

Overcoming the Career Barriers: Role of Career Optimism in Shaping the Career Intentions of Tourism & Hospitality Students


Abstract

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The study aims to evaluate impact of career barriers on students' career intentions in tourism & hospitality (T&H) industry. Furthermore, study examines the mediation effect of career optimism within the nexus of career barriers and career intentions. A 30-item survey questionnaire was employed to measure all the constructs in the hypothesised model. 347 valid feedbacks via questionnaires from students were used for the final analysis. Smart PLS software (Version 4.1.0.6) was utilized for the data analysis. The results revealed significant and negative influence of personal career barriers, social career barriers, and interactional career barriers on career intentions and on career optimism. The study findings also signified a partial mediating influence of career optimism within the nexus of career barriers and career intentions. The study findings emphasise the implementation of certain initiatives on the part of T&H educators and stakeholders and study also advocates the enhancement of optimistic attitudes among students to effectively navigate challenges and overcome the barriers. The study suggests for an integrated and holistic modelling approach that amalgamates psychological and motivational constructs along with external factors to facilitate intervention-oriented strategies aimed at addressing barriers.

Keywords: Career barriers, career optimism, career intentions, tourism & hospitality students.

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Introduction

The tourism & hospitality (T&H) industry's rapid expansion during the past few decades has put it among the world's eminent economic sectors in terms of employment and job creation (Manzo, 2019). The rapid advancement of this sector not only generates a substantial demand for a skilled workforce but also precipitates a significant enhancement in the development of talent (Jiang & Tribe, 2009). In 2023, there were 27 million new jobs created, indicating a 9.1% increase over 2022 (WTTC, 2024), reflecting the demand for workforce and scope of employment in the industry. Since labour is a major component of the sector, the availability of excellent human capital is crucial to the delivery of effective services (Unguren & Huseyinli, 2020). The T&H industry has long struggled to find and maintain highly skilled and educated personnel (Kong et al., 2012). As a result, it becomes imperative to improve the sector's reputation to draw in and keep talented workers within the industry to pursue longer careers (Lee et al., 2021). Career paths for the next generation of workers or students entering the T&H sector face complex challenges in the dynamic environment of ongoing economic uncertainty, growing competition, and industry instability (MacDonald & Giazitzoglu, 2019). Studies conducted lately on students' future career intentions have revealed a decline in their interest towards the sector (Coros et al., 2021). The issue has only worsened since the COVID-19 outbreak, leaving students' opinions of the sector tainted by dissonance and negative opinions (Birtch et al., 2021). As a potential future of the industry's employment, a comprehensive grasp of the specific barriers and interventions that mitigate those barriers, should be a prerequisite to address the issue (Manoharan et al., 2021; Zhong et al., 2021).

Despite the growing emphasis on students' career choice behaviour in T&H, researchers have largely overlooked the creation and implementation of potential interventions to overcome career obstacles. The transition from 'students to employees' necessitates enhanced personal competencies and positive attributes to confront obstacles (Porfeli et al., 2008). Students are expected to develop certain behaviours and attitudes to overcome obstacles in their careers and maintain motivation (Octowibowo et al., 2024). Amidst industry challenges, 'career optimism' defined as "a tendency for individuals to expect the best possible outcome or to emphasise the most positive aspects of one's future career development" (Rottinghaus et al., 2005: 11) appears to be a potential mitigating factor that might modify students' reactions to career barriers. Optimism has been found to be beneficial when coping with uncertainty and adapting to changes (Tolentino et al., 2014). However, its potential role in mitigating career barriers remains underexplored, especially in T&H industry. Hence, the study aims to answer the question, "Does career optimism mitigate the impact of career barriers on the students' career intentions?" Consequently, the objectives of the study are to evaluate the influence of career barriers on career intentions and to examine the mediation effect of career optimism within the nexus of career barriers and career intentions of T&H students. Modelling these relationships would provide institutions and career counsellors with empirical evidence regarding the factors that affect the career choices of students in T&H sector, while simultaneously signifying the importance of optimism and resilience among students to navigate various barriers. Such insights are also vital for industry stakeholders to attract and retain future talent.



Literature review

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Numerous theoretical frameworks have been established to elucidate the processes underlying the individual career development. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) propounds an extensive paradigm for investigating the dynamic interactions among personal attributes and contextual influences in the realm of career progression. Lent et al. (1994, 1996) reported personal and contextual influences leading to the formation of career interests and choices. Also Lent et al. (2000) proposed that contextual factors such as perceived barriers, form the perceived opportunity framework within which career objectives are conceived and executed and these barriers were viewed as disruptive affordances that may impede one's career development.

Career barriers in tourism & hospitality

Many studies have looked at the unfavourable perceptions that prospective recruits have about tourism-related jobs. Their research reveals an apparently extensive list of common factors that lead to unfavourable opinions, like, poor physical working conditions (Wu, 2013), high number of low-skilled jobs, low job satisfaction (Roney, 2007) and low social status (Richardson, 2008), causing graduates' exit from the field due to these widespread perceptions. All these perceptions have resulted in a high turnover rate in the T&H job markets (Khan et al., 2022). Emerging research studies have also unveiled various elements that have an influence on the career commitment and goals of T&H students e.g., career anxiety (Yurcu & Akinci, 2024), career adaptability (Ramaprasad et al., 2022), occupational stigma (Kusluvan et al., 2022), quality of education (Kahraman & Alrawadieh, 2021), cultural blocks (Griffin et al., 2021) and traditional influences (Lee et al., 2019). Under the thorough review, we found that studies provide insights into various negative influences of the factors/barriers. However, there is still a major dearth in literature devoted to possible solutions and interventions to overcome the barriers. Addressing this gap would be critical for improving career outcomes. To measure the significant aspects of T&H students' perceived career barriers, this study used the three-dimensional model, which includes personal career barriers, social career barriers, and interactional career barriers integrated by Liu et al. (2022). Personal factors have been associated in several studies as markers of professional growth (Sinclair et al., 2019). 'Self-efficacy' was identified by El-Dief and El-Dief (2019) as a significant personal component impacting career choice. In contrast, personal career barriers were linked to diminished interest and confidence, fear of potential failure, adverse disposition, and sense of risk in work, which manifested the most detrimental effects on future career decisions of students (Liu et al., 2022; Yan et al., 2021). Thus, the study proposes that:

H1a: Personal career barriers negatively affect career intentions.

Social determinants, associated with the framework of the social system, may constitute significant obstacles that impede students from entering the industry and influence the way the environment or community evaluates the individual (Sihite et al., 2019). Community perceptions that students in T&H are destined for service roles stem from a workplace culture of promiscuity, excess entertainment, and consumption of alcohol (Al-Ismael et al., 2019). Furthermore, parents, as primary socialisation agents, significantly shape adolescents' self-perception regarding their educational abilities and decisions (Sawitri et al., 2014). Students demonstrate stronger career intentions in relevant fields when they perceive familial and friends' support, coupled with the absence of societal barriers to their career pursuits (Inda et al., 2013). So, the study proposes the hypothesis:

H1b: Social career barriers negatively affect career intentions.

Interactional career barriers were defined as those that are related to industry, such as working conditions, career development opportunities, type of work, discrimination based on gender, and so on (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Song & Chathoth, 2008). Restrictive factors, such as an unfavourable working environment, a lack of professional growth, and poor work-life balance, have contributed to increased turnover rates and decreased the students' desire for jobs in T&H, particularly after the outbreak of COVID-19 (Huang et al., 2021). Therefore, study proposed the hypothesis:

H1c: Interactional career barriers negatively affect career intentions.

Researchers in the field of organisational behaviour (Luthans & Jensen, 2002) and vocational psychology (Juntunen & Wettersten, 2006) posited that 'hope' holds significant relevance for individuals engaged in vocational endeavours amidst the prevailing conditions of fierce competition and uncertainty. Hope theory by Snyder (2002) provides valuable insights into career motivation. Niles' (2011: 173) "hope-centered model of career development" posits hope as a fundamental element influencing all phases of the career development trajectory. Career optimism, closely associated with hope, denotes positive future expectations and confidence in overcoming hurdles. Alarcon et al. (2013) demonstrated that while hope and optimism are conceptually similar, they are empirically distinct. Drawing upon the conceptual parallels, Rand (2018) noted that optimism and hope yield similar outcomes in goal achievement and coping strategies. Therefore, this research positions career optimism as a precursor to hope, which enhances confidence in career pursuits.

Career optimism

Contextualised from the broader literature on optimism, the construct of career optimism is comprised of cognitive, emotional, and motivational components that shape the attitudes and actions of individuals towards their career (Higgins et al., 2010). Upon reviewing the literature on career optimism, it was apparent that this construct exhibits both “trait-like” and “state-like” attributes. The former portrays the persistent level of optimism in individuals, while the latter relates to varying levels of optimism which can emerge because of contextual influences (Kluemper et al., 2009; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Luthans et al. (2006) found that an individual’s optimism can be cultivated and is subject to change. For instance, an individual who generally exhibits optimism may occasionally demonstrate pessimism, while conversely, an individual who typically exhibits pessimism may on occasion display optimism (Kluemper et al., 2009). Hennessey et al. (2008) has also documented the effects of contextual elements or barriers on career optimism. Career barriers were identified as negatively impacting the career optimism of students in higher education as well (Aymans et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be inferred that perceived barriers hinder the development of optimism in individuals and adversely affect their positive perspective on future occupational prospects (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010). Consequently, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H2a: Personal career barriers negatively influence the career optimism.
- H2b: Social career barriers negatively influence the career optimism.
- H2c: Interactional career barriers negatively influence the career optimism.

Mediating effect of career optimism

Research has revealed that career optimism relates positively with satisfaction, dedication, and performance, thereby boosting involvement in career exploration and decision-making pursuit throughout the initial stages of an individual’s professional journey (Garcia et al., 2015). Numerous studies have demonstrated the advantageous effects of optimism, such as adaptation to collegiate environments (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992), coping mechanisms (Wanberg, 1997), and sustained perseverance (Peterson, 2000). It has been investigated that career optimism significantly influences a range of career outcomes, including career aspirations, career choices, (Rottinghaus et al., 2012), and career engagement (McIlveen & Perera, 2016). Optimism about one’s career has been demonstrated to improve academic and psychological adjustment, as well as improved coping techniques and career decisiveness (Gunkel et al., 2010; Perera & McIlveen, 2014). Furthermore, optimism is related to the ability to adjust to challenging situations and volatile professional environments (Higgins et al., 2010). Consequently, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H3: Career optimism significantly influences the career intentions.
- H4a: Career optimism mediates the relationship between personal career barriers and career intentions.
- H4b: Career optimism mediates the relationship between social career barriers and career intentions.
- H4c: Career optimism mediates the relationship between interactional career barriers and career intentions.

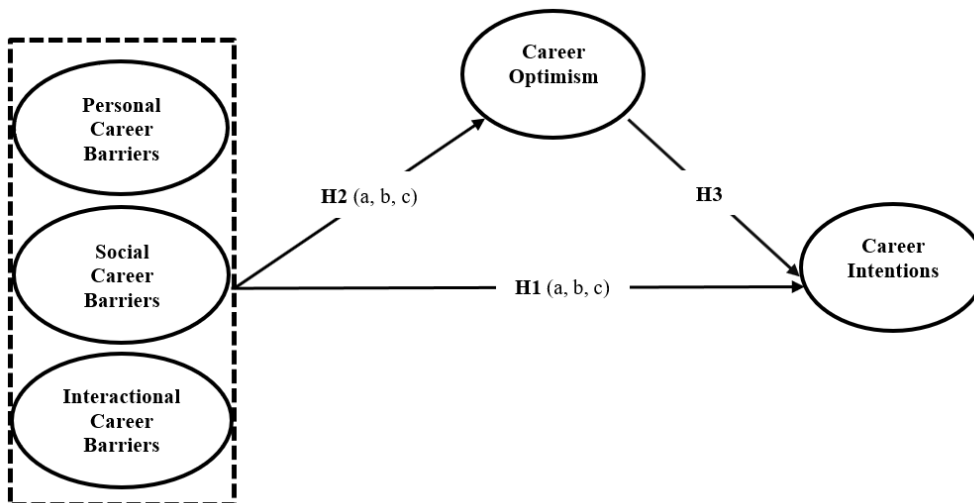


Figure 1: Conceptual framework
Source: Author elaboration

Methods

A questionnaire consisting of 30 items utilising a 5-point Likert scale was employed to gather the data. Items of personal, social, and interactional career barriers were derived from the works of McWhirter et al. (2007) and Song & Chathoth (2008). Career optimism was evaluated through items adapted from Rottinghaus et al. (2005). The scale for career intentions was extracted from the studies conducted by Kuslivan & Kuslivan (2000) and Chang & Tse (2015). A preliminary test of the questionnaire



was conducted with a small student sample to evaluate its clarity and appropriateness before data collection commenced. A pilot test with a sample size of 10-30 is deemed sufficient (Hill, 1998). Feedback from 22 participants indicated that all constructs achieved Cronbach’s Alpha values >0.70, suggesting no response difficulties. Consequently, the finalized 30-item questionnaire was distributed for data collection. The study targeted undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in T&H programs across six Indian universities, comprising three central and three state universities. For this study, only those students were chosen who were majoring in T&H, employing purposive sampling based on the assumption that such students are more inclined to consider industry careers. The research was carried out over five months (April-August 2024) with voluntary student participation ensuring authentic responses. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire, with 450 students approached through online and offline methods, yielding 392 responses. However, 45 responses were excluded due to incompleteness and quality control issues. Respondents not selecting ‘Agree’ on specific quality control items in questionnaire were excluded for inattentiveness, resulting in 347 valid responses for analysis, representing 77.11% of the students approached. The distribution of sampled respondents is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic data

Items	Classifications	Sample	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	182	52.45
	Female	165	47.55
Age	18-21	151	43.5
	22-25	169	48.7
	26-30	27	7.8
Marital status	Married	15	4.3
	Unmarried	332	95.7
Education level	Undergraduate	209	60.2
	Post-graduate	138	39.8
Total		347	100

Results

Measurement model results

Smart PLS software (Version 4.1.0.6) was utilised for data analysis. The study implemented the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) methodology. The process involved preliminary evaluations focused on measurement model (Chin, 2010). Each item’s outer loading relevance met the minimum threshold (Hair et al., 2022). Table 2 demonstrates that all constructs had Cronbach’s alpha values >0.70 and composite reliability values >0.60, confirming the model’s reliability criteria (Hair et al., 2013).

Table 2: Reliability and validity

Reflective Constructs	Items	Loadings	α	CR	AVE
Personal Career Barriers	PCB1	0.855	0.927	0.945	0.743
	PCB2	0.933			
	PCB3	0.901			
	PCB4	0.907			
	PCB5	0.916			
	PCB6	0.617			
Social Career Barriers	SCB1	0.935	0.938	0.953	0.803
	SCB2	0.920			
	SCB3	0.916			
	SCB4	0.932			
	SCB5	0.766			
Interactional Career Barriers	ICB1	0.925	0.944	0.960	0.856
	ICB2	0.938			
	ICB3	0.933			
	ICB4	0.905			
Career Optimism	CO1	0.917	0.956	0.962	0.704
	CO2	0.923			
	CO3	0.918			
	CO4	0.914			
	CO5	0.564			
	CO6	0.937			
	CO7	0.934			
	CO8	0.935			
	CO9	0.919			
	CO10	0.524			
	CO11	0.556			
Career Intentions	CI1	0.928	0.944	0.960	0.857
	CI2	0.922			
	CI3	0.937			
	CI4	0.916			

The convergent validity of the model’s constructs was validated by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct surpassing the acceptable threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017). An evaluation of the model’s discriminant validity was carried out using the Heterotrait-Monotrait test. Hair et al. (2019) explained HTMT as “the mean value of the item correlations across constructs relative to the mean of the average correlations for the items measuring the same construct.” Table 3 demonstrate that the model possesses adequate discriminant validity. The highest HTMT value observed among the constructs is 0.723, which remains significantly below the threshold of 0.85, thereby suggesting that the reflective constructs are sufficiently distinct from one another (Henseler et al., 2015).



Table 3: HTMT

	PCB	SCB	ICB	CO	CI
PCB					
SCB	0.723				
ICB	0.279	0.413			
CO	0.622	0.720	0.385		
CI	0.579	0.661	0.452	0.697	

Note: PCB: Personal Career Barriers, SCB: Social Career Barriers, ICB: Interactional Career Barriers, CI: Career Intentions, CO: Career Optimism

Hypotheses testing

Furthermore, to the validity and reliability assessments, the model underwent an analysis for common method bias and multicollinearity through the utilization of variance inflation factor (VIF) metrics. This metric serves as an indicator of common method bias (Kock, 2015). The observed values were <3, suggesting that the model is devoid of biases and simultaneously satisfies the criterion of <5, thereby indicating an absence of multicollinearity concerns within the model. Coefficient of determination i.e., R² values are classified as significant (0.67), moderate (0.33), and weak (0.19) (Chin, 2010). The R² values pertaining to career intentions and career optimism are 0.565 and 0.562. The findings signify that the endogenous variables are in a favourable state and that the model accounted for 56.5% and 56.2% of the variance in career intentions and career optimism, respectively. Furthermore, in this investigation, the bootstrap methodology was employed with 5000 samples to evaluate the significance of the path coefficients (Hair et al., 2017). Initially, direct effects of personal, social, and interactional career barriers on career intentions were scrutinised. The path values were derived, and the outcomes regarding the significance of the established causal relationships were confirmed, as presented in Table 4. A t-statistic of a path coefficient must meet or exceed 1.96 to be considered significant (Wong, 2019). The findings showed a significant negative impact of personal career barriers on career intentions ($\beta = -0.209, p < 0.01$). Social career barriers and interactional career barriers also exhibited significant negative impact on career intentions ($\beta = -0.407, p < 0.001$) and ($\beta = -0.209, p < 0.001$), respectively. This indicates that hypotheses H1a, H1b, and H1c are supported, thereby satisfying the first criterion put forward by Baron and Kenny (1986) for mediation analysis.

Table 4: Direct path coefficients

Hypotheses	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ((O/STDEV))	P values
PCB -> CI	-0.209	-0.212	0.063	3.329	0.001
SCB -> CI	-0.407	-0.406	0.066	6.189	0.000
ICB -> CI	-0.209	-0.209	0.044	4.751	0.000

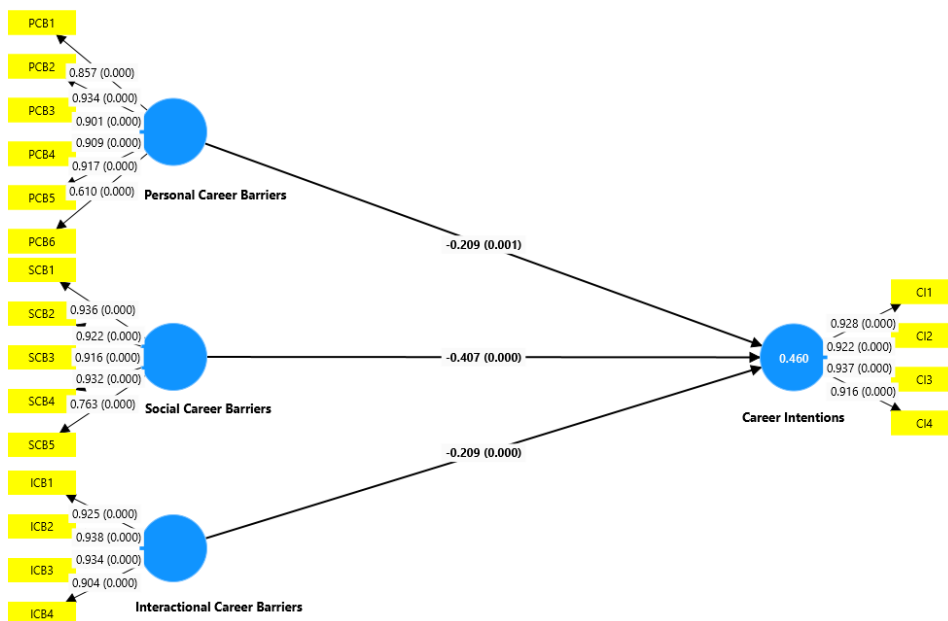


Figure 2: Estimated SEM path model

Furthermore, the dimensions, personal, social, and interactional career barriers in the model exhibited a substantial and negative influence on career optimism, as illustrated in Figure 3 with results shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Full model path coefficients

Hypotheses	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ((O/STDEV))	P values
PCB -> CI	-0.110	-0.113	0.051	2.176	0.030
SCB -> CI	-0.141	-0.142	0.058	2.415	0.016
ICB -> CI	-0.149	-0.149	0.042	3.559	0.000
PCB -> CO	-0.202	-0.203	0.056	3.637	0.000
SCB -> CO	-0.540	-0.540	0.062	8.696	0.000
ICB -> CO	-0.123	-0.123	0.041	3.034	0.002
CO -> CI	0.491	0.487	0.059	8.331	0.000



Consequently, hypotheses H2a ($\beta = -0.202, p < 0.001$), H2b ($\beta = -0.540, p < 0.001$), and H2c ($\beta = -0.123, p < 0.01$) received empirical support. This observation thus satisfies the second criterion of Baron and Kenny (1986) to advance to mediation analysis. In addition to the above results, career optimism was identified as having a significant positive effect on career intentions ($\beta = 0.491, p < 0.001$), thereby providing support for H3.

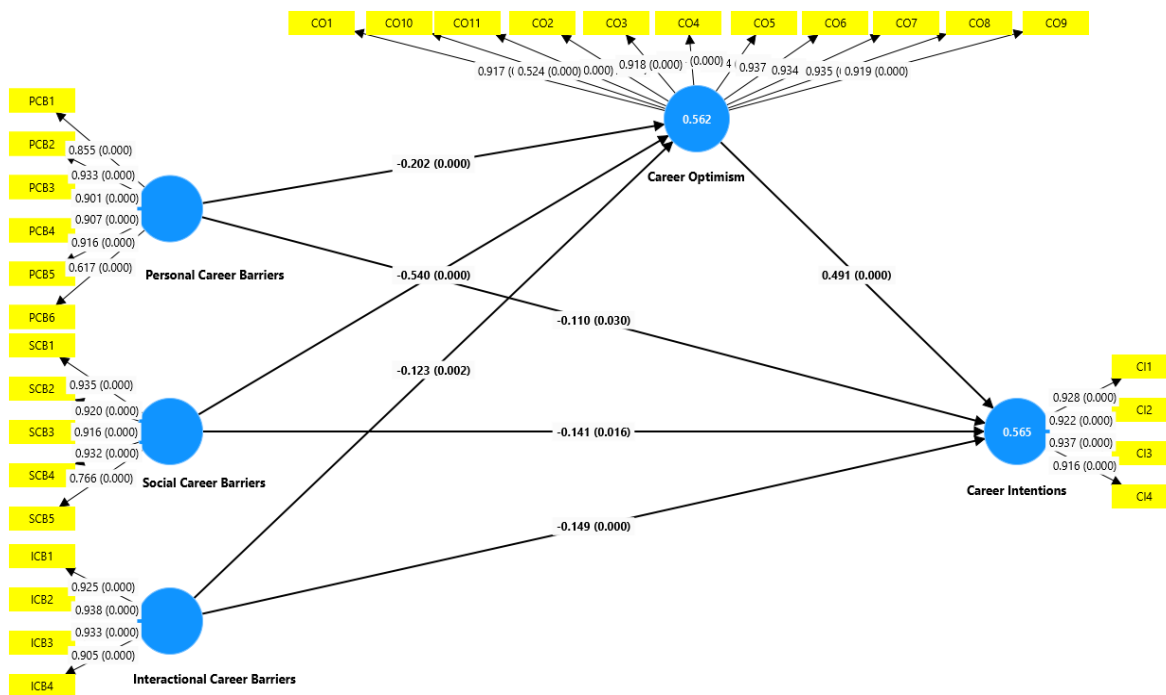


Figure 3: Full structural model

Mediation

Mediation analysis was conducted to examine the mediation effect of career optimism within the nexus of three dimensions of career barriers and career intentions. The indirect effects were evaluated by employing the bias-corrected percentile method with bootstrapping across 5000 samples (Hair et al., 2017). As indicated by the findings in Table 6, the confidence intervals did not include zero. Consequently, a significant indirect effect of personal, social, and interactional career barriers on career intentions was identified, with career optimism serving as a partial mediator across all three relationships, namely, personal career barriers and career intentions H4a ($\beta = -0.099, p < 0.001$), social career barriers and career intentions H4b ($\beta = -0.265, p < 0.01$), and interactional career barriers and career intentions H4c ($\beta = -0.061, p < 0.001$).

Table 6: Mediation results

Hypotheses	Coefficient	SE	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Bias	Percentile bootstrap 95% confidence interval	
						Lower	Upper
PCB -> CO -> CI	-0.099	0.031	3.228	0.001	0.000	-0.169	-0.046
SCB -> CO -> CI	-0.265	0.040	6.611	0.000	0.003	-0.354	-0.194
ICB -> CO -> CI	-0.061	0.022	2.720	0.007	0.000	-0.110	-0.023

Discussion

The current study aimed to evaluate how personal, social, and interactional career barriers affect the career intentions and optimism of T&H students. Additionally, the research sought to explore the mediating role of career optimism in the relationship between career barriers and career intentions. The findings offer valuable insights into the three dimensions of career barriers. The study confirmed that all three dimensions exerted significant and negative influence on career intentions. This suggests that heightened perceptions of barriers lead to a diminished interest in T&H careers among students. The confirmation of hypothesis H1a highlights the importance of personal factors in students' career commitment (Liu & DeFrank, 2013). Personal barriers, including lack of interest, reduced sense of achievement and self-confidence, were found to adversely affect career intentions. These results align with previous research indicating that individuals with low self-efficacy and inadequate preparation are more negatively impacted than their more prepared counterparts (Duffy et al., 2016). The validation of hypothesis H1b underscores the critical role of social barriers, identifying them as the most significant factor influencing career intentions. It was found that insufficient support from parents and peers, along with stereotypes about T&H careers, significantly impede individuals' career aspirations (Clarke, 2018; Mqwebedu et al., 2022). The importance of this barrier illustrates how perceptions of "significant others" can substantially influence students' career intentions. In various cultural contexts, tourism careers may be perceived as lacking prestige or stability (Al-Ismael et al., 2019), thus deterring students from



pursuing this field. This finding is supported by research indicating that students in developing countries prefer occupations with higher social status (Hoque & Ashif, 2020). Furthermore, empirical evidence for H1c highlights students' concerns regarding the sustainability of career prospects in T&H, as well as issues like gender discrimination and poor working conditions, which align with prior studies identifying these factors as crucial in influencing students' career aspirations (King & Hang, 2011; Wan & Kong, 2012).

Concerning the effect of career barriers on career optimism, findings indicated a substantial and pronounced negative effect of personal, social, and interactional career barriers. Hypotheses H2a, H2b, and H2c emphasise the role of personal and contextual support in influencing career optimism, supporting De Hauw & De Vos (2010) regarding contextual barriers' adverse effects on college students' career optimism. The results also validate the notion that career optimism is subject to modifications and contextual influences (Hennessey et al., 2008; Higgins et al., 2010). Furthermore, hypothesis H3 aligns with current literature, indicating that students with higher levels of career optimism hold a positive view of careers in T&H, enhancing overall career engagement (McIlveen & Perera, 2016). However, these results diverge from Wang et al. (2024), reporting that students with higher career adaptability and optimism tend to be more preoccupied with the thoughts of future career progression, reducing their inclination towards employment in the sector. Furthermore, the research enriches the existing corpus of knowledge by furnishing empirical evidence regarding the partial mediating effect of career optimism within the nexus of career barriers and career intentions. The empirical findings reveal a dynamic interaction among the variables. The comprehensive mediation analysis reveals that career optimism substantially diminishes the impact of personal, social, and interactional career barriers on individuals' career intentions, suggesting that individuals who exhibit a high degree of career optimism experience fewer negative impacts. Consequently, it is asserted that students who possess an inherently optimistic disposition are inclined to view barriers as transient obstacles rather than permanent. This positive outlook of future careers enhances their agency, resilience, engagement, and perseverance amidst challenges, indicating that fostering optimism is crucial for career development. Therefore, partial mediation emphasises the critical need for fostering career optimism and simultaneously complemented by the implementation of strategies that are specifically designed to directly confront and mitigate the barriers that individuals may encounter in their future career decision-making.

The findings of the study underscore specific practical implications for tourism educators, policymakers, and stakeholders within the industry. Firstly, in addressing the barriers, educators in T&H can devise strategies aimed at augmenting student engagement through the utilisation of interactive pedagogical approaches, problem-based learning, industry-related projects, and regular guest lectures from seasoned and experienced professionals in the field to stimulate interest among prospective recruits. To cultivate resilience and a growth mindset in students, investment in workshops could be a viable option to assist them in overcoming feelings of inadequacy. Further, T&H institutes can formulate their curriculum by involving industry specialists as well to enhance the practical orientation of the T&H programs, as discussed by Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron (2023). The policymakers can advocate for enhanced working conditions, ensure equitable compensation and remuneration, and establish transparent career development pathways to mitigate the likelihood of employee turnover. These implications possess the potential to positively influence the social value associated with employment within the industry. Crucially, career counsellors can opt for targeted interventions necessary to address societal perceptions and to contest stereotypes about careers within the T&H sector. Wan et al. (2014) proposed that the enhancement of the social status of the industry could be achieved through improvements in the nature of the work, thereby positively impacting future career aspirations. Furthermore, educators can prioritize the development of students' career optimism by promoting a positive career perspective to effectively navigate challenges (Gunkel et al., 2013) by establishing realistic objectives, sharing success stories, and implementing self-efficacy enhancement programs. This may contribute in sustaining students' hopeful outlook through optimism, which can aid in maintaining their motivation and perseverance. Career optimism can furnish a cognitive framework among the students to perceive specific barriers as transient and surmountable, thereby reinforcing confidence in their ability to discern pathways for overcoming barriers. Additionally, the study supports the assertion of Lent et al. (2000), which proposed career barriers important within career development models, particularly for T&H sector. The results also advocate for the adoption of comprehensive career models that amalgamate psychological and motivational constructs with external factors to facilitate intervention-oriented strategies aimed at addressing barriers.

Limitations and directions for future

While the research provided valuable insights into the interplay among career barriers, career intentions, and career optimism, it is imperative to recognise certain limitations of the study as well. The data was obtained from six universities in India through purposive sampling and was confined to only North India, which possibly limits the generalisability of the results to broader settings. Further investigations may benefit from a focus on multi-regional comparisons to elucidate variations in the effects of perceived contextual and personal barriers on optimism and career intentions. This research study implemented a cross-sectional design, meaning that data was collected only once from students during their academic tenure, leaving the evolution of student perceptions over time unexamined. Consequently, subsequent studies should consider adopting a longitudinal approach to comprehend and reveal the transformations in perceptions, optimistic attitudes, and career aspirations following internships and the completion of degrees. The investigation concentrated on specific barriers, potentially neglecting other pertinent variables such as personality traits and cultural norms, which could offer a more holistic understanding of how diverse personality types and individuals from varied cultural backgrounds respond to specific challenges or determinants of career intentions.



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