



# TOURISM INVOLVEMENT, WORK ENGAGEMENT AND JOB SATISFACTION AMONG FRONTLINE HOTEL EMPLOYEES

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**Abstract:** This study examined the relationship among tourism involvement, work engagement and job satisfaction in the hotel industry. Data was gathered from 336 frontline employees of 20 international hotels in Taiwan and was analyzed via structural equation modeling. Findings show that tourism involvement is positively related to work engagement, while both tourism involvement and work engagement are positively related to job satisfaction. Work engagement was found to partially mediate the relationship between tourism involvement and job satisfaction. Implications for hotel managers, limitations and future research directions are discussed. **Keywords:** tourism involvement, work engagement, job satisfaction. © 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

The core product of hotel firms is services (Kusluvan, 2003; Lashley & Lee-Ross, 2003; Richard & Sundaram, 1994). Despite services being intangible, hotel frontline employees “produce tangible services” via direct interaction with customers (Gonzalez & Garazo, 2006; Harris, 2012; Kusluvan, Kusluvan, Ilhan, & Buyruk, 2010; Smith, 1994). It is for this reason that frontline employees are critical elements of service quality. To better serve customers, hotel firms must understand attitudes and values that frontline employees should have in their jobs. Previous research has demonstrated that high performing tourism-related firms were characterized by engaged or satisfied frontline employees (Kusluvan et al., 2010; Lam & Ozorio, 2012; Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005; Slatten & Mehmetoglu, 2010). Engaged employees provide better service, which can increase customer loyalty (Salanova et al., 2005). Satisfied frontline employees can maintain high performance and deliver quality services (LaLopa, 1997; Kusluvan, 2003).

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Due to the known effect of work engagement and job satisfaction on firm performance, tourism scholars have attempted to identify antecedents of work engagement and job satisfaction (Kusluvan et al., 2010; Slatten & Mehmetoglu, 2010). The current study, however, explores a factor that has not been widely examined in the tourism literature: tourism involvement. Using tourism involvement to predict tourism employees' work outcomes is a fair extension of tourism research because work life is correlated to tourism (Dik & Hansen, 2008; McCabe, 2009; McCabe & Stokoe, 2010). Tourism provides "an alternative experience of time, that is, time off or holiday time, which appears as an alternative rhythm, free from constraints of the daily tempo" (Wang, 2000, p. 216). It has positive effects on tourism participants' work and overall lives (Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2012; Neal, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2007; Sirgy, 2001, 2002; Sirgy, Kruger, Lee, & Yu, 2011). Individuals who enjoy freedom in tourism activities are more likely to feel a great degree of control and to gain a sense of intrinsic motivation (Crane, 2011; Witt & Ellis, 1987). They are also more inclined to experience satisfaction, pleasure and enjoyment in all domains of their lives, including their work (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; Neal et al., 2007; Sirgy et al., 2011). Therefore, it seems appropriate to consider that highly tourism-involved employees demonstrate better work outcomes than low tourism-involved employees.

When investigating the influence of tourism involvement on work-related outcomes, one has to take into account that tourism involvement is not just simple participation in vacations. In contrast to the effect of vacation, which fades out rapidly (De Bloom, Geurts, Taris, Sonnentag, Weerth, & Kompier, 2010), Havitz and Dimanche (1990) define tourism involvement as a person's perceived relevance of tourism activities and the motivational state with regard to them. Tourism involvement encompasses an individual's long-term attitudes toward tourism activities. These attitudes in turn influence an individual's behavior over time. Studies have reported that people with different levels of tourism involvement demonstrate divergent tourism behaviors, such as information searching, decision making and experience sharing (Jamrozy, Backman, & Backman, 1996; Park & Kim, 2010; Zalatan, 1998). Some even adjust their lifestyle, such as travelling and spending more (Clements & Josiam, 1995; Kim, Scott, & Crompton, 1997) to become more involved in tourism-related activities. Therefore, tourism involvement has enduring rather than short-term effects on tourists (Havitz, Dimanche, & Bogle, 1994; Havitz & Mannell, 2005).

Many studies have found a close relationship between tourism, quality of life and working life of tourists (Dann, 2001; Etzion, 2003; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Kuhnel & Sonnentag, 2011; Lounsbury & Hoopes, 1986; Neal, Sirgy, & Uysal, 1999; Neal et al., 2007; Rook & Zijlstra, 2006; Sirgy et al., 2011; Sonnentag, 2003; Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006; Westman & Eden, 1997). In general, positive effects of tourism on tourists' overall life and working life have been found. Despite the positive implications of tourism on working life, examinations of the effects of

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