attracted extensive attention in the academic community, most scholars focused on how management can innovate the intern incentive mechanism and management methods to achieve the purpose of enhancing the attractiveness of the internship environment and retain talents. For example, Dai (2015) thinks that it should start from improving the treatment of interns; Wang (2017) has proposed that hotels should establish a new mechanism for interns; Chen (2013) believes that the key to reduce the intern's brain drain is improving the level of hotel management; It can be seen that the solutions proposed by relevant studies are still in regard to the external environmental factors, ignoring the interns' subjective consciousness and their psychological acceptance and recognition of the hotel industry.

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However, from the perspective of management, the highest level of self-actualization demand in Maslow's hierarchy of needs is determined by the internal psychological factors rather than the external environmental conditions. Therefore, only by finding the deep psychological factors that affect the intern's intention to stay, can we discover the fundamental problems and inspire the educators in the hotel industry.

In the psychological studies on factors that affect the job intention, professional identity is the focus of academic attention. Scholars have proved through a large number of investigations that there is a negative correlation between professional identity and turnover intention in industries such as teachers, nurses, counselors and social workers. Kong (2017) proved that the negative correlation between the two exists in private college teachers and social workers; Chen et al. (2017) verified that the lower the village clinic doctors' professional identity, the stronger their turnover intention. As the opposite of turnover intention, the intention to stay is also closely related to professional identity.

Although professional identity has been proved to be significantly positively correlated with employee's retention intention in many fields, the related research mainly focus on a few similar professional groups with high social value and favourable social image, such as teachers, nurses and college counselors. However, as an important support for individual career development, professional identity research should be multi-group, multi-industry, multi-dimensional, and it is still necessary to find the personality in common (Guan, 2016).

Therefore, studying the relationship between professional identity and retention intention of college students, is to add new thinking and verification to the existing commonality, apply the previous problems to new fields, and expand the original scope of professional identity research.

To explore whether the positive relationship between the two exists in the hotel industry, this paper proposes four dimensions of professional identity on the basis of an extensive literature review and conducts a survey on two colleges' interns majoring in hotel management. The results based on the correlation analysis and regression analysis are presented to verify the most important factors that can influence the intern's intention to stay in the four dimensions. Finally, the paper concludes the best psychological entry point to reduce hotel interns' brain drain and provides theoretical references and targeted recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition and Measurement of Professional Identity

At present, scholars generally believe that professional identity refers to both a process and a state, which implies both personal and situational aspects (Wang, 2010). The individual aspect emphasizes its own recognition of the specific occupation, while the situational aspect emphasizes the function and evaluation of the public for a certain profession (Guan, 2016). Since this study is based on the psychological perspective of college students majoring in hotel management, we choose the former explanation.

Generally, scholars have different understandings of the definition of professional identity due to various research objects and perspectives. Holland (1997) combined professional identity with professional interest theory, arguing that professional identity refers to the stability and clarity of individuals' understanding of their professional interests, talents and goals; Schein (1978) indicated that professional identity is a factor which can distinguish people from other group members in terms of attitudes and values; while domestic researchers in China focusing on the degree of personal preference, defined the professional identity as individual's enthusiasm, experience and professional values for work (Wang, 2010; Wei, 2013).

It can be summarized that professional identity is the value perception and acceptance of an individual. Meanwhile, the process of constructing professional identity is actually a process of balancing individual's own professional experience, which is inseparable from the individual's subjective initiative (Guan, 2016). Therefore, combining the previous viewpoints and the characteristics of hotel interns, professional identity in this paper is defined as the individuals' affirmative evaluation of the professional content, goals and values in the process of exploring their own professional roles.

In the measurement of professional identity, current methods can be divided into two aspects: universal and specialized measurement, and most of them are measured by specific scores. The higher the total score, the higher the individual's professional identity.

The former is a universal measurement method represented by Kremer and Hofman (1981). It is generally considered that the professional identity is measured by four factors: self-expression, unity ability, centrality and value; And “My Vocational Situation Scale” (MVS), formulated by Holland (1986), the father of Vocational Interest theory, mainly measures individuals' awareness of career goal, interests, and stable career decision-making ability.

Specialized measurement is a standard specially developed for a certain group. It has stricter restrictions on the research object and industry, and it also has higher accuracy. Because scholars have different definitions of professional identity, the specialized measurement methods show diversified and multi-angle characteristics. Chinese scholar Wei (2013) compiled a scale from the multi-dimensional structure of professional values, role values, professional belongings and professional behavioral tendencies; Wang (2010) divided the teacher's professional identity scale into 12 sub-items from four dimensions: professional will and expectation, professional will, professional value and professional efficacy.

Obviously, the research in this paper needs to choose the latter measurement method. According to the questionnaires which were either developed specifically for this study or adapted from previous research (Wang, 2010; Holland, 1980; Wei, 2013; McMillan, 1986), this paper decided to complete the research from four dimensions of professional values, professional belonging, professional behavioral inclination and professional will and expectation, with a total of 16 subdivision factors. Besides, this study will modify and improve some of the survey items based on the real situation of the hotel industry and the characteristics of the hotel college interns.

2.2. Definition and Measurement of Retention Intention

Most research on retention intention is to introduce the turnover intention in the opposite direction. At present, the existing researches have proved that the more the individuals agree with what they gain in job, the lower their intention to leave, and the stronger their intention to stay (Qiu, 2015).

According to the above related concepts and descriptions of Mowday et al (1979), Xu (2013) and Qian (2017) on the intention to stay, the definition of retention intention is: People's willingness to engage in a certain occupation for a long time and they do not try to find other jobs.

The measurement items about the retention intention are finally divided into three aspects, the attitude of employees to stay, their dependence on the industry and their tendency to search for other jobs referring to the measurement scales pilot tested by academics (Qian, 2017; Qiu, 2015; Wang, 2007).

3. Methods

3.1. Research Hypotheses

From previous researches, the negative correlation between professional identity and turnover intention in certain fields has been verified through survey analysis, interview analysis, and citing intermediary variables. In the study of the influence of social workers' professional identity on turnover intention, Kong (2017) drew a conclusion that there was a correlation between the two by means of stratified cluster sampling and interviews; Chen et al (2016) and Chen Li (2017) verified the significantly negative correlation between professional identity and turnover intention of village clinic doctors and teachers through the specific questionnaire.

In terms of the retention intention in hotel industry, most scholars chose to explore the influence from the perspective of the working environment, training mechanism and work pressure of hotel staff (Qian, 2017; Wang, 2007; Xu, 2013). However, there are very few research on professional identity and most of them are for the official staffs. For example, Guan (2016) research on high-star hotels verified the positive relationship between professional identity and retention intention, but the research object is the first-line official staff of the hotel and it cannot be confused with college interns regardless of the internal working attitude, future planning, or salary levels.

Therefore, this paper is devoted to finding out whether the relationship between professional identity and retention intention exists in Chinese college interns of the hotel industry, and the influence of four dimensions of professional identity on their retention intention. There are five hypotheses are proposed in this study and figure 1 shows the retention model of college interns' professional identity in hotel industry.

H: There is a significant positive relationship between professional identity and retention intention of hotel's college interns in China.

- H₁: There is a significant positive relationship between professional values and retention intention of hotel' s college interns in China.
- H₂: There is a significant positive relationship between professional belonging and retention intention of hotel' s college interns in China.
- H₃: There is a significant positive relationship between professional behavioral inclination and retention intention of hotel' s college interns in China.
- H₄: There is a significant positive relationship between professional will and expectations and retention intention of hotel' s college interns in China.

The retention model of college interns' professional identity in hotel industry

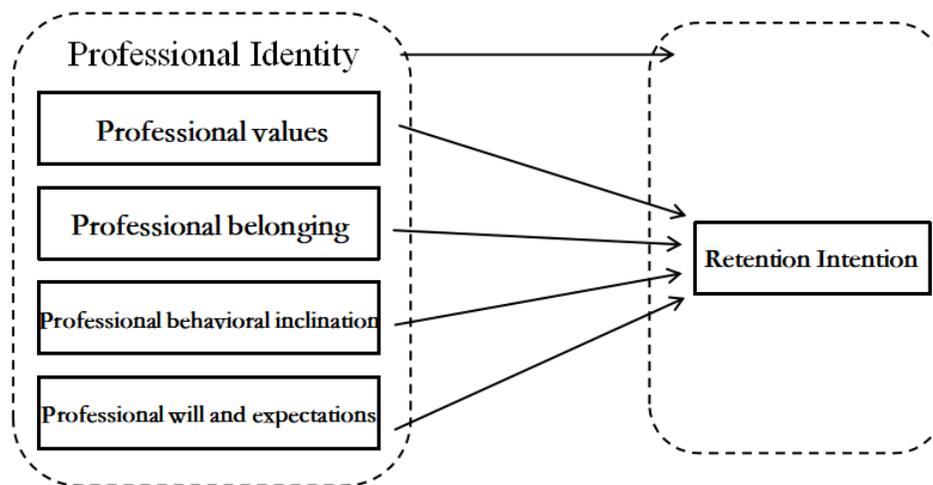


Figure1.Retention model of college interns' professional identity in hotel industry

3.2. Research Questionnaire

To empirically test the stated hypotheses, a survey questionnaire was developed and adapted from previous research (Guan, 2016; Qiu, 2015; Wang, 2010; Wei, 2013). The final questionnaire uses a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and consists of three parts: the professional identity level, the retention intention and the demographic profile. In the first part, the level of professional identity is divided into four dimensions (professional values, professional belonging, professional behavioral inclination and professional will and expectations) and each of them has four items. In the second part, there are three items to assess retention intention and the last part also has three questions to collect demographic information of respondents. The questionnaire is indicated in the Appendix.

3.3. Sample and Data Collection

This study uses online survey for data collection and the survey samples were consisted of college students from Guangdong Province majoring in hotel management. By screening whether they had hotel internship experiences, 131 usable responses were selected in total 138 questionnaires, yielding a 94.93% response rate.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data was pre-coded and then entered into SPSS24.0.

Firstly, each of four dimensions of professional identity and retention intention were subjected to factor analysis to ensure that they were valid indicators of those constructs. Next, Spearman correlation analysis was used to identify relationships between each of the dimensions and retention intention. Finally, a multiple linear regression was conducted using professional identity and its four dimensions as independent variables, and retention intention as the dependent variable. This is to examine the role of professional identity in predicting retention intention.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Statistical Description of Sample

In the process of studying professional identity, differences in individual basic conditions will have an impact on survey results. Therefore, the questionnaire designs three questions, including gender, university grade, and the reasons for choosing hotel management to judge the scope of the sample. Table 1 shows that nearly two-thirds of the sample is female, and more than half of the interns are juniors. These are consistent with the actual situation of Chinese university students majoring in hotel management. In addition, the proportion of all the reasons why the respondents choose this major were not much different. It can be considered that the data collection is relatively comprehensive.

Table 1. Sample statistics

Sample characteristics		N	Percent
Gender	Male	41	31.3%
	Female	90	68.7%
Grade	A freshman	12	9.2%
	A sophomore	23	17.6%
	Junior year	73	55.7%
	Senior year	23	17.6%
Reasons	Personal interest	40	30.5%
	Recommended by teachers, relatives and friends	12	9.2%
	Foreground is good	14	10.7%
	Volunteers are transferred at the time of admission	46	35.1%
	others	19	14.5%

4.2. Reliability Analysis

Reliability refers to the degree of dependability, consistency or stability of a scale. In this paper, the reliability of the scale was tested by the coefficients of Cronbach's alpha and according to Nunnally (1967), if the alpha value is higher than 0.7, the reliability can be considered to meet the standard. As Table 2 shows, the coefficients of Cronbach's alpha of the instruments were ranged from 0.844 to 0.941, this indicates an acceptable internal consistency reliability of the measurements in this study.

Table 2. Reliability test of the formal questionnaire

Dimensions	Cronbach's α	N
Professional values	0.844	4
Professional belonging	0.861	4
Professional behavioral inclination	0.884	4
Professional will and expectations	0.907	4
The total questionnaire	0.941	19

4.3. Validity Analysis

Validity refers to the extent to which the data measured by the questionnaire are in conformity with the actual situation. According to Kaiser's (1974) point of view, the relevance coefficient KMO value can be used to judge whether the project is valid for factor analysis.

Table 3 shows the KMO value of the questionnaire was 0.922, and for the four dimensions, the KMO values were greater than 0.70, which were significant at 0.01 level. This indicates that the validity of the questionnaire is very good, and the data is suitable for factor analysis. Table 4 shows the factor loadings for the four independent variables.

The cumulative variance contribution rates of the items in the four dimensions were 68.121%, 70.634%, 74.386% and 78.339%, indicating that the consistency of the items in the four dimensions and can be further studied and analyzed. The abbreviations of the variables are defined in the Appendix.

Table3. Validity test of the formal questionnaire

Variables	KMO	Bartlett	df	Sig.
PV	0.770	213.144	6	0.000
PB	0.779	250.954	6	0.000
PBI	0.821	293.451	6	0.000
PWE	0.816	357.054	6	0.000
Total questionnaire	0.922	1908.803	171	0.000

Table 4. Cumulative variance of four dimensions

Factor	The variable name	Cumulative factor loading
F1	Professional values	68.121%
F2	Professional belonging	70.634%
F3	Professional behavioral inclination	74.386%
F4	Professional will and expectations	78.339%

4.4. Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis is a study on the correlation degree of each variable in the model. Since there are four items in each dimension of professional identity, the arithmetic mean of all items in each dimension is taken for bivariate correlation analysis to obtain the correlation.

Table5 indicates the Spearman correlation of the five independent variable factors and the dependent variable. The correlation coefficient between each of the four dimensions and retention intention ranged from 0.529 to 0.757, which were significant at 0.01 level. This indicates that there is clearly a very strong correlation between professional identity's four dimensions and retention intention. Meanwhile, strong correlation exists between professional identity itself and retention intention with a correlation coefficient of 0.798.

Table 5. Correlation analysis of professional identity and the four dimensions with retention intention

Model	PI	PV	PB	PBI	PWE	
Retention intention	Spearman	.798**	.529**	.731**	.757**	.734**
	Sig.	000.	000.	000.	000.	000.
	N	131	131	131	131	131

** Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.5. Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is a statistical method to determine the interdependent quantitative relationship between two or more variables. From the results of regression analysis presented in Table 6, professional identity has proved to be significant predictors of retention intention with an adjusted R-square of 0.634. It can be concluded that there is a strong positive correlation and causal relationship between the two.

As Table 8,9 shows, the regression model of the four dimensions and retention intention has a good fitting degree with an adjusted R-square of 0.649. Moreover, Table 10 shows that professional behavioral inclination and professional will and expectations are significant predictors of the dependent variable with a significant t of 0.000 and 0.039. This indicates that professional behavioral inclination is the most noteworthy factor. Professional will and expectations also has a significant predictive effect and needs to be noted. In addition, the influence of professional values and professional belonging can be measured as a secondary factor with a significant t less than 0.05. (The dependent variable of Table 6-9 is retention intention)

Table 6. Fitting degree of PI and RI

Model	R-value	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard error
PI	.798	.637	.634	.71442

Table 7. Regression analysis of PI and RI

Model	Beta	t	Significant
PI	.798	15.041	.000

Table 8. Fitting degree of four dimensions and RI

Model	R-value	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard error
PV,PB,PBI,PWE	.812	.660	.649	.69951

Table 9. Variance of four dimensions and RI

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	significant
Regression	119.656	4	29.914	61.135	.000
Residual	61.653	126	.489		
Total	181.309	130			

Table 10. Regression analysis of four dimensions and RI

Model	Beta	t	significant
Professional values	.105	1.458	.147
Professional belonging	.176	1.632	.105
Professional behavioral inclination	.428	5.111	.000**
Professional will and expectations	.207	2.085	.039*

** Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4.6. Test for Hypothesis

From the results of bivariate correlation analysis and regression analysis presented in Table 6, it can be proved that there is a significantly positive relationship between professional identity and retention intention. Moreover, from the result of Table 10, professional behavioral inclination and professional will and expectations have proved to be significant predictors of retention intention. These provide strong support to the hypothesis H₁, H₃, H₄ that a relatively positive relationship exists between professional identity, professional behavioral inclination, professional will and expectations, and purchasing performance. Meanwhile, as professional values and professional belonging are not significant, hypothesis H₂ can not be supported.

5. Conclusions and Recommendation

According to the data of this survey, the degree of retention intention of college students majoring in hotel management shows two characteristics.

First, the interns' professional identity has a great impact on their retention intention. Interns with a high sense of professional identity often have a strong intention to stay in the hotel industry, and consider themselves as an excellent staff. This directly reflects the importance of high professional identity to the hotel industry.

Second, different dimensions of professional identity have various impacts on the intern's retention intention. Among them, the influence of professional behavioral inclination and professional will and expectations are significantly positively related to retention intentions, while professional values and professional belonging are not significant. This shows that the intern's value and emotional awareness of the hotel industry can not significantly affect their retention intention. Although they believe that the hotel industry has perfect prospects and have a good experience during the internship, these will not become their main reason to stay in the hotel. However, if the interns are willing to spend time learning the professional skills and be strict with their career performance in the hotel industry, that is, they have professional behavioral inclination and professional will and expectations, they tend to have a stronger intention to stay.

Overall, the result of statistics analysis offers two suggestions in improving the hotel's talent selection system and China's college education. Firstly, when hiring interns with long-term training intentions, the hotel can give priority to interns with professional behaviors and a clear career plan. By knowing whether candidates are paying attention to the latest information and relevant skills of the hotel industry, hotel managers can judge whether the candidates are willing to invest time and energy in the hotel industry. In addition, for senior staffs, hotel managers can improve their retention rate by developing their professional skills, helping them to draw up a reasonable career plan.

Secondly, it is recommended that the college educators should pay attention to cultivating students' comprehensive sense of identity in the industry. By enhancing students' understanding of the reality of the hospitality industry, providing opportunities for interaction with hotels and skills training activities, and guiding students to have expectations and plans for future employment, educators can help students build a sense of professional identity and lay the foundation for cultivating hotel and tourism talents.

Appendix: Items of the Questionnaire

F1: PV: Professional values

PV1: I think jobs in hotel industry are respectable.

PV2: I think hotel industry is potential and valuable.

PV3: I think that working in hotel industry will be appreciated and respected by others.

PV4: I think my social status will be improved after working in the hotel industry.

F2: PB: Professional belonging

PB1: Working in a hotel can make me feel interested and happy.

PB2: The working environment in hotel industry suits me.

PB3: I feel a sense of accomplishment after providing help and service to customers.

PB4: During the internship, I thought I was a member of the hotel family, sharing weal and woe.

F3: PBI: Professional behavioral inclination

PBI1: I will read books about the hotel industry.

PBI2: I will pay attention to learning relevant skills (such as make-up, using software, etc.) that will be used in the hotel industry.

PBI3: I will keep an eye on the latest news and information of the hotel industry.

PBI4: I will know the hotel's new job arrangements and training opportunities.

F4: PWE: Professional will and expectations

PWE1: I hope I can create value for the hotel.

PWE2: I am willing to communicate with guests and help them.

PWE3: I think I can be a qualified hotelier.

PWE4: I think I can be an excellent hotelier.

F5: RI: Retention intention

RI1: After investing in the opportunity and time cost of the internship, I think it would be a pity not to work in hotels after graduation.

RI2: After graduation, I want to work in hotels for a long time

RI3: After graduation, I will work in a non-hospitality industry

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