

From Internship to Employment: Investigating Interns' Career Intention in the Hotel Industry, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Many interns decide to work in different fields after graduation has caused challenge in the hotel industry to retain young talents. In this research, Theory of Planned Behaviour provides a structured approach to assess how attitude (pay, work environment and work attitude), social norm (peer influence) and perceived behavioral control (career development confidence) influence interns' career intention in hotel industry. A quantitative methodology was employed, using online survey to collect data from 200 respondents undergoing internships in hotel industry, Malaysia. The key findings revealed that work attitude, peer influence and career development confidence significantly influenced interns' career intention. The results of this study provide insights for the hotel industry to better comprehend the expectations of interns as well as the immediate need for strategic approaches to internship programs, transforming them into effective pipelines for nurturing long-term talent in the hotel industry.

Keywords: Internship, Career, Hotel, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Hotel industry is steadily expanding locally and globally, and it is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 16.13% in 2028, reaching 9.95 billion (Market Data Forecast, 2023). In Malaysia, there is a total of 3,645 hotels as of the third quarter of year 2025 (Kaur, 2026). The growth of this industry has increased demand for well-educated and skilled staff (Ivancie et al., 2022). The industry's competitiveness and productivity are largely dependent on the presence, knowledge, and professionalism of its workers (Asimah, 2018). It is reported that the hotel industry's turnover rate is relatively higher than other industries (Altenrath, 2020). Given its reliance on workers, the workforce plays a pivotal role in its operations, where they influence the quality of service supplied to customers and hence impacting the industry's success (Asimah, 2018). Thus, a high turnover rate is a big challenge in the hotel industry.

Structured internships are vital in developing skilled talent, mitigating youth unemployment, tackling skills gaps, and enhancing skillsets to align with present and future industry demands (Ng, 2024). In the hotel industry, internships have recently been viewed as a key strategy for improving graduate employability (Chen et al., 2021). However, the hotel industry struggled to replace its personnel since hotel occupations are characterized as 3D - dirty, hazardous, and tough labour, and have long been viewed negatively by Malaysians (Puvaneswary, 2023). A study by Mohammed (2018) observes that unfavorable working conditions, low job satisfaction and lack of motivating elements affect the interns' intention to pursue in hotel industry. In addition, hotel staff are among the country's lowest earners, with back-of-house employees receiving particularly low average wages (Hadi et al., 2023). Therefore, many school leavers in Johor are just taking up housekeeping jobs in hotels as stepping

stones, a “training ground,” and leaving once better-paying opportunities are offered, particularly in Singapore (Shadiqe, 2024).

Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH), Malaysian Association of Hotel Owners (MAHO), and Malaysia Budget and Business Hotel Association (MYBHA) have reported concerns about difficulties in attracting new employees as the young generation seems to prefer gig economy jobs and is reluctant to work long hours even when overtime pay was offered (Puvaneswary, 2023). The current workforce particularly Generation Z has a completely different mindset compared to Generation Y (born in 1982–1994) and Generation X (born in 1965–1980). Previously, workers spent their entire working lives in one industry, even in the same company yet this traditional model has recently been replaced by a career structure which the employees changed employers within the same industry or they change to other industries frequently (Raub & Rey, 2022). Furthermore, another study Ghani et al. (2022) found that the hotel industry is still using an outdated and ineffective method of employee retention, such as unidirectional interaction and feedback, where there is no way for employees to communicate with their employers about their long-term objectives, to get feedback, or to get growth ideas for their career. Consequently, employees may develop negative work attitude and lack of confidence in pursuing long-term careers in the hotel industry, considering it as an industry that does not support personal and professional development growth. As a result, majority of recent graduates consider jobs in the hotel industry as temporary stopgaps until they find more stable employment (Goh & Baum, 2021).

There are a few studies in hospitality research, particularly on factors that influence Generation Y’s employees’ retention in the hospitality industry (William et al., 2020), students’ perceptions of the hospitality industry (Amissah et al., 2019), and strategies to attract and retain Generation Z talent (Born in between 1997 and 2012) (Goh & Okumus, 2020). However, research on interns, specifically in the hotel industry is scarce. Due to the fact that hotel industry is a vibrant field that provides a variety of career opportunities such as front and reservation office, sales and marketing, event planning, housekeeping etc., it is imperative to investigate the intention of interns towards pursuing career in the hotel industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a large volume of published articles discussing internships in overseas countries, including China (Qu et al., 2021), India (Ganguli, 2019), Taiwan (Chen et al., 2021), Ghana (Amissah et al., 2019), and Korea (Ko et al., 2007). The literature by Leung et al. (2021) has indicated numerous factors that affect the hotel intern’s satisfaction in China, such as internship achievements, mentorship and assessment, interpersonal relationships, compensation, hotel features, hotel internship programming, and curriculum requirements. However, there is limited research on interns, particularly in Malaysia’s hotel industry.

In the hotel industry, internships have recently been viewed as a key strategy for improving graduate employability (Chen et al., 2021). However, the vital issue in the hotel industry was the high rate of “graduation leakage” (Papathanassis, 2021). This was supported by Han et al. (2019), who found that many internship students choose to work in other industries after graduation. According to previous research by Amit et al. (2013), when professional students’ expectations do not align with industry offerings, they may feel dissatisfied and leave the field. Thus, it is important to understand students’ career expectations to solve the problems of attracting and retaining quality students (Chen et al., 2021).

Mohammed (2018) emphasizes that it is not merely difficult to attract new employees and retain hospitality and tourism students as employees, but a significant number of graduates choose to work in other industries because hotel industry didn’t provide benefits that meet the expectations of current students, who are potential employees. Thus, Ferdian et al. (2022) highlighted that it is critical to determine the factors behind resignation of employees as well as their intention to stay in hotel industry.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

In this study, factors relevant to attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control are included to study their influences on interns' pursuit of a career in the hotel industry. This research proposes a comprehensive review for assessing the application of the Theory of Behaviour (TPB) in the field of the hotel industry. TPB, developed by Ajzen (1991), is a common social-psychological model for analyzing human behavior (Ulker-Demirel & Ciftci, 2020). The intention to carry out the behaviour is the best predictor of behaviour, in accordance with this theory (Werner, 2012). TPB has been used to forecast intentions and behaviors across a diverse array of studies, including intention to work with individuals with dual diagnosis (Werner, 2012); intention to enact workplace safety and health skills (Guerin & Toland, 2020); and occupational intentions (Arnold et al., 2006).

Firstly, attitude toward the behavior is impacted by a person's "behavioral belief" about the consequences of an action, as well as their positive or negative evaluations of these outcomes (Guerin & Toland, 2020). Hsu (2012) also directly examines attitude toward internships as a key variable influencing hospitality students' intentions to pursue internship opportunities. In this study, interns' evaluation for pay, work attitude and work environment were examined. A study Sthapit and Shrestha (2018) highlighted the pay strategy is extremely significant, as the right pay strategy assists in developing in competitive and successful organization, whereas the wrong compensation strategy can devastate the organization by having low retention rates and not leveraging the full potential of employees. Furthermore, another study pointed out that fair pay is thought to increase employee job satisfaction while decreasing job withdrawals (Dwesini, 2019). Thangaraja (2016) also supported that if employees feel that the salary package is not reasonable to the amount they done, then the organization failed to recognize their capabilities, contribution and effort are not appreciated, leading to high turnover rate. Most of the entry-level staff depart quickly after receiving training, as Singapore offers much better compensation. Housekeeping workers in Singapore reportedly earn over RM3,000 compared to RM1,200 to RM1,500 in Malaysia (Shadiqe, 2024). Therefore, an organization's pay strategy should be able to attract and retain quality employees, and maintain employee equity (Sthapit & Shrestha, 2018). In addition to that, the term working environment refers to everything that affects an employee's involvement with their work, including both the physical surroundings of the workplace and everything else (Msengeti & Obwogi, 2015). In the hotel industry, there is front of office and back of office. As in the front office, the working environment is typically fast-paced and demands excellent interpersonal skills to address a wide range of guest needs efficiently (Ahmad, 2024). The front office often experiences high-stress levels due to the challenges of customer service, such as heavy workloads, extended hours, and the need for constant interaction with guests, which can lead to burnout (Patah & Zahari, 2022). On the other hand, the back-office environment tends to be less dynamic than the front office but is critical for ensuring smooth operations. A positive work environment is crucial for the back office, as limited guest interaction and isolation can affect job satisfaction, which will affect the intention of staying in the hotel industry (Halim et al., 2021). Besides that, Mohammed (2018) indicated that improving the workplace may lead to reduced complaints and absences, at the same time enhancing productivity. Other than that, work attitude refers to those emotional traits that employees bring to bear on their routine tasks at work (Asimah, 2018). According to a large body of research, work attitude serves as both core mediators connecting other distal influences of organisational characteristics and work environments with turnover intention as well as direct antecedents of retention (Park & Min, 2020). Generation Z employees are interested in flexible working hours, valuing financial stability and workplace success, but they resist sacrificing their personal lives for professional achievements (Mahmoud et al., 2020). An employee's decision to remain in or leave the job is frequently influenced by their motivation. Therefore, it is important for management to comprehend how organizations affect the motivation of their employees since motivated employees are more productive, constantly seeking out better ways to complete tasks, and are generally more quality-oriented (Mensah, 2015).

H1: There is a relationship between pay and interns' intention towards pursuing career in the hotel industry.

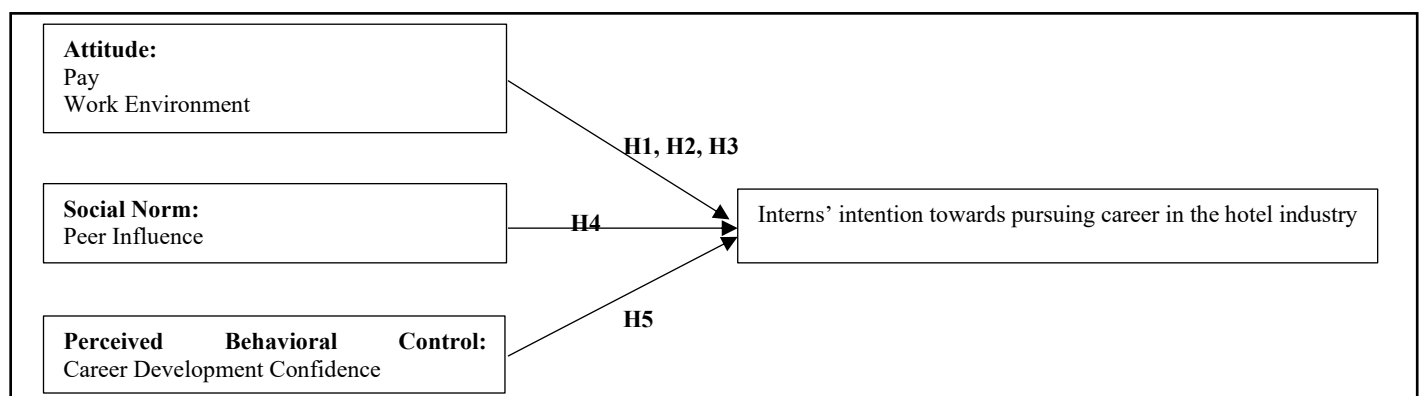
H2: There is a relationship between work environment and interns' intention towards pursuing career in the hotel industry.

H3: There is a relationship between work attitude interns' intention towards pursuing career in the hotel industry.

Secondly, subjective norm refers to an individual's thoughts on whether their peers and important people in their life require them to engage in stated behavior (LaMorte, 2022). Yakasai and Jusoh (2015) had demonstrated that social influence has a significant impact on behavioral intentions among university students in Indonesia. According to Younyi and Achankeng (2020), peers' attitude has a significant impact on their professional choices. Furthermore, Anthony et al. (2021) highlighted the impact of internal influences such as interest in hospitality careers, personality fit and desire to operate own business on students' decisions to major in a certain field, however, these internal influences interact with external factors such as family, peers, and societal expectations, to shape students' decisions regarding their career path. Peers play an important role in the socialization process, and it is often acknowledged that they exert pressure and influence on people's paths (Anthony et al., 2020). Thus, peer decisions can occasionally have a decisive role when choosing a career (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). In Malaysia, peer influence is a vital factor that affected students' career decisions. A study by Hashim and Embong (2015) found that 82.65% of Malaysian students acknowledged that their peer group significantly influences their career choices. This statistic underscores the reliance on peers for guidance and validation during the decision-making process.

H4: There is a relationship between peer influence and interns' intention towards pursuing career in the hotel industry.

Thirdly, perceived behavioral control is the crucial concept in TPB, differentiating it from older theory, Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). TRA, the TPB's earlier version, only relies on attitude and subjective norm to predict intention (Sansom, 2021). Perceived behavioral control is defined as a person's perception of the ease or difficulty of carrying out a specific action (Ajzen, 1991). Most of the organizations in hospitality sector are lack of sustainable management programmes, and their inability to direct employees' growth and development discourages them, therefore leading employee to start looking for alternative in other organization or industry and leave the company when they discover a better opportunity (Ghani et al., 2022). Moreover, Chan and Mai (2015) defined career confidence is the ability to pursue goals with optimism and ambitions of success in the face of challenges. Other researchers pointed out that career development confidence, which is a component of the maintenance stage, denotes the mindset towards pursuing a longer career in a particular sector (Ko, 2012). In Malaysia, the hotel industry struggles to retain employee due to insufficient sustainable management initiatives and limited career development chances (Chan et al., 2017). Thus, many employees feel uncertain about their future in the industry and depend heavily on the management system for career development, which can result in dissatisfaction and a lack of confidence in their career growth (Patah & Zahari, 2022). Notably, internship students are particularly affected, often opting to leave this sector after only six months of training (Sangaran & Garg, 2012). Nowadays, career expectations that give opportunities for advancement in the workplace and a fulfilling, balanced life appear to inspire younger generations more than monetary considerations alone (Wahab et al., 2020).



H5: There is a relationship between career development confidence and interns' intention towards pursuing career in the hotel industry.

Fig 1 Research Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The primary cross-sectional data for this study were collected using a self-administered questionnaire distributed via online platforms, specifically Google Forms (Jaiswal, 2024; Vasantha Raju & Harinarayana, 2016). The population of this study is internship students who are currently undergoing an internship in the hotel industry in Malaysia. A combination of purposive and snowball non-probability sampling methods was employed to reach potential respondents through relevant Facebook groups (internship communities), XiaoHongShu, Instagram, WhatsApp and email, resulting in a total of 200 valid responses.

The target population of this study comprised internship students who were undergoing internships in the hotel industry in Malaysia, regardless of whether they were local or international students. Since national secondary school graduates typically enter hospitality programmes at 18 years old, while International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) graduates may commence their studies at 17 years old, respondents aged 17 years and above were considered eligible for participation. Prior to the main survey, a pre-test involving 30 internship students was conducted from 17 May to 30 May 2024 to evaluate the clarity, effectiveness, and reliability of the questionnaire. The pre-test achieved a Cronbach's alpha value exceeding 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and reliability of the measurement scales (Amissah et al., 2019). Furthermore, a screening question was included at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure that only respondents who were actively undertaking internships in the Malaysian hotel industry during the data collection period participated in the study. Subsequently, the actual survey was administered to 204 internship students, of which 200 valid responses were retained for data analysis after excluding respondents who had completed their internships or were undertaking internships outside Malaysia.

Descriptive Analysis

SPSS software (version 27) was used to compute and analyze the demographic profile of respondents, focusing on their opinions towards pursuing a career in the hotel industry. Among the respondents, the majority were Malaysian students (98%), while only 2% were international students. In terms of gender, 35% were male and 65% were female, which may reflect the current trend of a higher female undergraduate population in Malaysia. Among the Malaysian respondents, the ethnic composition comprised 50% Chinese, 29% Malay, 19% Indian, and 2% from other ethnic groups, reflecting the ethnic distribution in Penang state, where the Chinese community is the majority. Regarding educational level, 31.5% of respondents held a Diploma, 60% were pursuing or had completed a Bachelor's degree, and 8.5% were at the Master's level. This is likely because most hotel industry internships are typically offered to students who are currently pursuing or have recently completed their undergraduate studies. As for age distribution, 27% of respondents were aged between 17 and 21 years, 62.5% were between 22 and 26 years, and 10.5% were 27 years and above, indicating that the majority were in the final years of their Bachelor's degree or were recent graduates undergoing internships as part of their graduation requirements.

Instruments of Measurement

A 5-point Likert scale (Yaska & Nuhu, 2024), ranging from '1' (strongly disagree) to '5' (strongly agree), was used to measure both the independent and dependent variables. To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, measurement items were adapted from previous empirical studies, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Instruments of Measurement

Variable	Instrument	Survey Question	Adopted
Pay	Competitive Salary	I think I will be provided with a competitive salary working in hotel industry.	Ch'ng et al. (2012)

	Pay Acceptability	I think the pay is acceptable for most departments in the hotel industry.	Wahab et al., (2020)
	Overtime Compensation	I am aware that employee initiative such as overtime in this industry is always compensated.	
	Salary Increment Opportunity	I believe that I have high chances in getting a salary raise in this industry in the future.	
	Salary Sufficiency for Life Satisfaction	I think that the salary for most hotel jobs is sufficient to lead to a satisfactory life.	Chan (2017)
Work Environment	Working Conditions Satisfaction	I am satisfied with the working conditions in the hotel industry.	William et al. (2020)
	HR Policies and Practices Satisfaction	I am satisfied with the policies and practices toward employees in the hotel industry.	
	Workplace Safety and Security	Hotel industry provides an environment in which I feel safe and secure.	
	Physical Work Environment Expectations	The physical working conditions of the job in the hotel industry match my expectations.	
	Interpersonal Respect and Inclusion	I feel accepted and am treated with courtesy, listened to, and invited to express my thoughts while working in the hotel industry.	
Work Attitude	Willingness to Learn	I have willingness to learn in my job at hotel.	Chen et al. (2021)
	Work Dedication	I have strong dedication to work in the hotel industry.	
	Work Motivation	I am well motivated in the hotel industry.	To et al. (2015)
	Extra Work Effort	I am happy to put extra effort in my job at hotel when needed.	
	Helping Willingness	I am willing to help out in my job at hotel when needed.	
Peer Influence	Peer Influence on Career Choice	My friends have influenced me to choose a career in hotel industry in the future.	Wahab et al. (2020)
	Peer Encouragement	My friends encouraged me to choose the career that I want.	
	Career Advice from Friends	My friends offered me proper advice on choosing career.	
	Reliability of Peer Information	Information given by my friends regarding a career is always reliable.	
	Career Similarity with Friends	The career that I will choose is similar to the career to be chosen by my friends.	
Career Development Confidence	Skills Development Opportunity	I believe that hotel industry offers opportunities for skills development.	Wahab et al. (2020)
	Continuous Training Availability	I am aware that continuous training is provided in hotel industry.	
	Career Development Opportunity	I feel it's a job that guarantees career development/ progression.	
	Promotion Opportunity	I am certain that employees who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted in hotel industry.	
	Long-Term Career Planning	I understand that long-term plans for my career development is offered in hotel industry.	

Internship students' intention towards pursuing career in hotel industry	Working Conditions Satisfaction	I am satisfied with the working conditions in the hotel industry.	Rodriguez et al. (2022)
	HR Policies and Practices Satisfaction	I am satisfied with the policies and practices toward employees in the hotel industry.	Lee et al. (2012)
	Workplace Safety and Security	Hotel industry provides an environment in which I feel safe and secure.	Wahab et al. (2020)
	Physical Work Environment Expectations	The physical working conditions of the job in the hotel industry match my expectations.	
	Interpersonal Respect and Inclusion	I feel accepted and am treated with courtesy, listened to, and invited to express my thoughts while working in the hotel industry.	

Common Method Variance (CMV)

Recognizing the possibility of common method variance (CMV), Harman's single-factor test was conducted using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with all measurement items entered unrotated. The results, as shown in Table 2, indicate that the total variance explained by the first component is 49.77%, which is below the recommended threshold of 50%, suggesting that common method bias is not a major concern in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Additionally, the total variance explained by factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 is 68.56%, indicating that the variance is distributed across multiple factors rather than being dominated by a single factor. This further suggests that the underlying constructs are well represented by their respective measurement items, thereby supporting the validity of the research model at the measurement level (Hair et al., 2019). Although Harman's single-factor test has known limitations, it remains one of the most widely used post hoc statistical remedies for detecting common method bias in behavioral research, as confirmed by a recent large-scale empirical review (Podsakoff et al., 2024).

Table 2 Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	16.92	49.765	49.765	16.92	49.765	49.765
2	1.942	5.711	55.476	1.942	5.711	55.476
3	1.314	3.865	59.341	1.314	3.865	59.341
4	1.119	3.291	62.633	1.119	3.291	62.633
5	1.066	3.134	65.767	1.066	3.134	65.767
6	0.949	2.79	68.557	0.949	2.79	68.557
7	0.83	2.44	70.997			
8	0.766	2.252	73.249			
9	0.731	2.149	75.398			
10	0.668	1.963	77.361			
11	0.614	1.807	79.168			
12	0.555	1.633	80.801			
13	0.531	1.563	82.363			
14	0.463	1.363	83.726			
15	0.451	1.327	85.054			
16	0.419	1.232	86.286			
17	0.404	1.187	87.472			
18	0.394	1.157	88.63			
19	0.362	1.065	89.695			

20	0.358	1.052	90.747			
21	0.312	0.917	91.664			
22	0.308	0.906	92.57			
23	0.289	0.85	93.42			
24	0.28	0.823	94.243			
25	0.273	0.802	95.045			
26	0.249	0.731	95.776			
27	0.243	0.714	96.49			
28	0.216	0.635	97.125			
29	0.195	0.575	97.699			
30	0.191	0.562	98.261			
31	0.165	0.486	98.747			
32	0.157	0.463	99.211			
33	0.148	0.434	99.645			
34	0.121	0.355	100			
Note: Extraction Method - Principal Component Analysis.						

Normality Test

Skewness and Kurtosis statistical test (Demir, 2022; Hatem, et al., 2022) were conducted to examine the normality of the constructs. Table 3 results show the skewness values are within the range of ± 3 and kurtosis value are within ± 10 , indicating in the acceptable range of normal distribution for multivariate analysis and suitable for further the structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis (Kline, 2015).

Table 3 Test of Normality – Skewness and Kurtosis Result

	Internship Students' Intention	Pay	Work Environment	Work Attitude	Peer Influence	Career Development Confidence
Skewness	-0.52	-0.345	-0.553	-0.982	-0.382	-0.732
Std. Error of Skewness	0.172	0.172	0.172	0.172	0.172	0.172
Kurtosis	-0.297	-0.537	-0.435	0.259	-0.826	-0.346
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.342

Measurement Model

The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) (Hair Jr et al., 2021) was employed to analyze the measurement model and structural model using SmartPLS 4.0 (Ringle et al., 2020; SmartPLS GmbH, 2022). As presented in Table 4, the results demonstrated strong reliability and validity, with all indicator loadings exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 as suggested by (Hair et al., 2019), while indicator reliability values surpassed 0.50, confirming convergent validity (Cheung et al., 2024). Table 4 further shows that the internal consistency reliability metrics, including Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (both above 0.60) along with an Average Variance Extracted greater than 0.50, met the established criteria (Haji-Othman & Yusuff, 2022). The table also confirms that all outer VIF values (O'Brien, 2007; Zainodin, Khuneswari et al., 2015) remained below 5.0, indicating no multicollinearity concerns. Thus, as evidenced in Table 4, the measurement model satisfied all necessary reliability and validity requirements, enabling subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 4 Result of Measurement Model

Latent Variable	Indicators	Convergent Validity		Internal Consistency Reliability			Outer VIF
		Loadings	Indicator Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	
		>0.70	>0.50	0.60-0.90	0.60-0.90	>0.50	
Pay	B1	0.815	0.664	0.874	0.908	0.665	2.178
	B2	0.792	0.627				2.114
	B3	0.793	0.630				1.863
	B4	0.833	0.695				2.084
	B5	0.841	0.708				2.194
Work Attitude	C1	0.849	0.721	0.916	0.937	0.750	2.715
	C2	0.852	0.726				2.497
	C3	0.843	0.710				2.415
	C4	0.888	0.789				2.091
	C5	0.896	0.803				2.389
Work Environment	D1	0.858	0.736	0.899	0.925	0.712	2.459
	D2	0.828	0.685				2.089
	D3	0.858	0.736				2.494
	D4	0.827	0.684				2.161
	D5	0.848	0.720				2.442
Career Development Confidence	E1	0.820	0.672	0.905	0.930	0.726	2.089
	E2	0.827	0.684				2.197
	E3	0.879	0.772				2.791
	E4	0.853	0.727				2.561
	E5	0.881	0.776				2.872
Peers Influence	F1	0.812	0.660	0.900	0.926	0.715	1.978
	F2	0.844	0.712				2.413
	F3	0.863	0.746				2.644
	F4	0.855	0.732				2.381
	F5	0.851	0.724				2.395
Intention of Pursuing Career	G1	0.816	0.665	0.849	0.899	0.690	1.940
	G2	0.842	0.709				2.007
	G3	0.793	0.630				1.686
	G4	0.869	0.755				2.337

Discriminant Validity

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was applied to assess the discriminant validity of the research model. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the Average Variance Extracted, or AVE, for each construct should be greater than its correlations with other constructs. As shown in Table 4, the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with all other constructs, indicating that each construct is perceived by respondents as a distinct factor, with its items correlating more strongly with their own construct than with others. Although the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) (Henseler et al., 2015) was also assessed and a few construct pairs were found to exceed the recommended threshold of 0.90, which are not shown here, the Fornell-Larcker results provide sufficient evidence to justify discriminant validity. As supported by Hair et al. (2019), the Fornell-

Larcker criterion remains a widely accepted method, particularly when backed by theoretical justification and additional validity checks.

Table 5: Discriminant Validity of Measurement Model - Fornell-Larcker Criterion (n=200)

	CDC (1)	IPC (2)	Pay (3)	PI (4)	WA (5)	WE (6)
Career Development Confidence (1)	0.852					
Intention of Pursuing Career (2)	0.833	0.830				
Pay (3)	0.796	0.800	0.815			
Peers Influence (4)	0.675	0.708	0.728	0.845		
Work Attitude (5)	0.819	0.794	0.729	0.541	0.866	
Work Environment (6)	0.829	0.801	0.801	0.691	0.748	0.844

PLS Path Analysis

The PLS path analysis results in Figure 2 and Table 6 demonstrate strong explanatory power, with an R-square value of 0.785 indicating that approximately 78.5 percent of the variance in Internship Pursuing Career (IPC) is explained by the predictor constructs. Hypotheses H1 and H2, which assess the influence of Pay and Work Environment (WE) on Intention of Pursuing Career (IPC), are not supported, as their p-values exceed 0.05 and their confidence intervals include zero, suggesting that these constructs do not significantly contribute to the prediction of IPC. Hypotheses H3, H4 and H5 are supported, indicating significant positive relationships between Work Attitude (WA), Peer Influence (PI) and Career Development Confidence (CDC), with IPC, as shown by t-values of 3.491, 2.495 and 2.455 respectively, all exceeding the critical value of 1.96. In addition, the p-values for these hypotheses are all below the 0.05 benchmark, recorded at 0.000, 0.013 and 0.014 respectively, and their confidence intervals do not include zero. The effect sizes (f^2), ranging from 0.0525 to 0.108, further justify the practical significance of these relationships. Furthermore, all VIF values are below the threshold of 5, indicating no multicollinearity issues within the research model.

Table 6: PLS-Path Analysis of t-values

Relationship	B value	SE	t-value	P-value	f^2	VIF	R^2	Confidence Interval		Decision
								LL	UL	
Pay → IPC	0.169	0.091	1.855	0.064	0.0349	3.885	0.785	-0.005	0.343	H1 is NOT supported
WE → IPC	0.140	0.086	1.629	0.103	0.0229	4.098		-0.019	0.316	H2 is NOT supported
WA → IPC	0.276	0.079	3.491	0.000	0.1082	3.351		0.120	0.427	H3 is supported
PI → IPC	0.180	0.072	2.495	0.013	0.0651	2.381		0.047	0.328	H4 is supported
CDC → IPC	0.235	0.096	2.455	0.014	0.0525	4.003		0.039	0.416	H5 is supported

In summary, the structural model results are statistically valid and confirm the reliability of the research model in explaining interns' intentions to pursue a career in the hotel industry.

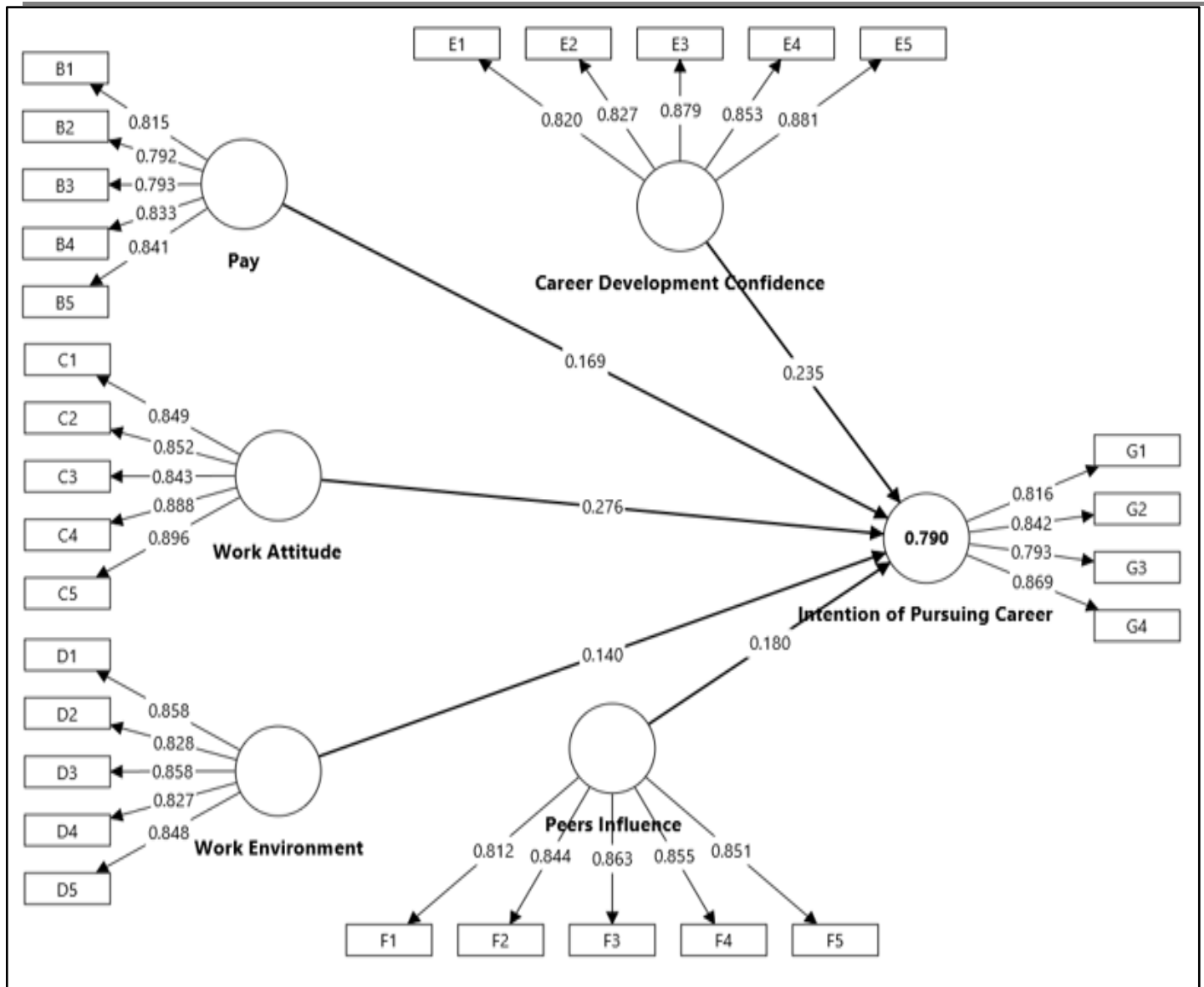


Fig 2 PLS-Path Analysis of t-values

Importance-Performance Map Analysis

Based on the Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) (Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016) results in Figure 3, work attitude emerged as the most significant driver and a critical factor influencing interns' career intentions, occupying the quadrant with the highest importance and performance. Following this, career development confidence and peer influence also demonstrate substantial importance but are positioned in the moderate-performance area, indicating potential for targeted enhancement. In contrast, pay and work environment show lower levels of both importance and performance, which is consistent with previous findings that revealed their weak predictive power and lack of significant impact on interns' intention to pursue a career in the hotel industry.

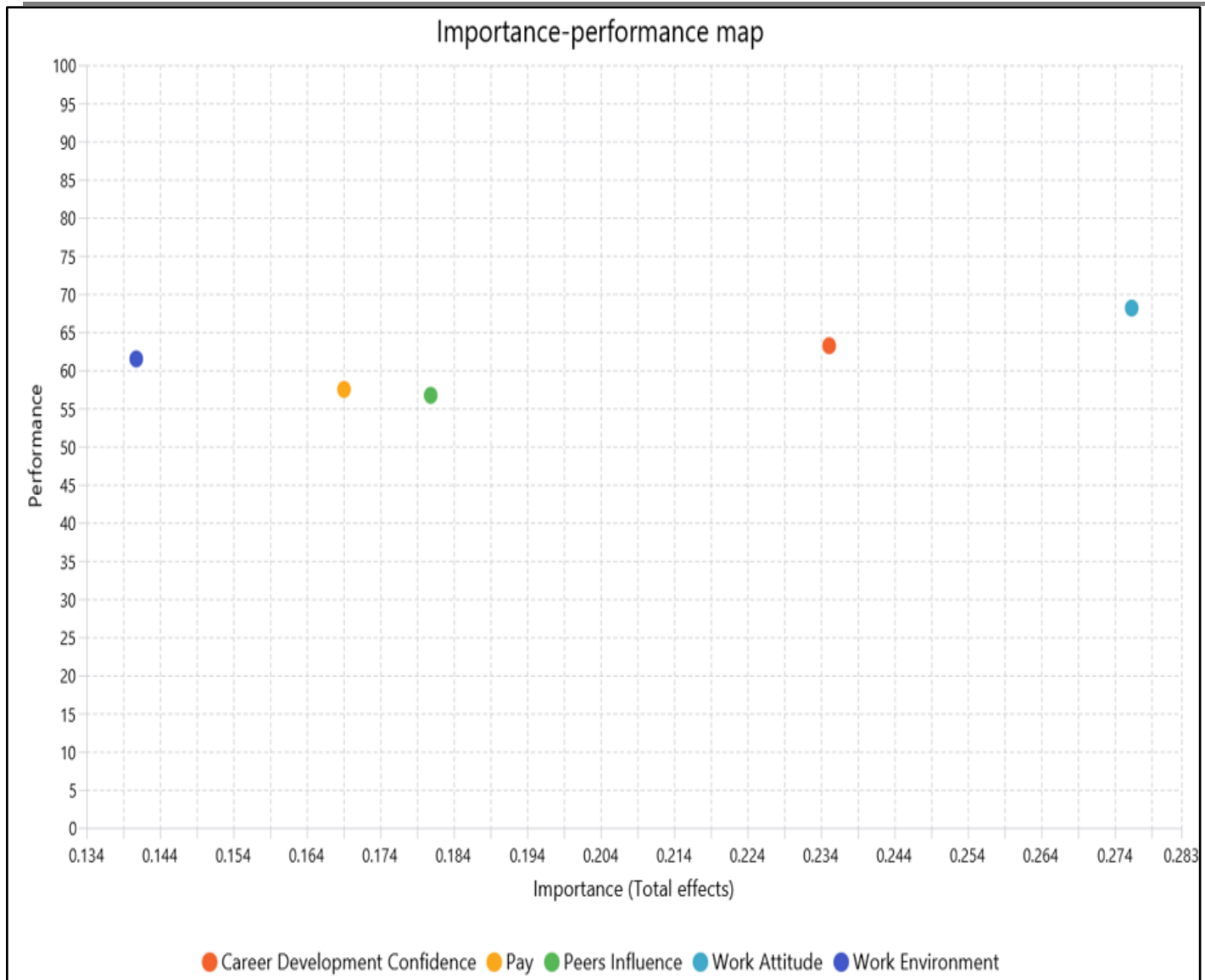


Fig 3 Endogenous Constructs Importance-Performance Analysis Results

Figure 4 illustrates the item level IPMA, highlighting the distinct patterns and contribution levels of individual indicators within the endogenous constructs. Items from the Pay construct, including Competitive Salary (B1), Pay Acceptability (B2), Overtime Compensation (B3), Salary Increment Opportunity (B4), and Salary Sufficiency for Life Satisfaction (B5), along with items from the Work Attitude construct such as Willingness to Learn (C1), Work Dedication (C2), and Work Motivation (C3), are positioned in the upper right quadrant, representing high importance and high performance. This indicates that these items are crucial drivers of interns' intention to pursue a career in the hotel industry and should continue to be prioritized. Meanwhile, items from the Career Development Confidence construct, including Continuous Training Availability (E2), Career Development Opportunity (E3), Promotion Opportunity (E4), and Long-term Career Planning (E5), as well as items from the Peer Influence construct such as Peer Influence on Career Choice (F1), Peer Encouragement (F2), and Career Advice from Friends (F3), are located in the mid-range for both importance and performance. These items hold moderate influence and should be targeted for further enhancement to increase their overall effectiveness. In contrast, items from the Work Environment construct including Working Conditions Satisfaction (D1), HR Policies and Practices Satisfaction (D2), Workplace Safety and Security (D3), Physical Work Environment Expectations (D4), and Interpersonal Respect and Inclusion (D5), together with the item Skills Development Opportunity (E1), are found in the lower left quadrant, reflecting lower levels of both importance and performance. As such, these items may require less managerial focus and should not be prioritized in resource allocation.

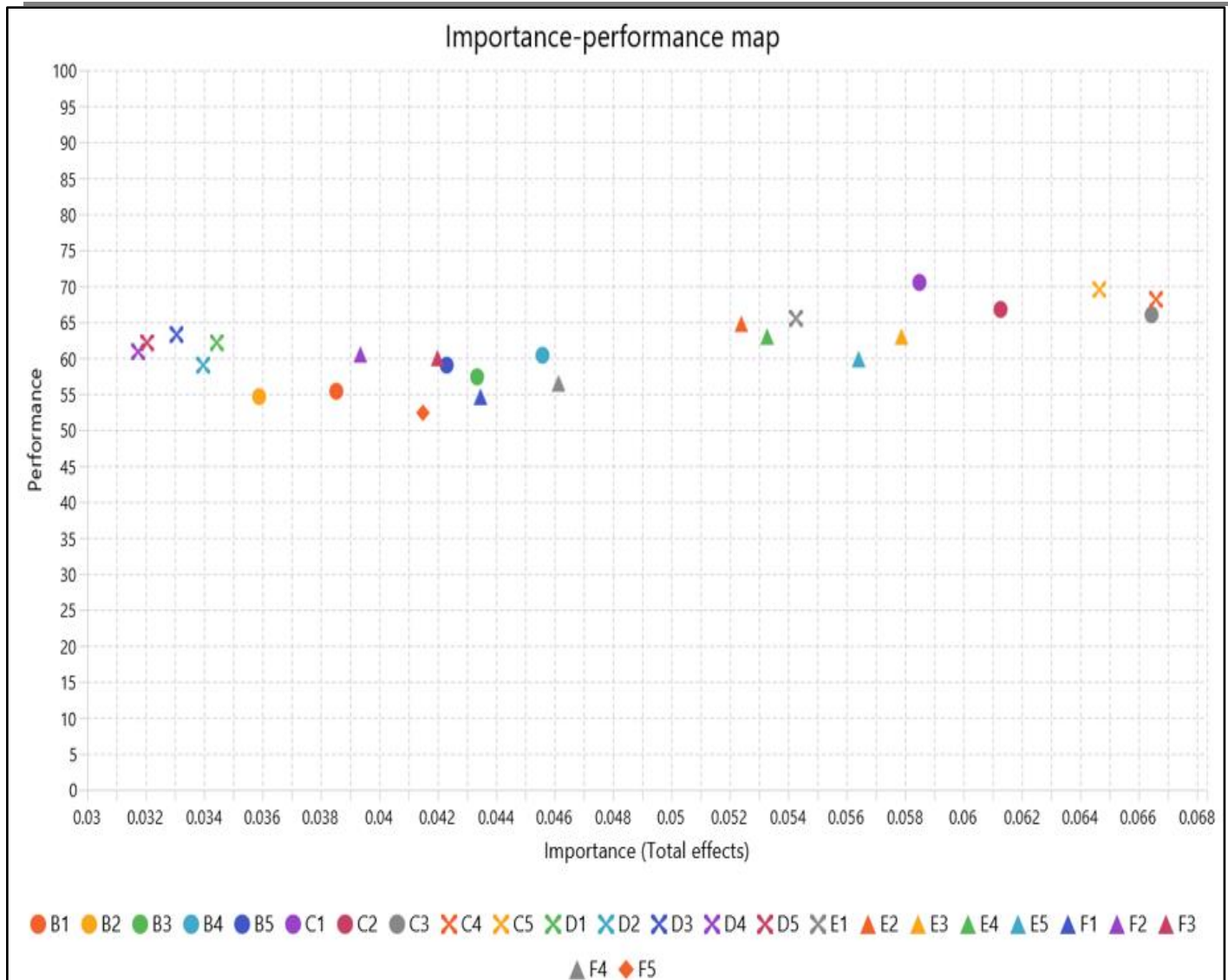


Fig 4 Items of Endogenous Importance-Performance Analysis

The results suggest a clear connection between work attitude and interns' intentions to pursue a career in the hotel industry, indicating that work attitude does indeed influence career intention in this field. The finding is consistent with Blokker et al. (2023) who reported that individual's attitudes facilitate the transition process from student to professional role. Mahmoud et al. (2020) also emphasizes that interns' work attitudes, which include perceptions of job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment, are vital in shaping their intention to pursue careers in the hotel industry. With the recent shift in Malaysia's hotel industry such as reducing the standard work week from six days to five days with a maximum of 45 hours per week, this highlights a growing recognition of employee welfare. This adjustment not only aligns with Generation Z's values but also demonstrates respect for work-life balance, enabling better time management and reducing burnout and stress. Such policies enhance positive emotions, including happiness and fulfillment, which play a key role in boosting interns' motivation and engagement at work (Riwayati & Santoso, 2022). When interns experience positive emotions, they are more likely to demonstrate a strong work attitude, shown through their readiness to put in extra effort and willingness to assist when needed (Van Wingerden et al., 2018). In the hotel industry, when interns perceive such support and balance, it can enhance their intention to pursue long-term careers in this sector. This combination of recognition, feedback, and work-life balance is crucial in shaping a more favorable perception of the hotel industry among potential young recruits.

The findings indicate a relationship between peer influence and interns' intentions to pursue careers in the hotel industry. The study by Wahab et al. (2020) highlights that positive peer relationships enhance students'

confidence in their career choices, thereby increasing their likelihood of choosing a career in hospitality. Besides that, Evason (2016) emphasizes that Malaysia is a high-context culture where communication depends more on context and relationships than on explicit words. In this cultural setting, trust and personal connections play an important role in decision making. This finding aligns with Zhou and Shirazi (2025) who highlighted that cultural, regional and societal implications exert a strong influence on young people's career choices. Advice from friends is often considered more trustworthy and relatable than guidance from acquaintances or authority figures, reflecting the importance of familiarity and strong interpersonal relationships (Evason, 2016). Similarly, the Raising Children Network (2019) notes that peers often act as crucial sources of information, shaping perceptions about various career paths, which can either motivate or dissuade students from specific fields. Recent studies also underscore the substantial impact of peer influence on students' career decisions. According to Flaherty (2024), peer influence is a key factor in shaping career decisions, as encouragement, advice, and shared experiences among friends enhance students' confidence and guide their decision-making during critical exploration phases. This aligns with findings that emphasize how strong peer connections boost decision-making confidence, thereby influencing students' professional paths.

Furthermore, the results aligned with the study of Wahab et al. (2020) which found that students are motivated by clear opportunities for career advancement in the hotel industry. As internship offers exposure to real world professional setting, this experience impacts the career readiness and future aspirations among the students (Ansari, 2025). When students perceive structured pathways for progression and professional development, their intention to join the industry are strengthened. Additionally, recent news highlights that young adults in their 20s experience greater well-being and a stronger sense of identity when they achieve career stability (The Star, 2024). When the industry offers structured development and clear growth pathways, it meets the aspirations of interns who seek stability. By fostering environments that support career progression, the hospitality industry can enhance job satisfaction and help young professionals build a stable career identity, ultimately encouraging them to enter and remain in the industry. Organizations such as Radisson and Hilton have recognized the importance of cultivating talent as a strategy to reduce turnover and improve employee retention (Brussels, 2024). By emphasizing career growth, these organizations aim to attract young professionals who may have previously been discouraged by the industry's reputation for limited career progression opportunities (Eisen, 2024). Conversely, Mohammed (2018) noted that the hotel industry has often been seen as lacking sufficient advancement opportunities, which can negatively affect students' perceptions. A lack of support in areas like training, mentorship, and promotion prospects may reduce interest in pursuing a career in this field. Typically, it has to take 10 years to advance to higher management positions, such as general manager, within the hotel industry; thus, interns may be hesitant about committing to such a long and perhaps unexpected professional path (SOEG Jobs, 2024).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, TPB offers a holistic view of the influences on interns' career intention. TPB provides a structured approach to assess how specific attitudes (pay, work environment and work attitude), social influences (peer influence), and perceived behavioral control (career development confidence) combined to influence the career intention in hotel industry. The findings suggest that clear career development opportunities, positive peer interactions as well as cultivating positive work attitudes are crucial for attracting and retaining young talent in the hotel industry. Interns are particularly motivated when they feel their contributions are valued and see clear pathways for personal and professional growth. These strategic efforts could lead to increased job satisfaction, fostering a stronger commitment to long-term career within the industry.

In line with the Malaysian government's targets of 47 million visitors and RM329 billion in tourism receipts for Visit Malaysia Year 2026 (Kaur, 2026), the hospitality industry must continuously evolve to meet increasing demand. In this context, it is vital for hotel management to address these influencing factors to reduce high turnover rates. Ultimately, the study offers valuable insights for hotel management and human resources professionals aiming to attract, develop, and retain future talent. The research underscores the need for a strategic approach to internship programs, transforming them into effective pipelines for nurturing long-term talent in the hotel industry.

Ethics Statements

The protocol for this study was approved by School of Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts, UOW Malaysia KDU Penang University College on 16 January 2024. All participants provided informed consent via Google Form before participating in the survey. Participant confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the process.

Author Statements

Jiaxuan Low was responsible for the conceptualization, data collection and wrote the original paper. Sweeting Cheah contributed to the conceptualization, instrument validation and final manuscript review. Joshua Teck Khun Loo conducted data analysis and prepared the findings section. Azreen Rozainee Abdullah contributed to discussion refinement and proof-reading.

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Declaration Of Interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

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