Occupational commitment and perceived social status for hospitality educators: A case study of Hong Kong

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Abstract

Influenced by Chinese culture, educators are highly respected in Chinese communities. However, the work of hospitality educators is not a highly regarded position in society because Chinese people commonly perceive hospitality management studies as unnecessary. These conditions place hospitality educators in a contradictory position, in that society respects them as educators but does not value their subject. On this basis, this paper investigates the influence of perceived occupational prestige on the occupational commitment of hospitality educators and the moderating effects of their industrial and education work experiences. The findings show that perceived occupational prestige is strongly related to the occupational commitment of hospitality educators. It is also found that work experience does not always have positive moderating effects on their occupational commitment. This study provides essential information on how hospitality educators' occupational commitment is influenced by perceived occupational prestige and the work experiences of hospitality educators in Hong Kong.

Key words: Hospitality Education, Occupational Commitment, Perceived Occupational Prestige, Chinese Culture, Educator's Social Status

Introduction

In recent years, the demand for hospitality management programs in Hong Kong has increased dramatically. The high demand placed for hospitality education programs comes from both local and overseas communities. Due to Hong Kong's worldwide reputation for hospitality and quality services, hospitality management programs have grown in popularity among students from the local area and overseas, especially those from mainland China pursuing tertiary education in Hong Kong (Hsu, 2015). There is a corresponding demand for hospitality educators with strong academic backgrounds and proven hospitality work experience (Hsu, 2015). However, due to the low prestige of hospitality work in Chinese culture, hospitality professionals with rich industry experience in Hong Kong often have lower-level academic qualifications and are therefore not qualified to teach in higher-education institutions (Hsu, 2015). As such, the hospitality education industry in Hong Kong is facing a labour shortage problem and a lack of qualified hospitality educators (Hsu, 2012; Hsu, 2015; Li and Li, 2013).

Hong Kong is significantly influenced by traditional Chinese culture and a sense of collectivism is rooted in Hong Kong society (Chong et al., 2015; Luo and Chui, 2016). Social and cultural factors strongly influence individuals' career choices and occupational commitment. Given the strong influence of collectivism, people from Hong Kong are concerned about feeling connected to others in peer-to-peer, student-to-teacher, and child-to-parent relationships (Yuen and Yau, 2015). As a result, perceived occupational prestige is an important factor in the career development process. Due to the strong influence of Chinese culture, hospitality jobs have a relatively low social status in Hong Kong, which discourages people with strong academic backgrounds from choosing to pursue careers in hospitality. Consequently, many experienced hospitality practitioners have not received higher education training,

leading to a shortage of hospitality educators with strong academic backgrounds and hospitality work experience. Attracting and retaining qualified hospitality educators and gaining their commitment are crucial to supporting the growth of hospitality education in Hong Kong.

Although educators are highly respected in Hong Kong society, hospitality education is less valued, due to the diminished prestige and low social status of hospitality as a profession in China. This places hospitality educators in a contradictory position, in that society respects them as educators but does not value or highly regard their subject. This position may affect hospitality educators' commitment to hospitality education in Hong Kong. The purpose of this paper is therefore to investigate the impact of perceived occupational prestige on hospitality educators' occupational commitment and to examine the level of occupational commitment of Hong Kong hospitality educators. The study adopts the social cognitive career theory proposed by Lent et al. (1994) and the occupational commitment model proposed by Meyer and Espinoza (2016). The study objectives are three-fold: 1) To test three dimensions (affective, continuance, and normative commitment) of occupational commitment among Hong Kong hospitality educators; 2) to examine the impacts of occupational prestige on the occupational commitment of Hong Kong hospitality educators; and 3) to test the moderating effects of the industrial and education work experience of hospitality educators on their occupational commitment.

The paper is organized as follows. First, it provides an overview of hospitality education in the context of Chinese culture. In doing so, it explains the reasons for the high demand for qualified and committed hospitality educators in Hong Kong. After that, it lays out the theoretical background of this study, as a foundation of the hypotheses development. The moderating effects of work experience and the link between perceived occupational prestige and the occupational commitment of hospitality educators are tested via moderating effect analysis and hierarchical multiple regression. The findings are presented to provide insights into the impact of Chinese culture on hospitality educators in Hong Kong

for society and government units, in order to support the development of hospitality education in Hong Kong.

Overview of Hospitality Education

Hospitality education is a professional academic program (Barrows and Johan, 2008). It is commonly categorized as a sub-major of management, under business administration (Li and Li, 2013), which is specifically designed to help students prepare for careers in the hospitality sector. Hospitality students are commonly required to take general business administrative courses at the beginning of their studies, followed by courses related to hospitality operations, such as hotel operations management, cruise management, and culinary management (Barrows and Johan, 2008).

Although hospitality education is now a professional academic program, it was previously perceived as being of lower academic standard than other academic disciplines (Pavesic, 1993). With the massive growth of the tourism and hospitality service sectors worldwide, the urgent need for a hospitality labor force has induced the growth of hospitality education in the past 30 years (Dredge et al., 2014). In the early stages of this growth, hospitality education strongly emphasized vocational training and mainly focused on fulfilling industry needs by training students in regard to technical skills (Airey et al., 2015).

Hospitality education institutions are aware of the importance of academic credibility and the recognition of hospitality management programs to improving the image of hospitality education and professionalizing it at the higher-education level (Evans, 1988). Hospitality institutions understand that the ranking and reputation of their programs can only be raised when they adopt traditional academic features and improve the employability of their students. They focus on the quality and quantity of their research outputs and their relationships with industry partners (Airey et al., 2015). Thus, throughout the

past decades, hospitality education has turned from being vocation-oriented to becoming more academic-oriented.

Hospitality Education in the Context of Chinese Culture

Hong Kong is strongly influenced by traditional Chinese culture, giving rise to a community in Hong Kong that values academic and career success (Jamnia and Pan, 2017; Lien and McLean, 2017; Pearce and Lin, 2007). Professional occupations with high academic requirements (e.g., physicians, university teachers, and engineers) are considered to be highly prestigious occupations, whereas those with fewer academic requirements (e.g., waiters and construction workers) are considered to be less prestigious occupations (Lin and Xie, 1988; Moufakkir et al., 2016; Zhao and Ghiselli, 2016).

Traditional Chinese values explain this phenomenon. Given the cultural norms of collectivism and the high value placed on harmonious relationships in Chinese culture, Chinese people emphasize reciprocity between their families and larger social communities. In Hong Kong, children are taught to respect age and rank; that is, to respect parents, elders, ancestors, and educators. In Confucianism, educators represent wisdom and knowledge, and are not to be questioned (Kennedy, 2002; Zhu, 2017). Unquestioning obedience and compliance on behalf of students are expected. In Chinese tradition, educators are regarded as scholars who transmit knowledge and essential skills for living and personal development. They are also viewed as moral figures and role models for students (Fwu and Wang, 2002; Moses et al., 2016; Yang and Lin, 2016). Therefore, educators, especially university educators, are highly respected in the Chinese community.

In contrast, hospitality jobs are usually classified as non-professional and low-prestige occupations in China (Jiang and Tribe, 2009; Moufakkir et al., 2016). The emphases on power distance and collectivism in traditional Chinese culture also provide an explanation for this. In the organizational context, employees with a high power distance are more likely to obey and follow the decisions of their supervisors and organizations (Hu et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2012). Similarly, hospitality employees are expected to respect their customers and to provide them with high levels of service by fulfilling their requests (Moufakkir et al., 2016; Tsang and Ap, 2007). The nature of this job leads to the low social status of hospitality employees, especially guest contact employees, in China. In Chinese culture, there is a high power distance between servers and customers; the status of servers is low because they must serve their customers and fulfil their needs and requests. Although hospitality employees may serve their customers professionally, serving work is perceived as being less prestigious and low in social status. Thus, hospitality jobs are regarded as low-prestige occupations in the Chinese community. Consequently, hospitality educators are considered non-mainstream educators.

Hypotheses Development

Theoretical Background: Social Cognitive Career Theory

The emphasis on social and cultural factors in social cognitive theory resonates with the aim of this study, which is to explore the link between occupational prestige and occupational commitment amongst Hong Kong hospitality educators. As Lent et al. (1994) proposed, social cognitive career theory emphasizes the interplay between the social cognitive variables in the career development process. Based on social cognitive career theory, educators have high levels of commitment to their occupation when they perceive the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards gained from that occupation (outcome expectations) as fulfilling their personal goals.

Based on the concept of social cognitive career theory, contextual factors can be barriers to or provide support for an individual's career choice and career development (Dahling et al., 2013; Lent and Brown, 1996). Contextual factors may include social constraints, race, gender, social status, or the realities of the world of work (Dzomonda et al., 2015; Patton and McMahon, 2014; Shen, 2011). Contextual influence is induced by various factors, including personal (e.g., gender and disability), environmental (e.g., support from friends and parental behaviors), and behavioral (e.g., job search intensity) variables (Lent et al., 2008; Zikic and Saks, 2009). The social cognitive variables work as contextual affordances that can be barriers to or support for an individual's career choice and career development (Dahling et al., 2013; Lent and Brown, 1996).

Social cognitive career theory highlights the significant influences of social and cultural factors. Cultural and social factors, such as gender and ethnicity, are significant factors in the career choice process as a whole (Lent and Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 2008; Patton and McMahon, 2014). According to social cognitive theory, individuals guided by common reality are likely to make career choices based on their social factor preferences (Lent and Brown, 2013; Lent et al., 2000).

Occupational Commitment

Given the strong sense of collectivism in Chinese culture, occupational prestige is significantly correlated with occupational commitment (Lu et al., 2002). Occupational commitment is also known as professional commitment or career commitment (Hackett et al., 2001; Klassen and Chiu, 2011). It is defined as "a person's belief in and acceptance of the values of his or her chosen occupation or line of work and a willingness to maintain membership in that occupation" (Meyer et al., 1993, p. 535). Occupational commitment is related to an individual's emotional attachment to his or her occupation (Andrus et al., 2006).

Occupational commitment and organizational commitment are closely inter-related but may not be equally important for some professionals. "Strategy marketization" or the market model weights occupational commitment as more important than organizational commitment. This model describes the phenomenon by which knowledge workers aggressively market their refined and portable knowledge and skills (Reed, 1996). Knowledgeable workers enjoy occupational advancement and mobility, and resist command and control culture (Horwitz et al., 2003; Miguélez and Moreno, 2014; O'Neill and Adya, 2007). They are not tied to one particular organization, but have a strong commitment to their occupations. This model is applicable in the hospitality education industry because one of the key characteristics of the hospitality education career is the high level of mobility across institutions (Baruch, 2004; Goldhaber et al., 2011; Ladkin and Weber, 2009). Employees with high levels of occupational commitment are likely to invest in their occupational knowledge and job expertise; thus, organizations can benefit from recruiting them (Hackett et al., 2001; Meyer et al., 1993; Meyer and Espinoza, 2016). Therefore, this study investigates the occupational commitment but not the organizational commitment of hospitality educators.

Meyer et al. (1993) proposed that the three dimensions of commitment (affective, continuance, and normative commitment) could be applied to occupational commitment. Affective occupational commitment refers to an employee's emotional attachment to identification and involvement with a particular career role (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1993; Mowday et al., 1979). It is mainly induced by personal psychological factors, such as the desire for self-enhancement. Continuance occupational commitment refers to the degree of an employee's attachment to the occupation due to the perceived costs of leaving and his or her non-transferable investment, such as professional expertise or high occupational status (Hall et al., 2005; Meyer et al., 1993). Individuals with high levels of continuance occupational commitment tend to commit to their occupations because they perceive that they have invested a great deal into them, such as time and work experience. Normative occupational

commitment refers to an employee's sense of moral obligation to the occupation (Meyer et al., 1993); this commitment is generated by external pressure from colleagues, friends, or family (Hall et al., 2005). The influence of normative commitment on Chinese people is strong because of Chinese collectivistic culture (Liu and Cohen, 2010; Wasti, 2016). The occupational commitment model posed by Meyer et al. (1993) clearly states the different dimensions of occupational commitment; thus, it can help to fully clarify employees' occupational commitment.

Occupational Commitment and Occupational Prestige

In China, perceived occupational prestige is associated with career commitment and turnover intention (Zhou et al., 2009). Given the strong sense of collectivism in Chinese culture, occupational prestige is significantly correlated with job commitment. Chinese people tend to commit to the occupations with high social status and occupational prestige. Lim et al. (2000) also found that perceived occupational image was positively associated with organizational commitment and job satisfaction. In particular, they note that occupational image could have a stronger link to normative commitment than to other types of commitment. It means that their commitment to their job is mainly generated by external pressure from colleagues, friends or family (Hall et al., 2005). Still, as educators' contribution are highly recognized by the Chinese community, educators with higher levels of perceived occupational prestige enjoy their work and a higher degree of occupational commitment (Jacob et al., 2017; Lu et al., 2002).

Based on the aforementioned arguments, this study proposes that perceived occupational prestige is closely related to three forms of the occupational commitment of hospitality educators. Thus, the following hypotheses are made.

H1: Perceived occupational prestige is significantly related to hospitality educators' occupational commitment.

H1a: Perceived occupational prestige is significantly related to hospitality educators' affective occupational commitment.

H1b: Perceived occupational prestige is significantly related to hospitality educators' continuance occupational commitment.

H1c: Perceived occupational prestige is significantly related to hospitality educators' normative occupational commitment.

The Moderating Effects of Work Experience

Social cognitive career theory posits that personal inputs have moderating effects on the career decision process and individuals' performance. Based on social cognitive career theory, personal inputs, such as work experience, have direct and indirect impacts on the occupational commitment of hospitality educators in Hong Kong (Lent et al., 2008). It is believed that individuals' work experience is not only closely associated with learning experience and self-efficacy expectations, but also has a moderating effect on occupational commitment. This provides theoretical support for this study, in that previous work experience may have moderating effects on individuals' career development processes. Based on this theory, the moderating effects of work experience are not limited to experiences related to an individual's current occupation, but also include the work experience individuals gain throughout their lives. Previous experiences contribute to individuals' learning experiences and eventually affect their career decisions and commitment (Liguori et al., 2018; Sharf, 2016).

Hospitality education is closely related to the hospitality industry; it has a strong vocational element and is often geared toward educating and preparing students for professional positions in the sector (Wadongo et al., 2011). Hospitality educators are always expected to collaborate closely with the hospitality industry and train talented graduates with related technical and human skills to meet industry needs (Chan, 2011). For hospitality educators with previous experience in the hospitality industry before

joining the hospitality education field, their experience is beneficial for them in terms of fulfilling the industry-related aspect of hospitality education.

In previous work, the relationship between work experience and commitment is contested and inconsistent. For instance, Tang et al. (2012) and Snape et al. (2008) suggested that employees' occupational commitment is closely related to the tenure of their occupations. In contrast, Lee et al. (2000) found a weak link between occupational commitment and occupation tenure. However, studies have consistently proved the moderating effect of experience on organizational commitment (e.g., Bennett et al., 2005; Hunter and Thatcher, 2007; Lee and Chang, 2013; Russ and McNeilly, 1995). On this basis, work experience is suggested to have a moderating effect on commitment, but is not considered a key antecedent of commitment. Therefore, this study explores this link under the assumption that the work experience of hospitality educators as hospitality professionals and as hospitality educators moderates the relationship between occupational commitment and perceived occupational prestige. Based on this argument, this study proposes that hospitality educators' occupational commitment may be influenced not only by their work experience as hospitality educators, but also by their experience as hospitality professionals. The following hypotheses are therefore made.

> **H2: Hospitality educators' work experience has a moderating effect on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and hospitality educators' occupational commitment.**

> *H2a: Hospitality educators' work experience has a moderating effect on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and hospitality educators' affective occupational commitment.*

H2b: Hospitality educators' work experience has a moderating effect on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and hospitality educators' continuance occupational commitment.

H2c: Hospitality educators' work experience has a moderating effect on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and hospitality educators' normative occupational commitment.

H3: Hospitality professionals' work experience has a moderating effect on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and hospitality educators' occupational commitment.

H3a: Hospitality professionals' work experience has a moderating effect on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and hospitality educators' affective occupational commitment.

H3b: Hospitality professionals' work experience has a moderating effect on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and hospitality educators' continuance occupational commitment.

H3c: Hospitality professionals' work experience has a moderating effect on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and hospitality educators' normative occupational commitment.

Based on the aforementioned arguments, the research model is formulated, as shown in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1

Methods

Sample and Procedures

The target respondents are hospitality educators in Hong Kong. In this study, hospitality educators are specifically defined as educators in Hong Kong institutions, including universities, community colleges, and vocational institutions, that provide hospitality education diploma, undergraduate, and postgraduate programs to students. The researchers first sent invitations to educators from various hospitality institutions in Hong Kong to participate in the survey for this study and to further distribute the questionnaire to their colleagues. The self-administrative questionnaire was distributed in the form of printed questionnaires, as well as in an online survey form. Paper surveys help researchers to acquire quick responses, while online surveys allow researchers to take advantage of the internet to reach participants who would be difficult to reach through other channels (Wright, 2005). The advantage of online surveys lies in the absence of time and destination boundaries. Educators could fill in the online survey at their convenience. All of the questions in the online survey were set as compulsory questions that the educators were required to answer before submitting their response. This reduced the potential problem of missing data. In this study, 356 questionnaires were received, 314 of which (88.8%) were valid for data analysis.

Of the 314 respondents, 176 (around 55%) are female and 138 (44%) are male. They come from more than 15 countries, including Korea, Canada, the Philippines, Thailand, mainland China, Austria, New Zealand, and others. The findings show that the backgrounds of hospitality educators in Hong Kong are diverse and international. In terms of age, 32 hospitality educators (10%) are under 30 years of age, 129 educators (41%) are 31-40 years old, 102 educators are 41-50 years old and 51 educators are over 50 years old. More than 50% of the educators are younger than 40, and around 32% are 41-50 years old. Moreover, 41 educators have less than five years of hospitality education work experience, while 137 educators have five to 10 years of experience. In addition, 103 educators have 11-20 years of experience,

and 33 educators have more than 20 years of experience. Of the 314 hospitality educators, 63 have been working in the Hong Kong hospitality education industry for less than five years, 142 educators have been working in the industry for five to ten years, 82 educators have been working in the industry for 10-20 years, and 27 educators have been working in the industry for more than 20 years. In terms of job position, 41 educators are associate professors or above and 93 educators are assistant professors or equivalent position. Furthermore, 154 educators are lecturers or instructors and 26 educators are teaching assistants or tutors.

Measures

Using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree"), the respondents were asked to rate each item, including perceived occupational prestige and the three dimensions of occupational commitment (affective, normative, and continuance occupational commitment).

Perceived occupational prestige: This was measured using the 10-item perceived occupational prestige instrument created by Lim et al. (2000). Sample items include: "Generally, the public is suspicious of the profession of hospitality educators", "The hospitality education profession is high in status and prestige", and "Hospitality education work is a highly respected occupation in the Hong Kong community".

Affective, continuance, and normative occupational commitment: The 18-item occupational commitment instrument created by Meyer et al. (1993) was used to measure the three dimensions of occupational commitment. The 18 items were divided into three facets: 1) affective occupational commitment (e.g., "I am enthusiastic about hospitality education", "I am proud to be in the hospitality education profession"); 2) continuance occupational commitment (e.g., "I have put too much into the hospitality education profession to consider changing now", "Too much of my life would be disrupted if

I were to change my profession"); and 3) normative occupational commitment (e.g., "I feel a responsibility to the hospitality education profession to continue in it", "Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel that it would be right to leave hospitality education now").

Demographic variables: In this study, five demographic variables were introduced as controls that might affect the dependent variable (Parker and Chusmir, 1991; Tierney and Farmer, 2002): age, position, gender, work experience as hospitality professionals, and work experience as hospitality educators. The demographic variables such as age, position, and gender were set as control variables in the hierarchical multiple regression analysis, while work experience as hospitality professionals and work experience as hospitality educators were set as moderators.

Analysis

To assess discriminant validity, we firstly conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the 28 items comprising the 3 dimensions of occupational commitment and perceived occupational prestige. CFA for the 28-item scale indicated that a single-factor model had a poor fit ($\chi2 = 8336.6$, df = 250, p < .01; CFI = .361, TLI = .259, RMSEA = .272). We then computed a two factor model which comprises perceived occupational prestige and occupational commitment. It combined the items of the three dimensions of occupational commitment (affective, continuance, normative). This two-factor model also yielded a poor fit ($\chi2 = 4619.1$, df = 135, p < .01; CFI = .449, TLI = .375, RMSEA = .328). Another CFA for a four-factor model with perceived occupational prestige and the three dimensions of occupational commitment (affective, continuance, normative) was conducted. This four-factor model yielded a good fit for the data ($\chi2 = 1494.9$, df = 344, p < .01; CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .10).

The coefficient alpha, composite reliability coefficients (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) for perceived occupational prestige were 0.891, 0.92, and 0.59 respectively. The factor loadings of each item range from 0.83 to 0.94. The coefficient alphas for affective, continuance, and normative

occupational commitment were 0.941, 0.978, and 0.981, respectively. The CR and AVE for affective occupational commitment were 0.86 and 0.55. The factor loadings of each item ranges from 0.85 to 0.92. The CR and AVE for continuance occupational commitment were 0.90 and 0.62 and the CR and AVE for normative occupational commitment were 0.51 and 0.86. The factor loadings of each item ranges from 0.89 to 0.96. The factor loadings of each item ranges from 0.92 to 0.96. The Chi-square difference tests indicated that the hypothesized four-factor model fits the data better than the two-factor $\Delta\chi2 = 3124.2$, $\Delta df = 209$, $p = .00 < .01$) and the one-factor models ($\Delta\chi2 = 6841.7$, $\Delta df = 344$, $p = .00 < .01$). Thus, the discriminant validity of the constructs was confirmed.

To test the hypotheses, hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to analyze the interrelationships between perceived occupational prestige and the three dimensions of occupational commitment. To test the moderating effects of work experience (proposed in Hypotheses 2 and 3), the moderated causal steps approach to regression analysis was applied (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Hidden bias caused by demographic differences was eliminated by setting the differences as control variables.

Findings

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables. The findings show that hospitality educators' affective occupational commitment ($\mu = 4.26$) is the highest of all types of occupational commitment. The levels of continuance ($\mu = 3.62$) and normative ($\mu = 3.59$) occupational commitment are similar. Besides, the mean of hospitality educators' perceived occupational prestige is 3.74.

Insert Table 1

The findings indicate that perceived occupational prestige is significantly related to hospitality educators' education background, nationality and positions but not closely related to their gender, marital status and age differences. Compared with hospitality educators with Master's degrees in Hong Kong (μ

= 3.66; p = 0.00 < 0.05), hospitality educators with doctoral degrees (μ = 4.05) have a stronger perception that hospitality education is a prestigious occupation. The level of perceived occupational prestige of Chinese hospitality educators (μ = 4.18; p = 0.00 < 0.05) is significantly lower than non-Chinese (μ = 4.42) hospitality educators. The perceived occupational prestige of the hospitality educators in lecturer or equivalent positions (μ = 3.67; p = 0.00 < 0.05) is significantly lower than that of assistant professors or above (μ = 4.14).

Besides, the findings show that different demographic variables have different impacts on the three dimensions of occupational commitment. The affective occupational commitment of hospitality educators with doctoral degrees (μ = 4.37; p = 0.00 < 0.05) and Master's degrees (μ = 4.12) are significantly different but there is no significant difference in the continuous and normative occupational commitment. The findings also indicates that Chinese hospitality educators have a lower level of affective occupational commitment (μ = 4.18) then those of non-Chinese hospitality educators (μ = 4.45; p = 0.004 <0.05) but Chinese hospitality educators' continuance occupational commitment of (μ =3.76) is significantly higher than that of non-Chinese (μ = 2.96; p = 0.00 < 0.05). Similarly, Chinese hospitality educators' normative occupational commitment of (μ =3.69) is significantly higher than that of non-Chinese (μ = 2.96; p = 0.00 < 0.05).

Furthermore, across all of the rankings, associate professors or higher positions have the greatest affective occupational commitment (μ = 4.60; p = 0.00 < 0.05), while lecturers and instructors have the lowest affective occupational commitment (μ = 4.49). This indicates that the higher ranking of hospitality educators results in a higher level of affective occupational commitment. Similar to the result for affective occupational commitment, the normative occupational commitment of hospitality educators in associate professor or higher positions (μ = 4.02; p = 0.00 < 0.05), is significantly higher than that of educators in other positions (μ = 3.62). However, there is no significant difference in continuance occupational commitment across positions (p = 0.08 < 0.05).

Hypotheses Testing

Following the procedures of hierarchical regression analysis suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986), the hypotheses of this study were tested by first entering the control variables (Step 1), followed by the dependent variable (perceived occupational prestige) (Step 2) and the moderators (work experience as hospitality professionals and hospitality educators) (Step 3), and, finally, the interactions (perceived occupational prestige X work experience as hospitality professionals; perceived occupational prestige X work experience as hospitality educators) (Step 4).

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to test the hypotheses. The results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis are shown in Table 2. The analysis results showed that perceived occupational prestige was positively related to affective occupational commitment ($\beta = 0.38$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.33$, Model 2); thus, H1a is supported. However, the analysis results do not support H1b, which proposed that perceived occupational prestige was significantly related to hospitality educators' continuance occupational commitment ($\beta = 0.10$, $p = 0.158 > 0.05$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.02$, Model 6). This implies that perceived occupational prestige does not induce hospitality educators' continuance occupational commitment. Besides, the results ($\beta = 0.41$, $p = 0.00 < 0.05$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.14$, Model 10) showed that perceived occupational prestige is positively related to normative occupational commitment; thus, H1c is supported. In summary, perceived occupational prestige is a contributing factor in regard to affective and normative occupational commitment, but not continuance occupational commitment.

Insert Table 2

H2a, H2b, and H2c predicted that work experience as hospitality educators moderates the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and hospitality educators' affective, continuance, and normative occupational commitment, respectively. As H1b was not supported, H2b was also not supported. Referring to Table 2, the interaction between perceived occupational prestige and work experience as

hospitality educators was negatively related to affective occupational commitment (β = -0.0906, p < 0.01, ΔR^2 = 0.10, Model 4) (shown in Figure 2) and normative occupational commitment (β = -0.16, p < .01, ΔR^2 = .02, Model 12) (shown in Figure 3); thus, H2a and H2b were supported. This implies that work experience as hospitality educators has a negative effect on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige on affective occupational commitment and normative occupational commitment.

Insert Figure 2

Insert Figure 3

H3a, H3b, and H3c predicted that work experience as hospitality professionals moderates the relationships between perceived occupational prestige and hospitality educators' affective, continuance, and normative occupational commitment, respectively. Similar to H2b, H3b is not supported, as H1b is not supported by the data. As shown in Table 2, the interaction between perceived occupational prestige and work experience as hospitality professionals was negatively related to affective occupational commitment (β = -0.13, p < 0.01, ΔR^2 = 0.10, Model 4) (shown in Figure 4). H3a is supported. It implies that work experience as hospitality professionals has a negative effect on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige on affective occupational commitment. However, the interaction was positively related to normative occupational commitment (β = 0.31, p < .05, ΔR^2 = .02, Model 12) (shown in Figure 5); thus, H3c is supported, which means that work experience as hospitality professionals strengthens the positive relationship between perceived occupational prestige and normative occupational commitment. Figure 6 summarizes the analysis results in the research model, with path coefficients.

Insert Figure 4

Insert Figure 5

Insert Figure 6

Discussion

Akinpelu et al. (2011) pointed out that demographic variables significantly influenced perceived occupational prestige. This study obtains a similar result. The findings show that perceived occupational prestige is significantly related to hospitality educators' education background, nationality, positions and work experience but not closely related to their gender, marital status and age differences. This implies that people in the same occupation may perceive their occupation prestige differently based on their education, nationality and occupation position.

Besides, the findings show that perceived occupational prestige is strongly related to the affective occupational commitment of hospitality educators in Hong Kong. This shows that hospitality educators perceive hospitality education as a prestigious occupation, due not only to its social status, but also its meaningfulness. It implies that hospitality educators may perceive hospitality education as a prestigious occupation because of its meaningfulness and significance. English et al. (2010) pointed out that employees evaluate their occupations commonly based on their perceptions of the meaningfulness and significance of those occupations (English et al., 2010). In Chinese tradition, educators represent wisdom and knowledge, and are regarded as scholars who transmit knowledge and essential skills for living and personal development (Fwu and Wang, 2002; Moses et al., 2016; Yang and Lin, 2016). As their role is important for new generations, they are highly respected by society. Based on these arguments, perceived occupational prestige is closely related to hospitality educators' affective occupational commitment. The findings of the current study support this relationship.

This study proposes that perceived occupational prestige is a perceived cost of leaving and is closely related to the continuance occupational commitment of hospitality educators in Hong Kong. However, the findings showed that perceived occupational prestige does not affect educators'

continuance occupational commitment. The social status of educators in China is high and educators are highly respected by society. Hospitality educators may lose the respect of society if they quit the hospitality education industry. This study proposes that losing the respect of society is a cost of leaving the hospitality education industry. However, based on this finding, perceived occupational prestige is not significantly related to the continuance occupational commitment of hospitality educators in Hong Kong. This implies that perceived occupational prestige is not a perceived cost of leaving or a material benefit of remaining in an occupation for hospitality educators in Hong Kong. Hospitality educators in Hong Kong are not committed to hospitality education as an occupation because of their unwillingness to lose social status or the respect of society.

The findings also proved that perceived occupational prestige is a contributing factor to the normative occupational commitment of hospitality educators. Chinese culture can explain this finding. In China, occupations with high academic requirements are highly valued and are commonly believed to bring fame and reputation to individuals and their families (Tang, 2002; Yan and Berliner, 2016). As mentioned earlier, educators, especially university educators, are recognized as moral figures and role models for students (Fwu and Wang, 2002; Moses et al., 2016; Yang and Lin, 2016). This makes educators highly respected in the Chinese community. However, the high levels of respect from external parties, including friends, parents, and even society itself, may place a great deal of pressure on hospitality educators in Hong Kong, which may push them to be more committed to their hospitality education occupation. Given the strong influence of collectivism in Hong Kong society, its external pressure is particularly strong. This pressure prompts hospitality educators in Hong Kong to commit to their occupation to meet the expectations of external parties. Therefore, perceived occupational prestige is positively related to hospitality educators' normative occupational commitment.

The Moderating Effect of Work Experience as Hospitality Educators

22

This study found that work experience as hospitality educators has a negative effect on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige on affective occupational commitment. It also shows that hospitality educators in Hong Kong face a great challenge in performing their contradictory role. When they have just joined the hospitality education industry, they may perceive themselves as educators in the higher education field, which is a prestigious occupation. This may induce their commitment to hospitality education as a lifelong career. However, once they have stayed in the hospitality education industry for a longer period of time, they may realize the challenges of their contradictory role. Although they are respected as educators by society, their field is poorly valued by Hong Kong society. This contradictory role induces challenges for hospitality educators in Hong Kong. It explains why work experience as hospitality educators has a negative effect on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige on those educators' affective occupational commitment. Besides, the hierarchical multiple regression results show that perceived occupational prestige is positively related to the normative occupational commitment of hospitality educators in Hong Kong. However, this positive relationship is weakened by work experience as hospitality educators. This implies that the influence of perceived occupational image on normative commitment decreases throughout the career development of hospitality educators in Hong Kong. It also indicates that the influence of Chinese culture may be diluted by work experience as hospitality educators.

Based on Figure 3, work experience as hospitality educators changes the nature of the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and normative occupational commitment from positive to negative. The normative occupational commitment of less experienced hospitality educators is positively associated with perceived occupational prestige. In contrast, the normative occupational commitment of more experienced hospitality educators becomes negatively associated with perceived occupational prestige. This finding can be explained by teacher concern theory and Chinese culture. According to the theory proposed by Fuller (1969), educators in their early career stages have a great degree of self-concern

and are highly aware of their self-image as educators. They are also concerned about how other people perceive them as educators. In particular, the role of educator is a very prestigious occupation in Hong Kong society. Less experienced hospitality educators can gain positive self-image from their friends and society. This causes them to engage in and commit to their occupation, to strengthen their self-image as qualified hospitality educators.

However, when hospitality educators remain in the hospitality education industry for a longer period of time, they may become less concerned than others, as perceived occupational prestige is no longer their key concern. The contradictory role of hospitality educators presents great challenges for hospitality educators in Hong Kong. Experienced hospitality educators may feel too tired to deal with others' perceptions of the hospitality education industry. This induces a negative impact on their normative occupational commitment. Therefore, the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and normative occupational commitment changes from positive to negative.

The Moderating Effect of Work Experience as Hospitality Professionals

The analysis results showed that work experience as hospitality professionals has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and affective occupational commitment. This implies that work experience as hospitality professionals weakens the impact of perceived occupational prestige on the affective occupational commitment of hospitality educators in Hong Kong. The finding supports social cognitive career theory, which highlights the influence of cultural factors on the career development process. It suggests that the occupational commitment of hospitality educators in Hong Kong is strongly affected by perceived occupational prestige. It also explores current Hong Kong hospitality educators' thoughts on their occupational prestige, finding that perceived occupational prestige is positively associated with the occupational commitment of hospitality educators in Hong Kong. However, both types of work experience (that of hospitality professionals and

that of hospitality educators) dampen the positive relationship between perceived occupational prestige and the affective occupational commitment of hospitality educators in Hong Kong. This proves the contradictory position of hospitality educators in Hong Kong.

This finding further shows that the average level of affective occupational commitment of hospitality educators with rich work experience as hospitality professionals is higher than that of those with less work experience as hospitality educators. Once hospitality professionals have stayed in the hospitality industry for a longer period of time, they may realize the truth about the low prestigious status of hospitality occupations. Hospitality educators with rich hospitality industry experience have strong feelings about the importance of hospitality education to the growth of the hospitality industry in Hong Kong. Therefore, work experience as hospitality professionals enhances the affective occupational commitment of hospitality educators in Hong Kong.

Besides, the findings show that work experience as hospitality professionals strengthens the positive relationship between perceived occupational prestige and normative occupational commitment. The large contrast in respect from society between two occupations may induce the normative occupational commitment of hospitality educators with rich hospitality industry experience in Hong Kong. When hospitality educators change their occupation from one that is less prestigious (a hospitality job) to one that is highly prestigious (an education job), the respect they gain from others prompts them to commit to their occupation as educators in higher education industry.

In addition, given the strong collectivism present in Chinese culture, hospitality educators gain respect and recognition from society after joining the hospitality education industry. The social status of their occupations as hospitality educators also improves the reputations of their families and companions (Hardin et al., 2001; Tang, 2002). Hospitality educators with rich hospitality industry experience are committed to their occupations due to the concerns of their families and significant parties. Therefore,

their normative occupational commitment is easily influenced by perceived occupational prestige, especially when they experience a large contrast between two occupations (hospitality jobs and hospitality education jobs). This explains why work experience as hospitality professionals enhances the impact of perceived occupational prestige on the normative occupational commitment of hospitality educators in Hong Kong.

Theoretical Implications

Social cognitive theory proposed by Lent et al. (1994) emphasizes the influence of contextual factors on the career development process. It proposes that contextual factors have a moderating effect on career choice development. Besides, it suggests that inputs such as previous work experience have a moderating effect throughout the career development process. However, most of studies (e.g. Bennett et al., 2005; Hunter and Thatcher, 2007; Lee and Chang, 2013) investigated the moderating effect of work experience one's current occupation but the effect of one's work experience in previous occupations is still under investigation in literature. In fact, people nowadays are more open-minded towards changing their occupation to another field when they find the prospect fits their career needs. On this basis, this study first attempt to test the moderating effects of two types of work experience: the work experience of hospitality educators as hospitality professionals and that of hospitality educators. The findings proved that previous work experience in other industries also has a moderating effect on one's commitment to his or her current occupation.

The findings also showed that the work experience of hospitality educators (hospitality educators and hospitality professionals) does not always have positive moderating effects on hospitality educators' occupational commitment. For instance, both types of work experience (that of hospitality professionals and that of hospitality educators) negatively moderate the relationship between the perceived occupational prestige and the affective occupational commitment of hospitality educators in Hong Kong.

It extends existing knowledge about the impact of social cognitive theory on the moderating effects of current and previous work experience. Many individuals may work in more than one industry during their careers. This study proved that work experience does not always positively moderate individuals' occupational commitment; sometimes, experience may have negative moderating effects on that commitment. It provides scholars with the insight that the influence of various work experiences in different industries should be carefully investigated.

Managerial Implications

Given the strong influence of Chinese culture, educators are highly respected by the Chinese community and have high social prestige in Hong Kong. The finding of this study proved that the hospitality educators in Hong Kong with higher perceived occupational prestige enjoyed a higher degree of occupational commitment. However, the results show that both types of work experience (that of hospitality professionals and that of hospitality educators) demotivate hospitality educators in committing to their occupation. In other words, occupational prestige cannot sustainably induce occupational commitment throughout the career development journey of hospitality educators. Thus, it is necessary for hospitality institutions to enhance the affective occupational commitment of hospitality educators throughout their career development journey.

To maintain and enhance the affective occupational commitment of hospitality educators, it is suggested to filfull the educators' psychological and spiritual needs (Yang, 2012). Educators who experience psychological and spiritual fulfilment have a strong sense of belonging and a strong commitment for their education work (Yang, 2012). They can also develop their envisioned future profiles by fulfilling their psychological and spiritual needs at work (Rhodes and Fletcher, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to support educators in that capacity.

It can be achieved by developing their professional identity throughout their education career development journey (Shahzad et al., 2015). Professional identity is defined as an identity or a role shared by a group of professionals (Alves and Gazzola, 2011). Educators' professional identity relates to society's expectations, conceptions and perceived image of educators (Beijaard et al., 2013).

To develop the professional identity educators, appreciation and recognition of their effort and their unique and important role in both hospitality education and the hospitality industry are recommended. The system of recognizing educators' effort is important for reducing the educators' stress (Muokwue and Ofojebe, 2009). The recognition system is not limited to regular salary increases and recognition from schools, students and the hospitality industry. It can also be other forms of educator recognition, such as the selection of mentors for junior educators and certification of their professionalism (Darling-Hammond, 2010). For instance, certified educators are motivated to enhance their teaching quality and willing to adopt various teaching methods in their classes (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Appreciation from students is also an effective way to recognize educators' work.

Limitation and Directions for Future Studies

Hospitality educators are facing great demands in their work, including teaching, research, and service. To fulfil these work demands, they are required to be teachers, researchers, and hospitality consultant professionals. When hospitality educators perform more than one role in their occupations, they may perceive their work role identities within those occupations differently. An educator's work role identity involves the ways in which educators interpret the meaning of their work and roles as educators (Kim et al., 2017). Hospitality educators may have varying levels of commitment to different roles. Some educators may be more committed to research-related work, while some may be more

committed to teaching-related work. Currently, hospitality educators' commitment to role identity has yet to be investigated. Future studies may focus on hospitality educators' commitment to different role identities.

This study investigates perceived occupational prestige. However, it does not specifically investigate the perceived occupational prestige of foreign hospitality educators in Hong Kong. Foreigners are generally respected in Chinese society. A foreign hospitality educator in Hong Kong may feel that he or she is even more prestigious in Hong Kong. The findings of the study show that the perceived occupational prestige of foreign hospitality educators is higher than that of Chinese hospitality educators in Hong Kong. Few studies have considered the perceived social status of foreigners in the Chinese community. This may provide a direction for future studies.

Besides, this study proved that perceived occupational prestige is a contributing factor to the occupational commitment of hospitality educators and different forms of work experience have moderating effects on occupational commitment. However, this study specifically investigated hospitality educators in Hong Kong. Indeed, the perception of hospitality education as a form of non-mainstream education does not solely occur in Hong Kong, but also in many other countries. It would be worthwhile for scholars to further investigate perceived occupational prestige and the occupational commitment of hospitality educators in other counties to verify the generalizability of these findings.

This study investigates the moderating effect of work experience as hospitality professionals on hospitality educators' occupational commitment. It assumes that this work experience is related to hospitality educators' current work. However, it overlooks the way in which the current job duties of some hospitality educators may not be related to their previous work experience as hospitality professionals. For example, hospitality educators with rich MICE industry experience may not teach MICE-related subjects or conduct any research in this area. Due to limited resources, it is impossible for

hospitality institutions to recruit one or more hospitality educators with related experience in each subject. This may have induced hidden bias in the moderating effect analysis results.

Conclusion

This study found that hospitality education is an attractive occupation for Hong Kong hospitality educators. They perceive hospitality education as a prestigious occupation due to both its social status and its meaningfulness. However, the findings showed that the work experience of hospitality educators dampens the impact of perceived occupational prestige on their occupational commitment. This may be because they realize that it is very difficult to change society's perception of hospitality occupations in Chinese society. This presents a problem for both hospitality and the hospitality education industry, which may affect the growth of the hospitality education industry in Hong Kong in the long run. It is hoped that the results of this study will highlight the concerns of researchers as well as hospitality institutions in regard to the occupational commitment of hospitality educators.

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Figures and Tables

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations of All Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Perceived occupational prestige	3.74	0.84	(0.89)					
2. Affective occupational commitment	4.26	0.68	0.63**	(0.94)				
3. Continuance occupational commitment	3.62	1.11	0.021	0.15	(0.98)			
4. Normative occupational commitment	3.59	1.15	0.29**	0.39**	0.46**	(0.98)		
5. Work Experience as Hospitality professionals	2.24	1.05	-0.13*	0.11	-0.08	-0.09	(0.12)	-
6. Work Experience as Hospitality Educators	2.37	0.60	0.06	0.19**	-0.09	0.18**	-0.34**	(0.27)

*Note: n=314; * p<.05; ** p<.01.*

Table 2: Results of hierarchical multiple regression

	Affective Occupational Commitment				Continuance Occupational Commitment				Normative Occupational Commitment			
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12
Control variables												
Age	-0.154	0.096	-0.533	-0.49	-0.13	-0.25	-0.28	-0.19	-0.86	-0.59	-0.67	-0.78
Gender	0.066	-0.028	0.03	0.05	0.13	0.09	0.69	0.61	0.12	0.19	0.33	-0.67
Position	-0.096	-0.005	-0.06	-0.08	0.34	0.07	0.09	0.09	-0.57	0.41	0.48	-0.01
Nationality	0.13**	0.12**	0.11**	0.62	-0.34**	-0.34**	-0.31**	-0.29**	-0.31**	-0.32**	-0.35**	-0.37**
Independent variable												
Perceived occupational prestige		0.38**	0.38**	0.37**		0.10	0.15	0.16		0.41**	0.39**	0.38**
Moderators												
Work experience as hospitality educators			0.11	0.15**			-0.18	-0.18			0.16	0.18
Work experience as hospitality professionals			0.06	0.03			-0.01	-0.01			-0.07	-0.09
Interactions												
Work experience as hospitality educators X Perceived occupational prestige				-0.09**				0.01				-0.16**
Work experience as hospitality professionals X Perceived occupational prestige				-0.13**				0.03				0.31*
Adjusted R^2	0.08	0.42	0.43	0.54	0.13	0.15	0.15	0.14	0.08	0.22	0.22	0.24
ΔR^2	0.11	0.33	0.01	0.1	0.156	0.02	0.01	0.001	0.11	0.14	0.01	0.02
F	4.13**	23.84**	20.87**	26.95**	6.25**	3.42**	5.56**	4.76**	3.96**	9.90**	8.53**	8.07**
ΔF	4.13**	179.45**	3.8*	35.09**	6.25**	6.89**	1.22*	0.13*	3.96**	56.82**	1.51*	4.22*

Note: N = 314; *$p \leq .05$,
**$p \leq .01$ (two-tailed).

Figure 1: The research model of perceived occupational prestige, work experiences and the three dimensions of occupational commitment
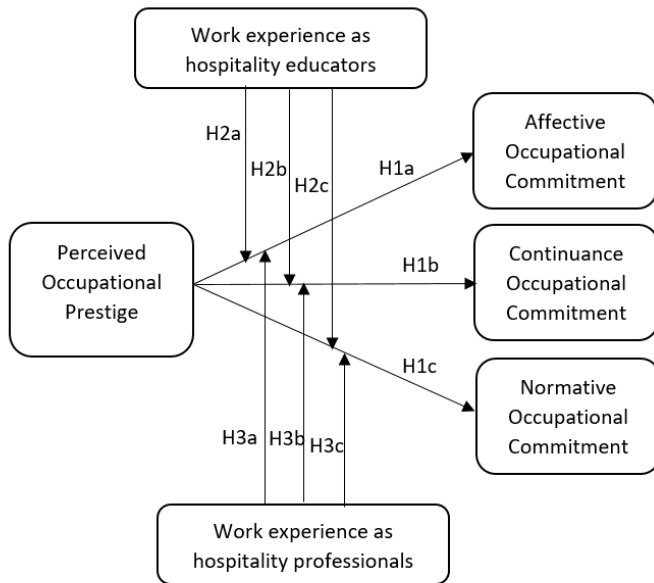

Figure 2: The moderating effect of work experience as hospitality educators on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and affective occupational commitment
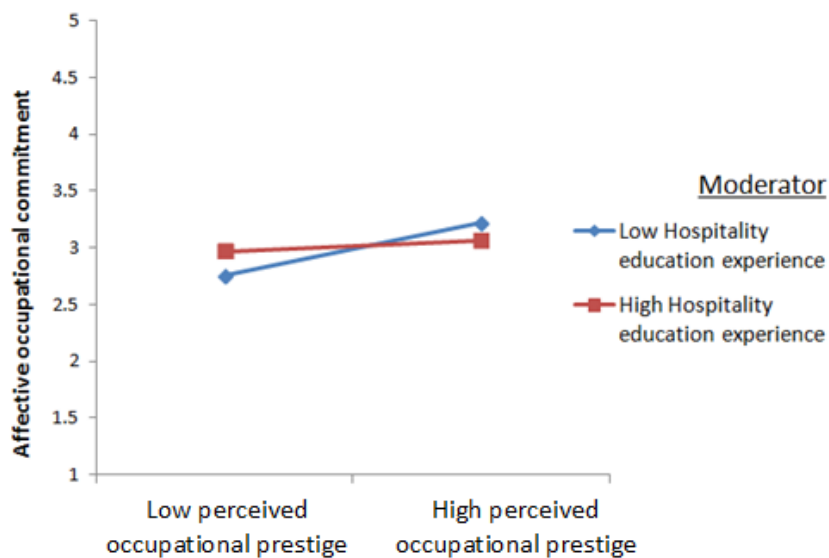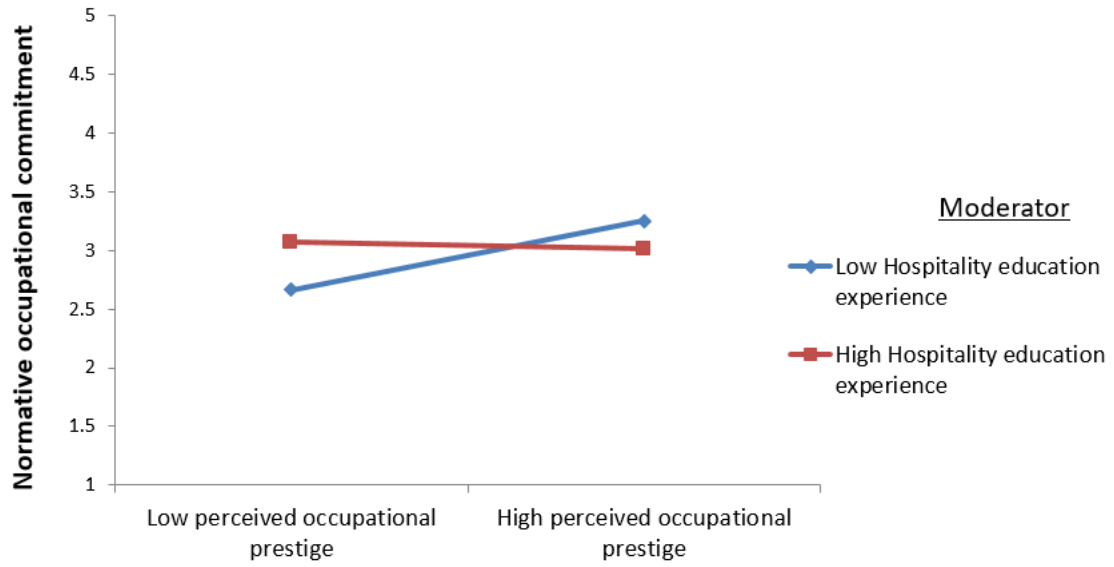
Figure 3: The moderating effect of work experience as hospitality educators on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and normative occupational commitment

Figure 4: The moderating effect of work experience as hospitality professionals on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and affective occupational commitment
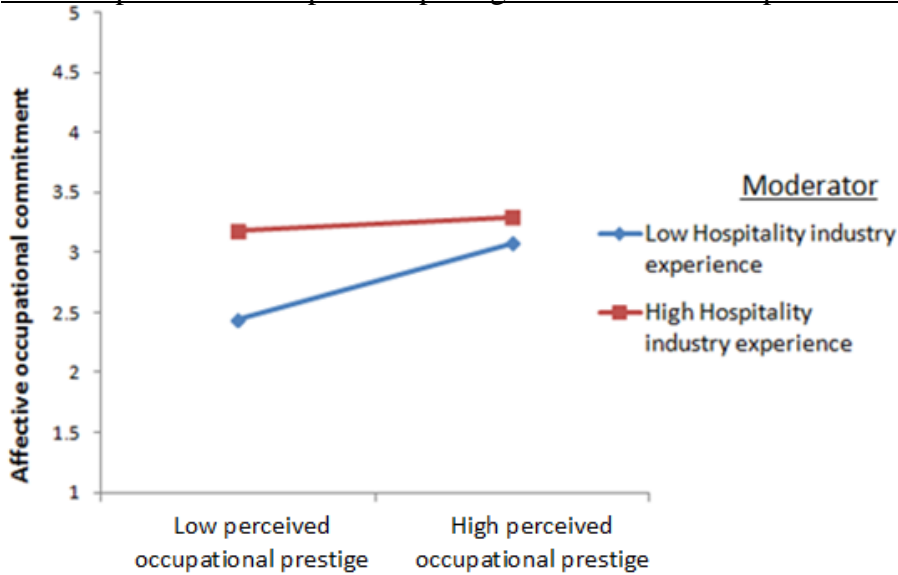
Figure 5: The moderating effect of work experience as hospitality professionals on the relationship between perceived occupational prestige and normative occupational commitment
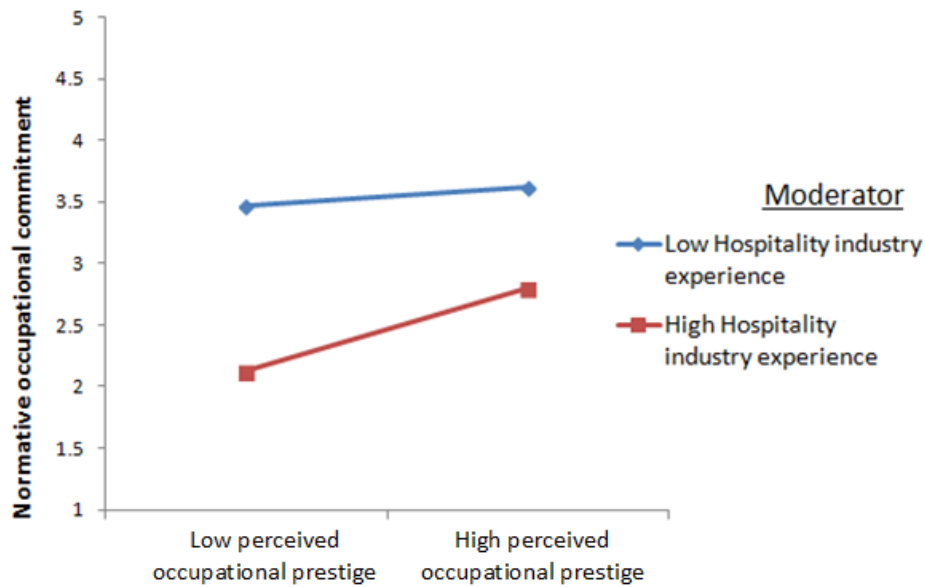

Figure 6: The research model with path coefficients