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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF WORKPLACE ETHICS IN TOURISM & HOTEL MANAGEMENT COLLEGE

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Abstract
Ethics are a critical concern in the tourism and hospitality industry, where practitioners are faced daily with ethical dilemmas pertaining to customer handling, managerial decisions, and organizational practices. This paper presents an investigation into workplace ethics among third-year Bachelor of Tourism and Hotel Management students at different University in terms of perceptions, ethical challenges encountered, and decision-making patterns. A total of 120 students who completed the second-year industry internship were selected by simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising 31 items-20 that assessed perceptions about workplace ethics, 6 that identified major ethical challenges, and 5 that measured ethical decision-making-rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument showed good internal reliability as assessed by Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70.These results indicated that the majority of students (60.83%) had positive perceptions, 29.16% neutral, and 10.01% negative perceptions of workplace ethics. Specific ethical challenges mentioned most included unclear workplace ethical guidelines (26.7%), unethical practices in handling guests (23.3%), and pressure from the supervisor to act unethically (18.3%). The established patterns in ethical decision-making showed that 26.7% of the students abide by ethical standards even in situations where pressure to act otherwise is high, and 16.7% reported feeling confused when faced with an actual ethical decision. The Chi-square test of independence demonstrated no significant relationship between gender and workplace ethical perception, $\chi^2(2, N = 120) = 0.69$, $p = .708$, thus there were no differences in ethical viewpoints among male and female students. Overall, results show disparate levels of ethical awareness in the students and that academic preparation, as well as internship experiences, both play an important role in shaping their ethical attitudes. The findings of this study provide useful input for educators and industry practitioners interested in enhancing ethics training and making internship environments more supportive within the hospitality industry.

Key Words: *workplace ethics, ethical decision-making, hospitality students, internships, ethical behaviour.*

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1. Introduction

Ethical conduct is an inherent part of the tourism and hospitality industry, as workers are generally exposed to clients and colleagues, as well as to the stakeholders involved in intensive service environments (Janes & Coper, 2020; Smith & Brown, 2019). The prosperity of any business in this industry relies on the trust of customers in terms of the quality of service provided. For this reason, ethical decision-making plays a major role in ensuring sustainability of operations and a good organizational reputation (Gursoy, Chi, & Karadag, 2018). Hospitality professionals often have to overcome various ethical dilemmas regarding guest-related issues, practices involving finances, discrimination in the workplace, and corporate social responsibility (Lee, Mattila, & Yoo, 2021).The undergraduate students undergoing Tourism and Hotel Management start learning ethical issues while undertaking their training. This is reinforced through the internships that the students undergo in the industry. Through internships, students can be exposed to practical ethical dilemmas and how to handle workplace ethics (Zhao & Mattila, 2022).

While the importance of ethics in hospitality education is recognized, there is a dearth of research in terms of students' perceptions, problems faced at internship sites, and decision-making patterns concerning ethics. Most previous studies have focused on either ethical awareness or organizational practices, but few look at the relationship between academic training, industry exposure, and students' practical ethical experiences.

This research tries to address the above lacuna and explores third-year undergraduate students' perceptions of workplace ethics, the key ethical issues they encounter during internships, and their patterns of decision-making in ethical situations. Grasping these issues shall assist educators and industry professionals in devising superior training programs, mentorship, and policies to adequately equip future hospitality professionals with high ethical standards in performing their work.

2. Research Objectives

2.1: To examine students' perceptions regarding workplace ethics during their industry internships, and whether these perceptions differ by gender.

2.2: To identify the key ethical challenges encountered by students during their industry internships.

2.3: To examine students' ethical decision-making patterns in workplace situations.

3. Hypothesis

H_0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant association between gender and students' perceptions of workplace ethics during their industry internships.

H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant association between gender and students' perceptions of workplace ethics during their industry internships.

4. Literature Review

4.1: Students' Perceptions of Workplace Ethics in Tourism and Hospitality

Ethics within the tourism and hospitality industry are very important since the sector is based on human contact and service quality. Ethical behavior directly impacts customer satisfaction, organizational reputation, and retention of employees (Janes & Cooper 2020; Gursoy, Chi & Karadag, 2018). Some of the ethical issues in the hospitality industry include bribery, misrepresentation, violations of guest privacy, discrimination, and unfair treatment (Smith & Brown, 2019).

In university education, students of tourism and hotel management are taught ethical theories. However, students' perceptions about work ethics shift during the internship, where they are confronted with actual situations. According to the findings by Kim & Baker (2021), on a daily basis, students encounter ethical dilemmas concerning customer service, tipping, and workplace conduct that shape their practical understanding of professional ethics.

4.2: Ethical Issues Faced in Industrial Internships

These internships bridge the gap between purely theoretical knowledge and real-life practice, thus confronting students with pragmatic ethical issues. In this respect, Zhao & Mattila (2022) pointed out that students frequently experience situations which call for ethical decisions, thus enhancing their perception of ethics in the workplace. However, these students may also become victims of unethical practices or pressures from superiors that create moral distress, as cited by Lee, Mattila, & Yoo (2021).

Common issues, as identified in previous studies, include a lack of appropriate ethical standards, discriminatory practices, favoritism, and mishandling of guests. Such issues, as identified by Kim & Baker (2021) and Lee et al. (2021), indicate that internships need more structured mentorship programs, ethical guidelines, and supporting mechanisms that would allow students to manage their ethical dilemmas more constructively.

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4.3: Ethical Decision-Making Patterns Among Hospitality Students

Ethical decision-making is influenced by academic preparation, industry experience, and the culture of the organization. Schwepker & Good, 2020, documented that formal ethics training provides students with the ability to recognize and deal with ethical problems. However, O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2019, highlighted that students face challenges in applying such ethical concepts in pressure situations at work, indicating a gap between theory and practice. Other studies emphasize that practical experience, such as in the form of case studies, role-playing, and mentorship, provides the key to developing ethical skills. Internship opportunities provide students with several situational and practical experiences where they can apply ethical decisions, and these situations tend to demonstrate patterns of behavior such as adhering to personal ethics, reporting unethical behavior, or following the instructions of their supervisors based on the pressures at play within a given situation. (Zhao & Mattila, 2022; Kim & Baker, 2021).

5.Research methodology

The quantitative descriptive survey design was used in this study, which was conducted to study workplace ethics among third-year undergraduate students enrolled in the Bachelor of Tourism and Hotel Management course at Different University, Haldwani, Uttarakhand. A total of 120 students who had completed their industry internship for the second year were selected by simple random sampling, comprising 90 males and 30 females, which allowed gender-based comparisons to be made for Objective 1.Data, were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of 31 items in total, divided into three parts:

(i) 20 items on students' perceptions of workplace ethics,
(ii) 6 items on major ethical challenges encountered during internship, and
(iii) 5 items on ethical decision making patterns in workplace situations.

All perception and decision-making items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. In the section on ethical challenges, students were instructed to select only one primary challenge they had personally experienced during the internship. The instrument revealed strong internal reliability as the Cronbach's Alpha for all three scales was above 0.70. Data were collected both online and offline after getting the institutional ethical clearance, which guaranteed the voluntary and anonymous conditions of participation. Data analysis was performed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Frequencies, percentages, and means were used to describe students' perceptions of ethical challenges and decision-making tendencies. Because both variables were categorical and, hence, suited for this test, a Chi-square test of independence was administered to examine whether workplace ethics perception varied significantly between the two genders of students. The methodological approach permitted a systematic and evidence-based assessment of workplace ethics among hospitality students after they completed their internship in the industry.

6. Result and discussion

6.1: To examine students' perceptions regarding workplace ethics during their industry internships, and whether these perceptions differ by gender.

The results based on 120 responses to the survey show that most students are presented in table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Students' perceptions regarding work place ethics.

S. No	Perception	Frequency	Percentage
1	Positive	73	60.83
2	Neutral	35	29.16
3	Negative	12	10.01

Most students, 60.83%, had a positive view of workplace ethics. This shows they are aware of and willing to report unethical behavior. This finding is consistent with Schwepker and Good (2020), who found that ethics training helps students deal with ethical issues. About 29.16% were neutral; they recognized the importance of ethics but lacked confidence in real workplace situations. This is similar to the findings of O'Fallon and Butterfield (2019), who reported that students struggle to apply ethical theory under pressure. A smaller group, 10.01%, had a negative view. They pointed to management pressure, profit motives, and industry norms as barriers. This aligns with Lee et al. (2021), who noted that high-pressure workplaces can lead to moral distress among employees.

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine whether gender influences students' perceptions of workplace ethics.

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Table 6.2:Observed Distribution for Chi-square test

Gender	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Male	53	28	9	90
Female	20	7	3	30
Total	73	35	12	120

The result was not significant.$\chi^2(2, N = 120) = 0.69$, $p = .708$,This means that gender and perception categories were unrelated.Cramer's $V = 0.076$ showed a very small effect size, confirming that the differences due to gender are negligible.

The findings indicate that male and female students have the same perceptions of workplace ethics during their internships. This leads to the understanding that gender is not a significant factor in influencing ethical awareness within hospitality contexts. The result corroborates previous studies, which demonstrate clearly that ethical sensitivity amongst hospitality students is more influenced by training environments, institutional culture, and exposure to internships rather than demographic factors like gender (Kusluvan et al., 2019; Kim & Baker, 2021). Furthermore, it is stated that structured ethics education is likely to reduce gender-based differences in ethical judgment, leading to more uniform ethical perceptions across the board in student groups (Schwepker & Good, 2020).

6.2: To identify the key ethical challenges encountered by students during their industry internships.

Students were asked to report the main ethical challenge they faced during their industry training. Each student provided only one response, highlighting the most significant issue they encountered.

Table 6.3: Most Significant Ethical Challenge Reported by Students (N = 120)

Ethical Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of clear workplace ethical guidelines	32	26.7
Unethical guest-handling practices	28	23.3
Supervisor pressure to act unethically	22	18.3
Observed favoritism or bias	15	12.5
Discrimination or unfair treatment	8	6.7
Breach of confidentiality	15	12.5

The most common challenge was the absence of clear workplace ethical guidelines (26.7%). This indicates that many organizations do not give interns clear codes of conduct or direction. Unethical guest-handling practices (23.3%) and pressure from supervisors to act unethically (18.3%) were also significant. These factors highlight that interns encounter real ethical dilemmas in guest interactions and face pressure from those in authority. Favoritism (12.5%) and discrimination (6.7%) were less frequent but point to ongoing inequalities in the workplace. A breach of confidentiality (1.7%) was rare but still noteworthy.These findings match those of Zhao & Mattila (2022) which reported that hospitality interns often face ethical dilemmas, including organizational pressure, unfair treatment, and customer-related ethical issues.

6.3: To examine students' ethical decision-making patterns in workplace situations.

The analysis of the patterns in the ethical decision-making of the students (Table 6.4) reveals different strategies in dealing with workplace-related ethical dilemmas. Of the total, 26.7 percent said they always stuck to ethical standards even when under pressure, and 23.3 percent declared that they would report perceived unethical behavior of others. About 20.8 percent thought they could always apply classroom learning to real workplace situations-a reasonable proof that academic training is helpful in making ethical decisions. However, 16.7 percent of the students believed that they were confused by ethical decisions, and another 12.5 percent followed the supervisor's or organizational directions-even if those were contrary to ethical standards.

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Table 6.4: Students' Ethical Decision-Making Patterns (N = 120)

Ethical Decision-Making Statement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I follow ethical standards even under pressure	32	26.7
I will report unethical behavior	28	23.3
I feel confused about ethical decisions sometimes	20	16.7
I can apply classroom learning to real situations	25	20.8
Follow supervisor or organizational instructions	15	12.5

These findings thus suggest that while most students are able to demonstrate a basic understanding of ethical principles, application in practice may be challenging, especially within high-pressure environments or whenever organizational norms conflict with personal ethics. This assertion agrees fully with the observations of O'Fallon and Butterfield (2019), who discovered that hospitality students often experience difficulty in applying ethical theory at workplaces. The results further emphasize how structured ethical guidance and practical training-case studies, role-playing, and mentorship-can enhance confidence and principled decision-making among students in professional environments.

7. Conclusion

This study, conducted on third-year undergraduate students of Tourism and Hotel Management, around workplace ethics issues after industry internships at Different University, has certain useful insights. A majority of students (60.83%) showed positive perceptions about workplace ethics, reflecting that academic education and internship exposure enhanced ethical awareness. However, the students also mentioned significant ethical challenges faced, such as unclear workplace ethical guidelines (26.7%) and unethical practices in handling guests (23.3%), indicating a lacuna between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Ethical decision-making patterns indicated that although a significant proportion of students (26.7%) followed the ethical standards even under pressure, some students (16.7%) became confused when confronted with real-life dilemmas, reflecting the need for more practical ethics training. Moreover, gender was found to have no significant difference in influencing perception towards workplace ethics, reflecting that organized ethics education can ensure uniformity in ethical awareness among students. Accordingly, in order to develop a better linkage between ethical theory and practice, structured ethics training programs involving case studies, role-playing exercises, and mentorship should be implemented by hospitality institutions and their industry partners to prepare students for confident, skilled, and principled decision-making in professional settings.

8. Implications

The results of this study carry practical importance for educational institutions and the hospitality industry. Universities can implement systematic ethics training as part of the Tourism and Hotel Management curriculum, employing case studies, role-playing exercises, and mentorship programs in order to increase the ethical awareness and decision-making skills of students.

Industry partners and hotels should clearly establish workplace ethical guidelines, establish supporting channels for reporting, and create internship environments that model ethical behavior, thus allowing students to feel confident in applying ethical principles in actual situations. Such steps will help bridge the gap between theoretical learning and its practical application, leading to a culture of integrity and professionalism among future hospitality professionals.

9. Limitations

These are some of the limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the research was conducted at a single university, and therefore the generalization of the findings to other institutions or regions may be limited. Second, the sample size of 120 students, though adequate for a descriptive analysis, is relatively small for population inference. Third, data collection depended on self-reported questionnaires, which may be prone to social desirability bias or inaccurate recall of internship experiences. Such limitations can be overcome in future research by including multiple institutions, larger sample sizes, and mixed-method approaches to comprehensively understand ethical perceptions and decision-making in hospitality students.

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