

The Analysis of Professional Identity Development of Tourism Students: A Case Study in Izmir

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Abstract

The number of graduates who have studied tourism management but continued their career in other businesses rather than tourism is not unconsiderable. It is important to develop professional identities for associate and undergraduate students studying in the field of tourism to make them remain in the sector. Professional identity refers to one's awareness regarding their profession, as well as their identification with the professional groups and social class to which they belong (Mancini et al., 2015). At this point, determining the students' individual commitment to the tourism profession as well as their level of exploration and awareness during their education is critical to a positive career development. By this way, the rate of tourism students employed in the sector after graduation will increase. Meanwhile, the service quality and then customer satisfaction in tourism will be improved through the growing number of highly skilled educated employees. The research results will guide authorities in order to develop and revise policies for career development of prospective tourism employees. Data were collected from students (undergraduate and associate degree) registered in one of the governmental universities in Izmir using a structured questionnaire. The results revealed that identity statuses had a significant difference on intention to leave department of tourism. Students in achieved and foreclosure statuses are less likely to leave the their department.

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INTRODUCTION

Jobs in tourism are often associated with low wages, low-skilled labour, part-time, seasonality, negative image, poor management offering a fuzzy career structure (Walmsley, 2004). A high rate of tourism graduates are employed in other branch of business even if they have started their professional careers first in tourism industry (Costa et al., 2013). Thus, understanding the factors that cause them to quit their job is really important for the hospitality industry with a high employee turnover rate. Since attitudes and behaviors of employees have a positive effect on customer satisfaction in tourism (Nunkoo et al., 2020), keeping qualified employees in sector emerges as an important issue. Professional identity is one of the factors that shape behaviors in the workplace (Sutton & Rubin, 2004). It develops first in the family (learning, representations, attitude towards work) and then at school, and this development continues throughout working life (Chen et al., 2007). Getting the university students (future tourism professionals) acquainted with their profession in their education may help the foundation of professional identity as well as positive work outcomes. Otherwise if this identification is not achieved, individuals may encounter some problems. This inadequate professional identity development leads the individuals not to be able have a voice in the professional life, not to be able to meet the required standards of the profession, not to be able to fulfill the duties of the job successfully. They may also experience problems in the transition from student life to working life and the acceptance by colleagues (Sabancıogulları & Dogan, 2012). Professional identity development is a complex process influenced by several factors, including on-duty experiences and professional socialization (Adams, Hean, Sturgis and Clark, 2006), but once a high level of professional identity developed, it has positive outputs in work life as well. Students do more research about profession-related issues soon after they make a career choice and their level of life satisfaction and self-esteem become higher than those who are yet to make a decision (Creed, Prideaux & Patton, 2005). Hereby, the essential aim of the research is to determine the professional identity development status of associate and undergraduate tourism students in terms of interpersonal dynamics of professional identity together with intrapersonal aspects at university level. Numerous studies conducted on future teachers, nurses. The study now will clarify it in terms of tourism.

Literature

Professional identity is expressed in various terms, and the terms of profession identity, professional self-image, professional identity, and professional self-concept can be used interchangeably (Sabancıogulları & Dogan, 2012). Professional identity consists of "attitudes, values, knowledge, beliefs, and skills shared with others within a professional group" (Adams et al., 2006). It is a process that involves the internalization of one's professional values, identification with the profession, and psychological integration into the profession (Trede, Macklin & Bridge, 2012). It creates professional awareness and is the identification with the professional groups at work, and the social classes to which they belong (Mancini et al., 2015).

"Identity status theory" was first developed by Marcia in 1966. It defined four identity statuses "achievement, foreclosure, moratorium, and diffusion" based on two behavioral components: exploration and commitment. *Exploration* identifies how much an individual weighs and considers options related to identity before making decisions about their goals, beliefs, and values, and *commitment* points out the level of preference for certain choices that are part of an identity (Kostermans, 2019). Crocetti, Rubini and Luyckx (2008a), Crocetti, Rubini and Meeus (2008b) expanded the two-dimensional model by Marcia to a three-dimensional model and investigated the identity

statuses (achievement, foreclosure, moratorium, searching moratorium, and diffusion) of close to two thousand adolescents in early and middle adulthood using 3 identity processes (in-depth exploration, commitment, and reconsideration of commitment). Crocetti et al. (2008a) conceptualized the third dimension as reconsideration of commitment based on the fact that identity development occurs over time and can be reconstructed, and it includes efforts to change existing conditions that are not satisfactory by making comparisons between current situations and other possible alternatives. Mancini et al. (2015) extended the previous models of Marcia, Crocetti and Meeus and provided evidence of PISQ-5d model. The model has five dimensions: exploration (in-depth and practices) and two types of commitment (identification and affirmation), along with reconsideration of commitment. Affirmation as a new dimension describes the importance attached to the professional category to which one belongs and the sense of pride in being a member of that category. She also included practice dimension, which measures the likelihood of taking actions directly related to a professional category. She showed that intergroup processes as well as intra-individual processes affect the university students' construction of their professional identity and validated five identity statuses that emerged from the PISQ-5d by assessing both work-related and academic factors. These five processes contributed to individuals being identified as achieved (reconsideration of commitment/low, high on the other four processes), foreclosed (affirmation and commitment / high, practices / medium, in-depth exploration/low, reconsideration of commitment/low), diffused (low scores on all five processes), moratorium (commitment, affirmation and practices/low, in-depth exploration/medium, reconsideration of commitment/high), and searching moratorium (high scores on five processes) statuses (Mancini et al. 2015). In the diffusion status, individuals are not involved in an active process of exploring different alternatives or belong to a particular identity domain. In the case of foreclosure, individuals are engaged without exploring. In the moratorium status, individuals are actively exploring different alternatives and still lack of making a commitment. In case of achievement status, they committed to a particular identity domain after an active period of exploration (Crocetti et al., 2008b). In searching moratorium, they reconsider those commitments (Crocetti et al., 2008b).

The professional identity (PI) development process of individuals continues throughout life (Adams et al., 2006). Professional identity has a significant impact on individual behaviors in the workplace, influences professional norms and values and work attitudes (Sutton & Rubin, 2004). Ibarra (2004) argues that professional identity development consists of three basic stages: *Engagement in occupational activities*: Knowledge and ability are important aspects of professional identity. By participating in real-life activities related to their professional roles, individuals can identify themselves with the aspects of their work that they enjoy or excel at. *Social network development*: Identity development is often viewed as an inherently social process. By building social networks around professional roles, individuals strengthen their professional knowledge and role. *Sense-making*: may involve self-discovery and the consolidation of personal and professional goals. Interpretation is rewriting one's own story with the synthesis of who they are and their newly discovered interests and abilities (Eliot & Turns, 2011, retrieved from Ibarra, 2004). Identity formation process may also occur differently in traditional and modern societies. While individuals in modern cultures are encouraged to achieve personal success, while individuals in traditional cultures may consider social expectations, roles, and group affiliations more significant than personal identity (Morsünbül, Crocetti, Cok & Meeus, 2016).

It is accepted that university programs contribute to the construction of students' professional identities and the years spent at the university are an important time in the development of individuals with professional identity

(Barbarà-i-Molinero et al., 2017). Reid, Dahlgren, Petocz and Dahlgren (2008) suggests that the practice-based curriculum contributes to the development of students' professional identities by preparing them for positions to be undertaken after graduation. The increasing interest of students PI development has caused universities to focus on the subject and include it in their missions (Barbarà-i-Molinero, Cascón-Pereira & Hernández-Lara, 2017). Wang et al. (2011), in their study conducted with the participation of Taiwanese and exchange students, found a partial relationship between students' socio-demographic characteristics, professional identity and career choice tendencies. In addition, professional identity fully mediates career choice intentions and experiential benefits. Therefore, the experiences gained affect the professional identity positively (Chen, Zhong, Luo & Minghui, 2020). Another study proved that students with achievement or target-oriented identity had high ranking on values of academic self-esteem and intrinsic work value and had lower intentions to leave higher education (Mancini et al., 2015).

There are also studies about the professional identity in work life. According to Hong (2010), professional identity is crucial for understanding the career and career decisions of beginning teachers. Professional identity increases the job satisfaction of university teachers and is effective in reducing their intention to quit their job by overcoming work limitations and dissatisfaction (Rhodes, 2006).

The number of professional identity studies in the field of tourism is limited. Chen et al (2007) found that professional identification has a positive effect on career satisfaction. In her research, Chen examined the relationship between the professional identity of the hotel management program interns and their intention to stay in the business (remain) through four factors (professional values, professional belonging, professional behavior tendency, professional desire, and expectation). Another study with tourism employees shows that socialization is a key element in the improvement of professional identity, which provides a sense of belonging to the group (Marhuenda, Martinez, and Navas, 2004). In a study by Wang et al. (2020), professional identity has a positive effect on employee satisfaction and commitment, a negative effect on turnover intention, supporting that PI has positive work outputs.

Method

Measures, Respondents and Procedure

A quantitative method with survey technique was used in the research. The structured online questionnaire consisted of two scales (professional identity and intention to leave the department of tourism) and demographic questions. Professional identity scale was adapted from Mancini et al. (2015). It had 5 sub-dimensions (affirmation, in-depth exploration, practices, identification with commitment, and review of commitment) and showed adequate psychometric properties. Intention to leave the department of tourism scale in the research was adapted from the Intention to leave work scale by Wayne et al., (1997). After each item was translated into Turkish, three tourism and one language scholar confirmed that the Turkish and English statements were consistent. Participants responded to the items using a 5-point likert scale, ranging from “Strongly disagree” (1) to “Strongly agree” (5). The questionnaire was pre- tested with a pilot research with a different sample of 124 students in June and the results showed that one statement in the questionnaire was not clearly understood. After the revision of it, the questionnaire took its final form. Besides, the ethics committee approval to collect data for this research was obtained from the Social Sciences’ Ethics Committee of Ege University (Date: May 26th, 2021 and Number: 964).

The data were collected in October with a structured online and face to face questionnaire due to hybrid (online and face to face) education model adaptation. Universe of the study was undergraduate and associate degree students of tourism in a university in Izmir. Convenience sampling method was used and a total of 271 students being educated at five different departments joined the research. Great care was taken to find students willing to join the study. The number of active students enrolled was 562. The sample size provision was quite adequate (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The 271 fully completed questionnaires were taken into data analysis, which is sufficient for Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson (2010).

The respondents consisted of 37% females and 62% males. Students with undergraduate degree were the largest group of respondents at 92%, followed by associate degree school students with 7%. 62% of the students participating in the study were under the age of 20 and 33% were between the ages of 21-30. Students were mostly enrolled at Tourism Management department (44%). Department with the least number of enrolled students was Tourism & Hotel Management (5,5%). 52% of the students chose tourism department as their first choice although 10% graduated from vocational high school (tourism).

Table 1. Demographics

		No #	(%)			No #	(%)
Sex	Female	101	37.3	Studied Another University	Yes	29	10.7
	Male	168	62.0		No	238	87.8
	Missing	2	.7		Missing	4	1.5
Age	17-20	169	62.4	Studying Another University?	Yes	16	5.9
	21-24	81	29.9		No	251	92.6
	25+	8	3.0		Missing	4	1.5
Depart	Hospitality Management	13	4.8	Internship	Yes	63	23.2
		Missing	11.1		No	205	75.6
		30			Missing	3	1.1
	Travel Management	21	7.7	Class	1	107	39.5
		85	31.4		2	94	34.7
		15	5.5		3	20	7.4
	Tourism & Hotel Manag.	118	43.5		4	47	17.3
		Missing	.7		Missing	3	1.1
		2		Experience	Yes	141	52.0
Degree	Undergraduate	251	92.6		No	127	46.9
	Associate degree	18	6.6		Missing	3	1.1
	Missing	2	.7	High school	Tourism	28	10.3
Priority Choice	Yes	140	51.7		Other	241	88.9
	No	129	47.6		Missing	2	.7
	Missing	2	.7				

Data Analysis

First, normality was checked to decide the use of parametric or non- parametric tests. Normality was assessed via Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. It calculated non-significant difference from normal distribution. Kurtosis (.724) and Skewness (-0.418) values were also found to have a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidel, 2013). Therefore; parametric tests were used for the analysis. First, exploratory factor analysis was used to determine the construct validity of professional identity the scale by Manchini et al. (2015) in our country. The scale needs further construct validity since the EFA results of Wang et al. (2020)'s study failed to validate a five- dimension model in the hospitality context. A hierarchical cluster analysis on standardized scores of Mancini et al. (2015)'s model PISQ-5d was conducted to determine identity statuses. Cronbach's alpha was used to demonstrate scale reliability. Analysis of variance for univariate with identity status was conducted to test meaningful effects on intention to leave department of tourism.

Results

Factor Structure of the Scales

Table 2 shows the factor analysis result of Mancini et al. (2015)'s professional identity model PISQ-5d. Four items of the scale were excluded because 3 items' communalities were below 0.50 and considered as not having sufficient explanation and one item was overlapping and load difference was below 0.1 (Hair et al., 2010). According to the results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), the professional identity scale consisted of four dimensions (level of identification, in-depth exploration, practices, reconsideration of commitment). Affirmation was not listed as a separate dimension. KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity values were significant. Total explained variance was 67%. The mean values for all dimensions respectively were 3.46, 3.84, 3.02, 3.23. Factor loadings ranged from .668 to .837.

Table 2. EFA Results (Professional Identity)

Scale Items	Item Loadings	Mean	Eigen values	Variance (%)	P
Level of Identification (LI)		3.46	5.167	32.296	.000
L1	.826				
L2	.802				
L3	.800				
L4	.797				
L5	.780				
L6	.769				
L7	.725				
L8	.668				
In- depth Exploration (IDE)		3.84	1.303	8.142	.000
IDE1	.826				
IDE2	.719				
Practices (PRTC)		3.02	2.136	13.353	.000
PRTC1	.837				
PRTC2	.798				
PRTC3	.789				
Reconsideration of Commitment (RC)		3.23	2.228	13.923	.000
RC1	.822				
RC2	.816				
RC3	.703				

Method: Principal Components, Varimax Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = .899 ($p < 0.001$)

Bartlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2 = 2000.528$ Cronbach's Alpha (α) = .717

To EFA results of Intention to Leave Department Scale, it was unidimensional measurement scale. KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity values were significant. Total explained variance was 78%. The mean value for it was 1.99. Factor loadings ranged from .826 to .921.

Table 3. EFA Results (Intention to Leave University)

Scale Items	Item Loadings	Mean	Eigen values	Variance (%)	P
Intention To Leave Department (ITLD)		2.00	2.346	78.215	.000
ITLD1	.904				
ITLD2	.921				
ITLD3	.826				

Method: Principal Components, Varimax Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = .696 ($p < 0.001$)

Bartlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2 = 410.313$ Cronbach's Alpha (α) = .856

Cluster Analysis: Identifying Identity States

After checking the outliers in the data set, the four dimensions identity scores were transformed into Z-scores. The next step was a hierarchical cluster analysis on standardized scores of the four dimensions. Ward's clustering method, and squared Euclidean distances were used on analysis. K-means with different clusters (3,4,5,6) were examined to decide final solution. Each cluster solution was compared in terms of iterations, the analysis of variance (ANOVA), the significant contribution of the dimensions as well as theoretical meaningfulness of each cluster. Although the number of iterations were fewer in other cluster analyzes, the results were far from being theoretically meaningful. Based upon pre-determined criteria, the five-cluster solution appeared to be ideal one.

Figure 1. Mean Values in the Five-Cluster Solution for 4 Status-Identity Dimension (Z-scores)

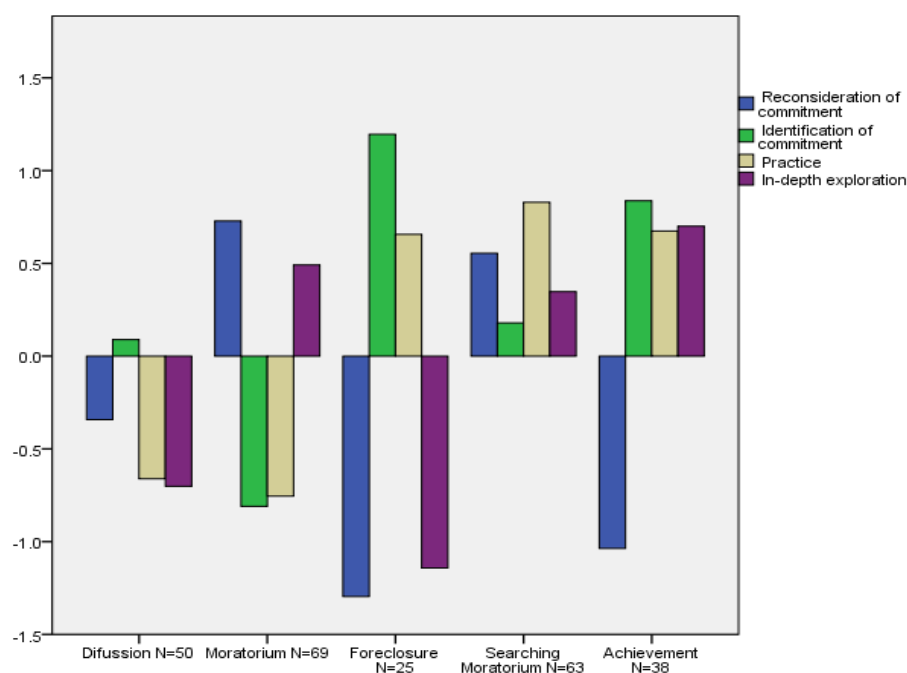


Figure 1 shows the Z-scores for reconsideration of commitment, practices, level of identification, and in-depth exploration for five clusters. The status of identity clusters were generally persistent with previous models by Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, and Meeus (2008c) with the exception of the first cluster. Contrary to what was expected students scored slightly high on level of identification. This is probably due to uncovered distinct forms of diffusion (Carefree diffusion, diffused diffusion) in identity status. Carefree Diffusion was characterized by low to moderate identification with Commitment (Luyckx Goossens, Soenens, Beyers, and Vansteenkiste, 2005). Therefore, It was decided to call this cluster diffusion. The diffusion cluster ($n = 50$) consisted of students who had low scores on all 4 dimensions and slightly high scores on the identification level. The foreclosure cluster ($n = 25$) constituted of students with moderately high scores on practices, moderate scores on level of identification, and low scores on reconsideration of commitment and in-depth exploration. The moratorium cluster ($n = 69$) was composed of students scored low level of identification and practices and high scores on in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitment. The searching moratorium cluster ($n = 63$) composed of students who scored high on identification, in-depth exploration, practices, and reconsideration of commitment. The achievement cluster ($n = 38$) consisted of

students scored high on level of identification, in-depth exploration, practices, and high on reconsideration of commitment.

Table 4. Four Dimensions of Professional Identity Status (ANOVA results)

	Cluster		Error		F	Sig.
	ms	df	ms	df		
Reconsideration of commitment	36.129	4	.369	240	97.895	.000
Level of identification	27.040	4	.424	240	63.714	.000
Practices	33.030	4	.449	240	73.538	.000
In-depth exploration	24.654	4	.456	240	54.043	.000

ms = mean square

Identity Status Differences On Intention To Leave Tourism Department

Univariate results showed that identity statuses had a significant difference on intention to leave department of tourism. — $F(4, 240) = 17.822, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .22$. Table 5 shows means of intention to leave department of tourism variable according to identity statuses.

Table 5. Means of Intention to Leave Department of Tourism Variable by Identity Statutes

Variable	Achievement		Searching moratorium		Foreclosure		Moratorium		Diffusion		Total		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	N	M	SD
Intention to leave department	1.40	.520	2.07	.970	1.26	.500	2.55	.971	1.867	.737	168	1.98	.937

Notes: M = Mean SD = Standard deviation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study was conducted to identify states of the undergraduate and associate degree students of tourism resulting from the PISQ-5 assessing two form of commitment (affirmation and identification), along with reconsideration of commitment and two form of exploration (practices and in-depth). In line with prior studies (Wang et al., 2020; Kostermans, 2019), the study failed to validate the five dimension professional identity model. EFA results of professional identity showed a four factorial structure of professional identity: stage of in-depth exploration, identification, reconsideration of commitment, and practices in the context of tourism students. Five identity statuses from a four factorial structure of professional identity could be extracted in the study. The highest number of students belonged to moratorium status. This shows that students are exploring potential possible career options, in other words, they have not determined the most appropriate career option yet. Students in diffusion status was also higher. The high numbers in those two statuses were probably due to the existing cultural differences in Turkey as Morsünbül et al., (2016) suggested that developing a strong and coherent sense of identity in Turkish cultural context makes identity formation challenging for Turkish youth. The complicated structure of the workforce, and labor market features associated with tourism industry (low wages, long working hours, poor benefits, low-social status and weak career options) in the country may lead students to focus on social expectations, expected roles and group memberships of the society rather than personal success in tourism. The study also aimed to reveal how intention to leave tourism department differs in different identity statuses. Univariate results showed that identity statuses had a

significant difference on intention to leave department of tourism. Students with achievement and foreclosure statuses scored lower on intention to leave the tourism department (see Table 5) than students with other statuses. This supports the results of the study by Mancini et al. (2015). The number of students belong to those two statuses: achievement and foreclosure constituted the least number of students in the study. Achievement status in the identity formation showed the most optimal profile (low burnout, high engagement) (Luyckx, Duriez, Klimstra & De Witte, 2010) and commitment is essential for a healthy identity development (Morsünbül et al., 2016), therefore contextual factors, such as appropriate university setting is essential for influencing this attitude (Luyckx et al., 2005). The university policymakers may revise current curriculum to provide a more talented training system in collaboration with professional stakeholders. To make the students acquainted with industry professionals and enhance their professional identity, regular seminars can be organized. A platform can be created that will enable students to communicate with successful pioneers of the department graduates. On the other hand, tourism policymakers societies, and professional groups should work more jointly to build a good image for the profession of tourism (Wang et al., 2020) to overcome cultural barriers against it.

The study is subject to some limitations. The study was carried out with data collected from only one university, it would be beneficial to compare the findings of the study using a larger sample from different universities. The study was also carried out at a university located in a popular tourism destination. It can be measured whether it will lead to different results in a university located in a region far from touristic activities. The study only searched identity status differences on intention to leave tourism department, further studies can focus on identity status differences on department, class and internship, high school. Another limitation of the study, the in-depth exploration dimension consisted of two items in EFA.

Declaration

The ethics committee approval to collect data for this research was obtained from the Social Sciences' Ethics Committee of Ege University (Date: May 26th, 2021 and Number: 964).

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