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A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF WHAT INFLUENCE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES AND MIGRATION INTENTION AMONG TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT GRADUATES IN THE POST COVID-19 ERA IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Migration intention among the graduates of tourism and hospitality education has emerged as an issue of concern for developing countries, especially when the employment opportunities and conditions in these countries affect graduates' perceptions of their future careers. This study aims to conceptualize a framework that can be used to analyze the factors affecting the migration intention of post graduate students in Tourism and Hospitality Management (THM) from public universities in Bangladesh. The framework suggests that the perceived employment opportunities, job security, and perceived industry recovery will be important antecedents of migration intention, and that career optimism will serve as a mediating variable. Using both career-related and migration decision perspectives, the study suggests that student' recovery expectations concerning the tourism and hospitality industry, employment stability, and employment opportunities may affect their intended future career growth and in turn impact their intent to migrate. Career optimism is expected to be a key driver as perceptions in the domestic tourism and hospitality employment environment are expected to be reflected in migration-related intentions of the students. The framework offers an integrated view of the role of labor-market perceptions and career expectations can play in migration decisions of future tourism and hospitality professionals. The study is important in literature as it links perceived job opportunities, job security and recovery of industries with career optimism and intention to migrate for post-graduate THM students in Bangladesh. The proposed conceptual framework can offer some insights on how universities, policy makers, and tourism and hospitality industry participants can contribute to building a more resilient and desirable home tourism and hospitality sector that will help increase employment, boost confidence in employment, and lessen the desire to migrate among graduates.

Keywords: *Migration Intention, THM Graduates, Perceived Industry Recovery, Career Optimism, Bangladesh*

INTRODUCTION

The tourism and hospitality sector is one of the world's largest job creators contributing to national economies and offering a variety of employment opportunities in accommodation, food services, travel and transport, recreation and events (UNWTO, 2023). The sector has slowly been rising up as a promising option for the country's burgeoning youth population in Bangladesh. In response, academic programs in Tourism and Hospitality Management (THM) have grown to produce competent manpower needed for the country's newly emerging service-oriented economy. Therefore, for tourism and hospitality graduates, having access to

appropriate jobs and training opportunities for sustainable career progression is a crucial factor in the transition from education to employment (Gursoy & Chi, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, caused an exceptional disruption to the global tourism and hospitality system, leading to job losses, recruitment freezes, business closure, and increased employment uncertainty (International Labour Organization, 2021). The impact of these disruptions was substantial on the career expectations of those who came out of the college during and after the crisis for employment. Specifically, inadequate employment opportunity, job security and the industry's capacity to regain confidence in tourism and hospitality careers has been a concern (Baum & Hai, 2020; Sigala, 2020). These conditions might have prompted graduates to rethink their career paths and look elsewhere for jobs, such as in the labor markets of other countries (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012; King, 2012).

Skilled and educated graduates' mobility, known as brain drain, has long been a worry for developing countries. Few opportunities of international migration are available in the domestic labour market, employment insecurity and expectations of better opportunities in another country can push educated youth to think about moving to another country for work (Massey et al., 1993; Van & Henkens, 2008). The ongoing migration of skilled graduates to other countries could pose difficulties in building and sustaining human resources to boost the tourism and hospitality industry in Bangladesh. Knowledge of what influences graduates' decisions to move away is therefore relevant to anyone interested in helping to retain skilled migrants and ensure the sector's competitiveness over the longer term, such as industry bodies, educational providers and the government.

While there is some existing literature that has been established on the links between employment opportunities, job security and decisions to migrate within and between different occupational and national groups (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Ashford et al., 1989; Sverke et al., 2002), there has been little research that focuses on these relationships among tourism and hospitality graduates in a developing country context after the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the psychological process by which graduates' perceptions of employment conditions can affect their intentions to migrate is still not well understood. Career optimism - positive beliefs about future career opportunities and career outcomes (Rottinghaus et al., 2005) - may also be a significant factor in explaining how graduates' perceptions of employment opportunities, job security, and industry recovery are related to migration-related decisions. This intervening function, however, has been under-researched in the field of tourism and hospitality employment studies.

This is especially relevant in the context of Bangladesh as there is limited empirical evidence available about the post-COVID-19 career decision-making and migration intentions of

the THM graduates. Perceived industry recovery, job security and perceived employment opportunities can interact and influence graduates' confidence in their future careers and thus their intent to pursue employment opportunities overseas. Hence, the relationships can be shown together for a more holistic picture of the relationship between labour-market perceptions, career optimism and intention to migrate among THM graduates.

Thus, the present study aims to explain the direct and indirect impacts of perceived employment opportunities, perceived job security, and perceived industry recovery on the migration intention of the tourism and hospitality graduates while career optimism has played as a mediator in the context of Bangladesh. Thus, it can create an opportunity for generating a theoretical gap along with the contextual gap. The study, therefore, presents a contribution to the body of literature on tourism jobs and the development of graduate career paths and migration within a post-COVID-19 environment by linking the perception of the labour market to a psychological career mechanism. At last, the study could be practically relevant for policy makers, education and training institutions and employers in the tourism and hospitality industries in providing ideas on how to increase the employability of graduates, increase job security and career optimism, and decrease the likelihood of skilled graduates looking to migrate for their careers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceived Employment Opportunities

Perceived employment opportunities are the subjective assessment of availability, accessibility and quality of employment opportunities for graduates in their chosen area of profession (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). The concept of perceived employment opportunities is usually shaped through the beliefs of individuals on achieving suitable employment according to their qualifications, career aspirations, and professional skills. The career planning, organizational commitment, job search behavior and migration decisions among young graduates are likely to be influenced through this perception which make them enter into uncertain labor markets. In the context of the tourism and hospitality industry, the industry has been playing the role as one of the world's largest employment generators through its contribution into national economies and diverse career opportunities like accommodation, food services, travel, transportation, recreation, and event management (UNWTO, 2023). Global tourism has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic which has also affected the employment opportunities for young graduates and entry level professionals (ILO, 2021). There is close association of perceived employment opportunities with employability theory that focuses on the graduate's confidence while securing their preferable position in the labor

market. Graduates who are likely to perceive more employment opportunities are less likely to migrate rather than those who have negative perception on employment availability (King, 2012; Docquier & Rapoport, 2012). Moreover, the career decisions of graduates cannot be explained sufficiently with just employment availability. The concept of job security is also important for understanding how employment perceptions can lead to long term career intentions.

Job Security

Job security refers to the perception of employees on their stability of employment in which there will be security for involuntary job loss (Ashford et al., 1989). The concept emphasizes more on anticipation and uncertain situation surrounded with employment continuity. From psychological perspective, job security has been defined as the threat of losing job and the tension associated with continuing the employment (Sverke et al., 2002). In the context of tourism and hospitality industry, the term has been recognized as the important one as it works as the determinant of employee satisfaction, organizational commitment and career retention. The pandemic condition of Covid-19 has affected graduates on the concept of job security due to huge job loss during and post period of pandemic. The employees after facing this pandemic tend to expect that their employment will ensure to provide long term prospects along with financial stability and protection against any kind of uncertainties. Several empirical evidences suggest that perceived job security is likely to influence positively on organizational commitment, career satisfaction, employee retention, and career optimism (DeWitte, 2005; Cheng & Chan, 2008). Though job security play important role in shaping career decision of tourism and hospitality graduates, it may appear as less attractive if the industry has effects of Covid-19. Besides job security, it is essential to understand perceived industry recovery for tourism and hospitality graduates while explaining post pandemic career and migration decisions. Therefore, career optimism of tourism and hospitality graduates reflect them believe to achieve successful and sustainable careers amid the post- pandemic challenges and uncertainties.

Perceived Industry Recovery

Perceived industry recovery refers to the cognitive evaluation of individuals on how effectively and quickly the tourism sector is shifting into pre crisis situation in terms of demand, employment and operational stability (Gursoy and Chi, 2020). According to Sigala (2020), perceived industry recovery is defined as the subjective judgment on the ability of tourism industry while restoring the business continuity and consumer confidence in the context of major disruptions like Covid-19 pandemic. In other context of labor market perspective, the concept of perceived recovery is highly associated with the expectations of rehiring, workforce rebuilding,

and the restoration of service demand while influencing the career intentions of graduates (Baum and Hai, 2020). Media narratives, government policies and peer experiences are likely to influence the belief of individuals regarding perceived industry recovery along with other objective economic indicators. These definitions indicate that graduate's perception may vary depending on their information sources and personal exposure to the industry even within the same national context. Collectively, perceived industry recovery is multidimensional context that reflects cognitive, emotional and informational assessment regarding how effectively the tourism and hospitality industry has been recovering from the crisis situation.

Career Optimism

This indicates the positive expectation and confidence toward future career development through which one believe they have the ability to achieve desired career outcome. Rottinghaus, Day, and Borgen (2005) defined career optimism as the expectation tendency for positive outcomes and opportunities of future career. Hirschi (2010) suggested that individuals' confidence is likely to be strengthening through career optimism while managing transitions and uncertainties in their career. While focusing on the career constructive perspective, positive expectation leads individuals to adapt any kind of changing environment in future career possibilities (Savickas, 2013). It is easier to adapt the changes which are being accepted positively.

Migration Intention

Migration intention is such term that defines one's willingness, plan and expectation to move from their own country to another for the purpose of employment, education or improved future opportunities. According to Ajzen (1991), the readiness toward the behavior of moving out is considered as an important predictor of subsequent behavioral action. Van Dalen and Henkens (2008) defined migration intention as the expectation and preferences of individuals toward their future relocation in response to perceived differences in economic and career opportunities. In the context of migration decision, Massey et al. (1993) has identified the influencing factor behind migration as perceived economic and employment disparities between their own and destination countries. The tourism and hospitality graduates are more likely to migrate for better employment and career opportunities as the demand of this industry is high in foreign countries in comparison to Bangladesh. The uncertainties regarding employment, job stability and industry recovery after Covid-19 pandemic have changed their career optimism and perception toward pursuing career abroad.

Theoretical Background

According to the literature focusing on the study, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Push- Pull Theory can be utilized to explain migration intention of tourism and hospitality graduates in Bangladesh.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) proposes those individuals' attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control shape behavioral intention of them while explaining the reason behind of one's intention to undertake a particular behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In recent studies, migration intention reflects the outcome of planned behaviors while career optimism reflects graduate's positive expectation toward their future career prospects influencing how they interpret employment-related conditions when forming migration intentions.

Relating with Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Lee (1966) has explained the migration through Push- Pull Theory in which push factors has association with unfavorable conditions in the origin and pull factors has association with attractive conditions and opportunities in the destination. In the context of this study, push factors can be identified as limited perceived employment opportunities, lower job security, and weak perceived industry recovery whereas better employment and career prospects in abroad can be identified as pull factors.

The combination of the two theories ensures a logical theoretical foundation for the proposed model in the context of this study. Push–Pull theory explains the reason behind the migration while Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explains the internal logic of intention formation toward migrating into a different country. The integration is also particularly appropriate for the post-COVID-19 context where tourism and hospitality graduates make career decisions under conditions of changing employment opportunities, job security concerns and uncertainty regarding industry recovery.

Hypothesis Development

Relationship between Perceived employment opportunities and Migration Intention

The relationship between perceived employment opportunities and migration intention has been well established in the literature. Individuals are more likely to migrate when they find inadequate employment opportunities in their own country for better future and economic conditions (Massey et al., 1993). The perception of better employment opportunities outside the country influences individual to migrate (Van Dalen and Henkens, 2008). When the tourism and hospitality graduates enter into a competitive market, the availability of suitable job opportunities strengthens their intention to seek career

opportunities abroad (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012). Thus, based on previous studies, the following hypothesis can be explained:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived employment opportunities will significantly affect migration intention among tourism and hospitality graduates.

Relationship between Job security and Migration Intention

Job security is the factor that influences individual's decision to remain or leave their domestic labor market. According to the previous study, the insecurity regarding job leads individual toward seeking more options and stable employment opportunities (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Cheng & Chan, 2008). In this context, tourism and hospitality graduates who perceive lower job security in their home country are intended strongly to migrate abroad. Thus, the following hypothesis can be explained:

Hypothesis 2: Job security will positively affect migration intention among tourism and hospitality graduates.

Relationship between Perceived industry recovery and Migration Intention

The relationship between perceived industry recovery and migration intention is highly relevant in the context of tourism and hospitality industry in post Covid-19 condition. A positive image and perception of industry recovery may lessen the migration intention among tourism and hospitality graduates. On the other hand, slow and negative industry recovery perception may discourage them to remain in the domestic labor market while seeking employment opportunities abroad. Thus, the following hypothesis can be explained:

Hypothesis 3: Perceived industry recovery will positively affect migration intention among tourism and hospitality graduates.

Relationship between Perceived employment opportunities and Career Optimism

The relationship between Perceived employment opportunities and Career Optimism has been well established in the literature. Graduate's confidence is likely to be strong when they positively perceive career opportunities in their field of study. When there are sufficient employment opportunities, they are likely to develop positive expectation among them toward their career success (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Rottinghaus et al., 2005). Thus, based on previous studies, the following hypothesis can be explained:

Hypothesis 4: Perceived employment opportunities will significantly affect career optimism among tourism and hospitality graduates.

Relationship between Job security and Career Optimism

Job security is the factor to build confidence among graduates regarding employment continuity and future career stability. According to the literature, secure employment conditions can contribute into positive career expectations and psychological confidence (De Witte, 2005; Rottinghaus et al., 2005). Moreover, positive expectations about future career opportunities act as the core component of career optimism. Thus, based on previous studies, the following hypothesis can be explained:

Hypothesis 5: Job security will positively affect career optimism among tourism and hospitality graduates.

Relationship between Perceived industry recovery and Career Optimism

The relationship between Perceived industry recovery and Career Optimism is well established in the literature. The state of industry recovery is likely to shape the expectations of graduates about their future career opportunities. When the graduates of tourism and hospitality perceive positive industry recovery in which they can sustain, they are likely to develop greater confidence toward their future prospects of tourism career and its sustainability in the labor market (Baum & Hai, 2020; Sigala, 2020). Thus, based on previous studies, the following hypothesis can be explained:

Hypothesis 6: Perceived industry recovery will positively affect career optimism among tourism and hospitality graduates.

Relationship between Career Optimism and Migration Intention

The relationship between the two can be explained through graduates' expectations regarding their future career success. Career optimism is the reflection of positive expectation of graduates toward their future career success (Rottinghaus et al., 2005). Graduates with stronger career optimism are confident enough to achieve their career goals both domestically and internationally which make them less likely to migrate abroad for pursuing their career goals. Thus, based on previous studies, the following hypothesis can be explained:

Hypothesis 7: Career optimism will significantly affect migration intention among tourism and hospitality graduates.

Relationship among Perceived employment opportunities, Career Optimism and Migration Intention

The relationship among perceived employment opportunities, career optimism, and migration intention can be explained by considering career optimism as a psychological

mechanism through which graduates evaluate employment conditions and make migration decisions. Favorable career opportunities may enhance career optimism while career optimism discourages the intention of graduates to migrate abroad (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Rottinghaus et al., 2005). On the other hand, limited perceived employment opportunities reduce career optimism while encouraging migration intention of graduates. Thus, based on previous studies, the following hypothesis can be explained:

Hypothesis 8: Career optimism mediates the relationship between perceived employment opportunities and migration intention among tourism and hospitality graduates.

Relationship among Job Security, Career Optimism and Migration Intention

The relationship among job security, career optimism and migration intention can be understood through the influence of employment stability on graduates' future career expectations. Higher job security builds confidence among graduates which strengthen career optimism (Witte, 2005). As a result, stronger career optimism leads to lower intention to migrate into another country. Thus, based on previous studies, the following hypothesis can be explained:

Hypothesis 9: Career optimism mediates the relationship between job security and migration intention among tourism and hospitality graduates.

Relationship among Perceived industry recovery, Career Optimism and Migration Intention

The relationship among perceived industry recovery, career optimism and migration intention can be explained through graduates' perceptions of the future viability of the tourism and hospitality industry. Positive perception on industry recovery makes the career optimism of graduates strong while increasing their confidence toward future opportunities in the field of tourism and hospitality (Baum & Hai, 2020; Sigala, 2020). Therefore, higher career optimism is more likely to reduce migration intention. Thus, based on previous studies, the following hypothesis can be explained:

Hypothesis 10: Career optimism mediates the relationship between perceived industry recovery and migration intention among tourism and hospitality graduates.

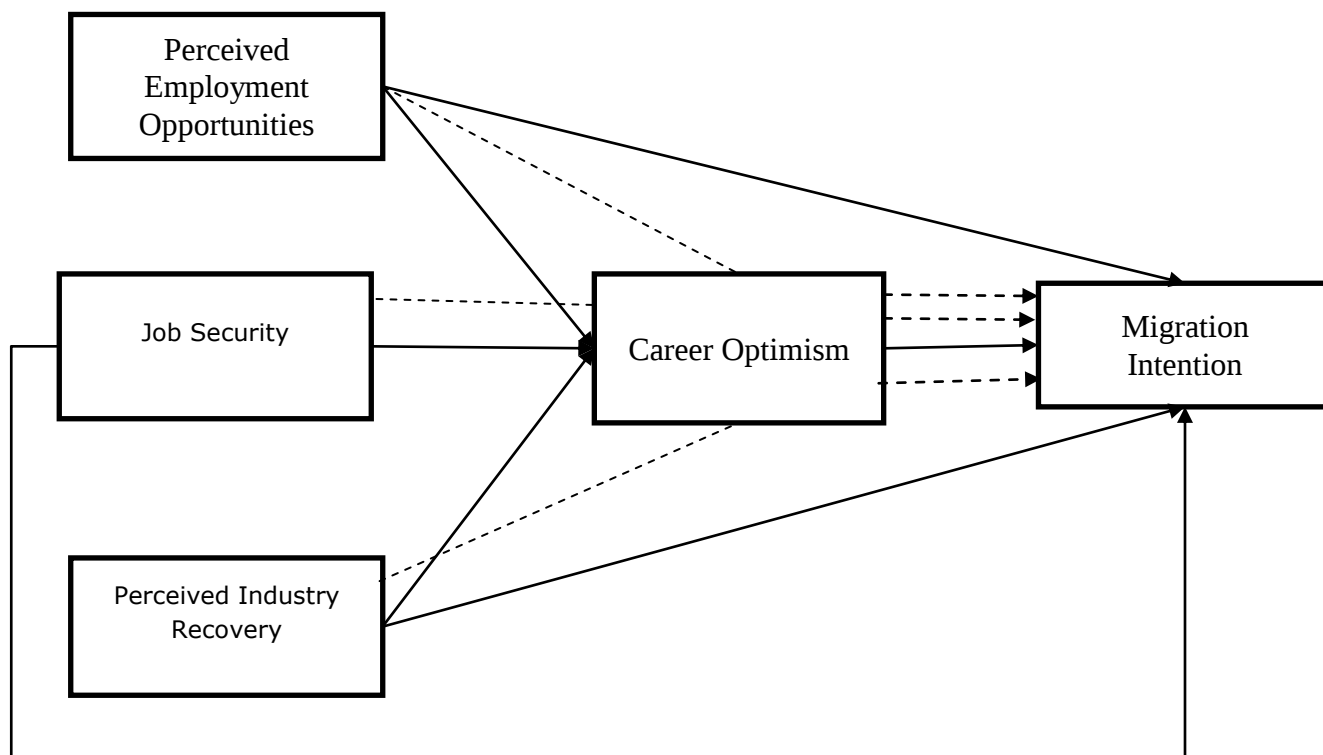


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations are acknowledged in this study that should be taken into consideration when interpreting throughout the study. The study is specifically conducted on the academic background of THM graduates in Bangladesh, it is not thus possible to make a direct generalization of the findings with the graduates of any other academic discipline or country. The study was conducted on conceptual framework not using any design like cross-sectional research design or any other which does not record the perception of respondents and their migration plans at a single point in time. This means that it is not possible to draw broad conclusions about changes over time in hopes of a career, perceptions about employment, and plans to migrate. Third, the study is self-reported and may not be influenced by the perceptions of the respondents, their social desirability and the temporary nature of their career. Fourth, the study uses perceived employment opportunities, job security, perceived industry recovery and career optimism as the key explanatory variables, and other factors like salary expectations, family influence, destination country opportunities, migration costs, social networks, and government policies could also influence migration intention but these are excluded in this

study. Finally, the study considers migration intention, not the actual migration behavior, this does not ultimately necessarily mean that graduates will actually migrate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given these constraints a number of suggestions can be provided on future research and industry stakeholders.

- Cross-sectional or longitudinal research designs should be applied in future studies to track changes in career optimism and migration attitudes of graduates as the tourism and hospitality industry continues to bounce back.
- Comparing the tourism and hospitality graduates from various countries might also offer a general overview of graduate migration. Other factors, such as how much they would like to earn, how they think their career would develop, family influence, opportunities to work abroad, conditions in the country where they would move to and perceived quality of life could be included in future research in order to create a broader model of intention to migrate.
- Academic institutions need to focus more on employability skills, industry-based training, internships, digital skills and preparing students for international careers in the tourism and hospitality sector.
- To boost the confidence of graduates in domestic tourism careers, industry stakeholders should concentrate on providing more permanent employment opportunities, transparent career pathways, competitive salaries and positive workplaces.
- The government should improve the graduate employment programs, promote cooperation between industry and university and devise policies to promote skilled graduates to establish their careers in Bangladesh.
- By boosting career optimism through career counseling, mentoring, professional development and enhancing the connection between universities and tourist's employers, the unnecessary migration intentions could be reduced to help keep skilled human resources in the domestic tourism and hospitality industry.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

For all stakeholders involved in the human resource development in Bangladesh's tourism industry, it is important to have a good understanding about the career and migration options of tourism and hospitality graduates. Academic institutions, industry bodies and also the policy makers like the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism should be aware of the

psychological and structural aspects which could affect the decision of the graduates to go on migration after COVID-19. The sustainability of the tourism and hotel industry is not only dependent on attracting qualified personnel to the industry, but also on retaining them in the domestic job market. Thus, it is imperative that they are able to keep highly skilled graduates in the country (Baum & Hai, 2020; Gursoy & Chi, 2020). Another previous study also indicated how the COVID-19 pandemic affected career perceptions, career opportunities, and employment security in the tourism and hospitality sector among students (Shah *et al.*, 2021; Manoharan *et al.*, 2021). Skilled migrants' migration, known as brain drain, can have long-term impacts on countries that rely on skilled human resources to drive economic development (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012; World Bank, 2023).

The study's main focus is on perceived employment opportunities, job security, and perceived industry recovery, which could have a positive or negative effect on graduates' migration intentions, either directly or indirectly via the influence of career optimism. With regard to the push–pull approach to migration and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), limited employment opportunities, low employment security, and slow recovery of industries can be regarded as potential push factors which may motivate graduates to consider the migration option overseas. Conversely, a positive outlook on the employment prospects, job stability, and recovery of industries could boost graduates' confidence in their future employment. This confidence will boost their optimism in their careers, which can lead to lower migration plans. It is also in line with the hospitality literature that points to the importance of career optimism especially in times of industry crisis and uncertainty (Manoharan *et al.*, 2021).

Domestic job opportunities, family and social situation, and education are key factors affecting graduates' career choices. The importance of perceived employment opportunities is particularly relevant as graduates' perceptions of the availability of suitable jobs can affect their confidence in establishing a career in their country of origin (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Massey *et al.*, 1993). The results of the previous study conducted in Bangladesh revealed that students from the tourism and hospitality major had negative perceptions on some factors such as job security, promotion opportunities, starting salary and working environment (Hoque & Ashif, 2020). Job insecurity is an even greater concern since the outbreak of COVID-19 as it is possible that job insecurity will make graduates think of more secure career paths in other countries (Sverke *et al.*, 2002; Cheng & Chan, 2008). Likewise, the pandemic generated expectations for fewer job opportunities, decreased job security, and reduced promotion opportunities among tourism and hospitality students (Shah *et al.*, 2021). The extent to which graduates perceive recovery in the industry could potentially impact their desire to stay within the domestic tourism and hospitality industry, as their expectations of future opportunities in the

industry might be influenced by their perception of recovery in the industry (Sigala, 2020; Baum & Hai, 2020; Shah et al., 2021).

Apart from these direct links, this study takes career optimism as a psychological mechanism between career-related perceptions and intention to migrate. Rottinghaus et al. (2005) and Hirschi (2010) proposed that those who are more career optimistic would have stronger positive attitudes toward their career future and would be more responsive to the effects of ambiguity and/or challenging work situations. Consequently, they may be less inclined to look for other job options overseas. In addition, recent hospitality research suggests that optimism as a psychological resource is very important to support the individual through crisis and uncertainty (Manoharan et al., 2021). In addition, Eva et al. (2020) found career optimism to be an important career-related construct related to people's expectations and reactions to future career opportunities. Thus, the present study treats career optimism as a consequence of the perception of the job experience as well as a mediator between employment-related perceptions and graduates' intention to migrate.

In general, the study suggests that perceived employment opportunities, job security and perceived industry recovery can affect the intention of migration of tourism and hospitality graduates in Bangladesh through direct and indirect channels, namely career optimism. The proposed conceptual framework is able to combine structural employment conditions, psychological career perceptions and migration behavior in a unified post COVID-19 tourism labor market. The study focuses on Bangladesh, and is designed to gain insights into what can draw in or deter tourism and hospitality graduates from looking for a job in another country.

The proposed framework can be followed by future researchers by empirically testing the hypothesized relationship using survey data from tourism and hospitality graduates from universities in Bangladesh or any other developing country context by applying structural equation modeling (SEM) or PLS-SEM. The framework might be expanded to include any of the other variables listed in the Limitations section, to create a more robust predictive model. As a tool, the framework can be applied outside academic settings to determine which perception is most likely to influence migration risk among university graduates in an individual's specific context - either as a university, a tourism board, or a policy maker - and then develop targeted interventions.

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